

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | TUESDAY 2 | MARCH 2021

## WEATHER



**Max:** 37°C  
**Min:** 20°C  
**Rainfall:** Nil

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Maasi 18  
**Tithi:** Thrithiyai/ Chaturthi  
**Star:** Hastham/ Chithirai  
**Rahukalam:**  
3 pm to 4.30 pm  
**Yamagandam:**  
9 am to 10.30 am  
**PRAYERS**  
**Fajar:** 5.14 am  
**Zohar:** 12.27 pm  
**Asar:** 3.34 pm  
**Maghrib:** 6.18 pm  
**Isha:** 7.29 pm  
**SUNSET TODAY 6.18 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.25 AM**  
**MOONRISE TODAY 9.20 PM**  
**MOONSET TOMORROW 9.28 AM**

## CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+11,563)	(+80)
1,11,23,619	1,57,275

covid19india.org

### STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+474)  
TN: 8,52, 016 12,501

### WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

11,48,25,850

### DEATHS

25,45,504

COUNTRIES  
AREAS WITH  
CASES 219

worldometers.info

**No Covid-19 death in Bengal for first time in nearly a year**

**Kolkata:** No one died of the coronavirus in West Bengal in the last 24 hours — a first since March 22 last year, the state Health Department said on Monday. So far, 10,268 people have died of the virus in the state, it said.

**Ex-French Prez Sarkozy jailed for graft**

**Paris:** A Paris court on Monday found French former President Nicolas Sarkozy guilty of corruption and influence peddling and sentenced him to one year in prison and a two-year suspended sentence. ■ **P5**

### INSIDE

**My duty to protect Tamil language, culture, history: Rahul**

■ REPORT ON PAGE 3

## COUNTER

## POINT



**Don't insist on the number of seats... our MLAs will anyway defect to the winning party after polls!**

## ‘Chinese hackers targeted India’s power thru malware’

**Washington/Beijing, March 1:** Amidst the tense border tension between India and China, a Chinese government-linked group of hackers targeted India's critical power grid system through malware, a US company has said in its latest study, raising suspicion whether last year's massive power outage in Mumbai was a result of the online intrusion.

Recorded Future, a Massachusetts-based company which studies the use of the internet by state actors, in

● **In New Delhi, the Ministry of Power on Monday said there is no impact on operations of Power System Operation Corporation (Posoco) due to any malware attack**

its recent report details the campaign conducted by a China-linked threat activity group RedEcho targeting the Indian power sector. The activity was identified through a combination of large-scale automated network traffic analytics and expert analysis. Data sources include the Recorded Future Platform, SecurityTrails,

Spur, Farsight and common open-source tools and techniques, the report said.

In New Delhi, the Ministry of Power Monday said there is no impact on operations of Power System Operation Corporation (Posoco) due to any malware attack and that prompt actions are taken on advisories issued against such threats. Responding on

the findings of the study, the ministry said, "There is no impact on any of the functionalities carried out by Posoco due to the referred threat. No data breach/ data loss has been detected due to these incidents." It further said, "Prompt actions are being taken by the CISOs (chief information security officers) at all these control centres under operation by Posocofor any incident/advisory received from various agencies like CERT-in, NCIIPC, CERT-Trans etc." — **PTI**

## NATION | 4

**Warrant issued against Kangana Ranaut**



## WORLD | 5

**Trump hints at Prez re-run in 2024**

## SPORT | 8

**Stop moaning over pitches: Viv**



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# All is not well with AIADMK alliance

**G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC**  
CHENNAI, MARCH 1

DMDK, the party founded by actor Vijayakanth, is seemingly angry with the AIADMK, in whose coalition it has been so far, and sends out signals of a possible break-up by calling for applications from its cadre to contest all over the State.

Though the announcement of the schedule for the Assembly elections has led to hectic activity in the political sphere with leading parties trying to wrap up the alliances and start campaigning, allies of the AIADMK are seemingly playing truant demanding seats more than what was offered to them by the coalition leader.

After the PMK, the ally with the biggest vote bank in northern Tamil Nadu, accepted the 23 seats that the AIADMK gave it, alliance talks with the BJP and DMDK are said to have gone south, particularly the parleys with BJP top honcho Amit Shah in Chennai on Sunday night. The talks, in which both Chief Minister Edappadi .K Palaniswami and Deputy Chief Minister O

### FRIENDS, FOES & FRENEMIES



► In Sunday's discussions, the demand placed by DMDK for over 20 seats was rejected by the AIADMK.



► Though Vijayakanth's present posturing indicates the party is willing to go it alone, there was also talk that the DMDK might drift towards Kamal Haasan's Makkal Neethi Maiam (MNM) that is open to the idea of forming a third front in the State.

The BJP has identified certain constituencies where it sees a greater prospect for its candidates and has asked for them. But those constituencies, many of them from the Western Kongu belt, are said to be AIADMK citadels which the party does not want to lose.

Panneerselvam

took part, went on late into the night as Shah's scheduled arrival to Chennai by road was delayed a bit. Since the BJP did not make any announcements on the finalisation of the alliance which he had promised to do on Monday did not happen, there were doubts about whether the talks yielded substantial results.

Negotiations with the DMDK, however, ran into a cul de sac clearly with the party leaders not meeting AIADMK leader and Minister P Thangamani at his residence on Monday. In Sunday's discussions, the demand placed by DMDK for over 20 seats was rejected by the AIADMK. ■ **P2**

# Tejashwi offers Mamata support

**Kolkata, March 1:** TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav Monday discussed the evolving political scenario in poll-bound West Bengal but there was no clarity yet about seat sharing. Emerging from a meeting with Banerjee, Tejashwi, the Leader of the Opposition in the Bihar assembly, said his first priority was to prevent the BJP's forward march in West Bengal. He appealed to Biharis domiciled in the state to rally behind the West Bengal chief minister in the elections.

He parried questions by journalists after the meeting at the state secretariat about whether the RJD will be contesting a few seats in West Bengal in alliance with the ruling TMC, merely saying "when Mamataji is fighting, it is we who are fighting. We will put in all efforts to ensure that she wins. Our full support is with her and her party." Tejashwi urged the people from Bihar living in West Bengal to stand with the ruling TMC, which is facing a stiff challenge from the BJP in its bid for a third straight term in office. — **PTI**

# HC to monitor Rajesh Das case

**Chennai, March 1:** The Madras high court will monitor the probe into the sexual harassment case against a Special DGP rank official in Tamil Nadu, saying it has to do so to ensure that the fundamental rights of the victim to a free and fair investigation is not reduced to an empty ritual. The court said there is a "faulty gene" in men which sometimes makes them think that a woman is subordinate to them and that at times she can even be treated like "chattel."

"If an officer, due to the power he wields, thinks that he can get over with his power and connections, from any act, this Court is

not going to be a mute spectator and this Court will step in and ensure that the rule of law is preserved," Justice N Anand Venkatesh said. In his interim order, the judge also directed that the names of both the accused and the victim shall not be publicised and also expressed concern over a woman officer being forced to undergo such an experience. The court took up on its own the case against the Special DGP level official, now placed under "compulsory wait," after the CB-CID filed an FIR, slapping sections including sexual harassment and criminal intimidation. — **PTI**

# MNM founder Kamal to contest from Alandur

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, MARCH 1

Makkal Neethi Maiam (MNM) founder Kamal Haasan is all set to take his maiden electoral plunge from Alandur Assembly constituency in Chennai as former Chief Minister MG Ramachandran (MGR) had entered the hallowed precincts of the State Assembly for the first time in 1967 by winning the Parangimalai seat, which was subsequently merged with Alandur.

Haasan, who had been invoking the name of MGR and trying to project himself as one following the AIADMK founder's political steps, will also start his campaign for the coming March 6 elections to the Assembly from Alandur constituency after paying homage to MGR's statue at Ramavaram Gardens. The predominantly middle-class locality of Alandur has also been chosen by Haasan and his party honchos, probably in view of the support the actor enjoys among urban educated people. ■ **P2**

● **Kamal will start his campaign from Alandur constituency after paying homage to MGR's statue at Ramavaram Gardens**



Police use water cannons to disperse and stop Shiromani Akali Dal workers and leaders from marching towards the Punjab Vidhan Sabha during a rally, in Chandigarh, on Monday. — **PTI**

# Police foil SAD bid to ‘gherao’ Punjab Assembly

**Chandigarh, March 1 :** Police here on Monday used water cannons to stop Shiromani Akali Dal leaders and workers from heading towards the Punjab Assembly, foiling the party's plans to "gherao" it in protest against the state government for its alleged failure in honour its poll promises.

Police took Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) chief

Sukhbir Singh Badal and other senior leaders to the Sector 17 police station in a bus and put them in preventive custody.

They were released later. Earlier in the day, the SAD held a rally at Sector 25 here. Heavy security was deployed and barricades were put up by the Chandigarh Police to stop the protesting Akalis from moving towards the Punjab Assembly. After

the rally was over, Akali leaders and workers started moving towards the Punjab Vidhan Sabha. But they were stopped by police, who used water cannons to disperse them. Addressing the rally, Badal asked Chief Minister Amarinder Singh to tell people why he "betrayed: each and every section of society by "failing" to implement the poll promises. — **PTI**

# 329 candidates for 2021 Nobel Peace Prize

**Copenhagen (Denmark), March 1:** The Norwegian Nobel Committee said Monday that there are 329 candidates — 234 individuals and 95 organisations — that were nominated for the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize by the February 1 deadline.

The Oslo-based organization said that it was the third highest number of candidates ever, adding the current record of 376 candidates was reached in 2016.

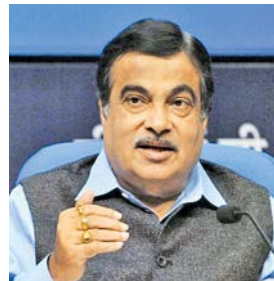
A vast group of people — heads of state or politicians serving at a national level, university professors, directors of foreign policy institutes, past Nobel Prize recipients and members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee — can submit a

● **Five Nobel Prizes were established under the terms of Alfred Nobel's will**

nomination for the prize. However, the nominees aren't announced by the very secretive board in Oslo, but those doing the nominating may choose to make it public, raising publicity both for the nominee and the proposer.

The Associated Press earlier has reported that the 2021 nominees include exiled Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and two other Belarus democracy activists, Veronika Tsepkalo and Maria Kolesnikova;

the Black Lives Matter movement; Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny; Stacey Abrams, the former Georgia gubernatorial candidate who has become a leading voting rights advocate; and former White House adviser Jared Kushner and his deputy, Avi Berkowitz, who negotiated a series of Middle East agreements known as the Abraham Accords. Groups nominated in 2021 include the World Health Organization for its role in addressing the coronavirus pandemic; NATO; Reporters Without Borders, known by its French acronym RSF; and Polish judges defending civil rights. — **PTI**



**Mandatory FASTag to help save ₹20K cr per annum on fuel: Gadkari**

**New Delhi, March 1:** Mandatory FASTag for highways will help save ₹20,000 crore per annum on fuel and boost the revenue by at least ₹10,000 crore, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said on Monday.

Launching a live monitoring system to assess the live condition at toll plazas pan India and releasing a rating system for highways here, the road transport and highways minister said this was a step towards achieving perfection in terms of highway use, construction and quality.

"Making FASTags mandatory for highway users for collection of electronic toll has significantly reduced delays at toll plazas. This will result in a significant saving to the tune of Rs 20,000 crore per annum on fuel cost," Gadkari said while addressing the media.

The minister said not only this, the electronic toll collection is set to boost royalty by ₹10,000 crore per annum.

Following the mandatory payment of user fee through FASTag at toll plazas from February 16, 2021, toll collection has seen consistent growth, and the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) said its daily toll collection through FASTag has reached about ₹104 crore.

Gadkari said a new GPS based system for tolling is in the offing, where highways commuters will be required to pay only for the distance travelled on the basis of entry and exit points.

— **Agencies**



## SHORT TAKES

## Uber launches 'public transport' option in Chennai

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH. 1

Uber has launched its 'public transport' journey planning feature in Chennai allowing riders the option to plan their transit journey with service information and end-to-end directions in the Uber app.

Uber riders will be able to view 'public transport' as an option along with other familiar modes like UberGo, Premier and Uber Auto, in their Uber app. The feature provides an overview of the city's metro and bus service information with details of the fastest and cheapest routes, schedules and directions to the nearest transit stops, to help riders make the smartest possible journey choices.

After successful partnerships with the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation and Hyderabad Metro Rail Limited, Uber's new launch in Chennai shows its commitment to tens of millions of riders, who rely on the company's innovative mobility solutions. Uber had recently announced its global commitment to make all rides on its platform 100 percent emission-free by 2040 through zero-emission vehicles and the integration of public transport and micro-mobility.

