

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | FRIDAY 26 | MARCH 2021

## WEATHER



**Max:** 39°C  
**Min:** 23°C  
**Rainfall:** Nil

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Panguni 13  
**Tithi:** Thrayodashi  
**Star:** Magam  
**Rahukalam:** 10.30 am to 12 noon  
**Yamagandam:** 3 pm to 4.30 pm  
**PRAYERS**  
**Fajar:** 5.01 am  
**Jumma:** 12.21 pm  
**Asar:** 3.34 pm  
**Maghrib:** 6.20 pm  
**Isha:** 7.31 pm  
**SUNSET TODAY 6.20 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.10 AM**  
**MOONRISE TODAY 4.11 PM**  
**MOONSET TOMORROW 5.02 AM**

## CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+59,069)	(+257)
1,18,46,082	1,60,983

covid19india.org

### STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+1,779)  
TN: 8,73,219 12,641

### WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

12,57,35,220

### DEATHS

27,60,675

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES  
219

worldometers.info

## Govt offers 67 blocks in second tranche of commercial coal mine auction

**New Delhi:** The government on Thursday offered 67 coal mines for sale, launching the second tranche of commercial coal mining auction and termed it a step towards 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'. This is the highest number of mines on offer in a particular tranche after commencement of the auction regime in 2014.

## SC to deliver judgement in Tata-Mistry case today

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court is scheduled to pronounce on Friday its judgement on the cross appeals filed by Tata Sons Pvt Ltd and Cyrus Investments Pvt Ltd against the NCLAT order which had restored Cyrus Mistry as the executive chairman of the over US\$ 100 billion salt-to-software Tata conglomerate. As per the Friday's cause list uploaded on the apex court website, a bench headed by Chief Justice SA Bobde would pronounce the verdict.

## COUNTER

## POINT



**I don't trust these surveys... I trust our bogus voters and vote riggers!**

# Asia's largest Tulip garden opens for public

**YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, MARCH 25**

As Spring has set in the picturesque Valley, the Asia's largest Tulip Garden situated on the banks of famed Dal Lake was thrown open for public Thursday, a day after Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, asked the countrymen to visit Jammu and Kashmir to witness the scenic tulip festival and enjoy warm hospitality of its people.

Though not many of one and a half million flowers have bloomed yet, the garden named after former Prime Minister Indira

Gandhi began attracting nature lovers including domestic and foreign tourists to enjoy the view of plant life on the first day of the opening for the brief season. Spreading over an area of about 15 hectares, the garden on the foothills of Zabarwan range will soon have tulips of nearly seventy varieties in full bloom adding colour to the landscape at 5,600 feet altitude, said the officials.

"Whenever you get the opportunity, do visit Jammu and Kashmir and witness the scenic Tulip festival," he said in a tweet.

## CITY | 2

**Palaniswami continues his whirlwind poll tour**



## 59,069 CASES IN A DAY

# Covid -ve report must for entering Bengaluru

## DC CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

The medical fitness requirements for women to get Permanent Commission in the Indian Army is "arbitrary" and "irrational", the Supreme Court said Thursday in the course of pronouncing its verdict on petitions filed by 80 women officers for permanent commission in the army. "We must recognise here that the structure of our society has been created by males, for males," the top court said. The apex court slammed the army's selective Annual Confidential Report evaluation discriminates against women officers.

"The pattern of evaluation causes economic and psychological harm to SSC (short service commission) women officers," a two-judge bench of Justices DY Chandrachud and MR Shah said.

**VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 25**

In one of the biggest single-day spikes in five months, India on Thursday recorded 59,069 new cases of Covid-19 in 24 hours along with 251 deaths. Due to the big surge in cases again, the Kumbh Mela has been curtailed to one month and Covid negative report has been mandatory for pilgrims. Besides, several states have started imposing restrictions on movement of people and all passengers to Bengaluru will now need to have a Covid-19 negative report from April 1.

The Rajasthan government has issued orders for no functions during Holi and Shab-e-Barat while two-day lockdown is expected to be imposed in Indore on Holi due to rising cases. In Chhattisgarh's Raipur, all

● **Six states — Maharashtra, Punjab, Kerala, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat — are reporting a surge in daily new cases and together they account for 80.63% of the cases reported in the last 24 hours**

tourist places have been shut down and restrictions for Holi have been imposed.

Six states — Maharashtra, Punjab, Kerala, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat — are reporting a surge in daily new cases and together they account for 80.63 per cent of the cases reported in the last 24 hours. While Maharashtra recorded 35,952 cases, Mumbai reported 5,504 fresh cases. ■ **P4**

## No development in 10 yrs, Mamata took Bengal back to 19th century: Rajnath

**Joypur (WB), March 25:** Accusing Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of "taking back Bengal to the 19th century, with no development work undertaken in the past 10 years", defence minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said the TMC dispensation, just like its predecessor, the Left Front, has

wronged the people of the state. Singh, who addressed a series of public meetings in Purulia, Bankura and South 24 Parganas districts, took at dig at the TMC's khela hobe (game will be played) slogan, and said Bengal, now on, will witness only work and development. — **PTI**

## Budget session of Parliament concludes 2 weeks ahead of schedule

**New Delhi, March 25:** Lok Sabha was on Thursday adjourned sine die, bringing the nearly two-month long Budget session to an end.

The session started on January 29 and was originally slated to end on April 8 but several members had urged Speaker Om Birla to end the session early as they focus on electioneering in five states going to polls. Speaker Birla had recently tested positive for Covid-19 and was not attending the House.

In his observations before adjourning the proceedings sine die (indefinite period), Bhartruhari Mehtab, who was in the chair, wished Birla a speedy recovery and informed members that the Speaker was stable. In Birla's absence, a panel of chairpersons, including Mehtab, Rajendra Agrawal, Rama Devi, Meenakashi Lekhi and Midun Reddy, chaired the proceedings. Panel of chairpersons usually comprises 10 members of the House who assist the Speaker run proceedings. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, several cabinet ministers and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi were present in the House. The first part of the Budget session started on January 29 with the President's address to joint sitting of both houses of Parliament. — **PTI**

# China LAC threat has only abated: Army chief

**PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 25**

Indian Army Chief General MM Naravane said on Thursday that threat at line of actual control (LAC) with China has "only abated" and "not gone away altogether."

He said that ceasefire with Pakistan at LoC has held in March barring one odd incident and he was optimistic since Pakistan army is "on board" on ceasefire. Army chief said that it was for the first time in about 5-6 years that LoC has been silent and this bodes well for the future.

Gen Naravane said that unless the elements which China had brought forward at LAC go back "we will not really be able to say that things are back to normal".

Asked if India had access to all areas at LAC it had access before April 2020, Army chief said "Some areas still remain under the discussion. I won't say that we don't have occupation of those areas but that will be the focus of our talks in the next round of discussions that take place." Gen Naravane said that there are some areas which still remain to be negotiated.

In overall scheme of things I feel that we have very strong ground to believe that we will be able to achieve all our aims," he said. On whether Chinese are still on territory that was in India's control before April 2020, Gen



● **Unless the LAC is demarcated, you can't make the statement that I am where I am. He is where he is. He doesn't have more and I don't have less. So all these questions are quite rhetorical unless LAC gets demarcated," said Gen Naravane**

Naravane replied: "No, that would be an incorrect statement. There are areas which are under nobody's control. So where we were controlling we are in those areas. Where they were controlling they are in those areas."

Army chief said that the whole issue of LAC is because of these grey areas. "Because there is no demarcated LAC and there are different claims and perceptions. So unless the LAC is demarcated, you can't make the statement that I am where I am. He is where he is. He doesn't have more and I don't have less. So all these questions are quite rhetorical unless LAC gets demarcated," said Gen Naravane.

## NATION | 4

**PM to visit ancient temple in Bangladesh**

**G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, MARCH 25**

Income-Tax sleuths stormed into 18 premises of DMK senior leader EV Velu, including the guest house of Arunai Engineering College in Tiruvannamalai where party president M K Stalin had stayed overnight and left for campaign just then, on Thursday, evoking strong political reactions, suggesting that the fear of loss in the elections has gripped the BJP and AIADMK.

That the I-T officials even searched the room in which Stalin was staying earned the wrath of DMK leaders. General Secretary of the party, Duraimurugan, called the media to say that the raids were

## SPORT | 8

**Saina reaches Orleans quarters**



# Raids at DMK leader's premises cause flutter

● **The various premises that were raided included the college properties of Velu, his offices in Chennai and Karur, his home and homes and offices of his friends and relatives**



politically motivated and the AIADMK was investigating the BJP to unleash I-T officials to intimidate the DMK leaders.

Duraimurugan even said that he suspected the Election Commission of India to have a role in the raids.

However, Chief Electoral Officer, Satyabrata Sahoo, when asked about it, told the media that the ECI has nothing to do with it. I-T officials raid premises based only on prior information, he said.

The various premises that were raided included

the college properties of Velu, his offices in Chennai and Karur, his home and homes and offices of his friends and relatives.

Since Velu, the DMK district secretary of Thiruvannamalai, is also contesting from the same constituency, Stalin was there to campaign for him.

The raids also created a flutter among the local people in Tiruvannamalai, where Velu is a popular politician, having won the constituency in 2011 and 2016 and running the engineering college since 1993. ■ **P3**

## CRPF officer, jawan killed in attack near Srinagar

**YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, MARCH 25**

An officer and a jawan of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) were killed and two others injured in a sneak attack by suspected militants at Lawaypora on the peripheries of Jammu and Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar on Thursday. The assailants are reported to have also decamped with two service rifles of the slain policemen.

The officials said that the jawans were part of a Road Opening Party (ROP) of the CRPF targeted with automatic weapons by militants. They blamed Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) for the incident and reiterated that the proscribed organization is now operating in the name of various shadow groups in J&K.

# Sri Lankan Navy arrests 54 Indian fishermen

and northeastern areas.

"Having considered the impact of foreign fishermen poaching in Sri Lankan waters on the local fishing community and the sustainability of fishery resources of Sri Lanka, the Navy is conducting regular patrols to curb illegal fishing activities in Sri Lankan waters," the Sri

Lankan Navy said in the statement.

The Lankan Navy seized a large Indian fishing vessel with 14 fishermen on board, about 3 nautical miles off the coast of Kovilan in Jaffna.

Two more Indian fishing vessels with 20 fishermen for engaging in trawling were arrested about 7 nau-

tical miles off Pesalai, Mannar and 5 nautical miles off the Iranativu Island, the statement said.

Two more Indian fishing vessels with 20 personnel were arrested about 7.5 and 8.5 nautical miles off Mullaitivu.

The two vessels had trespassing into Sri Lankan waters about 62 nautical

miles, crossing the International Boundary Line (IMBL) when the apprehension was made, the Sri Lankan Navy said in a statement. The Lankan Navy said it had previously informed the Indian authorities when similar incidents of trawling by Indian fishermen were reported. — **Agencies**

# KAMA

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People visit Asia's Largest Tulip garden on its opening day, in Srinagar, on Thursday.

— **PTI**



OTHER STORIES

BJP's Nadda in TN today

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

BJP President J P Nadda is arriving on Friday to address two public meetings and take part in an election roadshow to campaign for three of his party candidates contesting from Thittakudi, Thiruvaiyaru and Chennai Harbour constituencies for the April 6 elections to the State Assembly.

Nadda would land at Trichy by 11.40 am and then address the meeting at Thittakudi, where D Periyasami is the BJP candidate, at 12.20 pm. Then he will speak at Budalur, falling under the Thiruvaiyaru constituency where Poondi S Venkatraman is contesting in the BJP ticket.

Finally he would come to Chennai to take part in a roadshow at the Harbour constituency to seek votes for Vinoj P Selvam and then leave for Kerala where too he would address meetings and take part in road shows on Saturday.

Villagers stage protest and threaten to boycott elections

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

Nearly after two years of struggle for basic amenities, the people of Athivakkam village in Madurantakam have warned authorities of boycotting elections if their needs aren't met and have hoisted black flags in protest on Thursday.

Athivakkam which has a population of about 1,500 comes under Madurantakam constituency. According to the sources , the locals complain of lack of basic facilities like proper roads, street lights and drinking water.

Locals added that they face hard times to perform the last rites as some people have encroached the way to the burial ground.

Despite taking the matter to officers and MLA's no action was taken .Meanwhile , the villagers on Thursday hoisted black flags and demanded their needs be met.

As the state heads for the assembly election on April 6, they saw it as an opportune time to assert their demands.

The local authorities made provisions for street-lights alone. However the villagers want all of their needs to be fulfilled otherwise they said they would boycott the upcoming elections.

Cash, drugs, gold worth ₹35 cr seized in poll-bound Pondy

**Puducherry, March 25:** Law enforcement agencies have seized cash, drugs, gold, and other commodities valued at ₹35 crore, meant to be distributed as freebies in Puducherry since the model code of conduct was enforced in February.

More than 30,000 litres of liquor, arrack and toddy worth Rs 55 lakhs was confiscated since the announcement of poll date.Puducherry goes to assembly election on April 6.

Chief Electoral Officer Shurbir Singh said in a release on Thursday that there has been 'active surveillanceand strict enforcement of model code of conduct and also Excise Rules here.' As many as 93 teams of flying squads have been pressed into service and 30 rolling static surveillance teams are on duty round the clock covering all the 30 Assembly segments in the Union Territory.

Palaniswami continues his whirlwind poll tour

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

AIADMK's Chief Ministerial candidate Edappadi K. Palaniswami, continued with his whirlwind tour of the state by addressing at least six meetings in the Madurai region on Thursday, listing the things that his government had done, his plans for the future and also taking swipes at DMK leaders, particularly president M. K. Stalin.

At pastoral Alanganallur in Sholavandan constituency, Palaniswami referred to the exclusive reservation his government had provided for students of government schools in medical colleges and explained how it had helped many rural students realize their aspirations to become doctors.

Canvassing votes for his ministerial colleague R B Udhayakumar in the April 6 Assembly elections at Chekkanoorani in Thirumangalam constituency, he elaborated on his plans to bring in the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) to Madurai at a cost of Rs 1264 crore.

