

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | FRIDAY | 5 MARCH 2021

WEATHER

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

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
37/19 °C

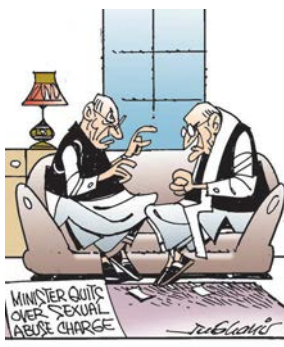
ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Bahula Saptami till 7.57 pm
Star: Anuradha till 10.39 pm
Varjyam: 4.01 to 5.33 (Saturday)
Durmuhurtam: 8.56 am to 9.43 am; 12.51 pm to 1.38 pm
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon

HILARI CALENDAR
Rajab 20, 1442 AH
PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)
Fajar: 5.40 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 4.30 pm
Maghrib: 5.48 pm
Isha: 8.30 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.17 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.10 PM
MOONRISE TODAY --
MOONSET TOMORROW 11.44 AM

COUNTER POINT



Sex for jobs? Very bad!
In our days, we only indulged in cash for jobs!

SHORT TAKES

SC for screening of OTT content

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Thursday favoured the screening of programmes on over-the-top platforms like Amazon Prime and Netflix while expressing concern that at times programmes are with porn contents. "We are of the view that there should be some screening of such programs," said a top court bench said.

■ Full report on Page 4

Covid cases cross 17,000

New Delhi: Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Karnataka continue to report a surge in the Covid-19 daily new cases and they cumulatively account for 85.51 per cent of the new cases reported in the past 24 hours. The daily new cases of in India were recorded above 17,000 after over a month with 17,407 new infections were reported on Thursday.

Rahul hits out at Centre for raids

New Delhi: A day after Income Tax searches on celebrities like Anurag Kashyap and Tapsee Pannu, Congress leader Mr. Rahul Gandhi hit out at the Centre over making agencies 'dance to their tune'. Mr. Gandhi took to Twitter and said the government is making its departments like income-tax, CBI, ED etc., dance to its tunes.

WIDER NET

Gujarat-based firm expands footprint in Telugu states

Adani goes on a buying spree

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 4

The Adani group is on an acquisition spree in the Telugu states and the latest target is a stake in the city-based electric bus manufacturer Olectra.

The Adani group, which made a foray into the fast-growing segment of electric vehicles a few years ago, has set its eyes on Olectra Greentech, in which a majority stake is held by the Megha group.

Sources told *Deccan Chronicle* that the Adani

NATION | 4



Metroman is BJP's CM face in Kerala

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Summer begins



The Sangameswara temple resurfaces from the water in the foreshore of the Srisailem reservoir in Kurnool district on Thursday. The temple becomes visible for two months of the year when the water level drops.

— DC

Tirupati, Vizag in Centre's best list

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 4

Visakhapatnam and Kakinada ranked in two categories while Tirupati in one, in the final rankings list of Ease of Living Index and Municipal Performance Index for 2020 announced by the Housing and Urban Affairs in New Delhi on Thursday.

Visakhapatnam stood 9th in the municipal performance index with a 52.77 score in the 'above one million population' category and 15th in Ease of Living Index with 57.16 score points in the same category. Union Minister of state for housing and urban development Hardeep Singh Puri released the ranking.

Tirupati got the second rank in the municipal performance index with a 51.69 score and Kakinada the 11th rank with a 46.89 score in the 'below one million population' category. Kakinada also ranked 4th in Ease of Living Index with a 56.84 score in the same category.

"We did the best in meeting all the parameters set by the ministry with regard to providing services from water supply to other basic services. We will keep improving every year to get better rankings," said a senior official of

Greater Visakhapatnam Smart City Corporation. Kakinada municipal Commissioner Swapnil Dinkar Pundkar has expressed joy on achieving the rank and said the city will strive to achieve a better place and will be top in future. He greeted all the government and private departments who were involved in submitting information to the ministry and noted the help and participation of all the staff and political leaders.

Expressing happiness over the achievement, municipal commissioner of Tirupati PS Girisha congratulated the denizens, public representatives and officials and staff. "The main goal of TMC is to improve the standard of living of every denizen and provide them a proper development-oriented environment."

■ Page 2: Centre scanned 111 municipalities

WILD FIRE BURNT 1,743 HECTARES IN FOREST AREA

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 4

Forest fires burnt 1,743 hectares forest cover in parts of Andhra Pradesh in the last four months.

The forest authorities say that 2,592 forest fires have been reported burning 1,743 hectares of forest cover from November, 2020 to February, 2021 in the state. The number of forest fires reported as follows: November-10, December-72, January-281 and February-2,229 and the number is expected to rise further in the ensuing months as IMD forecasts heat wave conditions in the state in the summer.

At present, forest fires ranging from 150 to 300 are being reported on a daily basis.

AP witnessed 10,012 forest forest burning forest area spread in about 6,381 hectares last year.

The authorities maintain that forest areas located mainly in Rayalaseema region covering Anantapur, Kadapa, Atm-akur, Srisailem, Nandyala, Markapuram and other areas witnessed forest fires this season so far.

One of the reasons for forest fires in Rayalaseema was heavy rainfall in the last year.

■ Page 3: Negligence is key cause for forest fire

680 in fray for 10 EG PR polls

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, MARCH 4

Nearly 700 candidates are contesting in 10 municipalities, including three nagara panchayats in East Godavari district. With 86 in the fray, the highest number of candidates in a single seat are battling for Pithapuram municipality. There are 72 candidates in Amalapuram, 76 in Mandapeta, Peddapuram (83), Samalkot (75), Ramachandrapuram (65), Tuni (67), Gollaprolu (53), Mummidiavaram (47) and 56 candidates in Yeleswaram nagara panchayats.

YSRC is contesting in 261, Telugu Desam in 202, Jana Sena (75), Congress (7), CPM (6), CPI (3), and BJP (35) while BSP is contesting in one ward.

Meanwhile, in Amalapuram municipality, six of 30 wards have become unanimous. A total of 174 candidates are contesting in Eluru Municipal Corporation elections. The break-up is 14 from BJP, four each from CPI and Congress, Jana Sena (21), TD (43), and YSR Congress (49) while 38 are contesting as independents.

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WORLD | 5

Republicans seek curbs on H1B visas

SPORTS | 8

Kieron Pollard slams six sixes in an over



Candle rallies to mark women's day in state

Jagan orders 10% discount on mobile phones for women

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 4

Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy has announced that candle rallies would be held all over the state on Sunday, setting off International Women's Day celebrations for the next day on March 8.

Marking the day, 2,000 stands with QR code would be arranged for women for easy download of Disha application on their mobile phones. There would be a 10 per cent discount to women on purchase of mobiles in select shopping malls on this Monday, a special day off to all women employees in the police department and five additional casual leaves to all women employees, the CM announced on Thursday.

These decisions were taken during a review meeting held at the CM's camp office in Tadepalli. It was also decided to felicitate two women constables from each wing and hold a short film competition on women's safety and empowerment.

The government will also organise an annual health checkup for anganwadi employees. The chief minister also announced a



Women employees of the state government participate in a Kabaddi competition at IGMSC Stadium ahead of the International Women's Day celebrations in Vijayawada on Thursday.

— DECCAN CHRONICLE

grant of ₹5 lakh on behalf of the government to the non-gazetted women employees union. An MoU would be signed with SERP, MEPMA and Hindustan Lever to ensure sanitary pads are made available at YSR Cheyutha shops at a discounted price. The government will lay special focus on train-

ing of girls of Plus-1 and Plus-2 to prepare them for competitive exams.

The CM advised officials to set up hoardings with details of Disha initiatives in front of junior colleges and other higher educational institutions.

Reviewing matters of YSR pre-primary schools, the Chief Minister had a

close look at the books and teaching aids designed for pre-primary children and displayed by officials of the women and child welfare department. The CM also reviewed the progress of the Nadu Nedu works in Anganwadis.

■ Page 2: Renovation of anganwadis began, says CM

EPFO RETAINS 8.5% FOR PROVIDENT FUND DEPOSITS

Chennai: EPFO has retained 8.5 per cent interest rates for EPF deposits for FY20-21 despite the economic downturn. The Central Board of EPFO in its meeting in Srinagar has recommended 8.50 per cent annual rate of interest to be credited on deposit accounts of more than five crore members for the financial year 2020-21.

■ Full report on Page 7

JOBLESS RATE AT PRE-COVID LEVEL

Chennai: At 6.9 per cent, the unemployment rate in the country has recovered to its pre-lock-down levels. However, the labour participation rate (LPR) and employment rate continue to be weak.

■ Full report on Page 7

TAJ MAHAL VACATED AFTER HOAX BOMB CALL, ONE HELD

New Delhi/Agra: The Taj Mahal complex in Agra was vacated on Thursday morning following a hoax bomb call. The caller, identified as Vimal Kumar Singh, has been detained for questioning. The police said Singh called the emergency response number and claimed that a bomb was kept inside the monument.

■ Full report on Page 4

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OTHER STORIES

YSRC EXTENDS SOLIDARITY TO VSP BANDH

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 4

The YSRC- led AP government has announced solidarity with Friday's bandh protest demanding cancellation of the Centre's decision to privatise the Vizag Steel Plant.

Transport minister Perni Venkataramaiah alias Nani, announcing the government's solidarity with the bandh call, said that APSRTC buses would not run up to 1 pm on Friday in support of the protest. He said that APSRTC employees would attend duties after 1 pm wearing black badges.

Addressing the media here on Thursday, minister Nani said that the government was against the privatisation of VSP and Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had already written to the Centre suggesting alternatives to retain the organisation within the PSU fold.

The minister said public life will not be affected and emergency health services will run as usual. He said the VSP was the right of Andhraites and mirrored the aspirations of millions of Telugu people. He recalled that there was a history of sacrifice of the Telugu people for establishing the steel plant in the state.

The minister stated the credit for merging the RTC with the government goes to the YSRC government. It was done to revive the organisation and curb the exploitation by private individuals, despite having the burden of ₹3,600 crore.

TD BACKS AP BANDH FOR VIZAG STEEL PLANT

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISA KHAPATNAM, MARCH 4

Telugu Desam announced its support to the State bandh called by the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant Parirakshana Committee on Friday. This was announced by party's national general secretary Nara Lokesh in Visakhapatnam and state president of the party K. Atchannaidu in Vizianagaram on Thursday.

Addressing a press conference in Vizianagaram, Atchannaidu said he had appealed to all the party workers to participate in the peaceful bandh all over the city. He also asked his party members to strengthen the agitation to protect the steel plant from going into the private sector.

Blaming the ruling party for the present crisis, Atchannaidu said the YSRC government was planning to grab the plant's unused lands.

"We lost 32 lives in the agitation for the steel plant but to get freedom from 36 cases, Jagan Mohan Reddy is supporting the Centre to privatise the plant," Atchannaidu said.

He appealed to people to defeat YSRC in the GVMC elections to save the steel plant.

CENTRE EXAMINED 111 MUNICIPALITIES FOR SURVEY

From Page 1

"Securing the second spot in MPI is the result of the hard-working of civic body staff and cooperation of denizens," he said.

The MPI examined the sectoral performance of 111 municipalities (with Delhi being assessed separately for NDMC, and the three municipal corporations) across five verticals which comprise of 20 sectors and 100 indicators in totality. The five verticals under MPI are Services, Finance, Policy, Technology and Governance.

The Ease of Living Index (EoLI) is an assessment tool that evaluates the quality of life and the impact of various initiatives for urban development. It provides a comprehensive understanding of participating cities across India based on quality of life, economic-ability of a city, and sustainability and resilience. The assessment also incorporates the residents' view on the services provided by city administration through a Citizen Perception Survey.

Both the indices represent an attempt to gauge the performance of cities on various parameters of urban living. The Ease of Living Index encapsulates the outcome indicators while the municipal performance index captures the enabling input parameters. These indices provide a holistic assessment of cities based on their efforts to cultivate better quality of life, create infrastructure, and address challenges of urbanisation.



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy with YSRC's new MLC candidates (from left) Balli Kalyan Chakravarthi, Md. Iqbal, Karimunnisa, Duvvada Srinivas, Challa Bhagiratha Reddy and C. Ramachandraiah after giving B-Forms to them at the CM's camp office on Thursday. All the five candidates affiliated to the ruling YSRC filed their nominations for the biennial election to the AP Legislative Council by MLAs on Thursday.

— DC

Jagan presents B-Forms to YSRC MLC candidates

YSRC to proceed legally against false propaganda

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 4

Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy personally presented B-Forms to the MLC candidates of YSRC at the CM's camp office in Tadepalli on Thursday.

The party nominees are Challa Bhagiratha Reddy, Balli Kalyana Chakravarthi, C. Ramachandraiah, Mohammad Iqbal, Duvvada Srinivas and Md Karimunnisa. The candidates along with their family members thanked Jagan and felicitated him.

Adviser to the government on public affairs, Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, said the Telugu Desam created a lot of hurdles in the conduct of government procedures in the AP Legislative Council but all these hurdles will be cleared in the coming

● Adviser to the government on public affairs, Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, said the YSRC is set to win a majority in the council, he said.

● He said the selection of MLC candidates showed the importance the YSRC attached to the backward communities in the party and the government.

days. The YSRC is set to win a majority in the council, he said.

He said the selection of MLC candidates showed the importance the YSRC attached to the backward communities in the party and the government.

Condemning the news in a section of the media that YSRC men were threatening candidates to withdraw from the civic polls, Ramakrishna Reddy said the YSRC would proceed legally against those spreading such "canards".

He said it was not possible to force someone to withdraw from the elec-

tions in these times when technology is put to good use by the election authorities. Candidate should go in person or send his authorised agent for withdrawal; and any candidate can proceed legally by following due procedures if any threat was held out, the adviser said.

Ramakrishna Reddy asserted that the pro-YSR trend in the gram panchayat elections will be repeated in the municipal elections, and noted that the urban local body elections will be held for 12 corporations and 75 municipalities. Of these,

three corporations and 12 municipalities saw unanimous election. The YSRC would sweep the civic polls as they are being held on party symbol, he said.

The adviser said Chandrababu Naidu is habituated to telling lies and it's proven once again through the false promises he made in the TD manifesto for the municipal elections.

Ramakrishna Reddy released a pamphlet with details of the welfare schemes implemented since the YSRC came to power and said these should be widely publicized in towns and cities. The YSRC is going for civic polls with the slogan, "Support good governance."

He said the YSRC government has plans to build townships and supply safe drinking water in towns and cities.

Naidu launches civic poll campaign from Kurnool

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MARCH 4

Telugu Desam national president Nara Chandrababu Naidu who launched his party's municipal poll campaign from Kurnool on Thursday called upon the people to get rid of the "scourge" of Jagan rule and envision its replacement with a people's government led by the TD.

"People are fed up with Jagan's rule, and it will not be long before TD returns to power," Naidu said.

Naidu who held a roadshow from Peddamarket to Chennamma circle covering all the important junctions in Kurnool city sought to strike a familiar chord with the public and spoke about the rise in petrol and gas prices and lack of avenues to earn a decent living in the state.

The former CM said if his party was voted to power, his first step would be cancellation of the steep hike in property taxes. He expressed optimism that the TD would win Kurnool Municipal Corporation in the present polls, as he "sees a surge in people's support towards the TD".

Advocates of Kurnool bar association raised slogans of "Go back Naidu" as he had not favoured shifting of the AP high court to Kurnool. He told them they were misguided by vested interests and that he was never against the 'High Court for Kurnool' demand.

