

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | FRIDAY 5 | MARCH 2021

## WEATHER



**Max:** 32°C  
**Min:** 22°C  
**Rainfall:** Nil

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Maasi 21  
**Tithi:** Saphami  
**Star:** Anusham  
**Rahukalam:** 10.30 am to 12 noon  
**Yamagandam:** 3 pm to 4.30 pm  
**PRAYERS**  
**Fajar:** 5.14 am  
**Jumma:** 12.27 pm  
**Asar:** 3.34 pm  
**Maghrib:** 6.18 pm  
**Isha:** 7.29 pm

**SUNSET TODAY 6.18 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.23 AM**  
**MOONRISE TODAY 11.57 PM**  
**MOONSET TOMORROW 11.05 AM**

## CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+16,275)	(+112)
1,11,73,023	1,57,583

covid19india.org

### STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+482)  
**TN: 8,53,449** 12,508

### WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

**11,59,80,156**

### DEATHS

**25,75,288**

**219**  
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

worldometers.info

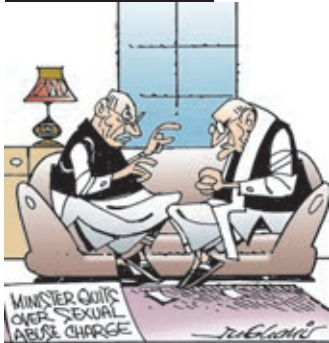
## PM Modi to hold virtual summit with Swedish counterpart today

**New Delhi:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold a virtual summit with his Swedish counterpart Stefan Löfven on Friday during which they will deliberate on the entire spectrum of bilateral ties and exchange views on regional and global issues, including further strengthening of cooperation in the post-Covid era.

## SC directs pvt hospitals to give priority in treatment to elderly amid pandemic

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court on Thursday directed that elderly people be given priority in admission and treatment at private hospitals besides at government medical institutions amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

## COUNTER POINT



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

# Chennai placed fourth in most liveable cities, Coimbatore 7th, Bengaluru tops

**New Delhi, March 4:** Bengaluru has been rated the most liveable city in India in the government's "Ease of Living Index". The others, in the order of ranking, are Pune, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Surat, Navi Mumbai, Coimbatore, Vadodra, Indore and Greater Mumbai.

Of the 49 cities ranked on livability index in the "million-plus population" category, Delhi figures in the 13th spot and Surinagar at the bottom. A total of 111 cities were judged in the index released on Thursday.

According to the index released by Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister

## LIVEABLE CITIES

The Ease of Living Index (EoLI) is an assessment tool that evaluates the quality of life and the impact of various initiatives for urban development

► In the category of 'population less than million', **Shimla** was ranked the highest in ease of living, followed by Bhubaneshwar and Silvassa



Hardeep Singh Puri, Shimla topped the category of cities with a "population less than

million". In this category, Bhubaneshwar was ranked second,

## TOP 10

1. Bengaluru
2. Pune
3. Ahmedabad
4. Chennai
5. Surat
6. Navi Mumbai
7. Coimbatore
8. Vadodra
9. Indore
10. Greater Mumbai

Silvassa came third, followed by Kakinada, Salem, Vellore, Gandhinagar, Gurgaon, Davangere and Tiruchirappalli. Muzaffarpur figured at the bottom of the livability index for 62 cities in the "less than a million" people category.

New Delhi Municipal Council topped the "Municipal Performance Index" in the "less than a million" population category. The rest are Tripuri, Gandhinagar, Karmal, Salem, Tirupur, Bilsapur, Udaipur, Jhansi and Tirunelveli. Indore topped the "Municipal Performance Index" in the million-plus population category.

— Agencies

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**IIT-M sets up aerosol lab at Munnar**



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**Prince Philip had successful heart procedure**

## SPORT | 7

**Axar, Ashwin put England in spin**



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'STOP HIS TN CAMPAIGN'

# BJP goes to EC against Rahul

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, MARCH 4

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

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

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



● **BJP Tamil Nadu president L Murugan has accused Rahul Gandhi of violating the Model Code of Conduct and urged EC to issue a direction to register a FIR against him under 124A section of the IPC**

by law.

Rahul Gandhi's comparison of the present government to that of the British rule would spread division, anger and fear and overawe the government, they said.

'SCREEN MOVIES'

# SC wants OTT to be controlled

**PARMOD KUMAR | DC**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

The Supreme Court on Thursday favoured the screening of programmes on over-the-top (OTT) platforms like Amazon Prime and Netflix while expressing concern over pornographic content.

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

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

The top court's observation came in the course of the hearing of a plea by Aparna Purohit, the commercial head of Amazon Prime Video in India, seeking anticipatory bail in a case filed by the Uttar Pradesh government against the web series Tandav. Ms Purohit has moved the top court against Allahabad high court's order refusing her the anticipatory bail in the case.

Having expressed its displeasure over the way objectionable content, including pornography was being shown on OTT



platforms without prior screening, the court asked Mr Mehta to place before it the recently notified Information Technology Rules, which provide for regulation of content on OTT platforms.

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

Tandav, a political thriller starring Bollywood stars Saif Ali Khan, Dimple Kapadia and Zeeshan Ayyub, was launched as an Amazon exclusive in January and a few days after there was outrage, mainly in right-leaning states, about the story it told. Objections were also raised about some scenes that some alleged were hurting religious sentiments and that it was derogatory towards Dalits. Some cuts were demanded and those were made.



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HAZARDAN SOUGHT REFUGEE IN A  
 HIDDEN ROOM AND WAS CONFRONTED  
 BY A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN—  
 TAVAT THE QUEEN!

HE SMILED DEANSURINGLY. "MY  
 FRIEND BUDGOM HAS SPOKEN OF  
 YOU. PERHAPS I CAN HELP..."

"NO ONE CAN HELP," LAMENTED  
 TAVAT. "I AM ALREADY DEAD."



## OTHER STORY

## 68 rowdies arrested under Goondas act in Kanchi

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH. 4

Kanchipuram police on Thursday arrested 68 rowdies in the district as a precautionary measure ahead of Tamil Nadu assembly elections, police sources said.

DIG Samundeeswari, IPS had recently directed Kanchipuram Superintendent of police, Shanmugapriya to identify notorious rowdies in the city. Police teams headed by the SP identified and arrested at 91 rowdies so far, including the 68 arrested on Thursday. A senior police official said, "we have also identified 339 rowdies, and deposited bonds under their names to sustain peace. if they fail to abide by the conditions of the bond, they will be put behind bars". Officials said the arrests came as a precautionary measure ahead of the Tamil Nadu assembly elections.