There he said Stalin was only attacking the AIADMK and talking ill of their alliance without having any real plans for the State.

In Usilampatti he recalled the schemes his government had implemented for the poor and also reminded them of the



Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami campaigns for Thirumangalam Assembly candidate R.B. Udhaya Kumar at Thirumangalam on Thursday.

— DC

promises made in the AIADMK manifesto to provide free washing machines, six gas cylinders a year and free Cable TV for ration card holders.

He also said that the government would get free driving licenses for people who have crossed 18 years and ensure that ration was delivered at the doorsteps of the people.

Speaking at Othakadai under Madurai East constituency, Palaniswami pointed an accusing finger

at the rival candidate and said that he would disrupt public peace.

He also recalled that in Chennai DMK cadre once beat up a restaurant owner for asking them to pay the bill for what they had eaten.

In Melur he described the constituency as one of villages and spoke about what his government had done on water management in the State. He attacked Stalin and also referred to DMK leader A Raja, recalling the case

against him on the 2G Spectrum case.

Alleging that the land grabbing will begin if the DMK came to power, Palaniswami said that the DMK would give power only to family members, who in turn would loot.

Taking a swipe at DMK Youth Wing secretary Udhayanidhi Stalin at Thiruthuraiipoondi, where he canvassed votes in favour of V V Rajan Chellappa, Palaniswami spoke about providing relief to weavers.



DMK president M.K. Stalin campaigns in Tiruvannamalai for candidates of eight Assembly constituencies on Thursday.

— K. Senthil Nathan

India's walkout at UNHRC a poll plank, says Stalin

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

India's failure to vote on a resolution against Sri Lanka at the United Nations Human Rights Council has been turned into an election issue by the DMK, whose president M K Stalin referred to it at a campaign meeting in Tiruvannamalai on Thursday and sought votes for the 'rising sun' symbol.

Canvassing votes for his party candidate E. V. Velu, who is pitted against BJP's S Thangavel in Tiruvannamalai, Stalin said the BJP had betrayed the interests of Sri Lankan Tamils by not voting against Sri Lanka.

Apart from the DMK demanding India to vote against Sri Lanka at the

UNHRC, he had personally written to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Stalin said, adding that all DMK MPs had also written to the PM urging him to vote against Sri Lanka.

When the Congress was in power at the Centre, the DMK had put pressure on the government to vote against Sri Lanka and ensured that it was done. That was when Delhi listened to Tamil Nadu and now Tamil Nadu was listening to Delhi, he said.

He asked if the PMK and AIADMK, which are in an alliance with the BJP, question the Centre for abstaining from voting by ignoring their demands. Did any of the parties or the Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami issue a statement against the Centre's betrayal of

Sri Lankan Tamils, he wondered.

By raising that issue, Stalin called up the people of Tiruvannamalai district to cast their vote in favour of the 'rising sun' symbol in all the eight constituencies and teach a lesson to the AIADMK-led alliance for failing to vote at UNHRC.

The resolution, 'Promotion of Reconciliation, Accountability and Human Rights in Sri Lanka' was taken up at the 46th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council at Geneva on Tuesday. Anyway, the resolution that accused Sri Lanka of human rights violations during the final days of its armed conflict with LTTE in 2009 was passed since 22 other nations supported it.

Impose curbs on election rallies, temple festivals



The next 10 days are crucial for Tamil Nadu on two counts; one the state government must immediately rein in Covid cases spiralling out of control and two polling will be held on April 6.

The emergence of clusters at schools and hostels in Kumbakonam and Thanjavur and also in Chennai made the state government order closure of

schools for classes 9, 10 and 11 from this week. Soon, all colleges and hostels were closed and ordered to conduct classes and hold semester exams online.

Meanwhile, a private company in Perungudi had 40 of its staff test positive. Similarly, more than 50 students of a private medical college at Enathur in Kancheepuram district tested positive. Also, a few



candidates contesting Assembly polls belonging to DMDK, MNM and DMK have contracted the virus.

In a related development, the Haridwar Kumbh Mela pilgrims were directed to

show a Covid-19 negative report. While the RT-PCR test report has been made mandatory for people to attend Kumbh, the duration has also been curtailed to just one month for the first

Hundreds of devotees take part in Kapaaleeswar temple car festival on Thursday.

— DC

time in its history.

Besides, ramping up RT-PCR tests and arranging fever camps to keep more beds, PPEs, medicines and oxygen cylinders ready, the TN government has to intensify crackdown on violators, especially in poll rallies and temple festivals.

Though the Centre opened up vaccination for all those above 45 years of age, the state is falling short on its vaccination target.

Vijayakanth goes around town

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

DMDK founder Vijayakanth went around through the constituencies of Villivakkam, Annanagar and Egmore seeking votes for the candidates of the alliance led by the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam of T T V Dhinakaran.

Perched on a campaign vehicle, Vijayakanth, sporting sunglasses, greeted the people with folded hands and also waved at them occasionally as he drove through the

roads of Chennai with party cadre accompanying him.

Vijayakanth had taken a similar ride through the roads of Gummidipoondi constituency on Wednesday.

The party treasurer Premalatha Vijayakanth was campaigning at Vridhachalam, where she is the DMDK candidate and her brother L K Sudeesh is down with Covid-19.

Premalatha, who underwent a RT-PCR test on Thursday, was negative for Coronavirus and con-

tinued with her campaign at the constituency that had one returned Vijayakanth to the Assembly.

Earlier, the DMDK candidate for Salem West constituency Mohan Raj had tested positive for Covid-19 and left the campaign to party workers.

Another senior leader of the party, B Parthasarathy, who was spearheading the alliance talks on behalf of the party, tested positive for Covid-19 and is under isolation. So, he too was not available for the campaign.

This CPI candidate lives in hut

**Chennai, March 23:** In a political battle which has quite a few crorepatris in fray, CPI's K Marimuthu is a relatively poor candidate, with the Left nominee having a few thousand rupees in his possession and lives in a hut.

Single phase polling to 234 Assembly constituencies is scheduled in Tamil Nadu on April 6 and the CPI is contesting from six seats as part of the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance.

The party has fielded Marimuthu from the traditional left stronghold of Thiruthuraiipoondi, a reserved segment in Tiruvarur district.

While some of his own comrades contesting the polls have declared movable and immovable assets valued at a few crores of rupees, many other rivals even own swanky four-wheelers that could cost a fortune to many.

Marimuthu, living in a hut, is keen to serve people from Thiruthuraiipoondi. CPI has no representation in the outgoing Assembly. Marimuthu's wife owns 75 cents of land while he has ₹3,000 cash in hand, besides ₹58,156 in bank balance. His spouse has ₹1,000 and total movable assets valued at ₹79,304, according to the poll affidavit filed by the CPI nominee. Her immovable assets total Rs 1.75 lakh while the aspiring legislator has none.

"People in my constituency are poor. They have no patta or means to build houses and so continue to live in huts," the 50-year-old Marimuthu said.

While he has been in active politics since 1994, Marimuthu and his family reside in a hut in Kaduvakudi village and use earthen stove as they cannot afford to refill LPG.

Two years ago, when cyclone Gaja blew his hut, Marimuthu who obtained ₹50,000 through a NGO to mend it, gave the entire sum to another person in the village who was ineligible for compensation as he did not have a patta and helped him repair the hut.

"I will safeguard the farm lands and ensure employment in the constituency (if he wins)" Marimuthu who had been in the forefront of agitations against hydrocarbon project, assures. He had been CPI Kottur union secretary for a decade.

Thiruthuraiipoondi has been CPI's bastion since 1971, though DMK's P Adalarasan had won the seat in the 2016 Assembly election.

CPI is now contesting in alliance with the DMK and this may brighten Marimuthu's prospects at the hustings. His main challenger is ruling AIADMK's Sureshkumar. PTI

----- Nannilam Assembly constituency -----

Equals in show of strength in Nannilam

R. VALAYAPATHY | DC  
TIRUVARUR, MARCH 25

Nannilam assembly constituency in Tiruvarur district is yet another constituency which is the cynosure of all eyes, as Food minister R. Kamaraj is contesting for the third time, with hopes of pulling a hat trick in the elections, while his opponent DMK candidate and party's Kudavasal north union secretary, Jothiraman, is also meeting the voters across the constituency, highlighting the misdeeds of the AIADMK government in the last 10 years.

When Kamaraj contested in Nannilam constituency in the 2011 election against DMK nominee Elangovan, there was an overall aversion among not only politicians, but also voters that Kamaraj was a person from Mannargudi.

However, this was subsequently erased by Kamaraj by his overall performance as two-time MLA-cum-minister, who handled the food portfolio in an effective manner. In

the present situation also, his achievements in Nannilam constituency will help him.

Initially this time, AIADMK cadres were not really enthusiastic in their campaigning, but after Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami's recent campaign at Valangaiman in favour of Kamaraj, the cadres picked up vigour; and now, they are all out campaigning in support of Kamaraj.

DMK nominee, Jothiraman, former chairman, Kudavasal panchayat union, is well-known among the locals and is also canvassing for votes, but party cadres here are disappointed that although DMK president M.K. Stalin recently campaigned in Tiruvarur constituency, he had skirted Nannilam constituency. They want Stalin to campaign in favour of Jothiraman.

Nannilam constituency is one among the reserve constituency, and was changed as general constituency after 48 years during the recent struc-

ture of assembly segments by the election commission of India (ECI). The constituency has a total electorate of 2,71,466 including 1,36,159 women, and there are several communities like Pillai, Kallar, Mutharaiyar and Dalits, with Dalits high in number, which could be the deciding factor.

According to minister Kamaraj, he had achieved several things in the last two tenure including establishment of government arts colleges in Nannilam, Kudavasal, engineering colleges in Valangaiman, the Kudimaramathu project across the constituency, 20 'amma' mini-clinics, over 40 bridges are under construction, a new bus stand worth Rs 3 crore is coming up in Nannilam, and a Rs 10 crore food-processing unit is also coming up in Nannilam, a new rail over-bridge work is going on at Peralam at a cost of Rs 17 crore, and almost all eligible old age persons have been sanctioned old age pension across the constituency. These achievements would work

towards his victory this time also, hopes Kamaraj.

Since the constituency is agriculture-oriented and crops like paddy, cotton and sugarcane are largely cultivated, farmers here want the new government to establish value-added products units with facilities to stock raw materials of agriculture produce, especially straw (vaikkol).

Voters, especially in Mudikondan and surroundings, want the government to think of alternate routes as the proposed Chennai Kanyakumari industrial belt would severely affect their livelihood, and also want a ring road between Poonthottam and Peralam.

As on date, there will be an equal battle between Kamaraj and DMK's Jothiraman. Candidates of Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam, Makkal Neethi Maiyam and Naam Tamilar Katchi, also are there in the fray. It is expected that they cannot succeed here, but certainly can split the vote share.



PMK founder-leader Ramadoss canvassing in Royapettah on Thursday.

— DC



## IN BRIEF

## Gold worth ₹18.90 lakh seized by Chennai air customs

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

Customs officials at the Chennai airport seized gold worth ₹18.90 lakhs.

According to the press statement from customs, based on intelligence that gold was likely to be smuggled from Dubai by concealing in aircraft, Air India flight AI 906 which arrived from Dubai was rummaged.

On rummaging one packet wrapped with white adhesive tape was found ingeniously concealed in the rear toilet of the aircraft. On cut opening, one gold kada and one gold chain totally weighing 408 grams valued at ₹18.90 lakhs were recovered and seized under Customs Act. Further investigation is on progress.

## Centre rejects Pondy govt's 10% quota for govt school students

Chennai, March 25: The Madras High Court was told on Thursday that the Centre has rejected the then Puducherry government's proposal to provide 10 per cent reservation to government school students in admission in UG medical courses under the state quota.

When the petition from Subulakshmi, a minor who was represented by her mother Mahalakshmi from the union territory, seeking a direction to the Centre on the matter came up before Justice B Pugalendhi, Ad-

ditional Solicitor General (ASG) Sankaranarayanan filed a counter-affidavit.

The counter stated that in view of the differences between the then government (led by Congress' V Narayanasamy) and then Lt Governor (Kiran Bedi), the matter was referred to the Central government.

The proposal was examined by the Centre in consultation with the Union Ministries for Health and Education and it rejected the same. The Puducherry government was also informed accordingly.

through a letter dated March 24, it added.

Opposing it, petitioner's counsel P Wilson told the judge that the stand of the central government would sound a 'death knell' to a similar quota introduced by the Tamil Nadu government, providing 7.5 per cent reservation in medical admissions to government school students who clear Neet.

The stand was against the Legislative power of a state under List III and also against the decision of the

constitutional bench of the Supreme Court, which had approved such inservice-reservations.

The power to grant inservice reservation was permitted for a State in the interest of welfare of the students and the central government cannot term it as illegal.

The decision of the central government was unfortunate and would run against the concept of social justice, he added. The judge posted the matter for further hearing in the first week of April.

—PTI

## Housing sale grows 74% in 2021 Q1 in Chennai

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

Chennai, which reeled under the pandemic stress, has shown a significant growth in residential sale in quarter 1 (January-March) of 2021 compared to 2020.

According to the latest JLL report released on Thursday, the Chennai residential market has grown by 74 per cent compared to Q1 2020. When the city sold out 2,453 units in the pre-lockdown quarter, the fresh quarter had registered sale of 3,200. The sale was driven by the southern suburbs including Perungudi, Pallavaram, Medavakkam, Navalur, Thalambur and Nanganallur, which accounted for nearly 60

per cent of the total off-take during the quarter.

Apart from Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Pune have also surpassed the sales volume of Q1 2020. Overall sales increased by 17 per cent on a sequential basis.

Mumbai has consistently been the largest contributor to sales in the last four quarters. In Q1 2021, Mumbai accounted for 23 per cent of the sales, followed by Delhi NCR with a share of 21 per cent.

Dr Samantak Das, chief economist and head, research, JLL said the sustained growth in sales presents clear signs of demand and buyer confidence returning to the market. This has been on the back of historically low home loan interest rates, stagnant

residential prices and lucrative payment plans. The ease of lockdown restrictions and commencement of the vaccination drive have further aided in bringing buyers back to the market, he said.