Addressing a well-attended meeting at Chennamma circle, Naidu trans-

YSRC GOVT COULDN'T GET A SINGLE COMPANY TO VIZAG CITY: LOKESH

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISA KHAPATNAM, MARCH 4

Former minister and all India general secretary of TD Nara Lokesh lambasted the ruling YSRC during his campaign for the party candidates fighting corporation elections in Visakhapatnam on Thursday.

He said the new government could not get a single company to the city while making vain attempts to stop some big companies going into the hands of the corporate sector.

"Jagan Mohan Reddy promised to get special category status if voted to

power but after becoming Chief Minister, he has been keeping mum," said Lokesh.

He said despite having plenty of natural resources, the government failed to get a single manufacturing company to the city or provide employment to single people. Unlike him, the TD government created 75,000 jobs in five years in Visakhapatnam.

Similarly during his padayatra, Jagan Mohan Reddy promised the unemployed youth that he would announce DSC soon after coming to power but he set aside his assurance.

"all the money goes to Telangana" and "crazy brands of liquor in AP" too were money suckers.

In a reference to his detention at an airport, Naidu appealed to the police not to misuse their powers to please those who wielded power at the top and curbed movement of political leaders. He said the police were brazenly subverting their power by forcing people to withdraw nominations in gram panchayat and municipal polls. Police were also foisting false cases to burden them with court proceedings, he said, adding that things will change for the good and TD is well on its way back to power as the "people are fed up with Jagan rule".

Botsa says YSRC clean sweep in municipal elections is inevitable

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 4

Minister for municipal administration Botsa Satyanarayana has refuted allegations from the opposition Telugu Desam that there was a huge increase in property tax rates and termed it a lie being spread by the Telugu Desam leaders.

The minister told the media here that the TD was spreading misinformation as it was unable to digest its humiliating defeat in the grama panchayat elections. He expressed confidence about the YSRC winning the municipal elections too as is evident from the wave of unanimous elections by YSRC candidates in many municipalities.

Addressing the media here, the minister said so far 578 wards across the state have elected their representatives unanimously. Of them, YSRC candidates won 571 wards without polls, securing 98.8 per cent success. Municipal elections are being held in 75 municipalities and 12 corporations, rounding off a total of 2,794 wards.

Unlike the panchayat polls, municipal elections are being held on party symbol, the minister said, adding, "The people are satisfied with the good governance of Chief Minister Jagan and have reposed their trust in the government."

The minister noted that the Jagan Mohan Reddy-led government was reaching the benefits of welfare schemes to all eligible persons irrespective of their caste, religion, or party affiliation. "TD chief Chandrababu Naidu had failed to implement even a single promise he made during the 2014 polls and he's trying to cheat the people again with his false promises," he said.

Satyanarayana said TD

YSRC NOMINEES GET UNANIMOUSLY ELECTED FROM 569 WARDS IN ULBS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 4

Out of 2,794 wards in 12 municipal corporations and 75 municipalities/ nagar panchayats, 578 wards were elected unanimously in the urban local body polls scheduled to be held on March 10 in the state.

Among the 578 unanimously elected wards, the ruling YSRC secured 569 while the Opposition Telugu Desam got six, BJP-1 and independents secured two wards.

Among the municipal corporations, in Krishna district at Machilipatnam, YSRC nominee from ward No. 11 was elected unanimously. In West Godavari at Eluru, YSRC nominees from ward Nos. 1, 3 and 32 were elected unanimously. In Guntur, ward No. 48 was secured by the YSRC nominee unanimously.

In Kadapa municipal corporation, YSRC nominees were elected unanimously from ward Nos. 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 27, 30, 32, 33, 34, 38, 41, 43, 46 and 47.

In Chittoor municipal corporation, YSRC nominees were elected unanimously from ward Nos. 1, 22 at Proddatur civic body in Kadapa district.

● Botsa Satyanarayana said TD leaders were engaging in a false propaganda against the state government by alleging a hike in property tax rates.

leaders were engaging in a false propaganda against the state government by alleging a hike in property tax rates. "Although the TD manifesto now says the party is for quashing the property tax in municipalities and municipal corporations, in reality, it won't have authority over

2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 49 and 50.

In Tirupati, ward Nos. 1, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 19, 27, 30, 36, 37, 38, 40, 45, 46, 47 and 48 were won unanimously by the YSRC nominees.

In Ongole, ward No. 28 was secured unanimously by the YSRC nominee and in Kurnool, ward Nos. 34 and 34 were elected unanimously by the YSRC nominees.

With regard to municipalities, in West Godavari at Kovvur, TD nominees won at ward No. 7, 16, 18 and 19. It also won at ward No. 25 at Naidupeta civic body in Nellore district. The TD also won from ward No. 19 at Nagari civic body in Chittoor district. BJP nominee was elected unanimously at ward No. 16 at Naidupet civic body at Nellore district.

In Kurnool district at Atmakur civic body, an independent nominee got elected unanimously from ward No. 8 and another independent nominee too got elected from ward No. 22 at Proddatur civic body in Kadapa district.

that tax even if the TD won the elections. There was no such thing as a hike or burdening the people with new taxes, as the YSRC government primarily focuses attention on public welfare," he said.

Minister Satyanarayana said the TD has no candidates to field, as its cadre has lost faith in Naidu's leadership. He said the panchayat elections have proven that YSRC is the clear winner with people's blessings and its success march will continue in the coming municipal polls and other elections.

SEC INITIATES STEPS TO CURB FORCED WITHDRAWAL OF NOMINATIONS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 4

The State Election Commission has initiated steps to curb electoral malpractices, including the forced withdrawal of nominations, under duress in the urban local body polls in the state.

The SEC in a statement issued here on Thursday stated that the returning officers were directed to accept withdrawal of nominations only from the candidates and not through any intermediary.

It also said that the candidate was not to be accompanied by a person or persons at the time of withdrawal of nomination to ensure that the candidate was doing so on his or her own volition.

The SEC took serious note of a case in Tirupati where a forged withdraw-

al was submitted at Division No. 7 and considered it as an instance of election fraud.

It assured to take necessary steps to correct the situation and assured to take a similar action in all such cases if reported in the state without showing any exception.

It directed the collectors and district election authorities to keep watch on such electoral malpractices and take steps to curb them.

The State Election Commission asked the affected parties of electoral malpractices to take such issues to its notice to take remedial action.

It said that the secretary and joint secretary will personally take these complaints and pursue them as the State Election Commission considered such malpractices to be grave in nature.

SEC SUSPENDS ELECTION PROCESS AT DIVISION NO. 7 AT TIRUPATI CIVIC BODY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 4

The State Election Commission suspended the election process at Division No. 7 at Tirupati Municipal Corporation with immediate effect following for the urban polls following electoral fraud.

The SEC noticed that a forged notice of withdrawal of nomination was submitted in respect of a validly nominated candidate M. Vijaya Lakshmi from Division

No. 7 at Tirupati Municipal Corporation on the last date of withdrawal of nominations on March 3.

The candidate lodged a complaint with the police about such electoral malpractice.

The SEC took a serious view of it and ordered for an inquiry. It said that it would issue instructions separately on the course of action to be taken for election of Division No. 7 at TMC after completion of a detailed probe.

RENOVATION OF ANGANWADIS BEGAN, SAYS CM

From Page 1

Construction of new buildings and revamping of existing buildings is being done in 44,119 Anganwadi centres. The work on anganwadi buildings should be started simultaneously in urban and rural areas, the CM said.

The government will provide 4,17,508 books for children of PP-1 class and 4,17,508 books for PP-2 children. The distribution of books will start on March 20 and would be completed by April 5. It has already distributed 16 of the 26 teaching aids to anganwadis and the remaining 10 will be distributed within a month.

The CM advised officials to provide an English-Telugu dictionary in schools and ensure the students learned the meaning of a new word every day. "Implement a similar programme in anganwadi centres," he said.

The officials said the details on the YSR Poshana and YSR Sampoorna Poshana Plus are being provided through posters. They are being set up in the village, ward secretariat and Anganwadi centres.

They said an SOP book is being provided with the prescribed rules on providing good food and hygiene to children. Videos on the same are being shared to the students.

programme, Ireland and Tata Trust rural development and Tata Trust cancer programme Assam, AP, Odisha and Rajasthan.

Interestingly, Swetha was involved in the election campaign of Atlanta Senator in 2014, on behalf of Hillary Clinton in the US presidential election 2016.

She campaigned for TD in the 2014 and 2019 elections.

Dissident leaders strongly oppose Swetha's candidature for the mayor's post

VMC | POLLS

Nani's daughter picked as TD's mayor candidate

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 4

Telugu Desam cleared the air on its mayor candidate in the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) elections by announcing Kesineni Swetha as their nominee.

Incidentally, Swetha is the daughter of Vijayawada MP, Kesineni Srinivas, alias Nani, who is presently campaigning for

the success of TD candidates.

The party's state president Kinjarapu Atchannaidu made the announcement and asked the cadre to work together to ensure TD victory.

The TD in Vijayawada city was earlier divided into two groups with one headed by Nani and another by MLC Buddha Venkanna and Nagul Meera.

The party high command

made Nani the in-charge in the VMC elections.

Recently, he changed the candidate in division 39 by giving the ticket to a migrant leader, K Siva Sarma, who recently joined TD from YSRC. There was another conflict when the division 34 candidate Kotteti Hanumantha Rao was replaced by a follower of Vangaveeti Radhakrishna.

The dissident leaders,

angry that their candidates were replaced by migrant leaders, strongly opposed the candidature of Swetha for the Mayor post and demanded that a nominee from their group be chosen for the post.

The internal conflicts went to the notice of party boss N Chandrababu Naidu, who called leaders from the two warring factions and appointed Atchannaidu to resolve

the differences.

Swetha, who completed her primary education in Atkinson School and Siddhartha School here and at Lawrence School Ooty, studied Intermediate in The International School at Bangalore before her BA in psychology and economics from Emory University, Atlanta.

She worked in the micro-finance service project, Ghana, Child Psychology



IN BRIEF

VROs to takes promotion issue to govt notice

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 4

The AP VROs Joint Action Committee chairman Vasa Samuel Divakar objected to the intervention of Amaravati JAC chairman Bopparaju Venkateswarlu in the promotion process of Village Revenue Officers to Senior Assistants and warned the leader not to obstruct the promotion process. The meeting of APVROs JAC was held in Vijayawada on Thursday in which leaders of the association from 13 districts participated and sought the government to conduct the promotion process transparently.

Mr Divakar said that promotion is the right of the VROs, but Venkateswarlu trying to restrain the right of the employees by proposing promotions to fewer employees as senior assistants from VROs. He said that the association opposed the mediating of Venkateswarlu and warned him about stern action if he tries to harm VROs rights. AP government employees association president K.R. Suryanarayana, secretary of the same, G. Askar Rao and other leaders decided to take their issues to the govern-

Tributes paid to Army Jawan at Srikakulam

Visakhapatnam: A state funeral was accorded to Naik Vanjarapu Rama Rao at his native place at Srikakulam with military honours and a Guard of Honour from the Police Department on Thursday. Representatives from Army, Navy, AP Administration, Police and NCC officials paid floral tributes.

to the mortal remains of Naik Rama Rao of 3 Engineers Regiment during the funeral ceremony.

Earlier, the mortal remains of Naik Vanjarapu Rama Rao arrived at Visakhapatnam Airport from New Delhi by Air India Flight on Wednesday night. A wreath laying ceremony with military honours was conducted at the airport by the representatives from Eastern Naval Command, Station Headquarters (Army), district officials and the city police as a mark of respect to the deceased.

27 fall ill at Srisalam after consuming food

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL MARCH 4

As many as 27 pilgrims fell ill after eating food which they carried with them from their homes, at Srisaillam temple town on late night of Wednesday.

All were immediately shifted to Sunnipenta primary health centre and discharged on Thursday.

According to the Srisaillam police station circle inspector Ramana, as many 35 pilgrims belonging to Nerajampalle in Yellalur mandal of Anantapur district came to Srisaillam on Wednesday night from their native by a specially arranged private travel bus.

They however had a dinner with Pulihora which they carried from their villages along with them after reaching Srisaillam on late night. After some time at least 27 people had developed vomiting and motions and immediately shifted to Sunnipenta PHC.

They all said to be out of danger and undergoing treatment.

BJP demands jobs for TG project rehabilitants

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 4

BJP leaders demanded the superintending engineer of the Telugu Ganga project to provide employment for the listed unemployed youth from families in Nellore region, who handed over their lands to the project three decades ago.

BJP leader Midathala Ramesh and others met the SE on Thursday and handed over a representation to him, demanding a quick resolution of the issue, as per the rehabilitation terms agreed during the initiation of the project.

Ramesh alleged that though a list has been prepared two years ago, till date the project officials have done nothing concrete to fulfil the rehabilitation terms. He said the proj-

V-P to students: Make India Vishwa Guru once again

Tirupati has always had a special place in my heart, says Venkaiah Naidu

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 4

Vice-President Muppavarapu Venkaiah Naidu on Thursday called upon the student community to work harder and smarter to make India a knowledge and education hub once again and regain the past glory of the country, which was once known as the Vishwa Guru (world guru).

"We have had an illustrious past. There was a time when India was known as Vishwa Guru. We had great institutions like Nalanda, Takshashila and Pushpagiri where students from across Asia came for learning. We have to regain that past glory and the Vishwa Guru status", he said while interacting with students of IIT-Tirupati on the occasion of its sixth Institute Day.

Recalling that he had the opportunity to participate in the foundation stone laying programme of IIT, IISER in Tirupati and IIIT-Sri City almost six years ago, the Vice-President said, "Tirupati has always had a special place in my heart. It evokes a sense of purity, devotion and inner peace. Now, this place has become even more dear to my heart because of the 'Jnana Yagna' or the cre-



Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu interacts with students and faculty at IIT, Tirupati on Thursday.

ation and dissemination of knowledge being performed in the portals of this institute as well as in a number of institutions that are located here.

He told the students that they are fortunate to be at a place where they can connect with India's ancient culture while studying modern cutting-edge technologies. "I want you to learn not only quantum physics and Artificial Intelligence, but also explore our rich heritage", he said.

He termed the new education policy as a well thought out document and emphasised the need to quickly translate this

policy into action. In that spirit, he stressed on the need for providing initial schooling in a child's mother tongue and called for efforts to increase the use of Indian languages in technical education, along with their use in administration and judiciary.

The Vice-President further emphasised the importance of emotional and social skills for engineering students along with technical skills.

"I am sure you will shape your destiny and contribute to the national transformation with your knowledge and skills you absorb here. But equally

important is the set of emotional and social skills that will enable you to adapt to a rapidly changing world", he noted.

Further, Mr Naidu lauded the IIT Tirupati for securing two renowned sustainability awards - 'GRIHA' and 'HUDCO' awards for design and construction of an eco-friendly transit campus with sustainable construction materials and technologies.

He appreciated IIT Tirupati for joining hands with the nation in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic. He also praised the institute for main-

taining the highest percentage of female student enrolment (18%) in B. Tech programme among all the IITs.

Meanwhile, the Vice-President visited the exhibition at the IIT premises. He also planted a sapling on the campus. Later, he inaugurated the Amara Raja multi-specialty hospital near Karakambadi, Tirupati.

Winding up his official visits, he then motored up to Sri Padmavathi Rest House in Tirumala, where he was given warm reception by TTD EO Dr KS Jawahar Reddy, Additional EO AV Dharma Reddy and CVSO Gopinath Jatti. He will offer his worship at Tirumala temple on Friday morning.

Mr Naidu was earlier welcomed by AP Deputy Chief Minister K. Narayana Swamy and others at Tirupati airport.

