


DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | THURSDAY | 11 MARCH 2021

WEATHER

 **Max:** 36.0°C
Min: 19.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
36/19 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Bahula Trayodasi
till 2.42 pm
Star: Dhanishta till 9.46 am
Variyam: 5.16 am to 6.59 am
(Friday)
Durmuhurtam: 10.27 am to
11.14 am; 3.11 pm to 3.59 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm

HJRI CALENDAR

Rajab 26,1442 AH
PRAYERS
(ROYAL MOSQUE)
Fajar: 5.40 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 4.30 pm
Maghrib: 5.48 pm
Isha: 8.30 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.13 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.12 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 04.54 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 05.24 PM

COUNTER POINT



Even now you can join our party. We will give you a ministry!

SHORT TAKES

SC moves on succession law

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Wednesday sought response from the Central government on a public interest litigation seeking to remove anomalies in succession and inheritance laws and make them uniform for all citizens. The petition said gender and religion-neutral laws in succession and inheritance is necessary to secure justice, equality and dignity of women.

229 sedition cases in 5 yrs

New Delhi: As many as 5,128 cases under the stringent anti-terror law UAPA and 229 on charges of sedition have been lodged across the country in a five-year period from 2015, minister of state for home affairs G Kishan Reddy informed Parliament on Wednesday. Manipur topped in the UAPA cases and Bihar in sedition cases.

IDBI Bank gets out of RBI curbs

Mumbai: The RBI on Wednesday announced that it has decided to take LIC owned IDBI Bank out of its prompt corrective action (PCA) framework following an improvement in its financial performance. This follows a review of IDBI Bank by the Board for Financial Supervision in its meeting held on February 18.

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P.C. Chacko quits Congress in Kerala



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EU-UK relations dip over 'vaccine ban'

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Ronaldo's Juventus out of Champions League



Vol. 25 No. 310 Established 1940 | 16 PAGES | ₹6.00

Urban civic body polls see 62% voter turnout

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 10

Andhra Pradesh has registered overall 62.28 per cent polling in elections held for urban local bodies throughout the state on Wednesday. The voting percentage is expected to go up further. Both State Election Commission (SEC) and municipal administration authorities had not got the final polling tallies from the districts till 7 pm.

Polls were held in 12 municipal corporations and 71 municipalities / nagar panchayats. The average percentage of polling was 11.71 at 9 am, 32.23 at 11 am, 42.84 at 1 pm, 53.57 at 3 pm and 62.28 at 5 pm.

Municipalities and nagar panchayats witnessed higher turnout of voters given the fact that out of 29,47,027 voters, 20,82,283 exercised their franchise, registering a poll percentage of 70.66. However, polling was relatively lesser in the 12 municipal corporations, as out of 48,09,173 voters, only 27,48,013 turned up at polling stations to cast their vote, recording a poll percentage of 57.14. Overall, out of 77,56,200 voters, only 48,30,296 vot-



A challenged woman being carried by her relatives to cast her vote at AU High School during the GVMC elections in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday. — DC

ers cast their vote, indicating a provisional poll percentage of 62.28. East Godavari district registered highest voting in the state at 75.93 per cent. Kurnool was lowest at 56.83 per cent. Rest of the poll percentages are Srikakulam 71.52, Vizianagaram 68.22, Visakhapatnam 56.83, West Godavari 62.02, Krishna 61.31,

Guntur 61.77, Prakasam 75.49, Nellore 71.06, Anantapur 66.11, Kadapa 65.01 and Chittoor 62.21.

Among the 12 municipal corporations, Ongole registered the highest poll percentage at 75.52 while Kurnool the lowest of 49.26.

■ Page 2: Elections were largely peaceful, says SEC

Eluru polls see low voting

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, MARCH 10

Municipal elections for 15 civic bodies in East and West Godavari districts, including Eluru Municipal Corporation, concluded peacefully on Wednesday with just a couple of isolated incidents.

Voters started queuing to exercise their franchise from morning itself. East Godavari district registered 76.33 per cent polling while its western counterpart 62.49 per cent. A larger number of

women voters exercised their franchise compared to men.

In East Godavari, Mandapeta registered the highest 82.8 per cent turnout, followed by Mummidivaram 81.9 and Amalapuram 77.73 per cent. There was 70.22 per cent voting in Tuni municipality, 75.6 in Pithapuram, 74.54 in Samalkot, 73.13 in Ramachandrapuram, 70.85 in Peddapuram, 77.12 in Yelawaram and 78.45 per cent in Gollaprolu Nagara Panchayat. West Godavari district collector

Revu Muthyala Raju said 2,32,468 voters out of 3,72,032 voters exercised their franchise in Eluru Municipal Corporation, Narasapuram, Nidadavole, Kovvuru and Jangareddygudem. In Eluru Municipal Corporation, voting percentage was only 56.82 per cent. More Eluru women than men turned up to cast their votes. Voting in Narasapuram municipality was 74.69 per cent, Nidadavole 76.74, Kovvuru 77.07, and Jangareddygudem 64.43 per cent.



East Godavari District Collector D. Muralidhar Reddy visits a polling station during Municipal elections at CBM High school in Pithapuram Municipality and verified the Polling process and interacted with voters and observed strong room, counting places on Wednesday. — DC

CHINA HAS NOT VACATED INDIAN AREAS, SAYS U.S.

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

China's People's Liberation Army "has not yet withdrawn from several forward positions" at the Line of Actual Control that it had seized after the initial clashes with Indian forces, a top US military commander told the Senate Armed Services Committee in Washington on Tuesday.

He also said the US and Indian navies are now securely sharing information, and India has substantially increased its acquisition of US defence gear.

Adm. Philip S. Davidson, US Navy head in the Indo-Pacific Command, said China's expansionary territorial ambitions were on display along its western border, where the PLA engaged in a standoff with Indian forces along the LAC since May 2020.

He said the standoff was predicated by clashes over construction activity near the disputed border, and that PLA deployed roughly 50,000 soldiers along the LAC, leading to a counter-deployment by the Indian Army.

Tirath sworn in as U'khand CM

CM takes oath alone, to pick Cabinet later

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI/DEHRADUN, MARCH 10

Tirath Singh Rawat, 56, currently Pauri Garhwal MP, on Wednesday was sworn in as the chief minister of Uttarakhand, replacing Trivendra Singh Rawat, who was forced to resign after discontent over his leadership and some of his decisions, including giving the state summer capital Gairsen the status of a new division.

Faced with dissension in its state unit as the central leadership was busy gearing up for the Assembly polls, due early next year, the BJP top brass decided to go in for a change of guard after sensing that the brewing dissension could spoil its chances of retaining power in the hill state. The BJP top brass took less than a week to defuse the political crisis after initial reports suggested that going to the

BJP-JJP GOVT IN HARYANA BEATS NO-TRUST VOTE

Chandigarh, March 10: The BJP-JJP government in Haryana survived the floor test on Wednesday, comfortably defeating the no-confidence motion moved against it by the Congress. The motion was defeated following division of votes. Speaker Gian Chand Gupta announced in the House that 55 members had voted against the motion while 32 MLAs had backed it.

■ Full report on Page 4

polls with Trivendra Rawat as CM will not be favourable for it in polls.

The former CM had failed to pacify his detractors and the BJP leadership was wary that if no action was taken, the

party could face the same fate as that of the then ruling Congress in 2016, when around a dozen of its MLAs had revolted.

A former journalist and also a former BJP state unit chief, Tirath Singh Rawat is known for his down-to-earth nature. In his parliamentary constituency, the first-time MP is popular for being very approachable.

Mr Rawat was administered the oath of office by Uttarakhand Governor Baby Rani Maurya at a simple function held at the Bhavan, Dehradun. The new CM was the only person who was sworn in on Wednesday, which means the members of his Cabinet will be finalised and sworn in later.

Earlier in the day, Mr Rawat was elected as the leader of the Uttarakhand BJP legislature party. His name came as a surprise to many as it was not among the nearly half-dozen names doing the rounds in the media.

Ahead of Maha Shivaratri



Priests perform aarti on the eve of Maha Shivratri festival at Har-Ki-Pauri Ganga Ghat in Haridwar. — PTI

TTD'S 57 VEDIC STUDENTS TEST COVID POSITIVE

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, MARCH 10

As many as 57 students at the Vedic school run by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) at Dharmagiri Veda Vignana Peetham in Tirumala have tested positive to Covid-19.

TTD management shifted them to the local SVIMS hospital for treatment.

It was following the relaxation of Covid-19 norms that the school was reopened for classes. All the 435 students underwent Covid tests (RT-PCR) five days ago and got negative reports before coming and joining the school.

However, when the TTD medical wing conducted the rapid test to students and staff on Tuesday, about 57 students tested positive and asymptomatic. Later, RT-PCR tests were done on the students. None has exhibited any Covid symptom so far and they remained healthy.

TTD staff carried out tests on the remaining 378 students and 10 faculty in Dharmagiri Veda Patashala and they too tested negative.

■ All the 435 students underwent Covid-19 tests (RT-PCR) five days ago and got negative reports before coming and joining the school.

Didi says she was attacked by men

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 10

Hours after filing her nomination in Nandigram, the hot seat of the West Bengal Assembly elections, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, in an explosive claim, alleged that she was attacked by a group of men in a "conspiracy" in the absence of police personnel, including the East Midnapore superintendent of police, in the constituency on Wednesday evening, leaving her injured.

The Trinamul Congress supreme, with injuries on her legs and forehead, was later rushed to Kolkata in a "green corridor" and was admitted to the Woodburn Ward of SSKM Hospital after she was wheeled in a stretcher.

The TMC has launched protests across the state. Rattled by Ms Banerjee's complaint, the Election Commission has sought a report on the serious security breach from the district administration.

The CM, who is a Z-plus category protectee, and is usually surrounded by a contingent of at least 25 security personnel in close quarters, apparently fell down, according to sources close to her.

Seated on the front seat of her car, Ms Banerjee,

Standing beside my car, I was doing namaskar. Suddenly four or five men blocked my car. They shoved and pushed me, leaving me injured. My legs got swollen. It is paining very much."

— MAMATA BANERJEE
West Bengal Chief Minister

gasping for breath, told the media: "Standing beside my car, I was doing namaskar. Suddenly four or five men blocked my car. They shoved and pushed me, leaving me injured. My legs got swollen. It is paining very much."

Asked about any foul play, she added: "It was definitely a conspiracy. The attack was deliberate. No police personnel were present there. Even the SP was not there. I will lodge a complaint with the Election Commission."

Questioning Ms Banerjee's version, Barrackpore BJP MP Arjun Singh wondered: "Who will attack her being the CM as well as the home minister of the state? How can someone attack the CM when a distance of 2 km is cleared for her movement wherever she visits? If there was any attack, the IPS officers should be suspended."

SEVA VAJRA FOR 875 VOLUNTEERS ON UGADI EVE

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 10

As many as 875 volunteers for the AP government would get the Seva Vajra, 4,000 volunteers the Seva Ratna and 2,18,115 volunteers the Seva Mitra awards as also a grand felicitation for their excellent services.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy announced this while conducting a review meeting on volunteers and housing department at his camp office in Tadepalli on Wednesday. He took a close look at the medals, certificates and badges that were readied for presentation to volunteers.

The Chief Minister directed the officials to provide quality construction materials to beneficiaries of the housing. There was also the need for improving the housing and infrastructure facilities in Jagananna colonies.

The Chief Minister said the state would award volunteers under three categories – Seva Vajra, Seva Ratna and Seva Mitra on the eve of Ugadi, in due recognition of their services.

■ Page 2: Use good items for Jagananna colonies: CM

POWER | START

Relaxation allows Aurobindo Realty to own two ports

AP eases rule to help Aurobindo

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 10

The Andhra Pradesh government on Wednesday relaxed rules to facilitate Aurobindo Realty own controlling stake in two ports – the existing Kakinada deep water port and the proposed Kakinada SEZ port.

There was an embargo on acquiring the controlling stake in two ports falling within a distance of 75 km. Infrastructure and investment special chief secretary Karikal Valaven issued orders relaxing the condi-

● The state government took legal opinion from former Chief Justice of India V.N. Khare and advocate general S. Sriram before approving the Aurobindo's request for rule relaxation.

tions. The state government took legal opinion from former Chief Justice of India V.N. Khare and advocate general S. Sriram before approving the Aurobindo's request for rule relaxation. The government also

allowed GMR group to buy back 26 per cent stake in the port project, though it sold its entire equity to Aurobindo, to fulfill the condition that the original concessionaire of the port project (GMR in this case) should not leave the project before two years of commencement of port operations.

