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CHENNAI | TUESDAY 9 | MARCH 2021

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WEATHER



Max: 32°C
Min: 23°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Maasi 25
Tithi: Ekadashi
Star: Uthiradam
Rahukalam:
3 pm to 4.30 pm
Yamagandam:
9 am to 10.30 am

PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.11 am
Zohar: 12.25 pm
Asar: 3.41 pm
Maghrib: 6.19 pm
Isha: 7.29 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.19 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.21 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 3.15 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 2.52 PM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+14,823)	(+74)
1,12,44,094	1,57,964

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+ 556)
TN: 8,55,677 12,521

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

11,76,02,506

DEATHS
26,08,341

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
219

worldometers.info

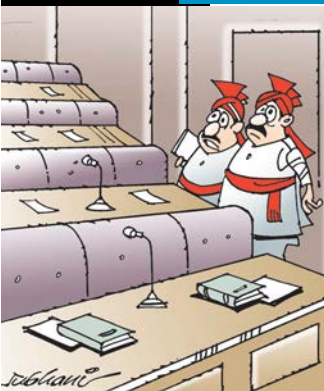
One convicted in murder of inspector in Batla House encounter

New Delhi: A court here on Monday convicted Ariz Khan, allegedly associated with the terror outfit Indian Mujahideen, for the murder of Delhi police inspector Mohan Chand Sharma in a case related to 2008 Batla House encounter which was questioned by certain political parties and leaders. Additional Sessions Judge Sandeep Yadav said "the evidence produced by the prosecution duly proved the case beyond reasonable doubts."

Covid-19: Over 35K people vaccinated on Monday

New Delhi: Over 35,700 beneficiaries received shots of the Covid-19 vaccine in the national capital on Monday, the highest number of people vaccinated in a single day since the start of the inoculation exercise on January 16, as per official data.

COUNTER POINT



The Opposition and the Treasury benches have staged a walkout to go to poll-bound states!

Meghan reveals suicidal thoughts, alleges royal racism

Los Angeles/ London, March 8: Meghan Markle struggled as a new member of Britain's royal family after her marriage to Prince Harry to such a degree that she even contemplated suicide, the Duchess of Sussex revealed in an explosive tell-all interview with American chat show host Oprah Winfrey. The two-hour special, aired on the CBS network in the US on Sunday and set to be aired on ITV in the UK on Monday



night, saw Prince Harry joining his wife half-way through as the couple also spoke about concerns of racism within the royal ranks after being asked about their son Archie's expected skin colour when mixed-race Meghan was preg-

nant with their first child. "I just didn't want to be alive anymore," Meghan said, adding that when she "went to the institution for help" she was told it would not be forthcoming as it "wouldn't be good for the institution". The 39-year-old former American actress, who is pregnant with her second child, revealed that the couple are expecting a baby girl and shared how the palace decided that their first-born,

Archie, could not be a prince and would therefore have no security. She alluded to "concerns and conversations about how dark his skin might be when he's born". "Who is having that conversation?" asked a stunned Winfrey. Meghan replied: "That was relayed to me from Harry, those were conversations the family had with him, and I think it was really hard to be able to see those as compartmentalised conversations. — PTI

CITY | 2

MDMK wants Vaiko's son to contest from Kovilpatti



SPORT | 8

Djokovic on top for record weeks

SC may review 50% quota ceiling, seeks states' view

New Delhi, March 8: The Supreme Court on Monday sought responses from states on a question of "seminal importance" whether legislatures were competent to declare a particular caste to be socially and educationally backward for grant of quota. The top court will examine the question of interpretation of the 102nd amendment to the Constitution dealing with reservation to a particular community, named in the list prepared by the President.

The 102nd Constitution Amendment Act of 2018 inserted Article 338B (deals with the structure, duties and powers of National Commission of Backward

● The top court will examine the question of interpretation of the 102nd amendment to the Constitution dealing with reservation to a particular community, named in the list prepared by the President



Classes) and 342A (power of the President to notify a particular caste as Socially and Educationally Backward Class (SEBC) and the power of Parliament to change the SEBC list.

The issue of interpretation of 102nd amendment arose before a five-judge constitution bench while examining a batch of pleas on the validity of the Maratha reservation law and the legal issue

of whether a state legislature is competent enough to declare a particular caste to be socially and educationally backward for grant of quota.

The bench, headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan, said it would also hear arguments on the issue of whether the landmark 1992 judgement in the Indira Sawhney case — also known as the Mandal ver-

dict, which caps the quota at 50 per cent — should be re-looked and referred to a larger bench.

The bench, also comprising justices L. Nageswara Rao, S. Abdul Nazeer, Hemant Gupta and S. Ravindra Bhat, said it would commence the hearing from next Monday and asked the states to file a brief note of written submissions on the issue. "We have considered the submission of different parties and are of the view that the interpretation of 102nd amendment is of seminal importance and, therefore, notice has to be issued to the states," the bench said. — PTI ■ P4

DMK seals agreement with CPM, other parties

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, MARCH 8

The DMK finalised its seat-sharing with the CPM by giving away six seats, less than the number asked for, and other smaller allies like the Tamilaga Valvurimai Katchi of T. Velmurugan and Adi Tamilar Peravai of Athiyaman, allotting them one seat each, which they will contest on the DMK's symbol 'rising sun'.

Another ally, Kongunadu Desiya Makkal Katchi of E.R. Easwaran, held talks on Monday but could not seal the deal as there was a tug of war with the DMK offering two seats and the party asking for three.

Meanwhile, the Mukulathur Puli Padai, an organisation led by actor Karunas and was earlier associated with the AIADMK, has extended its support to the DMK front, getting a seat to contest in the April 6 Assembly elections.

Two other parties — Manithaneya Jananayaga Katchi of Tamimam Ansari and a Forward Bloc group led by Kathiravan — have pledged their loyalty to the DMK alliance and are waiting to be given a seat or more each. ■ P2

Dhinakaran, Owaisi to fight TN polls together

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH 8

Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK), founded by T.T.V. Dhinakaran, has joined hands with the All-India Majilis-e-Itehadul Muslimen (AIMIM) of Asaduddin Owaisi to fight the April 6 Assembly elections in the state.

The AIMIM would contest three constituencies — V a n n i y a m b a d i ,

Krishnagiri and Sankarapuram — according to the agreement signed by Mr Dhinakaran and AIMIM's Mohamud Rahmatullah, the Tamil Nadu in-charge, and state president T.S. Vakil Ahmed on Monday.

Mr Owaisi, who has been accused of splitting anti-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) votes in various states, had initially shown some interest in aligning with the DMK. ■ P3

CM promises ₹1,500, 6 free LPG cylinders to women if he returns to power

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH 8

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami announced a bonanza of ₹1,500 monthly cash payment and free supply of six LPG cylinders a year for women on the occasion of International Women's Day on Monday after holding discussions with

party leaders on the preparation of the party manifesto and seat allocation to party candidate and allies. Earlier in the morning, the Chief Minister skipped another Women's Day celebration organized by the party, triggering speculations on a rift between him and Deputy Chief Minister O Pannarselvam. ■ P3

Oil prices keep Rajya Sabha on the boil

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

The second part of the budget session of Parliament started on a stormy note Monday with fiery scenes being seen in the Rajya Sabha.

The Opposition parties, led by the Congress, demanded a discussion on the rising fuel prices. Addressing the Rajya Sabha, leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge, said: "Petrol and diesel prices are nearly ₹100 and ₹80 per litre, respectively. LPG prices have also gone up — and ₹21 lakh crores have been

collected by putting excise duty/cess, and because of that the entire country, including the farmers, are suffering."

The Upper House had to be adjourned twice before being adjourned for the day as the Opposition persisted with its demand for a discussion on the rising fuel prices.

Earlier in the day, the Trinamul Congress sought the adjournment of the session in view of the Assembly elections in five states and Union territory of Puducherry that are only a few weeks away, and the MPs may not be able to attend.

5 Trinamul MLAs denied ticket, defect to BJP

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 8

Dealing yet another blow to their party supremo Mamata Banerjee, five sitting Trinamul Congress MLAs Sonali Guha, Sital Sardar, Jatu Lahiri, Rabindranath Bhattacharya and Dipendu Biswas on Monday joined the BJP after they were denied tickets this time. Another Trinamul leader, Sarala Murmu, who had got a ticket to a seat she did not want to contest from, walked into the saffron party after she was replaced.

US invites India to join Afghan peace effort

Washington, March 8: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is proposing a series of steps to help jumpstart Afghanistan's stalled peace process between the government and Taliban. He has called for a UN-facilitated conference with foreign ministers from Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India and the US. — AP

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KUMBakonam • TIRUVANNAMALAI • RAMANATHAPURAM • TRICHY • KANCHEEPURAM • CUDDALORE • PUDUCHERRY

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Har Pal Aapke Saath



POLL
READY

As many as 150 general observers and 40 police observers have been deployed and they will report in assigned constituencies before March 19. Also, 118 expenditure observers, plus one for Kanyakumari LS constituency will be deployed.

MANDATE 2021

TAMIL NADU

DECCAN CHRONICLE | TUESDAY | 9 MARCH 2021 | CHENNAI

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OTHER STORY

Stalin's vision docu mirrors Central programmes: BJP

Chennai March.8: Seeking to punch holes in DMK's vision document, the BJP in Tamil Nadu on Monday claimed several assurances mirrored programmes being implemented by the Narendra Modi-led NDA government and dared the Dravidian party to rework it and promise to rid the state of dynastic politics.

Mocking at DMK president M K Stalin over the ten-year vision document that would be implemented if his party was voted to power in the April 6 assembly elections, BJP state chief L Murugan asked whether the DMK would assure a Scheduled Caste member would be made the Chief Minister if it won.

A day after Stalin released the document focusing on seven key areas for the state's growth at a packed DMK rally in Tiruchirappalli, the BJP leader posed as many questions to the former.

"My seven questions for Stalin also include will he redraft the promises and assure to end dynasty politics, not to grab lands off farmers and to eliminate corruption," Murugan told reporters here, in an apparent reference to charges faced by the DMK.

Referring to the seven promises including provision of concrete houses and piped water supply, he said similar schemes were already being implemented by the Centre. "One should learn from Stalin and his DMK on how to deceive people by announcing the schemes of the BJP government," Murugan said.

—PTI

MDMK wants Vaiko's son to contest from Kovilpatti

ARULOLI M | DC
THOOTHUKUDI, MARCH. 8

The MDMK wants its general secretary Vaiko's son, Durai Vaiyapuri, to contest in Kovilpatti this assembly election. The district unit of the party also had passed a resolution in this regard.

The MDMK is said to have a comparatively strong base in Kovilpatti due to the major presence of the Telugu-speaking community to which Vaiko belongs.

In the 2016 election, Vaiko was expected to contest

from Kovilpatti, but he dashed his party cadres' hope by changing the candidate in the last minute, and fielded his party's Thoothukudi district youth wing secretary, Vinayaga Ramesh, who end up securing the third place next to AIADMK's Kadambur C Raju and DMK contestant, A Subramanian, by polling 28,512 (17.22 percent) votes.

This election, having got the chance of contesting the assembly election for the first time with the DMK in the 'rising sun' symbol, MDMK cadres in

Kovilpatti are expecting a sure victory, and hence, want Vaiko's son, Durai Vaiyapuri, to contest in the constituency.

The MDMK cadres in Thoothukudi district want Vaiyapuri to be an MLA. According to a party functionary, only Durai Vaiyapuri alone could lead the party, at the event of Vaiko retiring from politics. Party's Thoothukudi north district secretary, R.S. Ramesh, issued an open request to Vaiko to field Durai Vaiyapuri in Kovilpatti constituency, whom he called 'star of

hope' for future Tamil Nadu.

MDMK cadres and leaders want Durai Vaiyapuri to register his political entry by contesting in the Kovilpatti constituency, as they realize in the recent speech of Vaiko in Tirunelveli that there could be a major change in the party, after the election.

But the DMK functionaries in Kovilpatti do not appreciate the idea of fielding Vaiko's son in the constituency, which a functionary said, "They do not want to create another Vaiko."

Suspense in DMK, AIADMK over Gudalur candidate

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, MARCH. 8

The Gudalur (reserve) constituency in the far western part of Nilgiris still looks to be a DMK stronghold with its three successive victories in a row, and the AIADMK needs a lot of hard work to be done in a short time to regain it.

The Gudalur constituency has become a reserve constituency since 2011 assembly elections. Post-emergency, the DMK won there in 1977, 1980, 1996, 2006, 2011 and 2016 elections, while the AIADMK won there in 1984, 1991 and 2001 elections.

The Congress party surprised everyone by winning the 1989 elections there, contesting alone. However, the Congress could not get any opportunity to contest the assembly elections from

CONSTITUENCY WATCH

Gudalur after 1989, as it was allotted to either the DMK or the AIADMK in which alliance the Congress was a partner. Statistics show that after 1996, the Gudalur constituency has turned into a DMK bastion where the DMK has registered a hat-trick by winning the 2006, 2011 and 2016 elections with a thumping margin. After Gudalur became a reserve constituency in 2011, Dravidamani of the DMK won both the 2011 and 2016 polls with considerable ease, though the winning margin had come down a little in the 2016 polls.

Though the DMKD contested the 2011 polls in the AIADMK alliance in Gudalur (reserve) con-

stituency and eventually lost, the AIADMK itself contested the 2016 polls in Gudalur and lost. This election, rumours are rife that the Communist parties in the DMK alliance were keen to contest from Gudalur, but the DMK cadres feel that the move to part with the seat to any other alliance partner could more likely ruin the prospects for the DMK which is already firmly entrenched there.

In the AIADMK alliance, talks are in the air that there are chances that this seat will be allotted to any of the alliance partners interested in it. Since seat allotment is yet to be finalized in the DMK and the AIADMK alliance, the suspense continues.

24X7 control rooms to check poll malpractices

A. ARUL PALANI | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH. 8

The Commissioner of GST and Central Excise, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, the Election Commission of India (ECI), Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) of the union ministry of finance and the department of revenue, New Delhi have been tasked with carrying out checks to prevent illegal means to influence the electorates.

Accordingly, the Chennai GST Zone has formulated sufficient flying squads, road patrolling teams, e-way bill verification and static surveillance teams in each commissionerate

across Tamil Nadu and Puducherry in order to keep vigil over their jurisdiction and to stem the flow of unauthorised goods to lure the voters.

All the teams will keep a watch on the warehouses in their jurisdictions and authorised to prevent the stocking of goods like sarees, electrical goods such as refrigerators and washing machines, kitchen items and cash. All the commissionerates in Chennai GST Zone will be working in close coordination with various expenditure monitoring teams constituted by the CBIC and the law enforcement agencies constituted by the EC.

Sleuths of the flying squad seized unaccounted money of Rs. 90,000 and 3.740 kgs of silver ornaments from a car during a routine vehicle check at Sirkazhi in the district on Sunday.