TUDA Chairman and MLA C. Bhaskar Reddy, district collector M. Harinarayanan, Tirupati Urban SP Ch. Venkatappala Naidu, RDO Kanakanarasa Reddy, Prof. K.N. Satyanarayana, Director, IIT Tirupati, Prof. N. Venkaiah, Dean, Student Affairs, IIT Tirupati, Prof. A. Meher Prasad and others were present.

NEGLIGENCE IS KEY CAUSE FOR FOREST FIRES

FROM PAGE 1

The heavy rainfall in Rayalaseema had resulted in a thick growth of vegetation and it getting dried up and becoming vulnerable to catch fire. A section of villagers who go to forests to collect firewood and shepherds who graze their cattle, throw cigarette butts and partly burnt beedis and others on dry leaves resulting in the occurrence of ground forest fires either intentionally or out of ignorance or by mistake.

However, the authorities are initiating a series of measures to prevent forest fires by setting up a state-level fire monitoring cell that receives imageries of forest fires with their latitude and longitude from two satellites.

All the forest personnel ranging from the rank of head of forest forces to the forest assistant beat officer get alerts on their mobile phones about forest fires and based on such alerts, the concerned forest personnel armed with GPS devices swing into action to put out the fire.

The authorities keep fire fighting equipment ready to press into service based on need and also initiate measures to prevent forest fires by taking up water conservation measures by constructing check dams and dig out trenches. Fire lines will be drawn. The authorities carry out awareness programmes on preventive measures and also on how to control forest fires by roping in local villagers, members of Vana Samrakshana Samithis and representatives from the NGOs by taking out fire rallies and display of measures to be taken up on boards. The authorities take the history of forest fires in the last five years to identify the vulnerable places for initiating preventive measures during the fire season.

Principal chief conservator of forests N. Prateep Kumar said, "We are taking all requisite measures to control forest fires and also preventive steps.

We are witnessing only ground fires in our forest areas. We are keeping our personnel on high alert to attend to any cases of forest fires immediately and minimise the extent of burning of forest cover."

Temple in Kurnool resurfaces

D. SIVA RAMI REDDI | DC
KURNOOL, MARCH 4

The Sanghameswara temple at the confluence of seven rivers in Kurnool district is becoming visible as the water in the Krishna river and Srisaillam dam recedes.

The temple remains under water for about 222 days every year when the Krishna river is in full flow. Devotees can enter the temple and offer prayers to the Shivalinga only for about four months in a year.

Temple priest Telakapalli Raghunatha Sarma said that water needs to recede by another eight feet before people can enter the temple. "I am hopeful we can enter the temple in the 10 days. The sludge will have to



Sanghameswara temple priest performs puja to the gopuram of the temple.

be cleaned up," he said. Right now, only the gopuram of the temple is

visible.

The temple began getting submerged after the construction of the Srisaillam dam in 1980. It was not relocated like many other temples in the area. It remained hidden under water for more than 20 years and resurfaced in 2003.

The temple priest said that the Linga, made of neem wood, was installed by the Pandavas after they visited the Srisaillam Mallikarjuna temple. The Shivalinga is said to have been brought from Kashi and consecrated at the confluence of the Krishna and Tungabhadra and other five tributaries. The idol was named Sangameshwaram after the Sangama or confluence of rivers.

Huge demand for FinTech professionals

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 4

VIT-AP School of Business (VSB), VIT-AP University, ALPHABETA and TOPXIGHT Research Labs entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to provide employment opportunities to the students.

Dr S.V. Kota Reddy, Vice-chancellor VIT-AP University, after signing the MoU with ALPHABETA and TOPXIGHT Research Labs said that ALPHABETA is a US company offering products and services to Banks and Financial Services organisations. He told that FinTech is changing the business models and financial models that was never

seen before. There is a huge demand for qualified FinTech professionals across the globe. He stated that VIT-AP University addresses this demand through BBA programme with a specialisation in FinTech and further focuses on combining academic rigour with hands-on training.

Dr Kota Reddy said that students would also research contemporary issues by the end of the program, develop new business/finance models, and create patents. Students completing BBA Fintech can get into Banks and Financial Services in jobs such as Blockchain Expert, Blockchain App Developer, Financial Analyst,

Data Scientist - Finance, Business Analyst, Process Analyst, Compliance Manager, Product Manager and Business Development Manager.

Siva Visveswaran, Co-founder & CTO, ALPHABETA INC, stated that the FinTech sector's growth would be primarily driven, not by cost or labour arbitration but by innovation using new technologies such as AI, Blockchain, 5G and Big Data Analytics. He said that this joint FinTech Center would allow students to build the right skills through active learning, conducting research, working with cross-disciplinary teams, and creating demonstrable proof of work.

TS GOV. GLOBAL WOMAN OF EXCELLENCE

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 4

Governor Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan has been selected for the prestigious Top-20 Global Women of Excellence award for 2020. The international award is given by the Multi Ethnic Advisory Task Force, Illinois headed by US Congressman Danny K. Davis. The jury, in a congratulatory letter to Dr Soundararajan, said: "You have been chosen to be honoured as you are an ardent advocate of women's rights, gender parity, and women's equality and your outstanding contribution to the society."

The award jury appreciated the efforts of Dr Soundararajan in making a difference to society through her efforts in fighting for the women's rights and gender-equality and empowerment. The award will be presented during the 9th Congressional International Women's Day Gala at Naperville, Illinois, on March 7.

SEVERAL TRAINS TO TIRUPATI CANCELLED

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 4

Several trains to Tirupati were cancelled or short terminated due to proposed remodelling works of the Tirupati railway station for non-interlocking, pre-non-interlocking and electrification work in the Renigunta-Tirupati section.

The cancelled trains include Tirupati-Visakhapatnam double decker special express leaving Tirupati on March 5, March 7, March 10 and March 12. In the return direction, the train will be cancelled on March 6, March 8, March 11 and March 13. Tirupati-Puri special express leaving Tirupati on March 5, March 6, March 8, March 9, March 10 and 12, in the return direction, the train will be cancelled on March 7, March 8, March 10, March 11, March 12 and 14.

Similarly, Tirupati-Bilaspur special express leaving Tirupati on March 7 and 11 will be cancelled. In the return direction, the train will be cancelled on March 9 and 13.

The Bhubaneswar-Tirupati special express leaving Bhubaneswar on March 6 and in return direction on March 7 will be cancelled.

AP records 102 fresh cases of Covid, 1 death

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 4

Andhra Pradesh registered 102 new cases of Covid -19 and one death from Chittoor.

The state health authorities reported here on Thursday that out of 45,077 samples tested, 102 persons were found infected with the confirmed Covid -19. Out of a total number of 1,40,92,251 samples tested so far in the state, 8,90,317 persons were infected with the virus and of them, 8,82,272 recovered in the course of treatment, while 871 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Covid -19, Chittoor registered the highest at 25, followed by 22 in Visakhapatnam, 13 in East Godavari, eight each in Krishna and Kurnool, six in Nellore, five in Guntur, four in Anantapur, three each in

Prakasam, Srikakulam and West Godavari, two in Kadapa and zero cases in Vizianagaram.

With regard to cumulative Covid -19 active cases, Chittoor topped the state with 198, followed by 91 in East Godavari, 86 in Krishna, 71 in Nellore, 65 in Srikakulam, 59 in Visakhapatnam, 57 in Guntur, 56 in Kadapa, 50 in Anantapur, 47 in Kurnool, 39 in Prakasam, 37 in West Godavari and 15 in Vizianagaram.

Among daily death cases of Covid -19 patients, one death was reported from Chittoor district, sealing up the toll to 7,171.

The state health authorities discharged 56 Covid -19 patients after recovery in the last 24 hours. AP conducted Covid-19 tests on 2,63,900 samples per one million population and registered a positive rate of 6.32.

AUSTRALIA RETURNEE TESTS CORONA POSITIVE AT TUNI, EAST GODAVARI

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 4

A 25-year-old man who returned from Australia tested Coronavirus positive and his swab samples were sent to CMMB in Hyderabad for confirmation of the strain of the virus at Tuni in East Godavari.

The district health authorities said that the man, hailing from Thetagunta village in Tuni mandal, tested Covid-19 negative in

Australia before boarding the flight to India and arrived at his home village on Feb. 26. He went to the area hospital in Tuni for the Covid-19 test on March 3 and tested positive in the rapid antigen test. The hospital authorities conducted RT-PCR, which confirmed Covid-19 positive. They collected his swab samples and sent them to CMMB for finding out the strain of the virus he was carrying. The reports are awaited.

Kapu Sangham expresses anger over political leaders

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 4

Kapu Sadbhavana Sangham expressed anger over Kapu leaders in all Political Parties for their indifferent attitude on Kapu caste.

Sangham president Vasireddy Yesudas and its General Secretary Basava Prabhakara Rao told the reporters here on Thursday that Kapu leaders from all political leaders have attended on Kapu Ayikhya Garjana meeting on 31, January, 2016 and the then Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and the then Opposition leader Y.S.Jagan Mohan Reddy made it clear that there was no connection to Kapus in Violence Incidents at Tuni on the day. He said that now, the Railway Court issued summons to 41 Kapus out of which 30 are innocent and

● Sangham president Vasireddy Yesudas said he had taken their legal responsibility on behalf of 30 Kapu accused in the incident. He said that on that day, all Kapu leaders from all parties attended the meeting and 12 lakhs people were attending the meeting, but the police booked only 41 people.

they are only agriculture labourers. He said he had taken their legal responsibility on behalf of 30 Kapu accused in the incident. He said that on that day, all Kapu leaders from all parties attended the meeting and 12 lakhs people were attending the meeting, but the police booked only 41 people. He said that the political parties including ruling YSRC and TD should clear their stand on the Kapu Reservations issue.

Three teenagers drown in Godavari

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 4

Three teenagers - D. Phani Kumar (18), K. Prema Sagar (17) and M. Venkata Ramana (18) - drowned in Godavari River and their bodies were found at "Uttara Vahini" in Godavari River in Gadellanka village of Mummidiavaram mandal of East Godavari on Thursday.

The relatives of the teenagers of Batnavilli village in Amalapuram Rural Mandal have lodged complaint with Amalapuram Rural police on Thursday that their children were missing from Wednesday afternoon.

The children told their parents that they would go to beach. Amalapuram Rural Circle Inspector C.Suresh Babu said that the police traced the

● Amalapuram Rural Circle Inspector C.Suresh Babu said that the police traced the signals of their cell numbers and found their clothes at Gedellanka river, called as Uttara Vahini.

signals of their cell numbers and found their clothes at Gedellanka river, called as Uttara Vahini, which the place is sacred one and many of the people take bath on it.

He said that Prema Sagar had no parents and he is residing at his uncle and studying Polytechnic third year. The parents of M.Venkata Ramana are residing at Visakhapatnam and D. Phanikumar's father is physically handicapped. Amalapuram Rural police registered a case.

COPS SEIZE 42 CRUDE BOMBS FROM HOMES

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 4

The Srikakulam police seized 42 crude bombs from a couple of houses during a cordon and searched at Golla Kanchili under Kanchili mandal in Srikakulam district.

The investigation revealed that the crude bombs were stored for a possible clash between two political groups in the village.

DSP (Palasa) Sivarami Reddy said that there had been a rivalry (political and property) between Duvva Lokanadham and Dokkari Dhalayya in the village for the past few decades. There

was a clash between Lokanadham's group and Dhalayya's group last year.

Police registered cases against some groups under the Explosive Substances Act and the crude bombs were defused.

Rioting cases were reported against the duo in the past few years, but they never used crude bombs. There were reports that the clashes between the two groups took place with crude bombs around two decades ago, but it was not repeated.

"We are investigating the case from various angles to nab the supplier of bombs and others," the DSP added.

SHORT TAKES

SINHA'S APPOINTMENT CHALLENGED

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

The NGO Common Cause on Thursday moved the Supreme Court challenging the appointment of Praveen Sinha, a Gujarat cadre IPS officer, as an interim Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Sinha is already working in the investigating agency as Additional Director – a number two position in the organizational hierarchy.

The office of the CBI Director fell vacant upon the retirement of Rishi Kumar Shukla on February 2.

Seeking an urgent direction to the Centre to complete the process of selection of a regular CBI Director, the NGO Common Cause has contended that the appointment of interim Director was contrary to the provision of the bypassing the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act under which the CBI functions.

The NGO has challenged the government's February 3 decision to appoint Praveen Sinha as interim Director till the appointment of a new Director or until further orders.

In its petition, the NGO says that the unwillingness of the government to institute a transparent and accountable system impairs the right of the people since the CBI is currently probing cases involving rampant corruption in high places in the country.

BOMB SCARE AT TAJ MAHAL; CALLER DETAINED

New Delhi/Agra, Mar 4: The Taj Mahal complex in Agra was vacated on Thursday morning following a hoax bomb call, police said.

The caller, identified as Vimal Kumar Singh, has been detained for questioning in Firozabad. Additional Director General (ADG) of Police, Agra zone, A Satish Ganesh said.

Singh called the 112 emergency response number of the Uttar Pradesh police at around 9 am and claimed that a bomb was kept inside the monument that is conserved by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and protected by armed personnel of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF).

The police immediately informed the CISF personnel, who asked the visitors to vacate the premises of the iconic 17th-century monument and launched anti-sabotage checks around 9:15 am.

Nothing suspicious was found during the checks at the monument, a CISF officer said in Delhi.

An initial probe revealed that Singh is a resident of Patiyali in Kasganj and was presently staying in his maternal grandmother's house in Okhra village in the Narkhi area of Firozabad, the ADG said. "Prima facie it seems that he (Singh) is mentally unstable and is probably under treatment. We are probing why he made such a call. The Taj Mahal was reopened for visitors after about an hour and 45 minutes," he added.

VIRTUAL SUMMIT WITH SWEDEN TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold a virtual summit with his Swedish counterpart Stefan Lofven on Friday during which the two leaders "will hold comprehensive discussions on the entire spectrum of the bilateral relations and exchange views on regional and global issues including further strengthening of cooperation in the post-Covid era". Around 250 Swedish companies are "actively operating in India in various sectors such as defence, health and life sciences, auto industry, clean technology, heavy machinery and equipment".

In a statement, the MEA said, "This will be the fifth interaction between the two leaders since 2015. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had visited Stockholm in April 2018 for the First India Nordic Summit. (Swedish) Prime Minister Stefan Lofven had visited India in February 2016 for the special Make in India week. Earlier, the two leaders had met on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in September, 2015. In April 2020, the two Prime Ministers had a telephonic conversation to discuss the situation arising out of the Covid-19 pandemic."



Metroman E. Sreedharan visits Palarivattom Bridge in Kochi on Thursday.

Metroman Sreedharan made BJP CM face for Kerala polls

Syro Malabar Church mouthpiece snubs BJP, asks tough questions

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAR. 4

The state unit of BJP on Thursday announced that Metroman E. Sreedharan would be the party's chief ministerial face in the forthcoming assembly elections in the state to be held on April 6.

BJP state president Mr K Surendran made the announcement while addressing a public meeting in Pathanamthitta district on Thursday in connection with his Vijay Yatra.

"If given a chance, under Metroman, Kerala will see a development culture like never before," he said.

He said that a sizable section of people in Kerala want a personality like E Sreedharan to become the chief minister of the state. "In the present circumstances when corruption is rampant and development projects have hit a roadblock, a person of Sreedharan's stature is needed at the helm. We requested him to join the BJP with a clear purpose of utilising his services for the state and the country," he said.

The BJP leader said Sreedharan is known for completing the projects in a cost effective manner, without corruption and in a time bound manner.

"In Kerala we know projects have been moving at a snail's pace. Alappuzha bypass took 45 years, Kollam bypass nearly five decades," he said.

Significantly Surendran's announcement came on a day when Sreedharan inspected the Palarivattom flyover in Kochi and announced that it was ready for traffic movement.

