

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
KARIMNAGAR | FRIDAY | 26 MARCH 2021



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WEATHER



Max: 37.8°C
Min: 22.5°C
RH: 22%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Max/Min temp. 37/23°C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalgun Shuddha
Dwadasi till 8.18 am; Phalgun
Shuddha Trayodasi till 6.10 am
(Saturday)
Star: Magha till 9.33 pm
Varjyam: 10.08 am to 11.39 am;
4.58 am to 6.27 am (Saturday)
Durmuhurtam: 8.44 am to
9.32 am; 12.46 pm to 1.34 pm
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon
HILARI CALENDAR
Sha'ban 12,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.16 am
Zohar: 12.32 pm
Asar: 4.43 pm
Maghrib: 6.34 pm
Isha: 7.41 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.28 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.15 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 4.13 PM
MOONSET TODAY 4.28 AM

COUNTER POINT



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

SHORT TAKES

Driving test to get tougher

New Delhi: Those seeking driving licences are now required to pass a set of stringent skill tests that include reversing a vehicle with reasonable accuracy to qualify for it, Parliament was informed on Thursday. Passing percentage in order to be eligible to get a driving licence in all regional transport offices has been fixed at 69 per cent, said road transport minister Nitin Gadkari.

Suez Canal to remain choked

Cairo: The owners of a giant container vessel blocking the Suez Canal said on Thursday that they were facing "extreme difficulty" refloating it, prompting Egypt to suspend navigation through one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. Analysts warned the suspension could last days or even weeks.

■ Full report on Page 6

Heat waves likely to turn common

New Delhi: Potentially deadly heat waves will likely become more commonplace in South Asian countries, including India, in the coming decades even if global warming is limited to 1.5 degrees Celsius, a new study said. Scientists said such an increase in extreme heat events can create unsafe labour conditions in major crop producing parts of India.

₹3.1cr looted in bank heist

Karimnagar: In a major filmy style bank robbery thieves broke into the State Bank of India (SBI) branch in Gunjapadugu village of Manthani mandal Wednesday midnight and looted ₹18.46 lakh cash and six kgs of gold worth ₹2.9 crore without leaving any evidence. On Thursday, when the branch manager Prahlad Singh and his staff entered the bank, they saw it was robbed. ■ Report on Page 3



A BJP supporter, dressed in party colors and symbol, attends a rally by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, ahead of state assembly polls at Mecheda in East Midnapore district, Thursday. — PTI

Hi-octane campaign for WB's first phase poll ends

Kolkata, March 25: Curtains came down at 5 pm on Thursday on the high decibel campaign in 30 Assembly seats in West Bengal where polls are scheduled in the first phase on March 27. The 30 seats are spread across tribal-dominated Purulia, Bankura, Jhargram, Purba Medinipur (Part 1) and Paschim Medinipur (Part 1) districts which were once considered the citadel of the Left in the state. The campaign for the seats saw high-profile leaders of the BJP, which has emerged as the main

Opposition to the ruling Trinamool Congress, addressing poll rallies in Purulia, Jhargram and Bankura districts promising "ashol port-borton" (actual change) to build "Sonar Bangla" (prosperous Bengal). The star BJP campaigners for the seats going to poll in the first phase were Prime Minister Narendra Modi and home minister Amit Shah. The other star campaigners of the saffron party were UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, party president Jagat Prakash Nadda, top leader Smriti

Irani who repeatedly harped on the various scams. On the other hand, West Bengal Chief Minister held poll rallies in each of the 30 constituencies, her injured leg notwithstanding. The TMC supremo in her campaigns described the Modi government as "anti-people" and the Prime Minister a "liar". The 30 constituencies going to polls on Saturday had overwhelmingly voted for TMC in the last two state elections but BJP had swept them in the 2019 LS elections. —PTI

ACB FINDS CASH, JEWELS AT DY TAHSILDAR HOME

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MARCH 25

ACB officials who caught the deputy tahsildar in Vemsoor mandal red-handed at his office on Wednesday, raided his house on Mamata Hospital road in Khammam on Thursday. They found ₹37,18,150 cash, 30 tolas of gold jewelry worth ₹10.71 lakh and 637 grams of silver, worth ₹32,500 in his house. Upender was caught while receiving ₹1 lakh from a farmer Thota Sambasiva Rao. The ACB officials are investigating the source of wealth in the house of Upender. It may be recalled that the farmers burst crackers in front of Vemsoor tahsildar office when the deputy tahsildar was caught by the ACB sleuths.

