

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

KARIMNAGAR | THURSDAY | 25 FEBRUARY 2021



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Mamata calls Modi 'biggest rioter'



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Hillary to pen state of terror thriller

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Tiger Woods in hospital after major car crash



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WEATHER

Max: 34°C
Min: 17.1°C
RH: 28%
Rainfall: Nil
Forecast: Cloudy sky. Mist or haze likely. Max/Min temp. 34/18 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Shuddha Trayodasi till 5.12 pm
Star: Pushyami till 1.11 pm
Varjyam: 1.37 am to 3.11 am (Friday)
Durmuhurtam: 10.32 am to 11.19 am; 3.11 pm to 3.58 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
Rajab 12, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.37 am
Zohar: 12.39 pm
Asar: 4.43 pm
Maghrib: 6.27 pm
Isha: 7.35 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.36 AM
MOONSET 5.03 AM
MOONRISE 4.32 PM

COUNTER POINT



It's a lose-lose situation. We can't afford fuel for our campaign!

SHORT TAKES

India plans social media controls

New Delhi: Chafing from a dispute with Twitter, India plans to oblige social media companies to erase contentious content fast and assist investigations, according to a draft regulation. The Central government's planned "Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code" — a copy of which was seen by Reuters — come as various nations around the world try to assert tighter control over powerful Big Tech firms.

UP okays Bill to curb conversion

Lucknow: Amid protests by the Opposition, the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly on Wednesday passed by voice vote a bill aimed at curbing religious conversions by fraudulent or any other undue means, including through marriage. The Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill seeks to replace the ordinance promulgated in November last year.

NSE shuts down for three hours

Mumbai: National Stock Exchange faced major technical glitch leading to halt of trading for more than three hours from 11.40 am due to connectivity issues in the stock exchanges server. Surging volumes both in cash and futures and options segment on NSE towards monthly derivatives expiry may also have contributed to the technical glitch, said market experts.

■ Full report on Page 7

AFSPA extended in Assam by 6 months

Guwahati: The Assam government on Wednesday extended the 'disturbed area' status of the state for another six months from February 27 under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA). "As per powers conferred under section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, the Governor of Assam declared Assam as 'disturbed area' upto 6 months beyond 27/02/2021, unless withdrawn earlier," a release said.

Do or die for TRS men in MLC poll

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, FEB. 24

The upcoming Legislative Council elections for the two graduate constituencies will be an acid-test for ministers and TRS MLAs engaged as election in-charges in their respective districts. The party leadership has made it clear that ministers who fail to ensure victory for party candidates will be taken to task.

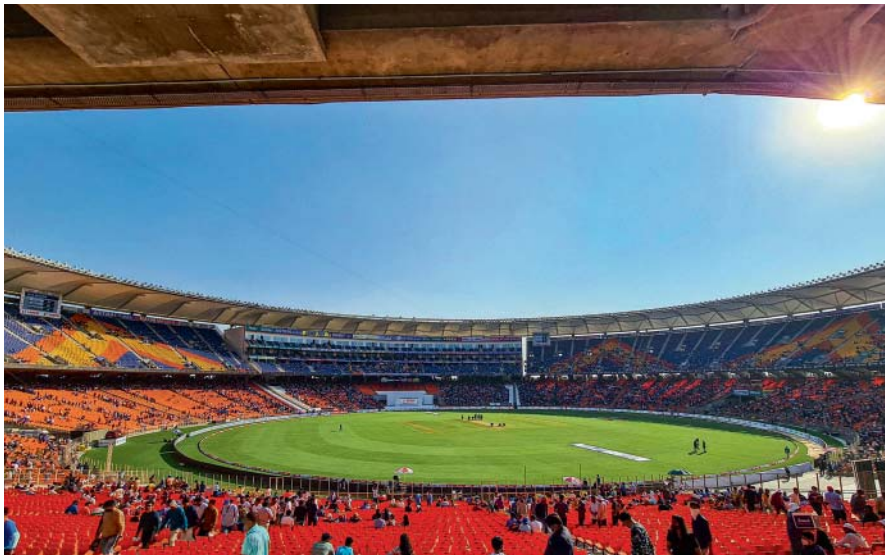
Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao has put the responsibility for ensuring the party's victory on in-charge ministers and MLAs of the respective districts. 'TRS working president K.T. Rama Rao's comments at the 'poll strategy meeting' at Telangana Bhavan on Wednesday have quickly become a hot topic of discussion in TRS circles.

Rama Rao met senior leaders to devise the poll strategy for the Hyderabad-Ranga Reddy-Mahabubnagar MLC election. The meeting was attended by ministers, MLAs and MLCs under GHMC limits. Ministers Talasani

Srinivas Yadav, Ch. Malla Reddy and Sabitha Indra Reddy were present on the dais with Rama Rao.

He told ministers Sabitha and Talasani that the party fared badly in their constituencies in the recent GHMC polls and this should not be repeated in MLC polls. These elections will impact the party's future and no complacency will be tolerated, he said. Many saw this as a hint that the TRS high command will even think of removing non-performers from the Cabinet and reward performers with berths. A Cabinet reshuffle is expected any time after the party's plenary on April 27. The TRS has appointed the three ministers as party in-charges for the Hyderabad-RR-Mahabubnagar MLC election and ministers Errabelli Dayakar Rao, Satyavathi Rathod, Puvvada Ajay Kumar, G. Jagadish Reddy, V Srinivas Goud and S Niranjan Reddy for the Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda constituency.

■ Page 2: TRS can't afford to lose seats it holds



Spectators arrive at the Narendra Modi Stadium on the first day of the 3rd cricket test match between India and England, in Ahmedabad on Wednesday. The stadium at Motera, which is billed as the world's largest, can seat 1,10,000 people.

— PTI

Narendra Modi stadium in Gujarat faces Oppn ire

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 24

The renaming of the revamped Sardar Patel Stadium, popular as the Motera Stadium, in Ahmedabad to Narendra Modi stadium turned into a political slugfest, with

the Opposition, especially the Congress, accusing the BJP of "insulting" Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. The latter rebutted saying Congress president Sonia Gandhi and others never visited Sardar Patel's statue — Statue of Unity — in Kevadia and are talking

about insulting Patel. The BJP also listed names of institutions and tournaments named after the Nehru-Gandhi family to hit back at the Opposition. President Ram Nath Kovind inaugurated the stadium on Wednesday. ■ More reports on Page 8

CM to fix Yadadri muhurat

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, FEB. 24

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao will visit Yadadri on February 28 to inspect the ongoing renovation works on the temple premises.

According to sources in

Chief Minister's Office, the CM is expected to fix the "muhurat" for inauguration of the renovated temple complex subsequent to his visit.

Yadadri temple has been a "dream project" for Rao ever since he assumed office in June

2014. He has visited the temple 14 times in the last six years. He wants to give the 1,000-year-old temple a makeover on the lines of Tirumala. The CM is planning to meet Chinna Jeeyar Swamy to finalise the inauguration date.

TN ORDERS PROBE ON SENIOR IPS FOR ABUSING WOMAN

Chennai, Feb. 24: The Tamil Nadu government on Wednesday placed a DGP rank official under "compulsory wait" following a sexual harassment charge against him, reportedly by a subordinate woman officer, and constituted an additional chief secretary-led committee to probe the allegation.

Special director-general of police (law and order) Rajesh Das, against whom the charge was allegedly made, has been downgraded and kept on "compulsory wait" at the office of the DGP, a home department order from S.K. Prabakar, additional chief secretary, said.

Das has been replaced by K Jayanth Murali, additional DGP/director of Vigilance and Anti-corruption.

In another order issued by Prabakar, the government constituted the enquiry committee, comprising of six members, including IAS and IPS officers, to probe the complaint.

— PTI

Family denied graveyard access

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, FEB. 24

In a shocking incident in Kothapalem village of BN Kandriga mandal in Chittoor district, a family that differed with other villagers during the sarparch election has denied permission for a deceased's family to hold a funeral procession through their land to the village graveyard on Tuesday.

Photographs and a video of the incident surfaced online on Wednesday.

"Villager Muthyalamma (65) died due to ill-health. The path to the village graveyard starts from a small piece of farm land owned by a family. They did not allow Muthyalamma's relatives to take the body through their land. This led to a protest by the deceased's family, which then kept the body on the road for some time in a protest mode. The issue was sorted out later," said K.

Ganesh, tahsildar. According to him, there were two graveyards in the village; one for the SCs and other for the general public. While the SC graveyard had good road access, the general graveyard had to be reached by this path, which was being used by the villagers for the past six decades.

The family that owned this piece of land erected a fencing around the farm land and blocked the path for the funeral procession. They did this because of some differences they developed with the villagers during the recently concluded sarparch elections.

"On being informed, we (revenue and police officials) rushed to the spot and pacified the protesters. We spoke to the landlords and convinced them to clear the path for Muthyalamma's relatives to continue the funeral procession. The funeral was held peacefully," the tahsildar said.

Rahul at sea



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi joins fishermen as they toil for the morning catch on the high seas in Kollam on Wednesday.

— PTI

CBSE syllabus for govt schools in AP, says Jagan

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 24

The state government has decided to introduce CBSE curriculum for classes I to seven in government schools from the 2021-22 academic year.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy conducted a review meeting on Mana Badi-Nadu Nedu in his camp office at Tadepalli on Wednesday.

He instructed officials to provide English-Telugu

dictionary in every Vidya Kanuka kit and to introduce CBSE syllabus from first to seventh standard in government schools for ensuring quality education in state schools.

The Chief Minister stated that they will gradually increase the syllabus up to standard X by 2024.

He emphasised that the first phase works of Mana Badi-Nadu Nedu should be completed by the end of next month. He said that school buildings should

have good interiors and designs.

He examined the photos of schools that have been upgraded with new infrastructure facilities as part of the Nadu-Nedu programme.

He also reviewed works of the second phase of Nadu Nedu and said that further changes should be made during the phase. He stated that priority should be given to quality and those found wanting would be serious dealt with.

ATTEMPT | NIXED

Top court says indulgence for a few will set precedent, have cascading effect

SC rejects one more chance to UPSC aspirants

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, FEB. 24

The Supreme Court on Wednesday rejected a plea by some aspirants who have already availed all the attempts to appear for civil services exams conducted by Union Public service commission (UPSC) seeking an extra chance on grounds that their preparations in October 2020 were hit by Covid.

Turning down the plea for an extra chance, a bench comprising Just-ice

A.M. Khanwilkar, Justice Indu Malhotra and Justice Ajay Rastogi, in its judgment said, "If an additional attempt remains restricted to the last attempts for the reason that they had suffered during the pandemic, all attempts irrespective of the nature of attempt (i.e. 1st, 2nd etc.) who appeared in Examination 2020 must have faced the same consequences as being faced by the writ petitioners and each one of them have suffered in one way or the other during the pandemic.

At the same time, this reasoning will equally apply to those who have crossed the upper age barrier."

Justice Rastogi speaking for the bench said, "... if this Court shows indulgence to few who had participated in the Examination 2020, it will set down a precedent and also have cascading effect on exams in other streams, for which we are dissuaded to exercise plenary powers under Article 142 of the Constitution."

Having rejected the plea for another chance, the

court left the window open for the Centre to exercise its discretion in the future if a situation that was projected before the court arises.

"We, however, make it clear that this decision would not restrict the 1st respondent (Union of India) or the executive in exercising its discretion in meeting out the nature of difficulties as being projected to this Court, if come across in future in dealing with the situation, if required," the judgment said.

The court further said, "It is the settled principle of law that policy decisions are open for judicial review by this Court for a very limited purpose and this Court can interfere into the realm of public policy so framed if it is either absolutely capricious, totally arbitrary or not informed of reasons..."

The top court had reserved the order after the Centre had argued that any such relief would be discriminatory to other candidates.

The Centre had told the Court that the candidates in general category get not one but six attempts for the UPSC civil services exam till the age of 32 while the OBC candidates get nine attempts till they turn 35 and the SC/ST candidates are allowed unlimited attempts till they turn 37.

The petitioners had approached the top court contending that they failed to appear for the UPSC CSE Prelims 2020 due to the disruptions caused by Covid pandemic and sought an extra attempt at the exam.

YOUNG PROF. HELPS OUT ENGG STUDENTS VIA YOUTUBE VIDEOS

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 24

A young assistant professor with a rural background is helping engineering students through the online platform YouTube Parnika Tutorials in learning their subjects and is winning accolades.