As the sector shows signs of recovery, prominent developers are expected to be at an advantage and capture a greater share of the market. Homebuyers have become more cautious in their purchase decisions. There is an increased preference for investing in projects by developers with an established track record. The housing loan rate going below 7 per cent for the first time in the last decade also triggered sales in all segments in the residential real estate, he added.

## Electrician murdered in drunken brawl, kin stage protest

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

The family of a 24-year-old man who was killed during a drunken brawl at a Tasmac in Puluthivakkam staged a protest outside the Padalam police station on Thursday demanding the arrest of murderers.

The deceased has been identified as Vinoth alias Robin, (24) a resident of

Mangalam village near Vedanthangal in Chengalpet district. He worked as an electrician, sources said.

According to the police, a few days back while Vinoth was boozing in a tarmac bar in Puluthivakkam, he got into a drunken brawl with a gang.

During an argument, the gang reportedly roughed him up and fled

the spot.

Vinoth alias Robin who was severely injured was rushed to the Chengalpet government for treatment.

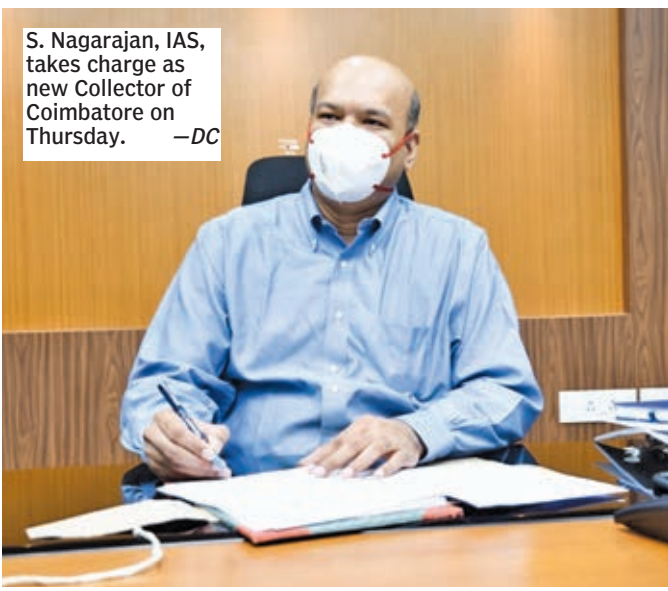
Meanwhile, on Thursday, he passed away at the hospital. After the news of his demise spread, the kith and kin of the deceased staged a protest outside the Padalam police station demanding immedi-

ate arrest of the gang responsible for his death.

The Padalam police have registered a case in connection with the murder and have begun investigation.

The police said they have taken a few employees of the Tasmac into custody.

CCTV footage from the place is being scrutinized, the police added.



S. Nagarajan, IAS, takes charge as new Collector of Coimbatore on Thursday. —DC

## Poll awareness rally

DC CORRESPONDENT  
THANJAVUR, MARCH 25

Collector M. Govinda Rao flagged off a rally of differently-abled persons here on Thursday to create an awareness about cent percent voting in the coming elections. Nearly 50 differently-abled persons took part in the rally, with

their two-wheelers fitted with extra wheels. The collector appealed to the differently-abled persons to vote without fail. Ramps have been provided in booths and for the visually handicapped, Braille ballot papers have been arranged, the collector added. The rally went via the main streets and ended at Annai Sathya stadium.

## Staff test Covid+, jewellery mart closed

Tiruchy, March 25: City corporation commissioner, S. Sivasubramanian, has ordered closure of a popular jewellery store in the city for three days, as one of the relatives of an employee there, was confirmed Covid-19 positive.

A corporation release said, following this, the Commissioner also ordered to conduct Covid-19 tests for all the 42 staff including the shop owner. He warned that any one in commercial establishments not following measures like wearing face masks and social distancing would be severely punished.

—DC

## Rise in Covid-19 cases: Tighten vigil, says forum

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC  
OOTY, MARCH 25

The Coonoor consumer protection association (CCPA) expressed concern over politicians not adhering to mask-wearing norms during electioneering, and wanted poll officials as well as local body officials to be strict with the candidates and their supporters canvassing here, since there is a steady increase in Covid-19 positive cases here.

S. Manogaran, president, CCPA, said that the Nilgiris has witnessed a little over 160 Covid-19 positive cases in the past two weeks alone. This is not only alarming, but also a warning signal to officials to be extra cautious in implementing Covid-19 prevention norms.

## Pondy reports 95 new Covid-19 cases, overall tally climbs to 40,740

Puducherry, March 25 : The union territory of Puducherry logged 95 fresh coronavirus cases during the last 24 hours taking the overall tally to 40,740, a senior official of the Directorate of Health and Family Welfare Services said on Thursday. No fresh

fatality was reported and the number of fatalities remained at 679, Director of Health and Family S Mohan Kumar said in a release. The 95 new cases were identified at the end of the examination of 2,039 people in the Union Territory, he added.

—PTI

in recent times, the steady increase of Covid-19 cases is now a real cause of concern. "We appreciate that the Nilgiris district administration has formed a few teams to penalize those defying Covid-19 prevention

norms. The mask-wearing culture and social distancing norms also seems to be on the wane. Of late, political candidates in the three constituencies here and their supporters are often seen visiting villages and other places to seek votes without following the Covid-19 prevention norms. Footage in various social media is proof of this. Quite a few politicians who are on a day-to-day campaign here are negligent in wearing masks and keeping social distance. So, officials here must form special teams to monitor these politicians. Candidates should be strictly directed to wear face masks and comply with social distancing norms," Manogaran added.

reachings Salem by a helicopter and from Gajalnaickenpatty, would reach the venue by road. In the meeting, both leaders would campaign for the 11 candidates in the DMK alliance in Salem district. The meeting will be held in 10.5 acres of land, and we expect one lakh cadres from the DMK and our alliance partners to participate in the meeting, he added.

"In Salem district, we have not made complaints against any officials to the election commission, since most of them are working neutrally. But a few police officials, in a show of support to the ruling AIADMK are creating hindrance for the DMK's campaigning and public meeting. We urge these police officials to change their attitude, or we will have to file complaints against them with the concerned authorities," Rajendran added.

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SHORT TAKES

PARLIAMENT  
BUDGET SESSION  
ENDS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

The Budget session of Parliament was on Thursday adjourned sine die much ahead of its April 8 scheduled closure owing to the Assembly elections in four states and one Union Territory.

The month-long second part of the Budget session began on March 8 and was scheduled to end on April 8.

Several MPs at the behest of their parties had earlier approached parliamentary affairs minister Prahlad Joshi, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and chairman of Rajya Sabha M. Venkaiah Naidu to curtail the session, citing elections as the reason.

Trinamool Congress leaders Sudip Bandyopadhyay and Derek O'Brien had written respectively to the Lok Sabha Speaker and the Rajya Sabha chairman, requesting them to adjourn the proceedings.

The first part of the Budget Session commenced with the address of President Ram Nath Kovind on January 29 and concluded on February 29.

Elections are due to be held in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Kerala, Assam and Puducherry from March 27 to April 29. The results will be announced on May 2.

The session witnessed several protests by the Opposition and repeated stalling of proceedings over the three contentious farm laws, rising fuel prices and the passage of the controversial NCT of Delhi Bill which provides greater powers to the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi in matters related to administration of the city.

WILL NO LONGER  
CALL RSS 'SANGH  
PARIVAR': RAHUL

New Delhi, March 25: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said it is not right to call the RSS and its associated groups 'Sangh Parivar' as a family has women, respect for elders, compassion and affection, and the organisation has none of these.

Gandhi's remarks come a day after he said the alleged harassment of nuns belonging to a Kerala-based congregation in Uttar Pradesh was a result of the Sangh Parivar's "vicious propaganda" to pitch one community against another and trample on minorities.

In a tweet in Hindi on Thursday, he said he will no longer refer to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh as 'Sangh Parivar', united family.

"I believe it is not right to call the RSS and associated organizations Sangh Parivar - there are women in the family, there is respect for the elderly, a sense of compassion and affection - which is not there in the RSS," he said on Twitter.

"Now I will not call RSS 'Sangh Parivar'" the Congress leader added.

RAUT BATS FOR  
PAWAR AS  
UPA CHIEF

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

Shiv Sena MP Mr. Sanjay Raut on Thursday said that NCP Chief Mr. Sharad Pawar should take over the reigns of the UPA.

Speaking to reporters Mr. Raut said, "The UPA is paralysed now. I think NCP chief Sharad Pawar should lead the UPA at the national level. When asked whether other parties support his demand," he said, "I don't think any regional party in the country has objection to Sharad Pawar heading the UPA. All of us are opposing the BJP at the moment."

This statement drew sharp criticism from the Congress with leaders asking Mr. Raut to keep his views with himself. Maharashtra Congress chief Mr. Nana Patole complained about Mr. Raut to the Maharashtra Chief Minister Mr. Uddhav Thackeray.

Mr. Patole said, Raut is a Shiv Sena MP. Shiv Sena is not a part of UPA. We told this to the Chief Minister also. He said that he will take up this issue." Insiders say that since the UPA chairperson is not keeping well there needs to be change in the top leadership of the UPA to fight the BJP effectively. Congress leader Husain Dalwai said, "Sena got more seats (in the last election), hence, it got the Chief Minister's post. But the Sena is still not part of the UPA. There is no need to take Mr. Raut's statement seriously."

# Govt pauses 'vaccine maitri' drive due to surge in cases

India records 53,476 new cases, biggest single-day rise in 5 months

FROM PG 1

Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai has decided to take up testing to at least 60,000 per day in coming weeks to contain the spread.

Given the situation in India, the government has decided to pause 'Vaccine Maitri', its diplomatic initiative, and temporarily put on hold large exports of the AstraZeneca-Oxford-SII vaccine, Covishield.

India's last commercial shipment was to Namibia on March 22 and the last dispatch of free vaccines was to Malawi on March 18. So far, more than 60 million doses of Made in India vaccines have been supplied to over 75 countries, including through COVAX, led by Gavi, the global vaccine alliance. With the government opening up vaccination for a larger chunk of population over the age of 45, the demand of vaccines at domestic level is expected

## Four school students in Odisha test +ve for virus

AKSHAYA KUMAR  
SAHOO | DC  
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 25

Odisha on Thursday reported 214 fresh Covid-19 cases, the highest single-day spike in the last two months. Of the 214 positives, 126 were detected in quarantine centres while the rest 88 were local transmission cases. With 33 new cases, Khurda district reported the maximum number of infections followed by Sudargarh (27 cases), while Bolangir and Cuttack each reported 20 cases.

With the inclusion of Thursday's figures, the cumulative infected cases in the state has gone up to

3,39,460. Odisha now has 1,151 active cases while 3,36,337 patients have recovered from the infection so far, said the state health and family welfare department.

With the increase in cases across the state, district administrations have started imposing night curfew in their respective regions as a measure to prevent the outbreak of a second wave. After Malkangiri, the Nabarangpur district administration on Wednesday evening decided to impose night curfew from March 25 between 8 pm and 6 am.

As many as four school students — three of a private school and one of Kend-

riya Vidyalaya-I, Bhubaneswar on Thursday tested positive for Covid-19. The three students of the private school are hostel boarders. They were asked to vacate the hostel. Their swab samples were earlier collected for testing after they developed Covid-19 symptoms.

On Thursday, the authorities of Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, postponed the examinations for Under Graduate and Post-graduate students scheduled for the day. The decision was taken following the detection of two Covid-19 positive cases in the varsity, informed examination controller Trilochan Mishra.

ed to rise manifold forcing the Centre to recalibrate its export commitments. Sources said the Indian government wants to first fulfil its domestic commitment before allowing exports of Covishield. India is likely to remove these restrictions after three months or so when more vaccines like Reddy-SupnikV and others enter the Indian market in a big way.

India's decision has irked the UN-backed international vaccine alliance Gavi which blamed India for going back on its export commitments. In a statement, Gavi said deliveries of the Covid-19 vaccines to low-income economies will face delays due to India's decision to halt exports.

However, sources in the government clarified that India has not imposed any ban on export of the vaccines but is only recalibrating supply schedules due to domestic commitment and manufacturing capacity.

## PM to visit ancient temple in B'desh

SRIDHAR  
KUMARASWAMI | DC  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

On the eve of his two-day visit to Bangladesh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said that he looked forward to offering prayers to Goddess Kali at the ancient Jashoreshwari Kali Temple, one of the 51 Shaktipeeths in the Puranic tradition, at Sathkira in western Bangladesh and also interacting with representatives of the Matua community at Orakandi in the eastern part of that country where 19th century Vaishnava seer Sri Harichandra Thakur disseminated his pious message.

Incidentally, the Hindu Matua community is also

reportedly present in considerable numbers in West Bengal that goes to the polls shortly.

The Prime Minister also said that he looked forward to his participation at the Bangladesh National Day celebrations in Dhaka on Friday and described the founder of Bangladesh "Bangabandhu" Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as one of the tallest leaders of the last Century, whose life and ideals continue to inspire millions. He added that he also looked forward to visiting Bangabandhu's Samadhi in Tungipara to pay respects to his memory. Modi said, "I will be visiting Bangladesh on 26-27 March 2021, at the invitation of Her Excellency Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina."

## Court extends Vaze's NIA custody till Apr 3

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC  
MUMBAI, MARCH 25

A special court on Thursday extended NIA custody of suspended API Sachin Vaze till April 3. The NIA had arrested Vaze in connection with the recovery of explosives-laden SUV near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence 'Antilia' in South Mumbai and now the murder of Mansukh Hire, which is also connected to bomb scare case has been transferred to the central probe agency.

The NIA produced Vaze before the court, as his police custody expired on Thursday. The NIA has invoked provisions of stringent Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) against Vaze. He

## No wrongdoing in police transfers: CS

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC  
MUMBAI, MARCH 25

Maharashtra chief secretary Sitaram Kunte on Thursday submitted a five-page report to chief minister Uddhav Thackeray denying any wrongdoing in police transfers and postings in the state. The CM had asked Kunte to give a "detailed report" following controversy over a report submitted by for-

mer state intelligence commissioner Rashmi Shukla on the alleged transfer racket in the home department.