## MGR statue burnt: Case against DMK men

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VELLORE, MARCH. 1

An MGR statue was burnt during the celebrations held to observe DMK president M.K.Stalin's birthday on Monday, near Tirupatur. Police have registered a case.

Sources said that the MGR statue at Kejalnayakkanpatti near Kandili in Tirupatur district was covered with a cloth in compliance to the poll code. On Monday morning, a few DMK workers celebrated their party president M.K. Stalin's birthday near the statue, and lighted up firecrackers.

In this, the cloth around the statue was totally burnt and the statue got charred, triggering tension in the area for a short while.

On learning about this, some AIADMK cadres had also gathered there. Kandili police rushed to the spot. The DMK workers explained that none had purposely set on fire the statue. Police have registered a case against the local DMK leader, and are investigating.

## Women's Day celebrated

**Vellore, March.1:** The Vellore chapter of the Indian Medical Association along with Naruvi Hospitals, Vellore, celebrated International Women's Day at Naruvi Hospitals, Vellore, on Sunday. This was followed by a CME programme. The event was inaugurated by Dr Bharani, Dr Sujatha, Dr Vasanthi Chandran, Mrs Anitha Sampath and Mrs Saliha Henry. Dr Madan Mohan, president of Indian Medical Association, Vellore, presided over the event. Naruvi Hospital Executive Director Dr. Paul T. Henry welcomed the gathering. Chairman Dr G V Sampath addressed the members of the IMA with the Naruvi message of care. The event was concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr. Nailesh T Hon. Secretary of the IMA. Academic sessions titled "Screening for breast cancer – an insight" by Prof. Aravindan Nair and "Interventional Pulmonology, helping patients to breathe better" by Dr. Prince James were conducted.

## Automobiles sales rev up in February

A.ARUL PALANI | DC  
CHENNAI, MARCH. 1

The sales of automobiles manufactured in Tamil Nadu registered a positive growth in February. TVS motor company, Royal Enfield, Leyland and Hyundai recorded an increase in sales. TVS marketing grew by 18 percent registering 297,747 units in February 2021 as against 253,261 units in February 2020.

Hyundai Motors registered a cumulative sale of 61,800 for February 2021 with a double-digit growth of 26.4 percent as against February 2020. Royal Enfield posted a sale of 69,659 motorcycles in February, against sales of 63,536 motorcycles in February last year.

The total TVS two-wheeler sales grew by 21 percent recording 284,581 units in February 2021 as against 235,891 units in February

2020. Domestic two-wheeler sales grew by 15 percent registering 195,145 units in February 2021 as against 169,684 units in February 2020, company sources said. The motorcycles sales grew by 16 percent recording 137,259 units in February 2021 as against 118,514 units in February 2020. The scooter sales of the company grew by 56 percent registering 95,525 units in February 2021 as against 60,633 units in February 2020.

The TVS Motor's total exports grew by 23 percent registering 101,789 units in February 2021 as against 82,877 units in February 2020. Two-wheeler exports registered a growth of 35 percent with 89,436 units in February 2021 as against 66,207 units in February 2020. The demand in the export market continues to be robust, but scarcity in container availability is affecting overall export volumes. The three-wheeler

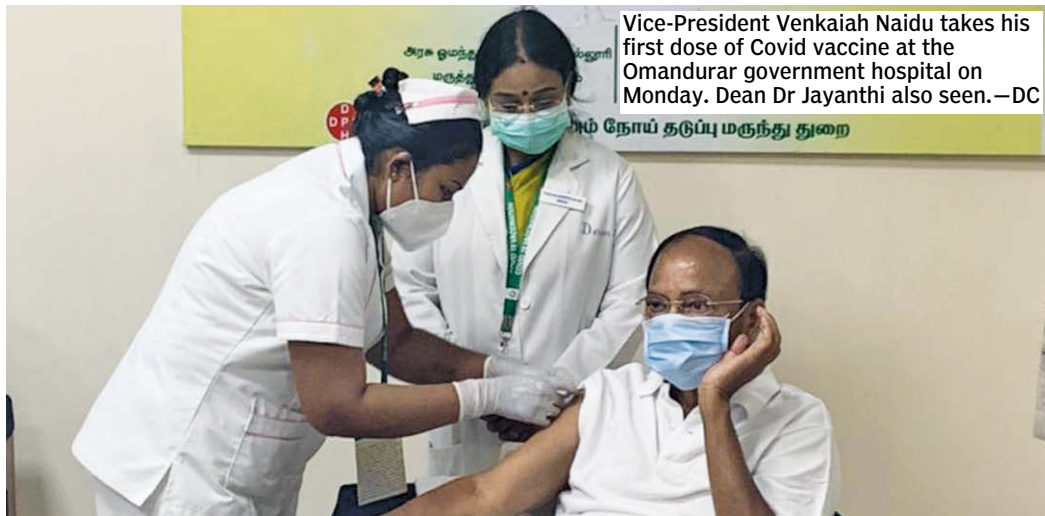
sector of TVS Motors registered sales of 13,166 units in February 2021 as against 17,370 units in February 2020.

Cars manufactured by Hyundai Motor India Ltd registered sales of 61,800 for February 2021 with a double-digit growth of 26.4 percent over February 2020.

Commenting on the February 2021 sales performance, Tarun Garg, director, sales, marketing and service, HMIL said, "Hyundai Motor India has been consistently striving to drive a resurgence in sales, thereby contributing towards economic recovery and bringing the industry closer to pre-Covid level sales. With a cumulative sale of 61 800 units in February 2021, Hyundai has recorded growth across segments. Super performer brands such as the Ultimate SUV – CRETA, VENUE, Spirited New VERNA, NIOS and the all-new i20 have

once again showcased Hyundai brand supremacy by redefining benchmarks in their respective segments. Both domestic and export demand have recorded a healthy double digit growth in February 2021, reflecting an all-round improvement in buyer sentiment."

The sales of trucks and buses manufactured by Ashok Leyland also went up in February 2021. The company registered a sale of 6,790 trucks, 324 buses and LCV 5662 in February 2021 compared to 4,760 trucks, 2,039 bus, 3867 LCV in February 2020. The domestic sale has increased to 20 percent with 12,776 vehicles in February 2021 compared to 10612 vehicles in February 2020. The export of trucks and buses also has gone up by 6 percent with sales of 7,802 vehicles in February 2021 compared to 7,368 vehicles in February 2020.



Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu takes his first dose of Covid vaccine at the Omandur government hospital on Monday. Dean Dr Jayanthi also seen.—DC

## Chengalpet SP booked for stopping complainant CB-CID files FIR against former DGP

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH.1

The Crime Branch of the CB-CID has registered an FIR against former Special Director-General of police, Rajesh Das, in connection to sexual harassment allegations against him.

According to the sources in CB-CID, the FIR was filed on Sunday, and on Monday morning the Madras High Court took suo

motu cognisance of the case.

Rajesh Das has been booked by the CB-CID for outraging the modesty of a woman under the Indian Penal Code and also under the Tamil Nadu Prevention of Women Harassment Act. The FIR also mentions Chengalpattu SP D Kannan who stopped the IPS officer on her way to Chennai, allegedly on the orders of Rajesh Das.

## DMDK functionary held for cheating

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH.1

The city police on Monday arrested a DMDK functionary on the charges of cheating a woman of Rs 16 lakh.

The arrested person has been identified as Sarath Kumar alias Sarath (28). He used to be DMDK'S Madipakkam Divisional Secretary, the police said.

According to the police, the victim identified as, Mohana, (28) a resident of

Periyar Street in Madipakkam had known Sarath for a few years. Sarath had told Mohana that he knew a person in Chennai Customs and that he could sell him smuggled gold for a low price.

Believing him, in 2019, Mohana gave Sarath Rs 30,000 for the gold and within a few days, he gave gold worth Rs 50,000 to Mohana. Subsequently, Mohana paid Rs 16 lakhs to Sarath for the next

batch of gold. However, this time Sarath reportedly spent her money lavishly. When the victim asked him to repay her money, he allegedly refused.

She then lodged a complaint with the Madipakkam police. It is said that due to police inaction in the case, Mohana approached St.Thomas Mount AC. Following this, Sarath was arrested on Monday. He was produced in Alandur court and lodged at Puzhal prison.



Sewage overflows on Tambaram-Velachery main road near near Selaiyur police station.—DC

## DMK files contempt against Union and TN govts

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH.1

The Madras high court has ordered notice to the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Secretary, State Health and Family Welfare Secretary, Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary and 6 others in connection with a contempt of court case.

The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy posted to last week of April, further hearing of the contempt petition filed by DMK represented by its Press Relation secretary TKS Elangovan.

In his petition, Elangovan sought to punish the nine officials for

their alleged willful failure to implement the orders of the court dated July 27, 2020. The court had on July 27, 2020 directed the Union of India through the Director General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, to convene a meeting along with the Health Secretary, Government of Tamil Nadu and the Secretaries of the Medical Council of India and the Dental Council of India in order to finalize the manner in which the facilities of Other Backward Class (OBC) reservation are to be provided for against All India Quota seats in the UG/PG (medical) courses with effect from the next academic year.

When the case came up

for hearing on Monday, senior counsel P.Wilson, appearing for the petitioner submitted that the issue relating to granting of reservations in All India Quota State surrendered seats was settled by the first bench on July 27, 2020 and this court directed to form a committee with Director General of Health and Family Welfare, Health Secretary, MCI and DCI secretaries and to take decision on the basis of reservations prevailing in the state. The Tamil Nadu government filed an appeal before the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court also reiterated the same while rejecting the appeal of Tamil Nadu government, he added.

He said despite directions, the committee so

formed without the Director General of Health and Family Welfare and without the state health secretary. It has not implemented its decision of reservations for this academic year 2021-2022, which was apparent from the MDS-2021 prospectus. The order of this court was flouted and hence, there was a clear case of contempt. The admissions for PG for 2021-2022 prospectus was issued without the reservations for state contributed seats as directed by this court and MBBS prospectus for admission 2021 may be released and if there were no reservations implemented for 2021-2022 students life will be doomed, Wilson added.

## Plea to restrain TN from transferring Returning Officers

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH.1

DMK MP and its Organisation secretary R.S.Bharathi has approached the Madras high court to restrain the state government from making any further transfers or change of Returning Officers or Assistant Returning Officers, unless any specific complaint is made against a particular Returning Officer or Assistant Returning Officer.

In his petition, Bharathi submitted that several Returning Officers have been transferred by a G.O dated February 3, 2021 issued by the Revenue and Disaster Management department and another G.O dated February 11, 2021 issued by the Public (Special-A) department without any consultation with the Election Commission of India and Chief Electoral Officer. Furthermore, the information available in the Public (Elections) department

website shows the lack of knowledge about transfer of the notified Returning Officers. A bare perusal of the list of officers, who have been transferred and the constituencies involved like Avadi. Kolathur, Dr.Radhakrishnan Nagar, Velachery and Jayankondam gives the notion that these transfers have been made with ulterior motives and were nothing but colourable exercise of power. There were also vacant positions of Returning Officers

which were not yet notified. As such, these actions were arbitrary and were likely to vitiate the sanctity of the entire electoral process, he added. He sought to stay the operation of the said two G.Os and to quash the same.

The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy, before whom the petition filed by Bharathi came up for hearing on Monday, adjourned it to March 3.

## Stalin to release vision statement for TN

From P1

Since the DMK would like its smaller allies to contest in its popular 'Rising Sun' symbol, most of the parties seem to have a different view on that. The IUMI has already made it clear it would face the elections in its 'ladder' symbol, the MMK is yet to decide on what symbol to go for.

The two Communist parties are expected to hold talks in the next couple of days and the Congress, too, whose State leaders were camping down south in view of Rahul Gandhi's visit to the southern district, will resume negotiations this week itself.

DMK is said to be keen on finalising the alliance by next week as the party is keen on making use of the ground that it levelled at Siruganur in the outskirts of Trichy for a magnificent State conference, earlier scheduled for March 14.

While the DMK had a grand plan to bring together the party's booth

committees to Siruganur and brief them all on how to approach the coming elections to the Assembly, the announcement of the poll schedule and the kicking in of the Model Code of Conduct had led to the abandoning of the conference.

Now the ground would witness a massive public meeting, almost on the lines of a conference, on March 7 where Stalin would unveil his vision for the next 10 years. The vision document would give details of the targets that Stalin had set to push the State up to the top post position in all areas of growth.