Dr Jagadeesh Kakarla started his channel in May 2020 during the corona crisis to provide quality education to everyone free of cost. He offered around 650 videos on database management, computer networks, computer organization, compiler design, automata theory, digital logic design, and C-programming. He is continuing with the channel post-Covid, by making and releasing videos useful to engineering students. These have a viewership of over two lakh.

Dr Jagadeesh works as an assistant professor in the department of computer science and engineering at a centrally funded institute in Chennai. He lost his father at age eight and continued his primary studies with support from his mother at Srikulam.

"Education is a treasure that cannot be stolen," he noted and said he concentrated on his studies primarily in Telugu medium till SSC. He pursued his B.Tech in Visakhapatnam and M. Tech from Pondicherry University. He did PhD from NIT Rourkela and served first as an assistant professor at Central University of Rajasthan.

Dr Jagadeesh said he knew the difficulties of engineering students in understanding the subjects and especially students from a rural background. Such students faced difficulty due to lack of proper Net connectivity to attend online classes. Hence he started the Parnika tutorials YouTube channel to help them. He said poor and 'middle-class' students who are preparing for various competitive exams such as GATE, UGC Net are struggling as they are unable to join coaching centres due to hefty fees of ₹50,000 and above for coaching.

IN BRIEF

TRS CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE SEATS IT HOLDS

From Page 1

The task is even tougher for the Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda in-charges as the seat is held by the TRS and the party cannot afford to lose this. Party high command is keen on TRS winning the Hyderabad-RR-Mahbubnagar seat, held by the BJP, at any cost to avenge the party's recent electoral setbacks at the hands of the BJP in the Dubbaka Assembly bypoll and the GHMC elections.

Chandrashekar Rao and Rama Rao are giving utmost importance to MLC polls for first time in the backdrop of the BJP's growing might in Telangana state. They reckon that the results of these elections will impact the upcoming Nagarjunasagar Assembly bypoll and the Warangal and Khammam municipal corporation polls as also the elections to a few municipalities in April.

All the nine ministers and MLAs in the respective districts remain focused on MLC polls since October last and have been undertaking extensive campaigning along with the contesting candidates to ensure the party's victory.

FOUR ARRESTED FOR POSING AS COPS, CHEATING

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 24

Cyberabad police arrested a gang of four persons who posed as police and government officials to cheat a man of ₹11 crore. The police officials seized gold and silver ornaments worth ₹50 lakh, seven mobile phones, five cars and ₹2 lakh from the accused. Police identified the main accused as Vijay Kumar Reddy, who posed as a provisionally selected IPS officer. He died by suicide at his parent's residence on February 5, when their scam was getting exposed.

The other accused were Smriti Simha who posed as chairperson of the International Human Rights Commission for entire south India, Raghava Reddy, who posed as Central Zone DCP, apart from Ranadhir Reddy, Ramakrishna Reddy, Abhilash Reddy and A. Pravalika. The last two are absconding.

The arrests were made following a complaint from P. Veera Reddy, a resident of Bachupally. Vijay Kumar Reddy and Smriti Simha pretended to be rich couple and used concocted stories to cheat the complainant of ₹11 crore, Cyberabad police commissioner V.C. Sajjanar said.

WAKF GEOTAGS FOR LANDS TO STOP GRABBING

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 24

The state Wakf Board is geotagging its properties to prevent encroachments and is digitising data on properties to ensure transparency and safety of records, said board Chairman Mohammed Saleem on completion of four years of his second term.

Saleem said the board has introduced online services for obtaining marriage, divorce and religion certificate.

It is also implementing the 'Quami Waqf Board Taraqqiati Scheme' launched by the minority affairs ministry.

He said the board is introducing a 'revenue management system' for the collection of rents, timely initiation of demand notices and monitoring rent collectors.

Uttam: TRS, BJP have no reach to face Cong.

Says TRS govt has disappointed all sections of society

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 24

Telangana Congress chief N. Uttam Kumar Reddy said on Wednesday that the Congress campaign for the MLC elections for the two graduate constituencies was receiving tremendous response.

Addressing two different election meetings, the Nalgonda MP Uttam Kumar Reddy said that Congress candidates Ramulu Naik and G. Chinna Reddy have been enjoying the backing of organisational strength in all six districts. Besides PCC and DCC office bearers, he said, leaders of all frontal, departments and various cells were actively working for the victory of Congress.

He claimed that neither the TRS nor the BJP have so much reach or strength to face Congress, although both were trying to lure voters with money and other sops.

Alleging that the TRS government had disappointed all sections of society, Mr Reddy said



N. Uttam Kumar Reddy

that employees, teachers, jobless youth and students were repeatedly cheated by Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao. "KCR, who is lavishly living in an ₹1,000 crore worth palatial bungalow, Pragathi Bhavan, has turned so insensitive that he never held a meeting to review problems being faced by common people. Employees have been waiting endlessly for the new Pay Revision Commission. Teachers have completely lost relevance. Lakhs of students are facing difficulties due to lack of funds and facilities. Jobless youth are frustrated without opportunities. But the Chief Minister has no time for any of

them." He blamed the BJP government at the Centre and the TRS in Telangana as equally responsible for bringing the situation to level. Under these circumstances, he said, people are looking towards the Congress for a solution.

Mr Reddy ridiculed the ongoing membership drive of the TRS party. He said instead of enrolling people on an ideological basis, TRS leaders were offering membership by selling insurance policies and medi-claims. He said every political party takes care of its members.

But TRS leaders are offering incentives and cash to achieve membership targets.

He also ridiculed BJP's 'Operation Aakarshan', an attempt to lure Congress leaders into its fold. "Telangana BJP leaders are searching for some disgruntled elements within the Congress. Earlier, the TRS had served as a trash can for Congress party, where non-important and irrelevant leaders got dumped. Since TRS trash can is almost full, BJP is proving to be a fresh dustbin," he said.

He further said that defection of a few leaders to the TRS or BJP would never impact Congress. "We are a cadre-based party. Leaders come and go. But cadre remains firm at ground level and never switches loyalties for money. Each Congress worker is capable. Congress has a capacity to produce leaders while TRS and BJP could only survive by behaving like vultures," he said.

Mr Reddy exhorted Congress cadre to work hard to ensure the victory of Ramulu Naik and Chinna Reddy in the MLC elections.

COURT CURBS ON NIZAM CLUB MEMBERSHIP

VUJJINI
VAMSHIDHARA | DC
HYDERABAD, FEB. 24

The city civil court of Hyderabad has restrained the management committee of the Nizam Club from inducting new long temporary members (LTT) as permanent members of the club, without getting prior approval, either through an annual general body meeting (AGM) or an extraordinary general body (EGM) meeting.

The XXVI additional chief judge of the city civil court issued these orders while dealing with a petition filed by K.M. Ashfaq Ahmed, a member of the Club's management committee, who wants to preclude himself in any decision that violates the bye-laws of the Club. A bye-law in the memorandum of registration of the Nizam Club says that no LTT member is allowed to be inducted as a permanent member, without the prior approval of the AGM or EGM. But, violating this bye-law, some members of the management committee have taken a decision to introduce around 150 LTT members as permanent members, and 30 among them were asked to pay fees prescribed for permanent members.

It was learnt, the petitioner alleged, that these persons were being asked more than 15 times the amount of the actual fees to get the permanent membership. Moreover, the present management committee's tenure was completed in September 2020. But, due to COVID-19 restrictions, elections have not been held.

Given that he could be held answerable to these violations, being a member of the management committee, Mr. Ashfaq approached the Court and sought its interference.

His counsel submitted that if the committee wants induct LTTs as permanent members.



Muhammed Suleman Kakar, Consul General of Afghanistan, addresses the media along with Sayed Mohammad Ibrahimkhil, Vice Consul General and CD Foundation director Charu Das at Banjara Hills on Wednesday.

— R.PAVAN

Afghan envoy awaits Tollywood film shoots

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 24

Speaking to media in Hyderabad for the first time since he assumed office on Wednesday here, His Excellency Muhammad Suleman Kakar, the Consul General of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan said, "I can't wait for the day when Tollywood as well as Bollywood movies will be shot again in Afghanistan. Who can forget Amitabh Bachchan's role in Khuda Gawah shot in the picturesque mountains of our country in the late 80s and released in 1992?"

Explaining the work of the consulate in Hyderabad, he said, "it was opened in January 2020 for primarily providing consular services in the states of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. But we are looking at a greater role of acting as a bridge between our two countries,

and boosting trade and showcasing our country to the people of Telangana."

Giving details of the opportunities for entrepreneurs in his country, Consul General Kakar, speaking in chaste Hindi, said, "our country is known for mineral wealth. Mining is a great opportunity. Besides that, we have infrastructure and energy as big areas for people from here to consider investing."

"As a nation with rich natural resources and exotic agriculture, we already have in India a great partner and historic friend. Over 80 per cent of our fruits and nearly 60 per cent of our dry fruits are exported to India. Now, we hope investors from Telangana to come and explore the great opportunities in infrastructure, energy, tourism, communication, education, transport and health," he said.

He thanked India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for sending 5,00,000 Covid-19 vaccines and said,

"bilateral relations between our two countries have remained strong and friendly over decades. We had been historical neighbours as well. We highly value our relations and remain committed to further expanding political and economic ties between two brotherly countries". "India has been very supportive in giving higher education opportunities for our youth. There are over 200 Afghan students studying in Osmania University alone, and over 800 students all over Telangana. The numbers will rise once the Covid restrictions are over," he said.

"As part of our future plans, we are planning to organise an Afghan food festival to promote Indo-Afghan food and culture exchange. We are also looking at taking a business delegation from here to Kabul soon," he added. Vice Consul General Sayed Mohammad Ibrahimkhil and CD Foundation director Charu Das were also present.

BJP poll overdrive takes off today

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 24

Telangana BJP is to go full-throttle with its election campaign for the Nagarjunasagar byelections, Warangal and Khammam municipality and the Legislative Council graduate constituencies from Thursday.

The party's state office-bearers met here on Wednesday in the presence of in-charge Tarun Chugh and state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar.

The state chief said that 40,000 activists have been trained for campaigning in MLC elections with each candidate covering 25 votes in the two segments. The activists will also collect details and contact numbers of the unemployed youth.

Chugh stated that several Union ministers and nation-

● The state chief said that 40,000 activists have been trained for campaigning in MLC elections with each candidate covering 25 votes in the two segments.

● The activists will also collect details and contact numbers of the unemployed youth.

tracts before March 15. The party will send 20 party observers to Tamil Nadu during the Assembly elections.

Shasakta mandal, Sakriya booth samiti, and Phase Pramukh appointments would be done before December 25, it was resolved. The April 6 party establishment day would be marked by massive programmes, including highlighting about the schemes and their implementation by the Centre.

The party hoped that they would win the MLC seats on a note as impressive as their showing in the GHMC elections.

Senior leaders D.K. Aruna, Vivek Venkataswamy, MPs, former MPs and MLAs and other key leaders participated in the meeting. Earlier, many leaders from Ranga Reddy and Warangal joined the party in the presence of Sanjay.

al leaders are likely to come for electioneering.

The meeting discussed the Gurrampodu land issue and about leaders who had joined the BJP from other parties. Chugh warned leaders against indulging in group politics.

The party will conduct district and mandal level office-bearers meeting from 26 to March 3 and organise training programmes in all dis-

4 more succumb to virus in state

BALU PULIPAKA | DC
HYDERABAD, FEB. 24

Four more people have lost their lives to Covid-19 in Telangana state since Sunday (February 21), the last day for which the state health department released its bulletin on status of Covid-19 cases.

As on Sunday, the state had registered 1,625 deaths from the disease. On Wednesday, the Union ministry of health, in its daily nationwide Covid-19 cases status report posted on its website, said Telangana state reported 1,629 deaths from Covid-19. As per the ministry's data,

two persons lost their lives to the disease in the state on Monday, while two more died on Tuesday.

As per the state health department, as on February 21, Telangana recorded 2,97,712 cases of Covid-19. On Wednesday, as on 8 am, according to the Government of India website <https://www.mygov.in/corona-data/covid19-statewise-status/>, Telangana's total cases stood at 2,98,057, indicating that in the two days since February 21, that is on February 22 and 23, the state recorded an additional 345 new Covid-19 cases.

These cases represent the

highest in terms of new Covid-19 cases during the 14 days preceding February 22.

Between February 20 and 21, the state reported 277 cases. On February 18 and 19, the cases were 322, on February 16 and 17 – 311, on February 14 and 15 – 228, on February 12 and 13 – 297, and on February 10 and 11, the number of fresh Covid-19 cases were 289.