## Covid outbreak in family clusters new menace

T. SUDHEESH | DC  
CHENNAI, MARCH. 4

Despite the health department's continuous appeal to avoid super spreading of Covid-19, the breakout of the virus through family clusters continues to be a cause of concern for the officials.

Health secretary J. Radhakrishnan on Thursday said that 450 cases were reported in 209 families across Chennai in the last 15 days. All cases happened due to the non-compliance of people to the Covid-19 protocols – wearing masks and social distancing at family functions and marriages.

Going by the family cluster cases in Chennai in the last 15 days, the health secretary said there were 80 positive cases in 34 families in Kodambakkam and 82 cases in 37 families in Adyar. The family clusters



Health secretary Dr. J Radhakrishnan flags off refrigerated truck of Covid vaccine by Indian Oil. —DC

in Chennai, according to the health secretary, are as follows: Tiruvottiyur (6 cases in 2 families), Madhavaram (6 in two), Tondiarpet (nine in one), Royapuram (19 in 2), Ambattur (37 in 12), Anna Nagar (51 in 19), Valasaravakkam (38 in 29), Alandur (33 in 24) and Perungudi (35 in 18). For the last few weeks, the city has been witnessing a spike in active cases and on

Wednesday 186 fresh cases and one death were reported.

These fresh numbers come at a time when the health secretary on February 5 wrote to the collectors and the Greater Chennai Corporation commissioner emphasizing that there should be no room for complacency as clusters from marriages, family functions and travel

had surfaced in some parts of the State.

In the communication, he had asked the officials to intensify containment activities in order to make sure the virus does not spread through family clusters. Radhakrishnan also said that not only Chennai but Coimbatore also reported family clusters. So it's mandatory for people to wear masks whenever they go out as it acts as a social vaccine.

"The new cases in Chennai show that one individual in the family can spread virus to the entire members if they behave irresponsibly. It requires concerted efforts to fight the pandemic", he added.

Meanwhile, the state has been allocated 27,54,330 doses of Covid 19 vaccines including 25.07 lakh Covishield and 2.77 lakh Covaxin shots.

## IIT-M sets up aerosol lab at Munnar

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH. 4

The Indian Institute of Technology-Madras (IIT-M) has established a state-of-the-art natural aerosol and bioaerosol high-altitude laboratory at Munnar, Kerala in collaboration with the College of Engineering, Munnar and department of environment and climate change, government of Kerala, with support from Sharp Business System (India)

Private Limited.

Inaugurated by Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan last month, the laboratory will help to make a better understanding of the atmospheric and climate-related aspects of the region with special emphasis on aerosol measurements.

A memorandum of understanding was also signed between the IIT-M and the Institute for Climate Change Studies, Kottayam, for the exchange of scientific

ideas and capacity building in climate change.

The laboratory is set up at a time when Kerala experienced devastating floods and landslides for the last few years. The strategic location of the proposed laboratory is important to understand the important aspects of the monsoon, which has shown an increasing trend and frequency of extreme rainfall events due to climate change and global warming.

## AIDWA lays siege to DGP office

SINDHYA SAMUEL | DC  
CHENNAI, MARCH.4

All India Democratic Women's Association on Thursday blockaded the DGP office in Chennai, demanding the arrest of a former DGP, against whom a sexual harassment charge was levelled by a woman IPS officer. Tension prevailed outside the DGP office for around an hour due to the protest.

According to police, around 100 members of AIDWA, an women rights organization affiliated to CPI(M) were stopped by the police force after they attempted to enter the DGP office premises. The protest demanding the arrest and suspension of the former Law and order DGP Rajeshdas, who sexually harassed a woman IPS officer in his vehicle last month and Chengalpet Superintendent of Police, P.Kannan who stopped the victim's car on the Paranur toll plaza in an attempt to thwart her from complaining against the former DGP, based on his orders.

Speaking to Deccan Chronicle, the state general secretary of AIDWA, P. Suganthi demanded that a permanent Internal complaint committee (ICC) be formed in the police department. She also expressed agony over the fact that Tamil Nadu being unsafe even for the women of high ranks. She added that the Crime branch of the CB-CID in TN has registered an FIR against Rajesh Das, however, the officer has not been suspended from his post yet. AIDWA demands immediate suspension of Rajesh Das and SP Kannan, she added. AIDWA on Thursday said that it stands in solidarity with the victim.

## Domestic flights cancelled due to low occupancy

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH. 4

The domestic flight services were cut down significantly at the Chennai airport due to lack of patronage, airport officials said. They pointed out that flights to most destinations had less than half the number of passengers and services had to be cancelled. With flight occupancy and passenger traffic decreased, 12 domestic flights were cancelled at the Chennai Airport on Thursday.

According to the Airport sources, several flights from Chennai to Kochi, Vizag, Patna, Maumbai, Guwathi had been cancelled.

While some of the airlines had informed AAI that the cancellations were due to the poor patronage, many of them have told AAI that the cancellations are due to 'operational reasons'. But officials say, when flight occupancy is very low, then an airline will suddenly decide to cancel its flight. If a flight has less than half of seats unbooked, then they wouldn't want to waste money on operating that flight and decide to cancel it and cite operational reasons as grounds for the cancellation," an official said.

Chennai airport which usually has about 260 flights travelling per day decreased to 231 on Thursday.

## New lease of life for victim of fall from 17th floor

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH. 4

The life of a 20-year-old air conditioning mechanic, who accidentally fell from the 17th floor of an under-construction building, was saved by a panel of doctors of a private hospital in the city.

The victim M.D. Firoj Alam, was working in a major construction site in Perungudi last December 9 when the accident happened. He was immediately rushed to the Apollo Specialty Hospitals, OMR, for emergency treatment of multiple injuries.

Dr. Roopesh Kumar, sen-

ior consultant neurosurgeon, said that the patient was brought in an unresponsive state. He was also suffering from breathing problems, extreme hypotension, and bleeding from the head, mouth, ears, and nose. His both legs had exposed bones. Specialists at the emergency department quickly started artificial respiration and treated his hypotension with blood transfusion and IV fluids.

We performed tracheotomy to facilitate ventilation and administered medications to reduce brain swelling. Once his blood pressure got stabilised, his fractured legs were fixed by our orthopedic and plastic surgeons. A team of urologists and gastroenterologists managed his liver and kidney injuries through non-operative procedures. Once he was relatively stable, a whole-body trauma series CT

scan was done which revealed severe traumatic brain injury with blood clots in his occipital lobes, multiple facial fractures, cervical spine fracture, liver and right kidney injuries with hemoperitoneum, and compound fractures in both lower limbs. He was shifted to ICU for further treatment.

A team including Dr. Pratheema Ramachandran and Dr. Devachandran Jayakumar, critical care consultants, attended injuries in a phased manner avoiding complications. Firoz was discharged from the hospital on Thursday.