Kunte's report states that no transfers were done during the period in which IPS officer Shukla tapped the phones and submitted her report. "In 2020, except in a few cases, all transfers were done on the recommendation of the police establishment board," the report said.

was arrested on March 13. Vaze's lawyer contended

that UAPA could not be attracted in this case.

# Aasu calls people to reject BJP in Assam

MANOJ ANAND | DC  
GUWAHATI, MARCH 25

On the day when the electioneering for the first phase of assembly polls came to an end, the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) asked the people of Assam to "reject the BJP that seeks to divide the people on communal lines and impose the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which threatens the existence of the Assamese people".

In fact the Congress led grand alliance and regional forces Asom Jatiya Parishad and Rajgor Dal have been defining the ongoing assembly polls as a referendum on controversial CAA, whereas the ruling BJP has chosen to remain silent on the issue in its election campaign and decided to counter the opposition with its development plank.

The implementation of the controversial law, which the BJP says it is committed to, is not part of the 10 promises it gave to the people of Assam in its election manifesto.

If the BJP leaders are confident and claims to have gained the ground that the party had lost during the anti-CAA movement in Upper Assam, going to poll in first phase of polling on March 27, the opposition Congress led grand alliance and two regional outfits are also equally hopeful and leaving no stone unturned to refresh and remind the anger that people had expressed during the anti-CAA movement that started in December 2019 and turned violent in Assam.

The Congress has promised a rollback of the CAA through a state legislation

● **THE HIGH-PITCHED campaign for the first phase of poll in Assam in 47 assembly constituencies slated for March 27 came to an end on Thursday evening.**

● **THE POLL will decide the fate of 264 candidates.**

● **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 was the central issue in the state, which was rocked by violence and protests against it, but BJP maintained a studied silence on it.**

in Assam, if voted to power.

The voice of the opposition was further boosted as hitting out at the BJP leaders for their statements on the implementation of CAA, the Aasu said

that the people of Assam would respond to the injustice and humiliation caused to them. "It's time to make progressive regionalism our guiding spirit to protect Assam and the Assamese," the Aasu, two days before the polling for the first phase, said.

The student activists also staged protest demonstrations at prominent locations of the state, district and sub-divisional headquarters asserting that the CAA would never be accepted by the people of Assam. The Aasu was also instrumental in formation of a new political party — Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) contesting the ensuing assembly polls against BJP.

"BJP national president J.P. Nadda on Tuesday had declared in Guwahati that the Act would be imple-

mented in letter and spirit. The party which came to power with the promise to protect the 'jati-maati-bhetti', betrayed the people by paying the way for legalising lakhs of Hindu Bangladeshis," AASU president Dipanka Nath said.

The students' union alleged that despite knowing that the implementation of the CAA would pose grave threat to the existence of the indigenous population, Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal, an ex-Aasu leader, confirmed that the CAA would be implemented in the state.

Meanwhile the stage is set for the first phase of polling in 47 constituencies of Upper and North Assam.

The electioneering for these constituencies came to an end on Thursday.

## Bengal tops in political ad spend on Facebook

Kolkata, March 25: The four states and one union territory that are going to polls from March 27, West Bengal emerged as the topper in spending for political advertisements on Facebook this year, according to data available with the social media platform.

Besides West Bengal, assembly elections will be held in three other states Assam, Kerala and Tamil Nadu and in the union territory of Puducherry.

The Facebook ad spend of the Trinamool Congress which seeks to return to power in West Bengal for the third consecutive term, exceeds that of the BJP, the main rival of the Mamata Banerjee-led party, in 90 days till March 22, the data revealed.

During the period, political parties of West Bengal spent about ₹3.74 crore on poll-related campaigns which fall under Facebook's advertisement category of 'social issues, election or politics'.

In ad spend under this category, West Bengal is followed by Tamil Nadu (₹3.3 crore), Assam (₹61.77 lakh), Kerala (₹38.86 lakh) and Puducherry (₹3.34 lakh) during the period, as per the data.

The Trinamool Congress has spent the maximum amount among parties, around ₹1.69 crore, of West Bengal during the period on campaigns such as "Banglar Gorbo Mamata" (Bengal's pride Mamata).

It also has constituency

● **POLITICAL PARTIES of West Bengal spent about ₹3.74 crore on poll-related campaigns which fall under Facebook's advertisement category of 'social issues, election or politics'.**

level versions such as "Dum Dum-er Garbo Mamata".

The TMC's digital advertisements are handled by the Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC) which runs other campaigns also for the party on the social media platform.

During the period under review, another Facebook page run by the name of "Khotikarok Modi" (Harmful Modi), has spent ₹33.12 lakh in political ads, according to the data. The state BJP's Facebook ad spend is around ₹25.31 lakh. It is advertising campaigns such as *Amar Paribar BJP Paribar* (My family is BJP family) and *Aar Noi Annay* (No more injustice).

The Facebook page of the TMC has 1.3 million followers while that of the West Bengal BJP has 1.7 million followers.

The state Congress spent around ₹5 lakh in advertisements on Facebook while the amount spent by Left parties is negligible.

According to an analyst, the total spending on digital advertisements of political parties would be more as they do not always pay directly for campaigns. — PTI

## Centre to send 50,000 troops to WB for May 2

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

After a record deployment of nearly one lakh troops for elections in West Bengal, Home Ministry sources claim that more than 50,000 central security personnel will be deployed at more than 30,000 counting centres across Bengal on May 2.

This massive deployment on May 2 counting day would be in addition to the one made by the local state police.

Top Home Ministry sources claimed that apart from violence during the elections, violence was also expected on the counting day, particularly in closely contested seats.

Hence a detailed blueprint for security of counting centres has been prepared by the Election Commission in consultation with the Home Ministry.

Bengal is witnessing an unprecedented eight-phase polling in Assembly elections this time which starts on

March 27 and the last phase of polling will be on April 29. Counting will be held across all five states on May 2.

Election Commission has deployed the highest number of central security forces this time with over a lakh para-military personnel to be on election duty this time around in Bengal.

However, both Home Ministry and election Commission admit that not just the elections but even counting in the "extremely sensitive state" was also extremely critical this time. Even elaborate security arrangements are being made for the protection of EVMs that will be kept at different strong rooms across the state.

Securing EVMs is also a challenge for the Election Commission and security forces since the first phase of polling will be held on March 27 while the last and eight phase of polling will be held almost a month later on April 29.

KERALA | POLLS

Former technocrat has vowed to make Palakkad city the best in the country in five years

# BJP hopes to chug into Palakkad with 'Metroman'

Palakkad, March 25: In a literal young versus old battle, BJP's 'Metroman' E. Sreedharan will take on sitting Congress MLA Shafi Parambil here for the April 6 Kerala Assembly elections, seeking to convert his technocrat charisma into votes.

A fierce triangular contest is expected this time in Palakkad, held by the United Democratic Front (UDF) since 2011, as the ruling LDF has also fielded a first timer, to take on the Congress and the BJP.

The BJP, buoyed by its success in Palakkad in the recent civic polls, has fielded the 88-year old Sreedharan to fight it out with the 38 year-old Parambil, seeking a hatrick of terms.

Clad in a pastel colour shirt and traditional dhoti, Sreedharan moves swiftly from one voter to another with folded hands and his trademark gentle smile. At

88, age seems to be no barrier for Sreedharan to fit himself into the garb of a seasoned politician, as stated by his critics.

Talking to people gathered around and reminding them to cast their votes on April 6 Assembly polls, the technocrat-turned-political leader travels from one place to another quickly, mingling with the crowd at ease.

With the unexpected entry of Sreedharan in the poll fray as BJP nominee, Palakkad, the land of palmyra, paddy fields and chariot races in central Kerala, has now captured national attention.

While UDF has once again reposed faith in Parambil, the ruling CPI (M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF), fresh from its good show in the recent civic polls in the state, aims to upset the plans of the two national parties. It has fielded a new face, C.P.

Pramod to take on the other two.

The UDF is banking on the popular image and personal influence of Parambil in the constituency and on various development and welfare initiatives implemented by him. Of the total 1.37 lakh votes polled during 2016 Assembly elections, Shafi had garnered 57,559 votes while his nearest rival Shobha Surendran of BJP got 40,076 votes and CPI(M) candidate N.N. Krishnadass received 38,675 votes.

A constant presence in the constituency, the young Parambil could successfully establish close personal ties with different walks of people including those in various Hindu communities during his 10-year stint.

The Congress Legislator said he was sure the voters in Palakkad were happy with his performance in



● **THE PALAKKAD ASSEMBLY constituency has 1,88,534 registered voters including 96,774 women and three transgenders.**

the last 10 years and would give him another chance to represent them in the Assembly.

Known for his firebrand speeches, Shafi is also the state president of Youth Congress. However,

Sreedharan seems unfazed by the youngster's popularity and is making all attempts to reach out to maximum number of voters in limited time.

He also seemed to be unperturbed about the controversies and criticisms raised by his political opponents.

The octogenarian recently hit headlines after photos of some voters washing his feet and others prostrating at his feet, went viral. Though his critics alleged that the photos reflected his 'feudal mindset', an unfazed Sreedharan said washing elders' feet reflected Indian culture.

The former technocrat, who has vowed to make Palakkad city the best in the country in five years, talks more development and less politics during the campaign meetings.

"My main focus and priority is development. The

BJP is fighting the polls on the plank of development," he said.

The BJP is pinning hope on its increasing vote share in the constituency, which comprises Pirayiri, Kannadi and Mathur village panchayats and Palakkad Municipality.

Palakkad Municipality is one of the two civic bodies in which the saffron party is in power in the state.

If the BJP's vote share in Palakkad was 19.86 per cent in 2011 Assembly polls, it increased to 29.08 per cent in 2016 and touched 29.76 per cent during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

The saffron party hopes that Sreedharan's high profile persona and clean image would bring it rich electoral dividends.

It also wants to make a mark among the various Hindu communities, who seem have a soft corner for the UDF candidate,

through Sreedharan's candidature.

Meanwhile, LDF nominee Pramod, entrusted with the task of taking on two big players, is making all possible efforts to reach out to maximum number of voters.

During the campaign, he highlights the development programmes implemented by the Pinarayi Vijayan government in various sectors, especially in health, education and infrastructure during the last five years.

His hopes lie on the votes garnered by the Left front in Palakkad Assembly segment during the last Parliamentary elections.

LDF candidate M.B. Rajesh had polled 32.83 per cent votes during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

The Palakkad Assembly constituency has 1,88,534 registered voters including 96,774 women and three transgenders. — PTI



## SHORT TAKES

MYANMAR  
PROTESTS AGAIN  
MET WITH FORCE

**Yangon, March 25:** Protesters against last month's military takeover in Myanmar returned to the streets in large numbers on Thursday, a day after staging a silence strike in which people were urged to stay home and businesses to close for the day.

Security forces sought to break up protests by force. Social media accounts and local news outlets reported attacks on demonstrators in Hpa-an, the capital of Karen state, as well as the eastern Shan state's capital Taunggyi and Mon state's capital of Mawlamyein.

BALLISTIC  
MISSILES FIRED  
BY N. KOREA

**Seoul, March 25:** North Korea test-fired its first ballistic missiles since President Joe Biden took office on Thursday, as it expands its military capabilities and increases pressure on Washington while nuclear negotiations remain stalled.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said the launches threaten peace and safety in Japan and the region, and that Tokyo will closely coordinate with Washington and Seoul on the North's testing activities.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the missiles were fired at around 7:06 a.m. and 7:25 a.m. from an area on the North's eastern coast and flew 450 kilometres on an apogee of 60 kilometres before landing in the sea.

ISRAELI POLL:  
ARAB LEADER IS  
KINGMAKER

**Jerusalem, March 25:** Mansour Abbas, an Arab leader in Israel seems to have emerged as the unusual "kingmaker" whose possible support has split open differences not only in the ruling Likud party, but also in its right-wing coalition, making the road to the government formation even more bumpy for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu's Likud party has emerged as the largest party, with all votes counted in Israel's unprecedented fourth election in less than two years. It still does not have a clear path to a 61-seat majority needed to form a coalition in the 120 member Knesset. The anti-Netanyahu bloc, comprising left, right and centrist factions, is also short of a majority in a highly-divided Israeli political spectrum.

CHINA RIFT: MORE  
SHIPS DEPLOYED  
BY PHILIPPINES

**Manila, March 25:** The Philippine military has ordered more navy ships to be deployed for sovereignty patrols in the South China Sea, where a Chinese flotilla has swarmed around a disputed reef and ignored Manila's demand to leave the area.

Philippine Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana has asked about 200 Chinese vessels he described as militia boats to immediately leave Whitsun Reef, a shallow coral region about 175 nautical miles (324 kilometers) west of Bataraza town in the western Philippine province of Palawan. China ignored the call, insisting it owns the offshore territory and that the vessels were sheltering from rough seas.

Military chief Gen. Cirilito Sobejana ordered the deployment of additional navy ships to beef up the country's mar-

NAVALNY HEALTH  
WORSENS  
IN PRISON

**Moscow, March 25:** Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has suffered back pains and leg problems in prison, his lawyer said Thursday.

The lawyer, Olga Volkova, said Navalny's condition has notably deteriorated in recent days. "He's suffering strong pains in his back and his right leg. He's feeling numbness in his right lower leg," Volkova said outside the prison in remarks carried by independent *Dozhd TV*. "His right leg is in terrible shape." The 44-year-old Navalny, who is President Vladimir Putin's most outspoken opponent, was arrested on Jan. 17 upon his return from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from a nerve-agent poisoning.