Tenant farmer's family members end life by suicide

DC CORRESPONDENT
MANCHERIAL, MARCH 25

Four members of a tenant farmer family have committed suicide, pained over mounting debts and inability to repay them. The bodies were found at the house in Malkepalli village in Kasipet mandal on Thursday morning. As per the FIR, the parents committed suicide on Wednesday night by hanging from the ceiling after giving poison to their married daughter and young son. The deceased were Janjirala Ramesh, 47, Padma, 39, Soumya, 20, and Akshay 15.

This is the first-of its-kind suicide due to mounting debts and losses incurred in the cotton crop in the state in the recent past. The family had taken a loan of nearly ₹10lakh from moneylenders. The family had promised to repay the debts on March 25 but failed to organise the money. Fearing harsh response from the moneylenders, they appeared to have decided to end their lives. It was only last year that the daughter was married off.

■ Page 2: Suicide note found in house

PERMANENT COMMISSION Army quizzed on rules

SC: Women SSC officers are discriminated against

New Delhi, March 25: The evaluation criteria set by the Army for granting permanent commission (PC) to women SSC officers constituted systemic discrimination which has caused an economic and psychological harm and an affront to their dignity, the apex court said on Thursday. The apex court said the administrative requirement imposed by the Army authorities while considering the case of women Short Service Commission (SSC) officers for PC, of benchmarking them with the officers lowest in merit in the corresponding male batch, is arbitrary and irrational. A bench of

Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah said this administrative requirement shall not be enforced while implementing the last year's verdict of the top court which had directed that women officers in the Army be granted PC. A superficial sense of equality is not in the true spirit of the Constitution and attempts to make equality only symbolic, the bench said in its 137-page verdict which was delivered on a batch of pleas filed by 86 petitioners questioning the manner in which the last year verdict has been implemented. Based on the above analysis, we are of the view that the evalua-

tion criteria set by the Army constituted systemic discrimination against the petitioners. The evaluation deployed by the Army, to implement the decision in Babita Puniya (last year verdict) disproportionately affects women, the bench said. It said this disproportionate impact is attributable to the structural discrimination against women, by dint of which the facially neutral criteria of selective ACR evaluation and fulfilling the medical criteria to be in SHAPE-1 at a belated stage, to secure PC disproportionately impacts them vis-a-vis their male counterparts. —PTI

COVID NEGATIVE REPORT MUST FOR BENGALURU

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

In one of the biggest single-day spikes in five months, India on Thursday recorded 53,476 new cases of Covid-19 in 24 hours along with 251 deaths. Due to the surge, the Kumbh Mela was curtailed to one month and Covid negative report os mandatory for pilgrims. Besides, several states started imposing restrictions on movement of people and all passengers to Bengaluru will now need to have a Covid-19 negative report from April 1. The Rajasthan government has issued orders for no functions during Holi and Shab-e-Barat while two-day lockdown is expected to be imposed in Indore on Holi due to rising cases. In Chhattisgarh's Raipur, all tourist places have been shut down and restrictions for Holi have been imposed. Six states — Maharashtra, Punjab, Kerala, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat — are reporting a surge in daily new cases and together they account for 80.63 per cent of the cases reported in the last 24 hours. Given the situation in India, the government has decided to pause "Vaccine Maitri", its diplomatic initiative.