Collector Praveen P. Nair said in a release here on Monday that the officials have handed over the seized cash and silver ornaments to the Nagapattinam treasury authorities, and are holding an enquiry with the car occupant, Abishek of Sirkazhi.

Nair said, all efforts were being taken to ensure peaceful polling in the six assembly segments in the integrated Nagapattinam and Mayiladuthurai districts. "We have prepared 3,109 ballot units, 2,282 control units and 2,466 VVPATs besides arranging all basic amenities including ramps in all the 1,861 polling booths in the two districts, Nair added.

₹90k, 3.7 kg silver seized by sleuths of flying squad

DC CORRESPONDENT
NAGAPATTINAM, MARCH 8

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Thenmozhi Sekar, AIADMK candidate, campaigning at Nilakottai reserved constituency in Dindigul district on Monday.

—K.Manikandan

SR launches vaccination camp for staff deputed for poll duty

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH. 8

The Southern Railway on Monday conducted a special vaccination camp for railway officials, who will be deputed for polling duty, at the railway health unit facility, Chennai. A total of 67 employees of Southern Railway headquarters and Chennai Division were vaccinated.

The employees deputed for election duty will be vaccinated in phases at the respective divisional hospitals/health units. They will be vaccinated in batches not exceeding 100 per day, adhering to all Covid-19 safety protocols.

The vaccination drive,



Greater Chennai Corporation Commissioner G.Prakash and Southern Railway Chief General Manager John Thomas inaugurate Covid vaccination camp for polling personnel on Monday.

—DC

organised in in co-ordination with the Greater Chennai Corporation, was inaugurated in the presence of John Thomas,

General Manager and G. Prakash, Commissioner, B.G. Mallya, Additional General Manager, Dr. V. Nirmala

Devi, Principal Chief Medical Director, Aruna Nayar, Principal Chief Personnel Officer, P. Mahesh, Divisional Railway Manager/Chennai, Ilangoan and Subramaniam, Additional Divisional Railway Managers of Chennai Division, Meganatha Reddy, Deputy Commissioner, GCC and Dr M.S. Hemalatha, City Medical officer, GCC.

The Southern Railway launched the Covid-19 vaccination campaign on January 21. In the first phase, over 1,200 healthcare officials and frontline staff of Southern Railway headquarters and divisions were vaccinated.

DMK would be easily contesting 170 seats

From P1

Of them, Karunas and Tamizhagam Ansari were MLAs, who had contested the 2016 Assembly on AIADMK symbol 'two leaves' had left the AIADMK front following differences with the leaders.

With the alliance talks almost over, the DMK leaders have started concentrating on allocating seats to its allies and also identifying its own candidates for the elections. Back from Trichy

after attending the massive rally there, the leaders have plunged themselves in picking the constituencies and the candidates.

Going by the present trend, even if the DMK allots a few more seats to its smaller allies, it would be easily contesting in over 170 seats. At least 10 candidates of other parties will be using the DMK's election symbol, which would technically make them DMK candidates.

Meanwhile, DMK presi-

dent M.K. Stalin's promise of ₹1,000 a month for women made at the Trichy meeting created a flutter in the political circles.

Makkal Neethi Maia founder Kamal Haasan and Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami claimed that it was their idea that was stolen by Mr Stalin.

Besides, the DMK, the Congress was also involved in the laborious task of identifying candidates for the 25 Assembly seats allotted to

them and for the by-election to the Kanyakumari Lok Sabha seat. The TNCC headquarters, Sathiyamurthy Bhavan, has been witnessing hectic activity with ticket seekers thronging the premises.

Some aspirants have gone to New Delhi to meet up or prevail upon national level leaders to get the tickets to contest the elections as many decisions are taken at the behest of the party high command.

Voters to be given gloves at booths

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH. 8

All voters would be supplied gloves and also screened for high temperature at the polling booths with a view to preventing the spread of Coronavirus, which has become a matter of serious concern to the Election Commission of India in the conduct of the Assembly polls on April 6.

A new set of restrictions has been brought in to combat the pandemic and it starts with filing of nominations, beginning March 12. Not more than two persons would be allowed to accompany a candidate going to file the nomination papers, the Chief Electoral Officer Satyabrata Sahoo said on Monday.



Chief Electoral Officer Satyabrata Sahoo, addresses the media at on Monday.

—DC

He told the media that voters infected with Covid-19 or having symptoms of the disease should visit the booths compulsorily in PPE kits and that too only in the last hour of polling. To prevent crowding at the booths, the numbers have been increased from 68,324 to 88,937 in the State, Sahoo

said. Explaining the other steps taken to prevent distribution of money and gifts to voters and other malpractices during polling, he said the number of officials employed for election duty would be 4,79,892.

The EVMs were tamper-proof as they came with the

latest technology, he said adding that most of the 76 counting centres would come under CCTV surveillance. Even the public can call the toll free number 1950 round the clock to register their complaints. Another facility has also been set up at the Secretariat to monitor the election process and it can be reached by calling the number 180042521950.

Election observers would land in the state as early as April 19 and there would be 150 general observers, 40 police observers and 118 expenditure observers. So far the authorities have seized ₹32.03 crore worth of cash and articles that were transported for distribution to voters. Apart from ₹23.75 crore cash, the seizure included 15.266 kg of gold.

Vacillation over vaccination: Inject confidence



Sanjay Pinto

A division bench of the Delhi High Court has reportedly raised a point about the availability of Covishield and Covaxin vaccines that has been on all our minds.

"If the two institutes say they have the capacity, it seems their capacity is not being exploited to full capacity. At the same time, we are donating, selling vaccines to foreign countries. There has to be a sense of urgency." As the country is gradually moving from hesitancy to eagerness, the question of greater, if not equal access to the vaccine is relevant.

One must concede that vac-



JUSTICE
FOR ALL

cination cannot be like a 'First Day, First Show' frenzied movie screening. The decision to stagger the administration of the vaccines; first to the most deserving categories of citizens – the medical fraternity

and government officials, followed by senior citizens and those above 45 years with co-morbidities, does make sense. However, there are legitimate pleas from other sections for priority.

What about those who are immobile, bed-ridden and in old age homes? And their care-takers and attendants? What about bank, postal staff, grocery store, and milk delivery personnel who have been working right through the lockdown? If news reports of thousands of doses of the vaccine being wasted everyday are accurate, one wonders why it cannot be offered to those who accompany senior citizens for the shots. Or have doorstep vaccination for the disabled.

Questions from medical experts about the list of co-morbidities considered for the 45 to 60 age group cannot

be dismissed. Not to speak of false declarations or privacy and confidentiality of the information from a medical insurance disclosure standpoint.

The freedom to choose a vaccine has not been granted so far. Although the reported side effects appear mild and transient, comparisons, anxiety and feedback about the advantages of one over the other, is inevitable. Choice may lead to more widespread voluntary vaccination. A citizen's option to choose a vaccine stems from the fundamental right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution. The case for choice acquires legitimacy in view of the emergency approval of the vaccines and the justifiable need for more data in the public domain about safety and efficacy.

There were laws in India of British vintage. Like the

Vaccination Act, 1880 and the Compulsory Vaccination Act, 1892 to control smallpox. Non-compliance was visited with imprisonment. The law was repealed two decades ago. In an interesting case, the Orissa High Court in J.Choudhury Vs The State (1963) had upheld regulations on compulsory inoculation against Cholera in the run up to a festival, despite rival claims of protection by homeopathic medicines. The Court whittled down the fine and jail term of a week on the homeopathy doctor; on conviction under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code for disobedience of an order of a public servant, to a fine of five rupees!

While there is no reason to fear compulsory vaccination in India, the legal basi hypothetically, can emanate from the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, which under Section

2(1) empowers State governments to "take measures" and "prescribe temporary regulations" as it may "deem necessary to prevent the outbreak" or "spread" of any disease. The central government also is vested with sweeping powers under Section 62 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, to issue necessary "directions" to central ministries, state governments, departments or statutory bodies. The statute also confers the National Executive Authority with 17 specific powers and tasks under Section 10 for disaster management and mitigation.

There could be other obtrusive nudges for vaccination. Like invoking Section 6 of the Passports Act, 1867 to refuse this travel document to applicants who are not immunised by citing "public

interest" or causing "prejudice to friendly relations with any foreign country" or to impound or revoke a passport under Section 10 on similar grounds. Of course, subject to judicial scrutiny.

Similar restrictions can be imposed on those entering the country who have not been vaccinated.

There are opinion pieces that seek to place the refusal to get vaccinated against the backdrop of passive euthanasia, drawing reference to the Supreme Court decision in the Aruna Shanbaug Vs Union of India (2011) case and a subsequent Constitution Bench verdict. In a toss up between private choice and public health, the latter is a reasonable restriction to certain fundamental rights under the Constitution. Let's remember that a vaccinated person can still be a carrier of the

virus. The shot does not lead to herd immunity but only affords a certain level of personal resistance to the infection.

With the exception of cases where vaccination is contra-indicated and subject to safety and efficacy, primacy to public health reigns supreme. This is in line with the American 'Harm Principle' championed by John Stuart Mill, which essentially places public interest on a higher pedestal than personal choices or beliefs, as upheld by the US Supreme Court in Jacobson Vs Massachusetts (1905).

Before we can push for vaccination for all, let's first make it available to all. With a deadline of yesterday.

(The writer is an advocate at the Madras high court, columnist & author)

SHORT TAKES

App and digital platform launched for women

Chennai, March 8: The release of an app only for women which is to do with promoting them through microfinance and another in healthcare that offers the power to beat breast cancer marked International Women's Day in the city.

The 'Hand in Hand India and Belstar' Microfinance's Samrithi app will cater to digital financial inclusivity of 1.3 million women across India. The app will ensure that visitors spend less than 60 seconds to avail of services like access to finance. The app is also available in Tamil, Hindi, Marathi and Punjabi. Flt Lt (Retd) Gunjan Saxena, the first woman to win the Shaurya Chakra award in India as a woman IAF fighter pilot, was the guest of honour who launched the app with her virtual presence in an event held at a city hotel.

Campaign on cancer awareness

Chennai, March 8: Apollo Cancer Centres launched the "The Power to fight Breast Cancer is in Your Hands" campaign, which illustrates the importance of regular self-breast examination and screening. Ms Radikaa Sarathkumar presided over the campaign by launching the digital platform for breast self-examination along with Ms Preetha Reddy, Vice Chairperson, Apollo Hospitals Group.

"One woman is diagnosed with breast cancer every 4 minutes in India, and one woman dies of breast cancer every 13 minutes. Women in India are generally diagnosed at a later, more advanced stage with a poor prognosis. About 1 in 29 women are expected to develop breast cancer during their lifetime. By 2030, it is expected that breast cancer will cause the most deaths amongst women in India, than any other disease," was the message to women from the speakers at the event.

Sastra winner in Tax Law Moot

DC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR, MARCH. 8

The Sastra law school has emerged winners again in the 11th K.R. Ramamani tax moot court competition organised by SOEL, Chennai.

The all women's team comprising Pratiksha Easwar, 5th year B.COM LLB (HONS), Aravindini U (5th year BA LLB (HONS) and Kavitha Ravi (5th year BA LLB (HONS), won the trophy coinciding closely with the International Women's Day. The moot problem was on an intricate issue on curative and retrospective provisions of Sec 40 of the Income Tax Act. A total of 30 teams participated, the highest till date. In the finals, Sastra Law School beat NLIU Bhopal, to be adjudged the winners. In the last eight years of this prestigious Moot, SASTRA emerged winners five times.

Loadmen-traders feud: Three injured

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, MARCH. 8

Police arrested 150 load men belonging to the CITU, including CITU's district secretary, Ramar, and CPI(M) district secretary, Raja, for allegedly ransacking a lorry booking office owned by the Tamil Nadu traders federation in Old Pal Pannai area near Gandhi market area in the city, on Monday.

The CITU loadmen association was on strike for the last five days, due to which work in lorry booking offices in and around Gandhi market were badly affected, and commodities got piled up in the lorry booking offices.

Despite several attempts by office bearers of the Tamil Nadu Traders Federation and owners of lorry booking offices and others concerned, the CITU loadmen association did not come to an amicable solution. Following this, the traders federation established a lorry booking of its own, which was inaugurated by federation general secretary Ve. Govindarajulu on Monday. Protesting this, a group of loadmen laid a siege at the newly-opened lorry booking office.

Police rushed to the spot and persuaded the agitators to disperse promising them a solution after negotiations with higher officials. But, the protesters who entered the lorry booking office for negotiations, suddenly turned violent and ransacked the office.

In turn, they were severely beaten up by the employees of the newly-opened lorry booking office in which at least three persons received head injuries. All were shifted to the hospital, police said.

Police arrested the agitators and restored normalcy. Traders federation president A.M. Vikkirama Raja and general secretary Ve. Govindarajulu strongly condemned the incident, and appealed to the city police commissioner to book the culprits, and also provide adequate police protection to staff in the lorry booking offices, including the new one, in order to ensure prompt movements of commodities.

CM promises 1,500/month and six free LPG cylinders for women

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH. 8

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami announced a bonanza of ₹1,500 monthly cash payment and free supply of six LPG cylinders a year for women on the occasion of International Women's Day on Monday after holding discussions with party leaders on the preparation of the party manifesto and seat allocation to party candidate and allies.

Earlier in the morning, the Chief Minister skipped another Women's Day celebration organized by the party, triggering speculations on a rift between him and Deputy Chief Minister O Panneerselvam.

So to scotch such rumours both the head honchos of the AIADMK

Seat-sharing talks still on

The AIADMK could not wrap up its negotiations on seat-sharing with its allies the Tamil Maanila Congress, led by G. K. Vasan, and the DMDK, founded by actor Vijayakanth. After talks between the DMDK delegation and AIADMK leaders hit a roadblock, Vijayakanth called for a meeting of his party's district secretaries on Tuesday morning.

Another ally of the AIADMK, the BJP, has been exulting over getting 20 seats to contest the Assembly elections and also the by-election of the Kanyakumari Lok Sabha seat. Its state vice president V. P. Duraisamy told the media that the state needed a governance like that of Gujarat under Narendra Modi.

He said the BJP has grown tremendously in the state and that was reflected in the party getting the 20 Assembly seats and the Lok Sabha seat. He said that all the seven schemes announced by Stalin at Trichy had been implemented by Palaniswami and also Narendra Modi.

Blaming the DMK for the fall of the V. Narayanasamy government in Puducherry, he said it was the DMK MLA's resignation the led to the crisis for the Congress.