## Unifying United Kingdom



Union flags flutter as police officers pass the Palace of Westminster in central London on Thursday. Under new guidance from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Union flag is to be flown on UK government buildings every day in a bid to unite the nation. — *AFP*

## Suez Canal suspends traffic

## Facing 'extreme difficulty' refloating stuck vessel: Owners

**Cairo, March 25:** The owners of a giant container vessel blocking the Suez Canal said Thursday they were facing "extreme difficulty" refloating it, prompting Egypt to suspend navigation through one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

Shipping analysts warned the suspension could last days or even weeks, forcing businesses to consider diverting their cargos to the much longer route round the tip of Africa in a blow to global supply networks. The Suez Canal Authority (SCA) said it was doing all it could to refloat the Panama-flagged MV Ever Given, a 400-metre (1,300-foot) long vessel which veered off course and ran aground in a sandstorm on Tuesday.

Satellite pictures released by Planet Labs Inc show the 59-metre wide container ship wedged diagonally across the canal. Japanese ship-leasing firm Shoei Kisen Kaisha said it owned the giant vessel and was facing "extreme difficulty" trying to refloat it. "In co-operation with local authorities and Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement, a vessel management company, we are trying to refloat (the ship), but we are facing extreme difficulty," Shoei Kisen Kaisha said in a statement on its website.

"We sincerely apologise for causing a great deal of worry to ships in the Suez Canal and those planning to go through the canal." — *AFP*

**400 mtr** -long MV Ever Given, from the class of so-called "megaships", veers off course in the canal as duststorm hits Egypt's Sinai Desert, Middle East.

**59 mtr** wide Taiwan-run, Panama-flagged vessel is stuck at about 0540 GMT near southern end of the canal, blocks the man-made waterway.

**25** crew unhurt, hull and cargo undamaged, and there is no oil leak, say the vessel's managers, Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement.

**100 vessels** are forced to wait at either end of the canal or midway, at Egypt's Great Bitter Lake, as a result of the accident, says canal service provider Leth Agencies.

**1869 Suez Canal** was opened. It has been widened since and is a crucial shortcut between Asia and Europe that saves ships from having to navigate around Africa.

## Entire ship crew is Indian

**Cairo, March 25:** The entire crew of Ever Given, the container ship that is stuck in the Suez Canal since Tuesday blocking traffic in one of the world's busiest waterways, is Indian and is safe, said the company managing the container.

In a report, news agency *The Associated Press* said Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement, the company that manages the Ever Given, said the ship's 25-member crew is safe and accounted for.

Apart from the Indian crew, the ship had two pilots from Egypt's canal authority aboard the vessel to guide it when the grounding happened around 7:45 am on Tuesday.

Shoei Kisen Kaisha, the company's owner, said, "All the crew came from India", adding that it is safe and the company is "trying to resolve the situation as soon as possible, but it proving to be extremely difficult".

On Tuesday, the 400 metre-long Ever Given got stu-

ck diagonally across the Suez Canal, reportedly due to a major dust storm and strong winds.

According to a report in the BBC, at least 150 ships are currently waiting to pass through the Suez Canal. The significance of the Suez Canal for international trade can be understood from the fact that nearly 12 per cent of global trade passes through this narrow canal connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea. — *AP*

## AstraZeneca confirms strong vax protection

## Virus origin: Four theories

**Geneva, March 25:** A team of international and Chinese scientists is poised to report on its joint search for the origins of the Coronavirus that sparked a pandemic after it was first detected in China over a year ago with four theories being considered, and one the clear frontrunner, according to experts.

The lengthy report is being published after months of wrangling, notably

between US and Chinese governments, over how the outbreak emerged, while scientists try to keep their focus on a so-far fruitless search for the origin of a microbe that has killed over 2.7 million people and stifled economies worldwide.

It wasn't immediately clear when the report will be released after its publication was delayed earlier this month. By many acco-

unts, the report could offer few concrete answers, and may raise further questions.

It will offer a first glance in writing from 10 international epidemiologists, data scientists, veterinary, lab and food safety experts who visited China and the city of Wuhan where a market was seen as the initial epicentre earlier this year to work with Chinese counterparts. — *AP*

US health leaders, said the company had left out some Covid-19 cases that occurred in the study, a move that could erode trust in the science. Some experts said

the new data provided by AstraZeneca was "reassuring" and that the information was likely solid enough for US regulators to authorise the vaccine.

"AstraZeneca may have just been too hasty in submitting the earlier, incomplete interim analysis rather than waiting to analyse and submit the full

## Biden keen to fix immigration rule

## Prez already sent in a law: White House

**Washington, March 25:** President Joe Biden is keen that the US Congress should quickly fix America's "broken" immigration system, for which he has already sent in a legislation, the White House has said. In February, the Biden administration introduced an ambitious immigration bill in Congress which among other things proposes to eliminate the per-country cap for employment-based green cards.

The US Citizenship Act of 2021 proposes a pathway to citizenship to 11 million undocumented workers, elimination of per country quota for employment-based green cards and work authorisation for dependents of H-1B foreign workers.

"The president...believes that there should be faster processing, that our immigration system is broken at many levels and of the system and that he is eager for Congress to move forward with action there



**THE PRESIDENT** ...believes that there should be faster processing, that our immigration system is broken at many levels and of the system and that he is eager for Congress to move forward with action there

JEN PSAKI, White House Press Secretary

tion bill, if passed by both the chambers of the Congress House of Representatives and the Senate and signed into law by President Joe Biden, would bring citizenship to millions of foreign nationals, including undocumented workers and those who came to the country legally.

The legislation would also benefit hundreds and thousands of Indian IT professionals and their families. Responding to another question on the inordinate delay in the issuance of employment authorisation card to H4 and L2 visa holders, a significant number of whom are Indian women, Psaki said that part of the reason the administration went to push

KAMALA TO LEAD  
RESPONSE TO  
BORDER ISSUES

**Washington, March 25:** US President Joe Biden has entrusted his Vice President Kamala Harris with the task of leading the diplomatic effort and working with neighbouring Mexico and Northern Triangle nations of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to stem the flow of immigrants to the southern border.

Biden said nobody is better qualified than Harris, who ran the second-largest attorney general's office in America, for this. "This new surge (of migrants) we are dealing with now started with the last administration but it is our responsibility to deal with it humanely. — *PTI*

for action on immigration on the Hill is to move forward with expediting the processing and doing that on several levels, including a number of the visas. "So, that's part of the reason why we think that's such an important piece to move forward," Psaki said.

An H-4 visa is issued by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services to immediate family members (spouse and children under 21 years of age) of the H-1B visa holders, most of whom are Indian IT professionals. The Biden administration has taken several steps to address the problems related to legal immigrants. — *PTI*

## Amid challenges, Biden to hold first press meet

**Washington, March 25:** President Joe Biden held off on holding his first news conference so he could use it to celebrate passage of a defining legislative achievement, his giant Covid-19 relief package. But he's sure to be pressed at Thursday's question-and-answer session about all sorts of other challenges that have cropped up along the way.

A pair of mass shootings, rising international tensions, early signs of intraparty divisions and increasing numbers of migrants crossing the southern border are all confronting a West Wing known for its message discipline. Biden is the first chief executive in four decades to reach this point in his term without holding a formal question-and-answer session.

He'll meet with reporters for the nationally televised afternoon event in the East Room of the White House. "It's an opportunity for him to speak to the American people, obviously directly through the coverage, directly through all of you," White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters aboard Air Force One on Tuesday. — *AP*

INDIA HAS TIES  
WITH RUSSIA:  
U.S. ADMIRAL

**Washington, March 25:** India has had a long-standing relationship with Russia for security cooperation and for armaments and the Biden administration should encourage New Delhi to move away from Moscow rather than take the route of sanctions for the purchase of major defence equipment like the S-400 missile system, a top US admiral has told lawmakers.

Admiral John Aquilino, during his confirmation hearing on Tuesday to be the next commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command or INDOPACOM, was responding to a question from Senator Jeanne Shaheen. — *PTI*

## GIANT | VULTURES

## Yurok tribe traditionally considers species a sacred animal

## Calif. condor can return to northwest

**San Francisco, March 25:** The endangered California condor could return to the Pacific Northwest for the first time in 100 years. The US Fish and Wildlife Service plans to allow the release of captive-bred giant vultures into Redwood National Park as early as this fall to create a nonessential experimental population for California's far north, Oregon and northwestern Nevada, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported Wednesday.

The project will be headed by the Yurok tribe, which traditionally has consi-

dered the California condor a sacred animal and has been working for years to return the species to the tribe's ancestral territory. Certainly within a year we hope to have birds in the sky, Tiana Williams-Claussen, director of the wildlife department of the Yurok tribe, said.

Not having him here for 100 years now, we as a people are wounded without having that spirit flying in our skies, she said.

The California condor is the largest native North American bird, with a wingspan of nearly 10 feet

● **THE US Fish and Wildlife Service** plans to allow the release of captive-bred giant vultures into Redwood National Park as early as this fall to create a nonessential experimental population for California's far north, Oregon and northwestern Nevada.

(3 metres).

The scavenger was once widespread but had virtually disappeared by the 1970s because of poaching, lead poisoning from eating

animals killed by hunters and destruction of its habitat.

In the early 1980s, all 22 condors remaining in the wild were trapped and brought into a captive-breeding programme that began releasing the giant vultures into Southern California's Los Padres National Forest in 1992.

That flock has been expanding its range while other condors now occupy parts of California's Central Coast, Arizona, Utah and Baja California, Mexico. The total wild population now numbers

more than 300 birds.

A dozen adults and two chicks died last summer when a wildfire ravaged their territory in Big Sur, along California's Central Coast. The new initiative calls for releasing four or six juvenile condors each year for 20 years throughout Redwood National Park, which is about an hour's drive from the Oregon border.

Condors can live for 60 years and fly vast distances, which is why their range could extend into several states.

— *AP*

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<b>NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER</b> Chief Engineer, Konkani Railway Corporation Ltd., invites Open Tender in Single bid system through E-Tendering on IREPS portal from eligible contractors for the following work. <b>Tender Notice No.: KR-W-01-58-2020-16. Name of Work :</b> Supplying and stacking of ballast at Murudeshwar ballast depot, loading of ballast into KRCL hoppers and Supply of ballast at nominated locations on cuss between Shirour-Murudeshwar sections for CTR (P) works under the jurisdiction of Senior Regional Engineer, Karwar region of Konkani Railway. <b>Estimated Cost:</b> ₹ 530.44 Lakhs excluding GST. <b>Completion Period :</b> Nine months including monsoon. <b>Closing Date/Time:</b> 16/04/2021 up to 15:00 hrs. for submission of online Offers/Bids. Manual offers shall not be accepted. Please visit <a href="https://ireps.gov.in">https://ireps.gov.in</a> website for details / participation. Corrigendum / addendum will be hosted in this website only.



## DECCAN Chronicle

26 MARCH 2021

### Calling the cops on Opp.? Bihar ruckus probe must

Legislators are not above the law, but legislatures — the place where laws are made — a House of Parliament or a state Assembly or Legislative Council chamber — are privileged sites, where the law and order machinery of the State, as embodied in the police force, may not intervene — and interfere with proceedings. The legislature, therefore, has marshals who obey the Speaker or Chairman and have been known to deal with unruly situations with firmness.

The logic is if elected representatives of the people were to be interfered with in the performance of their constitutionally mandated duties, then why bother having elections? A despotic executive may then do as it pleases.

In a democracy, these are matters that lie in the realm of first principles. If this were not the case, the majority party which runs the government will be at liberty to send the police in to silence opponents though force, pass unhindered any laws it likes and in the manner it likes, without fear of criticism. Then law-making may be conducted with the peace of the graveyard reigning.

Such a state of affairs will produce order and harmony of a kind that behoves a police state even if it masquerades as a democracy. Such examples are not unknown in the world. In India, however, we have been proud to run a noisy democracy. This has given us prestige even among autocracies which may sometimes denounce us but also envy us.

In light of this, what was witnessed in the Bihar Assembly last Tuesday can only fill every Indian with shame. MLAs of Opposition parties, men and women, were dragged on the ground by the police who had been called in. The scene that was telecast was one of brutality. Legislative decorum was being given a severe beating.

Chief minister Nitish Kumar appeared later to justify the police action, referring only to the bedlam his party's opponents were creating. Does he remain his own master, or is he dancing to the tune of his alliance partners who now appear to direct his every action and place him in the position of a puppet? On a subsequent day, standing up to speak in the Legislative Council, the CM, according to one report, "quivered" with anger as he continued to denounce the conduct of the Opposition. Not one word about the rights and wrongs of the police entering the legislative chamber.

The Opposition MLAs, led by RJD, had indeed been unruly in mounting their criticism of the Bihar Special Armed Police Bill, 2021, at the introduction stage. This is to be a state paramilitary force apparently on the lines of CISF, with the difference that it will have the power to arrest. In India, only civil police in a state have been given this power. Such a Bill is weighted against citizens. Some reports suggest Opposition parties tried to prevent the Speaker from coming out of his chambers. This is crossing the line. In such situations, marshals are known to be resourceful and vigorous, and are trained to deal with legislators.

If the Speaker called in the police, did he act on his own or did he act on advice? The circumstances are murky, to say the least, and deserve to be enquired into without delay. The CM, for his part, should be contrite, not brazen.

### Welcome Justice Ramana

India welcomes the initiation of the process by which Justice N.V. Ramana will be formally declared the next Chief Justice of India, with the current CJI Justice Sharad A. Bobde recommending the name of the senior-most judge after him, to the post. The elevation of Justice Ramana, when he takes office as the 48th CJI, after the incumbent leaves office on April 23, is yet another example of the maturity and independence of the Indian judiciary. After an illustrious career as a judge in more than one high court, and then as a judge of the Supreme Court, Justice Ramana deserves his rise to the highest chair in the Indian judiciary by the dint of his wisdom, brilliance, objectivity and hard work.

In clearing the way for the elevation of Justice Ramana, an in-house procedure of the Supreme Court has also wisely rejected a complaint by chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, against him in a case relating to the Amaravati land scam. It was extremely crucial not to set any precedent, which would have enabled an easy hijack of the chair in future by any self-interested party or group. However, the procedure adopted by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in handling the complaint of chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy, was kept "strictly confidential" and declared "not liable, in nature, to be made public".