He was entrusted with the task of repair and maintenance of the flyover which had been closed for vehicular traffic because of major defects.

Though the flyover was to be completed within 16

months, Sreedharan got the work finished within six months.

The Palarivattom flyover had triggered a major political storm in Kerala last year with a former PWD minister and Muslim League leader being arrested in connection with the corruption in construction of fly over. It is alleged that low quality material was used for the construction which led to major defects.

"Yes the flyover is ready for being handed over to the state government in a day or two. It is for the government to reopen it for traffic," Sreedharan said after inspecting the flyover.

Earlier, even the metro-man had very clearly expressed his desire to lead the state if given a chance as a chief minister.

Church mouthpiece snubs BJP: In another development, the BJP which was trying to woo the Christian community in Kerala received a snub from Syro Malabar Church.

The mouthpiece of the Church *Sathya Deepam* unleashed a scathing attack on the BJP government at the Centre for the hike in LPG Petrol prices.

In an article, the Church said questions need to be asked to the BJP on various issues. It took a dig at the BJP "Vijay Yatra". Are they celebrating the 100 scored by petrol prices or ₹225 increased in LPG prices during the last three months.

The Church mouthpiece sought to know as to why Stan Swami was in the jail and why justice was being delayed to Kandhamal victims.

The BJP leaders including state president K Surendran, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister Ashwath Narayan had called on Syro Malabar Church archbishop Mar George Alanchery in Kochi recently to seek his support for the party.

BJP says Cong. used wrong tea garden picture

MANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, MAR. 4

In what has caught the Congress campaign managers on the wrong foot, Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday attacked the opposition Congress over using photos of a Taiwan tea garden in their campaign saying Congress leaders couldn't even recognise Assam.

The mistake, he said, was an insult to the people of Assam and the tea garden workers of the state.

The problem started over a photograph of a Taiwan tea garden tweeted by the official twitter handle of the Congress party which has launched an aggressive campaign to what they said - Assam Bachao (Save Assam) campaign.

Mr Sarma who is campaigning in New Delhi to finalise the seat sharing arrangement of the party for the state in New Delhi took to Twitter saying, "Official Congress campaign page is using a photo of tea garden from Taiwan to say 'Assam Bachao'. Congress leaders can't even recognise Assam? This is an insult of Assam and tea garden workers of our state. #CongressInsultsAssam"

Mr Sarma who is leading the campaign of the party in the state also shared a photograph that the Congress used for their 'Assam Bachao (save Assam)' campaign, alongside another screenshot that said it was a tea garden in Taiwan. It was a screenshot from

● **THE PROBLEM** started over a photograph of a Taiwan tea garden tweeted by the official twitter handle of the Congress party which has launched an aggressive campaign to what they said - Assam Bachao (Save Assam) campaign.

● **THE MISTAKE**, Sarma said, was an insult to the people of Assam and the tea garden workers.

Fotosearch that said it was a photo from the Nantou Tea garden in Taiwan. The issue of tea garden workers is one of the major ones in the upcoming assembly elections.

While the Congress has been relentlessly campaigning in Assam and earlier this week Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi was seen interacting and dancing with tea garden workers in the state. She was also seen plucking tea leaves at the Sadhuru tea garden in central Assam.

"The life of tea garden workers is full of truth and simplicity and their labour is valuable for the country. Today, I sat with them and inquired about their work, family and the problems they face while working. I will not forget the love and warmth they showed to me," she said while concluding her two days visit to Assam. She also announced that if her party voted to power in Assam, the minimum wage of the tea garden workers would be hiked to ₹365.

FIVE TOP CPM MINISTERS MAY NOT CONTEST

DC CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAR. 4

Five top ministers in Pinarayi Vijayan Cabinet may not contest assembly elections this time if the deliberation held during the state leadership meet in Thiruvananthapuram is any indication.

The state secretariat meeting held at the party headquarters AKG Centre here was of the opinion that the two-term norm needs to be complied with strictly while finalising the candidates.

According to party sources, if the norm is enforced strictly then Industries Minister E P Jayarajan, finance minister T M Thomas Isaac, PWD minister G Sudhakaran, Law-SC/ST Welfare Minister A K Balan and education minister C Raveendranath will not be in the fray.

Other MLAs who have completed three or four terms would also be kept out.

The district leadership of the party in Alappuzha had earlier recommended that ministers Sudhakaran, Isaac should be given exemption and fielded considering their high prospects of victory. However, this recommendation has now been turned down.

But party sources said that the final word is yet to be spoken on the issue. The secretariat opinion will be presented before the state committee and taken back to the Assembly committees. In case if the assembly committee unanimously decides to recommend the names of ministers again, then the state leadership will be forced to reconsider it.

DMK signs deal with VCK, waits for Congress

G BABU JAYAKUMAR & D SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 4

The VCK agreed to contest in six seats, four in the reserved category and two general constituencies, in the April 6 elections to the State Assembly on Thursday even as the DMK was waiting for the rest of its allies, particularly the Congress, to return to the negotiating table and sign pacts in the next two or three days.

After signing the poll agreement with DMK President MK Stalin, VCK general secretary Thol Thirumavalavan said their priority was to thwart the BJP's plan to capture the State and hence they did not want to haggle over the number of seats.

It is in the same spirit, other allies – the Congress, CPM, CPI and MDMK – would agree for the seats offered to them, sources in the DMK said. However, the mood in the other party offices was different.

While Congress sources said that talks with the DMK were deadlocked as the final offer they had been given was 20 seats against their demand of 35 but hoped that everything would be solved amicably in a day or two. AICC's Tamil Nadu in-charge Dinesh Gunda Rao, who is in Chennai to handle the negotiations for seats, had a meeting with the TNCC functionaries and the general perception was that the party should not accept the low offer.

Though the cadre, in general, felt the need for an alliance with the DMK to defeat the BJP in the State, there were some voices favouring the party going it alone in the polls. Senior TNCC leaders, however, clarified that the negotiations would yield positive results in a day or two.

Since the VCK, which was given 2 MP seats in the Lok Sabha elections, was given six seats, the Congress leaders feel that they were entitled for 27 seats, given the fact that

TN BJP SEEKS BAN ON RAHUL'S CAMPAIGN

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 4

The State BJP has urged the Election Commission to restrain Congress leader Rahul Gandhi from campaigning in the State as he has reportedly compared the situation in the country to that which prevailed under imperial rule before independence.

In a letter to the Election Commission, State President L Murugan and V Balachandran, who is state in-charge for election liaison committee, also demanded the filing of an FIR under Section 124 A of the IPC.

They alleged that Rahul Gandhi was inciting and abetting the youth for another freedom struggle and that it was done with an intent to cause hatred, contempt and excite dissatisfaction towards the government established by law.

they contested from nine constituencies for the Lok Sabha in 2019.

So, the general hope is that they would settle for a round figure of 25 and the pact would be signed in the next two days. Similarly the other DMK allies too are asking for more seats, while there seemed to be no threat to the alliance.

While CPM leader Sitaram Yechury indicated that the alliance with the DMK was intact, at the local level the party was demanding more than the eight seats it had been offered. The CPM's State executive meeting, scheduled for March 6, would take a final call on the alliance, sources said.

The TNCC is also holding its extended executive meeting on Friday when the seat-sharing imbroglio may again figure and the leaders may be able to take a final decision on it.

Owaisi to start WB campaign from March 13

PRANMOY BRAH-MACHARI | DC
BERHAMPUR, MARCH 4

All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimin (AIMIM) has finalised its candidates for 13 out of 22 seats in Murshidabad, one of the four key districts, it will contest in the ensuing West Bengal Assembly Election.

AIMIM Murshidabad district convener Asadul Sheikh said, "Our party will contest several seats in minority dominated districts Murshidabad, Malda, South Dinajpur and North Dinajpur. Our party chief Asaduddin Owaisi will kickstart the party's poll campaign on

March 13 from Sagardighi. We have already selected eligible candidates for 13 seats.

"We have also sent party leadership a list of candidates for the remaining nine seats for approval. They are yet to take a call on it. We are optimistic that all the right candidates will be chosen very soon," he said. He informed that he himself would contest from Jangipur in the district.

However, AIMIM insiders indicated that the party, despite a desperate hunt, was not getting popular and eligible candidates which has caused a delay in starting the poll campaign.

CONTENT | CURBS

OTT platforms are showing filthy things with abuses, Centre tells top court

SC favours screening of shows on OTT platforms

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

The Supreme Court on Thursday favoured the screening of programmes on over-the-top (OTT) platforms like Amazon Prime and Netflix while expressing concern that at times programmes are with porn contents.

"We are of the view that there should be some screening of such programs. At times they are showing pornography too", said a bench comprising Justice Ashok Bhushan and Justice R. Subhash Reddy.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta appearing for the Centre told the court that "They are showing filthy things with abuses too."

The top court's observation came in the course of the hearing of a plea by Aparna Purohit, the commercial head of Amazon Prime Video in India, seeking anticipatory bail in a case filed by the Uttar Pradesh government rooted in the web series *Tandav*.

Aparna Purohit has moved the top court against Allahabad High Court's order refusing her the anticipatory bail in the case.

Having expressed its displeasure over the way objectionable content including pornography was being shown on OTT platforms without prior screening, the court asked the Solicitor General Tushar Mehta appearing for the Centre to place before it the recently notified Information Technology Rules, which provide for regulation of content on OTT platforms.

While senior lawyer Mukul Rohatgi appearing for Aparna Purohit, argued that it was about "freedom of speech and expression", the bench countered that it was

about "creating balance". *Tandav*, a political thriller starring Saif Ali Khan, Dimple Kapadia and Mohd Zeeshan Ayyub, was launched as an Amazon exclusive in January and all its nine episodes have been completed since there was no court stay against its streaming.

Unlike the movies, produced in India or abroad, require the censor board's clearance before release to the theatres, but the OTT that was evolved in the wake of the complete lockdown due to the pandemic, there is no control on the contents of the pro-

grammes shown on them. It was in the wake of this that the government framed regulations to regulate them.

Meanwhile, Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar on Thursday met representatives from the Over the Top (OTT) industry and said they have welcomed the government's new guidelines.

He also said that the OTT industry will partner with the ministry towards making the experience on the platform better for audience.

"Had a fruitful meeting with representatives from

OTT industry and explained the provisions of the OTT rules. All representatives have welcomed the new guidelines. The ministry and industry will partner together to make the OTT experience better for all audience," Javadekar tweeted. However, more details about the meeting were not available immediately.

The government had on February 25 notified new rules and guidelines for OTT platforms and digital news media, requiring them to make public their details and having a grievance redressal system in place.

SHORT TAKES

GUNMEN KILL
7 WORKERS,
BOMB KILLS DOC

Kabul, March 4: At least seven Afghan civilians were shot and killed by a group of gunmen in the country's east and a physician died when a bomb attached to her rickshaw exploded on Thursday.

The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the bombing, saying its fighters had detonated a so-called sticky bomb placed on the vehicle of a woman. They claimed she worked for the Afghan intelligence service in Jalalabad. Gen. Juma Gul Hemat, provincial police chief in Nangarhar, said the attack victims were workers at a plaster factory in the Sorkh Rod district. Police arrested four suspects.

HK COURT KEEPS
47 ACTIVISTS
IN CUSTODY

Hong Kong, March 4: A Hong Kong court on Thursday ordered all 47 pro-democracy activists charged under a Beijing-imposed national security law to be kept in custody after the Department of Justice appealed an initial decision to grant bail to 15 of them. Thirty-two of the activists were denied bail outright. The next court hearing is on May 31.

The activists were charged with conspiracy to commit subversion under the security law and detained over their involvement in an unofficial primary election last year that authorities said was a plot to paralyze Hong Kong's government. The charges against the activists were the most sweeping action taken against the city's pro-democracy camp.

INDIAN IN UAE
WINS ₹24 CR IN
LUCKY DRAW

Dubai, March 4: An Indian man, living in the UAE for the last 15 years, has won a whopping 12 million dirhams (₹24 crore) in a raffle, the latest addition to the long list of lucky winners from India, a media report said on Thursday.

Shivamurthy Krishnappa, who is a mechanical engineer and hails from Shimoga district of Karnataka, has been living in the UAE for the last 15 years. He bought the winning ticket number 202511 on February 17 this year; the Gulf News reported. Krishnappa was excited as he watched the draw live from home. When the host Richard called him on his mobile, Krishnappa said: "I am watching the live draw. Thank you so much. I cannot believe I have won."

SHEIKH HASINA'S
POLITICAL
ADVISER DIES

Dhaka, March 4: HT Imam, the political adviser to Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, died on Thursday at a military hospital here.

Imam, 81, breathed his last at 1.15 am. He was undergoing treatment at the Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka. Awami League Office Secretary Biplab Barua said in a social media post. Imam, who was the cabinet secretary to the 1971 wartime government, was hospitalised with various age-related problems, *Dhaka Tribune* reported. After the Awami League headed by Hasina formed the government following the 2008 election, Imam was appointed as the public administration affairs adviser to the prime minister. Following the 2014 elections, he was made the political affairs adviser.

Law on H-1B visas
in US Congress

Legislation to end allure of cheap foreign labour

Washington, March 4:

Three Republican US lawmakers have introduced a legislation in Congress to bar American employers from hiring H-1B workers, who are mostly highly-skilled Indian IT professionals, if they have recently, or plan to fire their local workers, seeking to put an end to the allure of cheap foreign labour.

Introduced in the House of Representatives by Republican congressmen Mo Brooks, Matt Gaetz and Lance Gooden, the American Jobs First Act proposes to overhaul the H-1B visa programme by making necessary changes in the Immigration and Nationality Act.

The H-1B visa, most-sought after among Indian IT professionals, is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

According to its text released on Wednesday, a foreign guest worker may not be admitted or provided status as an H-1B non-immigrant in an occupational classification unless the petitioner employer has filed with the Secretary of Labour an application stating the employer is offering an annual wage to the H-1B non-immigrant that is the greater of the annual wage paid to the US citizen or lawful permanent resident employee who did identical or similar work during the two years before the petitioner employer filed such application; or \$110.

China may disrupt
5G network: US

Washington, March 4:

Observing that the Biden administration views 5G as a high priority, the US on Wednesday expressed concern about the dangers of installing networks with equipment that can be manipulated, disrupted, or even controlled by China which it alleged has no regard for human rights or privacy.

"The Biden administration views 5G as a high priority, of course. We advocate for a vibrant digital economy that enables all citizens to benefit from the promise of 5G wireless networks. We also know that the stakes for securing these networks

could not be any higher," State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said.

He said 5G, of course, is transformative and will touch every aspect of lives, and this is critical for infrastructure sectors: transportation, electrical distribution, healthcare, public health, and many more. "And so that is why we are concerned about the dangers of installing networks with equipment that can be manipulated, disrupted, or even controlled by the People's Republic of China, which as we know, of course, has no regard for human rights or privacy," Price said. —PTI

tion; or \$110.

The petitioner employer also needs to file with the Secretary of Labour an application stating the employer will not require an H-1B non-immigrant to pay a penalty for ceasing employment with the petitioner employer before the date agreed to by the H-1B non-immigrant and the petitioner employer.

The bill referred to the Committee on the Judiciary, and in addition to the Committee on Education and Labour among other things suspends the F-1 Optional Practical Training programme, which grants all foreign students extendable work permits and exacerbates job market competition among American graduates.