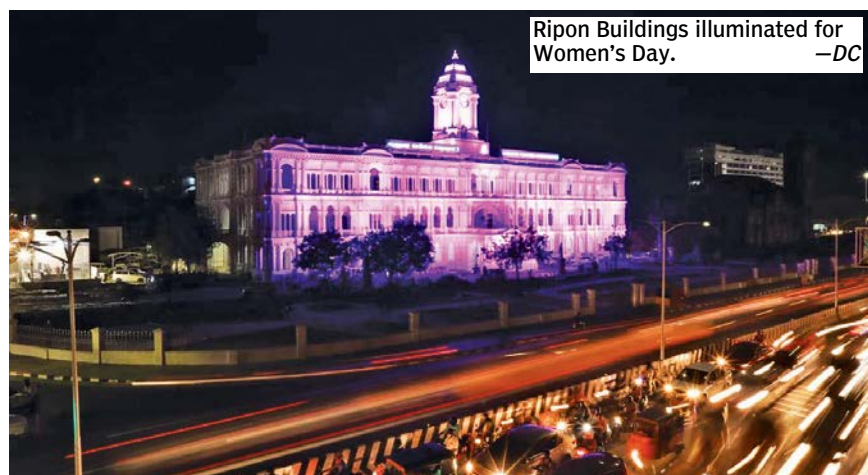
put up a joint show in the evening at the party office and also presented themselves before the media to

take a dig at DMK president M. K. Stalin for stealing their idea of ₹1,500 for women per month.

Palaniswami said that promise to pay women Rs 1,500 was part of the manifesto being prepared for the past 20 days in the party office. "Somehow Stalin had come to know of it and had announced it in Tiruchy," the Chief Minister said.

The manifesto is full of people-friendly schemes and it would be unveiled soon. Asked about the finalization of candidates, he said it would be done before nominations begin on March 12.

To a question he said that the minorities were with the AIADMK and that several groups had called on him in the last two days to pledge their support.



Ripon Buildings illuminated for Women's Day. —DC

Prevent Amazon meddling in Future-Reliance pact, PM urged

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH. 8

The 'Women of Big Bazaar SOS (Save Our Sustainance)' has requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to prevent the interference of Amazon, global online retail giant, in the agreement between Big Bazaar's Future Retail and Reliance as it will affect their livelihood.

The group represents more 2.1 lakh women — 10,000 direct employees and two lakh indirect staff — who earn their livelihood through working or supplying products to Future Group brands such as Big Bazaar, and associated retail chains of Future Group such as FBB, Central, Brand Factory, Easy Day, Heritage City, WH Smith, and 7-Eleven etc. In the wake of the Amazon-Reliance face-off for control over India's retail, the Future Group's service is facing threat.

IUML and MMK against roping in Owaisi

FROM P1

However, the two traditional Muslim parties in the alliance, the IUML and the Manithaneya Makkal Katchi, were against roping in Mr Owaisi as they felt that his brand of politics could lure the Muslim youth towards him.

When the DMK's minority wing secretary Mastan met Mr Owaisi at the latter's residence in Hyderabad in the first week of January to invite him to a conference in Chennai on January 6, all hell broke loose in the state and the DMK rescinded its plans. However, Mr Owaisi, who had been spreading his wings outside his original domain in Telangana, had been eyeing Tamil Nadu and now the AMMK had given him an opportunity to try his luck in the state.

The AMMK had decided to go it alone by roping in its own allies after Mr Dhinakaran's aunt and for-

mer chief minister J. Jayalalithaa's erstwhile confidante V.K. Sasikala suddenly announced that she was leaving the political turf and would only be praying for the victory of 'Jayalalithaa's party'.

Earlier, BP leaders had exerted pressure on the AIADMK to accommodate Ms Sasikala and Mr Dhinakaran in its front with a view to consolidating all 'AIADMK votes.' But the AIADMK leadership had put its foot down refusing to let neither Mr Dhinakaran nor his aunt into its fold.

Subsequently, even after Ms Sasikala called it quits, Mr Dhinakaran continued to remain in the electoral fray by calling applications from ticket seekers and announced that interviews to select the candidates would be held on Saturday and Sunday.

Mr Dhinakaran had fought the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in an alliance with the SDPI.



Health secretary Dr J. Radhakrishnan during an inspection along with officials on Monday. —DC

Health secy rings alarm bell

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH. 8

Health secretary J. Radhakrishnan rang the alarm bell on coronavirus spread surging again in Chennai and other places by cracking down on those not wearing facemask on Ranganathan Street in T Nagar on Monday.

He himself collected a fine of Rs 200 for those violating the facemask norms and urged the corporation officials to be strict on implementing the rule.

He said that passengers coming from other countries should take a Covid-19 test within 72 hours prior to their arrival and only those who test negative would be allowed into the country. For those coming from London, another test would be taken on their landing here, he said. However, he told the people not to be alarmed as there were 4,000 beds ready in Chennai and more beds were getting ready in the districts.

Octogenarian rescued from well

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, MARCH. 8

Fire and rescue services personnel on Monday rescued a woman octogenarian who accidentally fell into a 20-foot-deep well near Subramaiyapuram toll gate area here.

On an alert, a seven-member team of fire and rescue personnel including Assistant district fire officer, S. Karunakaran, station fire officer M. Melthio Raja, and leading fireman A. Michael, rushed to the spot. Michael entered the well which had five feet deep water. He tied a rope around the elderly woman, and other members pulled her up to the top.

Fire and rescue department sources identified the woman as Seethalakshmi, and said she was safe. She was shifted to the Mahatma Gandhi memorial government hospital and treatment and soon discharged, the sources added.

HC rejects plea on awards

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH. 8

The Madras high court has dismissed a Public Interest Litigation, which sought a direction to the authorities to continue to present the Award every year on the occasion of the birthday of former Chief Minister M.Karunanidhi i.e., on June 3 for the best contribution to classical Tamil studies by a researcher or a research institution in the areas of archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics, ancient grammar and linguistic study, literary criticism, creative writing, translation and music, drama, painting and sculpture, leading to the creation of



new knowledge in ancient Tamil culture and civilization and gaining international recognition.

The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy dismissed the PIL filed by advocate S.Doraisamy.

The bench said the petitioner seeks a direction to a government-controlled centre to present awards on the occasion of the birth anniversary of a

former Chief Minister of this state. These are matters with which courts should not be vexed. It is an entirely political decision, indeed, has been filed on political consideration at a time close to the elections. Whether or not a particular award has been continued and whether or not such award should be reinstated are matters for private consideration of the authority even if such authority is controlled by the government and appropriate representations may be made to such body without seeking any imprimatur of the court in such regard, the bench added and dismissed the petition.

HC imposes cost of ₹10,000 on woman revenue inspector

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH. 8

Observing that a woman revenue inspector has approached the court with unclean hands, the Madras high court has dismissed with a cost of ₹10,000, a petition filed by her, which sought a direction to the authorities to restore water connection to her house at Omalur taluk, Salem district.

Justice B.Pugalendhi dismissed the petition filed by R.Kala. According to petitioner, she is residing at Kottamettupatti village in Omalur taluk in S.No.78/3A. The land originally belongs to one Manickamchetty and the predecessors of Manickamchetty had allotted 6 cents of land to the petitioner's father about 50 years ago by way of gift but no deed was executed. The petitioner's father had put up a thatched house on the said land and thereafter, the petitioner had constructed a pucca concrete house and also paying the house tax and water tax to the town panchayat. During some repair works, the authorities had damaged the water line to her house and it has not been restored. The authorities have also claimed ₹2,500 for restoring the water connection but she refused to pay the same. She made a representation to the district collector. But there was no response. Hence, she filed the present petition, she added.

The counsel for the town panchayat submitted that the petitioner was in occupation of government poramboke land and has constructed a house and has also encroached upon the property of one Manickamchetty, who died in the year 1995. He has also produced the death certificate of Manickamchetty. When nobody was

residing in the said property, taking advantage of the same, the petitioner has made an application in the name of Manickamchetty, by forging his signature in the year 2013 and the water connection has been obtained by the petitioner in a fraudulent manner. On knowing the same, the water connection has been disconnected by the town panchayat, he added.

The judge said though an opportunity has been provided to the petitioner to show that the property belongs to her, the petitioner has not come forward with any document. Even in the affidavit filed by the petitioner, it was averred that the said property has been gifted to the petitioner's father 50 years back by the said Manickamchetty without any deed. Manickamchetty died in 1995 whereas an application was made in his name in the year 2013. The petitioner was working as a revenue inspector appears to have occupied another person's property without any valid documents and also made an application in the name of a dead person and also filed this petition against the authorities. "Since the petitioner has approached this court with unclean hands, this petition is dismissed with a cost of Rs 10,000. Since the petitioner is also working as a revenue inspector, the district collector/inspector of panchayat is directed to conduct an enquiry with regard to this averment against the petitioner. If it is found that the petitioner has unauthorizedly occupied the government poramboke land and has also occupied a dead person's land by taking advantage of her official capacity, the district collector shall take necessary action as per law, the judge added.

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IN BRIEF

MP PASSES ANTI-CONVERSION LEGISLATION

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MAR 8

The controversial Freedom of Religion Bill 2021, providing 10 years imprisonment for religious conversion of a girl through marriage or by any other fraudulent means was on Monday passed in the Madhya Pradesh assembly.

The bill, popularly known as 'Love Jihad' law, was passed by voice vote amid opposition by Congress which described it as "an attack on personal freedom and violation of Constitution".

State home minister Narottam Mishra however justified the bill saying that instances of some people marrying girls of other religions by concealing their real identities for conversion have of late come to the fore, forcing the government to legislate the law to check such illegal practices.

"I am not against 'love', but against 'jihad' (religious war)", he observed.

Mr Mishra took a dig at Congress for opposing the bill, saying that the Opposition party always pursued politics of appeasement to cultivate vote banks.

Participating in the debate, BJP MLA Rameswar Sharma said the bill was necessary to check the disturbing trend witnessed in tribal regions of the state in which Christian and Muslim men were found marrying tribal girls to usurp various privileges provided to adivasis by the government.

IM MAN GUILTY IN COP'S KILLING AT BATLA HOUSE

New Delhi, March 8: A court here on Monday convicted Ariz Khan, allegedly associated with the terror outfit Indian Mujahideen, for the murder of Delhi police inspector Mohan Chand Sharma and other offences in connection with the 2008 Batla House encounter.

Additional Sessions Judge Sandeep Yadav said the evidence produced by the prosecution duly proved the case beyond reasonable doubt.

The judge said that it was "duly proved that Ariz Khan and his associates caused murder of police official and fired gunshot on the police official."

The court will hear arguments on the quantum of sentence on March 15.

Inspector Sharma of the special cell of Delhi police was killed during the 2008 Batla House encounter in Jamia Nagar in south Delhi.

A trial court in July 2013 had sentenced Indian Mujahideen terrorist Shahzad Ahmed to life imprisonment in connection with the case.

The gunfight that broke out is viewed by many to be among the most politicised police encounters in the country. It saw sparring between the Congress and the BJP with many leaders of the former raising questions over the encounter and those from the saffron party accusing their Congress counterparts of appeasing minority community and going soft on terrorism.

SUSPENSION OF 10 AKALI MLAS REVOKED

Chandigarh, Mar 8: Punjab Assembly Speaker Rana K P Singh on Monday revoked the suspension of 10 Shiromani Akali Dal legislators. In the ongoing budget session, the speaker said the legislators can participate in the discussion on the budget, which was presented on Monday.

The 10 Akali legislators were suspended on Friday for disrupting Chief Minister Amarinder Singh's speech on the governor's address twice.

The Amarinder Singh-led government presented its last budget with a total size of ₹1,68,015 crore for 2021-22, making bulk of its provisions for agriculture, urban development, water resources, health and other sectors.

Dedicating the state budget to the farmers who are protesting against the Centre's three farm laws, Finance minister Manpreet Singh Badal decided against levying any fresh taxes in the state which will go to the Assembly polls early next year.

Announcing the next phase of the Congress-led government's flagship programme 'crop loan waiver scheme', Badal announced an allocation of ₹1,712 crore in which Rs 1,186 crore of 1.13 lakh farmers and ₹526 crore of landless farm workers will be waived.

SC MAY REVIEW 50% QUOTA CEILING, SEEKS STATES' VIEWS

From Page 1

"Notices be served on the standing counsel of each state and brief notes of submissions be filed," it added.

It noted the submission of senior advocates Mukul Rohatgi, Kapil Sibal and P.S. Patwalia, appearing for Maharashtra government, the verdict on the question of interpretation of the 102nd amendment might be affecting the federal structure of the states and, therefore, they needed to be heard.

Attorney-general K.K. Venugopal, appearing for Centre, said the states might be affected with the decision of the court on interpretation of the 102nd amendment and it would be better if notices were issued to all the states.

Some of the parties opposed the issuance of the notice, saying the question of interpretation did not concern them and it might delay the process.

The top court had said on February 5 that it would hear from March 8 in a hybrid manner -- a combination of physical and virtual hearings -- the pleas pertaining to the 2018 Maharashtra law granting reservation to Marathas in education and jobs.

It had fixed the schedule for hearing of the matter and said it would try to wrap up the hearing on March 18 itself. On January 20, the Maharashtra government had told the bench that a case of this nature should be heard once physical hearing commences.

On December 9, the apex court had said that issues pertaining to the 2018 Maharashtra law, granting reservation to Marathas in education and jobs, requires "urgent hearing" as the legislation had been stayed and the "fruits accrued" were not reaching the people.

The apex court had on September 9 stayed the implementation of the legislation and referred to a larger bench the batch of pleas challenging the validity of law.

The Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act, 2018, of Maharashtra was enacted to grant reservation to people of the Maratha community in the state in jobs and admissions.

- PTI

Hiren's death case now to be probed by NIA

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 8

The probe into the death of Mansukh Hiren, the owner of the explosives laden vehicle that was found outside industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence, has been transferred from Maharashtra Anti Terrorism Squad (ATS) to the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

Reacting to this Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has stated that transfer of Mansukh's murder case from ATS to NIA suggests something was fishy. The investigation into Hiren's death was transferred to the NIA on Monday and the NIA was in the process of re-registering the case into his death.

Speaking to the reporters in Mumbai on Monday, Mr Thackeray said that governments come and go, but the official administrative machinery remains the same and one needs to trust it. Mr Thackeray also said that the state had handed over the case of the vehicle laden with explosives and the mysterious death of Hiren to the ATS. According to him, the NIA taking over the case shows something was fishy. "If the Centre is planning on taking



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee participates in a rally with her party women candidates, who are contesting from different constituencies for the upcoming state Assembly polls, to mark International Women's Day in Kolkata on Monday.

- PTI

Kerala CM starts campaign with direct attack on Shah

During a rally, the home minister had termed Kerala as 'most corrupt'

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 8

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Monday hit out at union home minister Amit Shah saying that he had insulted the people of the state by terming Kerala as "most corrupt state".

Mr Vijayan while addressing an election meeting in his constituency Dharmadam in Kannur district said that several agencies had adjudged Kerala as the least corrupt state. The home minister is trying to mislead the people by creating smoke-screen. You created "acheche din" by facilitating 16,000 per cent increase in wealth," he said while referring to the allegations related to Shah's son.