It may be recalled that on Tuesday, the health department said that it will stop releasing daily Covid-19 bulletins, so that it can use the manpower and time devoted to preparing the bulletin and compiling Covid-19 case data.

Second most polluted city in winter was Hyd

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 24

Hyderabad, along with Kollam in Kerala, was found to be suffering from the second worst level of air pollution in South India during the winter. The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), New Delhi, said that after an extensive analysis of real time data from cities across the country, it found, with respect to south India that Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh had the highest levels of winter air pollution in 2020-21.

The CSE noted that the winter coincided with the unlocking of the economy after the hard lockdown because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Visakhapatnam, the CSE said, recorded a seasonal average of 75 ug/m3 of PM2.5 particulate matter, followed by Hyderabad and Kollam.

During 2020-21, though the average level of PM2.5 levels during the summer and monsoon months was considerably lower than the previous year due to the summer lockdown, the winter PM2.5 concentration rose compared to 2019 winter in many cities.

"This bouncing back of pollution post-lockdown unmask the high impacts of local and regional pollution. This demands quicker regional reforms to curb pollution from vehicles, industry, power plants and waste burning to curb the winter pollution and also sustain annual improvement at a regional scale with speed," according Anumita Roychowdhury, CSE's executive director in charge of research and advocacy. South India, the CSE said, saw five cities with an increasing winter air pollution trend.

FAKE | RAPE CASE

Psychologist suspects lack of attention for the victim

Student who claimed kidnap dies by suicide

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 24

A 19-year-old BPharma student who allegedly misled the Rachakonda police by claiming that she had been kidnapped and gang-raped, died by suicide at her home in Ghatkesar on Wednesday.

On February 10, she had accused an autorickshaw driver of kidnap and rape. Police after investigations, which took three days and into which 152 personnel were drafted, revealed that she wanted to leave home due to family problems

and had cooked up the story and had framed the driver due to previous enmity.

She had been admitted to hospital for mandatory checks. Following her discharge from hospital on February 13, the Rachakonda police said that she would be booked for providing false evidence.

Meanwhile, the girl slipped into depression and was hospitalised at Gandhi Hospital on Tuesday. She was discharged and taken home by her parents on Tuesday

evening where she attempted suicide. "She was rushed to hospital by her parents, where the duty doctors declared her brought dead," said the police.

The Ghatkesar police said that they have booked a case of suspicious death and shifted the body for the post-mortem examination (PME). "Based on the PME report and other evidence, the case will be further investigated and finalised," the police said. The BPharma student, who allegedly died by suicide on Wednesday had

been suffering from mental health issues, said Sakhi Centre administrator Rama Devi and support agency head P. Padmavathi at the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, the NGO running the Sakhi Centre in Medchal Malkajgiri.

Counselling for the victim started after her alleged kidnap case came to light and her statement was recorded. Authorities her telling them that she had not been feeling well for a long time and that she felt a constant need for affection and attention

from her near and dear ones. She had also told them during her counselling session that she feared losing people close to her.

Following this, Rama Devi and NGO representatives suggested that the victim's family seek professional psychological help for the student. They further suggested that the girl continue her stay at the centre itself. Her parents, fearing undue focus and scrutiny by public in the case, insisted on taking her home for the time being and said they would seek help later.

IN BRIEF

MLA, wife test Covid positive

Warangal: Bhupalapally MLA Gandra Venkataramana Reddy and his wife Gandra Jyothi, chairperson of Warangal Rural Zilla Parishad, tested positive for Coronavirus on Wednesday. They are currently undergoing treatment at a private hospital. The couple have asked officials and party workers, who had been in contact with them during the past few days, to undergo diagnostic tests and remain in home quarantine for a few days.

BANDI SANJAY FOR BANSWADA TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, FEB. 24

BJP state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar will visit Banswada town in Kamareddy district on February 25. He will address a public meeting in the town. Congress party senior leader Malyadri Reddy, few TRS and Congress leaders will join BJP in presence of the state chief. Nizamabad MP Dharmapuri Arvind, Kamareddy district BJP president and former MLA Aruna Tara and others will be present.

58 INDEPENDENTS IN FRAY FOR MLC IN NALGONDA

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, FEB. 24

About 74 candidates remained in the Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal graduate constituency election after conducting scrutiny of nominations. Two nominations were rejected.

The nomination of Mundra Mallikarjuna Rao of Telugu Desam was rejected due to mismatch of signatures of proposers mentioned by the contesting candidate. The nomination of Bathula Sravan Kumar of Dalita Bahujana Party was declared as invalid as he had 27 years old on the date of scrutiny against 30 years.

There are 58 independents, who filed their nominations in the constituency. Some of the graduates filed their nominations to prove their strength in the elections. Eighty per cent of candidates among independents are non-serious one.

Apart from independents, about 16 candidates filed their nominations from different political parties including Congress, TRS, BJP, CPI, Telangana Inti Party, Yuva Telangana Party, Telangana Jana Samithi, Telangana Prajasa Party, Shramajeevi Party, Telangana Sakala Janula Party, Aam Admi Party and Telangana Punar Nirmana Samithi.

21,000 CHILLI BAGS ARRIVE TO KHAMMAM

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, FEB. 24

A total of 21,075 bags of chilli arrived at the Khammam market on Wednesday.

Major portion of the chilli arrived belonged to Teja variety. The traders showed interest to lift Teja variety chilli at the price of ₹13,400 per quintal as they had orders from abroad. The price fluctuation is very high for the last one month. The traders offered ₹15,000 at one stage in the first week of February. About 1.65 lakh chilli bags have arrived at Khammam market since February 1.

SEVALAL'S 282 JAYANTI CELEBRATED

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, FEB. 24

The Banjara Samaj guru Sevalal Maharaj's 282 Jayanti observed officially in the Adilabad town on Wednesday. The Banjara leaders performed 'Bhog Bandar' on the occasion and rich tributes paid to Sevalal Maharaj. Banjara women and children in their traditional attire performed dances.

Addressing on the occasion, All India Banjara Seva Sangh National leader Amar Singh Tilawat appealed to the collector Sikta Patnaik and project officer of ITDA, Uttnoor Bhavesh Mishra to take steps for the allocation of funds.

'Manda Melige' marks mini Medaram jatara

About three to five lakh devotees are expected

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, FEB. 24

The mini Medaram Jatara began here on Wednesday with a large number of devotees thronging the tribal shrine.

Much like the biennial jatara, which begins on "Magha Suddha Pournami", tribal priests performed rituals for the mini jatara. However, deities Sammakka and Saralamma have not been brought from their altars in the forest. "Manda Melige", which means cleansing of the temple, remains the main event of the mini jatara.

Priests belonging to the Siddaboina clan performed rituals of cleaning the temple of Sammakka in Medaram while those of Kaka clan took up same rituals at the Saralamma temple in Kanneboinaipalli.

Siddaboina Jagga Rao, Muninder, Arun Kumar, Vasantha Raju, Laxmi, Dasaratham and Swamy cleaned the Sammakka temple and puja material. Kaka Saraiah, Bujanga Rao, Kiran Kumar and Laxmi Bai did so at the Saralamma temple.

Both the temples have been decorated with mango leaves and Dhwaya Stambhams have been erected in the front yard. It is a festival for women of the entire villages. They decorate their houses too and put Rangoli in front of their houses, apart from making offerings to the deities.

About three to five lakh devotees are expected to visit the shrines during the jatara. The district administration has allotted ₹1.52 crore for making all the arrangements for convenience of devotees. 160 showers have been set up along the Jampann-



Top: Tribal priests moving in a procession at Medaram. **Above:** Tribal welfare minister Satyavathi Rathod offering prayers at the Medaram temple.

avagu bathing ghat.

Tribal welfare minister

Satyavathi Rathod visited Medaram on Wednesday

and offered prayers to the deities.

Efforts by officials help resolve land problems

NARENDER PULLOOR | DC
NIZAMABAD, FEB. 24

The district administration has adopted a multi-pronged strategy to settle the decades-old land problems. This would, in specific, help small and marginal farmers.

Officials note that, in view of the real estate boom, land issues have turned more sensitive. It was taking a lot of time for officials to settle these issues.

The officials said they decided to settle land issues other than civil disputes. Firstly, the matters of names not included in registered documents were settled. Around 4,000 cases were disposed of. Secondly, the land issues of Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and companies were attended to. Aadhaar update was also being taken up.

Around 277 Records of Rights (ROR) documents were released after verification by respective mandal tahsildars and revenue divisional officers. The forest and revenue land disputes will be settled soon. A joint survey on 9,000 acres in the district will be taken up in the first week of March. Around 26,000 sada bainamas have also cleared so far.

As per directions of the state government, district collector C. Narayana Reddy is coordinating with tahsildars and RDOs to settle the land-related issues. He found that around 18,000 acres of government land was acquired for public needs and the records on these were yet to be updated. As a result, very few farmers are getting the Rythu Bandhu benefits.

In addition, details of 6,600 acres of government land were furnished in the prohibitory orders book. Part-B issues were also covered. A mandal tahsildar said digitisation of land records is a major achievement. People can access the land records. Transparency could minimise the irregularities. Now there would be no need to scout around at revenue department offices for unending times, as was the case in the past.

Bodhan RDO Rajeshwar said genuine land problems were mostly settled during digitisation. "We hope that no petitioner will come to the tahsildar and RDO offices for land-related issues in the near future." Joint survey of revenue and other departments will settle a majority of the land problems soon, he said.

Illegal sand mining rampant in Kattaleru

DC CORRESPONDENT
VEMSOOR (KHAMMAM), FEB. 24

Rampant illegal sand mining from small rivulets like Tammileru and Kattaleru against the guidelines of WALTA (Water, Land and Trees Act) in Vemsoor mandal posed a threat to environment.

The ground water and landscapes of the villages near the two rivulets are badly affected by the sand-mining activity. Gangs are taking the help of influential persons in the villages and mining the sand from 10 pm to 5 am.

This is transported to villages in Andhra Pradesh and far-away places like Vemsoor mandal in Telangana.

A tractor-load of sand is being sold at ₹7,500 and the gangs are making huge money. Nearly 400 tractor-loads of sand are being mined a day from these rivulets.

The sand from Tammileru is being collected at Adasarlapadu and Ramannapalem villages and the Kattaleru sand from Duddepudi and Bharanipadu villages. The gangs, in 10-member groups, are earning ₹5 to ₹6

crore a month.

Tammileru and Kattaleru are catering to the irrigation needs of Sattupalli and Vemsoor mandals in Khammam district.

There are two lift irrigation projects on Kattaleru and there is a major checkdam on Tammileru in Sattupalli mandal. Thousands of acres are being irrigated under the two flows.

If illegal mining continued, there will be huge loss to the two rivulets in future and ground water levels will fall. N Venkateswara Rao, an environmentalist, said excessive sand mining can force the river to change course, erode banks and lead to flooding.

It also destroys the habitat of aquatic animals and micro-organisms.

Interestingly, many people of Vemsoor mandal are getting sand from River Godavari through government agencies. The local sand from these two rivulets is being taken across the state borders.

Vemsoor mandal tehsildar Mujahid said more personnel were deputed at these villages to check the illegal sand mining from the two rivulets.

'TRS trash can full, BJP now taking Cong waste'

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, FEB. 24

TPCC chief N. Uttam Kumar Reddy ridiculed BJP's "Operation Aakashan" of luring Congress leaders into its fold.

Speaking at an election preparatory meeting at the Congress Bhavan in Hanamkonda on Wednesday, he said the Telangana BJP leaders are acting like scavengers searching for some disgruntled elements within the Congress party.

"Earlier, the TRS had served as a trash can for the Congress party where all non-important and

irrelevant leaders got dumped. Since TRS trash can is almost full, BJP is proving to be a fresh dustbin of Congress party," he said.

Uttam Kumar Reddy described Congress as a factory which produces leaders at all levels in huge quantity.

He said TRS, BJP or another party in Telangana became stronger only after it made a few Congress leaders defect to them. He said even KCR began his career from the Congress party and almost half of its Cabinet, MPs, MLAs and MLCs are ex-

Congressmen.

Similarly, he said that the BJP has been trying to gain some prominence in Telangana by scavenging for some disgruntled leaders. He said even the BJP's National Vice-President originally belongs to the Congress.

The TPCC chief said that the defection of a few leaders to TRS or BJP would never impact the Congress party.

Mr Reddy said the Congress campaign for Warangal-Nalgonda-Khammam Graduates' constituency MLC election was receiving tremendous response.