Aurobindo which initially acquired 51 per cent stake of the GMR group in the proposed KSEZ and greenfield port later managed to take over the remaining 49 per cent held by the K.V. Rao and associates, who are

close to both the TD and Congress governments of the past.

Aurobindo group, close to CM Jagan, also made K.V. Rao sell his stake in the existing deep water port. Both the legal experts, the former CJI and AG, opined that the government has power to make changes in the concession agreement when larger public interest is involved. Defending its decision, the government said the proposed investment by Aurobindo will give a boost to the state's economy and create jobs,

OTHER STORIES

PARTIES PERMITTED TO AFFIX OWN SEAL TO STRONG ROOMS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 10

The State Election Commission has made arrangements for protection of ballot boxes in the strong rooms till the day of counting of votes polled in the urban local body polls, on March 14.

Accordingly, all the ballot boxes with ballot papers would be placed in the strong rooms having armed guards for protection. Web cameras would be installed to keep continuous monitoring at strong rooms.

In the wake of apprehensions raised by the political parties on the safety of ballot boxes, the SEC has permitted the political parties to affix their own seal to the strong rooms. It has allowed the opening of strong rooms in the morning before the commencement of counting of votes scheduled to be held on March 14, only in the presence of political parties.

NAIDU: OFFICIALS COLLUDED WITH YSRC IN POLLS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 10

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday appealed to the State Election Commission to take stringent action against officials conniving with YSRC leaders and not ensuring that the election process was held in a democratic manner.

He accused the YSRC leaders of wantonly attacking TD cadres following fears that the ruling party will be unable to win municipal polls if elections are held in a free and fair manner. He accused police of needlessly arresting MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu and Telugu Nadu Students' Federation president Pranav Gopal when they visited the polling booth at AU High School polling on hearing about rigging there. This shows misuse of power by YSRC government, he said.

Naidu further alleged that in the 13th division of Machilipatnam, YSRC activists brandished knives and attacked TD sympathiser Dinakar out of fear of facing defeat in the polls.

MLA VELAGAPUDI HELD, FREED IN VISAKHAPATNAM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 10

Senior TD leader and third time MLA from Visakhapatnam East Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu and Telugu Nadu Students Front leader Pranav Gopal were taken into custody by the III Town police in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

III Town circle inspector K. Eswara Rao said it was a preventive arrest since the MLA and the student leader entered prohibited 100 metre at a polling booth under Word No. 21 in China Waltair. They were brought to the III Town police station and later released on self bail.

ROJA: RECOGNISE BACKSTABBERS WITHIN THE PARTY

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 10

Infighting within the YSRC was out in the open again after Nagari MLA R.K. Roja levelled allegations against her rival group members within the ruling party and urged the high command to recognise the backstabbers and take action against them. Speaking to the media after casting her vote at the Nagari municipality on Wednesday, she alleged that her rivals within the party are working against the party's will and for its defeat in the Nagari and Puttur municipal elections. She charged her rivals of fielding rebels in the Nagari and Puttur municipal elections to reduce the winning chances of the YSRC.

Polling ends peacefully at Nellore, Prakasam districts

Nellore records 71.06 per cent of voting, Prakasam 75.51 per cent

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 10

Polling for the Civic bodies in SPSR Nellore and Prakasam districts held on Wednesday were largely peaceful. Polling commenced at 7 am and continued till 5 pm without any disturbances.

While Nellore district recorded 71.06 per cent of voting in the election held for 4 civic bodies, the polling percentage was 75.51 per cent in Prakasam district where the election was conducted for 7 Civic bodies.

In Nellore district, the administration has conducted polls in 4 civic bodies including Atmakuru, Venkatagiri, Naidupeta and Sullurpeta and the polling percentage was 71.06 per cent at 5 pm with Naidupeta recording the highest of 76.97 per cent.

In the case of Atmakuru the polling percentage was 76.65 and it was followed by 70.70 per cent in Venkatagiri and 63.80 per cent at Sullurpet, where 54,163 voters exercised their franchise out of 76,219 voters.

Residents of Nukalapalem in Sullurpeta municipality boycotted election protesting against merging their village with the Civic body.

District collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu has inspected some polling stations in Atmakuru municipal limits and elicited information from the voters on the arrangements for the polling and facilities.

He said the polling had completed peacefully in all 87 polling stations. He said they gave instructions to the polling officials and police personnel to allow physically challenged persons and aged people on priority without confining to the queue lines citing the humid conditions.

Buttermilk and drinking water were also supplied to the voters at the polling stations. Volunteers from the Indian Red Cross Society were also deputed for supporting the needy persons.

Collector said they had also arranged thermal scanners, first aid centers, and a help desk for assisting the voters. Joint Collector Dr. M.N. Harendira Prasad, RDO Suvarnamma, and others accompanied the Collector.

In Prakasam district, election was held for 7 civic bodies including Ongole Municipal Corporation, Chirala and Markapuram municipalities apart from Addanki, Chimakurthy, Kanigiri and Giddalur Nagar Panchayats. The polling percentage was 75.51 in the district with highest of 83.04 per cent recorded in Addanki Nagar Panchayat and lowest of 67.92 per cent at Giddalur.

With respect to other Civic bodies, Chima-kurthy recorded 81.41 per cent, 76.25 per cent at Kanigiri, 75.60 per cent at Chirala, 75.57 per cent in Ongole and 71.22 per cent at Markapur.

Prakasam collector Pola Bhaskar inspected polling stations in several parts of the district including Ongole and Chirala.

He lauded the officials and police for preventing any untoward incidents during the polls held on Wednesday enabling the voters to exercise their franchise without any hassles.



Voters stand in a queue at 49th division to cast their vote in Kadapa Municipal Corporation — DECCAN CHRONICLE

Ex-MP's car damaged in poll disturbances

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 10

Former MP and YSRC leader Mudugula Venugopala Reddy has accused Telugu Desam activists of attacking and damaging his car during municipal polls at Guntur.

Giving details of the incident, the ex-MP said the TD leaders in 42 division had made some girls belonging to a hostel in Guntur city cast their votes illegally. He said wearing different dresses and masks, the girls kept repeatedly coming to the

polling booth and fraudulently voted giving out separate names.

Venugopala Reddy said while he caught one girl red handed, his party activists found three other girls voting illegally.

Following this, the former MP said, Telugu Desam goondas attacked his car with a big boulder and damaged the vehicle. He pointed out that though he had submitted memorandums to the State Election Commission and police officials to ensure law and order and avoid impersonation, there was no proper

supervision.

In a separate incident, Guntur MP Galla Jayadev rushed to 43 division at Guntur and demanded action against YSRC leaders for allegedly casting fake votes. Heated arguments ensued between YSRC and TD activists, leading to jostling. Police swung into action and dispersed the two groups.

Guntur collector Vivek Yadav removed Route 3 officer O. Venkateswarlu from election duty in Sattenapalli owing to latter's negligence in discharging his duties.



Nated actor and Hindupur MLA Nandamuri Balakrishna, along with his wife Vasundhara, stands in a queue at polling station in Chowdeswari Colony in Hindupur municipality in Anantapur district on Wednesday. — DC

BALAYYA CASTS HIS VOTE IN HINDUPUR

Anantapur: Nandamuri Balakrishna, accompanied by his wife Vasundhara, cast vote by standing in the queue at polling station in Chowdeswari Colony in Hindupur.

Balakrishna who has residence in Hindupur and enrolled votes in Chowdeswari Colony of 22nd municipal ward of Hindupur special grade

municipality, Balakrishna and Vasundhara arrived at polling station and stand in the queue for few minutes.

Balakrishna appeared cool this time as a big number of women took photographs with Balakrishna and his wife on outside polling station. He did not make comment on polls.

PEDDA REDDY HAS THREATENED TD CANDIDATES, ALLEGES DEEPAK REDDY

Anantapur: MLC Deepak Reddy objected to the poor action by the State Election Commission even after representations were submitted with concrete evidence.

Deepak Reddy, son-in-law of former TD legislator J.C. Prabhakar Reddy, recalled that 'Tadipatri MLA K. Pedda Reddy misused powers and threat-

ened TD candidates when they were filing their nominations.

"Our former municipal chairman candidature was torn by YSRC leaders in order to make the MLA's son's election unanimous", he said and added that evidence was submitted to SEC, but no action was initiated", Deepak Reddy alleged.

CHITTOOR DISTRICT RECORDS 62% OVERALL TURNOUT

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 10

The first-ever election for Tirupati Municipal Corporation (TMC) on Wednesday recorded a low voter turnout with only 53.80 per cent of voters exercising their franchise till 5 pm.

The temple city is a part of Chittoor district, which also saw elections for Chittoor corporation and four other municipalities including Madanapalle, Palamaner, Nagari and Puttur. The polling was held for 116 wards in these six civic bodies from 7 am to 5 pm.

As per the final figures shared by the district authority, the overall polling percentage in the district was 62.96 per cent by the end of 5 pm. Tirupati corporation had the lowest turnout of 53.80 per cent, while Puttur municipality recorded the highest turnout of 80.75 per cent.

Besides, Madanapalle municipality has recorded 61.48 per cent polling, followed by Chittoor — 66.91 per cent, Palamaner — 71.30 per cent and Nagari — 76.33 per cent. Out of the total 3,26,440 voters registered in these six civic bodies, 2,05,513 cast their votes.

It is alleged that the poor distribution of voter slips and confusion over identifying the respective polling booths has resulted in low voter turnout. Many voters were seen hurrying to other divisions to cast their vote, as their names had not appeared in the list at the polling booths in their locality.

Barring some stray incidents of heated exchange of words between ruling and opposition parties, polling took place smoothly in the district.

At the 15th ward in Tirupati, the urban police dispersed a large gathering of ruling and opposition party activists, who were indulged in exchange of words, by chasing them away with lathis and brought the situation under control.

District collector M. Harinarayanan and TMC commissioner P.S. Girisha reviewed the polling and directed the officials concerned to ensure voting right for each and every person by helping them to locate their polling booths.

SEC: Elections were largely peaceful

From Page 1

The rest include Vizianagaram (63.98%), GVMC (56.01), Eluru (56.33), Machilipatnam (71.14), Vijayawada (56.81), Guntur (57.15), Anantapur (56.41), Kadapa (54.85), Chittoor (66.06) and Tirupati (53.44 per cent).

SEC N. Ramesh Kumar asserted that municipal elections concluded in a free and fair manner with exception of a few stray incidents. For the first time, no re-poll has been necessitated in both civic bodies as also the recently concluded gram panchayat elections. However, there were a few instances of poll-related violence. Reports have been called from concerned collectors and SPs in this regard.

The election commissioner said the counting of votes will be taken up on March 14. Election of mayors and deputy mayors for municipal corporations and chairperson and vice-chairpersons for municipalities / Nagar panchayats will be held at the earliest, he stated.

Separately, director general of police Gautam Sawang said polling went off peacefully even though a large number of voters turned up at polling stations to cast their votes.

In Visakhapatnam, TD MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu and Telugu Nadu Students Front leader Pranav Gopal were taken

into preventive custody by police when they entered the 100-metre prohibited area at a polling booth in Division 21 of China Waltair. They were subsequently released on self-bail.

Visakhapatnam Ukku Parirakshana Committee, which is spearheading the movement against privatisation of VSP, suspended its agitation on Wednesday for enabling steel plant employees to take part in the municipal elections.

In Nellore district, residents of Nukalapalem in Sullurpet municipality boycotted the election in protest against merger of their village with the civic body.

At Eluru municipal corporation in West Godavari district, deputy chief minister and health minister Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas was unable to cast his vote, as his name went missing from the electoral rolls. Scores of other voters faced a similar fate.

In East Godavari district, police took into custody supporters of both BJP and Telugu Desam while they were distributing money to voters in Ramachandrapuram and Peddapuram municipalities. Ramachandrapuram police arrested seven BJP supporters and seized ₹37,000 from them. Peddapuram police seized ₹60,500 from TD supporters in ward number 27.

POLLING HELD PEACEFULLY IN KADAPA

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MARCH 10

Municipal polls in Kadapa district ended peacefully. District election officer, collector Chevoor Harikiran and SP Karur Karunapathi Nagendra Kumar Anburaj took steps to ensure peace. While 33 wards in Pulivendula municipality saw unanimous elections in the district, there was no election for Rajampet municipality.