Pension hike for ex-MLAs, MLCs

₹50,000 minimum pension, Assembly clears Bill

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

The Legislative Assembly on Thursday passed the Telangana Payment of Salaries and Pension and Removal of Disqualifications (Amendment) Bill, which enhances pensions of former legislators (MLAs and MLCs). The minimum pension of former legislators has been increased from ₹30,000 to ₹50,000 per month, with an upper ceiling of ₹75,000. Finance minister T. Harish Rao, who introduced the bill in the house, said that several former MLAs and MLCs were "struggling to pay hospital bills", whenever they undergo treatment. Though there is a provision for sanctioning more funds over the current limit, he said that the "process of approvals has become a major hindrance" for former legislators during emergency conditions. Former legislators, who were elected for three terms, will now get ₹50,000 pension per month as against ₹30,000 earlier. Those elected for over three terms will receive ₹75,000 pension per month,

Retirement age hike Bill passed by House

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

Finance minister T. Harish Rao allayed fears over fresh recruitments on account of state government's recent decision to increase retirement age of employees from 58 to 61 years. Speaking in the Assembly on Thursday, Harish Rao said the retirement age hike will not impact recruitment drives. The government will soon issue job notifications to fill over 50,000 vacancies in various departments, he said. The Assembly on Thursday passed the as against ₹50,000 earlier. The Bill also seeks to provide financial assistance up to ₹10 lakh for treatment of legislators and former legislators in case of hospitalisation. The legislators and former legislators can avail of this facility for their spouse also. Harish Rao said that no

Telangana Public Employment (Regulation of Age of Superannuation Amendment Bill 2021 to enforce the retirement age hike with immediate effect. Harish Rao, who introduced the Bill, said some Opposition parties and vested interests were trying to mislead students and job-seekers through a misinformation campaign that the retirement age hike by three years will halt fresh recruitment drives in Telangana for the next three years. ■ Page 2: Promotions led to vacancies: Harish

government had earlier considered for well-being of former legislators or had any concern towards them, but Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao felt the need to help them. Chief Minister Rao asked officials to bring the amendment bill for the purpose, the finance minister added.

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SHORT TAKES

SUICIDE NOTE
FOUND IN
HOUSE

FROM PAGE 1

The suicide note found in the house explained the mental agony the agriculture family was going through with the mounting debts and losses they faced in agriculture. "This is the fate of a middle-class family," they noted down. In the note, the family said they had taken 30 acres of land on lease and cultivated cotton this kharif season but got only 100 quintals of the yield that fetched them ₹3 lakh. They paid that money to one of the moneylenders.

The incident is indicative of the deepening agriculture crisis with the increased investment costs and losses incurred in the cotton crop due to pest attack, lower yields, especially among the tenant farmers.

The suicide note said the family would not have ended their lives if they had ₹7.5 lakh to clear the debts. It said, "The middle-class people give more priority to the 'Ijjath' and they can't live if once they lost 'Ijjath'."

Tenant farmers engaged in agriculture have no institutional support and governmental backing unlike the farmers who owned land. Some 70 per cent of the farmer suicides are that of tenant farmers.

Tenant farmers neither get Rythu Bandhu nor Rythu Bima nor crop loans from banks and no compensation for the damaged crop but they have to pay the lease amount to the landowner irrespective of gain or loss.

Landowners get all the benefits. The lease amounts for lands also increased in recent years. Thus tenant farmers have to pay huge amounts for taking land on lease for cultivation.

PODU LANDS ISSUE
TO BE ADDRESSED
BY KCRDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

The issue of podu lands in the state will soon be addressed by Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, tribal welfare minister Satyavathi Rathod assured the Legislative Assembly on Thursday. She also said that though clear instructions were issued not to trouble tribals practising agriculture in podu lands in forests of Telangana state, some officials were acting with some "over enthusiasm", the minister said.

There were 15,558 claims covering 53,565 acres for rights on forest land by podu cultivators that still need to be addressed, the minister said. She said that since the implementation of the Record of Forest Rights Act, 97,774 tribals were given the rights to cultivate on podu lands covering 3,03,970 acres of forest land in the state.

She also said that the government was considering a liaison officer position to coordinate with the forest department on issues relating to clearances to be obtained from the department by other wings of the government.