MANUU SIGNS MOU FOR 3 YEARS WITH DAHUU

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 24

Maulana Azad National Urdu University (Manuu) on Wednesday entered into a three-year memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Dr Abdul Haq Urdu University (Dahuu) to promote collaborative relationships for research and general cooperation in various academic areas.

The MoU was signed by Prof. Siddiqui Mohammad Mahmood, Manuu registrar, and his Dahuu counterpart Prof. B. Srinivasulu in the presence of Prof. S.M. Rahmatullah, Manuu V-C, and Prof. Muzaffar Shahmeeri.

BJP focusing on Singareni coal belt

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, FEB. 24

The BJP is making a serious bid to win elections for a recognised trade union in the Singareni Coalfields (SCCL). As part of this, the party is targeting K. Kavitha, leader of the TRS union that has a strong hold over there.

BJP state-in-charge Tarun Chug alleged on Wednesday that Kavitha is controlling the SCCL and has become a 'superpower' vis-a-vis the functioning of the colliery. It, he said, is riddled with corruption and irregularities.

Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao's daughter and an MLC, Kavitha was unanimously elected for the second time, recently, as honorary president of the Telangana Boggugani Karmika Sangam.

The SCCL is spread over six districts in Telangana and whoever has a hold over the SCCL will have major political influence and resultant electoral advantage.

Tarun Chug, during an interaction with the Singareni workers in Srirampur on Wednesday, said he was shocked to hear

that after becoming the leader of the trade union in SCCL, Kavitha was acting as a 'super power' there. "I want to send a message to her that 'Jinho Ne Loota Hai.. BJP Unhe Choda Nahi.. .. Jisne Gareeb ka Maal Utayahi .. BJP Use Nikalegi..".

The BJP leader said a representation given to him by the Singareni workers will be submitted to the Central government and the Union coal ministry as also the CBI. 'Koi Bhi Doshi Baksha Nahi Jayega... Kadi Se Kadi Saja Use Milegi'.

Bandi Sanjay alleged that huge irregularities were taking place in recruitments for dependent-jobs and there was huge misappropriation of funds. SCCL funds are being used for the TRS party programmes, he said.

Sanjay held the SCCL chairman and managing director N. Sridhar responsible for corruption in the company and alleged that "he has become a puppet" in the hands of the TRS leaders.

Singareni is spread over the erstwhile Adilabad, Karimnagar, Warangal and Khammam districts. Nearly 20 Assembly constituencies fall in the coal belt area.

Advt. No. 23/2021

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SHORT TAKES

TWO JAWANS
KILLED, 1 HURT IN
NAXAL ATTACKSRABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, FEB. 24

In three separate incidents on Wednesday, Maoists killed two jawans and injured another in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar district of Narayanpur.

According to Bastar range inspector general of police P. Sunderraj, a jawan of district reserve group (DRG), identified as Kaner Usendi, was killed in an encounter with Maoists in the forested village of Kukur under Sonepur police station at around 10 am.

In another incident, a jawan of Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), L. Balchandra, was killed in a pipe bomb explosion, triggered by Maoists, near a bridge around one km from Sonepur at around 11 am.

Similarly, a jawan of Chhattisgarh Armed Force (CAF), identified as Bankeswar Paikra, was injured when he stepped on an IED, planted by Maoists at Karel Ghati under Kukrajhar police station.

He was airlifted to Raipur for treatment. His condition was stated to be stable.

POLICE OFFICER
KILLED BY LIQUOR
SMUGGLERSNAYEAR AZAD | DC
PATNA, FEB. 24

A sub-inspector was killed and a police guard was injured in an encounter with liquor smugglers in Bihar's Sitamarhi district on Wednesday.

The incident occurred when a police team led by Sub Inspector Dinesh Ram reached village Kunwari under Majorganj police station to arrest Mukul, Ranjan and their associates in connection with an extortion case. Sources said that as soon as the police team started cordoning off the area, criminals opened fire in which the Sub Inspector was killed and a police guard sustained injuries.

According to the police, Mukul, Ranjan and others have also been involved in liquor smuggling from Nepal and other neighbouring states.

Later, Mukul was arrested while he was fleeing to Nepal after the firing incident and one of the smugglers was killed by the police.

"Manhunt has been launched and raids are being conducted to nab all those who have been involved in the incident", ADG (law and order) Amit Kumar told reporters in Patna.

The incident has triggered sharp reactions from across the political spectrum in Bihar: While the ruling JD(U) termed the incident as "an act of frustration" by the liquor mafia, opposition blamed the state government for its failure to check liquor smuggling from outside the state.

"The incident shows that there is no fear of law in Bihar. The state government should order a high-level probe and act against all those who are behind the entire liquor trade racket in the state. There are many big people who have close links with liquor mafias", RJD leader Subodh Rai told reporters. A total ban on liquor was imposed in April 2016. Liquor prohibition was the first major announcement by Nitish Kumar after he was sworn in as CM in 2015 following an emphatic victory.

Recently after the opposition raised questions on the success of liquor prohibition following eight hooch deaths in two separate incidents, Bihar CM Nitish Kumar defended the decision saying that "people were in favour of the act and if government employees are found consuming it will be dismissed from the service".

Scenes in Kashmir reminiscent of early '90s

Securitymen abruptly and unexpectedly set up makeshift checkpoints and conduct random searches

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, FEB. 24

Security across Jammu and Kashmir has been stepped up exceptionally with local cops and members of Central armed police forces conducting surprise cordon-and-search and frisking operations in cities and towns particularly summer capital Srinagar at intervals. The Army is also launching sensitisation and area domination operations in select Valley areas quietly.

The scenes witnessed particularly in some crowded areas of the Valley's main town including at and around historic Lal Chowk over the past few days are reminiscent of the early 1990s when the Kashmiri separatist campaign was at its peak. The adequately equipped uniformed men, abruptly and unexpectedly, arrive in an area, choose a location, set up makeshift checkpoints and roadblocks and conduct random searches which include frisking of pedestrians after making them wait in lines. They also stop vehicles and then subject passengers to body search and check their



Security personnel check identity card of a youth during a search operation at Kawdara in downtown of Srinagar on Wednesday.

— PTI

belongings thoroughly.

The authorities said that such random operations have been necessitated by the recent spurt in militant attacks and in view of the reports that the separatists are planning more violence in coming weeks.

Last week, two policemen were targeted by a pheran-clad shooter with

an AK assault rifle concealed under the traditional Kashmiri outfit in Srinagar's Barzulla area resulting in their instant death. Against the backdrop of this incident and the demand of banning *pheran* raised by some Jammu-based Bharatiya Janata Party leaders and likeminded outfits, the

security forces deployed along the streets and other public places in the Valley have in several instances forced people to take off the outfit. There have also been reports of visitors being allowed to enter certain government offices and other sensitive premises only after removal of pheran by them. This has

evoked sharp criticism by political activities and netizens.

Counter-militancy strategists and policing experts also disagree with such actions and call for tactical changes towards dealing with the emerging situation by the security forces effectively.

Former Director General of Police, Shesh Paul Vaid, said, "In 1990s also several incidents took place wherein militants used weapons hidden beneath their *pheran* to target security forces yet the garment was not banned. I don't think banning a particular dress is a solution."

He added, "*Pheran* and *Kangri* (traditional firepot) are part and parcel of the Kashmiri culture and lifestyle rather centuries' old wisdom to beat the biting cold in winters. As said, banning *pheran* is not the way out. The solution is, be alert, stop the person you suspect, subject him to frisking and if you find him hiding an illegal weapon beneath his garment take action as per law. That is what we would do during the heyday of militancy to minimise such gory acts".

Search on



Search for missing people continues in the disaster-hit areas of Tapovan in Chamoli district on Wednesday. So far, 70 bodies and 29 human body parts have been recovered from different places in the avalanche-hit areas, out of which 40 bodies and one human body part have been identified. DNA samples of bodies and 28 body parts have been sent to the Forensic Science Laboratory, Dehradun for matching.

— PTI

Phase-2 Covid jabs to begin from March 1

VINEETA
PANDEY | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 24

After the vaccination of healthcare and frontline workers in the first phase, it is now time for the general public to get the Covid-19 jab. From March 1, people over the age of 60 years and those over 45 years having comorbidities will be able to get vaccinated at 10,000 government facilities and over 20,000 private hospitals, the government said on Wednesday.

while announcing its plan to roll out the second phase of immunisation against the Coronavirus. The President, Prime Minister, several Cabinet minister and state Chief Ministers are expected to take the

jab from March 1.

The number of beneficiaries in this category is expected to be over 10 crore. The vaccine shots will be given free of cost in government hospitals but they will be charged for in private hospitals. Announcing the decision taken by the Union cabinet on Wednesday, Union minister for information and broadcasting, Prakash Javadekar, said that vaccine rates in the private sector are still being worked out by the health ministry in consultation with the private hospitals and manufacturers and will be announced in a couple of days.

"The second phase of the world's largest vaccination drive will begin from Monday in which anybody

above 60 years and 45 years plus with co-morbidities will be given vaccines in 10,000 government and over 20,000 private hospitals. Whoever goes to the government centre will be administered a vaccine free of cost. The Indian government will pay for them. Those who want to get vaccination from private hospitals will have to pay," Javadekar said. The minister, however, did not elaborate if people will have a choice of vaccines. Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said most of the ministers are thinking of paying for the vaccines.

Meanwhile, with Covid-19 cases surging in several states, the Centre on Wednesday deputed high-level, multi-disciplinary

teams to Maharashtra, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Punjab, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir for supporting them in public health measures for targeted Covid response and management, and effectively tackling the pandemic.

"These teams will work closely with state and UT administrations to ascertain reasons for the recent surge in the number of Covid-19 cases. They will also coordinate with health authorities of the states and UT for requisite Covid-19 control measures to break the chain of transmission. States and UTs have been advised to regularly review the emer-

ging situation with the concerned district officials to ensure that gains made so far in Covid management are not lost, Union health ministry officials said.

Union health secretary has also written to Maharashtra, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir which have been witnessing a rise in daily Covid cases, along with decreasing proportion of RT-PCR tests.

The health secretary has urged states/UT to focus on undertaking aggressive measures to break the chain of transmission and to ensure that RT-PCR testing is amplified to flush out undetected cases.

2 militants killed
in AnantnagDC CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, FEB. 24

Two militants believed to be associated with a proscribed outfit — possibly Jaish-e-Muhammad — were killed in a fierce gunfight raging in woods of southern Anantnag district since Wednesday morning. However, the authorities said that the identities of the slain men are being ascertained. The internet services in Anantnag have been suspended "as a precautionary measure," they said.

The Army said that the operation to flush out militants from Shalgul forest area of Srigufwara belt of Anantnag was launched following an input from the J&K police. The police sources said that its counterinsurgency Special Operations Group along with the Army's 3 Rashtriya Rifles moved in the woods on learning

about the presence of four militants including an IED 'expert'.

Initial reports quoting unnamed local police officials had said that all the four militants have been killed but later the police officially clarified that only two of them have been "neutralised" and that the operation was still underway. Local sources said that the Army also used a helicopter and drones for the surveillance of the area during the operation.

A statement issued by the police here said when, during the jointly launched cordon-and-search operation, the presence of militants was established they were given an opportunity to surrender.

"However, they fired indiscriminately upon the joint search party which was retaliated leading to an encounter."

Didi: Modi is the
'biggest rioter'RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, FEB. 24

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday branded Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the "biggest rioter" of the world who is waiting to face even a "worse fate" than that of former US president Donald Trump. The Trinamul Congress supreme cast aspersions on Mr Modi at her party rally on Dunlop Ground at Chinsurah in Hooghly to counter his attack on her at a BJP rally on the same venue only two days ago.

"Mr Modi is the biggest rioter, liar, cheat and the most vindictive. There is no parallel of him in the whole world. You saw what happened to Mr Trump. But Mr Modi went to ensure his victory. How could he dare to do that when he himself does not have any capability? His fate will be even worse than Trump. Violence never gifts anything good," she said.

Without taking the names of Mr Modi and his deputy Amit Shah, Ms Banerjee also taunted them in Bengali. She mocked that only two leaders *Kim-b-hootkimakar* (grotesque) and *Hodolokootkoot* (pot bellied man) have been calling all the shots in the country.

"There are only two leaders in the country. One of them is *Hodolokootkoot*. I do not what it is called in English or Hindi because it is a typical Bengali classical word. Another

leader is *Kim-b-hootkimakar*," she claimed.