Elections were held in Kadapa corporation along with the remaining 6 municipalities. Polling was held on Wednesday for 26 divisions in Kadapa and 109 wards in six municipalities. By the time the polling closed at 5 pm, the turnout was 66.77 per cent.

In Kadapa city, there were a total of 1,50,494 voters in the 26 divisions wh-

ere elections were held. As many as 86,428 voters exercised their franchise, they forming 57.43 per cent. Polling was held for 18 wards in Jammalamadugu. Of the total 34,688 voters, 26,815 cast their ballots. There, the polling percentage was 77.30.

Elections were held for all 24 wards in Mydukur. There, 27,532 persons voted out of a total electorate of 36,527.

The polling percentage there was 75.37. Elections were held for 25 wards in Badvel, where the total electorate was 37,504, of which 27,849 exercised their franchise. The polling percentage there was 74.26.

Polling was held in 32 wards in Proddutur municipality, where 73,746 voters cast their vote out of a total of 1,05,948 voters, registering a turnout of 69.61 per cent.

CM: Use quality material for Jagananna colonies

From Page 1

Seva Mitra will be awarded for 2,18,115 volunteers who served for over a year without complaints. The Seva Ratna award for 4,000 volunteers would involve five each volunteers selected from every mandal, five from each municipality and 10 from each corporation. "Seva Vajra" award for 875 volunteers will see five volunteers selected from each constituency. The selections will be done on the yardstick of efficiency they have shown in the door-to-door survey, etc.

A financial incentive of ₹10,000 would be given to Seva Mitras, ₹20,000 to Seva Ratnas and ₹30,000 to Seva Vajras. The Chief Minister inspected the medals, certificates and badges to be awarded to volunteers.

Reviewing the progress of the housing scheme, the Chief Minister asked officials to provide construction materials to those who opt to build their houses on their own. Ensure they are provided with steel, cement and other construction materials at a lower price, he said.

He directed the officials to focus attention on providing water and electricity facilities in these housing colonies so that the construction works would be expedited. Officials must also focus on solving the problems related to house sites that are facing legal disputes.

"There should be no compromise in the quality of construction of these houses," he has said. The Chief Minister directed the officials to ensure that the width of roads in Jagananna colonies should not be less than 20feet. He examined in detail the designs for the development of infrastructure facilities such as roads, drainage, electricity in Jagananna colonies and suggested changes.

VSP | DISINVESTMENT

Swamy says he will accompany CM in a delegation to Delhi

BJP MP opposes Centre's move to privatise VSP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 10

BJP MP Subramanian Swamy has opposed the Centre's move to privatise the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant.

Swamy met Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy at his camp office here on Wednesday. Later, Swamy told the media that the CM had already addressed two

letters to PM Modi on the steel plant issue. "I would also accompany the CM in a delegation of all-party leaders to New Delhi to meet the PM and present our views against the disinvestment of the VSP."

The BJP MP was in the city to attend a case in the AP High Court representing the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams in a defamation suit worth ₹100 crore filed against

the Telugu daily Andhra Jyothi. This was in connection with the publishing of a false report on TTD.

Swamy said he suspected the role of former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu in the efforts to defame the TTD.

He welcomed the CM's decision to conduct an audit of TTD's finances with the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy offers memento to BJP MP Subramanian Swamy at his house on Wednesday.

SHORT TAKES

AP extends five days casual leave

Vijayawada: The state government has extended the benefit of five days of casual leave in addition to the existing 15 days casual leave for all women employees working under its control. The state government issued an order on Wednesday extending the benefit of availing five days casual leave in addition to the 15 days casual leave and five days of optional holidays per calendar year to all the women employees working under the control of state government.

Acharya Auditya passes away

Nellore: Noted academician and correspondent of Auditya educational institutes, Acharya Audithya passed away while undergoing treatment for age related ailments at Nellore on Tuesday night. Industries minister Mekapati Goutham Reddy, former minister Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy, former Mayor SK Abdul Aziz, BJP senior leaders K. Anjaneya Reddy and P. Surendra Reddy expressed grief over the demise of Acharya after consoling his family members. They recalled his efforts for implementation of Telugu as the official language.

AP RECORDS 120 COVID CASES, ONE DEATH

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 10

Andhra Pradesh registered 120 fresh cases of confirmed Coronavirus and one death.

The state health authorities reported here on Wednesday that out of 48,973 samples tested, 120 persons were found infected with the virus. Out of a total number of 1,43,56,138 samples tested so far in the state, 8,91,004 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,82,763 were recovered in the course of treatment while 1,064 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of confirmed Coronavirus, Chittoor reported the highest 35 followed by 25 in Krishna, 17 in Visakhapatnam, 10 in Kadapa, 9 in Nellore, six in Guntur, five in East Godavari, four in Anantapur, three in Srikakulam, two each in Kurnool, Prakasam and Vizianagaram and zero case in West Godavari.

With regard to cumulative Coronavirus active cases, Chittoor continued to report the highest at 339.

4 PERSONS HELD FOR ATTACKING NEWLY WEDDED

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 10

Seetharama Puram police held 4 persons for assaulting a newly wedded couple for marrying without the consent of the parents of the woman on Wednesday.

The couple have been identified as Moodi Anitha of Devammacheruvu village in SR Puram mandal and Panem Balakrishna of Chitrenipalli village in Rudravaram mandal of Kurnool district.

According to police, Anitha fell in love with Balakrishna and sought permission from her parents to marry him.

She eloped with him on March 4 and married him on March 5 at Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy shrine in Ahobilam after the elders rejected the proposal.

Meanwhile police launched a search for Anitha after her parents lodged a missing complaint on March 5 and traced her at Chitrenipalli.

Temple is illuminated for Kotappakonda fest

Kotappakonda gears up for Mahashivratri today

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 10

All is set for the famous state festival Kotappakonda Tirunallu and Mahashivratri on March 11 in the Trikoteswara temple on the hilltop near Narasaraopeta in Guntur district.

This is the only hill that boasts of three peaks in different directions. The old stairway with 703 steps erected in 1761 by the then king Gunda Rayalu is still helping the devotees reach up to the temple.

Kotappakonda Tirunallu is a state festival with direct support from the AP government. Nearly 10 lakh people used to turn up for the holy Mahashivaratri celebrations there during Tirunallu from the states of AP, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. This year, the rush is likely to be less due to the corona fears.

The Shiva temple is situated at a height of 1,500 feet and the devotees use the ghat road and the stairway to reach the temple.

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) constructed the Chaturmukha (four-faced) Brahma and Seshasayana Vishnu idols on the ghat



Illuminated Sivalayam temple on Yanamalakuduru temple on the occasion of Maha Sivaratri in Vijayawada on Wednesday.

● The original name of Kotappakonda is Kondakavuru.

● Three hills of Kottappakonda Trikutadri derived their names from Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara.

● The 60-70 feet high Prabhas are rectangular frames tapering at the top, made of bamboo and decorated with coloured clothes and paper. They are taken in a procession as part of the festival.

the children's park, the bird sanctuary and the fish aquarium on the ghat road. The electric Prabhalu is a speciality of Kotappakonda Tirunallu as all villages surrounding the Kottappakonda hill would erect Prabhas at a cost of ₹5 lakh to ₹25 lakh. They will bring them to the god's abode on Mahashivratri.

This time, the number of Prabhas would be less due to the Corona protocol.

The Prabhalu are made with bamboo, decorated with colourful clothes and illuminated with electric lighting. These would be very tall, some 50-70 feet, and the surrounding villages would bring these chariots to the hilltop in processions.

Politics is thrown in too. The supporters of YSR Congress and Telugu Desam would decorate their chariots with their party flags. They used to compete which each other to decorate Prabhas.

Political leaders including ministers, MLAs and MPs would join the Tirunallu.

Narasaraopeta MLA Dr G. Srinivas Reddy said officials worked hard in the past fortnight to put the arrangements in place for the smooth conduct of the Tirunallu. The road going to the hilltop was widened to avoid traffic jams.

The APSRTC is operating special buses to Kotappakonda from various towns in the state.



Children play somersault on the sands as huge Shivalingam was set up by TSR Seva Peetham for the special prayers on the eve of Shiva Ratri celebrations at Ramakrishna Beach in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday. — K. MURALIKRISHNA

TD's poor planning damaged Polavaram wall, says Anil

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 10

Water resources minister P. Anil Kumar Yadav on Wednesday clarified that the diaphragm wall of Polavaram project has got damaged due to poor planning by the previous Telugu Desam government.

Addressing a press conference here, he accused the erstwhile government of executing works irregularly and halting every work in the middle. He pointed out that the diaphragm wall had been constructed in 2018 during Naidu's term. Now, around 1.8 metres of the wall has got damaged in the aftermath of floods. In this context, the minister accused a

section of vernacular media of not reporting facts.

Anil Kumar said the previous TD government gave contracts to its close associates and never bothered about quality. He assured that the YSRC government will complete the project on time, with Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy taking up the Polavaram project as his priority from day one.

On privatisation of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP), the minister said between 1999 and 2004, when Naidu ruled united Andhra Pradesh, as many as 54 companies like Nizam Sugars, Allwyn and cotton mills had either been privatised or shut down.

He maintained that neither Naidu nor Lokesh have any moral right to speak about VSP in Vizag, as they have opposed the city as the state's executive capital.

Anil Kumar Yadav recalled that Chandrababu Naidu had claimed himself to be the CEO of Andhra Pradesh instead of CM. He should answer people about why he supported privatisation way back in 2004.

Asserting the state government will fight with the centre for protecting VSP, he pointed out that the Chief Minister has already written a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking an appointment to discuss the issue along with trade union leaders.

Silk robes to presented to Srikalahasti

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 10

On the occasion of Mahashivratri, panchayat raj and rural development minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy presented silk vastrams to Lord Vayulin-geswara at

the Srikalahasti temple in Chittoor district on Wednesday.

Following the tradition, the minister – on behalf of the state government, carried the silk robes on his head up to sanctum sanctorum and handed over them to the temple priests.

Prior to this, the local legislator Biyyapu Madhusudhan Reddy, temple EO D. Peddiraju, officials and priests accorded a traditional welcome to Mr Peddireddy, on his arrival at the Maha Dwaram, the main entrance of the temple.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR SIVARATRI FESTIVAL

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 10

Elaborate arrangements were made for Mahashivratri festival on Thursday and all Lord Shiva temples were decorated with illuminating lighting in East and West Godavari districts.

The famous Pancharama Temples like Lord Bhimeswara Swamy temple in Draskharama, Lord Kumara Chalukya Rama Bhimeswara Swamy Temple at Samalkot, Lord Somarama Swamy Temple at Bhimavaram, Lord Ksheera Rama temple at Palakollu, Lord Kukkateswara Swamy temple at Pithapuram (Padagaya), Lord Mukhteswara Swamy Temple at Muktheswaram, Lord Someswara Swamy temple at Kotipalli and others were decorated and made all arrangements.

Due to Covid-19 scare, the devotees were not allowed to the inner place of the temples as was done previously. The devotees should take a darshan of the Lord from outside, said Endowment Department officials. However, Chief Priests will perform Abhishekams to the Lord on behalf of the devotees. The Bhuvan-eswari Peetham Seer Chinta Gopi Sarma of Peddapuram said that Lingodbhava Kaalam is 12.14 am on Friday.

TTD MULLS INDIGENOUS MILK PRODUCTION

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MAR. 10

With an aim to meet the requirements of the Lord Venkateswara temple at Tirumala, the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams has embarked upon an innovative project to enhance the indigenous milk production through embryo transfer.

As part of its Hindu Sanatana Dharma Prachara, TTD has started S.V. Gosamrakashanasala in 1956 as SV Dairy Farm and later changed the name as S.V. Goshala in 2004. The temple management also commenced another Goshala in a sprawling area of 400 acres near Palamaner in Chittoor district to develop indigenous breeds.

At present there are over 3000 cattle in these two centres. Among them, 600 are breeding cattle with many types of Indian breeds including Gir, Sahiwal, Ongole, Kangayam, the shortest among cows in the world-Punganur breed of Chittoor.

To sustain the productivity of indigenous breeds as well as to enhance milk production, the TTD under the instructions of Executive Officer Dr KS Jawahar Reddy, has now focussed on "Embryo Transfer Technology", to upgrade the bovines at SV Goshala.

The proposed project mullied by TTD is aimed at improving genetic potential of dairy cattle located at S.V. Goshala with a technique called Embryo Derived Pregnancies – EDP (IVF-ET) on current set of animals. This technology will not only help to increase productivity of animals but also reduces the risks of disease transmission by producing calves with superior germplasm.