It ends the diversity visa lottery programme, which the lawmakers alleged fails to serve US interests by issuing 50,000 green cards to foreigners from around the world regardless of their qualifications. Given that the Democrats have a majority in the House of Representatives, the bill has little chance to be passed. "My American Jobs First Act will bring much needed reform and oversight to the H-1B visa programme to ensure that US workers are no longer disadvantaged in their own country. To end the allure of cheap foreign labour, the bill will require employers to pay any H-1B workers a minimum amount of \$110,000," Congressman Brooks said. —PTI

Sweden axe attack:
3 grievously injured

Stockholm, March 4:

Hospital officials say three people wounded in an assault by a man using an axe in southern Sweden are in life-threatening condition and police have reduced the overall number of victims to seven.

The suspected assailant, a man in his 20s, was shot, arrested and is being treated in a hospital, police said.

A press conference was expected later Thursday on the attack. The other victims of Wednesday's assault in the small town of Vetlanda, 190 kilometres southeast of Goteborg, Sweden's second-largest city, include two seriously injured people, two with moderate injuries and one who is slightly injured, the Jonkoping region said in a statement late Wednesday. The attack took place in the afternoon and police say there are five crime scenes in Vetlanda, a town of 13,000.

The man's motive was not immediately known. Police said the man, who they would not identify in line with Swedish policy, is known to them for petty crimes. Overnight, officers raided an apartment where he was reportedly staying.

The *Expressen* tabloid said the suspect was a 22-

● ALTHOUGH MINIMUM

The attack took place in the afternoon and police say there are five crime scenes in Vetlanda, a town of 13,000.

● THE SUSPECTED

assailant, a man in his 20s, was shot, arrested and is being treated in a hospital.

● THE MAN'S motive was not immediately known. Police said the man, who they would not identify in line with Swedish policy, is known to them for petty crimes.

year-old man from Afghanistan.

Sweden's Home Affairs Minister Mikael Damberg told broadcaster SVT on Thursday that the case was being investigated as attempted murder but all aspects would be considered, including whether it was a terror attack.

"It is obvious that you look at whether there are terrorist motives behind it, you have to get to the bottom of it," he said. Regional police chief Malena Grann said police were investigating whether there were any terrorist motives in the case.

—AP

PROTESTERS
MARCH AGAIN
IN MYANMAR

Nay Pyi Taw, March 4:

Demonstrators in Myanmar protesting last month's military coup returned to the streets Thursday, undaunted by the killing of at least 38 people the previous day by security forces.

New protests were held in at least three areas of Yangon, the country's largest city, that have been scenes of violence for the past few days. Police again used force to try to disperse the crowds, according to social media accounts. Protests also continued in Mandalay, the second-biggest city. A formation of five fighter planes flew over the city on Thursday morning in what appeared to be a threatening show of force. The UN special envoy for Myanmar, Christine Schraner Burgener, said 38 people were killed Wednesday, a figure consistent with other reports.

The death toll was the highest since the Feb. 1 takeover, when the military ousted the elected government of leader Aung San Suu Kyi. More than 50 civilians, mostly peaceful protesters, are confirmed to have been killed by police and soldiers since then.

—AP

Farmers demonstrate in France



French farmers stand behind a banner reading "Our job: feed you well. No more denigration and misinformation" as they take part in a demonstration to alert about their financial situation and a large number of suicides in their profession, in Paris, on Thursday.

—AFP

Did Markle bully staff as a
royal Palace to investigate

London, March 4:

Buckingham Palace has launched an investigation into allegations that Meghan Markle, the Duchess of Sussex, bullied staff during her time as a frontline royal with Prince Harry in Britain. Markle, 39, lived at Kensington Palace for nearly a year after her marriage to Prince Harry, 36, the Duke of Sussex, in May 2018.

The probe comes as *The Times* published a leaked email on Wednesday from a staff member alleging that the former American actress drove two personal assistants out of the household and undermined the confidence of a third member of staff. "We are clearly very concerned about allegations in the 'Times' following claims made by former staff of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex," Buckingham Palace, which is responsible for all Royal Household staff, said in a statement.

"Accordingly, our HR team will look into the circumstances outlined in the article. Members of staff involved at the time, including those who have

Palace perpetuating
falsehoods: Meghan

Los Angeles, March 4:

Meghan Markle says Buckingham Palace is "perpetuating falsehoods" about her and her husband Prince Harry, according to part of an interview she has done with Oprah Winfrey.

The explosive claim is the latest salvo in an increasingly heated public relations battle between the British royal family and the US-based couple. The clip, released

Wednesday, came hours after Buckingham Palace said it was investigating claims Markle had bullied household staff in the months after her fairytale wedding to the prince.

"I don't know how they could expect that after all of this time we would still just be silent if there's an active role that The Firm is playing in perpetuating falsehoods about us," Markle told Winfrey.

—AFP

PRINCE PHILIP HAD
SUCCESSFUL HEART
PROCEDURE

London, March 4: Britain's Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, has had a "successful procedure" for a pre-existing heart condition at a London hospital where he was moved earlier this week, Buckingham Palace said on Thursday.

The 99-year-old husband of Queen Elizabeth II has now spent 16 nights in hospital first at the private King Edward VII's Hospital and now at St. Bartholomew's Hospital where he was transferred for further tests and observation for a pre-existing heart condition.

"The Duke of Edinburgh yesterday [Wednesday] underwent a successful procedure for a pre-existing heart condition at St. Bartholomew's Hospital," Buckingham Palace said in a statement about Prince Philip.

—AP

left the Household, will be invited to participate to see if lessons can be learned," it said. "The Royal Household has had a Dignity at Work policy in place for a number of years and does not and will not tolerate bullying or harassment in the workplace," it said.

Past and present royal employees are to be invit-

ed to speak in confidence about their experiences of working for the Duchess as part of the investigation. Lawyers for the couple, who stepped back as frontline royals last year, have said they are the victims of a calculated smear campaign based on "misleading and harmful misinformation".

—PTI

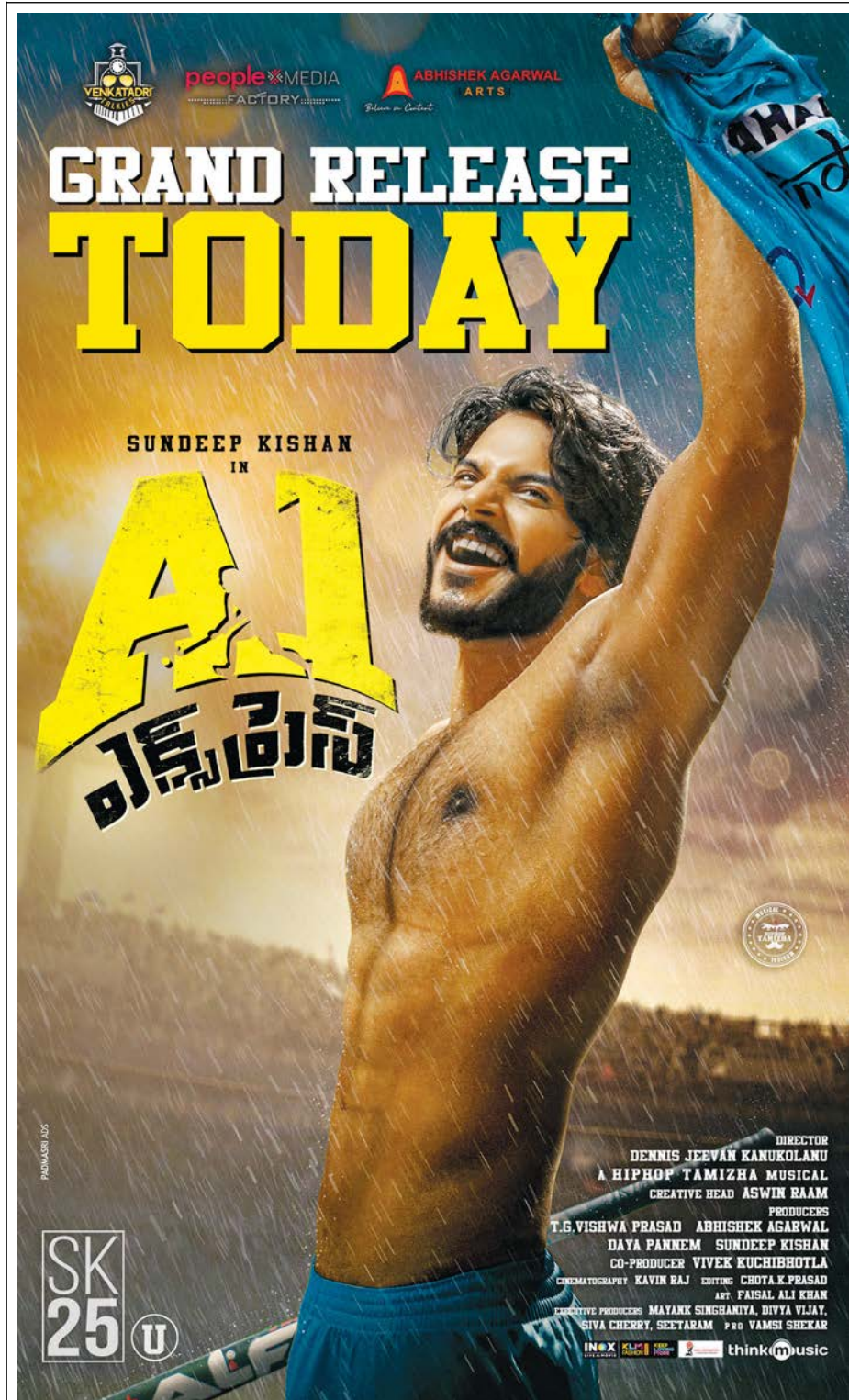
NEPAL SIGNS
PEACE DEAL
WITH REBELS

Kathmandu, March 4:

Nepal's government signed a peace agreement Thursday with a small communist rebel group widely feared because they were known for violent attacks, extortion and bombings in the country.

The government agreed to lift a ban on the group, release all their members and supporters in jail and drop all legal cases against them, while the group agreed to give up all violence and resolve any issues through peaceful dialogue.

—AP



FILM | FEST 'Loony Porn' lays bare a country that has revised its history

A teacher, a porn clip and a nation's hypocrisy

SUPARNA SHARMA | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

Romanian writer-director Radu Jude's *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn* opens with a naughty, kinky pornographic scene. Emi (Katia Pascariu), a school teacher, is having sex with her husband and they are recording the proceedings for a bit of extra thrill.

But somehow the sex tape leaks and is soon making the rounds of giggly WhatsApp groups of her students and their parents. Some download it, purportedly as evidence to beat Emi with. The fact that the

sex is consensual, between a husband and wife is irrelevant. There is outrage, and it's mostly about how could a middle-aged, married woman be so raunchy.

Radu Jude's film, which premiered in the main Competition section at the 71st International Film Festival of Berlin, uses this porn clip and the subsequent "trial" of Emi in the school's yard to draw circles around a society's hypocrisy.

The film is split in three parts. In the first, *Loony Porn* walks with Emi as she visits her school principal, goes to a book store and a pharmacy. Shot during the Coronavirus pandemic,

this segment has visuals of a city all masked up and wary of social interactions. But it's also a city busy consuming, enraging, eradicating the past.

We watch arguments and fights in a supermarket, with owners of big cars who block the sidewalk as a matter of their right.

Each clash is an assertion of the entitlement of the rich and marginalisation of others.

The film's second part is polyphonic and here, through commentary, archival footage, statistics, words, nudes in newspapers, building rising and in ruins, *Loony Porn* tells the story of Romania — about its role in

the Holocaust, its attitude to Jews, Romas, love for dictators, attitude to sex and children. It also tells us that in Romania, 6 out of 10 kids are subjected to family violence.

This fact hovers over the film's last segment — the meeting called by the school principal and parents to interrogate and then vote on Emi's future.

It is kicked off by a parent who insists on playing the sex clip for the benefit of all those gathered.

This scene, framed like an inquisition — the "accused" is in the middle, flanked by a judge who will rule based on the mood of the people and the enforcer of morali-

ty — is both dark and funny.

Though allegations, tangential discussions, innuendoes, inappropriate remarks, shrill sanctimony and, finally, the judgment, *Loony Porn* lays bare a nation that has revised its history to legitimise its past and current criminal acts and feels emboldened to air its prejudice, bigotry and misplaced rage.

Because many speak in the same tongue, collective hypocrisy gets elevated to a sanctimonious, narcissistic chorus.

What's striking is how familiar it all feels. This searing portrait of a nation and its people could well be a day in the life of India.

DECCAN
Chronicle

5 MARCH 2021

Dissent not sedition: SC
sends govt clear signal

In a ringing endorsement of a universal democratic view that voicing anti-government views is not sedition, the Supreme Court shot down a so-called public interest litigation by a couple of individuals against Farooq Abdullah, the senior Kashmiri leader and former chief minister of J&K. Regardless of whether the litigation was inspired or not by the forces that be, the truth is freedom of speech in a democracy is being challenged every day. There is a clear pattern to be seen behind offence being taken at every turn at any view expressed that runs contrary to the rigid opinions of the majoritarians who are quite willing to be at odds with India's tradition of tolerance and pluralism.

The criminalising of dissent is the clearest sign of an authoritarian government. There was a stinging lesson for the authorities in the Disha Ravi case when a learned judge, quoting the Rig Veda, said — "Let noble thoughts come to me from all directions" — to uphold the right of the activist to internationalise the farmers' stir issue. The cause of action was described as intent "to wage economic, social, culture and regional war against India".

There is little reason to suspect that the income tax raids on certain Bollywood personalities this week were not inspired by people in power who are trying to throttle celebrities expressing views not in consonance with the inflexible opinion of the leaders of the majoritarians

How very conveniently the political is covered into an issue for patriotism is revealing of how any deviation from the State's view on an issue as humongous as the farmers' agitation involving a very sizeable section of the population was viewed as that of a heretic who had to be punished.

There is little reason to suspect that the income tax raids on certain Bollywood personalities this week were not inspired by people in power who are trying to throttle celebrities expressing views that are not in consonance with the inflexible opinion of the leaders of the majoritarians. Glib explanations of there being a logical cause for action against tax avoidance do not cut ice. The action, in fact, is suggestive of intimidating tactics against dissent that has been occurring in a pattern of retribution in keeping with a larger modus operandi of making criminals of dis-

senters through persecution using official India machinery like I-T, ED and the police to register FIRs and foist cases.

Events are all too suggestive of a democracy in decay. Our worst fears were confirmed when India was downgraded to "partly free" for the first time since 1997 in the annual ranking of democracies by the US-government funded research group Freedom House, which cited worsening civil rights under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. As the world's largest democracy, in which a variety of opinions including dissenting ones must coexist in diverse people who are thought of as conscience keepers of the nation, India can ill afford to drop the safeguards against making criminals out of dissenters.

Mercifully, the courts have not shied away from not only enlarging those accused of high crimes like sedition by using arcane laws out of the British colonial era but rapping the State agencies in presenting instruments of oppression as legitimate criminal and civil charges. Everyone holding an opinion different from the views of official India or the central ruling party is not an inducer of violence or intent on waging a war against the State. It is a blessing that courts are alive to the rule of law and is dismissive of "rule by law" as a wise judge put it while granting bail in one case.

Damp squib Sasikala

For all those who were expecting political fireworks in Tamil Nadu when V.K. Sasikala, the erstwhile confidante of late J. Jayalalithaa, drove down to Chennai on February 8, it was a damp squib when she suddenly called it quits on Wednesday night. There was speculation that she would make a political impact. She, too, was trying to live up to that image by making statements, addressing cadre and even celebrating Jayalalithaa's birth anniversary with pomp and fanfare.