A wise BJP IT cell in-charge Amit Malviya later attributed her jibe to the PM and the union home minister respectively. "Sensing an inevitable saffron surge across West Bengal, Pishi is clearly jittery and resorting to name calling, something culturally evolved people of WB had never witnessed in public discourse," he tweeted.

A day after the Central Bureau of Investigation grilled her MP nephew Abhishek Banerjee's wife Rujira Banerjee Narula at her home for her suspected link to overseas financial transactions in the high profile coal smuggling case, Ms Banerjee also asked the PM, "How can you, after entering my house, call a Bachcha Meye of 22-23 years who is also Ghorer Bou a coal thief when you are roaming with coal thieves in your lap? Don't you feel ashamed of yourself to call our daughters and sisters at home coal thieves? You have dirt all over you."

Film producer Raj Chakraborty, actress Shayoni Ghosh, actor Kanchan Chakraborty and cricketer Manoj Tiwari joined the TMC in front of Ms Banerjee at the rally. Later the CM urged the PM to help government to purchase the vaccines from designated points on top priority basis and offer them to the common people as part of a rapid drive in the poll-bound state.

President's Rule
imposed in
PuducherryDC CORRESPONDENT
PUDUCHERRY, FEB. 24

With the Union Cabinet approving of the proposal to impose President's Rule in Puducherry, days after a Congress-led government in the union territory lost power during a vote of confidence, polls seem imminent.

Announcing the Cabinet decision in New Delhi, Union Minister Prakash Javadekar had told reporters that the decision was taken as no party was coming forward to stake a claim to form the government in the UT.

He also noted that the model code of conduct was expected to come into effect soon after the Election Commission announces the dates for elections in the UT, along with the four states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and West Bengal.

The Lt Governor in charge of Puducherry, Tamilisai Soundararajan, had no choice but to recommend President's Rule as the opposition group led by N. Rangasamy of the NR Congress with seven MLAs and having the support of four AIADMK MLAs besides the three (nominated) BJP MLAs who too have a vote was not keen on taking the reins of a government that might be in place for just about two months as polls are likely to be held in mid April itself.

With the Prime Minister visiting Puducherry on Thursday, it would have been embarrassing not to have resolved the situation arising after chief minister V. Narayanasamy put in his papers on Monday on walking out of the Assembly before the trust vote was taken.

TOUGH WORDS India has showed to China its salami-slicing strategy will not work with us: Naravane

Naravane: Strategy in place for talks with China

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 24

Indian Army Chief General M.M. Naravane said on Wednesday that India has strategy in place for further negotiations with China to resolve other pending issues in Ladakh and "again come out with a favourable outcome." Gen Naravane said that India has showed to China that its salami-slicing strategy "will not work with us" and "every move will be met resolutely".

He said that there was no overt signs of any collusion between China and Pakistan against India dur-

ing current stand-off at the LAC. He said that there were no large scale mobilisations by Pakistan or any kind of activity which would be suggestive of any kind of help being given by one to the other.

The Army Chief said that on disengagement with China there is a long way to go. "Now we have to move on to the stage of de-escalation and ofcourse after that moving back of the troops and deinduction of troops which went to the higher reaches," Gen Naravane said during an online interaction by Vivekananda International Foundation.

He said that there is a trust deficit with China and India will be cautious and watching whatever movement happens at the LAC.

Last week Indian and Chinese troops completed disengagement from Pangong Tso in Eastern Ladakh after nine months of stand-off. India and China are now discussing modalities of the second phase of disengagement in Depsang, Gogra, Hotsprings and Demchok.

Gen Naravane said that the disengagement which has happened with China is a good end result. "It is a win win situation and I

think for any agreement to last both sides should feel that they have achieved something. To that end, this I think is a good outcome that has resulted out of this 10 rounds of (Corps Commanders) talks which have taken place," said army chief. He said that going forward there are some issues which remain including in the area of Depsang.

"There are pending issues in the area of Eastern Ladakh. Also pending issues in other areas along Northern border. But we have our strategy in place for that. As Ambassador Satish mentioned that do we

have anything to negotiate in future? Yes definitely we have but I would not — of course for the obvious reasons — like to say what those strategies would be to further and progress negotiations and again to come out with a favourable outcome," said Gen Naravane.

He said that at the end of the day India has achieved a lot more. "China has been in the habit of creeping forward and making small incremental changes where-

in each change by itself was not very big or worthy of a very strong reaction. And because of small incremental moves, which were never



DECCAN
Chronicle

25 FEBRUARY 2021

Renew thrust on tests,
speed up vaccinations

The Union government's directive to states which witness a spurt in the daily case load of Covid-19 to tighten the testing procedures and the announcement that it will soon start the vaccination programme for people other than frontline workers have come not one day late. The pandemic shows no sign of going; in fact, it continues to make lives difficult in nations across the globe. The number of deaths due to the virus in the United States has crossed 5 lakhs; Britain, another hard-hit nation, which has already vaccinated one third of its adult population, sees a return to normal life only by June. Both France and Germany are worried about the turn the pandemic has taken. France has not yet announced a national lockdown, but there is night-time curfew. As many as 14 of the 16 states in Germany report higher than the target level of infections.

Back home in India, the scene is far from comfortable. As many as 16 of the 36 states and Union territories have reported a rise in the Covid num-

India has targeted to vaccinate three crore frontline workers in the first phase and is at present close to half the target. It must speed up the process and soon announce the roll-out of the programme for the next target group — people aged above 50 years

bers last week while seven states — Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Chhattisgarh, Delhi and Haryana — have reported a dramatic hike. Several districts in Maharashtra are under lockdown. India at present hosts all the important variants of the virus and scientists are afraid that some of them could frustrate vaccination drive by mutation.

This situation leaves the Union government with little option other than taking a serious look at the way the pandemic is fought at the ground. The nation has now practically done away with every restriction that was part of the lockdown announced last year. Life has returned to near normal in most parts of the nation. This is incompatible with the reality, and hence the government must take a relook at the restrictions before it is too late, including those on social, political and religious congregations. Educational institutions have started functioning in most states and now some states are opening even the primary classes. The government must seek expert advice on the opening of educational institutions and share it with the states.

India has targeted to vaccinate three crore frontline workers in the first phase and is at present close to half the target. It must speed up the process and soon announce the roll-out of the programme for the next target group — people who are aged above 50 years. The government has announced that it will rope in the private sector in the next phase. At present, only 0.8 vaccine doses, the lowest, have been given to 100 people in countries with highest total vaccinations. Hence the government should waste no time and come up with a transparent policy to co-opt private hospitals for the massive programme. The renewed thrust on RT-PCR tests is also welcome; the Union government should think of incentivising such tests by the states. There has to be a concerted effort by the Centre and the states to stop another wave of the pandemic.

Business trumps nationalism

Irrespective of whether it is viable strategy or not, the Narendra Modi government gives the impression of wanting to get back to business as usual with China as early as possible. Some Chinese investment proposals stuck in the pipeline since the time last summer when India woke up to sour northern neighbour's incursion into Indian territory have thus been cleared expeditiously.

These clearances appear to have been accorded no sooner than the disengagement of troops and military hardware were completed in the north and the south banks of Pangong Lake last Friday, and while the Chinese side is being difficult about vacating the strategically vital Depsang Plains where China's military presence cuts us off from our airfield at Daulat Beg Oldie and access to the Karakoram pass.

When the People's Liberation Army (PLA) moved into Indian territory there was much to-do about applying a squeeze on Chinese economic interests as a form of retaliation. Hundreds of Chinese apps doing brisk business in India were choked. The "Atmanirbhar Bharat" slogan was sought to be made routine from the highest levels of government. That phase appears to be behind us.

Perhaps the business end of things is trumping nationalism for the Modi government. It turns out that in 2020 China remained India's biggest trading partner, and more was imported from China than from the US and the UAE — the second and the third biggest trading partners — put together.

It also became evident that at a time when India's exports were suffering on account of Covid and other factors, its exports to China were in steady shape. Perhaps the Modi regime does not want this compromised. India also uses Chinese heavy equipment, electronics and household appliances in a big way. On the whole, the Indian economy seems as difficult to disengage from the Chinese as Chinese soldiers from eastern Ladakh. Perhaps this is a reason why officially India is yet to acknowledge that China intruded into Indian territories.

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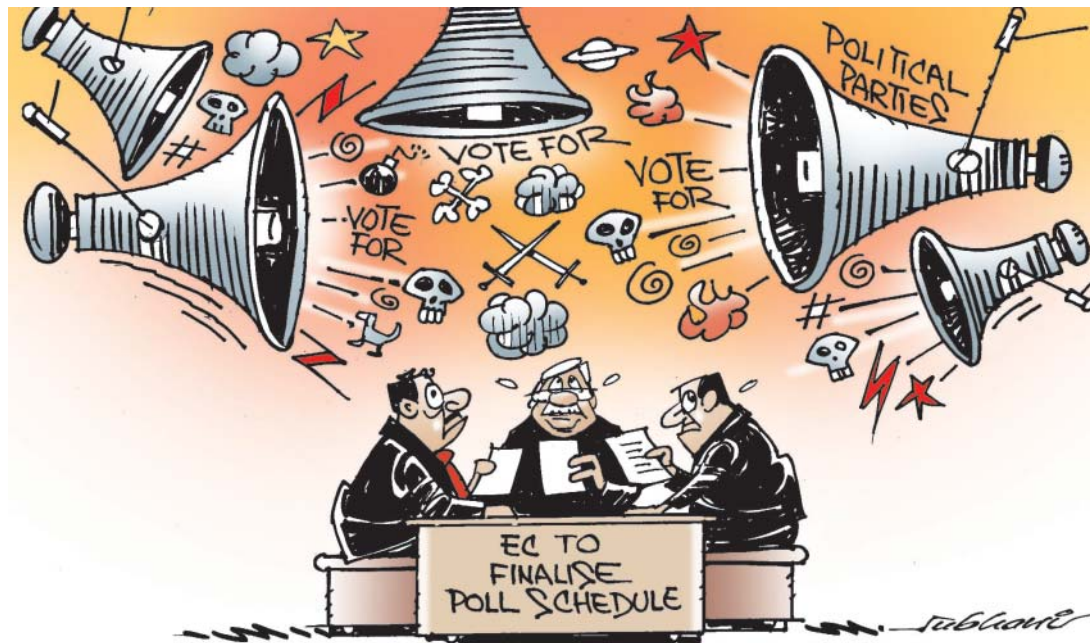
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Subhani

Ignoring Biden mantra
may be costly for India

K.C. Singh

Three events have been shaping India's geopolitical environment since the Galwan Valley stand-off between India and China since May-June last year. One is the trajectory of the Covid-19 pandemic and the pace of vaccination. Two, the ascendancy of US President Joe Biden and his swift moves to establish his domestic and international agenda. Finally, the farmers' agitation against the three agricultural reform laws, passed hurriedly by Parliament without a proper examination by a select committee or a division and vote. Consequently, the normal boundaries between domestic politics and international relations have shattered, as the local and global factors impinge on each other.

A classic case was how a "toolkit" developed for environmental activists to be more effective, tweeted by global youth icon Greta Thunberg, became the locus of the police arrests of Indian activists recommending it to protesting farmers. From there it is being sought to be linked to pro-Khalistan proponents abroad. Almost 100 British parliamentarians threw their weight behind the Indian farmers, whose protest has gradually widened as the lead passed from mainly Punjabi and Sikh farm union leaders to the redoubtable Tikait brothers of western Uttar Pradesh and the family of late Prime Minister Charan Singh. Besides rumblings in the US Congress, the state department urged respect for the protesters' rights. American farm unions also lent their weight to the Indian protests.

In the brouhaha, not enough attention has been paid to the repeated message from President Joe Biden, as he told the Munich Conference that "we

are at an inflection point". From that assumption, he argues how the US plans to regenerate economically and reassert strategically. The main challenges are climate change, the global pandemic, Chinese assertiveness combined with Russian obduracy, reform of multilateralism and defence of the democratic way of life.

Between President Biden's Munich address on February 19 and his remarks at the G-7 meeting a day earlier, the most striking was his plea over the role of democracy and rule of law. Critics maintain that historically US actions in this regard have often been differed from America's words. For decades, during the Cold War, the Americans not only happily worked with autocrats and dictators as allies but overthrew with alacrity democratic governments, for instance in Iran and Chile, if seen as unfriendly to US interests. Therefore, the Indian government has so far ignored subtle hints from the US that freedom of expression includes the freedom to protest peacefully and tweet or support those protests on social media platforms. The spat between the government and Twitter over which handles to block underscored the divergence between the Indian approach and that adopted in the West by and large.