"Though it takes nine months of time for the production of offspring, for these calves to turn into full-fledged milch yielding cows, it will take three years.

AP STUDENT WINS CLUSTER 1 FINALS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 10

Muthyala Rajendra Vikhyat from Rao's Degree College, Nellore emerged as winner in the Cluster 1 Finals of Tata Crucible Campus Quiz 2021, the maiden online edition of India's largest business quiz for campuses. The Cluster 1 Finals representing the Andhra Pradesh region, was a thrilling affair, with participants showcasing their quick thinking and sharp quizzing abilities. Kanav Mehra from Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Visakhapatnam was declared runner-up.

The winner Rajendra won a cash prize of Rs.35,000 and will now compete in the

Zonal Finals to qualify for the National Finals. Runner up Mehra won a cash prize of Rs.18, 000. Mr. Hitendra Sharma, General Manager Vivanta Hyderabad, Begumpet was the chief guest at the event and gave away the prizes in a virtual prize distribution ceremony. He asked students to enhance their knowledge by participating in the quiz and other knowledge competitions and make a habit of honing their skills.

The winners at the four Zonal Finals will directly qualify for the National Finals. The runners-up from the four Zonal Finals will compete in a Wild Card Final, and 2 out of the 4 runners-up will then qualify for the National Finals.

Relative murders aged woman

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 10

Thotapalligudur Police apprehended three persons including a woman on the charges of murdering an aged woman and robbing valuables from her.

The accused have been identified as M. Sujatha, 38, and her paramour G. Syeda, 41, and an auto driver, P. Sai, 22. The prime accused in the case, Sujatha is a close relative of the deceased A. Rathnamma, 73, and she devised the plan to eliminate the old woman to steal her gold to come out of a financial crisis.

According to Nellore rural DSP Y. Harinath Reddy, Rathnamma belongs to Padugupadu village in Kovur mandal and she has been taking shelter in an old age home at Narukuru village near Nellore for the last 2 years.

Relative of Rathnamma lodged a complaint with the police on February 22, 2021 stating that Rathnamma was missing from the old age home from February 14 this year.

Police registered a case No Cr.No.799/2021 u/s woman missing.

RULES FOR AIDED SCHOOLS TRANSFER

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 10

East Godavari District Educational Officer S. Abraham suggested the Aided School Managements

that if they want to hand over their properties along with teaching and non-teaching staff to the government, they should submit their nod in prescribed form.

MOTHER, SON DIE IN ROAD ACCIDENT

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 10

A woman and her 16-year-old son died in a road accident on Chebrolu police station limits in West Godavari District on Wednesday.

Chebrolu Sub-Inspector I.

Veerraju said that Ill Hemanth and his mother Kanaka Durga, 45, were going to Babayipalem of Nidamaru Mandal by bike from Jangareddy-gudem. They crossed a RTC bus, but meanwhile, another bike came in the same direction and hit it them.

Officers responsible, if paddy crop dries

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 10

West Godavari district collector Revu Muthyala Raju warned the officials that the agriculture department officials should take responsibility, if the paddy crop is dried even in an acre during the Rabi season.

He cautioned the officials to make field visits and monitor the situation time to time and supply water to the paddy fields, if necessary. Reviewing the supplying of irrigated water to rabi crop in West Godavari on Wednesday with the agriculture and irrigation

department officials at Eluru, Mr Muthyala Raju said that if the officials make field level visits, the problem can be noticed easily and take immediate steps to protect the crop. He also said that the officials can take suggestions from the farmers.

He said that they should pay attention to tale-end lands and the agriculture and irrigation department officials should coordinate with each other to sort out the water issues. He said that the officials should identify the areas where the water is being illegally taken out and book cases.

MATTER OF FAITH BJP MP says news published against the TTD is defamatory

Swamy to file defamation case against daily

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 10

BJP MP Subramanian Swamy announced on Wednesday that he will be filing a defamation case against a Telugu newspaper for publishing defamatory news articles against the TTD and damaging the reputation of Lord Venkateswara temple at Tirumala.

The BJP MP, who

claimed to have never lost a defamation suit in his lifetime, has taken up the issue pertaining to an article reportedly carried by a newspaper in 2019, over the alleged presence of Christian related content in the TTD's official website. In this issue, TTD has filed a defamation case for ₹100 crore against that newspaper.

Now, the BJP MP claimed to have been

filing a defamation case as a Balaji Bhakt (devotee), against the same newspaper. He came to the city court complex on Wednesday as his signature is required to proceed with the case. Since it was a holiday for the court, he signed the papers and announced the latest developments.

Speaking to media persons at the city court complex, Dr

Swamy alleged that the newspaper – at behest of TD chief Chandrababu Naidu, was publishing defamatory and half-truth news articles against the TTD and causing damage to the reputation of world-renowned Lord Venkateswara temple.

"Since Lord Venkateswara Swamy is our family God and my mother used to visit the temple very

often, I thought such defamatory campaigning against the Tirumala temple should be stopped," he said, adding that the newspaper has been deliberately campaigning against TTD in its attempt to defame the AP CM Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Recalling the episode of freeing the Nataraja Swamy temple in Tamil Nadu from the control of the

state government, Dr Swamy said that TTD will also be freed from the clutches of the government soon. He also recalled his recent legal battle against the BJP-led Uttarakhhand government for taking over 53 temples including the famed Badrinath and Kedarnath temples. He wondered why should state governments hold control over the temples.





Khattar govt wins first no-trust vote

After 6-hour discussions, Speaker said 55 members voted against motion, 32 backed it

Chandigarh, March 10: The BJP-JJP government in Haryana survived the floor test on Wednesday, comfortably defeating the no-confidence motion moved against it by the main opposition Congress. The motion was defeated following division of votes.

At the end of a marathon six-hour discussion on the motion, Speaker Gian Chand Gupta announced in the House that 55 members had voted against the motion while 32 legislators had backed it.

In place of secret voting, which former chief minister B.S. Hooda had earlier demanded in the House, the Speaker first asked the members favouring the motion to rise from their seats and those against it were asked to stand.

A headcount was done later. The 55 members who voted against the motion included 39 from the BJP, 10 of ally Jannayak Janta Party, five Independents and Gopal Kanda from Haryana Lokhit Party.

The BJP has 40 members in the Assembly which includes the Speaker. Thirty members of the Congress and two Independents — Balraj Kundu and Sombir Sangwan — who had earlier withdrawn support, backed the motion.

The opposition camp would have needed 45 members to win the no confidence motion. In the 90-member Haryana Assembly, currently having an effective strength of 88 members, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has 40 members, the JJP 10 and the Congress 30. Seven are Independents, five of whom are supporting the government, while one member is of the Haryana Lokhit Party. While the ruling BJP-JJP was batting on a comfortable wicket with numbers on their side, moving the motion, the first no-trust vote which 16-month old Khattar government faced, Leader of Opposition Hooda claimed the ruling dispensation has lost people's trust.

He also said it would expose those who were claiming to stand in favour of farmers if they vote against the motion.

— PTI



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee holds on to her injured leg after her campaign trial at Nandigram in Purba Medinipur on Wednesday. — PTI

Jolt to Cong. in Kerala as P.C. Chacko resigns

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI / THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 10

The Congress on Wednesday received a jolt with its senior leader from the poll bound state of Kerala P.C. Chacko calling it quits from the party. He sent in his resignation to the party chief Sonia Gandhi.

He said, "I have quit Congress and sent my resignation to the party's interim chief Sonia Gandhi. I had been deliberating upon this decision for the past many days. I come from Kerala where there's no Congress party as such. There are two parties — Congress (I) and Congress (A). It's a coordination committee of two parties functioning as the Kerala Congress unit. The "A" group was headed by former chief minister Oommen Chandy and the "I" group by state chief Ramesh Chennithala and these groups had been active for many years."

He further charged the Congress of not having

internal democracy. "There is no democracy left in Congress. The list of candidates has not been discussed with the state Congress committee. There are no panels for any discussions on polls, winnability of candidates. There have always been factions in parties, even in the Congress, but there is no point anymore," he added.

The recommendations of the groups being placed at the screening committee were being meekly accepted by the central leadership. "Under these circumstances there was no point in continuing in the Congress," he said.

Chacko, however, ruled out possibility of joining the BJP. "The BJP has no future in Kerala. It is not a party that is widely acceptable among the people of Kerala," he said.

The Congress high command is already feeling the pressure from the letter writers group who wanted change in the party and the latest allegation from Chacko has only added to its woes.



SHORT TAKES

U.S. 'HYPING UP' TAIWAN INVADE THREAT: CHINA

Beijing, March 10: China on Wednesday accused a top US commander of attempting to "hype up" the threat of an invasion of Taiwan to inflate Washington's defence spend and justify its own military chicanery in Asia.

The US' top military officer in Asia-Pacific, Admiral Philip Davidson, on Tuesday said China could invade Taiwan within the next six years, as Beijing accelerates its moves to supplant American military power in Asia. "Some US people continue to use the Taiwan issue to hype up China's military threat," foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters in Beijing.

PLAN TO ATTACK JEWS: MAN HELD IN SINGAPORE

Singapore, March 10: Singapore has detained a full-time national serviceman (NSF) for planning to carry out a knife attack against Jews at a local synagogue, according to a media report on Wednesday.

Singaporean Amirull Ali, 20, had also made plans to travel to Gaza, Palestine, to join the military wing of Hamas in its fight against Israel, the Internal Security Department said.

Amirull was self-radicalised with a deep hatred for Israel after being convinced that Palestinians were being oppressed in the Israel-Palestine conflict, the ISD said.

He was arrested on February 5 while he was an NSF, a compulsory military service for young Singaporeans in the Singapore Armed Forces.

N. KOREAN TO BE EXTRADITED TO THE U.S.

Kuala Lumpur, March 10: Malaysia's top court ruled that a North Korean man can be extradited to the United States to face money laundering charges, rejecting his assertion that the US charge was politically motivated.

The Federal Court on Tuesday refused to accept Mun Chol Myong's arguments because it was not a trial, and agreed with a lower court that prosecutors had followed procedures, said defence lawyer Gooi Soon Seng.

Mun, who is in his 50s, has lived in Malaysia for a decade and was arrested in May 2019 after US authorities requested his extradition.

Malaysia's government approved the extradition, but Mun challenged the US bid.

NON-MUSLIMS CAN USE 'ALLAH': MALAYSIA COURT

Kuala Lumpur, March 10: A Malaysian court ruled on Wednesday that non-Muslims can use the word "Allah" to refer to God, in a major decision in a divisive issue for religious freedom in the Muslim-majority country.

The High Court decision squashed a 35-year-old government ban on the usage of Allah and three other Arabic words by Christian publications, deeming the ban unconstitutional, said the plaintiff's lawyer, Annou Xavier. The government has previously said Allah should be reserved exclusively for Muslims to avoid confusion that could lead them to convert to other religions, a stance that is unique to Malaysia and hasn't been an issue in other Muslim-majority nations.

YOUTHS ATTACK ATHENS PS WITH PETROL BOMBS

Athens, March 10: Greek youths protesting an incident of police violence attacked an Athens police station with petrol bombs and severely injured one officer on Tuesday.

The violence came during a march by several thousand people in the southern Nea Smyrni district. Greek media said dozens of people attacked a motorcycle police officer with stones and clubs, severely injuring him.

Earlier, police said they had confiscated quantities of petrol bombs at the beginning of the protest. They said several participants in the march were armed with iron bars. The march to the Nea Smyrni police station was in reaction to an incident on Sunday during police enforcement of virus lockdown measures in a square in the Nea Smyrni area.

Royal remarks raise race issue in C'wealth

Cape Town, March 10: In countries with historic ties to Britain, allegations by Prince Harry and Meghan that an unnamed member of the royal family had "concerns" over how dark their unborn baby's skin might be have raised a thorny question: Do those nations really want to be so closely connected to Britain and its royal family anymore? It was expected the interview would expose more rifts in the royal family. Now it seems to be risking divisions within the "family" of the Commonwealth — an association of 54 countries, most of them former British colonies, held together by historic ties.

For decades, Queen Elizabeth II has been the driving force behind the Commonwealth. After the TV interview, shown in the US on the eve of Commonwealth Day, former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull cited it as another reason for the country to sever its constitutional ties to the British monarchy.

"After the end of the queen's reign, that is the time for us to say: OK, we've passed that watershed," Turnbull told Austr-

UK TALK SHOW HOST QUILTS OVER MEGHAN COMMENT

London, March 10: British talk show host Piers Morgan has quit the show "Good Morning Britain" after making controversial comments about the Duchess of Sussex.