So, coming like a bolt from the blue, her decision triggered a whole range of conjectures since people saw in it a conjuncture of two political events. One, the BJP desperately trying to force the AIADMK to patch up with Ms Sasikala, and AIADMK leaders digging in their heels refusing to let her or her nephew T.T.V. Dhinakaran into their fold. Since the BJP's intelligence was that Ms Sasikala and Mr Dhinakaran could take away some votes that would otherwise come to its coalition, it first put pressure on AIADMK and then on Ms Sasikala, asking her to scoot. Why this supposition found more takers in the state was because the people know Ms Sasikala as a power-hungry, diabolic operator who would not easily let go any opportunity to rule.

Also, when it is known that she cannot stand for election for another six years, what was the need to announce that she was leaving the turf? Besides, since her landing in Chennai, she had not made any significant breakthrough politically, other than having a few guests like actor Seeman, actor Sarathkumar and his wife Radhika and film director Bharathiraja. So, why should she say that she will pray and not play politics? Because the powers that be want her to not even be seen in the reckoning. It's a different matter that Bharathiraja spotted in her a "brave Tamil woman" not ashamed of going to jail and facing party cadre with fortitude.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

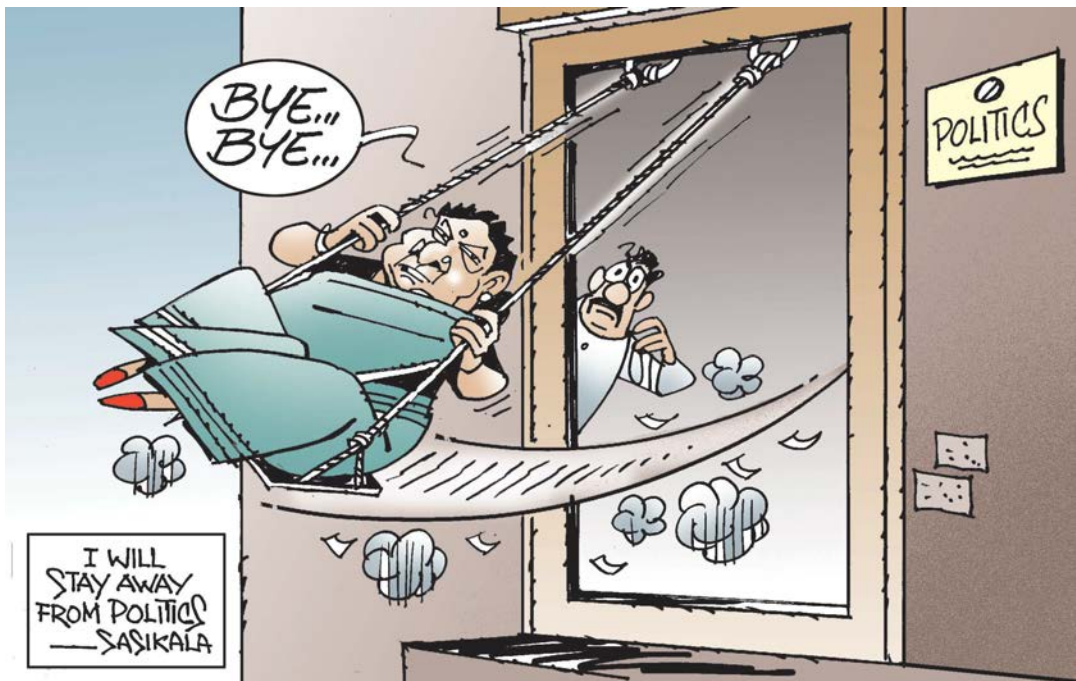
KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUBHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930-4; Fax : 040-27805256
Vijayawada: No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-2555284/2555287; Telefax: 0866-2552534
Visakhapatnam: Survey No.1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P.), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: 0891-2755285
Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswarum Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208
Anantapur: Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904
Karimnagar: Survey No.1341, Vavilapally Colony, Jagitiyala Road, Karimnagar - 505 001, Ph: 0878-2228908; Telefax: 0878-2220433
Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chennudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580
Chennai: SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/48/50/51; Adv: Fax: 22254765/22254766/42305325
Coimbatore: 77, Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore - 641 009, Ph : 0422 2231255
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Subhani



The tragedy of Suu Kyi:
Almost Shakespearean



Karan Thapar

As I See It

Shakespeare's tragedies have heroes, but they are not heroic. As the plays unfold you witness their crumbling. In fact, they destroy themselves because the flaw is embedded deep in their character. It's an inevitable and irresistible process. It's an outcome that cannot be prevented. That's why it's tragic.

I think that could also be true of Aung San Suu Kyi. I've known her since I was five. At the time, her mother was the Burmese ambassador in India, and Suu, as I have always called her, was an undergraduate at New Delhi's Lady Shri Ram College. Our parents became friends and Suu and my sister Kiran would often drive together to college.

Even as a teenager, Suu was drawn to politics. She sensed her future would ultimately lie in ruling Burma (the name she prefers for Myanmar) and didn't hide it even if she only spoke jocularly. A pencil-drawn portrait that she made of my sister Kiran, dated October 11, 1962, has inscribed at the bottom: "Kiran Thapar may be allowed entry into Burma at any time". Suu was only 17 at the time.

Years later her husband Michael told me at Oxford that when they married — and Suu was 27 at the time — she forewarned him that if Burma calls it would always be her priority. In fact, he sensed when she returned home in 1988 it was unlikely that she would come back. She didn't. They lived separately till he died. She was also cut off from her two young sons. Of the next 21 years, she spent 15 either in jail or under house arrest.

No doubt this hurt, and she suffered, but politics and the determination to come to power in Burma was more than a mission. It was a calling. It

defined Suu. Perhaps it was also her way of fulfilling her father's dream, which was cruelly aborted when he was assassinated months before Burma's independence.

When I last interviewed her, in September 2015, just before the election that brought her to power, the Rohingya issue was already a challenge she knew she would have to face if she won. At the time she was unable or unwilling to express concern and sympathy. I questioned her silence. Her explanation was that this was the only way of ensuring she would be seen as impartial by both sides. Silence would give her the opportunity and credibility to act impartially when she came to power. Her aim was to reconcile, and condemnation would get in the way. It would fan the flames, not douse them.

I had no reason to doubt her. It was also already clear she would never be President and internal security would lie with the Army, which had successfully thwarted her claim to the top job. Criticising them could endanger the limited power that she hoped to exercise. She had to tread carefully and speak cautiously. She had to compromise to survive. All of that was understandable.

Was her silence on the Rohingyas before elections impartiality, as she had claimed, or seeking favour with the Burmese majority? Today I feel it was her instinctive response to an unforeseen hurdle that could have obstructed the fulfilment of her ambition

The reaction happened internationally, not at home. The world viewed her attitude to the Rohingyas as a demeaning compromise. Her earlier reputation for valiant sacrifice was forgotten. That placed her on a high pedestal. This threw her down.

What wasn't was how terrible that compromise turned out to be. It only became clear after she won. Not for a moment did I think it would be tilted in favour of retaining power and influence whilst forsaking her own principles. Yet that was the undeniable outcome.

As State Counsellor if she spoke about the Rohingyas it was only in terms of terrorism and the killing of security personnel. She had nothing to say of the innocent men, women and children, killed in their hundreds and rendered homeless in their hundreds of thousands. It seemed political expediency dominated her principles completely. She would not express compassion. I didn't expect her to defy the Army or endanger Burma's fledgling democracy, but I also did not expect her lips to remain so firmly sealed.

This raised a disturbing question — was her silence on the Rohingya issue before the elections impartiality, as she had claimed, or seeking favour with the Burmese majority whose support she would need? Was it pragmatism or opportunism? Initially I thought it was both. Today I feel it was her instinctive response to an unforeseen hurdle that could have obstructed the fulfilment of her ambition to rule Burma. Just as separation from her husband and children and a decade and a half in detention did not deter her, nor would this.

The reaction happened internationally, not at home. The world viewed her attitude to the

Rohingyas as a demeaning compromise. Her earlier reputation for valiant sacrifice was forgotten. That placed her on a high pedestal. This threw her down. Once admired, she was now reviled. Outside Burma she became a fallen angel.

At home it was very different. Reverentially called "The Lady" and "Mother Suu", the majority she won in the 2020 elections was even greater than the landslide five years ago. And after the military threw out her government and put her under arrest, the admiration her people have for her seems to know no limits. But, alas, it's also likely to ensure that the generals do not change their mind and restore her to power.

So, like Shakespeare's tragic heroes, she may well ask if the price she paid for achieving her ambition was worth it? If it turns out to be only five years in power, with no credible possibility of restoration, did she compromise her principles and her international reputation for an office that was so easily snatched away and for authority that was never complete, often checked and so easily revoked?

Shakespeare's tragic heroes face similar dilemmas. But rarely do they live to address or answer them. With their denouement there is also usually death. Suu, however, is alive to face hers, even if in incarceration. She will have all the time she needs to reflect, and it won't be easy.

In that interview in 2015 she described herself as "a pragmatic leader". At the time, the adjective conveyed a sense of careful balance. Today it suggests a cover for unbecoming compromise. When I asked if she was ready for the challenge of ruling Burma, she answered: "It's a daunting challenge... I hope it brings out the best in me". Sadly, it did not. But as Shakespeare might add, that was inevitable. Suu would not be Suu if it could have been otherwise.

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

MINISTER QUILTS

Absolute power corrupts absolutely. The filthy rich Karnataka minister Ramesh Jarkiholi is perhaps totally drunk with authority as he new only power mongering. The allegation, if proved (but it will not), exposes the fact that an Indian politician or for that matter even President of USA is not an exception to sexual abuse. Rumours abound that the Karnataka minister was targeted by his own party members, as he was eying the post of CM through political management a la Yeddyurappa!.. Whether it was true or not is a different question. It was a trap laid to expose the minister and he had just walked into it.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

SEDITION & DISSENT

Let's hope the NDA government is mollified to some extent and not resort to impose sedition charge at the drop of a hat on every person showing opinion opposing them (SC says dissent is not sedition, DC, March 4). Not only that, the SC took umbrage on the petitioner who filed such PIL sans any conclusive evidence to prove his case and imposed a heavy penalty.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN
DECCAN
Chronicle

Stalls that stall your puff

HYDERABAD, March. 4

Whether we have budget or not it is the annual feature to experience shortage of essentials and then as we stampedere for them we could somehow acquire them at a heavy price.

As was won't, cigarettes were the first that went underground a trend known as "common man's cigarette", has suddenly become a scarce commodity. As was put out by the manufacturers there seemed to be low production of these cigarettes for want of certain materials. But why these cigarettes should be made available at stalls at 45 paise instead of the fixed rate of 33 paise nobody understands.

If the slave for the Dame Nicotine tries to bargain he knows he knows he would have to suffer from starvation of his blissful smoke. While man suffers from this, his mate at home is not spared.

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Diplomatic pool
to get eight new
joint secys soon

The ministry of external affairs (MEA) has been quite keen to add more joint secretaries to the diplomatic pool to staff new embassies and consulates being set up in various countries. Now, after some wait, headway has been made in this direction with the government planning to empanel eight IFS officers of the 2003 batch as joint secretaries.

According to sources, the cadre controlling authority of the IFS was ready with its list in December last year but was asked to wait since the government was about to empanel 41 IAS officers from the 2003 batch. The department of personnel and training (DoPT) reportedly informed MEA that there should be a gap of one month in the empanelment process between the IAS and IFS. It is further learnt

that, except for Devesh Uttam who is posted in the country, the remaining seven IFS officers are posted abroad.

It is a known fact that India's foreign service is woefully understaffed, with most Indian missions abroad having too few diplomats. This could be a small step towards addressing this grievance.

SREEDHARAN PADS UP FOR
ANOTHER INNINGS

The BJP wants to be a serious contender in Kerala and is hoping that "Metro Man" E. Sreedharan's induction in the party will help it make inroads in the impending Assembly elections. Will the gamble pay off?

Mr Sreedharan has enjoyed a full innings in his illustrious career, immense credibility with the *aam aadmi* as an honest and efficient

technocrat as well as respect among politicians across party lines, and picked up a Padma Shri, Padma Vibhushan and a host of other national and international honours.

Why would the man who shot to fame with the Delhi Metro project and who advised the Kerala government on Metro projects in the state and who is also involved in the other Metro projects in Jaipur and Lucknow want a stab at politics (and chief ministership, no less!) at the ripe age of 88 years?

Clearly, he enjoys wearing many hats. And a politician's *topi* would be the crowning glory of his career if he can manage the challenge of transforming from technocrat into a neta. His future progress will be watched closely by not just politicians but also bureaucrats who may be nurturing similar

ambitions themselves.

MP CHIEF MINISTER
FINDS HIS MOJO

The usually affable and soft-spoken Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan is a different man in his fourth term, according to the babus in the state. By some accounts, he seems to have set the proverbial cat among the pigeons! Mr Chouhan, it appears, is attempting an image makeover. The soft-spoken veneer has been replaced by a hard-nosed leader in "full action" mode.

The result of this transformation has been directed at the babus who, sources say, have begun to dread the CM's new-found penchant to order the transfer of officers, sometimes during a meeting itself. According to sources, Mr Chouhan has unceremoniously transferred

more than six district magistrates and SPs so far and seems to be in an unrelenting mood. One IPS officer, Vahini Singh, the SP of Niwari district, was transferred during a meeting by Mr Chouhan, who also told the gathered officials in as many words that he was keeping a close tab on them. Other officers transferred in this period are the SP of Guna Rajesh Singh, and the DMs of Neemuch and Betul, J.S. Rajee and Rakshak Singh.

Those in the know say that the chief minister is using the monthly meetings with state officials to scare them into submission through these tactics. Mr Chouhan means business is the unmistakable message and it seems to be hitting its mark quite effectively!

Share a babu experience! Follow dilithecherian@Twitter.com. Let's

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,846.08	1.16
Nifty 50	15,080.80	1.08
S&P 500*	3,827.09	0.19
Dollar (₹)	72.83	-0.15
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.45	0.22
Euro (₹)	87.63	0.41
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,372*217	0.48
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	65.79	2.68
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.212	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.481	0.011

* As of 8:30 PM IST

FDI equity flow rises 40% in April-Dec: Govt

Foreign direct investment grew 40 per cent to \$51.47 billion during April-Dec. 2020-21. India has attracted 22 per cent higher FDI inflow (including re-invested earnings) of \$67.54 billion during the first nine months of FY21 against \$55.14 billion in the same period of FY20. "FDI equity inflow grew by 40 per cent in the first nine months of 2020-21 (\$51.47 billion) compared to the year ago period (\$36.77 billion)," the govt said.

Arcelor Nippon inks pact for ₹50K cr plant



ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India (AM/NS India) inked an MoU with the Odisha government for setting up a 12 mtpa integrated steel plant in Kendrapada district with an investment of Rs 50,000 crore, officials said. Steel tycoon Lakshmi N. Mittal met chief minister Naveen Patnaik at his residence Naveen Niwas earlier in the day and discussed ArcelorMittal's projects in the state, an official said.

Companies garner ₹9,100 cr via NCD issues

As many as eight companies raised over Rs 9,118 crore through retail issuance of non-convertible debentures in the first ten months of the ongoing fiscal. In comparison, firms had garnered Rs 14,161 crore through this route in the April-January period of 2019-20. Most of the funds have been mobilised to support lending activities, working capital requirements and other general corporate purposes.

Kabira electric bikes sells 6,100 units in 96 hours

Kabira Mobility, the Goa-based EV startup and manufacturer of two electric model bikes, said it had reached a total bookings of 6,100 electric bikes on February 28 with a down payment of Rs 3,000. Delivery of the bikes will start from the first week of May. The company had launched India's fastest electric bikes called KM3000 and KM4000 on February 25 priced at Rs 1.27 lakh and Rs 1.37 lakh, respectively.