President Biden's words need closer attention to understand that this is a new America, traumatised by four years of Trumpian undermining of US institutions, including the former President denying his electoral defeat and repeatedly rejecting the orderly transfer of power. That wound is still open as despite the impeachment of Mr Trump having failed, the US Congress is in the process of setting-up a 9/11-type commission of inquiry into the Capital violence and Mr

Trump's role in it.

President Biden's Munich address began by recommitting America to its trans-Atlantic alliance, which his predecessor had contemptuously shredded. Then he developed at some length his defence of democracy. He argued that the alliance was rooted in the "richness of our shared values", including the need to protect the rights of all and the rule of law. He warned that in both the US and Europe "democratic progress is under assault". He added: "We are in the midst of a fundamental debate about the future and direction of our world". Despite the pandemic and the so-called fourth industrial revolution, he continued, democracy was essential and must prevail. He concluded this part with the telling sentence that "democracy does not happen by accident", nor is Western liberal democracy a "relic of history".

The same message emanated from the Australia-India-Japan-US Quad ministerial meeting, held a day before Mr Biden's Munich address. The statement notes the four nations share values as "political democracies, market economies and pluralistic societies". They seek a rules-based international order and respect for the territorial integrity of other nations. The second is aimed at both the maritime claims of China in South and East China seas, as indeed resolving Chinese intrusions across the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh. But India too had to accept in exchange the criticism of the military coup in Myanmar by joining the demand for the rule of law and democratic transition.

To assume that the US is just posturing against China and India's strategic value as a counterweight to China, economi-

Democracy for him is no longer some asinine prescription for the Third World, used selectively, but a living organism that needs defending if China and Russia have to be countered

cally and militarily, would keep any serious criticism of heavy-handed and majoritarian governance of the Indian government in check might be a mistake. Mr Biden has seen power exercised both from the White House as vice-president for eight years and from the Senate, where he chaired the foreign relations committee. Hillary Clinton recounts in her book *Hard Choices* that she and Mr Biden opposed President Barack Obama cutting Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak loose as the protests developed at Tahrir Square during the Arab Spring. That was Mr Biden as the traditional pragmatist. But the new Biden has emerged triumphant from Donald Trump almost bringing US democracy to its knees. Democracy for him is no longer some asinine prescription for the Third World, used selectively, but a living organism that needs defending if China and Russia have to be countered.

Sources in the BJP say Prime Minister Narendra Modi is unwilling to roll back the farm laws. As chief minister, he apparently browbeat protesting Gujarat farmers over the installation of electricity meters. He is trying to extrapolate that success in dealings with the farmers of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. The BJP's Haryana government hangs by a thread. The UP Assembly election is just a year away. The Covid-19 pandemic is starting to respite as the vaccination pace is slow, with the calls for private sector involvement ignored. As Harold Wilson once said, a week is a long time in politics. Exactly a year ago, a cocky President Donald Trump said before he travelled to India that the US was on top of Covid-19. With him gone and half a million Americans dead, the conclusion is unavoidable that political arrogance can be costly. India may discover just that, caught between Prime Minister Modi's obduracy, the BJP's reflexive majoritarianism and President Biden's evangelistic defence of liberal democracy.

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

LETTERS

COVID COUNT

The decision of the Telangana state government to stop daily Covid-19 case updates appears to be ill-advised (*TS stops daily Covid case updates, DC, Feb. 24*). When the country is fearing a second wave, there is a steep hike in the number of positive cases in the neighbouring states and new variants of the virus knocking at the door, a step like this can make people complacent. Already the number of those following Covid-19 protocols has come down sharply. A daily update would at least remind people to be cautious.

S. Nageswara Rao
Hyderabad

18 LAKH JOBS, A LIE

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao has asked party workers to tell the people that the TRS in six years of rule has created 18 lakh jobs (*KCR tells TRS to canvass 18 lakh jobs he created, DC, Feb. 23*). This is a lie. There is a difference between creating jobs and providing jobs. If that is true, the unemployment rate would not have shown an increasing trend in Telangana state. There are many vacancies in government departments and a few days back the government admitted that the vacancies could not be filled up because of litigation.

Vishwanath Pandit
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN
Chronicle5 Naxalites die
in clash with jail
wardens

KRISHNAGAR, February. 24

Five Naxalites were killed and 40 others injured in Berhampur jail in a clash with jail wardens this morning, according to District Magistrate of Murshidabad Ashok Chatterjee. The trouble started when Naxalite prisoners stabbed the head warden, who had to be removed to hospital in a critical condition.

After this the Naxalites rioted and began dragging away another employee of the jail. To save him, the wardens made a lathi-charge in which five were killed and 40 others injured.

Naxalites similarly rioted in Midnapore Central Jail twice in recent weeks. About 20 Naxalites escaped from prison in Filiguri on February 21.

— UNI

Mahir Ali

Keats' immortal
poetry can be
found on shelves
all across world

The headstone above a final resting place dug in Rome's non-Catholic cemetery 200 years ago today bears the indelible inscription: "This grave contains all that was mortal of a young English poet who, on his death bed, in the bitterness of his heart at the malicious power of his enemies, desired these words to be engraven on his tomb stone: 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water'."

There is a harp above the inscription, but no name. As some readers might have guessed, the mortal remains are those of John Keats, the bicentenary of whose distressingly premature demise was commemorated yesterday with readings, lectures, virtual tours and the like. His immortal remains can be found in bookshelves all around the world.

Contrary to what the gravestone suggests, it wasn't bad reviews that killed the poet. The villain was tuberculosis, commonly known back then as consumption. After a night out in London in February 1820, Keats coughed up blood and recognised its

colour. "That drop of blood is my death warrant," he told his housemate. "I must die."

A couple of years earlier, he had watched his younger brother, Tom, succumb to the ailment. As a teenager, he had seen his mother die of the same disease. Besides, he was a qualified apothecary and an apprentice surgeon who eventually chose poetry over medicine, but not before working at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals in London.

Orphaned at a tender age, Keats was a belligerent schoolboy, more interested in brawls than in scholastic pursuits. But he became a voracious reader in his later teens and soon began spouting verse. Hardly any of his juvenile poetry has stood the test of time, although the emotions expressed therein ought to be familiar to men — yes, it's the male gaze, although Keats was later to be commended (or criticised) for his feminine sensibility, too.

The sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" is generally seen as his first significant poem, signalling a lifelong fascination with

Greek mythology, which didn't always serve him well. It was followed not long afterwards by a far lesser known sonnet, Written in Disgust at Vulgar Superstition, an exhortation of organised religion. Some of the early poems also hint at political engagement, but it never came anywhere close to that of his contemporary (and admirer) Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Keats' first volume of verse, published in 1817, may not have been particularly impressive, but it did not deserve the derision it received from a Tory literary establishment almost genetically inclined to be dismissive of "Cockney poets". The criticism became even more vicious when Keats published his first long poem, Endymion; he himself was far from satisfied with this extended excursion into Greek mythology, but had decided that he couldn't countenance any further revisions.

What's particularly extraordinary, though, is that his genius wasn't widely recognised even after he published *Lamia*, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St*

Agnes and *Other Poems* in 1820. The "other poems" included, mind you, some of the most exquisite verses committed to paper in the English language — the odes "To a Nightingale", "On a Grecian Urn" and "To Autumn", alongside the odes "To Psyche" and "On Melancholy". The only notable poem that followed was the sonnet *Bright Star*.

Yet by the mid-19th century Keats was yet to be recognised as a gift to posterity, unlike older contemporaries such as Wordsworth and Coleridge (both of whom he had met). Perhaps it was only in the 20th century that Keats' stature (he stood 5ft 11in) was deservedly elevated to that of a literary giant, but his star was already shining bright in the late 19th century.

On a visit in 1877 to the cemetery where the poet's remains are interred, Oscar Wilde prostrated himself upon the grave and declared it to be "the holiest place in Rome". He marked the occasion with a sonnet that includes the lines: "Thy name was writ in water — it shall

stand/ And tears like mine will keep thy memory green."

The original manuscript can be found in the Keats-Shelley House adjacent to the Spanish Steps in Rome, where Keats grew pallid and spectre-thin and died just months after he arrived in Italy, having survived a tumultuous sea voyage that included quarantine off the coast of Naples because of a cholera outbreak in London.

Keats stepped ashore on his 25th birthday, fully aware that his fears that "I may cease to be/ before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain" were about to come true. His possible future shall eternally remain a mystery and matter of conjecture. But given his core body of work, it's hard not to conclude that the opening lines of *Endymion* would have served as a far more appropriate epitaph than a name "writ in water": "A thing of beauty is a joy forever/ Its loveliness increases; it will never/ Fade into nothingness..."

By arrangement with Dawn

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50781.69	2.07
Nifty 50	14982.00	1.86
S&P 500*	3,901.34	0.51
Dollar (₹)	72.33	0.16
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.44	0.33
Euro (₹)	87.98	0.03
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,307▼148	0.31
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.17	2.75
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.147	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.425	0.061

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Common infra for govt, corp bonds mulled

Unification of government bond and corporate bond markets will enable the trading of such securities on the same platform, thereby utilising common infrastructure for trading, clearing, settlement and holding of securities, said Sebi chairman Ajay Tyagi. "Unification of government bond and corporate bond markets is an idea whose time has come," Tyagi said. This would lead to seamless transmission of pricing info, he said.

Bidders of PSBs should have deep pockets: RBI



The potential owners of privatised public sector banks must be financially strong to ensure that the lenders have robust risk buffers, the RBI governor said. While the government has the final say in deciding the buyers, from the regulator's perspective, the bidders should meet RBI's fit and proper criteria and have enough financial strength to capitalise the banks significantly, governor Shaktikanta Das said in an interview.

Bosch to invest ₹800 cr to upgrade B'loru campus

Bosch Group, a German technology and services major, is investing Rs 800 crore to upgrade its existing campus in Bengaluru to a fully artificial intelligence of things (AIoT)-enabled 'smart campus.' The 75-acre campus is likely to house the second-highest number of Bosch employees in the world, said Soumitra Bhattacharya, MD of Bosch Ltd and regional president of Bosch Group in India.

Maruti drives in new Swift from ₹5.73 L onwards

Maruti Suzuki launched an updated version of its premium hatchback Swift priced between Rs 5.73 lakh and Rs 8.41 lakh, ex-showroom Delhi. It comes with manual and automatic automatic gear shift (AGS) transmissions. The manual trims are priced between Rs 5.73 lakh and Rs 7.91 lakh, while the AGS variants cost Rs 6.86 lakh to Rs 8.41 lakh. The 1.2 litre petrol model with manual transmission has fuel efficiency of 23.2 km.



■ Bourses trade till 5 pm; indices soar Glitch gives stocks an extended run

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, FEB. 24

The National Stock Exchange on Wednesday faced a major technical glitch, leading to a halt in trading for more than three hours from 11.40 am, as the bourse had faced connectivity issues with its server.

Surging volumes both in cash and futures & options segments before the monthly derivatives expiry on Thursday might also have contributed to the technical glitch, said market experts.

On Tuesday, the traded value of NSE's cash segment was Rs 75,979 crore against rival BSE's Rs 4,520 crore.

As traders had several open positions a day before the monthly equity derivatives expiry, the halting of trading led to a panic situation among the market participants as there was no communication either from the NSE or the market regulator as to when trading would be resumed while the BSE was functioning normally.

Around 1 pm the NSE spokesperson stated that the exchange's multiple telecom links with two service providers were having issues with their links, due to which there was an impact on NSE systems and that they were working on restoring the systems.

Finally, the market hours had to be extended till 5 pm to close the open positions in the market. The NSE finally

SEBI SEEKS NSE'S EXPLANATION FOR NOT MIGRATING TO DISASTER RECOVERY SITE

Mumbai, Feb. 24: Regulator Sebi on Wednesday asked the National Stock Exchange to explain why trading on the bourse did not migrate to a disaster recovery site after facing connectivity issues.

It also advised the NSE to carry out a detailed root cause analysis of the "trading halt" witnessed at the exchange.

The NSE should "explain the reasons for

reopened for trade at 3.30 pm after ironing out the glitches and trade continued till 5 pm uninterrupted.

The extended trading hours resulted in sharp gains for the market ahead of the futures & options contracts expiry.