## HC suspends stay on release of Nenjam Marapadille

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH 4

Decks have been cleared for the release of the Tamil film "Nenjam Marapadille", starring actors SJ Suryah, Regina Cassandra and Nandita Swetha, scheduled to be released on March 5, 2021 with the Madras high court suspending its interim orders dated March 2, staying the release of the movie.

Justice P.T.Asha suspended the interim orders of injunction, after recording the affidavit and undertaking filed by M/s Escape Artists Motion Pictures represented by its proprietor Madan, producer of the film.



## Rly to pay ₹8L compensation to kin of mishap victim

J.STALIN | DC  
CHENNAI, MARCH. 4

The Madras high court has awarded ₹8 lakh as compensation to the kin of a deceased person, who died after falling down from a running train between Kodambakkam and Nungambakkam. The court observed that the railway authorities are bound to provide safety measures to passengers, more specifically to working class passengers who travel on a day-to-day basis. While returning from work, they will either be tired or under pressure to reach their homes early.

Allowing a petition filed by J. Sivakumar, Justice S.M. Subramaniam set aside an order of the Railway Claims Tribunal, which rejected his compensation claim on the

ground that the deceased Indurani was not a bonafide passenger, and that she committed an act of negligence.

After perusing the inquest and the final report, the judge said the middle-aged woman aged about 38 years died, and the family lost one of their near and dear. Mere negligence or carelessness cannot be a ground to decline compensation to the victim. Railways are also equally to blame for not providing adequate security for train passengers. Thus, contributory negligence also plays a pivotal role.

The judge said, "A large number of women travel in EMU trains in Chennai. After duty, they are forced to rush to board EMU trains to reach their homes within a reasonable travel time. With this

pressure, several women and even other travelers are forced to stand and travel. The doors in EMU trains are broad with no shutters. Hence, there was a possibility of falling down from a running train due to jerk and jolt. Even the large number of accidents does not seem to teach lessons to the railway authorities to formulate safety measures."

"It is painful to state that higher officials of the Indian Railways are receiving a very decent salary from the taxpayers' money. Hence, they are expected to perform their public duties with high responsibility and accountability. A large number of passengers are suffering even without minimum facilities and adequate security in running trains," the judge added.

Chennai, March. 4: Former editor of popular Tamil daily 'Dinamalar' and renowned numismatist R Krishnamurthy died here on Thursday following heart attack.

Krishnamurthy, 88, is survived by his wife, two sons and two daughters. "He suffered a heart attack and passed away at his residence this morning," Dinamalar Editor K Ramasubbu said.

Known as 'RK', he became the Dinamalar editor in 1977 after joining the daily in 1956, founded by his father T V Ramasubbier.

A post-graduate in geology from the Presidency College here, he introduced the now well known 'Periyar' script which has lesser number of Tamil

characters in the newspaper's Tiruchirappalli edition in 1977.

Later, the Tamil Nadu government came forward to introduce the script in text books and it is widely followed today.

Governor Banwarilal Purohit, Chief Minister K Palaniswami, his Deputy O Panneerselvam and DMK President M K Stalin were among those who offered their condolences to the bereaved family.

In his condolence message, Purohit said Krishnamurthy was a 'renowned epigraphist' in Tamil script.

"His interests in Tamil script reform led him to trace its origin, which in turn kindled an interest in numismatics making him

travel across the world," he said in a Raj Bhavan release.

Krishnamurthy published many books on Tamil script epigraphy and numismatics.

His demise is a big loss to the people of Tamil Nadu, especially to the readers of 'Dinamalar'.

"I convey my deep condolences to the bereaved members of the family and pray to the Almighty to rest his soul in peace and give strength to his family to overcome this unfathomable loss," Purohit added.

Chief Minister and AIADMK party joint coordinator K Palaniswami, Deputy chief minister and chief coordinator O Panneerselvam said they

were "saddened" on hearing the news of the demise of Krishnamurthy.

"A journalist, Tamil scholar, Krishnamurthy has written several books on Numismatics and he is a very cultured person.

His demise is a huge loss to Indian journalism", the leaders said in a joint party statement.

Extending their deep condolences to the bereaved family members, the leaders said they pray to the Almighty for his soul to rest in peace.

DMK Chief M K Stalin, who visited the family to pay his last respects said the demise of Krishnamurthy was "a great loss" to Tamil journalism.

"Dinamalar and Murasoli (DMK's party organ) played

an important role with the use of computers in print journalism in the late 1980s.

Krishnamurthy was honoured with the 'Tholkappiar Award' from the President for his research work on Tamil. I extend my deep condolences to his family members," Stalin said in a party statement.

Among many other things, Krishnamurthy studied in detail the various inscriptions in Vattezhuthu script in different parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala and published three books in Tamil on the data collected by him. "Vattezhuthu is a 'circular' script that evolved out of the Tamil Brahmi script around fifth-sixth century AD. —PTI

## HC mulls including Adi Dravidar students in 7.5% quota scheme

J.STALIN | DC  
CHENNAI, MARCH. 4

In order to extend the benefits of 7.5 percent reservation in medical admission, to students who studied in government schools, also to the meritorious students belonging to the Adi Dravidar community, who studied SSLC in government schools but completed their plus two in private schools,

sponsored by the government, the Madras high court has said the government may consider addressing their woes after consulting its administration and educationalists without derailing the purpose of the scheme at least from the next academic year.

Justice V. Parthiban, who made the observation, however dismissed the petition filed by minor Soundarya,

"As far as the relief prayed for in this case is concerned, the Act and the provisions do not contemplate inclusion of the petitioner's category and therefore, the rejection of the petitioner's claim by the authorities is not to be interfered with, as the decision was taken in consonance with the scheme of the Act", the judge added.

According to the petitioner, the department of Adi

Dravidar welfare used to select top 10 students in every district from among the community and sponsor them to pursue their higher school education in private schools. She completed her SSLC with 452 marks out of 500 marks and secured second rank among Adi Dravidar students in Karur district. She was sponsored by the government to pursue her plus two in a private

school. She completed her plus two with 83 percent marks. She scored 158 marks in the NEET examination in 2020.

Meanwhile, the government introduced 7.5 percent reservation in medical admission to students, who studied in state government schools and have qualified in NEET. But her name was not included in the quota. Therefore, she sent a representation to extend the

reservation to her also. But it was rejected. Therefore, she has filed the present petition.

The judge said while ameliorating and upgrading the standards of students from the socially disadvantaged sections, the students who have opted for the benefit of the sponsorship have been excluded from claiming the benefits of 7.5 percent reservation scheme. If they had

any inkling about such reservation, a candidate like the petitioner would not have opted for the sponsorship to study in a private school for plus two. The candidates like the petitioner, being a rank holder, could have indisputably continued their above par performance had they continued in government schools but for their sponsorship to get educated in a private school.