QUIT AS MP,
FARMERS
TELL ARVINDDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

Nizamabad MP Dharmapuri Arvind is in a fix over the lack of provision of Minimum Support Price (MSP) for turmeric and the absence of a Turmeric Board, which he had promised in 2019.

On Thursday, turmeric farmers, who are on protest, raised slogans against him and demanded his resignation from Parliament.

His troubles grew with BJP's Tamil Nadu unit promising a turmeric development board and MSP for turmeric. Arvind tried to convince the farmers that the spices extension centre was a better alternative. The Centre had on March 15 categorically said that there was no proposal to set up a Turmeric Board in Telangana.

Earlier, replying to a question raised by TRS member, K.R. Suresh Reddy in the Rajya Sabha, Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar said the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry had already established a regional office-cum-extension centre of Spices Board at Nizamabad for export of spices, including turmeric.

Turmeric is one of the important spice crops in the country with a total production of 11.53 lakh tonnes.

Students fume at govt vacate order

Head home with fear of carrying virus after abrupt announcement

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

The shutting down of hostels and resident welfare schools in the state, barely a month after they reopened following the unprecedented gap of 11 months, has left the students stranded again.

The abrupt announcement that came in the wake of the rising Covid-19 cases among students in schools and colleges left the students with barely a day to vacate the hostels. Most hostels will soon shut down their mess services too. Students in colleges and universities are scared they might take the virus to their native places. They say it is difficult to find safe transport at quick notice. Students across all departments said they will have difficulty accessing online classes and other resources, especially in rural and isolated areas.

"There is hardly any internet connectivity in rural parts of Mahbubnagar. We have struggled through the past year without any access to books and classes. When I



With the state government closing all the educational institutions due to surge in the Covid-19 cases, many students were seen leaving for their hometown from Hyderabad on Thursday.

get back home, I will be required to help my parents in the field or at

work," said Mary, a student of MSc at OU. Another student at

JNTU-H, Jeevan, said by the closure, students will not now have the access to

libraries for books and papers for study and for research purposes.

PROMOTIONS
LED TO
VACANCIES,
SAYS HARISH

From Page 1

"Chief Minister KCR garu has ordered promotion to all government employees based on their seniority. Promotions for over 80 per cent employees were already completed and the balance will be completed in a month. The promotions have created vacancies at lower levels. All these vacancies will be filled under direct recruitment. This apart, several vacancies existed in various departments. All these will be notified soon. The government will issue job notifications to fill over 50,000 posts," he stated.

MINISTER RELEASES
BOOK ON STATE'S
FAUNAL DIVERSITYDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

Minister for forests and environment Allola Indrakaran Reddy on Thursday released 'Current Status of Faunal Diversity of Telangana', a book written by Zoological Survey of India director Dr Kailash Chandra.

This book focuses on the state's fauna. Located in the centre of Deccan plateau and western part of eastern ghats, the state was earlier referred as Trilinga Desa. It has a widely different type of forest which covers around 26,969.48 sq.km of geographical area, including 12 protected areas of the state. They include seven wildlife sanctuaries and three national parks and two tiger reserves covering an area of 5,692.48 sq. km. The state is also endowed with rich floral and faunal diversity. The book reports about 2,450 faunal species, belonging to 1,440 genera accommodated under 456 families and 125 orders of 45 different faunal groups, including 1,744 invertebrates and 706 vertebrates.

He was speaking after handing over 350 swachh autos with a higher lifting capacity of 1.5 tonnes for collection of garbage here on Thursday. The event was attended by Mayor Gadwal Vijaya Laxmi, minister T. Srinivas Yadav and GHMC Commissioner Lokesh Kumar.

These swachh autos were handed over to ragpickers, under the driver-cum-owner scheme. The beneficiaries contribute 10 per cent and GHMC 90 per cent of the cost. These

L VENKAT RAM REDDY |
DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

Buoyed by a victory in the two graduate MLC polls, the ruling TRS is banking on votes of the Other Backward Castes (OBCs) to achieve its target of winning and retaining the upcoming Nagarjunasagar Assembly bypoll on April 17. Voters from backward classes constitute the majority in this constituency. TRS party supremo and

8 of 11 pollution checking
units flashing red signalT.S.S SIDDHARTH | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

Eight out of the eleven pollution monitoring stations in the city have been recording increasing counts of particulate matter (PM) in the city. The pollutant PM10, mainly comprises dust and vehicle emissions.