Stalin, who made the announcement on his vision document at Anna Arivalayam on Monday after acknowledging the spate of greetings he received from various people, cadre and leaders on his 68th birthday on Monday, said that the preparation for the party's manifesto was also on. He also mentioned that alliance talks had started in earnest.

## MNM pins hopes on educated voters in urban areas

From P1

MANDATE 2021

Since the middle-class voters are likely to relate to the corruption issues that Haasan tries to raise, he might get more supporters in the Alandur area.

As such the constituency has voted both DMK and AIADMK candidates alternately with Panruti S Ramachandran clinching the seat as a candidate of the DMDK in 2011. Interestingly there is a possibility of the DMDK joining hands with MNM to form the Third Front for the elections.

With its relationship with the AIADMK souring after alliance talks ran into trouble the DMDK may drift towards MNM as actor Sarathkumar did. Sarath Kumar had complained that the AIADMK didn't even invite his party. Samathuva Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam, for talks.

As alliance talks shift to overdrive in the coming days in both the DMK and AIADMK camps there could be small parties that feel being short changed and move to the MNM camp. That was the hope that Haasan himself had expressed in the past.

Meanwhile, Haasan has also announced the dates of holding interviews for ticket seekers. As announced earlier even those who have not enrolled as members of the party can apply for a ticket to contest the election.

## DMDK drifting towards MNM?

From P1

Perhaps if the DMDK breaks off, as the indications are now, the BJP might be offered a few more seats by the AIADMK but the dispute between the two parties could not be easily solved since it is the demand for particular seats that the coalition leader is not able to accede to.

The BJP has identified certain constituencies where it sees a greater prospect for its candidates and has asked for them. But those constituencies, many of them from the Western Kongu belt, are said to be AIADMK citadels which the party does not want to lose.

Also it is rumoured that the BJP would like to accommodate the TTV Dhinakaran's AMMK in the alliance, which the AIADMK leaders were totally opposed to for

various reasons. While some sections of the BJP feel that by keeping Dhinakaran's party with them, they could add their vote tally, the AIADMK feels that it would weaken their party.

Meanwhile, Vijayakanth issued a statement, after his party delegation gave a miss to its meeting with Thangamani, announcing interviews for those aspiring to contest the elections from all the districts. The interviews would be held between March 6 and 8, the statement said.

Though Vijayakanth's present posturing indicates the party is willing to go it alone, there was also talk that the DMDK might drift towards Kamal Haasan's Makkal Neethi Maam (MNM) that is open to the idea of forming a third front in the State.



The department of urology and renal transplantation at the Government Stanley Hospital along with nephrology, anaesthesiology and microbiology departments have resumed renal transplantation in the Covid-19 era under the CM Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme.

Dr Prakash, HoD of urology, and his team were involved in the successful transplant surgery in which one Amulu donated her kidney to her son Vijay, who had chronic renal failure. Both mother and son are doing well. Nineteen patients are awaiting renal transplant surgery at the hospital which will be done with one transplant a week, said the dean, Dr P Balaji.

Nephrology HoD Dr Edwin Fernando has advocated a healthy lifestyle with good control over diabetes and hypertension to prevent renal failure.

—N. Sampath







## SHORT TAKES

C'GARH ALLOCATES  
₹30 CR FOR 'RAM  
GAMAN' CIRCUITRABINDRA NATH  
CHOUHURY | DC  
BHOPAL, MARCH 1

An allocation of ₹30 crore has been made in the annual budget of Chhattisgarh for 2021-22 towards the development of places in Chhattisgarh visited by Lord Ram during his 14-year-exile.

This was announced by Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel while presenting annual budget for 2021-22 in the Assembly on Monday. Chhattisgarh government in August last had unveiled a ₹137.45 crore ambitious project envisaging development of "Ram Van Gaman Tourism Circuit" linking 75 sites in Chhattisgarh, said to be visited by Lord Ram during his 14-year-exile.

Baghel has earlier written a letter to the Union tourism minister Pralhad Patel urging him to sanction the project under the Centre's scheme, Ramayan circuit of swadesh darshan. The letter cited various researches in the field which suggested that Lord Ram spent 10 years out of his 14-year-exile period at various places in Chhattisgarh. Folk songs of Chhattisgarh also establish this, the letter said.

Research work in the field suggests that Lord Ram spent some time in 51 places out of the 75 sites he had visited in Chhattisgarh during his exile, according to the letter. The state government plans to develop nine out of these 75 sites in the first phase at a cost of ₹30 crore.

NIA ARRESTS 4  
FROM J&K FOR  
NARCO TERRORISMDC CORRESPONDENT  
SRINAGAR, MARCH 1

National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Monday arrested four persons from Jammu and Kashmir allegedly involved in smuggling of heroin and other narcotic drugs worth million of rupees from across the Line of Control (LoC).

The money obtained through the sale of the contraband locally and in other parts of the country would be transferred to a major militant outfit to help it in carrying out "terrorist activities" in the Valley, the agency claimed.

A statement issued by the NIA here said that the case of "narco-terrorism" was registered by it in June last after the J&K police seized 21 kilograms of heroin and cash amount of ₹1,35,89,850 from the members of a drug syndicate operating in the Union Territory.

The accused who were formally arrested by the agency in Srinagar have been identified as Altaf Ahmed Shah, Showkat Ahmad Parray, Mudasar Ahmad Dar and Amin Allaie alias Hilal Mir—all residents of Kashmir Valley.

The NIA said that the case was initially registered under an FIR filed at a police station in Handwara area of frontier Kulwara district on June 11, 2020.

WARRANT ISSUED  
AGAINST KANGANA  
RANAUTSONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC  
MUMBAI, MARCH 1

A magistrate court in Mumbai on Monday issued a bailable warrant against Bollywood actor Kangana Ranaut, as she failed to appear before it despite issuance of summons in connection with a defamation complaint filed against her by lyricist Javed Akhtar.

Metropolitan Magistrate R.R. Khan had issued summons to Ranaut on February 1, with a direction to appear before the court on March 1.

On Monday, when the matter was called out for hearing, Ranaut was not present in the court following which the court issued a bailable warrant against her. With issuance of the warrant the court deferred hearing on this matter till March 22.

After hearing Akhtar and his lawyer Niranjan Mundargi the Magistrate court had ordered the Juhu police to file a report in December 2020.

The police had sought further time to submit the report and the court had ordered Juhu police to file the report by January 18, 2021, however, they had sought further time.

Finally, the police submitted the report in February and in the report police stated that the offences alleged against Kangana are made out for further investigation.

BJP trying to woo Christian voters  
ahead of Assembly polls in Kerala

Saffron party had secured close to 15 per cent votes in the last Assembly polls in 2016

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
MARCH 1

The BJP in Kerala is hoping to improve its electoral fortunes with the help of Christian votes in the coming Assembly elections.

The party which had secured close to 15 per cent votes in the last Assembly polls in 2016, believes that the support of Christians is crucial to convert the votes into seats. Two prominent leaders of the BJP called on Cardinal Mar George Alanchery who is the Major Archbishop of Syro Malabar Church in Kochi on Monday.

BJP state president K. Surendran who arrived in Kochi as part of his statewide Vijay Yatra, met the cardinal at the Kerala Catholic Bishops Conference headquarters in Kochi. Though the BJP leader maintained that it was only a courtesy call, sources said the issues related to Assembly elections also figured in the discussions.

Soon after Surendran left, Karnataka deputy chief minister C.N. Ashwath Narayan who is also in charge of Assembly elections in Kerala, drove straight to the Catholic Bishops Conference headquarters and held discussions with Cardinal Alanchery and other leaders of the Syro Malabar Church. The BJP has deputed Narayan who is known to have close ties with Christian denominations running educational institutions in Bengaluru and other parts of Karnataka.

Though Narayan also said that it was a courtesy visit, he admitted that political issues also came up for discussions during the meeting which went on for more than 30 minutes. He told media persons that the BJP was hopeful of getting a sizeable Christian vote in the coming elections. The party is focussing on Christian dominated constituencies in central Travancore, he said and added that a good number of Christian candidates will figure in BJP's candidate list this time.

More central leaders of the BJP are expected to meet Church leaders in Kerala in the run up to the polls.

The BJP which had only one member in the outgoing 140 member Kerala Assembly has been working assiduously to woo the Christians. Senior Kerala BJP leader and Mizoram Governor P.S. Sreedharan Pillai had taken the initiative to resolve the dispute between Jacobite and Orthodox factions in the state. The two churches are engaged in a decades old battle regarding the ownership of various Churches and associated properties.

Christians form about 19 per cent of the state's 3.5 crore population. The Christian vote is decisive in Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, Idukki, Ernakulam, parts of Kannur, Malappuram and Wayanad. Latin Catholic population plays a key role in the outcome of polls in coastal districts.

Though the BJP had



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi eats ice apple from a roadside stall during his election campaign for the forthcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly polls, in Kanyakumari district on Monday. He tweeted about "three alternatives" that the Centre has given to people as he went on to suggest that consumers have been left with no choice. "Prices of LPG cylinders hiked yet again. For people, these are Modi government's alternatives — Wrap up businesses, throw away cooking stoves and eat up jumlas (false promises)," his tweet said.

● **SENIOR KERALA BJP leader P.S. Sreedharan Pillai had taken the initiative to resolve the dispute between Jacobite and Orthodox factions in the state. The two churches are engaged in a decades old battle regarding ownership of various Churches.**

made an attempt to woo the Muslims as well by appointing A.P. Abdullakutty as national vice president of the party, the possibility of the community favouring the saffron party is remote. Abdullakutty who was a former firebrand leader of CPM was elected to parliament twice. After quitting CPM he joined Congress and became an MLA. Now he is one of the main faces of BJP.

Former union minister Alphons Kannanthanam who was also once CPM MLA, had joined the BJP and made a central minister during the previous Modi ministry. Now he is a Rajya Sabha member.



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee with RJD leader Tejwasi Yadav at State Secretariat in Kolkata on Monday.

CPM may relax criteria  
for senior ministersDC CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
MARCH 1

Though the CPM had decided to strictly enforce the norm of not repeating MLAs who have won back to back elections, there are enough indications on the ground that this criteria would be relaxed in the case of senior ministers of the outgoing Pinarayi Vijayan Cabinet.

The Alappuzha district secretariat of the CPM has recommended the names of finance minister Thomas Isaac and PWD minister G. Sudhakaran for one more time from Alappuzha and Ambalapuzha constituencies respectively considering their high chances of victory. If approved by the

state leaders the coming election would be Sudhakaran's eighth and Isaac's fifth electoral battle.

With the CPM aiming for a repeat, the party does not want to take any chances by keeping its popular leaders out of electoral contests in the name of norms. Party sources said if the norms are enforced strictly then at least 28 sitting MLAs of the CPM including 7 ministers will have to stay out of contest. As per norms finance minister Thomas Isaac, PWD minister G. Sudhakaran, fisheries minister J. Mercykutty Amma, local bodies minister A.C. Moideen, general education minister C. Raveendranath, higher education minister K.T. Jaleel, industries minister

E.P. Jayarajan and Law minister A.K. Balan should not be in the fray. Besides, Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan will also have to sit out.

The party feels that it would be suicidal to keep the ministers, especially those who have performed well, out of electoral fray in such a crucial election. However, the final decision on fielding the ministers will be taken at the state committee meeting to be held later this week.

Meanwhile, the seat sharing talks of ruling LDF remained inconclusive on Monday. The CPM top leadership had a one on one meeting with the leaders of the alliance partners at the party headquarters AKG Centre in Thiruvananthapuram.

20,000 troops on  
stand-by for WBDC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

Even as Union home ministry will deploy between 80,000-1,00,000 security personnel for the eight phase West Bengal Assembly polls, sources said an additional 20,000 troops will be kept on standby in case reinforcements need to be rushed at a short notice. All senior para-military forces officers deployed in Bengal have been directed to also co-ordinate with local SSPs and Election Commission observers for deployment and maintaining law and order during the poll process.

Home ministry sources said that they had received intelligence inputs from multiple agencies that

large-scale violence was expected especially during elections in West Bengal in anticipation of close contest between Trinamul Congress and the BJP. These intelligence inputs have also been shared with the Election Commission following which tight security arrangements are being made.

However, as a precautionary measure addition 20,000 para-military personnel will be kept on standby in case of an emergency situation. Bengal will witness an unprecedented eight phase polling starting March 27.

Similarly, the state will have an unprecedented security deployment for the polling as well as on counting day on May 2.