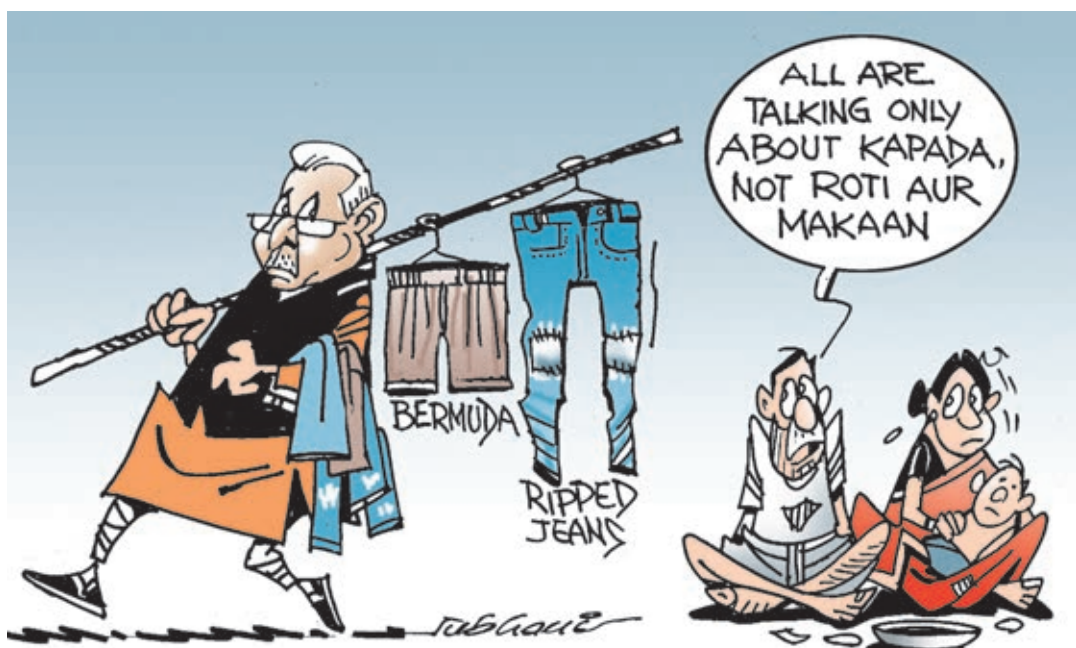
As several wise judges of the Supreme Court have pronounced, the procedure adopted in arriving at a decision is often of far greater significance to the ethos of instructions than the decisions themselves, and wise right decisions must still stand the test of transparency and fairness test of procedure.

The halo of the Supreme Court could have risen further if the procedure by which the way was paved for the next CJI considered taking into confidence the ordinary citizen crucial enough to be made a yardstick.

The mature decision of naming Justice Ramana as the next CJI, which was so apt, given an unimpeachable candidature as his, should not have taken the risk of leaving room for even an iota of doubt over the procedure adopted in bringing in the only second Telugu speaking CJI into office.

The honourable body would have done greater justice to the Justice if they had considered making the proceeding as transparent as an example the apex court expects from other institutions and lesser mortals.

Subhani



## Bengal to trigger domino effect in Indian politics?

Shikha Mukerjee

The 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections is more than just a contest between a regional party, the Trinamul Congress, and the challenger, which is a national party, the BJP. It is a battle that may well trigger a limited, yet crucial, domino effect in Indian politics.

The battle for West Bengal which begins on March 27, the first day of the eight-phase election, will be a test like no other. This contest is not a verdict on the performance of the Trinamul Congress government led by Mamata Banerjee over the past 10 years or the prospects of the state under a new untested regime of the BJP. It is a confrontation between two ideological positions that are fundamental to the future form of India's polity.

If the Trinamul Congress manages to retain power, then the war for federalism, multi-party democracy and secular politics will get a shot in the arm against the BJP's vision of a one-nation, one-identity, one nation-one party model or, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi explains it at every one of the many public meetings he has addressed in West Bengal as another unit of the "double engine sarkar" model. The conquest of this border state for the BJP would significantly strengthen its ideological and popular appeal as the defender of the Hindu majority and its legitimacy to discriminate on the basis of religious identity against the Muslim minority through a process that cancels the status of Muslims as citizens by deploying the Citizenship Amendment Act as an instrument of exclusion.

It will not be an easy election for any of the three blocs that are competing for the voters' hearts and minds. Because elections are about choosing a party for running a government, ideology and policy matter in equal measure. It boils down to weighing two things — first, which party will do more or give more to the voter; second, which party can be trusted to keep its election promises.

Every voter will decide based on his or her priorities, which is a complex mix of basic needs, aspirations and sentiments.

And then there is the Samyukta Morcha, a combination of the CPI(M)-led Left Front, the Congress and the newly hatched Indian Secular Front headed by a Muslim cleric, Abbasuddin Siddiqui. Put together as a survival and restoration strategy for the Left parties and the Congress, on its performance will depend the fate of the BJP and to an extent the Trinamul Congress.

The first and second phases, on March 27 and April 1, will set the stage as the 60 seats cover constituencies in East and West Midnapore, Jhargram, Purulia, Bankura, West Burdwan and South 24 Parganas districts where the BJP has pinned its hopes of beating the Trinamul Congress. Nandigram, in East Midnapore, is the crucial constituency; Mamata Banerjee is contesting against Suvedu Adhikari, once her blue-eyed boy now with the BJP, and it will be the key to this election. It defines the nature of the contest between the dominant Trinamul Congress and its leader, and the BJP led by Narendra Modi and defectors from the Trinamul Congress.

It will be definitive in

another sense; it will give a clue of how the Samyukta Morcha's appeal, especially that of the CPI(M) and the ISF's appeal works. Will the CPI(M) cut into the BJP's vote share by taking back the support it lost in 2019? Will the ISF cut into Trinamul Congress' Muslim vote share? Any reduction in the BJP's vote share will make its position, as the main challenger, precarious.

The options for the voter boils down to this — the Trinamul Congress, which as the party of the incumbent government has a lot to live down, but has a leader who remains the most popular choice as chief minister; the BJP, that does not have a chief ministerial candidate and is banking on the Narendra Modi mystique to hoist it to power and then install a face to lead the government, should it succeed in winning; or, the newly formed Samyukta Morcha, which is in the running as the alternative, if not to the party in power then as the alternative to the party in the Opposition.

This is also a fight between Mamata Banerjee and the rest. Can she be dislodged from her position of dominating the political landscape of West Bengal? Her campaign slogan "Bangla nijer meyeke chai", that is, Bengal wants its own daughter, underlines the centrality of Mamata Banerjee.

The BJP's campaign has swung between "Ashol Poriborton", or real change, which is a makeover of the Trinamul Congress' 2011 slogan calling for "poriborton", "Sonar Bangla", that is restoration of Bengal to an

imaginary unspecified golden age, and "Aar Noy Anyay", that is "no more oppression, wrongdoing, abuse, violation and a host of grievances", as it tests the public response and calibrates its appeal. By projecting itself as the only party in West Bengal which does not have legacy issues, since it was a nonentity till the 2016 Assembly elections and zoomed to principal challenger position after the 2019 Lok Sabha elections winning 18 seats out of the state's 42, the BJP has crafted a narrative of being a newly minted choice. For the BJP, West Bengal is like the final frontier; it has positioned itself as defending the nation from being overrun by Muslims crossing over as illegal immigrants, of bringing the periphery into the centre by imprinting Hindutva trademarks on the wayward margin through adoption of "Jai Shri Ram" as a unifier and the Ganga Arti as a sacred practice.

The CPI(M)'s campaign does not have a single defining slogan; instead it has updated its appeal by delivering its messages in the language of urban young adult voters, selling itself through reusing a mix of advertising slogans in Hindi, flash mobs and songs that are a takeoff on popular lyrics.

Inserting itself in between the spaces separating the parties in the fray, a platform has emerged that has one unequivocal message — "No Vote to BJP". It is an appeal for tactical choices in every constituency to keep the saffron tide at bay. It's also a call to Bengali voters to use their choice to shut out the "principal enemy", even if it means voting to bring back the Trinamul Congress for a third term.

West Bengal has to decide to be its whimsical wayward self or join the gang.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

### LETTERS

#### COMPULSORY VACCINATION

The decision of the government for Covid vaccination for people above 45 years of age is a step in the right direction to meet the challenge of the pandemic which is now starting to spread again with vehemence. To ensure that maximum percentage of the people is covered by the scheme, door-to-door enumeration and administration of the vaccine can be implemented. Despite the people having experienced lot of difficulties during the lockdown and after many thousands of deaths having taken place many people seem to be in no mood to understand the gravity of the pandemic if allowed to be uncontrolled. A certain amount of compulsion and coercion is also needed when people refuse to see reason and logic.

V. Girilakshmi, Coimbatore

#### GOOD START

THIS REFERS to the news NPAs fell to ₹5.7 lakh crore: Minister (March 24). It is heartening to note that NPAs of banks have been reduced from ₹8.96 lakh crore to ₹5.70 lakh crore in December 2020, as per the statement of minister of state for finance Anurag Singh Thakur in Parliament. NPAs have been posing grave problems to the public sector banks affecting their performance and profitability very much even to the extent of endangering their survival itself. Hence, in order to ensure the health and efficiency of the banks, NPAs should be reduced drastically. Realising the same, the Union government has brought in Insolvency and Bankruptcy Act, which has come in handy for the banks to initiate proceedings against the defaulters, which is yielding positive results in realising the banks' dues, for which it deserves to be appreciated. This momentum has to be continued unabated till reducing them to zero level.

M. Govindaraj, Gudiyatham

#### OLD VEHICLE POLICY

THE VEHICLE scrappage policy unveiled by the Union minister for road highways and transport, Nitin Gadkari last week, with an intent to phase out old, and unfit vehicles from the country's roads through an non-coercive approach is a step in the right direction and deserves accolades. The policy may take effect only from April 2022, but the government had already set the ball rolling by retiring about 2.3 lakh vehicles owned by various agencies under it. The new scrappage policy does not only have slew of incentives and disincentives to ensure high compliance among vehicle owners, but also envisaged measures to boost fuel efficiency in the long run by stimulating the auto industry.

M. Jeyaram, Sholavandan

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Mahir Ali



### Remembering the bloodbath 50 yrs ago which broke Pakistan into two

It would be tricky to designate the starting point of the sub-continent's second partition. The seeds, it could be argued, were sown during the late 1940s and fertilised through much of the succeeding two decades. There can be little question, though, that the point of no return was reached around midnight on March 25-26 half a century ago.

That was the night the massacres began in what was then East Pakistan and is today Bangladesh. The initial targets stretched from Awami League stalwarts and strongholds to the intelligentsia more generally — among them university students, professors, writers, journalists, doctors and engineers. All too many of an incipient nation's best minds were obliterated before its birth.

That could be described as Pakistan's parting blow in the aftermath of the nation's first properly democratic exercise the preceding December. The elections had been postponed from October after floods wreaked havoc in East Pakistan. They were followed in

November by a cyclone and tidal wave remembered as one of the deadliest natural catastrophes anywhere in the world.

The estimated death toll hovered around a million. Pakistan's military ruler, Gen. Yahya Khan, stopped over in Dhaka on his way home from a state visit to China, witnessed the devastation during a helicopter ride, then promptly resumed his journey home to Islamabad.

He returned in due course, purportedly to oversee the relief effort, but by then the eastern wing was already fluttering in the wind, poised to take solo flight. Much of the assistance in its hour of dire need had come from foreign countries. This inevitably reinforced the impression among the Bengalis that their "brethren" in West Pakistan couldn't care less about their trials and tribulations.

This sense undoubtedly fed into the December elections — the first to be based on universal adult franchise, 23 years after independence. The nationalist Awami League, with its six-point agenda for

provincial autonomy, won 160 of the 162 directly elected seats in East Pakistan — an absolute majority in any putative national parliament.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party surpassed expectations in Punjab and Sindh, but its total seats were barely half that of the Awami League — and, much to Bhutto's consternation, Yahya effectively designated Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the next Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Within less than four months, though, Mujib was designated a traitor (not for the first time) and taken into custody, the Awami League was banned, and voters in East Pakistan faced a bloodbath. The ferocity of the military action was all but unprecedented in the postwar decades.

Through the remainder of 1971, the denizens of West Pakistan were kept uninformed by the local media, official as well as "independent". With the start of the military action on March 26, complete censorship was imposed, and only official versions of the events were

allowed. The "trouble" in the eastern wing, Pakistanis were relentlessly told, was an Indian plot. Sure, there were some "traitors" and a lot more "miscreants", but they were all being adequately dealt with by our fearless "jawans". The implication was that in due course all would be well, the "patriotic" Bengalis were anyhow in a majority, and the necessarily harsh treatment would bring the rest to their senses.

In the 50 years since then, this kind of nonsense has never entirely been superseded by a more objective narrative. The recent cancellation of a seminar on the topic reinforces the impression that the sources of power in what was once deemed the rump state still can't handle the bitter truth.

Perhaps Pakistanis don't wish to be reminded of the fact that for all its foibles, follies and inherited flaws, Bangladesh is doing much better than Pakistan on a number of economic indicators. Or, for that matter, to recognise that the pattern began to be repeated, soon after the bifurcation, in

Balochistan.

By then the military chief in Pakistan was Gen. Tikka Khan, a former military governor of East Pakistan. It was under his aegis that the Army had claimed in March 1971 that it could "restore order" within 72 hours or so. That particular delusion came a cropper some nine months later, albeit only after India had openly pitched in.

The lessons of history are difficult, if not impossible, to learn without acknowledging the facts. All too many nations, including Pakistan and India, are often shy of facing up to their past. Not long ago, Poland made it a crime for anyone to suggest that some Poles had collaborated with the Nazis in perpetrating genocide against Jews. And so it goes...

As far as Pakistan is concerned, it may now be too late to atone for what had happened half a century ago, but remembering it accurately might suffice as a warning against repeating the experience.