The judge said it was up to the policymakers to come up with an equitable solution for these students as well, as the ultimate purpose of implementing such policies with inclusive social agenda of uplifting the students from government schools to achieve higher academic growth and prospects ought to include meritorious students from the Adi Dravidar community as well.

## City walls sport clean look sans garish poll graffiti



B. Vijayalakshmi

## Viewpoint

Namma Chennai seems to wear a clean look with Chennai corporation having cleared over 16,000 unauthorised advertisements including political graffiti, posters and hoardings from buildings at more than 8,000 locations in all the 16 constituencies of the city, following the announcement of polls.

According to Tamil Nadu Open Places (Prevention of Disfigurement) Act, 1959, graffiti on private walls is not permissible. In 2016, the Madras HC had said those violating the Act will face contempt. While photo-

graphs of CM and former CMs were removed from government offices and from advertisements of government welfare schemes, all scheme-related mobile vans were also cleared. Political advertisements in bus stands, railway stations, government buses, EB and telephone poles have been removed in almost all constituencies, according to sources.

Months before election, political parties had popularised their party symbols and had vied with their rivals to put up posters and election material. With new parties like MNM and



Chennai corporation workers removing posters in the city. —DC

AMMK joining the poll race this time, the fight for wall space had become tougher.

The EC on Wednesday directed petrol pumps and other agencies to remove advertisements and hoardings on Central schemes having photographs of Prime Minister Modi in West Bengal as it violates the model code of conduct. Meanwhile, a DYFI leader on Thursday lodged a complaint with the EC demanding the removal of the Prime

Minister from Covid-19 vaccination certificate, issued to people in Kerala.

Even though rules and court directions to regulate installation of banners and hoardings are already in place in Tamil Nadu, political parties and leaders want to put them up at will to woo voters.

Election Commission's crackdown during poll season puts an end to huge hoardings and cutouts dotting Chennai's skyline for a brief period.



**जवाहरलाल नेहरू उन्नत वैज्ञानिक अनुसंधान केंद्र (ज. ने. उ. वै. अ. के.)**  
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(An Autonomous Institution under Dept. of Science & Technology, Govt. of India and an Institution Deemed to be University)

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Applicants are advised to visit the website <http://www.jncasr.ac.in/admission/degree-programmes> for detailed information about these programmes, their eligibility criteria, fellowships etc. **The last date for submission of online applications is 19th April 2021.**

Sd/-  
**Administrative Officer**



## SHORT TAKES

## SINHA'S APPOINTMENT CHALLENGED

PARMOD KUMAR | DC  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

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

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

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

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

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

## BOMB SCARE AT TAJ MAHAL; CALLER DETAINED

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

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

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

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

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

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

## VIRTUAL SUMMIT WITH SWEDEN TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold a virtual summit with his Swedish counterpart Stefan Lofven on Friday during which the two leaders "will hold comprehensive discussions on the entire spectrum of the bilateral relations and exchange views on regional and global issues including further strengthening of cooperation in the post-Covid era".

Around 250 Swedish companies are "actively operating in India in various sectors such as defence, health and life sciences, auto industry, clean technology, heavy machinery and equipment".

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

## Metroman Sreedharan made BJP CM face for Kerala polls

Syro Malabar Church mouthpiece snubs BJP, asks tough questions

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
MAR. 4

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

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

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

He said that a sizable section of people in Kerala want a personality like E. Sreedharan to become the chief minister of the state.

"In the present circumstances when corruption is rampant and development projects have hit a roadblock, a person of Sreedharan's stature is needed at the helm. We requested him to join the BJP with a clear purpose of utilising his services for the state and the country," he said.

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

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

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

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

Though the flyover was to be completed within 16

months, Sreedharan got the work finished within six months.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## BJP says Cong. used wrong tea garden picture

MANOJ ANAND | DC  
GUWAHATI, MAR. 4

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



A medic administers the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, in New Delhi on Thursday. - PTI

## PM to address Commanders' conference in Guj. tomorrow

PAWAN BALI | DC  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

At a time when India is facing serious security challenge from China, country's top commanders from Army, Navy and Air Force are meeting for three-day Combined Commanders' Conference from Thursday in Kevadia in Gujarat to brainstorm and strategize an effective response to current and future threats.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to address the conference on Saturday where he will lay down his strategic vision for the defence forces. Defence

minister Rajnath Singh will also address the conference on Friday.

The last Combined Commanders' Conference was held in Jodhpur in 2018. Theaterisation of armed forces, self-reliance in defence sector, and emerging threats in the cyberspace and in the form of drones will also be discussed.

The Commanders' Conference is crucial as it will be attended by the Commander-in-Chief rank officers of the three services and the tri-services organisations such as the Integrated Defence Staff Headquarters, Strategic Forces

Command and the Port Blair-based Andaman and Nicobar Command.

The Chief of Defence Staff Gen Bipin Rawat will also be attending the meeting.

Mr Modi is expected to be given a briefing on the progress made in the field of the creation of theatre commands. Of all the theatre commands under plan, Air Defence Command is likely to be implemented first.

The Prime Minister will be given a detailed presentation on the restructuring of the Army formations in view of the recent Chinese aggression in the Ladakh sector.

## Mamata may announce TMC candidates list today

RAJIB CHOWDHURI  
KOLKATA, MARCH 4

Without sharing seats with some anti-BJP parties despite holding talks on securing support from them, in what appears to be the toughest battle of

her political career, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee will announce the Trinamul Congress' list of candidates at her residence in Kalighat here on Friday, which she also considers as her lucky day, in all 294

seats across the state for the coming Assembly elections. The day is likely to witness the announcement of the candidates' list by the Congress-Left Front-Indian Secular Front alliance and the BJP as well for the first two

phases -- March 27 and April 1 -- covering 60 seats. Speculation about a pre-poll pact and seat-sharing between the ruling TMC and other parties, which are against the BJP, became rife as RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav met Ms

Banerjee a few days ago, and also stood by her. Meanwhile, Akhilesh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party, NCP supremo Sharad Pawar and Sanjay Raut of the Shiv Sena also rallied to support her and stand behind the TMC chief.

## After one month, daily Covid cases cross 17,000

DC CORRESPONDENTS  
with agencies input  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Karnataka continue to report a surge in the Covid-19 daily new cases and they cumulatively account for 85.51 per cent of the new cases reported in the past 24 hours.

The daily new cases of in India were recorded above 17,000 after over a month.

On Thursday, 17,407 new infections were reported in a day with 89 daily new fatalities.