The Nifty-50 closed 274 points, or 1.86 per cent, higher at 14,982 while the Sensex gained 1,030 points to close at 50,781.

"Due to technical glitch, the option buyers (especially 'put' option buyers) had to pay the price because we witnessed premiums falling drastically due to the loss of time. For call buyers (as well as put writers), it may not have impacted much because once the market resumed trading for a short period, market had a sharp upsurge which could have definitely benefitted them. But for other counter

party, prices just diminished rapidly," said Sameet Chavan, technical and derivatives analyst, Angel Broking.

Marketmen questioned the bourse's decision to halt trade, as only index feeds were not refreshing? Feeds for underlying contracts were fine and so was order matching, so why shut down the entire market?" asked Jimeet Modi, CEO & founder, Samco Ventures.

"A similar issue in index feeds had happened a few months ago, but trading was not completely halted. Instead, trading went on with the glitch in index prices that day. Sebi and NSE need to quickly look at alternatives here," Modi said.

All pvt banks can now offer pension, other govt biz

New Delhi, Feb. 24: The finance ministry on Wednesday allowed all private sector banks to participate in government-related business like collection of taxes pension payments and small savings schemes.

Currently, only a few large private sector banks are allowed to conduct government-related business.

"Embargo lifted on grant of Govt business to private banks. All banks can now participate. Private banks can now be equal partners in development of the Indian economy, furthering Govt's social sector initiatives, and enhancing customer convenience," finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in a tweet.

An official statement said, "with the lifting of the embargo, there is now no bar on RBI for authorisation of private sector banks (in addition to public sector banks) for government business, including government agency business. The government has conveyed its decision to RBI."

The government has already announced its intent to privatise two public sector lenders, other than IDBI Bank, in the Budget 2021-22.

—PTI



Nirmala Sitharaman

ReNew Power gets \$8 bn valuation in merger deal

New Delhi, Feb. 24: ReNew Power has agreed to merge with blank-cheque company RMG Acquisition Corporation II, giving India's biggest renewable power producer an enterprise value of \$8 billion and a listing on the Nasdaq.

The biggest deal in the fast-growing clean energy sector is expected to close in the second quarter, a company statement said on Wednesday.

The deal will be financed with cash proceeds of \$1.2 billion, including \$855 million in investments from serial blank-check dealmaker Chamath Paliapitiya, funds managed by BlackRock and Sylebra Capital.

A blank-cheque company is a developmental stage firm that does not have established business plan.

"The transaction would further bolster ReNew's leading position in solar and wind energy generation for the Indian market, by funding medium-term growth opportunities, as well as paying down debt," it said.

This is the first major overseas listing of an Indian company via the Spac (special purpose acquisition company) route, which is a big hit currently on Wall Street.

A Spac is a shell or blank-cheque company and its sole aim is to raise capital via an initial public offering to acquire a private business at a later date and then take it public without going through the traditional route of IPOs.



In this transaction, RMG Acquisition Corporation II is the blank-cheque company. It raised \$345 million in its December 2020 IPO. Founded in 2011, ReNew Power counts Goldman Sachs and Canada Pension Plan Investment Board (CPPIB) among its prominent investors. It owns and operates 5 GW of solar and wind energy projects.

The merger comes at a time when India is targeting 450 GW renewable energy capacity by 2030.

"The Indian renewable energy sector has grown rapidly over the last decade," said Sumant Sinha, founder chairman and CEO of ReNew. "During this time, ReNew has been a driving force in making sure that the sources of this growth are sustainable, and also economically competitive."

"Over the next decade, ReNew plans to maintain its track record of market share growth. Over time, we will expand our capabilities even further, with utility-scale battery storage, and customer-focused intelligent energy solutions," he said.

—PTI

RMG II CEO Bob Mancini said the firm was looking to partner with a company driving change on a global scale, with a proven track record, and best-in-class management. "We found that company in ReNew," he said.

The pro forma consolidated and fully diluted market capitalization of the combined company would be \$4.4 billion.

"Proceeds (from the deal) will be used to support ReNew's growth strategy, including the buildout of its contracted, utility-scale renewable power generation capacity, as well as to reduce debt," the statement said.

ReNew's management, and its current group of stockholders, including Goldman Sachs, CPPIB, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, and Jera Co, among others, who together own 100 per cent of ReNew today, will be rolling a majority of their equity into the new company, and are expected to represent 70 per cent of the effective company ownership.

—PTI

India, China reduced global income inequality: ILO

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 24

Economic convergence, driven mainly by China and India, has caused global labour income inequality to decline over the past 13 years, finds the International Labour Organisation.

According to the ILO, the global labour income distribution is lopsided. A worker in the top decile earns \$7,475 per month and one in the bottom decile, just \$22. The highest-earning 10 per cent of workers worldwide received almost half, or 48.9 per cent, of total pay, the next decile received 20.1 per cent while the remaining 80 per cent workers received just 31 per cent.

Although global pay inequality levels are very high, it is important to note that they have decreased between 2004 and 2017. However, if India and China are excluded, a much slower reduction in labour income inequality over that period has been observed. Interestingly, these findings do not reflect a decrease in

DIFFERENT STROKES
▶ Global labour income distribution is lopsided. A worker in the top decile earns \$7,475 per month and one in the bottom decile, just \$22
▶ The highest-earning 10% of workers worldwide received 48.9% of

inequality within India or China—indeed, the data suggest that neither country registered such a decline during 2004-17. Instead, the two countries have enjoyed very high growth rates, which, together with their initially low level of average labour income, have contributed "mechanically" via economic convergence to a global decrease in inequality.

The report also finds that despite the economic progress made in past decades, the number of people not in employment, education or training and workers in poverty are likely to increase in Asia-Pac, including India, due to the recent deceleration of GDP.

total pay while 80% workers got just 31% Neither India nor China registered a dip in inequality, rather their growth along with initial low income 'mechanically' reduced global inequality

The share of youth who are not in employment, education or training in the region reached 24.3 per cent in 2019 compared with 23.9 per cent in 2018. The high rate is driven by South Asia, where opportunities for young women to go to university or work is limited. In South Asia nearly 161 million youth, including 81 million young women, have this status.

Further, the labour productivity growth rate, measured as output per worker, dropped from 4.3 per cent in 2018 to 3.9 per cent in 2019. This drop was driven mainly by countries in South-East Asia, the Pacific and

South Asia, including India and some of the Asean countries where GDP growth decelerated. Poor job quality and high rates of informality remain a challenge to be tackled by governments and employers' and workers' organisations. As many as 79.1 million workers in Asia and the Pacific, or 4.2 per cent, remained in extreme poverty in 2019, and 277 million workers or 14.6 per cent were still living in moderate poverty. While working poverty continues to decline, those who have escaped poverty remain highly vulnerable to adverse economic shocks and therefore face a significant risk of becoming poor again.

The report also found that the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) of India is not in line with international best practice. The main difference between the ILO modelled estimates of November 2019 and those of November 2018 is the revision of historical unemployment rates for India. There are considerable methodological differences here, it said.

91-year-old Suzuki chairman to bow out

RIVER DAVIS
FEB. 24

Suzuki Motor Corporation's 91-year-old chairman Osamu Suzuki is stepping down after leading an automaker for longer than anyone else in the industry.

Suzuki, who served as the Japanese carmaker's chief executive for 22 years and then as chairman for another two decades, will step down from his current role following a shareholders meeting in June, the company said in a statement on Wednesday. He will remain as a senior adviser.

With almost half a century at the helm, Suzuki is widely credited with turning the carmaker into what it is today: one of the largest small-vehicle manufacturers in the world. Instead of taking Japan's biggest auto giants like Toyota Motor Corp head on, Suzuki worked to grow the company by finding new markets around the world for its compact automobiles, building a dominant share in India during his first of two terms as



Osamu Suzuki

president from 1978 to 2000.

The nonagenarian also steered Suzuki into alliances with two of the world's biggest automakers, Volkswagen AG and General Motors Co, though those ultimately failed.

His departure comes one week after Honda Motor Co's chief executive Takahiro Hachigo said he would resign effective June, underscoring the churn the Japanese auto industry is currently undergoing. Japanese carmakers are beginning to recover from a tough pandemic-marred year, but even as demand revives, they're struggling to meet sales targets amid a global chip shortage.

—Bloomberg

ITALIAN GROUP TO ACQUIRE MODERN FOODS

Mumbai, Feb. 24: Private equity player Everstone Capital has sold Modern Foods, which it had taken over in early 2016 from Hindustan Unilever, to Italian baking major Grupo Bimbo for an undisclosed sum.

Everstone in a statement on Wednesday said that Modern Food Enterprises, which was held by its bread and bakery platform Everfoods Asia, was sold to Ready Roti India, the domestic subsidiary of the Italian major.

Grupo Bimbo is the largest baking company in the world, operating in 33 countries, including in India, and has a diversified portfolio of over 13,000 products and more than 100 brands.

Everfoods acquired Modern Foods from Hindustan Unilever in April 2016 and successfully relaunched the iconic bread brand in June 2017 nationwide. HUL had bought Modern Foods from the government in 2000 as part of the divestment process and later decided to exit as part of its strategy to leave non-core sectors.

Modern Food Industries was set up by the government 1965 as Modern Bakeries in Madras and was renamed as Modern Food in 1982. When sold off to HUL it had 13 bread manufacturing units apart from fruit juice concentrates under brand name Rasika in New Delhi and aerated soft drinks Double Seven.

HUL took over 74 per cent of its equity in January 2000 for Rs 10.5 crore.

—PTI

Harpic drives RB's India sales

New Delhi, Feb. 24: British FMCG major RB Plc on Wednesday said the large contribution from markets like India, where consumption of its hygiene products such as toilet cleaner Harpic soared in the Covid-impacted 2020, helped it to grow 11.8 per cent to 13.99 billion pounds in the year.

The company witnessed a volume growth of 9.6 per cent in 2020, led by the strong performance of its disinfectant brands driving market penetration and share, said RB, which owns brands like Dettol, Lysol, Durex, Strepsils and Vanish.

"All geographic regions have grown, with the largest contributors to growth including the US, India and China," said RB (Reckitt Benckiser) in an



earning statement.

Its leading disinfectant brands have seen exceptionally strong levels of penetration and brands as Dettol and Lysol are used in over 300 million households globally.

In India alone, Harpic is now used in over 100 million homes, up by nearly 30 million compared to 2019, as a result of purpose-led marketing campaigns centred around behaviour change," the company said.

Lysol is now estimated to be present in over half

of all US homes, while in Canada, its penetration is up over 1200 basis points over the past year.

"Mortein and Harpic also delivered growth in all their major geographies, with Harpic particularly strong in India," it said.

In 2020, RB's net revenue for the hygiene segment was up 19.5 per cent at 5.81 billion pounds.

Its popular brands as Dettol and sexual wellbeing brand Durex helped RB to get its net revenue from the health segment to go up by 12.1 per cent to 4.89 billion British pounds in 2020 on a like for like basis.

"Consumer demand for disinfectants drove strong demand for Dettol throughout 2020, with the brand growing over 50 per cent," it said.

—PTI

SHORT TAKES

Murray knocked out by Gerasimov

Montpellier: Andy Murray was dumped out of the ATP event in Montpellier on Tuesday after suffering a straight-sets defeat in the opening round against Belarusian Egor Gerasimov.

Murray, who missed the Australian Open after testing positive for Covid-19, was playing his first ATP Tour event since last October. The 33-year-old Briton lost in the final of a second-tier Challenger tournament in Italy to Illya Marchenko earlier this month. Murray fell a break behind in the seventh game against Gerasimov on Tuesday, but fought back to force a tie-break. He missed one opportunity to take the set in the breaker, but his opponent clinched it on his fourth set point. It was all one-way traffic in the second set, though, as Murray had to save a match point to avoid being on the wrong end of a bagel. The three-time Grand Slam champion is currently 121st in the world, having been beset by hip and groin injuries. — *AFP*

Jyoti stuns world champ, in Last 8

New Delhi: Jyoti Gulia (51kg) upstaged two-time world champion Nazym Kyzaibay of Kazakhstan to enter the quarterfinals along with two others but three Indians bowed out after second-round losses in the 72nd Strandja Memorial Boxing Tournament in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Gulia, a 2017 world youth champion, prevailed 3-2 over Kyzaibay, a gold-winner from the 2014 and 2016 senior world championships. The Haryana-boxer is also a 2019 national champion. She will take on Romania's Perijoc Lacramioara in her quarterfinal bout on Thursday. Another Indian to enter the quarter-finals on the second day was Bhagyabati Kachari, who outclassed Russian opponent Anna Galimova 5-0 in the 75kg category. — *PTI*

Doncic clinches thriller for Dallas

Los Angeles: Luka Doncic nailed two clutch three-pointers, including the game winner with one second left, to lift the Dallas Mavericks to a thrilling 110-107 victory over the Boston Celtics on Tuesday in Texas.