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quick  
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,440.12	-1.51
Nifty 50	14,324.90	-1.54
S&P 500*	3,894.83	0.15
Dollar (₹)	72.62	-0.06
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.39	0.24
Euro (₹)	85.74	0.12
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,347.44	0.09
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	62.12	-3.56
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.131	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.598	-0.016

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

67 coal blocks  
offered in second  
tranche of auction

The government offered 67 coal mines for sale, launching the second tranche of commercial coal mining auction. The blocks on offer are a mix of mines with small and large reserves, coking and non-coking mines and fully and partially explored blocks spread across six states—Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, MP, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. This is the highest ever number of mines on offer in a tranche.

Policy mandatory for top 1,000 firms  
Dividend policy  
scope extendedFC BUREAU  
MUMBAI, MARCH 25

In a move to further strengthen corporate governance practices and disclosure requirements, markets regulator Sebi on Thursday decided that the top 1,000 listed companies should put in place a dividend distribution policy.

"Requirement for formulation of dividend distribution policy by the existing top 500 listed entities has been extended to the top 1,000 listed entities on the basis of market capitalisation," the Securities and Exchange Board of India said in a statement after its board meeting.

In case companies hold their board meetings for more than one day, the financial results should be disclosed by them within 30 minutes of end of the board meeting for the day on which such results are considered, the Sebi said.

Also, the regulator has decided to do away with the requirement to seek stock exchange's approval for change of name of a listed entity.

Further, the requirement to publish newspaper advertisements for the notice for board meetings where financial results are to be discussed and for quarterly statement on deviation or variation in use of funds, has been dispensed with.

The timelines for submission of periodic reports—statement of investor complaints, corporate governance report and shareholding pattern—will be

ANALYST CALL RECORDINGS TO BE  
MADE PUBLIC IN 24 HOURS

New Delhi, March 25: In order to address information asymmetry among shareholders, the Sebi on Thursday decided that listed firms should make available audio and video recordings of analyst and investor meet on their websites as well as stock exchanges within 24

hours or before the next trading day.

It also decided that written transcripts of post-earnings conference calls should be made available on websites of listed companies and respective stock exchanges within five working days after such calls. —PTI

harmonised to 21 days from the end of each quarter, Sebi said.

Frequency of submission of compliance certificates relating to share transfer facility and issuance of share certificates within 30 days of lodgement for transfer, sub-division, among others, have been revised from half-year period to one year.

The Sebi board has also cleared amendments to LODR (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations.

"These amendments are

aimed at ensuring gender neutrality and maintaining consistency within the LODR Regulations, harmonising certain provisions of the LODR Regulations with Companies Act, in addition to strengthening the corporate governance practices and disclosure requirements and easing the compliance burden on listed entities," it said.

The provisions of LODR norms, based on the market capitalisation criteria, should continue to apply even if such entities fall below the thresholds.

SOLAR PANELS  
TO COME UP  
ALONG NATIONAL  
HIGHWAYSSANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

In a move that will support India's electric charging infrastructure, the government has proposed to install solar panels along the national highways.

"The ministry has decided to explore solar energy generation potential on National Highways and it is proposed to install solar panels in available places that are not earmarked to be used for any transport/highway related services/ plantation and meets the requirements for installation of solar panels," minister of road transport and highways Nitin Gadkari informed the Lok Sabha.

Further, solar panels have been installed on roof tops of toll plazas in the projects of Pune-Solapur NH, Nagpur bypass, Wainganga Bridge to Chattisgarh Border and Solapur-Yedishi highway.

As per data from the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, grid connected rooftop solar PV systems have been installed in 82,487 residential houses totalling 358 MW capacity as on November 18, 2019. An aggregate capacity of 477.2 MW of rooftop solar plants has been installed at 7448 government buildings as on March 15, 2021. With an average generation of 1.5 million units per year per MW, about 715.8 million units per year are being generated from these plants.

Urban women employment  
remains static in FebruarySANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

Urban female employment rate has remained static at 5.4 per cent last month, the same as in February 2020. Only 7.3 per cent of urban women of 15 years or more were employed in fiscal 2019-20, says a survey.

According to CMIE's Consumer Pyramids Household Survey, urban female employment rate was at 8.4 per cent in 2019-20.

In an earlier report, the Asian Development Bank had found that the pandemic had shrunk the women labour force in India by 10.5 per cent against 2 per cent shrinkage in case of men between October 2019 and October 2020.

Participation of women



in the labour market itself remains very low. According to the official Periodic Labour Force Survey in 2018-19, while 73.7 per cent of urban men participated in the labour markets, only 20.4 per cent of urban women did so. The situation prevails despite the fact that 50 per cent of all fresh graduates were women between 2011-12 and 2015-16. In 2018-19, 53 per cent of all fresh graduates were women.

"Indian women work a lot. But, their work is predominantly at home... Their participation in the labour markets outside their houses in urban India is very low in spite of their superior education," said Mahesh Vyas, CEO of CMIE.

"There are only three cases under which this can happen. Either Indian women are not willing to go out to work or they are not allowed to go out to work or people are not willing to give them work in spite of their education," he said.

According to a paper presented at the World Economic Forum earlier, increasing participation of women in labour force to the same level as men can boost India's GDP by 27 per cent.

## MARKET BLEEDS ON FRESH LOCKDOWN FEARS

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, MARCH 25

The steep rise in fresh daily Covid-19 cases, which recorded the biggest single day jump in five months at 53,476 and thus raising the possibility of fresh lockdowns, led to continued heavy selling in the stock market in consumer-focused sectors like Auto, FMCG and Realty for the second day.

The local market underperformed Asian peers by a big margin, losing more than 1.5 per cent as major Asian markets closed mixed. Weak European markets experiencing a third wave of Covid infections also added to selling

pressure, as that may drag down global growth.

The Sensex closed 740 points, or 1.51 per cent, down at 48,440 while the Nifty-50 shed 224.50 points, or 1.54 per cent, closing at 14,324.90; both indices are at two-month low levels.

As a government spokesperson talked about the presence of new mutant variants of Covid-19 virus, daily cases in Maharashtra surged to 31,855 while daily cases in other states also were rising, forcing local authorities to announce fresh restrictions.

The broader market took a bigger hit, with the BSE Mid-cap Index down 2.22 per cent and the BSE

Small-cap Index down by 1.85 per cent.

Consumer focused stocks were the worst impacted by the fresh lockdown fears. The top losers among the sectoral indices included BSE Auto (-2.80 per cent), FMCG (-2.37 per cent), Power (-2.83 per cent) and Consumer Durables (-2.28 per cent).

Investors suffered a notional loss of close to Rs 3 lakh crore as the BSE market capitalisation dropped below the Rs 200-lakh crore mark to Rs 198.75 lakh crore.

FPIs were net sellers to the tune of Rs 3,383.60 crore while DIIs were net buyers by Rs 2,267.69 crore.

## COFFEE-BREAK

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

**Aries:** Praise is coming your way. Something you wanted badly could be yours. A profitable trip, maybe overseas, is in store. A marriage is likely. Health is good.

**Taurus:** Beware of minor accidents. Money may cause concern but gains will come. Throat or ear problems are likely. A legal notice may irritate you. See things in perspective.

**Gemini:** Watch out for aches and pains. A positive financial transaction is likely. Spend time with your children. You will soon buy a new car. There is an addition to the family.

**Cancer:** Some of you could soon invest in a house or property. Beware of dental and eye problems. Handle business transactions carefully.

**Leo:** Delay your investment plans for now. Problems related to the lungs need to be addressed. You will nurture your relationship with a friend. Acknowledge others.

**Virgo:** Avoid arguments. New contacts and friends are likely. Health will cause concern. Drive carefully. Be careful about relations with siblings, and be mindful of what you say.

## You share your b'day with

Prakash Raj is an Indian actor. He is known for his roles in the films like Wanted, Singham, Dabangg 2, Bharat Ane Nenu, Heropanti, Rangasthalam amongst others.

**Libra:** Money matters will be good. A positive period is indicated. You will easily impress the opposite gender. Take guidance if you are undecided about anything.

**Scorpio:** Avoid functions and parties not to your taste. Take professional advice on legal matters. Relationship with spouse will not be easy.

**Sagittarius:** A reunion with an old friend will brighten you up. Don't share sensitive information. A trip might not be comfortable, but will be helpful.

**Capricorn:** A brilliant day for real estate deals. Avoid joint ventures it might be risky. A good time to rethink your career options and making plans for the benefit of your progeny.

**Aquarius:** Some tension is likely. Celebrations bring cheer. Unexpected financial gain is indicated. Participation in group activities is on the cards. Try to see things from others' perspective.

**Pisces:** Physical desire is waning due to matters of the mind taking up your attention. Religious discourses and meetings provide comfort. Avoid arguments. Domestic harmony will affect.



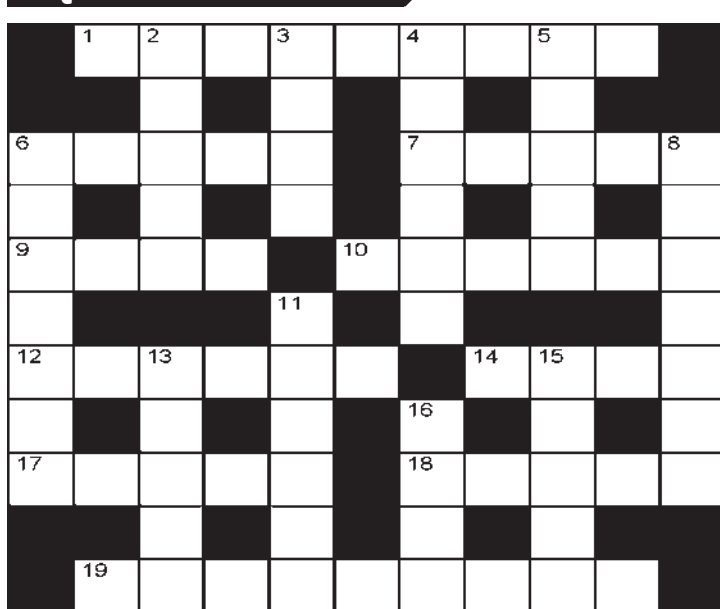
**bridge**  
PHILLIP  
ALDER

Following the bidding convention senryus comes this logical follow-up from Charlie Smyth of Urbana, Illinois: Hours spent playing bridge / Learning all the conventions / But I'm still lousy. Gnash! But keep applying yourself with a likable partner with whom you can have success.

Some conventions are easy at the start, but as you unpeel the layers, they get

more complicated. Roman Key Card Blackwood is one example. Most players can handle 14-30-20-21. Five clubs shows one or four keys (counting the four aces and the trump king as key). Five diamonds indicates zero or three keys; five hearts promises two keys but no trump queen; five spades announces two keys and the trumps queen. However, when a minor is agreed, especially clubs,

## QUICK CROSSWORD



Across  
1. Farm animals (9)  
6. Stingling insects (5)  
7. Waste drain (5)  
9. Legal document (4)  
10. Put right (6)  
12. Shellfish (6)  
14. Fashionable (4)  
17. Handles (5)  
18. Pursue relentlessly (5)  
19. Lose moisture (9)

Down  
2. Offspring (5)  
3. Otherwise (4)  
4. Cap, scarf adornment (6)  
5. Intimidated (5)  
6. Marriage (7)  
8. Lost weight (7)  
11. Breed of cow (6)  
13. Range (5)  
15. Frequently visited place (5)  
16. Scorch (4)

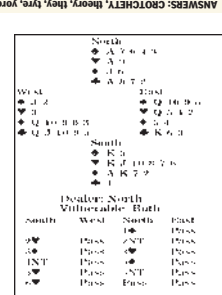
YESTERDAY'S ANSWER  
Across: 1. Meltedown, 7. Cynic, 8. Colic, 9. Limits, 10. Shoo, 12. Tome, 14. Judged, 17. Resin, 18. Photo, 19. Prospect.  
Down: 1. Minim, 2. Locate, 3. Dock, 4. Welsh, 5. Sculpture, 6. Accordion, 11. Supple, 13. Miser, 15. Grout, 16. Onus.

## Word Mine

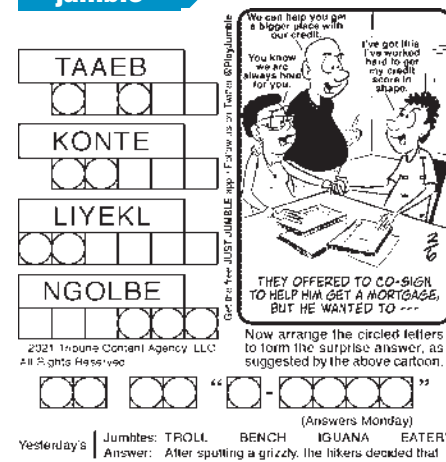
Y  
T T C  
R H C E O

TODAY'S RATINGS: 3 AVERAGE: 4 GOOD; 5 OUTSTANDING

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



## jumble

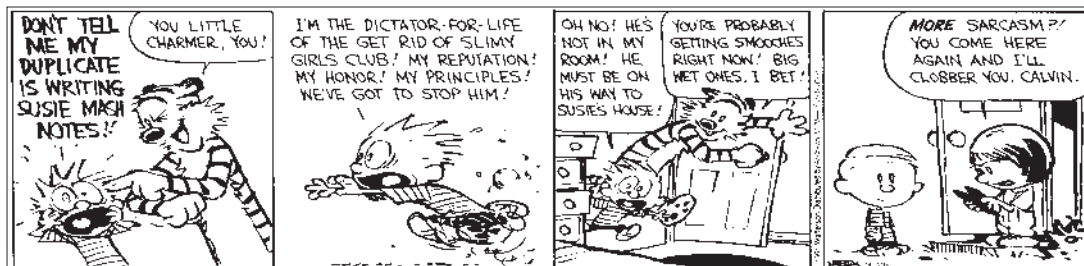


Yesterday's  
Jumble: TROLL BENCH IGUANA EATERY  
Answer: After spitting a grizzly, the lickers decided that they wouldn't — BEAR TO THE RIGHT

the dummy and concede only one trump trick. But he had to be careful. After cashing the diamond ace, declarer ruffed the next diamond with the heart ace. If he had ruffed low, East would have overruffed and returned a trump, with fatal consequences. Here, caution was duly rewarded.