The active caseload has increased to 1,73,413 which comprises 1.55 per cent of the total infections, as per Union Health Ministry data.

At the same time, the total number of cases with UK, South Africa and Brazil variants of the Covid virus in India has now reached 242.

Maharashtra has reported the highest daily new cases at 9,855. This is the highest number recorded in Maharashtra since October 18 when 10,259 new cases were reported.

It is followed by Kerala with 2,765 while Punjab reported 772 new cases.

On the other hand, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar and Assam have shown a reduction in the active cases in the last 24 hours.

As many as 23 States/UTs have not reported any Covid19 deaths in the last 24 hours.

Meanwhile, a study from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) has identified multiple mutations and unique proteins in isolates of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19.

The study, published in the *Journal of Proteome Research*, has also shown that the host produces several proteins of their own as their body launches an immunological defence in response to the viral attack.

Meanwhile, Home Ministry has once again reiterated to all States and Union Territories that it was willing to pro-

## Elderly facing difficulty in getting vaccinated

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
MAR. 4

Senior citizens visiting hospitals for taking Covid vaccination shots are having a difficult time across Kerala.

With problems in registration and token system continuing, the elderly (60+) and 45+ people with chronic ailments, are being given fresh dates at many places after being made to wait in the queue for hours.

The 60+ people and 45+ with chronic illnesses are finding it difficult to enter the portal which is resulting in the delay in allotting vaccination date and time. Since the vaccination of over 3.5 lakh government staff which has been deputised for election duty has to be completed by March 6, there is additional burden on the hospitals.

vide "all possible assistance and help" to ensure a smooth rollout of Phase-II of Corona vaccination which started on March 1 in the country. The Ministry on Thursday asked the States that they can seek any possible help from the Centre is they face problems in smooth implementation of the vaccination programme.

A week ago Home Minister Amit Shah had chaired a high level meeting to review the rollout of phase-II Corona vaccine and had instructed his officials to maintain close co-ordination with all States and provide all possible assistance to them.

Now with some states reporting a sharp increase in Corona cases, Home Ministry which has been working as the main central or nodal agency, on Thursday asked different states if they required any help or assistance to ensure smooth implementation of the vaccination process.

## Owaisi to start WB campaign from March 13

PRANMOY BRAH-MACHARI | DC  
BERHAMPORE, MARCH 4

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

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

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

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

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

## DIPLOMATIC | POWER

## Jaishankar visits Dhaka ahead of Prime Minister's visit

## India for no crime, no death border

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar on Thursday said killings reported on the "border" with Bangladesh were because of criminal activities and actually took place deep inside Indian territory, even as pitched for a "shared objective" of a "no crime, no death" border with Bangladesh.

The remarks in response to queries from the Bangladesh media were made during his day-long visit to Dhaka in the presence of his counterpart

there A. K. Abdul Momen. The two foreign ministers also discussed inclusion of Japan for trilateral connectivity projects in the Bay of Bengal, the EAM said.

The Teesta river-water sharing issue also came up for discussions, with the Water Resources Secretaries of the two nations scheduled to meet soon.

Jaishankar also said that India had so far dispatched a whopping nine million doses of India-manufactured Covid vaccine to Bangladesh out of which two million doses were a "gift", even as Mr. Momen expressed "happiness" at

the despatch of so many vaccine doses from India to his country.

The EAM's visit was essentially a preparatory one ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh at the end of this month.

Bangladesh is celebrating 50 years of its existence this year and both countries are also celebrating 50 years of establishment of diplomatic relations with each other this year. The Indian armed forces' victory over Pakistan in the war in December 1971, had led to the liberation of the erstwhile East Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh as an

Independent nation.

In his remarks, the EAM said, As all of you know, we are working to prepare for the planned visit of our Prime Minister. It will surely be a very memorable visit. If I recall right it would be his first visit outside India since the Coronavirus pandemic and his second as Prime Minister to Bangladesh."

Praising the leadership of Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina, the EAM said "I would also like to express our admiration and pride, as your closest neighbour and friend, at Bangladesh's graduation from (Least Developed Country) LDC

status. It is truly a tribute to your miraculous socio-economic progress, and a reflection of the statesmanship and leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina."

Jaishankar added, "We see Bangladesh as a key neighbour and a valued partner not only in South Asia but also in the broader Indo-Pacific region. It is no secret that we cite it to others as an example for emulation. And that is why we are working so hard to expand our relationship in all dimensions, ranging from security, trade, transport and connectivity, culture, people to people ties."



## SHORT TAKES

GUNMEN KILL  
7 WORKERS,  
BOMB KILLS DOC

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

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

HK COURT KEEPS  
47 ACTIVISTS  
IN CUSTODY

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

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

INDIAN IN UAE  
WINS ₹24 CR IN  
LUCKY DRAW

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

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

TOSSED INTO SEA  
OFF YEMEN, 20  
MIGRANTS DIE

**Nairobi, March 4:** The International Organisation for Migration says at least 20 migrants are dead after smugglers threw 80 overboard during a voyage from Djibouti in East Africa to Yemen.

A statement says "smugglers started shouting there were too many on board" after the boat with 200 migrants, including children under 18, set off on Wednesday. The IOM says five bodies have been recovered, and survivors are being treated in Djibouti. This has happened before as thousands of migrants continue to try to make their way from the Horn of Africa to Yemen and then on to rich Gulf countries.

The Coronavirus pandemic and the resulting closed borders have slowed but not stopped the flow of migrants.

Law on H-1B visas  
in US Congress

## Legislation to end allure of cheap foreign labour

**Washington, March 4:** Three Republican US lawmakers have introduced a legislation in Congress to bar American employers from hiring H-1B workers, who are mostly highly-skilled Indian IT professionals, if they have recently, or plan to fire their local workers, seeking to put an end to the allure of cheap foreign labour.

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

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

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

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

China may disrupt  
5G network: US

**Washington, March 4:** Observing that the Biden administration views 5G as a high priority, the US on Wednesday expressed concern about the dangers of installing networks with equipment that can be manipulated, disrupted, or even controlled by China which it alleged has no regard for human rights or privacy.

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

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

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

tion; or \$110.

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

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

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

Sweden axe attack:  
3 grievously injured

**Stockholm, March 4:** Hospital officials say three people wounded in an assault by a man using an axe in southern Sweden are in life-threatening condition and police have reduced the overall number of victims to seven.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

year-old man from Afghanistan.

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

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

PROTESTERS  
MARCH AGAIN  
IN MYANMAR

**Nay Pyi Taw, March 4:** Demonstrators in Myanmar protesting last month's military coup returned to the streets Thursday, undaunted by the killing of at least 38 people the previous day by security forces.