With temperatures expected to rise in the days and weeks ahead, which typically helps in dispersal of pollutants, the PM10 particles are not expected to be dispersed as much because they are heavier than the other commonly occurring polluting particles of the PM2.5 kind.

The 11 monitoring stations are located at the

Buddha Purnima Project office, MGBS Bus Station, Chikkadpally, Langar Houz, Madhapur, Sainikpuri, Rajendranagar, Nacharam, Abids, Shameerpet, and KBR National Park.

Of these, only three had readings of PM10 which were within the permissible limits of 100 micrograms/ metric cube. These stations were at Sainikpuri, KBR National Park, and Rajendranagar.

"Whenever there are clear skies and winds are blowing, such conditions allow for dispersion. The winds then disperse the particulate matter. But when there is no or very less wind, the chances of the particulate matter hanging in the air is large," a senior official from the Telangana state pollution control board (TSPCB) said.

The major contributors to PM10 are the unburnt or improperly burnt hydrocarbons or fuel. Even experts from the central pollution control board (CPCB) said that during the end of the summer season, there is an increase in the relative humidity which locks the particulate matter in the air.

"There might not be PM which is a cause for concern, but the summer months also increase the quantity of ozone in the air. This can be harmful for the human body," Dr D Saha, an expert on air pollution, attached to the CPCB, told DC.

Etala orders officials to
track Covid positive casesDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

Health minister Etala Rajender has asked health officials to report on the severity of Covid-19 cases to enable the government to formulate a method to track and test cases. He was interacting with senior health officials about the concerns of ministers.

The feedback from director of health Dr Srinivas and director of medical education Dr Ramesh Reddy was that cases are rising in both government and private hospitals. Many are visiting hospitals with symptoms while most were mild cases.

The major challenge for the doctors is to ensure that the moderate cases do not become severe. Ensuring less mortality is the key in fighting pandemic.

Rajender asked officials to ensure that treatment was provided to all without any difficulty. He also insisted that testing of samples must be increased to 50,000 every day. Due to the rise in cases, the epidemiology wing of districts must focus on tracing the contacts of people who have tested positive, he said.

Rajender insisted that they must be updated with regard to positive cases so that they can scout around and see if they have been quarantined or not.

There are complaints on

34,051 RECEIVE COVID-19 VACCINE

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

Vaccination was availed by 34,501 persons Wednesday taking the tally of the total beneficiaries in the state to 10,45,301. The state government has opined that the vaccine wastage is at 0.80 per cent.

There are 508 centres for the vaccination and there

has been a good response from senior citizens. Approximately 3,29,473 senior citizens have been vaccinated and of them 18,745 were carried out on Thursday.

Among others those in the 45 to 59 years age-group with co-morbidity were 12,032 while 2, 151 healthcare and frontline workers took their second dose.

TS REPORTS 493 NEW COVID CASES

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

The state reported 493 new cases of Covid-19 of which 138 are from Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation, 42 from Medchal Malkajgiri and 35 from Ranga Reddy.

The overall figure of positive cases has been put at 3,04,791. With four deaths, the toll has touched 1,680.

Total active cases in the state are 3,648 and those

social media that those who are testing positive are not revealing it to anyone, which can also aggravate the situation.

The medical and health department also had a video conference with all the officials in districts

where it was insisted that vaccination must be increased.

It has been decided to set up 2,000 centres in the state as from April 1 all those who are above 45 years can opt for vaccination.

able to connect. The domestic connections will have to be provided by April 10 and bulk connections will be carried out later. It was noted that the linking process in slums has been completed.

HC slams Wakf
inaction against
encroachersVUJINI
VAMSHIDHARA | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

The Telangana High Court on Thursday lambasted Wakf Board for its efforts in resuming Wakf properties or lands from illegal encroachers.