CHINA REFUTES  
ATTACKS AGAINST  
INDIA'S POWER GRID

New Delhi, March 1: China on Monday reacted angrily to US media reports—that cited a US cyber-security firm as saying that Chinese hackers carried out malware attacks on Indian power grids last year to warn India on the border issue—with Beijing describing the allegations as "fabrication" and adding that it is "highly irresponsible to accuse a particular party with no sufficient evidence around". The Chinese Embassy spokesperson in New Delhi quoted the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson in Beijing as saying, "As a staunch defender of cyber security, China firmly opposes and cracks down on all forms of cyber attacks. Speculation and fabrication have no role to play on the issue of cyber attacks. It is highly irresponsible to accuse a particular party with no sufficient evidence around."



A medic administers the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine to Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar at Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences in Patna on Monday. — PTI

BIHAR TO GIVE  
COVID VACCINES  
FREE TO ALLNAYEAR AZAD | DC  
PATNA, MARCH 1

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar received the first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine on his 70th birthday on Monday and urged people to get vaccinated as per the central government guidelines. He also announced his government's decision to provide the vaccination free of cost including at private hospitals in the state.

"Our government has decided to provide vaccination free of cost for the people of the state. This facility will also be made available at private hospitals. I, therefore, urge all those who are eligible to get vaccinated", he said.

The announcement comes on the day country started the second phase of its nationwide vaccination drive. The decision to provide free vaccination was taken on Sunday during a meeting chaired by the Chief Minister.

Free vaccination for Covid-19 was one of the key promises made by the NDA during the Bihar Assembly elections.

Kumar who took the vaccine at the state-run super speciality hospital Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (IGIMS) in the presence of health minister Mangal Pandey said that "I am in good health after taking my first dose. Doctors have fixed March 31 for the second dose of vaccination for me".

He further said that arrangements for vaccination for members of the state legislature have also been made at the hospital.

Later, while responding to the state government's announcement, Bihar BJP in a statement said, "The state is ready for vaccination of elderly and people above 45 years of age. The cost of vaccination in private hospitals of ₹250 will also be borne by the NDA government. The largest vaccination drive in the world is progressing in the country as well as in the state".

Ahead of the second phase of the vaccination drive, Bihar health minister had released data on Twitter claiming that "the total number of healthy patients in the state reached 2,60,594 and recovery rate is 99.26 per cent. There are 398 active corona patients in the state".

● **FREE VACCINATION for Covid-19 was one of the key promises made by the NDA during the Bihar Assembly elections.**

## SHOCKING | ORDER

PARMOD KUMAR | DC  
WITH AGENCY INPUTS  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

The Supreme Court on Monday asked a government servant accused of repeatedly raping a minor girl if he would marry her.

Heading a three judge bench Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde asked the lawyer appearing for the accused whether his client would marry the victim girl.

Dismissing the petition by the accused as withdrawn, the top court in its order said "However, there shall be stay of arrest of the petitioners for a period of eight weeks. Thereafter, the Trial Court will decide the question of the liberty

## Bombay HC set aside trial court order granting anticipatory bail to accused

## ‘Will you marry her,’ SC asks rape accused

of the petitioners."

"We are not forcing you to marry. Let us know if you will. Otherwise you will say we are forcing you to marry her," the CJ said, making clear the position of the bench.

As the lawyer upon taking instructions from the accused rapist informed the court that the accused can't marry the victim as he is already married.

"I wanted to marry her. But she refused. Now I cannot, as I am already married. Trial is going on, charges are yet to be framed", accused told the court.

"You should have thought before seducing and raping the young girl. You knew you are a gov-

● **DISMISSING THE petition by accused as withdrawn, SC in its order said 'However, there shall be stay of arrest of petitioners for a period of eight weeks. Thereafter, Trial Court will decide question of the liberty of the petitioners.'**

● **OTHER JUDGES on the bench included Justice A.S.Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian.**

ernment servant." CJ told the lawyer appearing for the accused.

Other judges on the bench included Justice A.S.Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian. The top court was hear-

ing a plea filed by the accused against the Bombay High Court's February 5 order cancelling the anticipatory bail granted to him by the trial court in January last year.

Describing it as "atrocious", the Bombay High Court had set aside the trial court order granting anticipatory bail to the accused who has moved the top court against the High court order.

The accused had repeatedly raped the victim when she was 16 year and studying in 9th standard. However, when things came to light, the accused mother dissuaded the victim's mother from reporting the matter to police.

She assured that when the victim will turn 18 she will be married to the accused. But that did not happen and a complaint was filed after a gap of two years.

He has also been accused of offences punishable under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

In his plea filed in the top court, he has referred to the Maharashtra Civil Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules 1979 and said it pointed out that if a government servant is detained in police custody under criminal charges for a period of 48 hours, then he shall be deemed to have been placed under suspension by an order of appointing authority.

PM Modi takes 1st dose of  
Covid vaccine at AIIMS

FROM PAGE 1

Along with the PM, top political figures including vice-president M. Venkaiah Naidu, home minister Amit Shah, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar, NCP patriarch Sharad Pawar, his daughter and MP Supriya Sule, Rajasthan governor Kalraj Mishra, Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik and Bihar CM Nitish Kumar also got vaccinated. The vice-president took the jab at the Government Medical College in Chennai. Supreme Court judges and their family members will get the vaccine jabs on Tuesday. Health minister Harsh Vardh an also announced he will take the shot on Tuesday.

During his brief stay at the hospital, the PM chat-

ted with the nurses and other staff and even cracked jokes with them. One of the nurses who administered the vaccine to him, P. Niveda, said the PM, after getting the vaccine shot, remarked: "Laga bhi diya, pata bhi nahin chala" (Already done? I didn't even feel it).

Mr Modi also used humour to put at ease the medical staff during the inoculation and asked the nurses administering the vaccine whether they planned to use "some special thick needle" as politicians are known to be "very thick-skinned", drawing laughter.

"When PM Modi arrived, it was natural that the medical staff at AIIMS were perhaps a bit overawed", a source said.



## SHORT TAKES

KHASHOGGI FIANCEE  
WANTS SAUDI'S  
MBS PUNISHED

**Istanbul:** The Turkish fiancée of slain Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi said on Monday that Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman should be “punished without delay” over the murder. The United States on Friday declassified a report that publicly accused the crown prince of approving Khashoggi murder in the kingdom’s Istanbul consulate in 2018.

But the United States stopped short of applying sanctions against the 35-year-old de facto leader, known by his initials MBS.

“It is essential that the Crown Prince, who ordered the brutal murder of a blameless and innocent person, should be punished without delay,” Khashoggi’s fiancée Hatice Cengiz said in a statement posted on her official Twitter account in English and Arabic.

NEW WTO CHIEF  
ACCEPTS SWISS  
PAPER'S APOLOGY

**Geneva:** The first woman and first African to lead the World Trade Organisation on Monday welcomed an apology from a Swiss newspaper that had dismissed the seasoned international professional as a grandmother.

“It is important & timely that they’ve apologised,” Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said in a tweet.

The development economist took over as the new WTO chief on Monday after a long, high-powered career serving as minister of finance and foreign affairs in her native Nigeria and 25 years at the World Bank.

CUOMO AGREES  
BEHAVIOUR SEEN  
AS ‘FLIRTATION’

**Albany:** New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo acknowledged for the first time Sunday that some of his behaviour with women had been “misinterpreted as unwanted flirtation,” and said he would cooperate with a sexual harassment investigation led by the state’s attorney general.

In a statement released amid mounting criticism from within his own party, the Democrat maintained he had never inappropriately touched or propositioned anyone. But he said he had teased people and made jokes about their personal lives in an attempt to be “playful.” “I now understand that my interactions may have been insensitive or too personal and that some of my comments, given my position, made others feel in ways I never intended. I acknowledge some of the things I have said have been misinterpreted as an unwanted flirtation. To the extent anyone felt that way, I am truly sorry about that,” he said.

AUSSIE CABINET  
MIN. ACCUSED  
OF RAPE

**Sydney:** Australia’s Prime Minister rejected calls on Monday to suspend a cabinet minister accused of rape, saying the unnamed official “vigorously denied” allegations that have now been referred to police.

Scott Morrison — already under mounting public pressure to tackle what has been called a toxic sexist culture in Canberra politics — insisted the minister was innocent until proven guilty.

“Allegations of criminal conduct should be dealt with by competent and authorised agencies,” Morrison said, adding it was a “matter for the police.” Morrison recently received a letter detailing allegations that a man currently serving in the cabinet raped a 16-year-old girl in Sydney in 1988.

The woman took her own life last year. The man not been named publicly due to Australia’s defamation laws.

Morrison said he had raised the issue with the minister “who absolutely rejects these allegations.”

“It is the police, in a country where you’re governed by the rule of law, that determine the veracity of any allegations of this nature,” Morrison said in a testy exchange with journalists on Monday. “The police have had this matter referred to them. The individual involved here has vigorously rejected these allegations. And so, it’s a matter for the police.” Police said they had “received a complaint relating to an historic sexual assault,” but “will not be making further comment.”

## Covid vaccine IP rights divide WTO

India, South Africa lead calls to waive rights, notion rejected by pharmaceutical giants

**Geneva, March. 1:** The World Trade Organisation faces calls led by India and South Africa to waive intellectual property rights for Covid-19 vaccines — a notion fiercely rejected by pharmaceutical giants and their host countries.

The WTO will thrash out the divisive issue at its general council meeting on Monday and Tuesday as its new head Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala takes up her post. Some countries see the waiver as a short-cut to ending the novel coronavirus that has hobbled the global economy.

The IP plan was filed by India and South Africa on October 2 and garnered support from a host of developing countries which — correctly — anticipated being left behind in the vaccination race.

The text proposes a temporary exemption from certain obligations under the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), so that any country can produce vaccines without worrying about patents.

The waiver would also cover “industrial designs, copyright and protection of undisclosed information”, and would last “until widespread vaccination is in place globally, and the majority of the world’s population has developed immunity”.

More than 80 countries support the proposal, including Argentina, Bangladesh, the DR Congo, Egypt, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan and Venezuela. Backed by NGOs including the medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF), they think it would facilitate timely access to affordable medical products for all countries in need.

“All Covid-19 health tools



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson bumps elbows with Head Girl Hirah Hussain during his visit to St Mary's C.E. Primary School in Stoke-on-Trent, central England on Monday, to see how their preparations are going ahead of students returning on March 8, after England's third lockdown.

— AFP

**ALL COVID-19** health tools and technologies should be true global public goods, free from the barriers that patents and other intellectual property impose

SIDNEY WONG,  
MSF's co-director for  
access to medicines

and technologies should be true global public goods, free from the barriers that patents and other intellectual property impose,” said Sidney Wong, MSF’s co-director for access to medicines.

The idea also has the backing of World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

“If not now, then when?”

Tedros said of the scheme on Friday, condemning the “serious resistance” against it. The International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations is strongly against the proposal.

“Taking away patents now or imposing a waiver wouldn’t give you a single dose more,” IFPMA chief Thomas Cueni told reporters last week.

“It wouldn’t empower you to get the vaccine because you still wouldn’t know how to roll them out on a large scale.” The United States, the European Union and Switzerland — home to major pharmaceutical firms — oppose the idea, along with other wealthy nations including Australia, Britain, Japan, Norway and Singapore.

— AFP

FRANCE, GERMANY STRUGGLE TO  
SELL ASTRAZENCA VACCINE SAFETY

**Paris, March. 1:** Already facing a daunting Covid vaccination challenge, French and German authorities are fighting to convince more people that a jab from the pharma giant AstraZeneca is just as effective as others.

Stocks of the vaccines from the British-Swedish firm are going unused in both countries, depriving officials of a crucial tool to help end a pandemic that has sparked a social and economic calamity on a scale not seen since World War II.

Only 273,000 AstraZeneca doses have been administered in

France out of 1.7 million received as of end-February, according to health ministry figures.

The poor take-up comes even as the target group for the jabs, health workers over 50 and people with other serious health risks, can get the vaccine directly from their doctor instead of waiting for appointments at vaccination centres.

Experts say it is also cheaper to produce than the two other vaccines approved for Europe, from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, and does not require ultracold storage, making it easier to deploy.

— AFP

French ex-prez  
Sarkozy guilty of  
graft, to be jailed

**Paris, March. 1:** Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy was found guilty of corruption on Monday and handed a three-year prison sentence, in a ruling that deals a major blow to any lingering political ambitions.

The sentence includes two years suspended and the remaining one year would be converted into a non-custodial sentence, meaning it is unlikely Sarkozy will end up behind bars over this case.

He is almost certain to appeal and remains free, with no arrest warrant issued, but he faces several other corruption investigations over campaign financing and alleged influence peddling.

The sentence for seeking to illegally influence a judge is the latest twist in the tumultuous political career of the 66-year-old who remains a favourite for many on the right for his combative style and tough talk on crime and immigration.