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

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

## Farmers demonstrate in France



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

Did Markle bully staff as a  
royal? Palace to investigatePalace perpetuating  
falsehoods: Meghan

**London, March 4:** Buckingham Palace has launched an investigation into allegations that Meghan Markle, the Duchess of Sussex, bullied staff during her time as a frontline royal with Prince Harry in Britain. Markle, 39, lived at Kensington Palace for nearly a year after her marriage to Prince Harry, 36, the Duke of Sussex, in May 2018.

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

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

**Los Angeles, March 4:** Meghan Markle says Buckingham Palace is "perpetuating falsehoods" about her and her husband Prince Harry, according to part of an interview she has done with Oprah Winfrey.

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

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

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

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

Past and present royal employees are to be invit-

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

Houthi rebels: Missile hits  
Saudi oil facility in Jiddah

**Dubai, March 4:** Yemen's Houthi rebels said they struck a Saudi oil facility in the port city of Jiddah on Thursday, the latest in a series of cross-border attacks the group has claimed against the kingdom amid the grinding war in Yemen.

Saudi Arabia's state-owned media did not immediately acknowledge any incident in Jiddah. Brig. Gen. Yehia Sarie, a Houthi military spokesman, tweeted that the rebels fired a new Quds-2 cruise missile at the facility. He posted a satellite image online that matched Aramco's North Jiddah Bulk Plant, where oil products are stored in tanks. The rebels claimed they

● **IN RECENT** weeks the group has stepped up its attacks, repeatedly crashing drones and missiles into the kingdom's Patriot missile batteries.

hit the same facility last November, an attack the Saudi-led coalition later admitted had sparked a fire at the plant. The facility sits just southeast of Jiddah's King Abdulaziz International Airport, a major airfield that handles Muslim pilgrims heading to Mecca.

Flights coming into airport diverted or otherwise flew in circles early Thursday morning without explanation, according to tracking data from

website FlightRadar24.com. Since 2015, the Houthi's battling the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen have targeted international airports, along with military installations and critical oil infrastructure, within Saudi Arabia. In recent weeks the group has stepped up its attacks, repeatedly crashing drones and missiles into the kingdom's Patriot missile batteries. A Saudi-led military coalition intervened in Yemen after the rebels seized the country's capital, Sanaa. The war has settled into a bloody stalemate, with Saudi Arabia facing international criticism for its airstrikes killing civilians. — AP

PRINCE PHILIP HAD  
SUCCESSFUL HEART  
PROCEDURE

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

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

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

NEPAL SIGNS  
PEACE DEAL  
WITH REBELS

**Kathmandu, March 4:** Nepal's government signed a peace agreement Thursday with a small communist rebel group widely feared because they were known for violent attacks, extortion and bombings. The government agreed to lift a ban on the group, release all their members and supporters in jail and drop all legal cases against them. — AP

## FILM | FEST Radu Jude's 'Loony Porn' lays bare a country that has revised its history to legitimise its past

## A teacher, a porn clip and the hypocrisy of a nation

**SUPARNA SHARMA | DC  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4**

Romanian writer-director Radu Jude's *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn* opens with a naughty, kinky pornographic scene. Emi (Katia Pascariu), a school teacher, is having sex with her husband and they are recording the proceedings for a bit of extra thrill. But somehow the sex tape leaks and is soon making the rounds of giddy WhatsApp groups of her students and their parents. Some download it, purportedly as evidence to beat Emi with. The fact

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

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

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

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

ing the Coronavirus pandemic, this segment has visuals of a city all masked up and wary of social interactions. But it's also a city busy consuming, eradicating the past. We watch supermarkets and fights in a supermarket, with owners of big

cars who block the sidewalk as a matter of their right. Each clash is an assertion of the entitlement of the rich and marginalisation of others.

The film's second part is polyphonic and here, through commentary, archival footage, statistics, words, nudes in newspapers, building rising and in ruins, *Loony Porn* tells the story of Romania — about its role in the Holocaust, its attitude to Jews, Romanas, love for dictators, attitude to sex and children. It also tells us that in Romania, 6 out of 10 kids are subjected to family violence.

This fact hovers over the film's last segment — the

meeting called by the school principal and parents to interrogate and then vote on Emi's future. It is kicked off by a parent who insists on playing the sex clip for the benefit of all those gathered.

This scene, framed like an inquisition — the "accused" is in the middle, flanked by a judge who will rule based on the mood of the people and the enforcer of morality — is both dark and funny. Though allegations, tangential discussions, innuendoes, inappropriate remarks, shrill sanctimony and, finally, the judgment, *Loony Porn* lays bare a nation that has revised its



history to legitimise its past and current criminal acts and feels emboldened to air its prejudice, bigotry and misplaced rage. Because many speak in the same tongue, collective hypocrisy gets elevated to a

sanctimonious, narcissistic chorus.

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

**NORTHERN RAILWAY**  
Corrigendum No. 01 to  
Open Tender NIT No. 13/2020-21  
Open Tender invited by Sr. Divisional  
Signal & Telecom Engineer/N Railway/  
Ambala Cantt. for & on behalf of the  
President of India against NIT No. SW-  
Sig/UMB/E-Tender/NIT-13/2020-21  
(Open Tender) i.e. OT-34/2020-21 &  
OT-35/2020-21 which were scheduled  
to be opened on 24.03.2021 but due to  
administrative reason, the same has  
been cancelled till further advice. No.1  
SW-Sig/UMB/NIT-13/Corrigendum-  
01/2020-21 Dated: 04.03.2021 495/21  
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

**SOUTH EAST CENTRAL RAILWAY**  
TENDER NOTICE FOR  
TRANSPORTATION WORK  
Tender Notice No.: 110-06-  
Transport-comp, Date: 02.03.2021.  
Name of Work: Transportation of  
Diesel Locomotive components for  
locomotive maintenance of Diesel Loco  
Shed, Raipur from DL/SR to any point  
or vice versa for a period of 02 years.  
Tender Value: ₹ 48,65,125.13  
Earnest Money Deposit: ₹ 0.00.  
Cost of Tender Document: ₹  
0.00. Closing Date and Time of  
Tender: 24.03.2021 on 15.30 hours.  
Manual offers are not allowed  
against these tenders and any such  
manuals offers received shall be  
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details for the above work, please  
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DECCAN  
Chronicle