The court was embarrassed with the inability of Wakf Board and the state minority department to detail the number of properties or lands that have taken back so far from land grabbers. A division bench, comprising Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijaysen Reddy, was dealing with three PILs complaining about the failure of the Board to take action against illegal encroachments.

Earlier, the Wakf Board assured the court that it would constitute a task force cell to restore properties that were grabbed. However, it had said that shortage of funds was making it difficult.

On Thursday, the bench noticed that no action was taken in the last three months despite assurances given to the court.

● COURT DIRECTED both Wakf and the State to come with a new status report.

Wakf Board has not filed the affidavit but the State Minority Welfare department filed a counter that the proposal to constitute the task force cell was still in the discussion stage and submitted that 2,186 eviction orders have been issued to encroachers to dispossess them from the properties of Wakf.

But when Chief Justice Kohli questioned about how many had been executed successfully and how many of them went to appeals before the Tribunal or forums to get stay orders, counsel for the State was unable to give details as they had no information.

Reacting to it, the Bench said "Don't always say that we are working on it. We don't want an action plan but action." It directed both Wakf and the State to come with a new status report furnishing all details of encroached lands and how many have been resumed.

Inter board strict
on fire safety ruleDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

The Telangana State government and the Board of Intermediate Education (TSBIE) have submitted before the High Court that from this year on, they are strict and uncompromising in according affiliations to Inter colleges that did not have the No-Objection Certificate (NOC) from the fire safety department for their classroom buildings and premises.

The TSBIE submitted a detailed report to the court on Thursday to explain how they are following the rules, in response to a PIL seeking a probe into the irregularities committed by Narayana and Sri Chaitanya Educational Institutions.

The secretary of BIE informed the bench that the Board of Intermediate has issued closure notices to 68 private junior colleges that failed to fulfil the norms and conditions.

Nine out of the 68 erring colleges have submitted NOC from the fire department and 19 colleges have been granted affiliation, after they have shifted out of the buildings where they were functioning and 40 colleges have been closed down. Thirty out of the 40 colleges that have been closed belong to Narayana and Sri Chaitanya.

After considering the report, the court opined that requisite action has been taken and it closed the PIL filed against Narayana and Sri Chaitanya colleges.

Support sanitation
staff, urges KTRSANJAY SAMUEL
PAUL | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

MA&UD minister K.T. Rama Rao has urged households in Greater Hyderabad to cooperate with sanitation staff by placing dry and wet garbage in separate bins to improve efficiency in garbage collection and also in achieving a healthy Hyderabad city.

He was speaking after handing over 350 swachh autos with a higher lifting capacity of 1.5 tonnes for collection of garbage here on Thursday.

The event was attended by Mayor Gadwal Vijaya Laxmi, minister T. Srinivas Yadav and GHMC Commissioner Lokesh Kumar.

These swachh autos were handed over to ragpickers, under the driver-cum-owner scheme. The beneficiaries contribute 10 per cent and GHMC 90 per cent of the cost. These



autos have been distributed in all the 30 circles within GHMC. The vehicles have been designed to also carry hazardous materials.

The minister said "I appeal to the citizens of Hyderabad to join hands in making it a Healthy Hyderabad. Cooperate with the sanitation staff by placing dry and wet garbage in separate bins to improve efficiency in garbage collection."

He recalled and lauded the services rendered by sanitation staff during the spread of Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown. He suggested a special sanitation drive given the rise in Covid-19 cases.

TRS banks on OBC vote

L VENKAT RAM REDDY |
DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

Buoyed by a victory in the two graduate MLC polls, the ruling TRS is banking on votes of the Other Backward Castes (OBCs) to achieve its target of winning and retaining the upcoming Nagarjunasagar Assembly bypoll on April 17. Voters from backward classes constitute the majority in this constituency. TRS party supremo and

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao is likely to announce the party's candidate on Friday, soon after the budget session of the Assembly ends.