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CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



THE WIZARD OF ID | Parker and Hartsd



ARCHIE | Bill Henry Scarpelli &amp; craig boldman



BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



TARZAN | Edgar Rice Burroughs





## SHORT TAKES

## Saina reaches Orleans quarters

**Paris:** London Olympics bronze medallist Saina Nehwal advanced to the quarterfinals of the Orleans Masters badminton tournament after prevailing over France's Marie Batomene in the women's singles second round here on Thursday. Running against time to make it to her fourth Olympics, Saina recovered from the opening game reversal to see off world no. 65 Marie 18-21, 21-15, 21-10 in a 51-minute clash in the Super 100 event, which is part of BWF's revised Olympic qualification period.

The fourth seeded Indian, who had pulled out of last week's All England Championships due to a thigh injury, will face either France's Yaelle Honyaux or Malaysia's Iris Weng next.

Ira Sharma, ranked 162, also made it to the quarterfinals after beating Bulgaria's world no. 71 Mariya Mitsova in straight games at 21-18, 21-13 in 32 minutes. — *PTI*

## Pospisil sorry for rant after exit

**Miami:** Vasek Pospisil's anger boiled over in a foul-mouthed rant referencing ATP Tour chairman Andrea Gaudenzi Wednesday as the Canadian went down in three sets in the first round of the Miami Open.

American qualifier Mackenzie McDonald advanced with a 6-3, 4-6, 6-3 victory over Pospisil, who swatted a ball out of court, smashed a racket and incurred a verbal abuse point penalty on set point of the opening set — a display that had him later offering an apology on Twitter.

Asked during a changeover by umpire Arnaud Gabas what the problem was, 67th-ranked Pospisil unleashed a tirade focused on Gaudenzi.

"I want to sincerely apologize for my behaviour on the court in Miami earlier today," Pospisil later tweeted.

"I disrespected the game I love and for that I am truly sorry." — *AFP*

## Brown says Hami to retire after win

**Manama:** Lewis Hamilton is set to claim an unprecedented eighth drivers' world title — and then leave Mercedes and retire from Formula One, predicted rival team boss Zak Brown of McLaren. Brown, the architect of McLaren's resurgence after a spell in the doldrums, told the *Daily Mail* he believed Max Verstappen of Red Bull and George Russell of Williams will be recruited by Mercedes in an all-new line-up for 2022.

He added that he would not be keen to offer Hamilton a return to McLaren next year because he was building the team for the future with Lando Norris and Daniel Ricciardo.

Speaking ahead of the season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix, Brown explained that it would be "bad timing" if Hamilton wanted to find a seat next year. Hamilton's decision to sign only a one-year contract with Mercedes has made his future the subject of intense speculation. — *AFP*

## Lanka set Windies 375-run target

**North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda:** Pathum Nissanka's hundred on debut and Niroshan Dickwella's pugnacious 96 solidified Sri Lanka's outstanding second innings rearguard with a total of 476 that left the West Indies with the challenging victory target of 375 on the fourth day of the first Test on Wednesday.

## Live on TV

## CRICKET

**India vs England:** Second ODI from 1.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

## SHOOTING

**World Cup:** 25m Rapid Fire Pistol Men Final from 1.30 pm; Trap Women Final from 3.45 pm; Trap Men Final from 5 pm on Sony Six

## FORMULA ONE

**Bahrain Grand Prix:** First Practice from 4.55 pm; Second Practice from 8.25 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

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## TIGERS ON PROWL

## Kohli's men aim to seal series in 2nd ODI against England

**Pune, March 25:** The immensely talented Suryakumar Yadav is likely to get a chance to showcase his '360 degree' hitting skills when a rampaging Indian team takes on a rather clueless England, aiming to seal another series victory in the second ODI here on Friday.

Shreyas Iyer's dislocated shoulder has once again brought Yadav in focus and his ODI debut, after a blockbuster T20 first outing, looks imminent after an all-round show by the hosts ensured an easy victory in the first game.

Iyer has been one of India's most prolific 50-over batsman before the Covid-19 enforced lockdown but such is the team's strength that a debutant looks more formidable for a world championship opposition, who are no less menacing but seem utterly confused at this point.

Being spoilt for choices is always a good headache to have for the think-tank and skipper Virat Kohli will be more pleased than anyone else.

Kohli has not had Ravindra Jadeja's services for close to three



Suryakumar Yadav (left) and India captain Virat Kohli in this file pic.

months but neither Axar Patel in Tests, and now Krunal Pandya in the ODIs, have let the team miss their maverick from Rajkot.

Prasidh Krishna, already a household name due to IPL, looked completely at home on his ODI debut, hurrying batsmen for pace in the absence of

Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami. Meanwhile, England will look to level the series and stay alive in the contest.

England have a lot to ponder on and injuries to skipper Eoin Morgan and batsman Sam Billings, while fielding, in the lung-opener have only added to

their woes. Morgan has been ruled out of the remaining matches while Billings will miss Friday's game.

All-rounder Ben Stokes was firm in his belief that England do not have too many reasons to worry despite the continuing disappointments.

— *PTI*

## NUMBERS GAME

## INDIA HAVE WON THREE OUT OF FIVE ODIS AT PUNE:

- India have won three and lost two in five one day internationals at Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium, Pune where the second match of the series will be played on Friday (March 26).
- England, on the other hand, have lost both one day internationals played here. They lost to India by three wickets with 11 balls remaining in the first encounter between the two sides on January 15, 2017. In the first one day international match of the current series, hosts defeated England by 66 runs on Tuesday.
- Virat Kohli's 122 off 105 balls with eight fours and five sixes against England on January 15, 2017 is the highest individual score at this ground.
- Jasprit Bumrah took four wickets for 35 runs against West Indies on October 27, 2018 is the best bowling performance at this ground. Prasidh Krishna's four for 54 on debut in the first match of the series is the second best bowling here. In five previous matches, the team batting first have won three times while two victories were achieved on chasing the target.

— *S. PERVEZ QAISAR*



Manu Bhaker (from left), Rahi Sarnobat and Chinki Yadav pose with their gold medals after winning the 25m pistol team event at the World Cup in New Delhi on Thursday.

## Golden girls top pistol team event

**New Delhi, March 25:** The Indian juggernaut remained unstoppable at the ISSF shooting World Cup with the country's women shooters grabbing the spotlight by clinching the 25m pistol team gold medal following a silver in the 50m rifle 3 positions team event here on Thursday.

The seventh competition of the day was marred by the Hungarian team's pull-out from the men's rifle 3 position final — against India — after a dispute with its seasoned shooter Peter Sidi over a bipod that was attached to his rifle, leading to a postponement of the event to Friday.

The host nation's team

will take on third-placed USA in the final.

There was positive news for India after that unprecedented act, as the triumvirate of Chinky Yadav, Manu Bhaker and Rahi Sarnobat shot a total of 17 to beat Poland's Joanna Iwona Wawrzonowska, Julita Borek and Agnieszka Korejwo, who managed to score 7. "In individual competitions if we make mistakes, we are losing the points, nobody else. But here, we feel a little more responsible. It is very different from qualification, it is hit or miss here, but, in qualification, every shot counts in a different way," Sarnobat said. — *PTI*

## PSA Challenger squash in Chennai

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

International squash action returns for the first time in over a year with the PSA Challenger Tour hosting the HCL-SRFI Indian Tour from March 27 to 31 at the Indian Squash Academy here.

Organised by the Squash Rackets Federation of India (SRFI), the Chennai leg of the HCL Indian Tour will feature a men's PSA Challenger 20 event and women's PSA Challenger 10 tournament.

Eight nationalities will be represented across the two draws, with players from Canada, Egypt, France, India, Japan, Russia, Spain and the United States all travelling to Chennai to take part in the tournament.

World No.47 Mahesh Mangaonkar (India) will be the top seed for the men's draw, while compatriot and world No.69 Sunayna Kuruvilla gets the top billing for the women's event.

The pandemic caused a major disruption in the sports sector with countries sealing their borders

and deferring all sports to control the spread of COVID-19. No major tournament was organised in the last year and therefore, our excitement for the upcoming HCL SRFI Indian Tour is natural,' SRFI Secretary-General Cyrus Poncha said.

This tournament is being organised keeping in mind the government's decision to start sporting events; however, with no major attendance as well as the COVID-19 protocols, he added.

He said it was also in line with the Federation's mission to prepare players for the upcoming 2022 Commonwealth Games and Asian Games.

The first HCL-SRFI Indian Tour will take place under strict COVID-19 protocols, a press release said.

All players and officials will be allowed movement within a bio-bubble (a secure perimeter including players' hotel and match venue) to minimise the risk of COVID-19 infection.

Participants will be tested prior to travelling to the tournament and then twice (on March 26 and 29) upon arrival.

## CITY CLIPS

## Shrikrishna beats Arshad

Shrikrishna beat V.M. Arshad of Kerala in the Saleem Snooker Academy-Jhillmill all-India open snooker tournament.

**Results: Round of 64:** Navin (Coimbatore) bt Shoab Ur Rehman (GBC) 4-2; Peter Paul (RSPB) bt Kankan Shamshi (UP) 4-1; Rafath Habi (RSPB) bt Dnashk Reddy (AACSA) 4-1; Dilip Kumar (RSPB) bt Atul Kishore (Kerala) 4-1; Shrikrishma (PSPB) bt V.M. Arshad (Kerala) 4-0; Viswanath Reddy (Hyderabad) bt Pratish (TNBSA) 4-0.

**Round 8:** Bharath Reddy (Hyderabad) bt Bhuvaneshwaran (ABC) 3-1; Atul Kishore (Kerala) bt Nizam (Thiruppur) 3-1; Radhesh (Towers Club) bt Hari Narayanan (MCC) 3-0; Saleem SA (SSA) bt Dinesh (Coimbatore) 3-0.

**Round 7:** Ashish Jain (SLVS) bt Mohammed Hassan (TNBSA) 3-2; Radhesh (Towers Club) bt Uday Kumar (TNBSA) 3-2; Pratish (TNBSA) bt Magesh.S (TNBSA) 3-2; Bharath Reddy (Hyderabad) bt Damu Menon (TNBSA) 3-2; Nizam (Thirupur) bt Sanjay (SSA) 3-2; Kaja (Madurai) bt Abhishikt (Hyderabad) 3-2; Kamaraj (SVS) bt Karthik (Red15) 3-2; Waseem Ahmed (RSPB) bt Dilip Nani (CueZone) 3-1; Dinesh (Coimbatore) bt Aditya (Cues&You) 3-0; Yeswanth (CueZone) bt G. Srikanth (Hyderabad) 3-0.

## Denim enters semis

Top seed Denim Yadav defeated Ronin Lotlikar 6-2, 6-0 to enter the semifinals of the TVS ITF juniors under-18 tennis tournament.

In the girl's singles quarter-finals, Amodini Naik got the better of fifth seed Riyah Dugar 7-5, 0-6, 6-1

**Results: Boys: Singles (Quarter-finals):** Denim Yadav (IND) bt Ronin Lotlikar (IND) 6-2, 6-0; Yuvan Nandal (IND) bt Dhruv Hirpara (IND) 6-2, 6-2; Aayush P. Bhat (USA) bt Dhananjay Athreya (IND) 6-0, 7-6(6); Agriya Yadav (IND) bt Monil Lotlikar (IND) 7-5.

**Doubles: Semi-finals:** Yuvan Nandal (IND)/Denim Yadav (IND) bt Anup Bangargi (IND)/Rishivandhan Sadeeshkumar (IND) 6-2, 6-2; Aayush P. Bhat (USA)/Maanav Jain (IND) bt Dhruv Hirpara (IND)/Aryan Shah (IND) 6-3, 6-3.

**Quarter-finals:** Yuvan Nandal (IND)/Denim Yadav (IND) bt Carl Holder (FRA)/Devaharshith Nelelam (USA) 6-3, 6-3; Aayush P. Bhat (USA)/Maanav Jain (IND) bt Monil Lotlikar (IND)/Ronin Lotlikar (IND) 6-3, 6-2.

**Girls: Singles (Second round):** Janani Ramesh (IND) bt Shireen Ahamed (IND) 7-6(7), 1-6, 6-1.

**Doubles: Semi-finals:** Saina Deshpande (USA)/Arunkumar Lakshmi Prabha (IND) bt Kristi Boro (IND)/Saniya Manoj Masand (IND) 6-4, 6-7(4) [10-6]; Nandini Dixit (IND)/Madhurima Sawant (IND) bt Naga Roshne Arunkumar (IND)/Riyah Dugar (IND) 4-6, 6-1 [10-5].

## INJURED IYER VOWS TO COME BACK STRONGER

**Pune, March 25:** Injured India batsman Shreyas Iyer has left the bio-secure bubble here after he was ruled out of the ongoing ODI series against England as well as the entire IPL starting next month even as he vowed to come back even stronger.

Iyer dislocated his left shoulder while fielding during the first ODI against England on Tuesday and he is set to undergo surgery, which will rule him out of action for a minimum four months.

"Shreyas Iyer has exited the bio-bubble," the BCCI said on Thursday ahead of the second ODI here.

Earlier in the day, Iyer vowed to come back from the injury even stronger. "You know what they say, the greater the setback, the stronger the comeback. I shall be back soon," Iyer tweeted. — *PTI*

## Super Kings to continue IPL preparatory camp in Mumbai

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

Chennai Super Kings have landed in Mumbai on Thursday to continue with their preparations for the 2021 Indian Premier League season and will be based there for a month.

Super Kings play their first five matches in Mumbai — against Delhi Capitals (April 10),

Punjab Kings (April 16), Rajasthan Royals (April 19), Kolkata Knight Riders (April 21) and Royal Challengers Bangalore (April 25) — before moving to Delhi, Bengaluru and Kolkata for the rest of the league stage fixtures.

All matches of IPL-14 will be played at neutral venues, with the Playoffs and final staged in Ahmedabad between

May 25 and 30.

Super Kings began their pre-season preparatory camp involving available players at Chepauk from March 8, with all-time skipper MS Dhoni leading the way.

"The players felt the fortnight-long camp was very beneficial. We also had four or five days of open nets," Super Kings CEO KS Viswanathan said.