At the public meeting held in Thiruvananthapuram on Sunday, Amit Shah had put certain questions to the chief minister about the involvement of his former principal secretary in

gold smuggling case, appointment of key accused in government department, her trips to Gulf along with senior official, corruption and mysterious death of a person allegedly involved in gold smuggling.

Mr Vijayan put counter questions to Amit Shah. Why have the central agencies not been able to crack the gold smuggling case even after eight months? How did Thiruvananthapuram international airport, which is under Centre's complete control, become a gold smuggling hub under the NDA regime? Isn't the main person who conspired gold smuggling a Sangh Parivar man?

He also took a dig at Mr Shah saying that he had not been in jail on the charges of murder, fake encounter, snooping, kidnapping. "Amit Shah should remember that he faced such serious charges. "People of Kerala know who Pinarayi Vijayan is. They have seen our work," he said.

About mysterious murder as alleged by Shah, Mr Vijayan said that let the home minister clearly state the facts instead of creating a smoke-screen. "If he reveals the name of the person, I am sure Kerala police will probe the matter," he said.

The chief minister said Mr Shah personified "communal politics."

He said Kerala does not believe in the communal politics that he espoused. "Our culture is not his culture. We are following the footsteps of our great social reformers Sree Narayana Guru, Chattampi Swami, Mahatma Ayyankali, Ayya Guru who spoke about communal harmony and universal brotherhood," he said.

Mr Vijayan criticised the Congress for failing to utter a word against Shah and his party.

Earlier, Mr Vijayan who arrived in Kannur was given a warm reception by LDF workers at the international airport. He was taken in a procession to

Dharmadam.

The chief minister was elected from Dharmadam constituency in 2016 with a huge margin of 36,905 votes. Though the Congress and BJP are yet to announce their candidates, political observers say Mr Vijayan might retain the seat comfortably considering the support his party enjoys in the constituency.

Meanwhile, the state leadership of CPM decided to exclude Law Minister A K Balan's wife Dr P K Jameela from the list of probable candidates for Tharoor constituency. Her name was taken off following opposition within the party.

Meanwhile, with the Congress high command directing that 60 per cent of the party candidates for the forthcoming assembly polls should be youth, women and new faces, the state leadership will have to make changes in the existing list of probable candidates.

Sources said that at the national executive meet-

ing of Youth Congress, Rahul Gandhi is believed to have reiterated that the representation for youth and women in the list of candidates should not come down.

Youth Congress state president Shafi Parambil MLA who attended the national executive meeting apprised Mr Gandhi about the less number of youth and new faces in the existing list.

Sources said based on the feedback, Rahul is understood to have spoken to the PCC leadership asking them to ensure good representation for youth and women. The Congress high command has also asked the PCC to prune the list of probables before submitting to the screening committee. As of now two to five names figure in the list for each constituency. Kerala PCC president Mr Mullapally Rama-chandran is likely to contest the polls from Kannur district. Earlier he had decided to keep off the electoral fray and concentrate on campaign.

Remarks on rape case last week completely misreported, says SC

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde on Monday said his remark to a rape accused that "will you marry her" was taken out of context and "misreported".

Expressing dissatisfaction with the "misreporting" of the proceedings, Chief Justice heading a bench also comprising Justice A.S.Bopanna and Justice V. Rama subramanian said that "We have the highest respect for womanhood". "We have

given highest respect to womanhood. We asked 'are you going to marry'. We didn't order (to) marry," the CJI said.

The clarification from the top court came in the course of the hearing of a petition by a 14-year old girl from Haryana seeking court's nod for the termination of her 26 week old pregnancy. Agreeing with the bench that it was a case of misreporting, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said "You asked a question in a different context. You were quoted

out of context." Lawyer Biju for the petitioner girl seeking termination of pregnancy described the alleged misreporting as "tarnishing of the image of the highest court".

The question had arisen in the context of an understanding between the victim girl's mother with the mother of the accused, who is now 23, that he would marry her (victim) after she becomes an adult.

In a hearing on March 1, the CJI had asked the petitioner accused if he would

marry the victim making it clear that court was not compelling him or offering an option.

However, entire thing got closed after accused petitioner seeking anticipatory bail said that he had offered to marry the victim girl but she refused and now he is married to another woman.

Rejecting his plea for anticipatory bail, the top court in the last hearing granted him four weeks of protection from arrest, giving him liberty to seek bail from the trial court.

MAJOR CONCERN

India sees over 18,000 new cases for third consecutive day

Covid cases surge, recovery rate drops

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

New cases of coronavirus infection in India were recorded above 18,000 for the third consecutive day taking the total tally of Covid-19 cases to 1,12,29,398, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Monday.

The active cases also registered an increase for the sixth consecutive day and the active caseload increased to 1,88,747 which now comprises 1.68 per cent of the total infections. The recovery rate has dropped further to

96.91 per cent, the data stated.

A total of 18,599 new infections were registered in a day, while the death toll increased to 1,57,853 with 97 daily new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed. On January 29, 18,855 new infections were recorded in a span of 24 hours.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,08,82,798 which translates to a national recovery rate of 96.91 per cent, while the case fatality rate stands at 1.41 per cent.

The count of active cases

● **ACCORDING TO THE ICMR, 22,19,68,271 samples have been tested up to March 7 with 5,37,764 samples being tested on Sunday.**

across India saw a net increase of 4,224 on Monday, compared with 4,219 on Sunday. States that have seen the biggest daily net increase in active cases are Maharashtra (5,090), Punjab (333), Karnataka (268), Haryana (133), and Gujarat (115).

With 14,278 new daily recoveries, India's recov-

ery rate stands at 96.91%, while fatality rate remains unchanged at 1.41%.

The Indian states and UTs with the worst case fatality rate at present are Punjab (3.15%), Maharashtra (2.36%), and Gujarat (2.19%). The rate in as many as 15 is higher than the national average.

Delhi recorded as many as 239 fresh coronavirus cases on Monday. With this, the tally of cases in the national capital has reached over 6.41 lakh, while the death toll mounted to 10,924. Three fatalities have been recorded in the last 24

MODI LIKELY TO ADDRESS 5 RALLIES IN KERALA

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAR. 8

The BJP has decided to field party national vice president A P Abdullakutty from Malappuram Lok Sabha constituency for the bypoll to be held along with the assembly elections. The decision was conveyed in a statement issued by BJP's central election committee in Delhi.

The decision to field Abdullakutty has been taken in view of the peculiarity of the Muslim dominated Malappuram constituency. This is

Abdullakutty's first election after joining the BJP. Earlier, he was MP twice from the CPM and later MLA from the Congress for one term.

The BJP has projected Abdullakutty as the party's Muslim face by elevating him to the post of national vice president. The Muslim League and the CPM have not decided the candidates for the Malappuram constituency as yet.

The Malappuram Lok Sabha bypoll was warranted by sitting MP and Muslim League leader P K Kunhalikutty's resignation. Kunhalikutty who returned to Kerala politics, would be contesting the forthcoming Assembly polls.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is slated to address five public meetings as part of the campaign in Kerala. Amit Shah will be addressing seven meetings. Rajnath Singh, J P Nadda, Nirmala Sitharaman, Yogi Adityanath are the other star campaigners who would be soliciting votes for the party in Kerala in the coming days.

BJP NOT TO ANNOUNCE CM FACE IN ASSAM

Guwahati, Mar 8: The BJP will not announce the chief ministerial candidate before the Assam polls and a decision in this regard will be taken by its Parliamentary Board at the time of forming the next government, the saffron party state unit president Ranjeet Kumar Dass said on Monday.

Incumbent chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal and influential minister and convenor of the North East Democratic Front (NEDA) Himanta Biswa Sarma have also said the ultimate decision on selecting a person for the chief minister chair in the new government will be that of the party's Parliamentary board.

This is in contrary to the position in 2016, when BJP had projected the then union minister Sarbananda Sonowal as its chief ministerial face before the elections were held.

"When there is no government, then the CM name is projected. When we are in government, then we do not project any name for the CM post," Dass said.

- PTI

SHORT TAKES

PHILIPPINE COPS
KILL 9 IN RAIDS
ON REBELS

Manila, March 8: Philippine police backed by military forces killed nine people over the weekend in a series of raids against suspected communist insurgents, with authorities saying the suspects opened fire first. Others, however, said those killed were unarmed activists. Police said Monday that all of those killed were associated with "communist terrorist groups" and had shot at officers while they were serving search warrants. The suspects died while being brought to hospitals, police said. Police served at least 24 search warrants, mostly for illegal firearms and explosives, in a number of locations.

THREE DEAD IN
KENTUCKY
OVERDOSES

Hazard (Kentucky), March 8: Police in a southeastern Kentucky community are working with a federal drug enforcement agency to identify the source of suspected overdoses that resulted in three deaths and sickened several other people, including two officers. The Hazard Police Department said on Facebook that officers responding to a report of suspected overdoses in an apartment found three bodies Thursday.

A fourth person suspected of overdosing was taken to a hospital while eight more overdoses have since been reported in the city, the statement said.

Police urged residents to use caution if they see any substance that is not easily recognizable.

FIVE BALOCH
ULTRAS KILLED
IN PAKISTAN

Karachi, March 8: Pakistan's security forces on Monday killed five militants of the outlawed Balochistan Liberation Army in the country's restive Balochistan province.

The militants of the separatist outfit were killed following an intelligence-based operation in Splinji area of Mastung district, a senior official of the Counter Terrorism Department in Quetta said.

They were planning a big terror attack in Quetta. Explosives, detonators and arms were recovered from their hideout. The five militants were involved in carrying out attacks on labourers and security forces. "When we raided their hideout, they opened fire on the police officials instead of surrendering," he said.

UN SAYS FIRE IN
YEMENI MIGRANT
CENTRE KILLS 8

Cairo, March 8: The UN migration agency said a fire broke out Sunday in a detention centre for migrants in Yemen's capital, killing at least eight people and injuring more than 170 others.

The International Organisation for Migration said the cause of the fire at the detention centre in Sanaa was not immediately clear. Over 90 wounded migrants were in serious condition, IOM said. The detention centre is run by the Houthi rebels, who have controlled the capital since the outbreak of Yemen's conflict more than six years ago.

The Houthis said they were investigating to determine the cause of the fire. A UN official said the fire broke out in a hangar close to the main building of the detention centre.

SEDITION CHARGE
AGAINST MORE
THAI ACTIVISTS

Bangkok, March 8: Prosecutors in Thailand charged 18 pro-democracy activists with sedition on Monday, while lodging additional charges of insulting the monarchy against three of them.

The charges, which carry a maximum penalty of up to seven years in prison, stem from an anti-government rally in September.

The three charged with violating the lese majeste law, which outlaws criticism of senior members of the royal family, are Panusaya Sithijirawattanakul, Jatupat Boonpattarakas and Panupong Jadnok. A court denied bail for all three, and they were being transferred to prison. Thai authorities have stepped up their legal offensive against those involved in a student-led protest movement.

Meghan alleges royal racism in tell-all

Former actress tells chat show host Oprah Winfrey that she had contemplated suicide

Los Angeles/London, March 8: Meghan Markle struggled as a new member of Britain's royal family after her marriage to Prince Harry to such a degree that she even contemplated suicide, the Duchess of Sussex revealed in an explosive tell-all interview with American chat show host Oprah Winfrey.

The two-hour special, aired on the CBS network in the US on Sunday and set to be aired on ITV in the UK on Monday night, saw Prince Harry joining his wife half-way through as the couple also spoke about concerns of racism within the royal ranks after being asked about their son Archie's expected skin colour when mixed-race Meghan was pregnant with their first child.

"I just didn't want to be alive anymore, Meghan said, adding that when she went to the institution for help she was told it would not be forthcoming as it wouldn't be good for the institution. The 39-year-old former American actress, who is pregnant with her second child, revealed that the couple are expecting a baby girl and shared how the palace decided that their first-born, Archie, could not be a prince and would therefore have no security. She alluded to "concerns and conversations about how dark his skin might be when he's born".

Who is having that conversation?" asked a stunned Winfrey. Meghan replied: "That was relayed to me from Harry, those were conversations the family had with him, and I think it

● **THE 39-YEAR-OLD** former American actress, who is pregnant with her second child, revealed that the couple are expecting a baby girl and shared how the palace decided that their first-born, Archie, could not be a prince and would therefore have no security.

was really hard to be able to see those as compartmentalised conversations. They were saying they didn't want him to be a prince or a princess and that he wasn't going to receive security."

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex's children do not automatically become princes or princesses because of a rule that has been in place since 1917, unless the Queen steps in.

Both Meghan and Harry refused to divulge who exactly made remarks about their son's skin tone, with Meghan admitting that if she revealed who was involved in such talks it would be very damaging to them.

That conversation I'm never going to share," asserted Harry. The 36-year-old Duke of Sussex, who is still sixth in line to the British throne, also spoke of his hurt at his father Prince Charles not taking his calls after the couple decided to step back as frontline royals last year.

[I had] three conversations with my grandmother [Queen Elizabeth II] and two conversations with my



Britain's Prince Harry (L) and his wife Meghan (C), Duchess of Sussex, in a conversation with US television host Oprah Winfrey. — AFP

father [Charles], before he stopped taking my calls, he said. It was, like, I needed to do this for my family. This is not a surprise to anybody. It's really sad that it's got to this point. But I've got to do something for my own mental health, my wife's and for Archie's as well, because I could see where this was headed, he said, in reference to the couple's decision to relocate. They have since moved

to California after formally stepping down from royal duties in March 2020, and it was announced last month that they would not be returning as working members of the royal family. Harry said the couple were only able to afford their new life in California because of his mother Diana Princess of Wales. My family literally cut me off financially. I've got what my mum left me. Without

that, we never would have been able to do this I think she saw it coming, he said.

Asked by Winfrey how they would respond to accusations that they were money-grabbing because of deals they have signed with Netflix and Spotify since moving to California, Harry replied: First of all this was never the intention. We're certainly not complaining. Life is great. We've got a beautiful hou-

se, beautiful family. The dogs are really happy.

From my perspective all I needed was enough money to be able to pay for security, to keep my family safe, he said. During the interview, the royal family were also accused of failing to protect the Duke and Duchess, with Meghan saying the situation "started to really worsen" after the couple married in 2018.

— PTI

Myanmar forces
kill 2 protesters

Mandalay (Myanmar), March 8: Security forces shot dead two people in northern Myanmar on Monday, local media reported, as the military government continued its attempt to stamp out opposition to its February 1 coup. The Irrawaddy newspaper said the victims were shot in the head during anti-coup protests in Myitkyina in Kachin State. Graphic video on social media showed protesters in the street backing away from tear gas, responding with rocks, then fleeing after a fusillade of what seemed to be automatic gunfire.

Demonstrators hurriedly carried away a number of casualties, including one apparent fatality, a person who had clearly sustained a severe head wound. A second body was seen a little later, on a stretcher, his head covered with a cloth.