The UK's media watchdog said earlier Tuesday that it was launching an investigation into the show under its harm and offence rules after receiving more than 41,000 complaints about his comments on Meghan.

alian Broadcasting Corp. "Do we really want to have whoever happens to be the head of state, the king or queen of the UK, automatically our head of state?" The value of the Commonwealth has been debated before, with critics questioning if countries and people once colonised — and even oppressed — should remain in such an association with a former coloniser.

— AP

EU-UK ties dip over 'vaccine ban' comments

Brussels, March 10: Relations between the European Union and recently departed Britain took another diplomatic dip on Wednesday when the EU envoy in London was summoned to explain comments that Britain had issued a vaccine export ban. The United Kingdom was so irate about Tuesday's comments from European Council President Charles Michel that Britain had "imposed an outright ban on the export of vaccines," that it called in the ambassador for a morning meeting.

A British government statement said that it "has not blocked the export of a single Covid-19 vaccine. Any references to a UK export ban or any restrictions on vaccines are completely false." The spat comes against a background that the Covid-19 vaccination drive in Britain is seen as a huge success while that in the 27-nation bloc has been a major failure.

The United Kingdom has given about 35 per cent of its adults a vaccine shot while the EU is further back with 9.5 per

PAK TO CLOSE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Islamabad, March 10: Pakistan announced on Wednesday that all educational institutions in cities worst hit due to the Coronavirus pandemic will be closed down from March 15 for two weeks due to a surge in Covid-19 cases in the country.

Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood announced the decision after the National Command and Control Centre (NCOC) reviewed the Coronavirus situation at educational institutions.

— PTI

cent. Already uneasy bedfellows during Britain's 47 years of EU membership, thing got progressively worse since the 2016 referendum when the United Kingdom voted to leave the bloc. After acrimonious departure talks, the split became official last year.

— AP

YAHYA SINWAR RE-ELECTED GAZA HAMAS CHIEF

Gaza City, March 10: Yahya Sinwar was re-elected Wednesday as the head of Hamas's political wing in Gaza, extending his tenure as the Islamist movement's de facto leader in the Israeli-blockaded Palestinian enclave, Hamas said.

Sinwar, a former commander of Hamas's military branch, served more than two decades in an Israeli prison before he was released in 2011 as a part of a prisoner exchange.

First elected to the post in 2017, he faced four challengers this time, including Nizar Awadallah, the former head of Hamas's advisory Shura Council. Hamas's overall chief Ismail Haniyeh, currently based in Qatar, congratulated Sinwar in a statement. "The movement's commitment to (internal) elections every four years confirms our deep faith in the principle of rotating power," Haniyeh said.

Sinwar's re-election comes ahead of May 22 Palestinian legislative polls. The Islamist group is considered a terrorist organisation by much of the Western world.

— AFP

Protesters adapt tactics after Myanmar police use violence

Forces' crackdown has failed to slow protests against the Feb. 1 coup

Mandalay, March 10: Protesters against the military takeover in Myanmar carried homemade shields and moved with more caution and agility Tuesday, adapting their tactics to the escalating violence from security forces not reluctant to use lethal force to break up crowds.

In Mandalay, the nation's second-largest city, about a thousand demonstrators emerged onto the streets, those in the vanguard carrying shields marked with a three-fingered salute, the movement's symbol of defiance. They marched for just a few minutes before dispersing to avoid a possible confrontation with riot police. Another group made a mobile protest, driving through the streets on motorbikes.

Security forces trying to stop people from gathering have used water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets most often, but also have fired live ammunition at crowds. The crackdown has left more than 60 protesters dead but has failed to slow the widespread protests against the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

A school principal involved in the protest movement died Tuesday from unknown causes after being taken into custody by security forces, according to media reports and an activist who knew him. The death of Zaw Myat Lin in custody was the second in recent days.

— AP



Anti-coup protesters retreat from the frontlines after discharging fire extinguishers towards a line of riot policemen in Yangon, Myanmar, on Wednesday.

— AP

● **MYANMAR SECURITY** forces on Wednesday raided the Mingalar Taung Nyunt neighbourhood in Yangon that houses state railway workers who have gone on strike to protest the coup. Photos, video showed officers blocking streets and people escaping. At least three arrests were reported.

BIMSTEC MEET: LANKA INVITES MYANMAR FM, TRIGGERS ROW

Colombo, March 10: Sri Lanka has invited the new foreign minister of Myanmar's junta to the BIMSTEC ministerial meeting next month, triggering a controversy that it is endorsing the military coup in that nation. Sri Lanka has neither endorsed or rejected the recognition of the

military regime which topped Myanmar's elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi's government on Feb. 1, just as it was to start its second term. The coup reversed years of slow progress toward democracy after five decades of military rule.

Sri Lanka's FM Dinesh Gunawardena invited the

military regime's FM Wunna Maung Lwin, for a virtual meeting of the FMs of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand under the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) on April 1.

— PTI

Biden administration will not defend Trump immigration rule

FBI releases new video after bombs left at RNC, DNC offices

Washington, March 10: The FBI has released new video showing someone placing two pipe bombs outside the offices of the Republican and Democratic national committees the night before the Jan. 6 riot at the US Capitol.

The explosive devices were placed outside the two buildings between 7:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. on Jan. 5 and were located by law enforcement the next day.

outgrowth of the Biden administration's effort to undo Trump administration immigration policies. The new administration recently dismissed high court appeals over for-

mer President Donald Trump's effort to deny funding to so-called sanctuary communities.

The justices, at the administration's request, also put off cases they had

onal Committee headquarters nearby. The bombs were rendered safe, and no one was hurt.

The video, released Tuesday, shows a person in a gray hooded sweatshirt, a face mask and gloves appearing to place one of the explosives under a bench outside the DNC and separately shows the person walking in an alley near the RNC before the bomb was placed there.

— AP



Yusuf Raza Gilani

PAK HC REJECTS PLEA AGAINST GILANI POLL WIN

Islamabad, March 10: The Islamabad High Court on Wednesday rejected a petition by Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party challenging former premier Yusuf Raza Gilani's upset win in the Senate elections, ruling that it was not appropriate to "unnecessarily drag" the judiciary in political matters.

Gilani, who contested the Senate election as a Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) candidate, defeated ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) candidate and Finance Minister Abdul Hafeez Shaikh by securing 169 votes against 164 votes by Shaikh on Wednesday, giving a major blow to Prime Minister Imran Khan who had personally campaigned for his Cabinet colleague.

The Opposition had demanded the prime minister's resignation after the debacle following which Khan decided to take a vote of confidence on Saturday which he won comfortably. The Islamabad High Court (IHC) heard a plea by PTI lawmaker Ali Nawaz.

— PTI

No China role in Dalai succession: US

Washington, March 10: The Chinese government should have no role in the succession process of Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, the Biden Administration said on Tuesday.

"We believe that the Chinese government should have no role in the succession process of the Dalai Lama," State Department Spokesperson Ned

Price told reporters at his daily news conference.

"Beijing's interference in the succession of the Panchen Lama more than 25 years ago, including by 'disappearing' the Panchen Lama as a child and attempting to replace him with a PRC (People's Republic of China) government-chosen successor, it remains an outrageous abuse of religious

freedom," Price said.

Previous president Donald Trump in December had signed into law a bill which called for establishing a US consulate in Tibet and building an international coalition to ensure that the next Dalai Lama is appointed solely by the Tibetan Buddhist community without China's interference.

It is the policy of the

United States to take all appropriate measures to hold accountable senior officials of the Chinese government or the Chinese Communist Party who directly interfere with the identification and installation of the future 15th Dalai Lama of Tibetan Buddhism, successor to the 14th Dalai Lama, the act said.

— PTI

NEW | STUDY

During intervals without virus curbs, infection rates were four per cent higher

Higher airborne pollen levels behind Covid risk

Berlin, March 10: Higher concentration of airborne pollen is associated with increased novel Coronavirus infection rates, according to a study that used data from 31 countries across five continents.

Researchers at the Technical University of Munich (TUM) and the Helmholtz Zentrum Munchen in Germany noted that people in high-risk groups can protect themselves by watching pollen forecasts and wearing dust filter masks. The team collected data on airborne pollen concentrations, weather conditions and SARS-CoV-2 infections, taking into

consideration the variation of infection rates from one day to another, and the total number of positive tests. The researchers also included data on population density and the effects of lockdown measures.

The study, published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, analysed pollen data from 130 stations in 31 countries on five continents. The team showed that airborne pollen can account for, on average, 44 per cent of the variation in infection rates, with humidity and air temperature also playing a role in some cases.

● **THE STUDY**, published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, analysed pollen data from 130 stations in 31 countries on five continents.

During intervals without lockdown regulations, infection rates were on average four per cent higher with every increase of 100 grains of airborne pollen per cubic metre, the researchers said. In some German cities, concentrations of up to 500 pollen grains per cubic metre per day led to an overall increase in infection rates of more

than 20 per cent, they said. However, in the regions where lockdown rules were in effect, the infection numbers were on average only half as high at comparable pollen concentrations, according to the study. The researchers explained that high pollen concentrations lead to a weaker immune response in airways to viruses that can cause coughs and colds. They noted that when a virus enters the body, infected cells usually send out messenger proteins, adding this is also the case with SARS-CoV-2.

These proteins, known as antiviral interferons, signal nearby cells to escalate their antiviral defence to keep the invaders at bay. Additionally, an appropriate inflammation response is activated to fight the viruses, according to the researchers.

However, the researchers said, if airborne pollen concentrations are high, and pollen grains are inhaled with the virus particles, fewer antiviral interferons are generated. The beneficial inflammatory response itself is also affected, they said. The study suggests that high concentration of pollen can lead to an increase in the number of respiratory illness-

es, including Covid-19.

Whether individuals are allergic to the different pollen types is irrelevant, the researchers said. "You cannot avoid exposure to airborne pollen," says Stefanie Gilles, first author of the study. "People in high-risk groups should, therefore, be informed that high levels of airborne pollen concentrations lead to an increased susceptibility to viral respiratory tract infections," Gilles said.

The researchers noted that when studying the spread of SARS-CoV-2, environmental factors such as pollen must be taken into account.

— PTI

DECCAN Chronicle

11 MARCH 2021

Uncertainty deepens after US move on Afghanistan

The first concrete move from the US side under the new Joseph Biden administration would appear to have deepened uncertainties in respect of the unfolding situation in Afghanistan in the context of the withdrawal of all US troops by May 1 this year, the date set under the Doha accord that the previous Trump administration had reached with the Taliban in February last year.

Ostensibly, India has been brought upfront — along with Pakistan, Russia, China, Iran (the key regional powers) and the US — in fleshing out the roadmap under this approach. For now, however, this seems more notional than real, given the evident conceptual fragility of the idea.

In addition, without putting too fine a point on it, it needs to be underscored that Afghanistan president Ashraf Ghani has given the latest US proposal short shrift. This underlines the complexity of the Afghanistan dynamics, which is all at once imbued with military action, diplomatic moves, and the nursing of ambition by domestic political entities.

The Taliban will enter government with American blessing without contesting an election, although Taliban appears to have orchestrated unprecedented levels of violence for one whole year

Besides, regional powers such as Pakistan, Iran and Russia — and in its own way China, which may be expected to be on the same page as Islamabad in lining up four square behind the Taliban — see a post-US role for themselves that could make life difficult for Afghanistan. It is with Iran that India may enjoy an appreciable measure of tactical congruence and will have to seek to enlarge this space.

In the circumstances, it may be in New Delhi's interest to carefully weigh the situation rather than be in the self-congratulation mode through media projections for being placed in the same

bracket by the US as the other key regional powers which, unlike India, have a border with Afghanistan — even if on paper India has not enjoyed a place of such primacy before.

The new American ideas have been placed in peremptory fashion in a letter sent last week by secretary of state Antony Blinken to Afghanistan president Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, Afghanistan's principal peace negotiator with the Taliban. The Taliban as well as the leading political actors inside Afghanistan were made aware of the details by Zalmay Khalilzad, the US envoy for Afghanistan peace who hammered out the Doha accord last year, and has been kept on by President Biden as his point-man to oversee the end-game in Afghanistan.

The Blinken plan, which places New Delhi in a privileged category along with the other key regional players, envisages a UN-sponsored conference in Turkey in the coming weeks to ensure the emergence of a peace deal that will embrace all parties and make for the entry of the Taliban into Afghanistan's government structure as a 50 per cent partner through the device of an interim government.