■ May seek \$35 bn valuation in blank-cheque deal Flipkart weighs US listing by merging with a Spac

BAIJU KALESH & ANTO ANTONY MARCH 4

Walmart Inc's Flipkart is exploring going public in the US through a merger with a blank-cheque company as it seeks to quicken its listing process, according to people familiar with the matter.

The Bengaluru-based online retailer has been weighing a US initial public offering and it's now also looking at other options, the people said. Flipkart's advisers have approached several Spacs, said one of the people, who asked not to be identified as the information is not public. Flipkart could seek a valuation of at least \$35 billion in a blank-cheque transaction, the people said.

Deliberations are at an early stage and Flipkart could still explore other options, the people said. A representative for Flipkart had no immediate comment.

The e-commerce firm is joining other Indian firms like online grocer Grofers in exploring a US listing through Spac deals. ReNew Power last week agreed to merge with a US-listed special purpose acquisition company (Spac) in a deal that will give India's biggest renewable power producer an enterprise value of \$8 billion.

Merging with Spacs will allow Walmart to take its India unit to market at a faster pace than the usual IPO route. As many as 10

Spacs look to India for next wave of targets: Nomura

BAIJU KALESH MARCH 4

Blank-cheque companies are increasingly looking to India for acquisition targets, which will keep the country's recent deal-making streak going, according to Nomura Holdings Inc.

"Spac-led transactions are expected to increase in the coming years in India," Utpal Oza, head of investment banking for India at Nomura, said in a phone interview. "Wherever you've got businesses which have caught the fancy of international investors especially in sectors such as renewables, tech or e-commerce, where the corporate structure enables it to be merged quite easily, you will see Spac activity."

A blank-cheque company is a shell company that raises money from public investors with the goal of acquiring a business within two years. These deals—some sponsored by the

rich and famous including Hong Kong billionaire Richard Li and ex-Credit Suisse chief Tidjane Thiam—have raised more than \$66 billion in the US alone just this year, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

Singapore could join the bandwagon soon. The country's exchange is consulting the market on allowing Spacs to go public, and could see its first such listing this year if it gets enough support. As many as 10 Indian companies could go public through Spac deals before the end of the year and the trend could accelerate if Singapore's blank-cheque firm listings are permitted, Oza said.

In India, Nomura expects equal revenue contributions from equity capital markets, mergers & acquisitions as well as financing, Oza added. In a further boost to its business, the Japanese bank plans to hire four bankers across debt origination,

corporate finance and sector coverage, he said.

Nomura also expects more initial public offerings in India this year, with sentiment buoyed by the post-debut performance of recently listed companies, said Mangesh Ghogre, its head of equity capital markets for India.

In 2020, companies raised about \$4.6 billion through first-time share sales in the South Asian nation and their shares are now trading more than 50 per cent above their IPO prices on average, data compiled by Bloomberg show. Nomura ranked second as IPO arranger in India last year, just behind Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd, according to the Bloomberg league table.

About \$1.7 billion has been raised so far this year, while State Bank of India is preparing its mutual fund joint venture for an offering that could raise \$1 billion.

—Bloomberg

EPF rate retained at 8.5%

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 4

Giving a much-needed relief to the employed class worried about the falling interest regime, the Employees Provident Fund Organisation has retained the interest rate on EPF deposits at 8.5 per cent for the current fiscal (FY20-21).

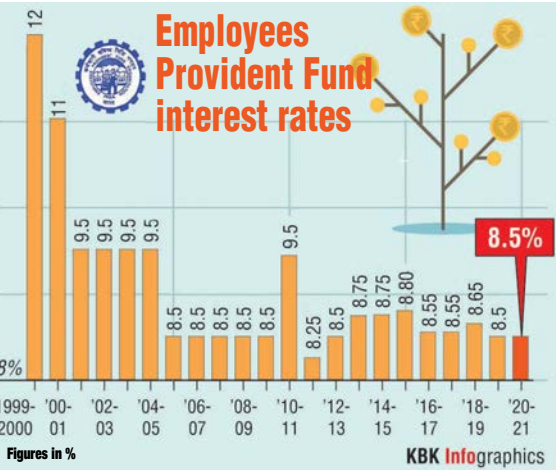
The EPFO had to liquidate investment in equities to maintain the rate at the current level, but it would still be making a profit this year. Though the EPFO's Central Board has recommended 8.50 per cent rate, the final call on the rate is taken by the finance ministry.

At 8.5 per cent, the EPF rate is better than most government small savings scheme rates, ranging from 6.9 per cent to 8.4 per cent, and bank fixed deposit rates of 5.5 to 6.3 per cent.

A government release on Thursday said the Central Board of the EPFO has recommended an annual interest rate of 8.5 per cent to be credited on deposit accounts of more than five crore members for the financial year 2020-21. The decision on interest rate would be sent to the finance ministry for concurrence and later notified in the gazette, after which interest will be credited into the subscribers' accounts.

For FY21, EPFO decided to liquidate investment in equity and the interest rate recommended is a result of combined income from interest received from debt investment as well as income realised from equity investment.

As per reports, EPFO had an income of Rs 70,500 crore for distribution and even after keeping interest rates for current year at 8.5 per cent, it would have a surplus of around Rs 300 crore. From 2015-16, the EPFO had started investing in equity through exchange-traded funds (ETFs) based on the NSE-50 and BSE-30 indices. The investment in equity assets started from 5 per cent for FY15 and is now at 15 per cent of the incremental portfolio.



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The EPFO's decision comes amidst speculations that the interest rates would be lowered for FY21 due to the pandemic impact. In FY20, the EPFO had cut the interest rate on PF deposits to a seven-year low of 8.5 per cent. The rate of interest was 8.8 per cent in 2015-16, which came down to 8.65 per cent in FY19.

In the last budget, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced that the depositors investing more than Rs 2.5 lakh in EPF in a year would not enjoy tax exemption. This restriction is applicable for contribution made on or after April 1, 2021.

"The interest rate offered by EPF is better than most of the small savings schemes. So, even if you have 8.5 per cent with tax exemption till a contribution of Rs 2.5 lakh and 8.5 per cent for the remaining portion with tax, it remains a good option. It is a risk-free investment and is better than the bank fixed deposit rates ranging between 5.5 per cent and 6.3 per cent," said Suresh Sadagopan, founder of Ladder7 Financial Advisors.

The current interest rate on EPF is higher than most of the small savings scheme rates. Public Provident Fund and National Savings Certificate provide 7.9 per cent interest rate. Kisan Vikas Patra offers 7.6 per cent and Sukanya Samridhi Yojana 8.4 per cent. The five-year Post Office Monthly Income Scheme offers 7.6 per cent interest rate and post office term deposits of 1-3 years offer interest rate of 6.9 per cent. Post office 5-year recurring deposits offer 7.2 per cent.

Wipro to buy UK's Capco for \$1.45 bn

New Delhi, March 4: IT services major Wipro on Thursday said it has signed an agreement to acquire London-headquartered Capco, a global management and technology consultancy, in a \$1.45-billion (over Rs 10,500 crore) deal.

This will be the biggest ever acquisition by Wipro. In a regulatory filing, Wipro said the acquisition will strengthen its position as a consulting and IT services provider to the banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI) sector, provide access to marquee BFSI clients and create a large global financial services practice for the company with a strong consulting footprint.

Clients will benefit from a combination of Wipro's capabilities in strategic design, domain and consulting, digital transformation, cloud, cybersecurity, data and IT services with Capco's deep domain and consulting capabilities across banking, payments, capital markets, insurance, risk and regulatory offerings, it added.

The transaction is expected to be completed during the quarter ending June 30, subject to regulatory approvals and customary closing conditions.



Thierry Delaporte

Capco works with more than 100 clients. It has over 5,000 consultants based in 30 global locations in 16 countries

Founded in 1998, Capco works with more than 100 clients and has many longstanding relationships with the world's leading financial institutions. It has over 5,000 consultants based in more than 30 global locations across 16 countries. The company's consolidated revenues for the year ended December 2020 was \$720 million.

"We are very excited to welcome Capco's admirable leadership team and employees, and site regulatory approvals and customary closing conditions.

global clients, to Wipro. Together, we can deliver high-end consulting and technology transformations, and operations offerings to our clients.

"Wipro and Capco share complementary business models and core guiding values, and I am certain that our new Capco colleagues will be proud to call Wipro home," Wipro CEO and managing director Thierry Delaporte said.

Capco CEO Lance Levy said the companies will together offer bespoke transformational end-to-end solutions, now powered by innovative technology at scale, to create a new leading partner to the financial services industry. "We look forward to leveraging the complementary capabilities and similar cultures of both companies to drive industry change and offer exciting opportunities for both our clients, and our people," Levy said.

The deal will require anti-trust approvals under the competition laws of the US, Germany, Canada, Brazil and Austria along with other regulatory approvals, the filing said.

—PTI

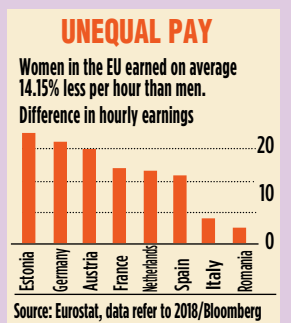
EU to bar employers from asking candidates' pay

AOIFE WHITE MARCH 4

Employers may be prevented from quizzing job candidates on their current earnings under European Union rules that aim to help women secure higher pay, EU Equality Commissioner Helena Dalli said.

"If it happens, it would be a form of discrimination. We are saying it shouldn't happen. The candidate can report this," she told reporters ahead of the Thursday publication of draft rules on pay transparency. "Previous pay has no bearing on skills and the abilities of the applicant for work and that's why we believe this must not be revealed if the employee does not want to."

The European Commission is proposing binding pay transparency legislation to help close a pay gap that sees women paid 14.1 per cent less than men across the 27-nation bloc. The proposals are subject to potential amendments and approval by EU governments and the European



Parliament before they become law applying throughout the EU.

Candidates should have the right to ask prospective employers for pay information under the proposal "which aims at empowering workers in the negotiations on pay," Dalli told reporters. Exposing pay information will help women see if they are being paid fairly for the same work, regulators say, and may help equality advocates and trade unions seek compensation for pay discrimination.

Women have been hit badly by the pandemic, she said, since many are in precarious employment. The pay transparency rules are only "one tiny move" in larger efforts to help women gain equal pay, including efforts for men to take more leave for child-rearing. Women's reduced hours or maternity leave can hit their pension contributions. Women receive pensions that are 30 per cent lower on average.

The EU's proposal requires governments to set penalties, including fines, at a level they think will be effective, if companies aren't supplying information on potential pay gaps. Large firms with more than 250 employees should publish information on the pay to female and male workers and supply more detailed information to their staff. Smaller firms will be required to supply pay information at a worker's request.

The rules cover basic salary, bonuses, overtime, pensions and travel and housing allowances. The proposal isn't asking for women to be paid the same as men but that any pay differences must be based on clear criteria.

—Bloomberg

Cyber attack behind NSE glitch?

FC BUREAU MUMBAI, MARCH 4

NSE's technical glitch on February 24 could have been due to a cyber attack and not telecom service provider's failure, given the way the system came to a halt slowly, according to a report published by Moneylife Foundation, an NGO, engaged in spreading financial literacy and consumer awareness.

The manner in which NSE's operations shut down have all signs of a cyber attack, rather than a telecom failure, according to the report.

The problem on February 24 began around 9.54 am when traders couldn't place orders or exit and the trades seemed to have frozen. By 10.06 the problem had affected



other parts of the system and indices were not getting updated. But there was no announcement nor a closure by the NSE till 11.11 am. The exchange closed the derivatives market at 11.40 am and the cash market at 11.43 am. This slow shutdown may be due to hacking rather than a telecom issue, the report said.

The NSE is yet to name which telecom service provider failed though it

said that it has multiple telecom links with two service providers, the report said.

"Communication failure would have brought trading to a halt immediately," the report said.

The NSE not able to restart operations from disaster recovery site despite testing it every quarter under a Sebi mandate also could have been for some other reasons, as it would have hindered large traders, who invest heavily in NSE's colocation servers placed inside NSE building and may have lost their advantage a day before options expiry.

"5 per cent of all orders and 95 per cent of all trades come from the colocation servers within the NSE building," the report said.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE RETURNS TO PRE-LOCKDOWN LEVELS IN FEB.



SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 4

At 6.9 per cent, the unemployment rate has recovered to its pre-lock-down levels. However, the labour participation rate (LPR) and employment rate continue to be weak.

In February 2021, the unemployment rate stood at 6.9 per cent, lower than the February 2020 unemployment rate of 7.8 per cent. The unemployment rate had ranged from 6.5 per cent to 9 per cent in the post-lock-down period since July 2021, according to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy.

"The return of the unemployment rate to pre-lockdown times is not worth celebrating because it is more a reflection of a shrinking labour force than a decline in the count of the unemployed," said Mahesh Vyas, CEO and MD of CMIE.

Meanwhile, the Naukri JobSpeak Index shows hiring in the IT-software/software services industry registered a record growth of over 33 per cent in February compared to January because of the increased adoption of digital technologies in India.

The index witnessed an uptick of over 22 per cent in hiring activity in February at 2,356 job listings compared to 1,925 in January.

It said most industries saw a positive sequential uptick in recruitment activities after a long gap.

SHORT TAKES

Sania bows out of Qatar semis

Doha: Sania Mirza's first tournament in more than a year ended with a semifinal defeat as she was ousted from the Qatar Total Open along with her partner Andreja Klepac, here on Thursday. Sania and her Slovenian partner lost 5-7, 6-2, 5-10 to America's Nicole Melichar and Dutch player Demi Schuurs in one hour and 28 minutes.

Playing against players, who are ranked 11 and 12 in the world was tough but it was a decent outing for Sania, who recovered from Covid-19 recently, and her partner. It was first tournament for the Indian since last February. Sania and Klepac split \$100,000 and earned 185 ranking points each. Since Sania was not defending much points, it will help her improve her ranking. Sania will break back into top-200 and is expected to climb to the 177th spot from the current 254. — PTI

Nagal posts best win of ATP career

Buenos Aires: India's Sumit Nagal registered the biggest win of his career when he stunned second seed Cristian Garin of Chile in straight sets to enter the quarterfinals of the Argentina Open ATP 250 tournament here.

Nagal, ranked 150, produced high-class tennis on Wednesday to register an impressive 6-4, 6-3 second round win over his Chilean rival, who is ranked way above at the 22nd spot in the ATP chart.



Sumit Nagal

Nagal will play Spain's Albert Ramos-Vinolas, in what will be the Indian's maiden quarterfinal appearance at the ATP Tour level.

Ramos-Vinolas had defeated Dominik Koepfer of Germany 7-5 6-4. — PTI

Rani rules in semis, Lovlina out

New Delhi: Asian champion Pooja Rani (75kg) entered the semifinals to secure a medal but two-time world bronze-winner Lovlina Borgohain (69kg) bowed out after a quarterfinal loss at the 35th Boxam International Boxing Tournament in Castellon, Spain.

In late night bouts on Wednesday, Olympic-bound Rani defeated Italian Assunta Canfora to join the seasoned M.C. Mary Kom (51kg), Simranjit Kaur (60kg) and debutant Jasmine (57kg) in the last-four stage. The three had won their quarterfinals earlier in the day.

Rani is a three-time Asian medallist and also a 2014 Asian Games bronze-winner. However, Borgohain, who has also qualified for the Tokyo Games, lost 0-5 to Russia's Saadat Dalgatova to make a surprisingly early exit from the tournament. Asian bronze-winner Manisha Moun (57kg) was another Indian to be ousted from contention when she was defeated 0-5 by Italian Irma Testa in the quarterfinals. — PTI

Sharath loses in pre-quarters

Doha: Indian challenge at the World Table Tennis Contender series ended after veteran Sharath Kamal suffered a loss to world no 7 Lin Yun-Ju of Chinese Taipei in the men's singles pre-quarterfinals here on Thursday. The 38-year-old Indian suffered a 6-11, 4-11, 8-11 defeat against Lin.