The conviction is likely to undermine any attempted comeback to



Nicolas Sarkozy

frontline politics, an ambition he has denied, but which has been promoted by many supporters ahead of 2022 presidential elections.

Wearing a dark suit and tie, Sarkozy showed no emotion as the sentence was read out and he left court without commenting to waiting journalists before heading to his private office in central Paris.

“What a senseless witchhunt, my love Nicolas Sarkozy,” his wife, former supermodel and singer Carla Bruni, posted on Instagram, next to a picture of the couple embracing. “The fight goes on, the truth will come out. #injustice.”

— AFP

## Trump hints at Prez re-run in 2024

**Washington, March. 1:** In his first public speech since leaving the White House, former US president Donald Trump has raised the climate issue while criticising his successor Joe Biden for rejoining the “very unfair” Paris Agreement, saying what good does it do when America is “clean” but China, Russia and India are not.

Speaking at the Conservative Political Action Committee in Orlando, Florida on Sunday, the 74-year-old leader, who left the White House on January 20, came down heavily on the Biden administration for putting the “United States back into the very unfair and very costly Paris Climate Accord without negotiating a better deal”.

“First of all, China does not kick in for 10 years, Russia goes by an old standard which was not a clean standard... but we get hit right from the beginning when it costs us hundreds of thousands and millions of jobs, it was a disaster... but they go back in.”

“We have the cleanest air and cleanest water... and what good does it do when we’re clean, but China is not and Russia is not and India is not, so they are pouring fumes... you know the world is a small piece



Former U.S. President Donald Trump addresses the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) held in the Hyatt Regency in Orlando, Florida.

— AFP

of the universe and we’re trying to protect everything,” Trump said amidst applause from his supporters.

On February 19, the US officially returned to the historic Paris climate accord, 107 days after it left at the behest of former president Trump. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres had termed that decision as a “major disappointment for global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote global security.”

In the past also, Trump has criticised China, India and Russia for pollution. In October last year, he accused China, India and Russia of not taking care of their “filthy air” as he

justified America’s withdrawal from the landmark Paris climate agreement. “Look at China, how filthy it is. Look at Russia. Look at India. The air is filthy,” Trump had said during the final presidential debate with his Democratic challenger Joe Biden in Nashville, Tennessee. Days earlier while speaking to his cheering supporters at an election rally in North Carolina.

Donald Trump told conservatives Sunday he was considering running for president again in 2024, as he reasserted dominance over the Republican Party and warned of a “struggle” for America’s very survival. Echoing the

● **IN OCTOBER** last year, Trump had accused China, India and Russia of not taking care of their “filthy air” as he justified America’s withdrawal from the landmark Paris climate agreement.

grievance politics of his 2016 campaign and the harsh rhetoric of his one-term presidency, the 74-year-old fired up an enthusiastic crowd at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Orlando.

In a keynote speech — his first since leaving the White House on January 20 — he repeated his false claims that he won the election instead of President Joe Biden, and hammered establishment Republicans who voted against him in the latest impeachment drama.

But while he teased his future plans, he left the crowd guessing about whether he will challenge Biden in a rematch.

“With your help we will take back the House, we will win the Senate, and then a Republican president will make a triumphant return to the White House — and I wonder who that will be?” Trump said to a raucous cheer.

— PTI

PROTESTS GO ON  
IN MYANMAR,  
DESPITE DEADLY  
CRACKDOWN

**Yangon, Mar. 1:** Police in Myanmar’s biggest city on Monday fired tear gas at defiant crowds who returned to the streets to protest the military’s seizure of power a month ago, despite reports that security forces had killed at least 18 people around the country a day earlier.

The protesters in Yangon were chased as they tried to gather at their usual meeting spot at the Hledan Center intersection. Demonstrators scattered and sought to rinse their faces with water in vain attempts to ease the irritating effects of the gas.

In the capital, Naypyitaw, the country’s ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi made a court appearance Monday via videoconference, the *Independent Myanmar* news agency reported. It said she received a charge under Section 505(b) of the Penal Code for allegedly inciting unrest. Further details of the court appearance were not immediately available.

— AP

300 RALLY IN  
BANGLA TO  
DENOUNCE  
PRISON DEATH

**Dhaka, March. 1:** About 300 student activists rallied in Bangladesh’s capital on Monday to denounce the death in prison of a writer and commentator who was arrested last year on charges of violating a sweeping digital security law that critics say chokes freedom of expression.

The protesters marched through the Dhaka University campus and Dhaka’s streets toward the country’s Home Ministry to also demand the annulment of the digital security law and the release of seven student activists arrested during recent protests denouncing the death of 53-year-old Mushtaq Ahmed.

They broke a barricade by removing barbed wire fences on the way to the ministry, but were intercepted by a few hundred police officers outside the ministry in downtown Dhaka.

“The state must take responsibility. He has been killed, it was not a natural death. How come he was held for nine months in jail without any justice?” said one protester, Mahfuza Akhter.

“We want justice,” she said. There were no immediate reports of any violence. Ahmed’s death Thursday night sparked protests on streets and on social media, and prompted global human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, to urge Bangladesh’s government to conduct a thorough investigation.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, or CPJ, demanded that the government cancel the security act.

— AP

**BERLINALE | 2021** Winners to be announced on the last day, the Golden, Silver Bear trophies will be given in June

## Virtual screenings, gender-neutral awards and Tina

SUPARNA SHARMA | DC  
NEW DELHI, MARCH. 1

Berlinale, the world’s biggest film festival which usually attracts close to 5,00,000 film fans to the German capital, opened quietly on thousands of laptops across the world on Monday morning and for five worthies at the plush Berlinale Palast theatre.

Sitting at a safe distance from each other in the 1,600-seater theatre were five former Golden Bear winners (the festival’s top prize which goes to the best film) who will pick this year’s winner from 15 films in the festival’s

Competition section.

The sixth jury member, Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof, could not make it. Rasoulof, who won the Golden Bear last year for *There Is No Evil*, a film on capital punishment in Iran, has been found guilty of making films that are a “propaganda” tool “against the system” and is under a travel ban. He will be watching films on his laptop.

Usually held for 10 days in February every year, the 71st edition of the International Film Festival of Berlin is a hybrid affair that’s been

cut short and split into two. From March 1-5, Berlinale will run virtually for film critics and industry across the world. The winners will be announced on the last day, but the Golden and Silver Bear trophies will be presented in person, in June, when organisers hope to invite stars for red carpet events and screen films for the public.

Another departure from the past is that this year the festival has gone “gender neutral” in terms of awards. Berlinale is the first international film festival that has replaced best actress and best actor prizes with awards for best lead and supporting performance. The jury is, quite literally, out on

whether this will be a unique way to showcase women’s talent or whether it will end up robbing actresses of yet another chance to be celebrated on the world stage.

Berlinale’s artistic director Carlo Chatrjian, speaking about this year’s Competition section, has said that these are “deeply personal films that reflect the disruption brought on by the events of 2020”.

The films competing for the top prize this year are from Germany, France, Romania, Hungary, Mexico, South Korea and Japan. They were either shot or were in post-production during the pandemic.

Films outside the Competition section that

are set to have their world premiere at Berlinale include director Azazel Jacobs’ French Exit starring Michelle Pfeiffer, and the real-life thriller *The Mauritanian*, which stars Jodie Foster and Benedict Cumberbatch. Foster won the Golden Globe for best supporting actress for her performance in *The Mauritanian* on Monday.

Another film that has already created a lot of buzz is *Tina*, a documentary about the queen of rock’n’roll by Oscar winners Dan Lindsay and T.J. Martin (Undeclared). It features never-before-seen concert footage and interviews with the notoriously private 81-year-old superstar.



A still from the documentary *Tina*



DECCAN  
Chronicle

2 MARCH 2021

G-23's Jammu conclave  
exposes Cong faultlines

The Jammu conclave on Saturday of the 23 Congress dissidents (G-23) who wrote to interim party president Sonia Gandhi in August demanding a “full-time and effective leadership”, as well as proper internal party elections, now appears to have fully emerged as a caucus reminiscent of the ginger group that the late V.P. Singh had formed with disgruntled Congressmen to take on then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

The difference is that the anti-Rajiv dissidents challenged a PM, using the same ammunition as the rest of the Opposition, and in time became the principal Opposition. In the Lok Sabha polls that followed, Mr Singh ended up as PM through political stagecraft. This time the circumstances are very different. The Congress is in Opposition and is facing a very determined ruling party under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But, in Jammu, the G-23 have played their real hand.

This can be seen to be in two parts. First, Ghulam Nabi Azad, the former J&K chief minister who days ago retired from the Rajya Sabha, where he was the designated Leader of the Opposition, was projected as Congress president by one of the most important dissidents, Kapil Sibal. Two, in his own remarks, Mr Azad did not fail to make a favourable mention of Prime Minister Modi, a reference to the PM, teary-eyed, marking out the retiring Congress leader for praise in the Upper House recently.

He was critical of the BJP government at the Centre only to the extent of questioning the Modi government's move to constitutionally reduce J&K from a state to a Union territory. He did not question the ending of J&K's autonomy, setting himself apart from the position taken by the Gandhis in Parliament.

It's not clear if all the G-23 leaders will be in the Azad camp for Congress president when the party elections take place. Some of them apparently also see themselves as contenders. But what became evident was that the thrust of the Jammu conclave was against the Congress leadership, though names were not mentioned. The Jammu meet leaders noted that the Congress had become weak and they had come together to strengthen it. Their other objective was to campaign against the BJP. But not much was said about the BJP at the forum.

The G-23 had launched themselves through a letter to the interim chief (which arrived in newspaper offices before it landed with Mrs Gandhi) not long before the Bihar Assembly election. They held their first formal meet in Jammu weeks before Congress will be up against formidable challengers in the Assembly elections in West Bengal, Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, where the Congress government was practically toppled through the BJP's manoeuvring recently.

After the Congress' below par showing in Bihar, the caucus leaders sharply questioned the leadership. They would doubtless have the opportunity to do so again if their party fares poorly in the upcoming state polls and may even pray for the opportunity. However, it hardly behoves an official Congress spokesman in New Delhi, Abhishek Singhvi, to be critical of G-23's Jammu show. The party election has been pushed from January-February this year to June — no doubt with the Assembly polls in view. But this was an executive decision, rather than one formally made consensually, including with the dissidents.

## Biden lets Saudis off the hook?

America's strategic interests seem to have prevailed even as US President Joe Biden reprimanded Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman by releasing an intelligence report saying the assassination of critic Jamal Khashoggi was carried out with the prince's tacit approval. Mr Biden stepped back after suspending some arms sales, drawing criticism from his own party that he didn't go the whole hog and sanction MBS, who goes scot-free for the sinister actions of his Rapid Intervention Force lackeys which pursues and silences dissidents at home and abroad.

In calling out the Crown Prince, who is the real power behind his ailing father King Salman, who still occupies the throne, Mr Biden merely sent out the political signal that he is different from Donald Trump and that Saudi Arabia can't expect the same kind of cosy ties it enjoyed with the White House through Mr Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, especially if it breaches human rights as brazenly as, say, Russia did with Alexei Navalny.

The Saudi-US pact goes back eight decades to the Franklin D. Roosevelt era when Americans gained access to cheap Saudi oil in exchange for protection under a bizarre security covenant between the world's oldest democracy and the epitome of an Islamic monarchy. The tensions that came with the release of the intelligence report may only help push the kingdom further towards Russia and China, the latter already Saudi's biggest trade partner.

The prince's actions, which included detention of hundreds of princes and businessmen at a luxury hotel in 2017 aimed at consolidating his power base, may not have endeared him to a more liberal America with its faith in personal freedoms. Mr Biden's moves since moving into the White House has been to reset America's ties with many countries with the focus on first stamping out Mr Trump's erratic and personalised style of handling foreign relations. Can Mr Biden propel America quickly enough into cherishing democratic values and human rights once again? That remains the key question.