In effect, such a plan proclaims that the Taliban will enter government with American blessing without contesting an election, although Taliban appears to have orchestrated unprecedented levels of violence for one whole year. President Ghani declared last Saturday, "Transfer of power through elections is a non-negotiable principle for us." It is to be seen what a stalwart such as former President Hamid Karzai — and others — make of the Blinken approach in contrast with that of President Ghani. For all concerned, this is like walking on shards of glass.

Quotas: Let Parliament decide

The Supreme Court has decided to open up the issue of capping the percentage of reservation in government jobs at 50 per cent and whether legislatures are competent to declare a particular caste to be socially and educationally backward. It has sought the opinion of states on the issue.

The court struck on the idea while hearing a petition on the legal validity of the Maharashtra Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Act, 2018, which granted 16 per cent reservation to people of the Maratha community in jobs and admissions. The Supreme Court said it would also hear arguments on whether the landmark Mandal verdict, which capped the quota at 50 per cent, should be re-looked at and referred to a larger bench.

Reservation is essentially a political question; its legal aspects are addressed by Article 15 (4) of the Constitution which empowers the State to make "special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes". It is for the executive and the legislature to decide on the modalities of such provisions with the larger aim of uplifting the underprivileged classes of people.

The court will get the opinion of the state governments based on the position of the parties that run them. There are parties that are uncomfortable with the very idea of reservation while there are others who believe there should be no cap on it. The seminal question is how much they will help the court address the issue of the power of the legislature to implement the constitutional mandate on reservation. The judiciary should ideally limit itself to seeing if the modalities the government introduces are consistent with the larger framework of the Constitution. It should resist the temptation of offering judicial solutions to political problems.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

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Printer & Publisher

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 Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. HSD-348/2006-08

Subhani



Afghan trouble looming: Pak likely to make gains



K.C. Singh

US President Joe Biden, within two months of taking charge, has moved with speed to implement his domestic and international agenda. His predecessor's jibe dubbing him "Sleepy Joe" is proving totally wrong. Of concern to India is the United States pushing Afghanistan towards what the draft paper sent to all parties, including the Taliban, calls the "Afghanistan Peace Agreement". Simultaneously, US secretary of state Anthony Blinken wrote to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and senior statesman Abdullah Abdullah, urging acceleration of the entire peace process.

The Biden presidency has directly or indirectly impacted other South Asian developments too. India and Pakistan surprisingly announced restoration of the 2003 ceasefire agreement after two years of heavy exchanges along the Line of Control. India ignored its dictum that no de-escalation with Pakistan was possible till it abandoned the use of terror as an adjunct to diplomacy. Pakistan decided to withdraw its precondition that till India restored the status quo ante in Kashmir, normality couldn't be restored. The US role is more clearly manifest, observing its new exit strategy from the two-decade Afghan conflict.

That the US would treat Pakistan with greater deference than the Trump administration did became clear early after Team Biden began articulating its foreign policy priorities. The retention of Zalmay Khalilzad as US special representative for Afghanistan confirmed continuity rather than innovation in America's Afghan policy. President Trump fathered the deal with the Taliban and declared a complete US troop withdrawal by May 1, 2021. US troop levels are now down to 2,500. Thus, Mr Blinken's letters to the two top Afghan leaders and the draft peace agreement,

despite the letter which concedes "we have not yet completed our review of the way ahead", sets out the future path.

While the letter cajoled President Ghani to cooperate through subtle threats and doomsday scenario, the draft peace agreement specifies the next steps, under three sub-headings. One outlines the guiding principles for a new constitution and the future Afghan state. It envisions a multi-ethnic state and the protection of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The second spells out the possible shape of a transitional government that includes separation of powers. The President will be the commander-in-chief, apparently for the seamless integration of Taliban fighters in today's Afghan Army. He will also retain international relations, perhaps for better coordination with multiple foreign stakeholders, especially regional powers. The third is the need for a "permanent and comprehensive ceasefire".

Two immediate processes are envisaged. One, the United Nations will be urged to convene the foreign ministers and envoys from "Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India and the US". Separately, Turkey will be asked to host a "senior-level meeting of both sides" — the Afghan government and the Taliban, in coming weeks to "finalise a peace agreement". A controversy arose on whether Russia, perhaps on behalf of Pakistan and China, wanted India excluded from the regional group. The old Quadrilateral Coordination Group had the US, Afghanistan, Pakistan and China. Thus, India's inclusion is acceptance that the regional group would lack balance without India, as the interests of China, Pakistan and Russia mostly converge. In any case, India's development assistance to Afghanistan has been exemplary and appreciated by the ordinary Afghan.

Can India engage the Taliban, despite Pakistani objections? The Taliban too will need development aid, which even now is largely channelled in the rural hinterland through them as the government lacks access.

But the United States has unvelled the playing field by scaling back its military presence. The Afghan Army is unable to control anything more than the larger population centres. Even in Kandahar, the country's second-largest city with great symbolic significance for the Taliban, the land access is with the Taliban. Mr Blinken's letter ends with the warning that a US troop withdrawal by May 1 is a possibility and thereafter, even with US financial assistance for the Afghan Army, "the security situation will worsen and that the Taliban could make rapid territorial gains." This is a surrender to the Taliban-Pakistan interests even before a dialogue begins.

This perhaps explains the Pakistan Army accepting a ceasefire at the Line of Control with India. They can see the balance of forces in Afghanistan tilting in their favour. Thus, they are willing to put their Kashmir strategy on hold, trying through a dialogue and America's urgings for the status quo to be restored, while they consolidate their advantage in the west, especially by negating India's role in a post-Ghani Afghanistan. It would be delusional to assume the Pakistan Army has swallowed the altered status quo in J&K.

Indian options are circumscribed by mutated regional geopolitics compared to the late 1990s, after Kabul fell to the Taliban in 1996. First, India-Iran-Russia then had total convergence of strategic interests to ensure that the Taliban couldn't capture northern Afghanistan. The three coordinated to keep the Northern Alliance alive and the Panjshir valley free, while Ahmad Shah Masood lived. Iran's western border was still

blocked by an inimical Saddam Hussein. Today that alliance is one in name only, as shown by the controversy over Russia's role in barring India from the regional grouping. Moreover, Iran's primary strategic interest is in getting US and other sanctions lifted and retaining control over "Shia Crescent" that runs through Shia-majority Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Today the Iran-Taliban ties are workable if not warm, with the Taliban curbing its anti-Shia zeal for the larger strategic goal of reducing its dependence on Pakistan. Iran provides an alternative exit to the open seas, and both distrust the US.

The transition in Afghanistan will be tricky. Taliban tactics of fight-and-talk worked for them, particularly with the US broadcasting its military exit. Why will they accept a "permanent and comprehensive" ceasefire without gaining substantial control over the transitional government? The Afghan government needs money and air cover for special forces, about a quarter of the total army, well trained by the US and doing the critical fighting as the regular forces buckle. India might be able to finance but can hardly replace the US level of air cover with drones, armed helicopters and medivacs. Can India engage the Taliban, despite Pakistani objections? The Taliban too will need development aid, which even now is largely channelled in the rural hinterland through them as the government lacks access. But a constant negative will be the BJP's minority-bashing majoritarian policies and its Kashmir policy. Pakistan will count on that to keep India in the Taliban's bad books. As the US exits, India must redesign its approach to an altered AfPak salient. India's domestic and neighbourhood policies are scraping against each other. The looming Assembly elections, particularly in West Bengal and Assam, will show whether even the Indian masses are tiring of divisive and jingoistic politics.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambksingh.

LETTERS

JOB MARKET

This is with reference to the report 'Worst-hit sectors back in job mkt' (DC, March 10). It is good that some of the worst pandemic-hit sectors have re-entered the job market this year. As far as travel, tourism and hotels sectors are concerned they lost their peak season of October to March which is meant for particularly foreign tourist inflow. Still the hiring intents of travel and hospitality were at 10 per cent is truly good. Hope rest of the other sectors which were hit badly by Covid-19 will also pick up slowly as things are getting normal.

Panchakarla Govardhana Rao
Kankipadu

RAILWAY FACTORY

The resignation of Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat seems to be a damage control exercise for the BJP. Though he is annoyed by his own party men and colleagues with his style of functioning, he has been continued at the helm till Tuesday. Moreover he is facing serious corruption charges. Had he been asked to step down the moment a CBI case was registered in the High Court's direction in relation to corruption charges, his party could have gained more moral authority in the eyes of people. Any way it's better late than never. The state of Uttarakhand seems to be following its tradition of incomplete term chief ministers very strictly.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Cong-R bags 6 seats, TPS gets 5

HYDERABAD, MARCH. 10 As in the rest of the country, the Organisation Congress and its allies were badly bruised in Andhra Pradesh with the Ruling Congress annexing all the four seats in Andhra region, and the Telangana Praja Samithi bagging all the five seats in Telangana, the results for which were officially announced till 1 a.m. today.

Unofficial reports received indicated that the Organisation Congress leader, Mr. N. Sanjeeva Reddi is trailing behind the Ruling Congress nominee and his one-time protegee, Mr. P. Anthony Reddi in his home constituency of Anantapur.



Mahir Ali

Crippled inside: Royal family's racism isn't its biggest problem

I recall staying up late more than a quarter-century ago to watch Diana's BBC interview with Martin Bashir. I couldn't be bothered to repeat the experience with her son Harry and his wife Meghan Markle's "tell-all" chat with Oprah Winfrey.

Bashir has been accused of deception in obtaining the interview. It was nonetheless fascinating, as the first instance of a senior member of Britain's most elite institution laying bare the royal family's dysfunction. "There were three of us in this marriage," Diana complained about her husband's relentless infatuation with the woman his family didn't allow him to marry.

At least not until the princess of Wales succumbed to her injuries in a car crash two years later. Diana's status as an "outsider" has been compared with that of Meghan. The parallels are limited. The ill-fated Diana-Charles match was in effect an arranged marriage between a nubile teenager and a considerably older heir apparent, a decorative

decision rather than the culmination of a fairytale romance.

Diana may not have been blue-blooded, but she was the daughter of a trusted viscount and former royal equerry. Meghan is a biracial actress from the other side of the Atlantic with a divorce behind her. Both of them, one might say, left one dysfunctional family to enter another, but beyond that, the commonalities mostly reside in media hype.

Hundreds of millions of women, young or otherwise, experience trials and tribulations with their in-laws. The unfortunate experiences of Diana and Meghan don't even come close to the frequently fatal ordeals of targeted brides in the subcontinent. And there's no good reason why any one family's experience or ordeal should be elevated above others.

On the other hand, not every family doubles as a political institution. The Windsors are by no means globally unique in this respect, except insofar as at least the senior-most members of the family interfere in

political affairs. Just last month, a series of investigative reports in *The Guardian* pointed to a history of royal involvement in framing legislation, which shows the Windsors to be particularly wary of revealing the extent of their wealth.

The British royal family is symbolic of the feudalism that persists in a nation that purports to be a model democracy, boasting "the mother of parliaments". In several other countries there are debates about how the upper house of parliament is elected, and whether the process is democratic. In Britain the upper house is selected.

The proportion of hereditary peers has diminished in recent decades, but even life peers are appointed by the monarch, albeit usually on the advice of the government of the day. Mind you, the chamber — the only upper house in any bicameral parliament in the world to be larger than the lower house — includes the bishops and archbishops of the Church of England. As for the separation of church and state, suffice it

to say that the head of state — the monarch — is also the supreme governor of the Church of England. That's hardly a barrier, though, to un-Christian ideas and practices among the royal family.

Perhaps the most publicised "take-away" from Meghan and Harry's conversation with Oprah relates to racism.

There was hostile speculation among one or more members of the royal family, apparently, about the skin colour of the couple's offspring. The duke and duchess (as they still are) refused to reveal the identity of the culprit/s, but made clear that it was neither the queen nor her husband — whose racist observations over the decades are infamous.

It may also be worth recalling that the present monarch is only a generation removed from an uncle who taught her to flash the Nazi salute. But neither the ideological inclinations nor the racial preferences of the royal family are the biggest issue.

It's the feudal institution itself

that's an absurd anomaly in the 21st century, as its subjects — not just in Britain, but in Canada, Australia and New Zealand — will sooner or later realise, collectively or one by one.

To some people, this was clear centuries ago. Percy Bysshe Shelley was bold but hardly innovative in penning the sonnet England in 1819, in which he decried princes as "the dregs of their dull race, who flow/ Through public scorn — mud from a muddy spring".