Security forces also clamped down on anti-coup protesters elsewhere Monday, firing tear gas to break up a crowd of around 1,000 people who were demonstrating in the capital, Naypyitaw. The protesters deployed fire extinguishers to create a smoke screen as they fled from authorities. Meanwhile, thousands of protesters marching in Mandalay, the country's second-largest city, dispersed on their own amid fears that soldiers and police were planning to use force to break up their demonstration.

Large-scale protests have occurred daily across many cities and towns in Myanmar since the

AUSTRALIA ENDS
DEFENCE TIES
WITH MYANMAR

Canberra, March 8: Australia has suspended its defence cooperation with Myanmar and is redirecting humanitarian aid because of the military takeover of the government and ongoing detention of an Australian citizen. Foreign Minister Marise Payne said on Monday that Australian diplomats only had access to economic policy adviser Sean Turnell twice since he was detained in early February.

She described the access as "very limited consular support." "We continue to absolutely call for the release of Professor Sean Turnell," Payne told *Australian Broadcasting Corp.* Australia announced late Sunday it had suspended a defence training programme with Myanmar worth about 1.5 million Australian dollars (\$1.2 million) over five years. The programme had been restricted to non-combat areas. — AP

country's military seized power, and security forces have responded with ever greater use of lethal force and mass arrests.

The coup and its violent aftermath have led foreign governments and international organizations to impose measures against Myanmar's military leaders.

— AP

20 dead in E. Guinea blasts

Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), March 8: A series of explosions at a military barracks in Equatorial Guinea killed at least 20 people and wounded more than 600 others on Sunday, authorities said. President Teodoro Obiang Nguema said the explosion at 4 pm local time was due to the "negligent handling of dynamite" in the military barracks located in the neighbourhood of Mondong Nkuantoma in Bata.

"The impact of the explosion caused damage in almost all the houses and buildings in Bata," the president said in a statement, which was in Spanish. The defence ministry released a statement late Sunday saying that a fire at a weapons depot in the barracks caused the explosion of high-calibre ammunition. It said the provisional toll was 20 dead and 600 injured, adding that the cause of the explosion will be fully investigated. The country's president said the fire may have been due residents burning the fields surrounding the barracks.

State television showed a huge plume of smoke rising above the explosion site as crowds fled, with many people crying out "we don't know what happened, but it is all destroyed." Images on local media seen by *The Associated Press* show people screaming and crying running through the streets amid debris and smoke. Roofs of houses were ripped off and wounded people were being carried into a hospital. Equatorial Guinea, an African country of 1.3 million people located south of Cameroon, was a colony of Spain until it gained its independence in 1968. Bata has roughly 175,000

Sweden sentences woman
for taking child to IS area

Stockholm, March 8: A southern Swedish court on Monday sentenced a woman to three years in prison for taking her 2-year-old son to Syria in 2014, to an area that was then controlled by the Islamic State (IS) group.

The woman, who lived in the southern town of Landskrona, has allegedly told the child's father that she and the boy were only going on a holiday to Turkey.

However, once in Turkey, the two crossed into Syria and IS-run territory. The Lund District Court said the woman, who was not named, took the child to an area "where there was war and an environment characterised by the violent ideology of the Islamic State group."

The court, which did not identify the woman's nationality, rejected her claims that she had only

● **A SOUTHERN** Swedish court on Monday sentenced a woman to three years in prison for taking her 2-year-old son to Syria in 2014, to an area that was then controlled by the Islamic State (IS) group.

● **THE COURT**, which did not identify the woman's nationality, rejected her claims that she had only intended to go to Syria for a few days to see how it was and then return.

● **SHE MANAGED** to escape to Turkey where she was arrested with her son and two other children she had given birth to in the meantime.

intended to go to Syria for a few days to see how it was there and then return home.

inhabitants. Earlier, the Health Ministry had tweeted that 17 were killed and the president's statement mentioned 15 dead.

The Health Ministry made a call for blood donors and volunteer health workers to go to the Regional Hospital de Bata, one of three hospitals treating the wounded. The ministry said its health workers were treating the injured at the site of the tragedy and in medical facilities, but feared people were still missing under the rubble.

The blasts were a shock for the oil rich Central African nation. Foreign Minister Simeon Oyono Esono Angue met with foreign ambassadors and asked for aid. "It is important for us to ask our brother countries for their assistance in this lamentable situation since we have a health emergency (due to Covid-19) and the tragedy in Bata," he said.

A doctor calling into TVGE, who went by his first name, Florentino, said the situation was a "moment of crisis" and

that the hospitals were overcrowded. He said a sports center set up for Covid-19 patients would be used to receive minor cases. Radio station, Radio Macuto, said on Twitter that people were being evacuated within four kilometers of the city because the fumes might be harmful.

Following the blast, the Spanish Embassy in Equatorial Guinea recommended on Twitter that "Spanish nationals stay in their homes."

— AP

U.S., S. KOREA
AGREE ON NEW
COST-SHARING
TROOP DEAL

Seoul, March 8: South Korea and the United States have reached agreement on Seoul's contribution to the costs of the US troop presence on the peninsula, Seoul said Monday, as the two allies kicked off annual joint military exercises.

The issue had bedevilled the two allies' security alliance under former president Donald Trump, who had a transactional approach to foreign policy and repeatedly accused the South of free-riding.

Washington stations 28,500 troops in the country to defend it from the nuclear-armed North, which invaded in 1950. They are a key part of US forces' deployment in Asia, but negotiations over funding had been gridlocked by the former US administration's demands that the South pay billions of dollars more towards their costs.

The Trump administration initially insisted on \$5 billion a year — a more than fivefold increase. Under the previous deal, which expired at the end of 2019, Seoul paid Washington about \$920 million annually.

Seoul's foreign ministry said the two sides had reached an agreement "in principle" without specifying the agreed amount. "The government will resolve a gap that has lasted for more than a year through a swift signing of an agreement," it said in a statement. The new deal must still be approved by the South Korean legislature. US President Joe Biden has vowed to revive frayed US alliances under his predecessor to counter the challenges posed by Russia, China, Iran and North Korea.

The two sides "will now pursue the final steps needed to conclude the Special Measures Agreement for signature and entry into force that will strengthen our Alliance and our shared defence," it added. — AP

CHINA PLAN TO
INSTAL PATRIOTS
NOT PURGE OF
OPPN: LAM

Hong Kong, March 8: Hong Kong's leader on Monday praised China's plan to ensure only "patriots" remain in politics, denying the move was a purge of the opposition. Chief Executive Carrie Lam ruled out any need to consult the public on the changes, as they were decreed by Beijing. Legislation to vet all election candidates in Hong Kong is currently being discussed by China's rubber-stamp parliament and is expected to be adopted on Thursday. China has said only those deemed "patriotic" will be allowed to stand.

Critics say the radical overhaul of the city's already limited democratic system will demolish what remains of the pro-democracy opposition and ensure only loyalists remain, an argument that Lam rejected on Monday. "The improvements to the electoral system are not designed to favour someone, it is designed to ensure that whoever is administering Hong Kong is patriotic," Lam, a pro-Beijing appointee, told reporters after returning from the gathering in Beijing.

"The decision is timely, necessary, lawful and constitutional, and the central authorities' leadership and decision-making power are out of question." Authoritarian China promised Hong Kong would keep a degree of autonomy and certain freedoms when it reverted from British colonial rule in 1997.

The city has a partially elected legislature and China also promised to one day grant residents universal suffrage. Critics had for years complained freedoms were being steadily eroded. Beijing then ramped up the dismantling of the financial hub's democratic pillars. — AP

MYTHICAL ANGELS

Seven hail from Afghanistan who are receiving posthumous honours

15 nations' women feted by Jill Biden for courage

Washington, March 8: First lady Jill Biden says nearly two dozen women the State Department is honouring for their courage made an intentional decision to persist and demand justice despite their fear. The 21 women being recognised Monday with the department's International Women of Courage Award include seven from Afghanistan who are receiving posthumous honours. The first lady says that the women's stories make it easy to think of them as mythical heroes or angels among us but that they're also humans

who want to enjoy life's simple pleasures.

Some of these women have spent their lives fighting for their cause. Others are just starting out on a journey they didn't ask for, Biden says in remarks prepared for the ceremony, which were obtained by *The Associated Press*.

Some were called to service, and some couldn't escape it, Biden says. They are fighting for their own lives and for their children. They want to right the wrongs of our past, to build a brighter future for everyone. They aren't

● **SOME WERE** called to service, and some couldn't escape it, Jill Biden says. They are fighting for their own lives and for their children. They want to right the wrongs of our past, to build a brighter future for everyone. They aren't immune to fear.

immune to fear. No one is.

Biden says that in the course of ordinary lives, each of the women made an extraordinary choice.

You see, courage isn't really found, Biden says. "It doesn't conjure away

our doubts. It's an intentional decision made.

The ceremony is being held virtually and not at the State Department because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

The 14 living awardees are from Belarus, Cameroon, China, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, Iran, Myanmar, Nepal, Somalia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Venezuela.

"These women made an extraordinary choice, to persist, to demand justice, to believe that, despite the obstacles and fear they faced, there is a future

worth fighting for," Biden says.

Touching on the past year, the first lady says the pandemic shows how the things that connect us, our love for family and friends, our hope that we will be together soon transcend language and distance. She says that diplomacy, at its best, is a recognition of this connection and that the United States, under President Joe Biden's leadership, will support women around the world.

We will make the choice to lead, to be bold and to lift up the women and girls

everywhere who light our way, Biden says in her prepared remarks. For 15 years, we have honoured women around the world who have made the extraordinary choice to fight for something bigger than themselves.

Today, we recommit to being worthy of that courage, to understanding that our lives are tied together in immeasurable and powerful ways and to choosing, every day, to honor that connection, she says. We will stand with you as we build a brighter future for us all.

— AP

DECCAN Chronicle

9 MARCH 2021

Regional power strong in TN, alliances ready

The regional satraps of the South were always powerful enough politicians to make this region of India mostly stay off rule by mainstream national parties and not just in the couple of decades of the new millennium. As a bastion of Dravidian rule since 1967, Tamil Nadu has been even more of an outlier in national politics. The regional versus the national is at play once again as alliance talks on seat-sharing meandered in compulsory coalition politics in which the Dravidian majors seek out the national parties to be partners or vice versa, but without ever conceding a share in power in Tamil Nadu by way of a coalition government. Both the Congress, an older player in Tamil Nadu's politics, and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party may have been miffed but still had no recourse but to accept a lesser number of seats in their respective alliances.

The battle lines are drawn for the Tamil Nadu leg of the polls, which is due on April 6, with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)-Congress alliance pitted against the twice triumphant All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)-led front of 2011 and 2016, but which has a new ally now in the BJP. There were never any great ideological barriers against joining either alliance as most parties in the Tamil Nadu mix have been allies on either side in the past. The presence of the BJP in an alliance for the Assembly polls triggers the secular versus majoritarian religious politics debate whereas the two Dravidian fronts used to be separated in the past only by theism versus atheism theme of religious politics. The narrowness of the 2016 verdict suggests that the contests may be even tighter this time.

Friends have remained friends like the Pattal Makkal Katchi (PMK) with the AIADMK since 2011 and "frenemies" have stayed back for now after abandoning fleeting thoughts of switching alliances. Fringe players like Kamal Haasan, whose fledgling party Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) fared reasonably well in a few urban pockets in the Lok Sabha polls of 2019, may make things a bit interesting at the hustings, even though the electorate can be expected to continue to vest power in one of the two major Dravidian parties. The big difference this time around is that Tamil Nadu has moved on from the days of its larger-than life leaders like M. Karunanidhi, M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) and Jayalalithaa, and the Assembly polls for 234 seats without them is a first since the mid-1950s, when M. Karunanidhi of the DMK made his poll debut.

The anti-incumbency factor after two terms will be weighing heavily on the ruling party-led combine while his father's longtime lieutenant M.K. Stalin will be hoping the trends favour his vaulting to the gaddi for the first time. Association with the BJP did not work for the AIADMK in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, which was a 37-1 washout, which means the pressure may be even more on Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswami and his deputy O. Panneerselvam, who have kept the state government going for four long years. And, however hard Kamal Haasan may have tried to stress on ridding the state of the corrupt Dravidian parties, institutionalised graft has never appeared to have been an issue with the franchisees somewhat accustomed to accepting cash-for-votes besides freebies from their rulers.

Heed Pope's call for peace

The pictures that the world got to see through the lenses of Pope Francis' entourage on his recent visit to Iraq reflect the destruction the region has witnessed in the last two decades and the urgent need to rebuild it by ushering in peace. The Pope's call for an end to violence was meant for all those who were responsible for it, which started with the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003. Each player who held sway in the region, the Islamic State included, bathed itself in inglorious acts in the land which created and nurtured one of the most ancient of human civilisations. As St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, "no one was righteous, not even one", in this deadly game.

The import of the visit, the first one by the head of the Roman Catholic Church, is that it was not meant for photo ops alone. Pope Francis met leaders of every community that has been hit. He visited Qaraqosh, a Christian town, and Mosul, a Sunni heartland, both overrun by the Islamic State, and Erbil, capital of the autonomous Kurdish region. He met Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, one of the most senior leaders in Shia Islam, in the holy city of Najaf. He had an emotional meeting with the father of Alan Kurdi, the boy whose body was washed up on a Turkish beach six years ago, epitomising the sufferings of Syrians who tried to escape the savagery of war. He also visited Ur, the land of Prophet Abraham, the patriarch of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths.

Winding up the visit, the Pope, who commands no military divisions, made an urgent appeal to humanity: we must reaffirm our conviction that fraternity is more durable than fratricide, that hope is more powerful than hatred, that peace more powerful than war. Now, he who has ears, let him hear.

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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

Bengaluru: 5th Floor, BMTC Commercial Complex, 80 Ft. Road, Koramangala, Bangalore-560095. Ph: 08043460500; Fax: 080-22960551/52/55

Visakhapatnam: Survey No. 1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017. Phones: (0891) 2552333/2552334, Fax: (0891) 2755285

Vijayawada: No. C 3 & 4, Patnamadi, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.). Phones: (0866) 2555284/2555287, Fax: (0866) 2555234

Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry 533125. Phones: (0883) 2417208, 2417618

Anantapur: Thopavan Colony, Bangalore Bye-Pass Road, Anantapur 515004. Phones: (08554) 276903, Fax: 08554-276904

Nellore: Survey No. 527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemedugunta 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

Kochi: No. 3-B, 3rd Floor, DD TRADE TOWER, Kaloor-Kadavanthara Road, Ernakulam, Ph: 0484-4039408

Kozhikode: No 6/1002 E, First Floor City Mall, Opp. YMCA Kannur Road, Kozhikode - 673 001 Fax : 0495 4019018

Thiruvananthapuram: St Joseph Press Thycaud post, Cotton Hills, Thiruvananthapuram-14, Ph: 0471-2735105/67, Fax: 0471-4016112 Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08ss

Aakar Patel



India's image in free fall, but govt in denial on real causes

In 2020, the Narendra Modi government decided to improve India's standing on various indices that showed a deterioration in governance. These indices that were upsetting New Delhi spanned from those produced by non-profits working in specialised areas, multilateral bodies like the United Nations, institutions traditionally seen as being on the Right, like the World Economic Forum and The Economist, and also the government's own data.