Doncic hit consecutive go-ahead three-pointers in the final 30 seconds, draining a step-back three with 15 seconds left to make it 107-105. He repeated the feat by shooting a high arching 28-footer over two Celtics defenders with less than a second left to win it. The 21-year-old Slovenian finished with 31 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists as the Mavs earned their sixth win in seven games. — *AFP*

Bamford fires Leeds to 3-0 win

Leeds: Patrick Bamford strengthened his case for an England call-up ahead of the European Championship by scoring his 13th goal of the season in Leeds' 3-0 win over struggling Southampton in the Premier League on Tuesday. Bamford squeezed a low, angled shot into the corner from the edge of the area in the 47th minute to put Leeds ahead and move level with Harry Kane and Dominic Calvert-Lewin as the leading English scorers this campaign. Only Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah and Manchester United midfielder Bruno Fernandes have scored more. Left back Stuart Dallas provided an outside-of-the-foot finish at the end of a breakaway in the 78th for Leeds' second goal and Brazilian winger Raphinha wrapped up the victory with a curling free kick from 20 meters as Southampton's winless run extended to eight games. The margin of victory flattered Leeds. — *AFP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

India vs England: Third Test, Day 2 from 2.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

South Africa T20 Challenge: Warriors vs Knights from 5.55 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Jamshedpur vs Bengaluru from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Europa League: Arsenal vs Benfica from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 2; Napoli vs Granada from 11.25 pm on Sony Six; Villarreal vs Salzburg on Sony Ten 1; Leicester vs Slavia Praha from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Six; Milan vs Crvena Zvezda from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 1; Manchester United vs Real Sociedad from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2

AXAR'S SIXER!

Patel takes 6/38 as India bowl England out for 112

Ahmedabad, Feb. 24: Axar Patel's devastating six-wicket haul bundled England out for 112 before Rohit Sharma's languid elegance shone through in an unbeaten half century that handed India the edge on the opening day of the day-night third Test here on Wednesday.

The combination of left-armer Patel and off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin exploited the turning Motera pitch at the newly-inaugurated Narendra Modi stadium to the full and England's first innings folded in just 48.4 overs after the visitors opted to bat.

Patel (21.4-6-38-6) grabbed his second five-for in his second Test while Ashwin (16-6-26-3) took three.

At stumps, India were 99 for 3 from 33 overs with Rohit batting on 57 off 82 balls. Ajinkya Rahane (1) was giving him company following skipper Virat Kohli's dismissal in the second last over of the day.

Kohli was dismissed for 27 off 58 balls by left-arm spinner Jack Leach (10-1-27-2).

India trailed by just 13 runs with seven first innings wickets in hand. Before this, it was a nightmare that unfolded for England with the 47-run stand for the third wicket being their best.

They lost their last six wickets in the second session. The last seven wickets yielded just 38 runs.

This was after Ishant Sharma, only the second Indian fast bowler after Kapil Dev to play in 100 Tests, fittingly took India's first wicket in the third over to open the floodgates for the hosts.

He was accorded a guard of honour by his teammates after being felicitated by President Ram Nath Kovind and Home Minister Amit Shah ahead of his landmark game. In reply to a below par score, India negotiated the opening spells of much-vaunted England seamers James Anderson and Stuart Broad without any damage in the tricky twilight period. — *PTI*



India's Axar Patel celebrates an England wicket on the opening day of the third Test in Ahmedabad on Wednesday.

SCORECARD

England (1st Innings): Zak Crawley lbw b Patel 53, Dom Sibley c RG Sharma b 1 Sharma 0, Bairstow lbw b Patel 0, Root lbw b Ashwin 17, Ben Stokes lbw b Patel 6, Ollie Pope b Ashwin 1, Ben Foakes b Patel 12, Jofra Archer b Patel 11, Jack Leach c Pujara b Ashwin 3, Broad c Bumrah b Patel 3, Anderson (not out) 0. **Extras (b 1, lb 2, nb 3) 6. Total (In 48.4 overs) 112.**
FoW: 1-2, 2-27, 3-74, 4-80, 5-81, 6-81, 7-93, 8-98, 9-105.
Bowling: Ishant 5-1-25-1, Bumrah 6-3-19-0, Axar 21.4-6-38-6, Ashwin 16-6-26-3.
India: Rohit Sharma (batting) 57, Shubman c Crawley b Archer 11, Cheteshwar Pujara lbw b Leach 0, Virat Kohli b Leach 27, Ajinkya Rahane (batting) 1. **Extras (b 2, w 1) 3. Total (for three wickets in 33 overs) 99.**
FoW: 1-33, 2-34, 3-98.
Bowling: Anderson 9-6-11-0, Broad 6-1-16-0, Archer 5-2-24-1, Leach 10-1-27-2, Stokes 3-0-19-0.

Players will need to adapt quickly to lights, says Kohli

Ahmedabad, Feb. 24: Indian skipper Virat Kohli is worried that the lights at the Narendra Modi Stadium here could potentially impact visibility and said the players will need to adapt quickly.

The refurbished stadium, the largest cricketing arena in the world, doesn't have the traditional flood-light towers but a ring of LED lights around the perimeter of its roof. It is similar to the 'ring of fire' at the Dubai International Stadium, which often poses a challenge to the fielding

It is such an exciting atmosphere here at the largest cricket stadium. I'm a bit more worried about the lights than the colour of the seats.
— **VIRAT KOHLI**
India cricket captain

side. "It is such an exciting atmosphere here at the largest cricket stadium. I'm a bit more worried about the lights than the colour of the seats," Kohli said at the toss ahead of the day/night Test against

NUMBERS GAME

● Ishant Sharma became the 11th Indian and 70th player overall to complete a century of Test matches after appearing in the Ahmedabad Test on Wednesday

● The pacer, who made his debut against Bangladesh at Dhaka in 2007, has taken 13 years and 275 days to reach this milestone. He is only the second Indian after Kapil Dev (131 Tests) to play 100 Tests.

● Axar Patel recorded his best bowling performance in an innings by taking 6/38. His previous best was 5/60 on debut in the previous Test.

● England slumped to their second lowest total in India by making 112 in 48.4 overs. It was England's fourth lowest total against India. Their lowest total against India is 101 in 45.1 overs at The Oval in 1971 while 102 in 26.2 overs at Mumbai in 1981-82 is the lowest on Indian soil.

● The Ahmedabad Test is the second day/night Test on Indian soil. The first one was played between India and Bangladesh at Kolkata in in November 2019.

— *S. PERVEZ QAISER*



A vehicle rests on its side after a rollover accident involving golfer Tiger Woods in Rancho Palos Verdes, a suburb of Los Angeles. Woods suffered leg injuries. — *AP*

Tiger in hospital after major crash

Washington, Feb. 24: The amazing golf career of Tiger Woods, from two-year-old prodigy to his epic comeback 2019 Masters victory, was in jeopardy Tuesday after injuries suffered in a serious solo car crash.

The 45-year-old American, among the world's most famous athletes for the past quarter-century, underwent surgery for multiple leg injuries following the early morning wreck near Los Angeles.

It could mean the end of a groundbreaking career that has seen Woods win 15 major titles, three shy of the all-time record set by Jack Nicklaus, and 82 US PGA crowns, level with Sam Snead for the all-time mark.

Woods has faced plenty of prior troubles off the course, including multiple back and knee surgeries, the 2009 revelation of multiple affairs that led to an emotional public apology and divorce from wife Elin Nordegren plus a 2017 reckless driving incident.

Woods was recovering from 2017 back surgery when he was arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, his mug shot drawing worldwide attention. He said he had not realized how prescription drugs he was taking might interact and later pleaded guilty to reckless driving.

In the 1990s, Woods put



Tiger Woods

himself alongside pal and NBA star Michael Jordan as two of the world's most iconic sports stars and richest endorsement pitchmen, his fame going beyond golf lovers or sports fans.

Woods thrilled audiences with his skill as well as a winning charm and personality, global audiences inviting him into their homes through television every week, while at the same time keeping private details about his life.

Woods was the first black winner of the Masters in 1997, hugging his father Earl after his historic victory in course record fashion. In 2019, Woods would come off the same green at Augusta National after winning his first major title since 2008 and hug his children, Sam and Charlie, in a bookend moment to signal a completed return from back surgery Woods hoped would allow him a normal life. It also gave him another chance at golfing glory.

— *AFP*

Andhra go down to Punjab

Indore, Feb. 24: Punjab bounced back from back-to-back defeats to beat Andhra by seven wickets in a Group 'B' match to register their first win in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Wednesday.

Punjab skipper Mandeep Singh won the toss and sent Andhra in to bat and Siddarth Kaul (4/27) was bang on target from the word go. Kaul got Ashwin Hebbur, centurion in the previous match against Tamil Nadu, for 1 in the fourth over.

Kaul then struck a huge blow by getting the wicket of Andhra captain Hanuma Vihari (2).

A disciplined bowling effort from Punjab meant Andhra innings never had the momentum. Kaul

picked up four wickets while left-arm medium-pacer Barinder Sran took three as Andhra were bowled out for 175 in the 49th over.

Chasing the target, Mandeep starred with an unbeaten 64 (81 balls, 8 fours) to take Punjab home in 36 overs and register their first win in the tournament.

Meanwhile in Surat, Baroda beat Hyderabad by 110 runs, courtesy Kedar Devdhar's hundred and impressive show by the bowlers.

Put into bat, Baroda rode on Devdhar's stroke-filled 131 to post a competitive 316/7 on the board, and then bundled out the opposition for 206, with Babashafi Pathan (3/37) doing the bulk of the damage.

Devdhar was back among the runs as he tore apart the Hyderabad attack with his 139-ball innings, hammering 14 boundaries and two maxims. He and Smit Patel (35) added 79 runs for the first wicket. But Patel perished after being caught by B. Sandeep off right-arm medium pacer Ajay Dev Goud (2/68).

Hyderabad could not capitalise on a 75-run strong start given by openers Tanmay Agarwal (34) and Tilak Varma (47) and suffered a middle-order collapse. Both the openers perished in quick succession as Hyderabad slipped to 83/2.

Baroda rattled Hyderabad by striking twice, first Ninad Rathwa ran out Himalay Agarwal (17) and Babashafi Pathan

then sent back Mickil Jaiswal (5). B. Sandeep (18) and T. Ravi Teja (19) weren't able to convert their starts as Hyderabad found themselves reeling at 143/6. Hyderabad were eventually bundled out for 202.

BRIEF SCORES

■ Andhra 175 in 48.1 overs (Nitish Kumar Reddy 30, Siddarth Kaul 4/27, Barinder Sran 3/29) lost to Punjab 176 for 3 in 36 overs (Mandeep Singh 64 n.o., Abhishek Sharma 32, Prabhsimran Singh 32).

■ Baroda 316/7 in 50 overs (Kedar Devdhar 131, Krunal Pandya 55, Ajay Dev Goud 2/68, C. V. Milind 2/74) bt Hyderabad 206 in 42.2 overs (Tilak Varma 47, Tanmay Agarwal 34, Babashafi Pathan 3/37, Lukman Meriwalla 2/39).

Giroud's gem earns victory for Chelsea

Bucharest, Feb. 24: Olivier Giroud's magnificent bicycle kick broke Atletico Madrid's resistance and earned Chelsea a crucial away goal on Tuesday, a 1-0 victory giving Thomas Tuchel's side a slender advantage in the Champions League last 16.

Giroud's acrobatic strike was initially ruled out for offside but stood after VAR showed Mario Hermoso had got the final touch, delivering a huge blow to Atletico's hopes of reaching the quarter-finals. Atletico Madrid had put on a typically disciplined defensive performance until that point but Giroud's moment of

genius means they will have to score in London on March 17 if they are to avoid an early exit.

It also continues a worrying dip for Atletico, whose lead in La Liga is also under threat after one win in four matches. Meanwhile at Rome, Holders Bayern Munich brushed off their recent poor domestic form by throwing down a Champions League marker with an emphatic 4-1 win at Lazio to take a "huge step" towards the quarter-finals. Robert Lewandowski gave Bayern an early lead before Jamal Musiala scored his first Champions League goal. — *AFP*