Perhaps the most apposite precursor to the Harry-Meghan saga is that of another celebrity couple hounded out of Britain by racists 50 years ago. The same year, one of them put on record a bunch of timeless thoughts, including the verses: "You can go to church and sing a hymn/ You can judge me by the colour of my skin/ You can live a lie until you die/ One thing you can't hide/ Is when you're crippled inside."

By arrangement with Dawn

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,279.51	0.50
Nifty 50	15,174.80	0.51
S&P 500*	3,900.17	0.64
Dollar (₹)	72.91	0.02
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.12	0.22
Euro (₹)	86.63	0.24
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,286▲112	0.25
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.85	0.49
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.247	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.540	-0.004

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Telecos can instal only govt approved gears

The amended telecom licence norms will enable the government to control the installation of network equipment from non-trusted sources. With effect from June 15, telecom operators will be required to take permission from the National Cyber Security Coordinator (NCSC) for up-gradation of existing networks. The NCSC can impose conditions for the procurement of telecom equipment.

Over 1.54 L gram panchayats have high-speed net



Over 1.54 lakh gram panchayats are now ready to provide high-speed broadband services under the BharatNet project, telecom minister Ravi Shankar Prasad informed Parliament. Out of 5,97,618 inhabited villages in the country, a total of 5,58,537 villages have 3G or 4G mobile wireless coverage. BharatNet project is being implemented to connect all the GPs (about 2.5 lakh) by broadband/high-speed infra, he said.

Easy Trip Planners IPO subscribed 159 times

Easy Trip Planners' initial public offering was subscribed 159.33 times on the last day of subscription. The Rs 510-crore issue received bids for over 240.27 crore shares against more than 1.50 crore shares on offer. The category meant for qualified institutional buyers (QIBs) was subscribed 77.53 times, while those for non-institutional investors 382.21 times and retail individual investors 70.40 times.

Joyalukkas, IBM tie up for e-com in 11 countries

Joyalukkas, a leading jewellery retailer, has collaborated with IBM Global Business Services to design, develop and deploy a new cloud native e-commerce platform across 11 countries, including the UAE, USA, UK, Singapore, Malaysia, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Oman. IBM has developed for Joyalukkas a cloud enabled e-commerce platform for the retailer's evolving jewellery business.



■ Restrictions on bank end after 4 years

IDBI Bank out of PCA framework

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MARCH 10

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday announced that it has decided to take LIC-owned IDBI Bank out of its prompt corrective action (PCA) framework following an improvement in its financial performance.

This follows a review of IDBI Bank by the Board for Financial Supervision in its meeting held on February 18, the RBI said.

IDBI Bank was placed under the PCA framework in 2017 over its high bad loans and negative return on assets.

In the latest quarter, as of December 31, 2020, IDBI Bank's gross bad loans stood at 23.52 per cent of gross advances.

"The performance of IDBI Bank Limited, currently under the Prompt Corrective Action Framework (PCAF) of RBI, was reviewed by the Board for Financial Supervision (BFS) in its meeting held on February 18, 2021," the apex bank said in a release.

"It was noted that as per published results for the quarter ending December 31, 2020 the bank is not in breach of the PCA parameters on regulatory capital, Net NPA and Leverage ratio," the RBI said.

The central bank said that IDBI Bank has provided a written commitment that it would comply with the norms of minimum regulatory capital, Net NPA and Leverage ratio on an ongoing basis and has



FREEDOM AT LAST

- ▶ IDBI Bank was placed under the PCA framework in 2017 over its high bad loans and negative return on assets
- ▶ The bank has met three out of four key criteria needed to exit the PCA
- ▶ Its net NPA has stayed under 6% for 5 quarters

apprised the central bank of the structural and systemic improvements that it has put in place which would help the bank in continuing to meet these commitments.

"Taking all the above into consideration, it has been decided that IDBI Bank Limited be taken out of the PCA framework, subject to certain conditions and continuous monitoring," the RBI said.

The bank has met three out of four key criteria needed to exit the PCA. Its net NPA has remained under 6 per cent for five consecutive quarters, capital adequacy ratio has remained above the regulatory minimum of 11.5 per cent for five quarters with Tier 1 capital ratio above 8

per cent. Its leverage ratio stood at 5.71 per cent at the end of the third quarter, above the 4 per cent threshold under the PCA.

Under the PCA framework, the RBI takes regulatory action if a bank overshoots the prescribed limits on bad loans or fails to comply with capital adequacy ratios. In simple terms, if the financial and operating indicators of a bank weaken below a prescribed level, the PCA could be triggered where the RBI may require a bank to take mandatory corrective actions such as raising capital levels, restricting dividend payments, and restricting branch expansions or face restrictions on management compensation, among other measures.

Arunachalam moves NCLT against Murugappa

FC BUREAU CHENNAI, MARCH 10

Continuing her fight against the Rs 38,000-crore Murugappa Group, Valli Arunachalam, daughter of former Murugappa Group chairman M.V. Murugappan, has approached the NCLT Chennai, seeking a waiver of the minimum shareholding requirement for filing a case against the group for alleged mismanagement and oppression.

Her family owns 8.21 per cent in Ambadi Investments, the flagship company of Murugappa Group. But only a party with at least 10 per cent shareholding can move a case on grounds of oppression and mismanagement.

If the waiver is granted, Arunachalam can sue group holding company Ambadi Investments for alleged oppression and mismanagement. Earlier, she had sent a legal notice to Murugappa family members after she was denied a board seat at Ambadi Investments.

Murugappa Group is a family-run business conglomerate that never had a female member from the family on the board. Arunachalam has been fighting for this for the last three years.

Arunachalam's plea for equal representation in the company's affairs has been denied since her father's demise a few years back.

Malls set to sport Trusted Shopping Centre mark

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 10

If all goes according to the designs of a shopping centres' body, malls and shopping centres that comply with standard safety and hygiene standards will soon sport a 'Trusted Shopping Centre' tag, which will help customers to step into the complex with confidence.

The Shopping Centres Association of India (SCAI) has launched a certification programme for malls and shopping centres, but all the retailers are very enthusiastic about the proposal fearing high compliance cost.

The association has launched consumer-centric certification under the existing IRF Trusted Mark Certification scheme, which is a third-party certification on cus-



tomers service metrics and benchmarks, and will be audited by National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies under the Quality Council of India.

The certification scheme will incorporate 'new normal' checklists like compliance of safety and hygiene measures by retailers and shopping centres. These checklists will be based on guidelines of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and standard operating procedures (SOPs) specifically devel-

oped by respective trade bodies for retailers across all formats, categories and channels.

"The Indian market has 650 large and over 1,000 small shopping centres offering organised retail environment to shoppers and this 'Trusted Shopping Centre' mark certification...has been introduced to step ahead in setting global best practices towards customer services," said Amitabh Taneja, chairman, SCAI.

But some retailers don't find value in the certification. "All the retailers in a mall will have to adhere to the standards. There will also be a cost involved in getting the certification. I don't think customers come to a mall on the basis of certification. We don't see much value in it," said a retail chain executive.

NTPC's 217 MW floating solar plants by June

FC BUREAU HYDERABAD, MARCH 10

State-run power major NTPC's southern region is gearing up to commission about 217 MW floating solar capacity, including floating plants of 100 MW at Ramagundam, this summer, a senior official said on Wednesday.

In a virtual interaction, NTPC regional executive director (south) C. V. Anand said, the capacity involves three projects in the region; "100 MW at Ramagundam, 25 MW at Simhadri, Visakhapat-



nam, 92 MW at Kayamkulam, Kerala. So, these are the floating solar we have taken up right now," he said.

A 230 MW ground solar project is also being established at Ettayapuram near Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu, according to a com-

pany release.

"Time schedule for floating solar is somewhere this financial year beginning, say May-June; by the time this all will be commissioned," Anand said.

Floating solar, he said, is a new concept and it does not require additional land.

He said the projects utilise existing water reservoirs of the company at its plants.

NTPC said the company has a significant presence in the southern region with a total installed capacity of 9125 MW.

US ban on Chinese cotton opens long-term opportunity for India

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 10

The US ban on import of cotton from China's Xinjiang has opened up an opportunity for Indian cotton products. However, import duty on cotton and delay in announcing RoDTEP rates is affecting the competitiveness of Indian cotton products in the global market.

The US had announced an import ban on all cotton and tomato products from western China's Xinjiang region in January over allegations that they are made using forced labour of detained Uighur Muslims. Xinjiang accounts for 60 per cent of China's cotton products exports. China has a leading 36 per cent share of global textile exports and the ban will have a major impact on Chinese exports.

"This is a big opportunity for other textile exporters, including India. India being a strong player in cotton, it has to grab this opportunity, else it will lose out to countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia and Vietnam," said Kailash Lalpuria, executive direc-



tor and CEO, Indo Count.

According to Sanjay Jain, an industry veteran, garments and home textiles stand to gain from China's loss. We have a potential to double the exports of value-added cotton products. We will have to invest in world-class manufacturing facilities and increase capacities to grab this opportunity. Increased investments in garment units will help increase production in six months," he said.

However, Indian cotton products are not competitive enough in the global market and the recently imposed import duty on raw cotton has made domestic products even more costly. The recent Budget had imposed 5 per cent basic customs duty and another 5 per cent Agriculture Infrastructure

and Development Cess on cotton.

The cotton textile industry has to import extra long staple (ELS) cotton, organic cotton and contamination-free cotton to the tune of 10 to 12 lakh bales per year. India produces just 3 per cent of its consumption and has to import the deficit to meet the consumption requirements.

"This imported cotton is used for making premium products with high levels of value addition. Increase in the raw material cost will make our products costlier compared to that of our competitors," said Lalpuria.

Further, exporters are not able to price in refund under the RoDTEP scheme in their products, as the rates have not been announced. "The previous MEIS scheme was stopped and the RoDTEP scheme was introduced on January 1, 2021. It has been more than two months now and the government has not announced the rates for different products. Without knowing the rates, we are not able to quote the prices," said Jain.

INDIAN TECH STOCKS PLAY CATCH WITH US TECH RALLY



RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 10

Indian tech stocks rallied on Wednesday after mammoth overnight gains of 3.69 per cent in the US tech stock index Nasdaq Composite and 4.03 per cent in Nasdaq 100, as US bond yields trended lower after a well-received US debt auction and the path cleared for a \$1.9 trillion Covid-19 relief bill.

IT stocks outperformed Sensex and Nifty's gain of 0.5 per cent. The BSE IT Index gained 1.58 per cent while NSE's Nifty IT Index gained 1.67 per cent.

Mid-cap IT stocks gained more than the large-cap IT names.

The top gainers among Nifty IT Index were L&T Infotech (6.30 per cent), Coforge (earlier NIIT Technologies) (5.82 per cent), Mindtree (5.38 per cent) and Mphasis (3.43 per cent).

The large-cap gainers included Wipro (1.57 per cent), Infosys (1.56 per cent) and HCL Technologies (1.42 per cent).

"With Technology stocks doing well on the Nasdaq stock market, the day clearly belonged to Midcap IT as the street demonstrated increased appetite today for Technology," said S. Ranganathan, head of research, LKP Securities.

"Global cues were positive as bond yields pulled back following a well-received US debt auction, thus easing concerns about rising inflation. The US House of Representatives voted to advance President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion Covid-19 relief bill, clearing the way for the measure to be considered on Wednesday, when it is expected to pass," said Siddhartha Khemka, head-research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

QUANTITY | PLAY High share of raw materials in exports trimming realisation

Plastic exports lag in value addition

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 10

In plastic exports, India has been able to grab a slot in the top-10 global ranking in volume terms. However, its ranking falls into the top-20 when it comes to value of trade, indicating a huge gap in value addition. Industry experts say a high share of raw materials in exports is the main reason for India's lower ranking in value terms.

The country occupies seventh position in the global ranking behind major exporters like China, the US and Germany in plastic goods shipping when considered volume-wise. But in value of exports, the



country drops steeply to the 18th position, according to a study by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, or Unctad.

The lag in value compared to volume is prominent in intermediate forms of plastics, intermediate manufactured goods, final manufactured goods and synthetic textiles. In the case of

intermediate forms of plastics, it is 6th in volume of exports but 15th in value.

"The problem lies in value addition. While our total exports are valued over \$11 billion, almost \$6 billion comes from export of raw materials and about \$5.5 billion from finished goods. When more than 50 per cent of our exports consist of

raw materials, their trade will fetch lesser value compared to countries which ship finished goods," said Deepak Ballani, director general of All-India Plastic Manufacturers' Association.