The government was clearly concerned about its drop. We know this as it put out a press release on July 10 with the headline: "Niti Aayog organises a virtual workshop to monitor performance of 29 select Global Indices". At this workshop it was decided that the government would prepare a "single, informative dashboard for all the 29 Global Indices" which would allow for "monitoring of the parameters as per official data as well as the data source used by the publishing agencies".

This monitoring exercise was "not just to improve rankings but to improve systems and drive reforms to attract investments and to shape India's perception globally".

The government appeared to

believe that the issue was one related to image rather than reality. A report the next month said the government was "working to improve India's ranking on 29 global indices, and it wants the message to reach everyone loud and clear". The way it would do this was "a massive publicity campaign" that would "shape India's perception" through advertising and "micro-sites of ministries" and it would also "publicise the problems, parameters and data sources of global indices".

Would this address the problem at hand? It would not. The issue was not one of perception or bias, but one of fact. The world was not conspiring to show us in a bad light. The solution lay in acknowledging that India had been declining in several areas since 2014 and working on trying to improve them. Spending money on a media campaign would not change the numbers. India's discrediting the data of all these agencies and institutions was unlikely to reverse the views of those who had looked at and understood the facts.

Under Prime Minister Modi, India's ranking rose on three indicators (including the World Bank's Doing Business index), it remained the

same on two but and fell on forty-one. The decline was so broad and so pronounced that organisations captured similar results through different methodologies. India since 2014 has done poorly on six indices that tracked civil liberties and pluralism, five that tracked health and literacy, two tracking religious freedom and minorities, two tracking Internet denial, six tracking national power of various types, four tracking the rule of law and corruption, four tracking sustainability and environment, four tracking gender issues and their safety, four tracking economic freedoms of Indians and four tracking urban spaces.

The record leaves little room for debate or dispute. The scale and rapidity of decline in governance is manifest. It may appear strange that the Modi government should have thought reversing this performance required "a massive publicity campaign" which would "shape India's perception" through advertising and more websites, but it is how the government thought. A more credible response might have been to say that the decline was not the Modi government's doing entirely; to deny it altogether was to run away from the problem. The solution was not

"image correction" but improving performance through governance.

After the publicity strategy had fallen through for whatever reason, the government then decided at the end of 2020 that if it asked ministries to "ensure swift and updated data" it would help on the indices. This was based on the assumption that the government's work was excellent; it was merely data lag that caused it to plummet. This was also of course wrong, and the indices that have come out after that showed continued decline.

The latest report has come last week from Freedom House, which says that India is not free but "partly free". This is not opinion; it is based on a set of indicators. India says it is democratic. Freedom House agrees. It gives India 34/40 on political rights. Full marks for free and fair elections, Election Commission impartiality, freedom to start political parties, opportunities for the Opposition to increase their power. Not full marks on whether voting is hampered by violence and affected communal tension. All this we already know. The fact is that we do very well on political rights, and in fact the government gets 3/4 on transparency, which is

hardly accurate.

The real problem is political rights are only 40 per cent of the Freedom House score. The other 60 per cent is civil liberties. Here we perform poorly (33/60). On the issues of freedom of expression, religion, academic freedom, freedom of assembly, freedom for NGOs to work (the report names the attack on my former organisation Amnesty India specifically), rule of law, independence of judiciary, due process by the police and so on, our rating is poor. Can we disagree with this? We cannot. The answer is not to deny, as the government has done through a one-page response. This will not work because another report is coming soon: the reputable Varieties of Democracy report from the University of Gothenburg. Last year's report had said: "India has continued on a path of steep decline, to the extent it has almost lost its status as a democracy."

Our precipitous decline is being noticed and recorded abroad with alarm. It is strange that within India we are carrying on as if it is business as usual.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

Subhani



Stop meddle & muddle: Rework regional policy



Mohan Guruswamy

Much as we would like to exalt our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru as the founder of modern India's foreign policy, like all other major countries our policy too derives its basis from one man, France's Cardinal Richelieu, who enshrined national interest as the only guiding principle to conduct affairs with other nations. The French have an elegant phrase for it. *Raison d'état*. Richelieu rejected the notion that policy should be based on values and sentimental considerations. He believed, as we all still do, that the State has permanent interests, the singular pursuit of which requires much intellectual and moral flexibility. He believed that the only challenge facing a policymaker is to decide what the national interest was and what it required? It was this singular pursuit that had Catholic France intervening in the Thirty Years War (1618-48) on the Protestant side to block the increasing power of the Pope. At Richelieu's prompting, the philosopher Jean de Silhon defined the concept of reason of state as "a mean between what conscience permits and affairs require".

How we see our national interest depends on how we see ourselves. Therein lies the rub. The rump Republic of India sees itself as the successor to the British Raj, which left these shores in 1947. For the two centuries that Britain was the paramount power in India, India's national interests were synonymous with those of Britain. The paramount power's paramount interest, as far as India was concerned, was to keep the goose that laid the golden egg healthy and well. Lord

Curzon of Kedleston, who was Viceroy of India (1898-1905) and later Britain's foreign secretary (1919-24), is still regarded by many of our foreign policy elite as the man who outlined India's grand strategic vision and its focus on fixing borders. It is argued by these people that while the political context might have changed, geography has not. Physical geography may not have changed, but political geography has changed very much. Afghanistan is no longer the glacis on which the war for India will be fought. Neither are Tibet and Xinjiang buffers any longer against northern threats. The threats are at our doorsteps now.

In the immediate period after 1947, India's foreign policy was still conducted by the Western educated elite who had imbibed their lessons in Cambridge and Oxford and believed they were legatees of the white man's burden, including the defence of India. India's immediate neighbours, for their own reasons, still largely see India's conduct towards them as the continuation of the British legacy. It didn't help very much when the Oxbridge elite were followed by the St. Stephen's elite who were also cast about the same last "laat sahib" mould.

Consequently, our diplomats have tended to be overbearing with the smaller non-hostile neighbours, often treating them like errant schoolboys. This is the constant lament heard in the neighbourhood, whether it is in Colombo or Kathmandu. Increasingly, such voices are being heard in Timphu as well. With Bangladesh, too, we have rapidly descended from being the liberator to the neighbourhood bully. The dominant Indian discourse

of "the demographic aggression" by Bangladeshi "ghusbaits" has created a certain unhelpful mentality in both countries. What after all must a nation think when its larger neighbour thinks of it as an unending source of human vermin?

To add to our woes, we still seem to be wearing those Curzonian blinkers that have bequeathed us the Great Game mentality with its focus on highways, railway lines and sea lanes and ports as military threats. South Block still doesn't seem to have realised that modern military means and technology have made the theories of Mahan and Mackinder largely irrelevant. It is this kind of infantilism that makes us see every Chinese investment in the cash-starved region as a threat to India's hegemony, when even our worst fears about Hambantota or Gwadar make them juicy and easy targets.

While excoriating foreign secretary Earl Russell in the House of Lords on February 4, 1864, Edward Stanley, the Earl of Derby, said: "The foreign policy of the Earl may be summed up in two short homely but expressive words — meddle and muddle." But we are now no longer prepared to behave like Lord Curzon either. The tension between that Curzonian tendency to meddle and the passive spirit of Jawaharlal Nehru to muddle still persists. We see this manifested in New Delhi's policy responses to the current situations in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh or the Maldives — with more muddle than meddle. The muddle in

Our diplomats have tended to be overbearing with the smaller non-hostile neighbours, often treating them like errant schoolboys. This is the constant lament heard in the neighbourhood, whether it is in Colombo or Kathmandu.

South Block is not due to the limited number of options. There is no *l'embarras des richesses*, but a poverty of clarity.

The most significant development of this century so far has been the rise of China as an economic powerhouse, with its military not lagging far behind. Former Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi, responding to criticism about China's assertiveness, just said: "China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and that's just a fact." Indeed it is, and at this point in time even India is much too small to be able to compete with it in its spree of chequebook diplomacy. Most of India's regional neighbours are poor countries and if their adversity forces them not to look at Chinese gift horses in the teeth, then we must understand it. In other circumstances, we too might have done so too? Debt doesn't kill. I recall the dictum enunciated by Walter Wriston, the legendary Citibank chairman who told my class at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy over 40 years ago: "Countries don't go under, they just roll over".

But our inherited Curzonian vision and now a little bit of the American-induced notion of containment are pushing India into a confrontationalist posture with China. India will do well to remind itself that of the four countries that are a part of the 'Quadrilateral', only India has a long and contentious land border with China. The other three players are hooked up to China's growth engine and are also the most responsible for its rise — America with its trade profligacy, and Japan with its massive investments and transfer of technology. They have created today's China. India must be wary about becoming their cat's paw.

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,441.07	0.07
Nifty 50	14,956.20	0.12
S&P 500*	3,870.96	0.76
Dollar (₹)	73.25	-0.30
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.94	-0.02
Euro (₹)	86.96	0.17
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,114*122	0.27
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.27	-1.57
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.223	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.592	0.038

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Tata Motors gets shareholders nod for PV hiving off

Tata Motors said its shareholders have approved hiving off its passenger vehicles business into a separate entity. On March 5, the shareholders voted to consider and approve the transfer of the passenger vehicles business unit to TML Business Analytics Services Ltd as a going concern on a slump sale basis for a lump sum consideration. The firm had said that its PV business has been valued at Rs 9,417 crore.

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Groundwater extraction causing them to sink Coasetal cities inundating four times faster: Study

JONATHAN TIRONE
MARCH 8

The economic impacts of rising sea levels will be felt four times faster by people living in some of the world's biggest coastal cities, which are sinking beneath their own weight into manmade cavities created below the surface. The scientific assessment published on Monday in Nature Climate Change is the second in a month to show that coastal economies are more vulnerable than previously thought to the danger of rising sea levels. The extraction of groundwater and other resources from beneath cities, including Jakarta, New Orleans and Shanghai, is causing them to slowly sink, a phenomena called subsidence, resulting in greater risks from flooding and storm surges.



"Due to its coincidence with major population centres, subsidence has global social and economic implications," reads the peer-reviewed research written by scientists from China, France, Germany and the UK. "These results indicate that the impacts and adaptation needs are much higher than reported global sea-level rise measurements suggest." While sea-levels have

risen at about 2.5 millimetres a year globally over the last two decades, coastal residents representing some 58 per cent of the world's population have experienced average relative sea-level increases of 7.8 to 9.9 millimetres annually, according to the research, which used satellite data to gauge changes in land elevation. The risks of groundwater extraction have long been

known but the new research suggests policy makers can regulate development and groundwater extraction to slow down and mitigate the impact of higher oceans. "Human-induced subsidence in and surrounding coastal cities can be rapidly reduced with appropriate policy for groundwater utilisation and drainage," the researchers wrote. "Such policy would offer substantial and rapid benefits to reduce growth of coastal flood exposure due to relative sea-level rise." For cities like Jakarta, the window to mitigate sinking ground levels and rising seas is already closing. Indonesia is relocating its capital to higher ground on the island of Borneo, a move that will cost billions of dollars by the time it begins later this decade.

—Bloomberg

IMF suggests carbon tax for India

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 8

Levying a carbon-tax will help India accelerate the shift away from thermal power generation in order to become a global leader in achieving emission reduction targets while boosting revenues to reduce the country's fiscal deficit, finds the International Monetary Fund. While India is expected to achieve both its 40 per cent non-fossil fuel target and

its emissions intensity target by 2030, the country's current emissions target is not as strong compared to some other countries. India's mitigation policy is of central interest to the global community as significant economic and population growth is likely to account for a larger share of global emission in the next 10 to 20 years. India has an opportunity to become a world leader by taking bolder steps toward mitigation, says the IMF.

To achieve larger emission reductions, India may need to focus on phasing out its reliance on coal-fired power plants. For this, levying a direct tax on fossil-fuel production, in proportion to carbon content and carbon emissions would accelerate the shift away from thermal power generation while also providing a fiscal dividend. A \$50 per tonne carbon tax would reduce carbon dioxide emissions by about 35 per cent below a "no-policy-change" baseline scenario by 2030.

Unlike subsidisation for renewable energy, which carries a fiscal cost, a substantial carbon tax could provide a large fiscal boon to India. A \$50 per tonne carbon tax would generate 1.5 to 2 per cent of GDP in additional fiscal revenues by 2030. If this boost to revenues were used to cut the country's deficit, it would play a large role in counteracting the deterioration in India's fiscal position.

ANUPAM RASAYAN PRICES IPO IN ₹553-555 BAND

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 8

Surat-based specialty chemical maker Anupam Rasayan' Rs 760-crore initial public offering opens on March 12. The price band for the public issue has been fixed at Rs 553 to Rs 555 per equity share of Rs 10 face value. "The issue aggregating up to Rs 760 crore is a fresh issuance of equity shares...The company proposes to utilise the net proceeds towards repayment of debt and for general corporate purposes," the company said during a virtual press conference.

The company has two distinct verticals of life science related specialty chemicals comprising products related to agrochemicals, personal care and pharmaceuticals; and other specialty chemicals, comprising specialty pigment and dyes, and polymer additives. Anupam Rasayan has developed long-term relationships with various multinational corporations, which has helped the company expand its product offerings and geographic reach across Europe, Japan and United States, the company said. As of December 31, 2020, the company operates through six multi-purpose manufacturing facilities based in Gujarat, with four facilities located at Sachin, Surat.

Larger firms recover better than smaller ones

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 8

Larger companies have demonstrated better recovery in terms of sales and profitability compared to their smaller counterparts, finds an analysis by CMIE.

"India's smart economic recovery is described as one in which large companies did well for themselves even as the smaller ones languished. MSMEs have suffered as they are unable to survive the sudden and prolonged lockdown and the consequent shrinking of overall business. Large companies are not only better placed to ride out the storm but also gain by cannibalising markets of the withering smaller companies," says Mahesh Vyas, CEO of CMIE.

The private think-tank studied the quarterly financial statements of 3,220 listed non-finance companies to understand growth in net sales, wages and profitability. Listed companies have been recording a fall in net sales in year-on-year comparisons well before the lockdown pounded them. Then, in the first quarter of the lockdown net sales were down by a massive 39 per cent, followed by 10 per cent in the September quarter and a little less than one per cent in the December quarter. The lockdown affected companies of all sizes severely. But, the recovery was selective. Larger



companies have recovered in terms of sales growth while smaller companies still see shrinking sales. The largest companies by size saw their sales shrink by 1.5 per cent in the December quarter. If petroleum refining and aviation industries are removed, the largest companies showed positive growth. Sixty-two per cent of such companies reported growth in net sales. Large companies too registered a growth of 6.6 per cent. All the other companies in the mid- and small segment recorded a fall in sales and the extent of the fall in sales was inversely proportional to the company size. Similarly, the wage bill of all the companies increased by 3.5 per cent in the December quarter. The largest companies saw a higher 4.7 per cent increase in the wage bill while large companies saw a 1.2 per cent increase. All other companies saw a fall in their wage bill. The fall in the wage bill increases as the size of the companies becomes smaller.