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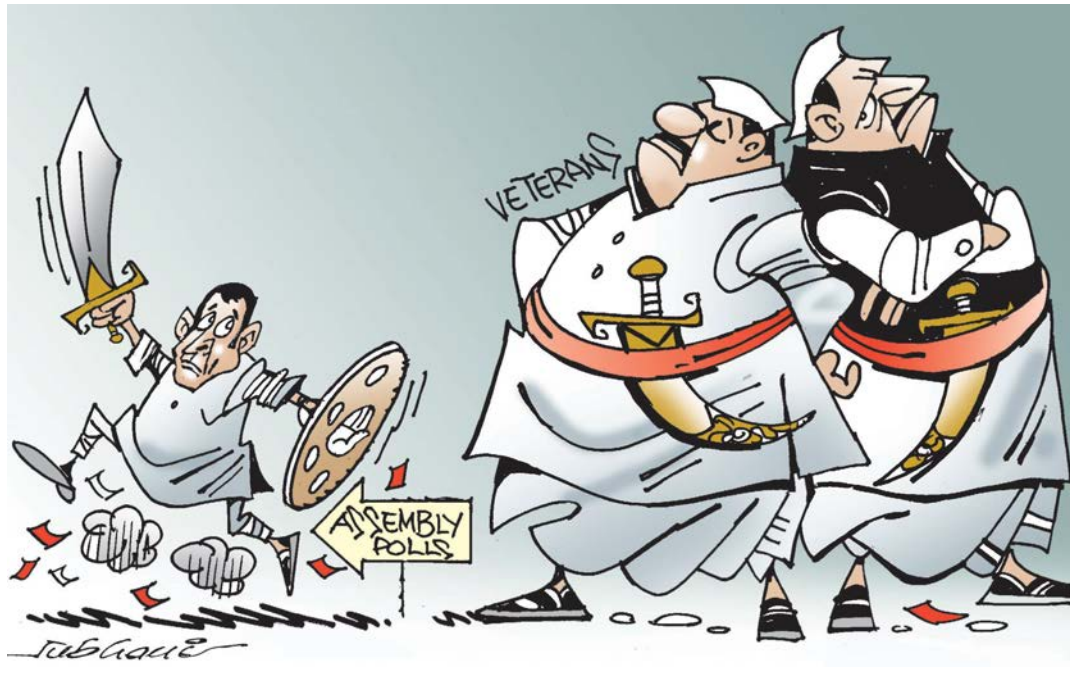
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Subhani

New online, digital code  
fails to empower usersShashidhar  
Nanjundaiah

The new Information and Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 under Section 79 of the IT Act has created a flutter. The news media has paid extraordinary attention, space and time to it as it unfolded, and with good reason. Few people dispute the need for some kind of regulation of the digital media. But the debate is over whether it does what is needed. How empowering a tool are the new rules for the public, who are the ultimate users?

From the press statements of minister for information and broadcasting Prakash Javadekar and minister for information technology Ravi Shankar Prasad, it seems that the new rules seek to rein in the online media and the social media platforms by intervening in their content, and that the overarching objective is to get the digital platforms to be enveloped into “the law of the land”. (I draw a technical distinction between “online platform” from “digital platform” — the first is an unbundled series of news stories released across time, while the latter is a package, similar to a printed newspaper.)

Because the interpretations of sensitive laws of the land by government agencies — in regard to the freedom of expression versus sedition, for example — in recent years have been disputed, a certain amount of scepticism with regard to Rules 2021 should be expected. Experts have questioned whether the new rules even pass the test of constitutionality — in terms of rationale, purpose, proportionality, necessity, and possible impingement on people's basic rights.

First, to tease out what is new in the rule. In its artic-

ulation, the rule seeks to empower the user's voice, especially in case content is objectionable to them. The new rule changes the privacy protection norms that the social platforms seek to exercise by drawing a line between acceptable messaging and spreading objectionable messages. The mandating of age-appropriateness in the rule for the over-the-top (OTT) content certainly ensures that parents have the right to monitor which content is available to their child and which content could be abhorrent. International OTT channels do declare the customary caution about the nature of the content. The rule attaches online news to the conventional definition of news, making online-only news platforms adhere to the same Press Council of India and the Cable Act norms as the conventional media do. The rules mandate a self-regulatory mechanism, like the National Broadcasters' Standards Association (NBSA). A three-tier redressal mechanism entails inter-ministerial oversight. Social media companies, or “intermediaries”, would need to disclose the originator of a “mischievous” message.

I would like to take a media literacy point of view here. In a social media world, the user is also a producer of messages. Media literacy has increasingly gained popularity in school and college curricula in several countries after the alarming rise and opiate-like popularity of fake news. Recently, the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism at the Arizona State University introduced a degree programme in media literacy that takes a train-the-trainer approach and teaches journalism students to further educate society. It empowers the user through an under-

standing of messages, modes and meanings. Among other functions, media literacy unlocks the user's understanding of how to decode media messages — including what is omitted and unstated.

Fake news is a significant reason that media literacy has emerged strongly in the education curricula around the world. Facts and fiction are distinguishable quite simply — if you mix facts with fiction, the concoction can still be called fiction, but the other way around should not be acceptable. One would have expected the Rules 2021 to draw that distinction in an effort to stem fake news. In the long run, its mandate to identify — and punish, presumably — objectionable content may act as a threat and thereby a deterrent to fake news mongers. Handing itself the authority to know who the originator of an objectionable message is does empower the government to act against such individuals. But it misses the point on educating the user. The tiered approach of redressal would only empower users to the extent that social media platforms already allow — through complaints about content that one may find objectionable. There is no real way in which to prevent fake news or intimidation or national security threats because there is no scope for prior restraint in the current technology adoption.

The word “media” in the term “social media” is totally misleading — it is merely media in a technology sense of the term. Yet it is an empowering tool like none other in recent history. People tend to use the social media as a public square, mixing facts and fiction, public and pri-

**If the government's intent is to provide more rights to its people, it must help soothe the nerves of people who are now confused about what to say on the social media.**

vate. Other users exposed to the public discourse have been consuming and re-producing it, essentially dismissing the need for credible information, or for doing any kind of fact check. The new rule does not take care of this problem. How does a user distinguish between the credible and non-credible platforms?

So, the proposed rule on the social media “intermediaries” seems both perfunctory and off the mark. Is it because the real intent is to rein them into a more government-controlled content environment in the name of the “law of the land”, which are being adhered to anyway? In an ideal world, strengthening the hands of the user and empowering the government should be the same thing. But is it possible for a government to use the former as a front for the latter? The decryption-on-demand mandate is a powerful indicator that this could be the result, providing access to the government to whether what people are saying — and perhaps thinking — can be punished if found to be politically inconvenient.

The exemplary and now routine arrests of seemingly ordinary individuals who are seen to be endangering the nation's sovereignty have spooked a large number of citizens. If the government's intent is to provide more rights to its people, it must help soothe the nerves of people who are now confused about what to say on the social media. If the government seeks to make genuine efforts through the Rules 2021, it must decontrol, not control, the information flow, but in parallel also launch a national drive to make the user more aware of the importance of real information, drawing a distinction between certified, credible platforms and opinionated individuals pretending to be the disseminators of information.

*The writer has led reputed institutes of media and communications, and is the founder of “Being Responsible”, which promotes media literacy. The views expressed here are personal.*

## LETTERS

## PM'S REGRET

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has regretted that he could not make much efforts to learn Tamil. One feels that even now it's not late for him to learn the language. Life, after all, is a continuous learning process. Be that as it may, the Prime Minister should speak in English in international meetings to put his points across well, or in other words, to communicate effectively to the peoples of various nations.

S. Ramakrishnasayee,  
Chennai

THE PRIME Minister Narendra Modi has replied to a question in his ‘Mann ki Baat’ programme (in Hindi) that he felt his inability to learn Tamil - a beautiful old language rich in literature and poetry - as a ‘shortcoming’. This comment being said just weeks ahead of assembly elections in Tamil Nadu is nothing short of opportunism to garner votes. He has also said that India is a country with several languages which “symbolise our pride and culture”. But it is an irony that all said and done the BJP government is going all out to impose Hindi on non-Hindi speaking states! Let us watch and listen to what he would say (about Bengali language) when he canvasses for votes in West Bengal!

M.C. Vijay Shankar,  
Chennai

## PRIVATISATION ISSUE

RECENTLY OUR Prime minister has stated that “it is not the government's business to do any business”. Well said. But whose business it is to manage the public sector projects? Does it imply that his government intends to privatise public sector projects by selling out to the rich industrialists? For example the Vizag steel plant is spread over 20,000 acres out of 33,000 acres land acquired from the public 50 years back. What is the fate of 13,000 acres of excess land? Even the plant is deliberately closed quoting losses, but how can the buyer be allowed to get away with the unused land which costs rupees lakhs of crores at present market value? And they gave all that land only for the steel plant. If privatised, the land should be returned to the owners. As PM has rightly said “the government should not do any business”, the Centre or the state government should not do real estate business, selling public property in the name of privatisation.

A. Seshagiri Rao,  
Chennai

Mail your letters to  
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Aakar Patel

As democracy  
endangered,  
India's global  
reputation hit

The *Washington Post's* editorial board has written that India's claim of being a democracy should be put in question. This headline came after it summed up what was happening in India accurately across the spectrum of governance, from the farm laws being passed without voting in Parliament to young women being jailed because they edited an open-source document.

India's ministry of external affairs did not put out a brave response to this, as it did earlier when a pop star that almost nobody in India had heard of wrote six words (“Why aren't we talking about this?”) over a CNN headline on February 2. India's brave soldiers like Akshay Kumar and Sachin Tendulkar did not respond to the *Washington Post* either, as they had done to Rihanna. Presumably the Prime Minister did not instruct his minions to react because he does not care about what the *Washington Post* writes, whereas the pop star has millions of followers.

The *Economist*, which is the world's most respected magazine, has carried a headline in its latest issue which reads: “The Indian government's pursuit of its critics is not just unfair, but hypocritical.”

Like the *Post*, this magazine is well-informed about what is going on in India. It says that the Narendra Modi government's actions have made it globally look “mean and silly”.

The government had not responded to this either, though presumably it will have to do something. One reason is that *The Economist* has referred to the Indian government's promotion of Gurujit Golwalkar through an official tribute earlier in February. The magazine told its readers that “Mr Golwalkar believed that Nazi Germany's management of its Jewish problem represented a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by”.

Let us examine what the *Washington Post* has claimed, that we are not a democracy. The West doesn't see democracy beginning and ending at the polling station. It has to be accompanied by civil liberties, fundamental rights and access to justice. All of these ingredients together form what the government structure, which they consider democracy.

In our case, we believe elections are democracy. But there is a problem here. India achieved freedom at the group level in 1947. Independence meant that control of the State was transferred

from a set of people led by foreigners to Indians entirely. This gave Indian citizens the space to determine how to govern themselves and write their own laws to enjoy individual freedoms and civil liberties.

Freedom at the group level meant essentially the right to vote. This was available, but restricted, in the British period too. Freedom at the group level liberated India from a system that already included voting rights, legislatures and lawmaking ability for Indians. It was on limited subjects, however.

After 1947 India should have focused on individual freedoms so that the exercise could be deepened. Here India stumbled. The State (meaning, the apparatus of government) did not relinquish its rights to citizens. It contested the space and asserted itself over citizens on essential freedoms.

The rights — to freedom of speech and expression; practice any profession or occupation; peaceful assembly; to form associations; freely practice and propagate religion; not to be deprived of life and liberty — do not exist in India today. These rights are fundamental, which enjoy a high degree of protection from encroachment by the State. But

they are not available to Indians today despite what the Constituent Assembly wanted. The State has taken them away and many never existed in the first place.

There are so many laws that regulate and criminalise free speech that it is difficult to know where to start. Sedition, criminal defamation and criminal contempt are a start. They don't exist in the nations where our laws are derived from (India's Constitution isn't based on Manu Smriti, but the constitutions of other nations).

The Supreme Court in the 1950s ruled while the Constituent Assembly guaranteed freedom to practice “any” profession or “carry out any occupation”, it could not allow butchery of cows because that offended Hindus; and while the Constitution was supreme, Hindu sentiment was more supreme.

Protest (peaceful assembly) has been criminalised, right to propagation has been criminalised and so has the right to occupation. The freedom of speech is criminalised with sedition, criminal defamation and criminal contempt laws.

The State sought to regulate these freedoms by so-called “reasonable restrictions”, which overturned the

rights themselves. This was always the case in India. However, this government has pushed the rights of the State over the rights of Indian citizens to the point where it will crush individuals who stand up to the State. This is what the *Washington Post* and *Economist* are writing about. The reason the Indian government is silent on these accusations is that they are true.

We can tell a pop singer to shut up because she is a young woman. It's slightly more difficult to tell the *Washington Post* and *Economist* to get lost, so silence is the next best option. What is left unsaid is that this is not something that will pass over. The Indian government's continued actions and its refusal to reverse what it is doing to its citizens has come at a cost to India's global reputation. We are too close to the story as it unfolds before us in real time today to be able to calculate what this cost is. But it is substantial, and entirely avoidable. It's a different matter that the Indian government today does not care what it does to Indians as long as it can continue on its path.