5 MARCH 2021

Dissent not sedition: SC  
sends govt clear signal

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Damp squib Sasikala

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

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

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

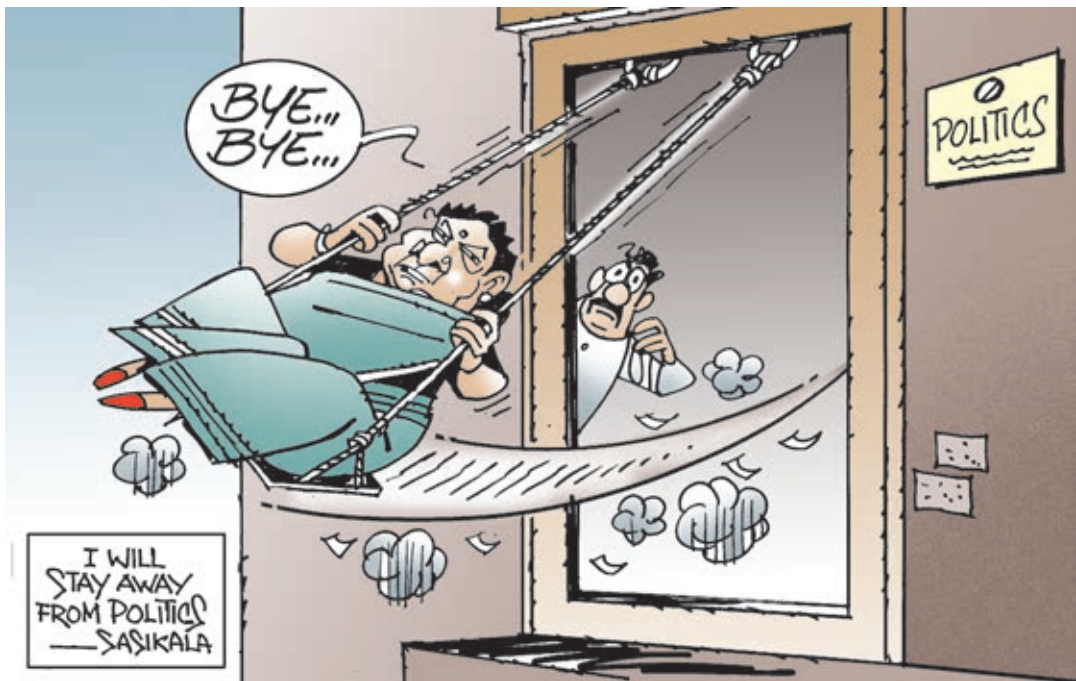
KAUSHIK MITTER  
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR  
Printer & Publisher

R. MOHAN  
Resident Editor

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:  
**Chennai:** SP 3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai 600032. Phones: (044) 22254747, 22254748  
**Coimbatore:** 77 Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore 641009. Phone: (0422) 2231255, 2231256  
**Hyderabad:** 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad 500 003. Phone: (040) 27803930-4. Fax: (040) 27805256.  
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**Rajahmundry:** Vemagiri, Dhawleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry 533125. Phones: (0883) 2417208, 2417618  
**Anantapur:** Thapovan Colony, Bangalore Bye-Pass Road, Anantapur 515004. Phones: (08554) 276903, Fax: 08554-276904  
**Nellore:** Survey No. 527/2, Burrampur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemudugunta Panchayat, Nellore. Phone: (0861) 2348581/ 82, Telefax (0861) 2348580  
**Karimnagar:** Survey No. 1341, Vavilalpally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar 505 001. Phone: (0878 ) 2228908; Telefax (0878) 2220433  
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Subhani



The tragedy of Suu Kyi:  
Almost Shakespearean



Karan Thapar

As I See It

Shakespeare's tragedies have heroes, but they are not heroic.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

SASIKALA'S EXIT

The sudden and most unexpected decision of VK Sasikala to quit politics and sink her ambitions to reach a high public position in life is both a blow and puzzle to her detractors and worshippers. While she was expected to play a key role in TN politics her decision to hang her boots has come as a crude and rude jolt to all TN political watchers. Nothing could be guessed or surmised about the background for the lady's curious somersault. There are thousands of admirers and lakhs of adversaries for Sasikala throughout TN but there is no doubt that everybody is surprised and puzzled equally. Had Sasikala been accommodated in the AIADMK-led alliance following the principle that there is no permanent foe or friend in politics its chances at the hustings could be brighter. Anyway we can take it that a turbulent and tumultuous chapter in TN politics has come to an abrupt end which none had expected.

V. Rahul Venkatasubramanian, Chennai

SASIKALA'S DECISION to quit politics would not have come at a better time viewing from the prism of the AIADMK. This has indeed mitigated the damage to the AIADMK which Sasikala's active participation in politics would have caused. With the two major parties, AIADMK and DMK struggling to keep their allies intact, this is going to be the toughest Assembly election fought in Tamil Nadu.

S. Ramakrishnasayee, Chennai

JUDICIAL SHOCK

THIS REFERS to the editorial *Rape case: Bizarre suggestion* (March 3). It is really shocking that the Chief Justice should ask the rape accused if he was willing to marry the victim. Is it not an out of the way or irrelevant and obnoxious question to be put to the accused? While all politicians in Tamil Nadu are busy in readying their respective parties to face the Assembly elections on April 6, it is only Brinda Karat, CPI (M) leader, who is really social-conscious to place her objection to CJJ's question in the public domain and asking him to withdraw the remarks (*Karat urges CJJ to take back 'marry' remarks*, March 3). The question is not only out of context, but also not in the interest of the victim at all in any way, she being a minor.

Manoharan Muthuswamy, Chennai

Dilip Cherian  
Dilli Ka Babu



Diplomatic pool  
to get eight new  
joint secys soon

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

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

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

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

SREEDHARAN PADS UP FOR  
ANOTHER INNINGS

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

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

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

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

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

ambitions themselves.

MP CHIEF MINISTER  
FINDS HIS MOJO

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

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

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

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

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



## SHORT TAKES

## Sania bows out of Qatar semis

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

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



Sumit Nagal

## Nagal posts best win of ATP career

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

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

Nagal will play Spain's Albert Ramos-Vinolas, in what will be the Indian's maiden quarterfinal appearance at the ATP Tour level. Ramos-Vinolas had defeated Dominik Koepfer of Germany 7-5 6-4. — PTI

## Sharath loses in pre-quarters

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

The World No. 32 Sharath, who was playing his first international tournament after a year's break due to the pandemic, couldn't gain momentum despite showing good resistance in the latter part of the match against the higher-ranked Yun-Ju. Earlier, Manika Batra and Sreeja Akula also lost their respective final qualifying round matches in the women's singles category. While Batra lost to World No. 69 Ganna Gaponova 5-11, 6-11, 14-12, 5-11, Akula went down fighting 9-11, 11-5, 11-6, 6-11, 5-11 to Russia's Mariia Tailkova.

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## POLLARD 6x6 PACK

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

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

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

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

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

Sri Lanka skipper Angelo Mathews hailed his opposite number.

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

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



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

— KIERON POLLARD  
West Indies captain after hitting 6 sixes

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

Unfortunately it didn't happen."