COFFEE-BREAK

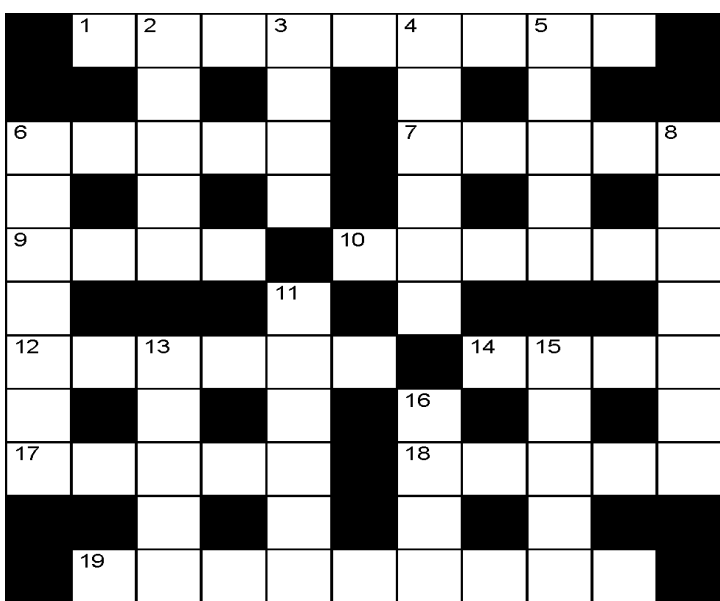
Your day today By Dr C.V.B. Subrahmanyam

- Aries:** You will have to plan your day without relying on others' help. You need to make efforts to maintain the morale at workplace today. You will be the life of a party.
- Taurus:** You will need to pay proper attention to avoid misunderstanding at the domestic front. Finances need attention. Plan a monthly budget and stick to it.
- Gemini:** Spend quality time with your near and dear ones. You are likely to visit some close relatives to celebrate an auspicious occasion today.
- Cancer:** Do not be surprised if a longstanding friendship takes a romantic turn today. Unnecessary investment would block money. Students will be successful in examinations.
- Leo:** It is advisable to be co-operative with your colleagues. A special compliment from a friend would keep you in a cheerful mood. Don't pay heed to gossip at work.
- Virgo:** Your pleasing personality and good communication skills are likely to come in handy while dealing with tough situations at work. Spend time with your partner, and let them know how you feel.

You share your b'day with

- Shashi Tharoor, an Indian politician, writer and former international diplomat who has been serving as Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, since 2009.**
- Libra:** You will enjoy spending time with children. Some of you will get their desired promotion or hike due to their continued hard work. Household chores will take time.
- Scorpio:** You are certain to earn monetary profits through proper planned investments. Working in a team as a cohesive unit is likely to bring promising professional results.
- Sagittarius:** Luck will be on your side when at work. A good day for teaching professionals. A social get-together with your family and friends is in the offing.
- Capricorn:** You are likely to face some problems at work as a negative person tries to interfere and cause misunderstanding. Make sure you strictly avoid a temper flare-up at the domestic front.
- Aquarius:** Students are likely to get a special training for their benefit. You need to recreate romantic memories to uplift partner's mood. Be careful against indulging in an argument with strangers.
- Pisces:** Wise investment and careful spending will be highly rewarded. At the professional front you are likely to learn different aspects of time management. Spend the evening with your partner.

QUICK CROSSWORD



- Across
- Cause for complaint (9)
 - Observed secretly (5)
 - Ravine (5)
 - Article (4)
 - Creative person (6)
 - Memorial tablet (6)
 - Passport endorsement (4)
 - Angered (5)
 - Representative (5)
 - Call attention to (9)
- Down
- European river (5)
 - Whirlpool (4)
 - Type of cat, goat, rabbit (6)
 - Dog breed (5)
 - Captain (7)
 - Pull out (7)
 - Disarray (6)
 - Was ill (5)
 - Thoughts (5)
 - Tuck (4)

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

Across: 1. Showdown, 7. Rainy, 8. Mango, 9. Argued, 10. Delf, 12. Last, 14. Protea, 17. Khaki, 18. Weigh, 19. Hedgehog.

Down: 1. Swing, 2. Oxygen, 3. Dumb, 4. Wince, 5. Dreamlike, 6. Toothache, 11. Growth, 13. Shade, 15. Thing, 16. Wing.

Word Mine

G
LRD
UTNNI

TODAY'S RATINGS: 20 AVERAGE; 23 GOOD; 26 OUTSTANDING

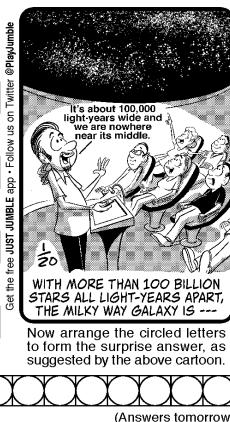
How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown in today's puzzle? In making a word, each letter may be used only once. Each word must contain the letter at the top of the pyramid. There should be at least one nine letter word. Plurals, foreign words and proper names are not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

Dealer: South
Vulnerable: Both
West North East
1NT Pass 6NT All Pass
Opening lead: ♠9

jumble

TISEU
PUCEO
SRBABO
RYPITU

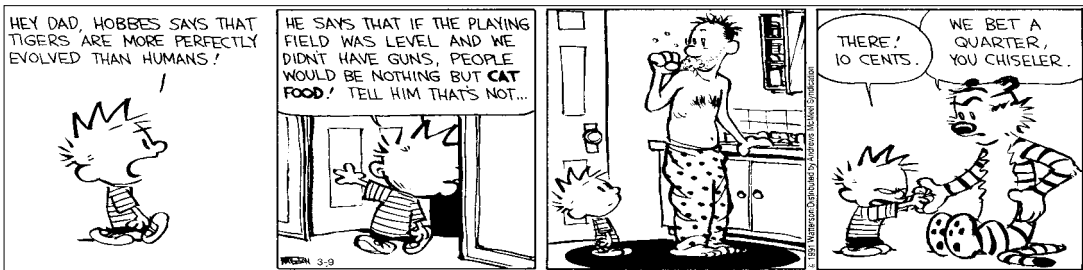
Yesterday's Jumbles: DECAPY THANK CHUBBY PROVEN
Answer: The expensive walnuts don't taste right and weren't what they were — CRACKED UP TO BE



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

(Answers tomorrow)

CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



THE WIZARD OF ID | Parker and Hartsd



ARCHIE | Bill Henry Scarpelli & Craig Boldman



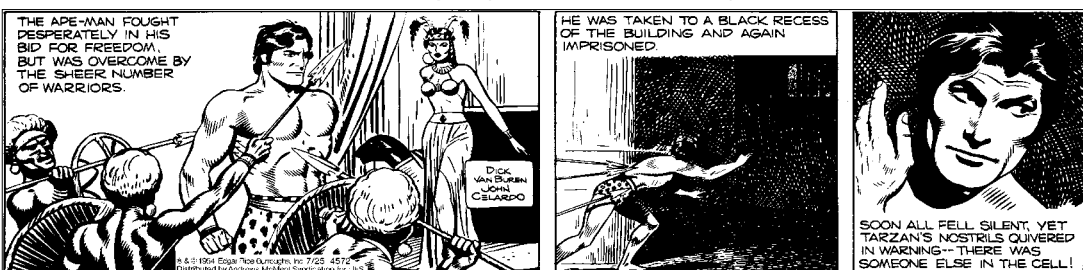
BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



TARZAN | Edgar Rice Burroughs



bridge
PHILLIP ALDER

IS IT THE SAME, OR IS IT DIFFERENT?

Please may I introduce you to Dayjah Voo? Maybe you think you have met him before. But are you sure? Or is it today's deal? True, the club suit and the contract are identical to yesterday's. In six no-trump with a friendly spade lead, there are eight tricks outside clubs. You need only four club tricks, not five. No doubt you are planning to adopt the safety play of leading a low club toward dummy's holding.

This produces four club tricks whatever the lie of the suit and is particularly effective when West has all five missing clubs.

Well, you are nearly right. But there is another twiprice that may cause you to fall. At trick one, the natural reaction is to play low from the dummy, capturing East's spade queen with your king. Now a low club to the 10 wins trick two, East discarding a heart. You return to hand with

a heart and lead another low club. However, West, if in midseason form, wins with his queen and returns a heart. This removes your last hand entry before the clubs have been unblocked. Suddenly the contract has perished.

What is the solution? Well, there are two (three, if you count a squeeze-endplay against West in clubs). You could win trick one with dummy's spade ace. Alternatively, play dummy's

spade jack. In this latter case, whether East covers with the queen or plays low, you have three hand entries remaining after trick one: two in hearts and one in spades. You can take the safety play in clubs and untangle your 12 tricks.

Always be careful not only to count your tricks but also to watch your entries.

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SHORT TAKES

Bajrang takes gold, No.1 rank

Rome: Olympic-bound Indian wrestler Bajrang Punia pulled off a two-pointer in the last 30 seconds of the gold medal bout to defend his title at the Matteo Pellicone Ranking Series event, a result that propelled him back to world number one rank.

Up against Mongolia's Tulga Tumur Ochir, Bajrang was trailing 0-2 till the final moments of the 65kg final but managed to level the scores, 30 seconds from the final whistle.

Since the last scoring point came from the Indian, he was declared the winner on criteria on Sunday night.

Bajrang's leg defence seemed to be a particularly improved aspect of his game in the one-year break, forced by the coronavirus pandemic.

Bajrang was placed second in the rankings before the event and is now on top of the table in the 65kg category with 14 points. — *PTI*

Mumbai pip Goa for historic final

Goa: Two hundred and ten minutes of football over two legs, yet there was no winners to head into the final between Mumbai City FC and FC Goa!

Such was the battle, that it came down to ISL's first-ever sudden death in a penalty-shootout to decide the first finalists of Season 7. And it turned out to be Mumbai City who had the last laugh as they edged FC Goa on penalties 6-5.

One of the highlights of the thriller was when both coaches decided to substitute their goalkeepers with the contest heading into the penalty shootout. Goa brought on Naveen Kumar while Mumbai raised some eyebrows when they decided to field Phurba Lachenpa in place of skipper and one of the best goalkeepers of the season Amrinder Singh. But, as it turned out to be, the Sikkimese gloveman survived the battle of nerves, helping Mumbai City book a place in the final for the first time.

Sharath, Sathiyam and Batra in Rd 2

Doha: Ace Indian paddlers Achanta Sharath Kamal, Sathiyam Gnanasekaran and Manika Batra started their campaign at the WTT Star Contender Doha on a winning note by progressing into the second round of their respective singles categories, here on Monday. Sharath struggled in the initial stages as he lost the first game against Brian Afanador before the world no. 32 recovered well to seal the match 8-11, 11-8, 11-7, 11-1 against the Puerto Rican in the first round. World no. 37 Sathiyam was also trailing 0-2 in his opening match before making a remarkable comeback to pull off a sensational 9-11, 7-11, 11-7, 11-4, 11-4 victory against France's Emmanuel Lebeson. Commonwealth Games gold medalist Batra notched up a comfortable 11-5, 11-9, 11-9 win against Chinese Taipei's Hsein-Tzu Cheng in the first round.

Team LeBron dominate All-Star

Atlanta: Damian Lillard nailed a game-ending three pointer from just inside half court as LeBron James improved to 4-0 as an NBA All-Star Game captain with a 170-150 win over Team Durant on Sunday night. Two-time NBA MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo captured the Kobe Bryant MVP Award going a perfect 16-of-16 from the field for a game high 35 points in Atlanta. — *AFP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

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

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Second Semifinal, 2nd leg — Mohun Bagan vs North East United from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, HD

Champions League: Round of 16, Second Leg — Juventus vs Porto from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2; Dortmund vs Sevilla from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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Editor: KAUSHIK MITTER

CATCH 20-20!

Team management in dilemma over picking perfect XI

Ahmedabad, March 8: The Indian team management faces a problem of plenty going into the five T20 Internationals against England, an assignment which marks the beginning of the side's build-up to this year's T20 World Cup at home.

There are 19 players available for selection and with two in contention for each slot, the XI for the five games, starting here on Friday, will be an indication to how head coach Ravi Shastri, captain Virat Kohli and bowling coach Bharat Arun are looking at the next six to seven months for the shortest format.

Will they look for a settled combination to first clinch the series and then experiment or will they field absolute rookies in the squad looking at the bigger picture?

For a team that's so closely followed, the result does matter and that's why one can expect a settled first eleven for the first three games since all matches are at the same venue on similar kind of tracks.

The roaring comeback of Rishabh Pant will lead to a lot of interesting developments at the top of the order.

Pant's inclusion means that K.L. Rahul, who till a few months back was the first choice keeper-opener, is unlikely to don the big gloves.

Shikhar Dhawan and Rohit Sharma were a settled white ball opening pair till recently but Rahul's emergence as a potent white ball specialist has spiced up the competition. Dhawan recently had a score of 150 odd in the Vijay Hazare Trophy for Delhi and when it comes to Rohit, there's nothing to be discussed.

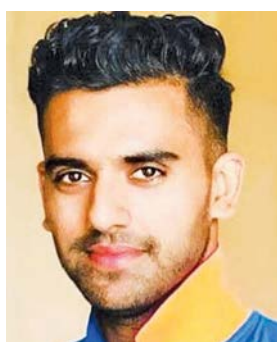
So where does the team management fit in Rahul, who has been a successful



Shikhar Dhawan



K.L. Rahul



Deepak Chahar



Shreyas Iyer



Bhuvneshwar Kumar

IPL opener? Will he be slotted in the middle-order as Dhawan's game is not suited to batting lower down?

These are two pertinent questions and in the answer, will be a follow-up question.

With skipper Kohli himself coming in at No 3 and two game-changers like Pant and all-rounder Hardik Pandya expected to play the big shots at Nos 5 and 6, where does it ideally leave Rahul?

The only place he can be slotted is No 4 but Shreyas

Iyer and Suryakumar Yadav are also jostling for a place.

If one closely follows the pattern of picking the playing XI, Surya, a sentimental favourite, will have to wait for his turn as Shreyas has done nothing wrong.

But when it comes to a three-way battle between Rahul, Shreyas and Surya, the Karnataka man beats the two Mumbai boys hollow with his repertoire of strokes and ability to shift gears.