*The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist*



## quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,849.84	1.53
Nifty 50	14,761.50	1.60
S&P 500*	3,898.07	2.28
Dollar (₹)	73.55	-0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.40	0.02
Euro (₹)	88.40	0.78
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	45,520*241	0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	65.02	0.93
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.209	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.426	-0.030

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

## WTO to hold ministerial meet in late 2021

World Trade Organization members agreed to hold the next major ministerial meeting in Geneva, Switzerland in late 2021, delegates said. The biennial conference was originally set to be held in Kazakhstan last year but was delayed due to the pandemic. The WTO's director-general Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala who began work on Monday hopes the meeting will provide a venue for a deal on fisheries subsidies and WTO reforms.



## ■ Sales jump 12% at Maruti, 29% at Hyundai Cars regain speed, clock 24% growth in February

MICHAEL GONSALVES  
PUNE, MARCH 1

Major carmakers on Monday reported robust double-digit sales in February, bringing cheers to the automakers depressed from the prolonged Covid pandemic that had hit them hard.

The top 10 carmakers who produce 97 per cent of the total domestic sales clocked a 24 per cent growth in domestic volumes in February at 298,694 units against 241,533 units sold in February 2020.

Maruti Suzuki, India's biggest car maker by sales, said it sales in February jumped 11.8 per cent to 1,52,983 units from 1,36,849 units it sold a year ago.

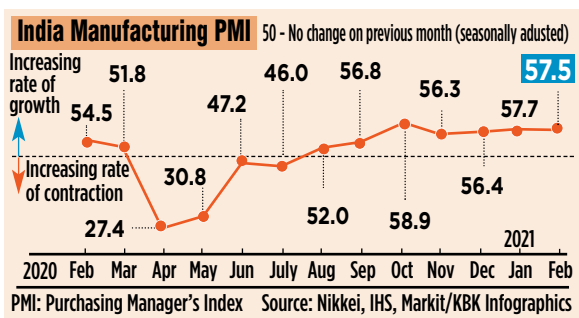
Sales at its rival Hyundai, the second largest carmaker, also rose 29 per cent to 51,600 units, up from 40,010 units.

Tata Motors reported an 119 per cent jump in sales to 27,225 units, up from 12,430 units.

Korean brand Kia Motors logged a 7 per cent rise in volumes to 16,702 units against 15,644 units.

Mahindra and Mahindra, the SUV specialist, also reported 41 per cent jump in sales last month to 15,391 units, up from 10,938 units a year ago.

Japanese carmaker Toyota registered a 36 per cent sales growth last month. It sold 14,075 units compared to 10,352 units in February 2020. Toyota attributed this sales growth to new launches like Innova Crysta and



## Mfg PMI stays in expansion zone

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

Strong demand and increased output helped India's factory activity to stay in expansion for the seventh straight month in February. Although the Nikkei Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index, or PMI, compiled by IHS Markit, eased slightly to 57.5 in February from 57.7 in January, it remained well above the 50-level separating growth from contraction.

"Better demand conditions and successful marketing campaigns reportedly underpinned a fur-

ther increase in new orders during February. Although easing from January, the pace of growth remained sharp in the context of historical data," IHS Markit said.

Pollyanna De Lima, economics associate director at IHS Markit, said, "Indian goods producers reported a healthy inflow of new orders in February, a situation that underpinned a further upturn in output and quantity of purchases. This was evident from a quicker rise in outstanding business and another decline in inventories of finished goods."

Fortuner facelift and Fortuner Legender in January.

French car brand Renault posted 26 per cent growth in February volumes to 11,043 units against 8,784. The company has started dispatches of their latest model Kiger to its showrooms.

Honda Cars sold 28.3 per

cent more cars at 9,324 units last month, up from 7,269 units it sold last year.

Sales at MG Motor registered its best-ever monthly retail at 4,329 units last month, marking a growth of 215 per cent compared to February 2020. China's SAIC-owned British carmaker registered this

## GST COLLECTIONS SEE 7% YoY RISE AT ₹1.13 L CRORE

FC BUREAU  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

For the fifth month in a row, the goods and services tax (GST) mop-up crossed the Rs 1-lakh crore mark in February. GST collections in the month stood at Rs 1.13 lakh crore, which is 7 per cent higher year-on-year but lower than the all-time high of nearly Rs 1.20 lakh crore recorded for January, government data showed on Monday.

"Out of the total GST for the February month, the Central GST was Rs 21,092 crore, State GST was Rs 27,273 crore, Integrated GST was Rs 55,253 crore (including Rs 24,382 crore collected on import of goods) and compensation cess was Rs 9,525 crore (including Rs 660 crore collected on import of goods)," the finance ministry statement said.

It said the government settled Rs 22,398 crore to CGST and Rs 17,534 crore to SGST from IGST.

growth on account of robust demand for Hector facelift, Hector Plus, and Gloster.

Riding on the success of the Magnite SUV, Nissan Motor saw 313 per cent growth in February volumes to 4,244 units against 1,028 units sold in the same month last year.

## IDBI BANK TO SET OFF ₹45,580-CR LOSSES AGAINST SECURITIES PREMIUM ACCOUNT

New Delhi, Mar. 1: LIC-controlled IDBI Bank will set off its accumulated losses worth Rs 45,586 crore against the balance in the securities premium account, according to the bank's draft scheme.

Its accumulated losses (or debit balance of profit and loss account) at the end of March 31, 2020, stood at Rs 45,586 crore. They were at Rs 44,739 crore as on December 31, 2020.

The accumulated losses as on March 31, 2021, shall be ascertained after the audited financial statements are approved by the bank's board, said the lender.

The bank's authorised share capital is Rs 25,000 crore.

The issued, subscribed and paid-up share capital is worth Rs 10,752.40 crore and the security premium is of Rs 50,732.27 crore.

IDBI Bank said the balance standing to the credit of securities premium account of the bank as per audited financial statements for FY20 and as on April 1, 2020, it is Rs 49,669 crore.

This balance as on December 31, 2020, stood at Rs 50,718 crore as per the unaudited financial statements.

Last month, its board had approved a proposal for setting off the bank's accumulated losses by April 1, 2021, in full or partially, by using the balance in the securities premium account.

—PTI

## ₹77K crore bids for spectrum on Day 1

New Delhi, March 1: India's first auction of spectrum in five years attracted Rs 77,146 crore of bids on the opening day on Monday, with Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel, and Vodafone Idea participating in the bidding process—a response that the government said was better than expected.

There were, however, no takers for spectrum in 700 MHz and 2500 MHz bands on the first day, and the auctions will conclude on Tuesday.

About 2,308.80 MHz of spectrum, that carry telecom signals, in seven bands worth nearly Rs 4 lakh crore at the reserve or start price, was offered for bidding in the auction that began on Monday.

Communications minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said Rs 77,146 crore worth of spectrum was bid on the first day but there were no takers for the airwaves in the premium 700 MHz as also 2500 MHz bands. The response from players and the bids received surpassed government's internal estimates that had anticipated bids worth Rs 45,000 crore.

"The winning bids that have come till 6 PM today is Rs 77,146 crore. We thought since there are only three players, and spectrum replacement is happening...our estimation was that the bids will touch about Rs 45,000 crore, but it is a matter of assurance that it has gone as high as Rs 77,146 crore," Prasad said.

The bidder-wise details were not available immediately. A total of 2,308.80 MHz spectrum is being



put to auction, out of which there have been bids for 849.20 MHz so far, an official release said.

Bids were received in 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1800 MHz, 2100 MHz and 2300 MHz bands, as players gave the prized 700 MHz band a miss on the first day of auctions.

"Total value of spectrum put to auction was about Rs 4 lakh crore. In this, 700 MHz band was a costly band, and that cost itself is Rs 1.97 lakh crore," the minister said adding that the government will take a call on 700 MHz band, used for 5G, in case it remains unsold in the ongoing auctions.

Excluding 700 MHz and 2500 MHz bands, the bidding accounted for 60 per cent of the spectrum that was put to auction.

The 700 MHz band went unsold during the 2016 auctions, too. During 2016, when there were seven bidders, the spectrum sold was 41 per cent by quantity and 12 per cent by value of the total spectrum put to auction. The corresponding figures in the 2021 spectrum auction so far are 37 per cent and 19 per cent respectively, with three participants.

—PTI

# COFFEE-BREAK

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



**Aries:** A short pleasure trip with family is likely to give an opportunity to regain lost trust. Being determined would help in looking on the bright side of life.



**Taurus:** A careful planning would be prerequisite to bring desired professional results. Do not get surprised if the day brings a sudden inflow of funds.



**Gemini:** Be very careful while signing financial documents. A romantic encounter is likely to add spice to life. Spend quality time with family.



**Cancer:** Sudden unexpected expenses might exert financial pressure. You will have to make efforts to infuse a lease of life in your romantic relationship.



**Leo:** It is the right time to channel your creativity. You are likely to receive full support of family to your plans related to financial schemes. Spend time with children.



**Virgo:** Warm romantic thoughts occupy mind. A preventive care would save you from illness. Make sure you don't indulge in gossips to please seniors at work. Go on a vacation with your partner.



**Libra:** Today you will be able to increase your contacts with like-minded people. You would be taken for a ride if you behave too generous in financial matters.



**Scorpio:** Taking some calculated risks in financial matters will enable to earn profits. Traveling proves a blessing in disguise by bringing a love in your life.



**Sagittarius:** Performing rituals/auspicious ceremonies at home prove highly beneficial. To maintain a strong financial position, the key lies in a careful investment.



**Capricorn:** You will receive assistance from other family members to finish your pending jobs. You should concentrate on your children, specially their academics. Go out and socialise with friends.



**Aquarius:** You may be better off keeping your views to yourself for now as people may not be ready to hear what you have to say. Travelling for work will be beneficial. Meditation will help you relax.



**Pisces:** Meetings will go off well and you will find it easy to strike the right cord when sharing your views. Be diplomatic and accommodating in your interactions at work. Hectic travel is indicated.

bridge  
PHILLIP  
ALDER

## TRY TO THINK THE RIGHT THOUGHT

Ambrose Bierce wrote, "I think I think; therefore, I think I am." Most bridge players think, but how often is it along the wrong lines? (Has your partner ever taken ages before making the wrong play?) Today's deal highlights one unthinking error.

In the auction, South pushed hard to reach six diamonds despite his partner's values apparently being in clubs.

West led the heart ace and continued with another heart. South won in hand with the king, played a diamond to dummy's jack, ruffed a low club in hand and played off all of his trumps. He crossed to dummy's heart queen, cashed the two top clubs, discarding spades, and took the spade finesse: down one.

The declarer grumbled about his bad luck,

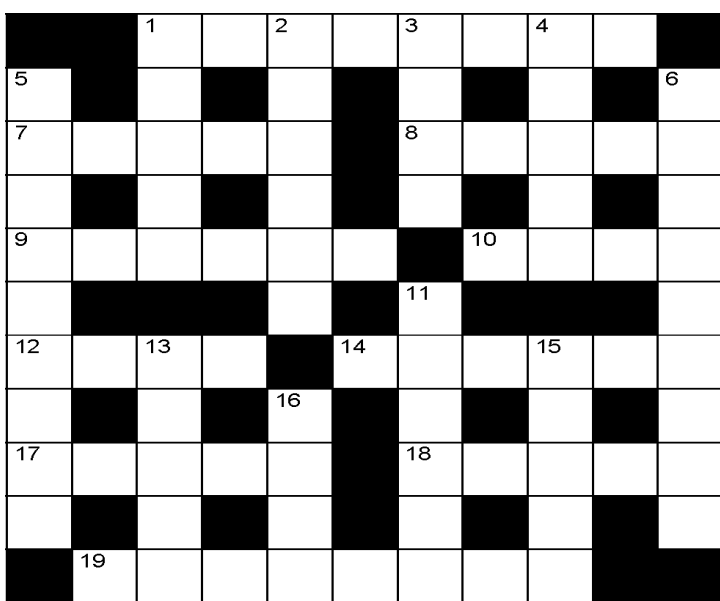
unaware that he had made a mistake. There were two main chances for the contract: clubs 4-4 or the spade finesse working. As the latter could wait, South should have thought more about a possible even club split. To benefit from that, South had to ruff two low clubs in his hand and still have a dummy entry left.

At trick one, South must unblock his heart king under West's ace. He wins

the heart continuation in the dummy, ruffs a low club, plays a diamond to dummy's jack, ruffs another low club and draws trumps. He enters dummy with a heart and cashes the top clubs. When they break evenly, South claims. But if the clubs are not 4-4, he takes the spade finesse. Watch those entries.