According to Ballani, the industry understands that it should focus on value addition, as it brings better revenues for the exported goods as well as create more jobs. "However, we are not able to compete with countries like China, which can churn out products much faster than us."

There are over 50,000 units producing plastic products and 95 per cent of them are micro, small and medium enterprises.

Procuring the latest technology both in terms of software and equipment is a pain point for these smaller companies. Further, they are not able to attract adequate finance for adapting the latest technologies and scaling up production.

Moreover, better prices in the international market forces the raw material and intermediate product makers to rather export their goods than sell them locally to the manufacturer of finished goods.

Higher duty on some of the raw materials is also affecting the competitiveness of the manufacturer of finished goods. The pandemic has further worsened the shortage of raw materials.

SHORT TAKES

Hyderabad FC rope in Hitesh

Hyderabad: Young midfielder Hitesh Sharma has signed a two-year contract extension with Indian Super League (ISL) side Hyderabad FC, the club said on Wednesday. "I am really proud and happy to have signed this contract with Hyderabad FC," said Hitesh. "I believe that we have the best players, the best management and the best coaches we can ask for at the club and I hope to continue the hard work for years to come," he added. The 23-year-old, who joined Hyderabad FC in January 2020, played a crucial role in the side's fight for a place in the top-4 this league campaign. He made 15 appearances (13 starts) and grew into a regular in the first team under head coach Manolo Marquez this season. He played a total of 1,060 minutes in the season, which remains his busiest league campaign in his career. — PTI

Mohammedan SC held by Punjab

Kolkata: Punjab FC snatched a remarkable 3-3 draw after Mohammedan SC scored two goals in as many minutes in the second half in a thrilling I-League clash here on Wednesday. Chenchu Gleytshen's brace was cancelled out by Faisal Ali and Pedro Manzi strikes in the second half. Azharuddin Mallick then gave Mohammedan the lead again only for Ashish Jha to score the equaliser for Punjab in the 88th minute. Punjab FC showed intent and played like they had to prove something, in the opening minutes of the match. In the 34th minute, Chenchu headed home from inside of the box after he was found by a Pritam Singh cross. Punjab FC wasted little time in the second half and doubled their lead just seconds into the half. In the 46th minute, Chenchu was found by a cross and the forward unleashed a swirling finesse shot that crashed into the back of the net. — PTI

Indian team set for Le Mans race

New Delhi: Racing Team India is set to become the first all-Indian-driver team to race in the iconic 24 Hours of Le Mans, after having been granted a provisional entry for this year's edition of the twice-round-the-clock classic. The team, which features an all-Indian driver line up of Narain Karthikeyan, Arjun Maini and Naveen Rao, will compete in the LMP2-AM category of the iconic race. The No. 74 car will be prepared and run by Eurasia Motorsport, making it a true-blue Asian effort. Padma Shri awardee and India's first Formula One driver Narain Karthikeyan said, "This is a proud moment not just for our team, but for our nation as a whole. Racing at Le Mans with an Indian team is a dream I have nurtured since 2009 when I first visited the Circuit de la Sarthe. I would like to thank all of our sponsors and partners, and especially the ACO and the Asian Le Mans Series team."

Sharath crashes in quarterfinals

Doha: Veteran Sharath Kamal bowed out of the World Table Tennis Star Contender series after going down in straight games to World No. 12 Dmitriy Ovtcharov in the men's singles pre-quarterfinals here on Wednesday. Sharath, ranked 32nd, lost 9-11 8-11, 6-11 to the German in a lop-sided contest. Sharath showed consistency in the first game against Dmitriy, who recently won the WTT Contenders title, and came close. But he could never get under the skin of a man who was in superb form. He looked good again the second but could not overcome the blues. In the end, the third game was so easy for the German that he didn't need to make any extra effort to complete the task. Dmitriy will take on Swede Anton Kallberg in the quarterfinals on Thursday. — PTI

Live on TV

CRICKET

Vijay Hazare Trophy: Semifinal from 9 am on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL

Champions League: Round of 16, 1st leg — Slavia Praha vs Rangers from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 1; Manchester United vs AC Milan from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 2; Dinamo Zagreb vs Tottenham Hotspur from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 1; Olympiakos vs Arsenal from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2; Roma vs Shakhtar Donetsk from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Six, HD

NATS AND BOLTS

Varun fails fitness test as injured Natarajan is at NCA

Ahmedabad, March 10: Leg-spinner Varun Chakravarty's failure to clear fitness tests has ruled him out while pacer T. Natarajan is racing against time to be battle-ready, making him doubtful for at least the early part of India's five-match T20 series against England starting here on Friday.

Chakravarty has repeatedly failed to clear the fitness test at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru while yorker specialist Natarajan is yet to join the squad here due to an apparent "shoulder niggle".

"Varun Chakravarty was selected because he recovered from his shoulder injury that ruled him out of the Australia series. He did his rehab at the NCA and started throwing normally."

"However, he has failed to clear the YoYo test mark stipulated for a 2km run at least twice," a senior BCCI source said.

The question now being asked is why did the Chetan Sharma led committee select such a player, who, after the month of October, hasn't played even one competitive game for his state Tamil Nadu.

"We can understand he was doing his rehab during Mushtaq Ali (T20 Championship). But then again, he didn't play a single Vijay Hazare Trophy game. How do you assess his match fitness based on games that he played five months back? I guess Varun Chakravarty is a lesson for selectors," said the source.

"If a player is generally not maintaining the standards set by this Indian team, his bowling alone can't be a criteria for selection," the source added.

It is learnt that Rahul Chahar will be inducted in the squad as he is already in the bio-bubble since the start of the Test series.

In case of Natarajan, the NCA medical staff is trying to get him fit or at least the later part of the



India pacer T. Natarajan in this file photo

series. Rahul Tewatia is training with the Indian team in Ahmedabad as he awaits his second fitness Test results.

INDIA LEAP TO NO.2 IN T20 RANKINGS

India climbed a spot to second in the latest ICC men's T20 International team rankings ahead of a five-match series against top-placed England beginning on March 12.

England are seven points ahead of India, who were third before the away series against Australia. Australia's 2-3 loss to New Zealand in a recent five-game series pushed the side below India with just one point.

In the T20 batting chart, India batsman KL Rahul lost a place to be at the third spot but skipper Virat Kohli retained his sixth position. — PTI

Southampton to host the India vs Kiwis WTC final

Dubai, March 10: The International Cricket Council on Wednesday formally announced that Southampton will host the inaugural World Test Championship final between India and New Zealand in June and a limited number of fans could be allowed if the easing of lockdown in the UK continues.

The game will be played inside a bio-secure bubble at the Hampshire Bowl in Southampton from June 18-22. The venue was confirmed on Monday by BCCI President Sourav Ganguly.

"Should the UK government's phased easing of Covid-19 lockdown measures proceed as planned, it is anticipated that a limited number of fans will be allowed into the Hampshire Bowl to watch the final," the ICC statement read.

Initially, the final was supposed to be held at the Lord's but the ICC Board and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) decided to change the venue to ensure that the fixture could be staged safely with the potential impact of Covid-19 minimised for all involved.

"In selecting the Hampshire Bowl, the ICC drew on ECB's experience of delivering a full summer of bio-safe international cricket in 2020."

"The venue provides world-class playing and training facilities, giving both teams the best possible environment in which to prepare," the ICC said.

"The ICC WTC final is the pinnacle event in the Test calendar and is intended to be a week-long celebration of the oldest form of the game," Geoff Allardice, ICC General Manager, Cricket said. — PTI

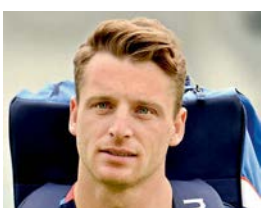
India are favourites for T20 World Cup: Buttler

Ahmedabad, March 10: England white-ball vice-captain Jos Buttler feels hosts India, who are strong in every format of the game, are favourites for this year's T20 World Cup.

India will host the tournament in October and November.

"Going into World Cups, you probably look at hosts nations one specially as strong as India who are going to be favourites for that tournament," Buttler said.

"There are many excellent teams, in the last few World Cups hosts



Jos Buttler

nations have performed very well. India is of course strong in every format and T20 is no different and especially playing at home I see India as the favourites," Buttler added.

"It's vital for us to play and hopefully you wanna

win that series and take that confidence and gel together as a group and have that clarity ahead of the World Cup."

"So, it's a fantastic opportunity for us as a side to be playing against India in World Cup conditions," he added.

"This is a great benefit for us. Being here and to play in Ahmedabad in the brand new stadium which may play a big part in the World Cup and no one has played here before. So it's a big advantage for us to learn about conditions," Buttler said. — PTI



Indian cricket captain Virat Kohli with teammates during a training session at Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Tuesday. — PTI

IPL best prep for T20 WC: Billings

Ahmedabad, March 10: England wicket-keeper batsman Sam Billings feels the upcoming IPL will be good preparation for the T20 World Cup later this year but conceded that he will get limited game time due to the "phenomenal" competition in the Delhi Capitals' squad.

"You look at the squad that Delhi have, and especially the overseas options: you could go with any combination and it would be a successful one," Sam said.

"The competition for places is phenomenal: they obviously got to the final last year, so game time might be limited,

but it comes back to the point of preparing for a World Cup and giving myself the best chance in these conditions to prepare for that."

Sam recalled the first time he got a glimpse of the flamboyant Rishabh Pant.

"With Pant, I played with him for 2 years when I was in Delhi. I turned to Rahul Dravid and asked 'who is this kid? He was smacking Nathan Coulter-Nile, Chris Morris, Rabada everywhere in the open net. I was just thinking 'this is unbelievable!' and that year he lit up. It's been great to see him evolve," Sam said. — PTI

Bach back as Olympic boss

Lausanne, March 10: International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach promised to deliver a "safe, secure" Tokyo Olympics this year as he was re-elected for a second term on Wednesday.

As he opened the IOC Session, Bach said it was no longer a question of whether the Olympics, which were postponed last year as the coronavirus pandemic spread around the globe, would take place but in what conditions they will be held.

"Tokyo remains the best prepared Olympic city ever and at this moment, we have no reason to doubt that the opening ceremony will take place on July 23," Bach said.

"The question is not whether, the question is how these Olympic Games will take place."

"The IOC is working at full speed together with our Japanese partners and friends to make the postponed Olympic Games a safe manifestation of peace, solidarity and resilience of humankind in overcoming the pandemic."

Bach said his aim was to create "a safe, secure and fair environment for all the athletes."

The local Japanese organisers are due to announce by the end of the month whether foreign



Thomas Bach

spectators will be allowed to attend the Games, although it is widely reported that they will be barred due to Covid-19 concerns.

Bach, 67, received unanimous backing in the election for IOC president in which he was the sole candidate, with 93 of the 94 valid votes from IOC members in favour of his re-election.

"Thank you very much from the bottom of my heart for this overwhelming vote of confidence and trust," said Bach, sending out a 'virtual' hug to his supporters.

"This is more overwhelming given the reforms and difficult decisions we had to take."

"It's touching me deeply and also makes me humble," the German said, describing his first eight-year mandate as "not so easy". — AFP



Dortmund's Erling Haaland celebrates after scoring his side's second goal against Sevilla during their Champions League match in Dortmund, Germany, on Tuesday. — AP

Porto end Juve campaign in CL

Turin (Italy), March 10: Cristiano Ronaldo's Juventus crashed out of the Champions League in the Last 16 for the second year running on Tuesday, losing to 10-man Porto on away goals despite winning the second leg 3-2 in Turin.

Sergio Oliveira's extra-time free-kick sent twice former winners Porto through to the quarterfinals as the tie finished 4-4 on aggregate.

Leading 2-1 from the first leg in Portugal, Oliveira's first-half penalty increased Porto's advantage but Juventus levelled the tie through two goals

from Federico Chiesa. Oliveira then rifled home a low free-kick on 115 minutes, which passed through the legs of Ronaldo, with Adrien Rabiot's header in reply coming in vain for Juventus.

Meanwhile, Erling Braut Haaland scored twice as Borussia Dortmund held off a late Sevilla fightback to reach the Champions League quarterfinals with a 'crazy, amazing' 5-4 aggregate win after a frantic 2-2 second-leg draw.

Haaland tapped in a first-half opener and scored a retaken penalty after the break at Signal Iduna Park. — AFP



Regd. No. H/SD/509/2021-23
Printed and Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at Deccan Chronicle Press situated at Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd., Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208. RNI Registration No. 3081/1957. Editor: Kaushik Mitter