The World No. 32 Sharath, who was playing his first international tournament after a year's break due to the pandemic, couldn't gain momentum despite showing good resistance in the latter part of the match against the higher-ranked Yun-Ju.

Earlier, Manika Batra and Sreeja Akula also lost their respective final qualifying round matches in the women's singles category. While Batra lost to World No. 69 Ganna Gaponova 5-11, 6-11, 14-12, 5-11, Akula went down fighting 9-11, 11-5, 11-6, 6-11, 5-11 to Russia's Mariia Talkova.

Live on TV

CRICKET

India vs England: Fourth Test, Day 2 from 9.30 am on Star Sports 1

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: First Semifinal, 1st leg — Goa vs Mumbai from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, HD

WWE

SmackDown: Bouts from 6.30 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

POLLARD 6x6 PACK

Kieron hits 6 sixes in an over off hat-trick man Dananjaya

St. John's (Antigua and Barbuda), March 4: West Indies captain Kieron Pollard on Wednesday became only the third man to hit six sixes in an international over in his team's four-wicket Twenty20 victory over Sri Lanka.

The feat came in the sixth over of a bizarre West Indies innings, bowled by off-spinner Akila Dananjaya who moments earlier in his previous over had been celebrating taking a hat-trick. Pollard followed in the footsteps of South Africa's Herschelle Gibbs against the Netherlands in the 2007 World Cup and India's Yuvraj Singh, who also achieved the feat in the 2007 Twenty20 World Cup against England.

Pollard was eventually out for 38 off 11 balls as the West Indies chased 132 to win at the Coolidge Cricket Ground, reaching their target in the 14th over when Jason Holder clobbered his side's 13th six. "I felt I could hit six sixes after the third one," said 33-year-old Pollard.

"Once I had five sixes I knew I had the bowler on the back foot. He was going around the wicket and it was difficult for him. I just told myself: 'Go for it!'"

Sri Lanka skipper Angelo Mathews hailed his opposite number.

"Pollard as we know is very destructive," Mathews told the post-match presentation.

"What I told Akila was to go for his wicket even if he gets hit for six sixes. If he misused one we could have got him out."



I felt I could hit six sixes after the third one. Once I had five sixes I knew I had the bowler on the back foot. He was going around the wicket and it was difficult for him. I just told myself: 'Go for it!'

— KIERON POLLARD
West Indies captain after hitting 6 sixes

Kieron Pollard celebrates hitting 6 sixes off Akila Dananjaya of Sri Lanka during a T20 match at Coolidge Cricket Ground in Osbourn, Antigua and Barbuda, on Wednesday. — AFP

Unfortunately it didn't happen."

Only eight men have hit six sixes in an over in all forms of cricket with fellow West Indian Garfield Sobers the first to do so in an English county game in 1968.

West Indies' openers

Evin Lewis and Lendl Simmons bludgeoned 52 off the first 20 balls as the two-time T20 World Cup winners looked comfortably on course.

However, having hit three sixes off three balls off Mathews' opening over, Lewis was caught by

Danushka Gunathilaka in the deep off Dananjaya for a brisk 28. That brought 41-year-old Chris Gayle to the crease for his first international appearance in two years. But he lasted just one ball when he was plumb lbw to Dananjaya who then completed his

hat-trick by having Nicholas Pooran caught behind by Niroshan Dickwella. — AFP

Brief scores: Sri Lanka 131/9 in 20 overs (Nissanka 39, Dickwella 33, McCoy 2/25) lost to West Indies 134/6 in 13.1 overs (Pollard 38, Holder 29 n.o., Hasaranga 3/12, Dhananjaya 3/62)

STOKES WAS SWEARING AT ME, SAYS SIRAJ

Ahmedabad, March 4: India pacer Mohammad Siraj on Thursday said England all-rounder Ben Stokes swore at him on the opening day of the fourth and final Test here, an incident "handled well" by skipper Virat Kohli during an on-field showdown with the visiting player.

Kohli was seen having an animated discussion with Stokes after the all-rounder allegedly swore at Siraj. Umpire Nitin Menon had to intervene for play to resume after England were reeling at 32 for three.

"He was swearing at me, so Virat *bhai* intervened and handled that well. These things happen at ground," Siraj said at the post-match press conference.

Stokes, on his part, played down the incident. "Pretty animated was that (the conversation)? ...Look at it from a different way, you know, two-three guys who care about what they are doing, care about representing and played against each other and you know, why would they not be competitive?" he asked.

"So we are not going to back down to anyone... For me that is what it was competitive guys trying to get over each other," he added.

Siraj was also at the centre of the controversy during the Test series in Australia where he was racially abused by a section of the crowd. — PTI



Axar Patel (right) celebrates the dismissal of England's Dom Bess with Virat Kohli on the first day of the fourth Test in Ahmedabad on Thursday. — BCCI

with an extra batsman, will reveal that four — Stokes, Bairstow (28, 67 balls), Dan Lawrence (46 off 74 balls) and Ollie Pope (29 off 87 balls) got starts but failed miserably on the conversion part. The others came in and went without breaking a bead of sweat. It was as if already in their minds, they were playing on a track they thought would turn square.

Stokes was a cut above the rest both in defence and offence before a moment's indecision cost him his wicket. — PTI

NUMBERS GAME

FIVE LEG BEFORE IN ENGLAND'S 1ST INNINGS

Five batsmen were dismissed leg before wicket in England's first innings on the opening day of the fourth and final Test match against India at Ahmedabad on Thursday (March 4).

It was fifth instance in India and seventh overall when five England batsmen were dismissed in this manner in an innings against India.

Shubman Gill's duck was his second in 13th innings of seventh Test match.

England scored 205 runs in 75.5 overs without a duck in their first innings. They managed to creep past 200 for the first time in six innings.

The highest partnership of the innings was 48 runs for the fourth wicket between Ben Stokes and Jonny Bairstow. Since piling up 578 in benign conditions at the outset of the series in Chennai, England's batsmen have yet to produce another fifty stand. — S. PERVEZ QAISER

SCORECARD

England 1st Innings: Zak Crawley c M. Siraj b A. Patel 9, Dom Sibley b A. Patel 2, Jonny Bairstow lbw b M. Siraj 28, Joe Root lbw b M. Siraj 5, Ben Stokes lbw b W. Sundar 55, Ollie Pope c S. Gill b R. Ashwin 29, Dan Lawrence st R. Pant b A. Patel 46, Ben Foakes c A. Rahane b R. Ashwin 1, Dom Bess lbw b A. Patel 3, Jack Leach lbw b R. Ashwin 7, James Anderson not out 10. Extras (b-3, lb-5, nb-1, wd-1) 10. **Total: (all out in 75.5 overs) 205.**

FoW: 1-10, 2-15, 3-30, 4-78, 5-121, 6-166, 7-170, 8-188, 9-189. **Bowling:** Ishant Sharma 9-2-23-0, Mohammed Siraj 14-2-45-2, Axar Patel 26-7-68-4, Ravichandran Ashwin 19-5-47-3, Washington Sundar 7-1-14-1.

India 1st Innings: Shubman Gill b J. Anderson 0, Rohit Sharma (batting) 8, Cheteshwar Pujara (batting) 15. Extras (nb-1) 1. **Total (for one wicket in 12 overs) 24.**

FoW: 1-0. **Bowling:** James Anderson 5-0-0-1, Ben Stokes 2-1-4-0, Jack Leach 4-0-16-0, Dom Bess 1-0-4-0.

Axar, Ashwin put Eng in spin

Ahmedabad, March 4: England's batsmen lost the battle of both mind and skills in yet another shoddy performance to surrender the momentum to India with Axar Patel and Ravichandran Ashwin calling the shots on the opening day of the fourth and final Test here on Thursday.

After five innings, England crossed the 200-run mark but a total of 205 in 75.5 overs was certainly not what Joe Root had expected when he called it right at the toss on a day which would have ideally been best for batting.

There was turn and bounce but the pitch was far from being a minefield that some of the England batsmen save Ben Stokes (55, 121 balls) made it out to be.

For India, spinners Axar Patel (26-7-68-4), Ravichandran Ashwin (19-5-47-3) and Washington Sundar (7-1-14-1) toyed with the already messed up minds, clueless on how to deal with the conditions.

Mohammed Siraj (14-2-45-2) also played his part to perfection with the semi-new and old ball, hurrying the batsmen with sheer pace as he did with Jonny Bairstow.

India ended the day at 24 for 1 with wily old James Anderson (5-5-0-1) accounting for an out-of-form Shubman Gill (0). Rohit Sharma (8 batting) and Cheteshwar Pujara (15 batting) were holding fort for the home side.

A cursory look at the England line-up, loaded

Karachi, March 4: The Pakistan Super League was on Thursday postponed with immediate effect after three more cricketers tested positive for Covid-19, taking the total number of cases in the T20 event to seven and prompting the cricket board to announce an inquiry into the fiasco.

Out of the seven cases, six are players while one is a support staff member. "Following a meeting with the team owners and considering the health and wellbeing of all participants is paramount, the Pakistan Cricket Board has decided to postpone the HBL Pakistan Super League 6 with

immediate effect," the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said in a statement. "The decision was made after seven cases were reported in the competition, which had started on 20 February."

PCB CEO Wasim Khan said an inquiry will be conducted to understand what went wrong.

"It is a great disappointment for us and we find ourselves in a situation where we question whether we can provide full protection for players as their health and well-being comes above everything else," Wasim Khan told a press conference here.

"We looked at the option

Following a meeting with the team owners and considering the health and well-being of all participants is paramount, the Pakistan Cricket Board has decided to postpone the HBL Pakistan Super League 6 with immediate effect. — PAKISTAN CRICKET BOARD

of halting proceedings for a few days but in the last few days there was huge concern even among the franchisees and players.

"Collectively we could have done a lot of things better and this is not a

blame game but we have to look with a microscope at what went wrong and we have to provide confidence and assurance in the future to touring teams and players," he added.

Khan said the priority of the board right now is to ensure that players are able safely travel back to their respective destinations.

"...We all had a responsibility for self-policing and unfortunately we were not able to do that."

The three players, who have tested positive most recently, were not part of the sides that featured in Wednesday's double-header, and had been tested in

the afternoon after showing symptoms.

Only 14 games could be completed in the 34-match tournament.

The PCB said it "will focus on the safe and secure passage of all participants, and arrange repeat PCR tests, vaccines and isolation facilities to the six participating sides."

The board was apparently forced to take the decision after some of the foreign players and few local team officials expressed their concern over the situation and Australian all-rounder, Dan Christian decided to fly home immediately. — PTI

Sindhu, Srikanth shuttle into last 8

Basel, March 4: Indian shuttlers P.V. Sindhu, Kidambi Srikanth and Ajay Jayaram had a good day in office as they advanced to the quarterfinals of singles competition at the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament here on Thursday.

Indian mixed doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponnappa also progressed to the quarterfinals, continuing their recent good run in international badminton.

World champion Sindhu hardly broke any sweat, beating USA's Iris Wang 21-13, 21-14 in the women's singles competition, while former world no. 1 Srikanth notched up a 21-10, 14-21, 21-14 victory over world no. 50 Thomas Rouxel of France and Jayaram eked out a hard-fought 21-18, 17-21, 21-13 against third seeded Dane Rasmus Gemke in their respective men's singles second round matches.

Satwik and Ashwini, who reached the semifinals at Toyota Thailand Open Super 1000 in January, defeated the Indonesian combination of Rinov Rivaldy and Pitha Haningtyas Mentari 21-18, 21-16 in a mixed doubles second-round match.

While second seed Sindhu meets fifth seeded Thai Busanan Ongbamrungphan next,

● **Two-time former champion Saina Nehwal bowed out of the tournament after a hard-fought first-round loss in the women's singles opening round of the Swiss Open.**

while fourth seed Srikanth, who had won the title in 2015, will face sixth seeded Thai Kantaphon Wangcharoen and Jayaram will be up against another Thai Kunlavut Vitidsarn, seeded eighth, in the last-eight stage.

However, Sourabh Verma lost 17-21, 14-21 to eighth seeded Thai Kunlavut Vitidsarn to crash out of the men's singles event.

Earlier, two-time former champion Saina Nehwal bowed out of the tournament after a hard-fought first-round loss in the women's singles opening round on Wednesday night.

The London Olympic bronze-medallist battled for 58 minutes before going down 16-21, 21-17, 21-23 to Phittayaporn Chaiwan of Thailand.

Saina's husband and fellow shuttler Parupalli Kashyap too went down 15-21 10-21 to Spain's Pablo Abian, while young Lakshya Sen lost 16-21 12-21 to Victor Svendsen in the men's singles first round. — PTI

HARDEN SOARS HIGH TO SINK EX-TEAM ROCKETS

Los Angeles, March 4: James Harden returned to Houston for the first time since his tumultuous departure from the Rockets on Wednesday, posting a triple-double to lead the Brooklyn Nets to a 132-114 victory over his former NBA team.

Harden, greeted by a first-quarter video tribute, cheers and a smattering of boos, delivered 29 points, 10 rebounds and 14 assists to fuel Brooklyn, where he finally landed in January after demanding a trade.

Harden was grateful for the tribute video that showcased his accomplishments in Houston, including the 2018 NBA Most Valuable Player award and the league scoring title the past three seasons.

He became just the sixth player in NBA history to record a triple-double in his first game against his

former team, ably helping the Nets overcome the continued absence of Kevin Durant.

In Philadelphia, Joel Embiid scored 40 points and pulled down 19 rebounds to lead the 76ers to a 131-123 overtime victory over the Utah Jazz in a clash of the top teams in the East and West.

The Cameroonian center drained a three-point shot to knot the score at 118-118 with 6.5 seconds left in regulation and Tobias Harris scored 11 of his 22 points in overtime to lift the Sixers to victory over the league-leading Jazz.

Utah star Donovan Mitchell finished with 33 points.

Two West Coast games came down to the wire, as the Portland Trail Blazers edged the Golden State Warriors 108-106 and the Sacramento Kings beat Los Angeles Lakers 123-120. — AFP

Moves that made Nikhat & Dipika

ABHJEEET KUMAR SINGH | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 4



Nikhat Zareen

Boxer Nikhat Zareen, squash star Dipika Pallikal along with Miss World 2017 Manushi Chhillar punched one for the women, talking their hearts out to depict their inspiring journeys on Thursday.

In a virtual meet to announce the launch of 'Watch Us Move,' a campaign by Adidas to celebrate womanhood and their freedom of movement, the three spoke of their personal struggles against the backdrop of unrealistic stereotypes and how they battled through them to inspire young girls who aspire to emulate them.

"I still remember my father's words when he said *beta ladkiyo me itna dam nahi hote girls boxing karne ke liye* (girls don't have the strength to box) and that actually challenged me to pursue boxing and change the societal mentality that girls are geek and can't punch," Nikhat, the Nizamabad-based amateur woman boxer, said.

"I took the move and started it off. Fortunately in 2011, when I won the Junior Championship gold

medal, everyone was shocked. I was elated while my father was very proud of my achievement," the toughie added.

"Eventually, I started getting calls from young girls who too wanted to take up boxing as a career which really motivated me. I finally proved my point and opened the doors for many more budding talents," she added.

Record breaking squash player Dipika Pallikal said it's time for women to take the centre stage and shine. "I think we as a women have really broken the stereotypical barriers and carved out our own paths," she said.

Model Manushi felt "Watch Us Move celebrates women, their achievements and inspires us to adopt a positive approach to life."

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