Similarly, in the pace

department, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, once upon a time India's best white ball exponent, is coming back after a long lay-off and will be engaged in a two-way fight with Deepak Chahar and Shardul Thakur.

For Bhuvneshwar, his experience and being a better bowler at the death compared to Chahar holds him in good stead but he hasn't played a lot of cricket save a few Mushtaq Ali games.

Yuzvendra Chahal, Washington Sundar and

Axar Patel are the three spinners expected to feature in the playing XI on the sluggish Motera tracks.

In all, there are too many good players and very little space to fit all of them with three sure-shot picks — Mohammed Shami, Ravindra Jadeja and Jasprit Bumrah already resting or recuperating from injury.

Once they comeback, it will be a bigger selection headache for the management but one that they won't mind. — *PTI*

GURJAPNEET TAKES HAT-TRICK IN GURU NANAK'S BIG WIN

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 8

Gurjapneet Singh's hat-trick helped defending champions Guru Nanak 'A' register an easy win over Avichi Arts & Science in the seventh Pavit Singh Nayyar Memorial all India inter-college T20 cricket tournament.

BRIEF SCORES
Avichi Arts & Science 87/9 in 20 overs (V. Harish 44, R. Keerthivasan 31; Yudheeswaran 4/11, Gurjapneet Singh 3/11) lost to Guru Nanak 'A' 89 no loss in 4.4 overs (S. Aravind 45 (not out), S. Arun 39 (not out)); The New College 103 in 19.4 overs (G.S. Dayanithi 3/20) lost to Gobi Arts & Science 104/1 in 12.4 overs (R. Vineeth 64 (not out); MCC 130/9 in 20 overs (A. Mohammed Rafeek 44) lost to SSN 131/7 in 18.5 overs (M. Monish Raj 30); Bharath Arts & Science

129 in 19.1 overs (M. Vijayakumar 49) lost to RKM Vivekananda 130/4 in 17.1 overs (Md. Adnan Khan 43, R. Vimal Kumar 76); Guru Nanak Stars 194/5 in 20 overs (N. Sunil Krishna 71, C. Saffin 39, V. Abishek 36) bt SMVEC, Puducherry 102 in 19.4 overs (J. Venkataramanan 28, S. Jagadeeswaran 25; R.M. Seshan 3/22); MVIT, Puducherry 119/5 in 16 overs (M. Sudarshan 3/19) bt Mar Gregorios 112/5 in 16 overs (Jaya Surya Prabha 59; G. Ilango 3/17); Loyola 172/7 in 20 overs (M. Vishal 36, S. Rithik Easwaran 45, Tushar Raheja 35, A.H. Mohamed Suhail 28 (not out); Paul Raj 4/36) bt Presidency 135/5 in 20 overs (P. Surendiran 63, Logesh 68); Pachaiyappa's 162/4 in 20 overs (J. Ranjith Kumar 38, S. Sanjay 39, A.S. Santhosh 35 (not out) bt SGC, Puducherry 142/8 in 20 overs (G. Dilip 36, Rishi Rajendran Raut 48 (not out)).

Blown away in opener, India eye turnaround

Lucknow, March 8: A rusty Indian women's cricket team will be seeking some rhythm in the second ODI against South Africa here on Tuesday after being outplayed by the visitors in the series-opener.

Though captain Mithali Raj and her deputy Harmanpreet Kaur had insisted that rustiness won't be an issue in their first series in 12 months, India clearly looked a side which had not played for a long time in the opener of the five-match series on Sunday.

A better prepared South Africa, on the other hand, were clinical and will be hard to beat in the coming games.

After the game, Kaur realised the players needed some time to gel as a unit. Barring Kaur, Raj and Deepti Sharma to a certain extent, none

ICC WOMEN EVENTS TO HAVE MORE TEAMS FROM 2026

Dubai, March 8: The ICC tournaments for women cricketers will have more teams from 2026 onwards with the governing body on Monday announcing its expansion plan for the game to mark the international women's day.

The ICC said the T20 World Cup will have 12 teams instead of 10

from the 2026 edition. The ODI World Cup will also be expanded — from eight teams to 10 — from the 2029 edition. The 2024 T20 edition will continue to be a 10-team affair and the next two ODI World Cups will have eight teams which is the norm at the moment. — *PTI*

of the batters could apply themselves on a decent batting surface.

The spinners, who are traditionally considered India's strength, hardly troubled the South African duo of Lizelle Lee and 21-year-old Laura Wolvaardt, who put up the highest ever

opening wicket stand against India to run away with the contest.

There were some positives, however, such as Raj scoring a gritty half-century and pacer Jhulan Goswami showing she is still among the best in the business. — *PTI*

Samarth puts Karnataka in semis

New Delhi, March 8: Young opener Devdutt Padikkal sent a strong message to the national selectors before England ODIs as he slammed his fourth consecutive List A ton as Karnataka beat Kerala by 80 runs in a quarter-final game of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Monday.

Karnataka rode on skipper Ravikumar Samarth's knock of 192 off 158 balls and a stroke-filled 101 by 20-year-old left-handed Padikkal (off 119 balls) to post an imposing 338/3 and then bundled out the opposition for 258.

Kerala's decision to put Karnataka into bat at the Air Force ground backfired badly, as Samarth and Padikkal toyed with their attack with a massive 249-run partnership for the first wicket.

Samarth, a 28-year-old right-hander, hammered 22 boundaries and three



Priyank Panchal

sixes in his 158-ball knock.

He completed his century in 112 balls and was aggressive right from the start, while Padikkal hammered 10 boundaries and two maximums.

PANCHAL'S TON TAKES GUJARAT TO SEMIS

Skipper Priyank Panchal's stroke-filled 134 and an equally impressive show from the bowlers set

up Gujarat's massive 117-run win over Andhra in the quarter-final here.

Gujarat rode on Panchal's 134 to post a 299 for 7 and then bundled out the opposition for 182, to make it to the semi-final. India Test star and Andhra captain Hanuma Vihari was out for a five-ball duck.

Opting to bat at the Arun Jaitley Stadium, Gujarat lost Dhruv Raval

(18) early, after he was dismissed by medium pacer KV Sasikanth (2/55).

However, skipper Panchal took on the Andhra attack and found an able partner in one-drop batsman Rahul Shah (36 off 59 balls; 3x4) as the two rallied the Gujarat innings with their 80-run second-wicket stand. But just when it looked like the duo would take the game away, Andhra slow-left arm spinner A Lalith Mohan (2/55) broke the partnership by trapping Shah leg before. — *PTI*

BRIEF SCORES
■ Gujarat 299/7 (Priyank Panchal 134; Rahul Shah 36; M. Harishankar Reddy 3/60, A. Lalith Mohan 2/55) bt Andhra 182 (Ricky Bhui 67, Arzan Nagwaswalla 4/28; Piayush Chawla 3/33).
■ Karnataka 338/3 (Ravikumar Samarth 192, Devdutt Padikkal 101; Basil N.P. 3/57) bt Kerala 258 (Vathsal Govind 92; M. Azharuddeen 52; Ronit More 5/36, Shreyas Gopal 2/64).

Djokovic on top for record weeks

Surpasses Federer's World No. 1 mark

Paris, March 8: Novak Djokovic set a new landmark of 311 weeks as world number one on Monday, one week longer than Roger Federer whose tally of a record 20 Grand Slam titles is now firmly in the Serb's sights.

"Big day today", tennis superstar wrote on Twitter. Djokovic, 33, won his 18th major at the Australian Open in February.

With Federer turning 40 in August, the Serb has time on his side. He is also a year younger than Rafael Nadal who also has 20 majors.

"It really excites me to walk the path of legends and giants of this sport," said Djokovic, in a statement released by the ATP.

"To know that I earned my place among them by following my childhood dream is a beautiful confirmation that when you do things out of love and passion, everything is possible."

He has spent 88 weeks at number one, across two different stints.

Djokovic reclaimed the top ranking from Nadal in February 2020 and finished as year-end number one for the sixth time, tying the record set by Pete Sampras. ATP Chairman Andrea Gaudenzi said: "Novak's many achievements in tennis are nothing short of extraordinary. Among them this record may stand as his single most impressive." — *AFP*

CITY CLIPS

Vinayak sets new meet record

V. Vinayak of SDAT Velachery set a new meet record by finishing the men's butterfly 50mts event in 00:25.55 seconds in 74th state senior aquatic championship in Chennai. He eventually won the individual men's championship. B.Shakthi of Ansa Dubai was named the individual champion in women's. TDSA Tirunelveli were crowned the overall champions.

Results (Day 2): Women: Freestyle 1500mts: 1. V. Varsha (SDAT Velachery) 19:52.84; 2. PKKR Mahalakshmi (Chettinad) 20:25.59; 3. P.M. Abishiktha (ORCA) 20:28.47. **Breast stroke 200mts:** 1. Shriya Ishwar Prasad (VELS) 03:03.08; 2. B.Preethi (ORCA) 03:13.93; 3. S.A. Mahalakshmi (TDSA Tirunelveli) 03:15.16. **Butterfly 100mts:** 1. B.Shakthi (ANSA Dubai) 01:08.36; 2. Priyanga Pugazharasu (SDAT Velachery) 01:14.30; 3. Sohaliya Syed (Individual) 01:15.62. **Back stroke 200mts:** 1. Madhumitha Sirram (VELS) 02:38.62; 2. Dayanitha (Waves) 02:47.26; 3. C. Lakshitha (SDAT Dolphin) 02:54.59. **Freestyle relay 4x100mts:** 1. SDAT Velachery 04:39.46; 2. ORCA 04:42.87; 3. TDSA Tirunelveli 04:49.65. **Individual champion:** B.Shakthi (Ansa Dbal) 35points. **Women Overall Champion:** TDSA Tirunelveli 92points.

Men: Butterfly 50mts: 1. V. Vinayak (SDAT Velachery) 00:25.55; 2. V. Leonard (TDSA Tirunelveli) 00:27.48; 3. K. Saran (ORCA) 00:27.71; 3. Sairam (SDAT Velachery) 00:27.71. **Butterfly 100mts:** 1. V. Vinayak (SDAT Velachery) 00:25.58; 2. V. Vaman (SDAT Velachery) 01:08.30; 3. S. Karthickeyan (ORCA) 01:08.93. **Breast stroke 200mts:** 1. B. Benedict Rohith (TDSA Tirunelveli) 02:31.72; 2. B. Akash Navin (TSPA) 02:37.45; 3. M.S. Yadesh Babu (SDAT Dolphin) 02:41.53. **Back stroke 200mts:** 1. H.Nithik (Turtles) 02:20.96; 2. C. Darrel Steve (Loyola College) 02:23.56; 3. V. Leonard (TDSA Tirunelveli) 02:24.57. **Freestyle 1500mts:** 1. Sarvapalli Krishna Pranav (ORCA) 17:54.47; 2. H. Ahmad Azrag (Turtles) 18:19.16; 3. Shane Lionel (TDSA Tirunelveli) 18:40.57. **Freestyle relay 4x100mts:** 1. TDSA Tirunelveli 03:57.12; 2. Turtles 04:03.96; 3. SDAT Dolphin 04:04.25. **Individual Champion:** V. Vinayak (SDAT Velachery) 35points. **Men Overall Champion:** TDSA Tirunelveli 115 points. **Overall Tournament Champion:** TDSA Tirunelveli 213 points.



Loyola, winners of the Red Bull cricket tournament.

Rhithik, Triloknag shine in Loyola's win
Rhithik Easwaran (72) and Triloknag (84*) helped Loyola College beat SRM IST in the final of the Red Bull cricket championship. **Brief scores:** SRM IST184/10 in 20 overs (Mukhilesh 49, Jagathan 31; Rohit Parakh 4/33) lost to Loyola College 188 in 20 overs (Rhithik Easwaran 72, Triloknag 84 (not out)).

Jaiganesh hits half-century
D. Jaiganesh's half-century helped VRSCET defeat Siga Management 'A' by 155 runs in the Villupuram DCA league.

Brief scores: II Division: New YG.Ind.CC 100 in 22.5 overs (D. Elangovan 4/26) lost to United CC 'B' 102/6 in 20.1 overs. III Division: Suriya G.O.I. 159 in 24.4 overs (V. Rajasekar 38, S. Vijaya Raja 28, P. Karunakaran 45, A. Jayabalan 3/28; M. Mohan Raj 3/35) bt TVS CC 58 in 12.2 overs (S. Ravindharan 4/26, B. Thilakar 3/3); VRSCET 218/7 in 25 overs (D. Jaiganesh 54, G.Mothish 33, A. Kumar 38; Naveen Raj 3/28) bt Siga Management 'A' 63 in 17.2 overs (G.Jeevananthan 3/10); LMCC 200/6 in 25 overs (M. Vishwaraja Pillai 32, D. Narendiran 39, S.Jayakuppura 38; G. Kumar 3/34) bt Power CC 117 in 24.2 overs (A. Vijayaraj 28, B. Paranthaman 32).

3 TN players for world wheelchair tennis
D. Mariappan, K. Karthik and S. Balachandrar of Tamil Nadu will represent India in the regional qualification for the BNP Paribas World Team Cup for Wheelchair Tennis at Vilamoura, Portugal from May 9 to 16.

The three players started their training under the free coaching scheme for wheelchair tennis players initiated by Tamil Nadu Tennis Association (TNTA) with support of Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu (SDAT).

Haresh bags a 6-wicket haul

B. Haresh bagged a six-wicket haul as Pattabiram CA posted a big win over Ebenezer CA in the second division of the TNCA Thiruvallur DCA League Championship.

Brief scores: I Division: Seshadri MCC 81 in 29.3 overs (B. Akshai 39 (not out); R. Rohit 3/25, M. Mathivanan 4/18) lost to Standard CC 87/2 in 11.4 overs (R. Ram Arvindh 58 (not out)). **II Division:** Pattabiram CA 180/4 in 30 overs (M. Vinith Kumar 89 (not out), B. Haresh 26) bt Ebenezer CA 118 in 21.3 overs (G. Bala Pratap 33; B. Haresh 6/35). **III Division:** Sri Vaishnavi CC 192/6 in 30 overs (C. Venkata Prashanth 43, R. Vijay 26 (not out), P. Sajith 48 (not out); V. Tharun Kumar 3/50) lost to Atthis CC 196/5 in 28.3 overs (S. Sourav 30, P. Harsha 56 (not out), V. Tharun Kumar 40 (not out)). **IV Division:** Universal CC 114 in 28.2 overs bt Lucas TVS RC 56 in 19.4 overs (M. Ramesh 27 (not out); K. Nagaraj 5/16).

Dharshan wins eight medals

B. Dharshan of Madurai Rifle Club clinched eight medals including three gold in the 46th state shooting championship held recently. He emerged on top in 10M Air Rifle for junior men, 10M Air Rifle (ISSF), and 50M Small Bore Free Rifle Prone Junior Men Team.



B. Haresh



K. Nagaraj