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## QUICK CROSSWORD



Across

- Art of clock-making (8)
- Annoyed (5)
- Aromatic herb (5)
- Up-to-date (6)
- Standard (4)
- Villain (4)
- Big gun (6)
- Secured (5)
- Inspect books (5)
- Sailor's dance (8)

Down

- Travelled on foot (5)
- Passengers (6)
- Ear part (4)
- Zest (5)
- Sacking (9)
- Get rid of (9)
- American state (6)
- Cowboy show (5)
- Elbow (5)
- Biblical garden (4)

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

- Across: 1. Tendered, 6. Orca, 7. Umpire, 9. Harsh, 11. Asked, 12. Issue, 13. Steer, 16. Kennel, 18. Kiln, 19. Kamikaze.

- Down: 1. Toothpick, 2. Nicer, 3. Rout, 4. Deposit, 5. For, 8. Endurance, 10. Sputnik, 14. Erica, 15. Slam, 17. Ebb.

## Word Mine

Z  
B  
O  
L  
R  
L  
U  
E  
D

TODAY'S RATINGS: 2 AVERAGE; 3 GOOD; 4 OUTSTANDING

How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown in today's puzzle? In making a word, each letter may be used only once. Each word must contain the letter at the top of the pyramid. There should be at least one nine letter word. Plurals, foreign words and proper names are not allowed.

Dealer: North  
Vulnerable: Both  
South West North East  
1 ♠ Pass 2 ♠ Pass 3 ♠ Pass 4 ♠ Pass  
5 ♠ Pass 6 ♠ Pass 7 ♠ Pass 8 ♠ Pass  
9 ♠ Pass 10 ♠ Pass 11 ♠ Pass 12 ♠ Pass  
13 ♠ Pass 14 ♠ Pass 15 ♠ Pass 16 ♠ Pass  
17 ♠ Pass 18 ♠ Pass 19 ♠ Pass 20 ♠ Pass  
Opening lead: ♠ A

## jumble

CRAGI  
TAFIH  
SYWILE  
TWUITO

THE NEW DOWNTOWN CARDIOLOGY CENTER WAS BUILT IN THE

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Yesterday's Jumbles: EXERT MOLDY NIBBLE INJURE

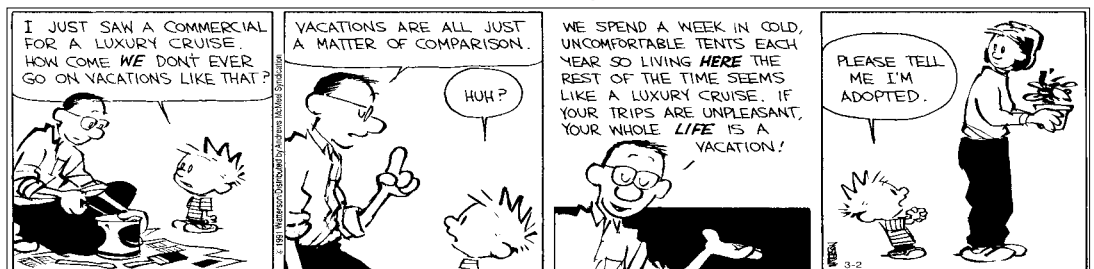
Answer: The fishing boat owner wanted more customers, so he put up a billboard to — REEL 'EM IN



THE

(Answers tomorrow)

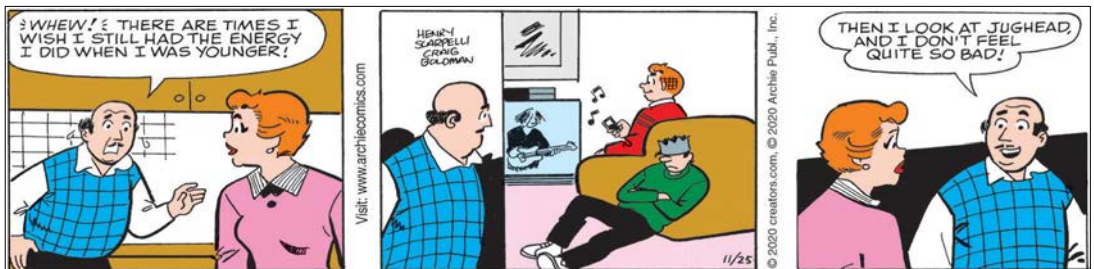
CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



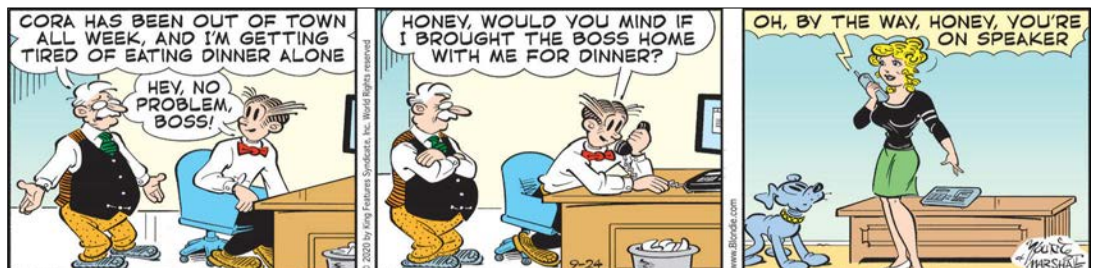
THE WIZARD OF ID | Parker and Hartsd



ARCHIE | Bill Henry Scarpelli &amp; craig boldman



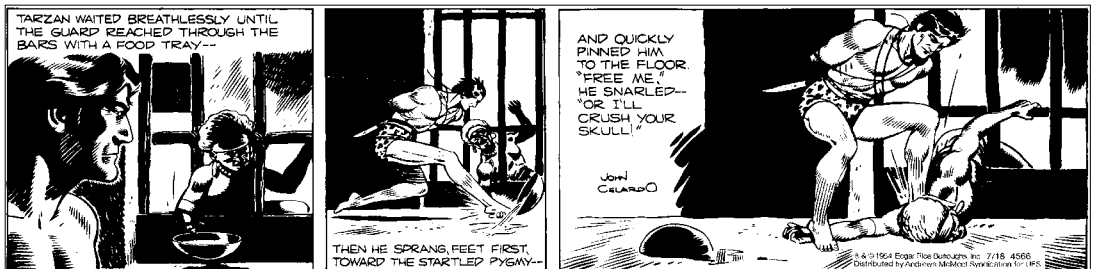
BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



TARZAN | Edgar Rice Burroughs





## SHORT TAKES

## Varun, Malvika win in Uganda

**New Delhi:** Indian shuttlers Varun Kapur and Malvika Bansod registered hard-fought wins to clinch the men's and women's singles titles respectively at the 2021 Uganda International in Kampala. Varun had to sweat it out to get the better of seventh seeded Sankar Muthusamy 21-18, 16-21, 21-17 in the men's singles final, while second seed Malvika notched up a come-from-behind 17-21, 25-23, 21-10 victory over compatriot Anupama Upadhyaya in the women singles summit clash. The junior world no. 2 Varun, who has been a consistent performer on the junior circuit and clinched his sixth title earlier this year, won the first game convincingly before losing the second. However, the 17-year-old looked in complete control in the decider and wrapped up the match comfortably in his favour. — PTI

## Sayali clinches sub-junior TT title

**Indore:** Sayali Wani of Maharashtra outwitted Haryana's Suhana Saini 4-3 to emerge champion at the 82nd Cadet & Sub-Junior National Table Tennis Championships here on Monday. Top-seeded Suhana led 3-2 but goofed it up in the crucial sixth game, allowing her Nasik rival to inch ahead. Sayali courageously saved a match point at 9-10. And when she made it 10-all, she grabbed the first chance to go 11-10 up before finishing the game and match in style. — PTI

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# FULL THROTTLE

## Kohli & Co. back in nets ahead of final Test

**Ahmedabad, March 1:** Big guns Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and Ajinkya Rahane went full throttle at the nets as the Indian cricket on Monday trained in earnest for the upcoming fourth and final Test against England.

The fourth Test starts here on Thursday.

Captain Kohli, his deputy Rahane and senior opener Rohit were seen batting at the nets in a video posted by the BCCI on Twitter.

The three senior players drove, pulled and flicked against the fast bowlers and spinners at the Narendra Modi Stadium here.

Head coach Ravi Shastri was seen interacting with Rohit and Kohli before the two star batsmen sat together for a discussion.

Left-arm spinner Axar Patel, who bagged 11 wickets in India's thumping win in the pink ball third Test at the same venue, was seen rolling his arms over at the nets against some of the world's best batsmen.

They were also seen fielding with Rahane, standing next to Rohit in the second slip position, taking a one-handed diving catch to his right.

The Kohli-led Indian team lost the first Test in Chennai by 227 runs, but bounced back with a 317-run hammering of the visitors in the second Test. In the previous match, India shot out England for 112 and 81 to wrap up the Test inside two days on a challenging Motera track. The Indian team had a full-fledged practice session here on Sunday as well. Leading 2-1 in the series, India will be without top pacer Jasprit Bumrah in the final Test. — PTI



## TRESCOTHICK IS ENGLAND'S NEW BATTING COACH

**London, March 1:** England on Monday appointed former opener Marcus Trescothick as the new batting coach of the national team, besides roping in Jon Lewis and New Zealand's Jeetan Patel as bowling and spin bowling coaches on permanent basis. These three are part of the four new appointments to England's coaching set-up, which is being headed by chief coach Chris Silverwood. The team is currently touring India and is down 1-2 in a four-match Test series.

Trescothick will take over from Jonathan Trott, who replaced South African Jacques Kallis in the ongoing tour. Kallis had played the role of a batting consultant for England in Sri Lanka.

Trescothick, who scored over 10,000 international runs across formats, is expected to take up his new role in mid-March after stepping down from his position as assistant coach at Somerset. — PTI

## Hogg bats for Ashwin's ODI return

**Sydney, March 1:** Former Australia all-rounder Brad Hogg has called for Ravichandran Ashwin's inclusion in India's ODI squad, saying the senior off-spinner is a wicket-taker who also adds depth to batting.

Replying to a tweet by a fan, Hogg said Ashwin would be a great addition to Indian side in the 50-

over format.

"I think it is a great option, gives the batting line up extra depth allowing the top order to be more aggressive at the top," Hogg said in reply to a tweet by a fan asking if Ashwin can make a comeback to ODI cricket.

"And he is a wicket taking option with the ball, as well as economical. Get

him back in. #INDvENG #Cricket," Hogg tweeted.

Ashwin, who has featured in 111 ODIs and 46 T20Is, besides 77 Tests, has been out of India's limited overs side for a few years now. He last appeared in an ODI game in June 2017.

The 34-year-old played a major role in India's historic Test series victory in Australia earlier this year:

In the third Test against England last week, he became the fourth Indian to take 400 Test wickets.

The fourth and final Test between India and England begins on Thursday in Ahmedabad. The hosts lead the series 2-1. After the Test series, the two teams are scheduled to play five T20Is and three ODIs. — PTI

## Stop moaning over pitches: Viv

**New Delhi, March 1:** West Indian batting legend Viv Richards is not amused with past and present English cricketers "moaning and groaning" about the spin-friendly pitches in India and said the visitors did not prepare well for the challenge.

The newly-laid Motera track in Ahmedabad became a subject of debate after India crushed England inside two days in the third Test to go 2-1 up in the four-match series. The severe criticism came from former England captains like Michael Vaughan and a section of the British media.

All the chatter has not gone down well with Richards, whose incredible range of strokes and fearless approach to the game terrorised the best of



Viv Richards

bowlers in his prime in every corner of the cricketing world. "I've been asked questions recently about the Test match that was played in India, the second and third Test match against England. And I am a little confused about the question really because there seems to be a lot of moaning and groaning about the wicket that they were playing on," Richards said. — PTI

## Italian rally champ joins Team MRF

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH 1



Paolo Andreucci

Team MRF Tyres on Monday announced that Paolo Andreucci, a 11-time Italian Rally Champion, will compete in the Italian Gravel Championship (CIR-Terra) with Team MRF Tyres.

Paolo Andreucci's car will be shod by the Indian tyres for the 2021 six-round championship and he will drive a Citroen C3 Rally 2. Paolo who has more than 20 years of experience in tyre development will be a valued asset as he also takes on the mantle of tyre development for Team MRF Tyres along with Fiore Brivio — renowned for his Rally tyre development. Team MRF Tyres has an aggressive 2021 testing schedule and Paolo

Andreucci will play an important role in this program.

Arun Mammen, MRF Tyres vice-chairman and managing director, said: "We are proud of how competitive Team MRF Tyres was in the 2020 European Rally Championship season. To be able to attract an 11-time national champion to MRF Tyres speaks about our commitment to rallying in Europe and the continued development of our rally tyre." — PTI

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