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

West Indies' openers

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

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

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

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

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

## STOKES WAS SWEARING AT ME, SAYS SIRAJ

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Axar, Ashwin put Eng in spin

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

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

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

For India, spinners Axar Patel (26-7-68-4), Ravichandran Ashwin (19.5-4-47-3) and Washington Sundar (7-1-14-1) toyed with the already messed up minds, clueless on how to deal with the conditions.

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

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

A cursory look at the England line-up, loaded



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

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

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

## NUMBERS GAME

## FIVE LEG BEFORE IN ENGLAND'S 1ST INNINGS

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

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

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

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

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

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

## SCORECARD

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

**FOW:** 1-10, 2-15, 3-30, 4-78, 5-121, 6-166, 7-170, 8-188, 9-189. **Bowling:** Ishant Sharma 9-2-23-0, Mohammed Siraj 14-2-45-2, Axar Patel 26-7-68-4, Ravichandran Ashwin 19.5-4-47-3, Washington Sundar 7-1-14-1.

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

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

## Sindhu, Srikanth shuttle into last 8

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Krishna bags 6 wkts in Triplicane CC win

**Chennai:** R. Krishna took six wickets as Triplicane Cricket Club beat Triplicane Sports Club in the TNCA III Division 'B' league.

**Brief scores:** III Division B: Perungalathur Cricket Club 216 in 50 overs (E. Selva Kumar 61, S. Gunaseelan 45, P. Johnsathan 3 for 56, E. Vasantha Kumar 3 for 49) lost to Bunts Cricket Club 218 for 8 in 49.4 overs (Nareish Rajaram 56, C. Sarath Kumar 45, T.K. Gowthama Raj 39, R. Sathish Kumar 3 for 47). Royapettah Cricket Club 127 in 45.2 overs (S. Santhosh Kumar 43, N. Subhash 3 for 27) lost to Sical Recreation Club 128 for 8 in 28 overs (A. Shrikaran 65 not out, M. Parthiban 5 for 36). Madras Aryan Club 187 in 50 overs (S. Somasundaram 83, V. Sasikaran 4 for 44, M. Arul 3 for 43) lost to Rising Stars Cricket Club 190 for 3 in 41.4 overs (A. George Samuel 100 not out, M.R. Sudarshan 35, S. Pavan 33). Triplicane Sports Club 136 in 42.3 overs (D. Govindaraj 83, R. Krishna 6 for 24, M. Elavaran 3 for 44) lost to Triplicane Cricket Club 140 for 4 in 22.5 overs (S. Saravanan 53 not out, J. Gowri Sankar 45). Prem Cricket Club 178 in 38.2 overs (G.K. Saal Gowtham 56, R. Vineeth 3 for 25) lost to Sea Hawks Cricket Club 180 for 2 in 41.5 overs (G. Babu 94, A. Vasudhavan 59).

**IV Division D:** Youngsters Cricket Club 172 in 45.3 overs (Prakalathan Subramanian 41, S. Karthikeyan 30, B. Srihan 30, N. Arun Raj 3 for 18) lost to T. Srinivasaraghavan Memorial Sports Club 173 for 8 in 40.1 overs (J. Babin Christo 78, A.S. Rangarajan 3 for 50). Galaxy Sports Club 137 in 49.5 overs (L.



R. Krishna



M. Surendhar

Ashok Kumar 70 not out, Advait Sharma 5 for 36) lost to Tiger Cricket Club 140 for 2 in 31.4 overs (S. Santhosh Kumar 66 not out, J. S. Athish 42). Sumangali Homes 255 in 48.3 overs (Himalaya 87, P. Girish Prabhu 44, S. Babu 43, S. Palani Raj 4 for 57, M. Purushothaman 3 for 36, R. Prabhuram 3 for 92) beat Fox Trotters Cricket Club 143 in 47.5 overs (Vishaakh E Menon 30, G. Umesh 3 for 8). Magnet Cricket Club 207 in 49.3 overs (S.R. Thirunaryanan 71, Vasisht Shankaraman 37, K. Vijay Priyadarsan 32, H. Tarun Sivaraj 4 for 82, Sanjay Vembu 3 for 65) beat Garnet Cricket Club 183 in 47.2 overs (M. Somasundaram 37, J. Aravind Krishnan 4 for 43). Venkateswara Cricket Club 329 for 5 in 50 overs (A. Md Shuaib 73, C. Akshath Pradeep 62, V. Shashank 46, Sajjad Hussain 41, V. Vignesh 35 not out) beat Book Sellers XI 279 in 46.3 overs (Lawrance Dsouza 126, M. Varun Kumar 58, M.R. Naveen 43, M. Surendhar 6 for 39).

## FINANCIAL Chronicle

## Arcelor Nippon inks pact for ₹50K cr plant

ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India (AM/NS India) inked an MoU with the Odisha government for setting up a 12 mtpa integrated steel plant in Kendrapada district with an investment of ₹50,000 crore, officials said.

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## EPF interest rate retained at 8.5%

SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, MARCH 4

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

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

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

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

the subscribers' accounts.

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

As per reports, EPFO had an income of Rs 70,500 crore for distribution and even after keeping interest rates for current year at 8.5 per cent, it would have a surplus of around Rs 300 crore.

From 2015-16, the EPFO had started investing in equity through exchange-traded funds (ETFs) based on the NSE-50 and BSE-30 indices. The investment

in equity assets started from 5 per cent for FY15 and is now at 15 per cent of the incremental portfolio.

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

In the last budget, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced that the depositors investing more than Rs 2.5 lakh in EPF in a year

would not enjoy tax exemption. This restriction is applicable for contribution made on or after April 1, 2021.

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

## FLIPKART WEIGHS US LISTING BY MERGING WITH A SPAC

BAIJU KALESH &  
ANTO ANTONY  
MARCH 4

Walmart Inc's Flipkart is exploring going public in the US through a merger with a blank-cheque company as it seeks to quicken its listing process, according to people familiar with the matter. The Bengaluru-based online retailer has been weighing a US initial public offering and it's now also looking at other options, the people said. Flipkart's advisers have approached several Spacs, said one of the people, who asked not to be identified as the information is not public. Flipkart could seek a

valuation of at least \$35 billion in a blank-cheque transaction, the people said.

Deliberations are at an early stage and Flipkart could still explore other options, the people said. A representative for Flipkart had no immediate comment. The e-commerce firm is joining other Indian firms like online grocer Grofers in exploring a US listing through Spac deals. ReNew Power last week agreed to merge with a US-listed special purpose acquisition company (Spac) in a deal that will give India's biggest renewable power producer an enterprise value of \$8 billion. —Bloomberg



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