Sources said that Mr Chandrashekar Rao has more or less decided to field a BC candidate, as was done successfully in the 2018 Assembly polls, to render the contest a fight between BCs and Reddys as a strategy.

The Congress and BJP had fielded candidates

from the Reddy community in 2018 while the TRS fielded Nomula Narasimhaiah, a BC from the Yadav community, and went on to win the battle. TRS candidate, known for his leftist politics, trounced Congress heavyweight K. Jana Reddy, who had earlier won the elections from here seven times. The Congress has already announced Jana Reddy's candidature for the bypoll. Currently, there is no word from the BJP on its candidate.

Aadhaar card link till April 30

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

In order to avail the 20,000 litres of free drinking water under the special scheme, the time limit for linking of Aadhar cards of

those with water meters has been extended to April 30.

In a review meeting, the Hyderabad metropolitan water supply and sewerage board decided that 500 teams would work on the

ground to assist households in connecting their Aadhar cards to the scheme. It has been noted that many prospective beneficiaries are facing snags and those who have new meter boards are not

able to connect. The domestic connections will have to be provided by April 10 and bulk connections will be carried out later. It was noted that the linking process in slums has been completed.

SHORT TAKES

Power usage goes up in March

Khammam: The power consumption this summer increased unexpectedly in Khammam district from March this year. The power consumption per day from March 1 to 20, 2021 is 7.06 million units against 5.79 million units per day in March 1 to 20, 2020. The power consumption increase is 1.27 million units per day. The Transco officials themselves were surprised over the increasing power consumption and decided to commence an awareness programme on power saving methods by following best practices to reduce power bills. The power consumption in the district for the last 24 days- from March 1 to 24, 2021 is 169.1 million units against 139.1 million units from March 1 to 24, 2020. Interestingly, the Transco officials are supplying the power as per demand due to the producing nearly 300 MW power from SCCL solar projects in Yellandu and Bhadradi Power Prject at Aswapuram. The Transco officials coined a slogan to reduce the power consumption by calling the consumers to save power.

FIGHT BETWEEN ITC, BJP TAKES A SERIOUS TURN

DC CORRESPONDENT
BHADRACHALAM, MARCH 25

The fight between farmers led by BJP and ITC officials over middlemen took a serious turn on Thursday with both parties lodging police complaints against each other.

Bharatiya Kisan Morcha state president Kondapalli Sridhar Reddy said that the officials of ITC company, which is cheating the subabul farmers in giving agreement price to the wood, is filing false cases against the farmers.

The Morcha and BJP leaders warned ITC and its officials for filing false cases against their leaders. Instead of rendering justice to farmers, the company is trying to blackmail BJP leaders, who are fighting on behalf of subabul farmers, they said.

"We will fight against the ITC till the abolition of the middlemen system in wood lifting from the farmers," Sridhar Reddy said.

He said that the company was trying arm-twisting methods to convince the farmers to implement their rules in wood purchase from the farmers.

"The officials are violating the agreement price and not issuing purchase orders to farmers. They are conniving with middlemen and looting farmers," he said and added that ITC will face the ire of farmers in the district.

He said that the company officials had filed false complaints in Burgampahad police station that he and subabul farmers had entered the company premises and damaged its assets. He said that BJP and Kisan Morcha staged a dharna in front of the company on January 28 demanding the company to pay remunerative price for the wood.

Sridhar Reddy went to the police station on Thursday as part of the case.

BJP Bhadradi district general secretary Bhukya Sitarum Naik said that the police should file a case against the ITC for cheating farmers in lifting the wood and not giving agreement price to their wood. Sitarum Naik lodged a harassment complaint against the ITC official. He said that ITC officials were harassing him by not issuing purchase orders. "As I am a tribal, I was harassed mentally. I was denied the agreement price," he said.

COOL IDEA

It costs ₹10,000 to turn a normal bicycle into a battery operated Youngster develops battery run cycle

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MARCH 25

The phrase "necessity is the mother of all inventions" adheres to young innovator Mupparapu Raju for developing items to address everyday problems of common people.

A native of Gopalpur in Duggundi mandal of Warangal Rural district, 31-year-old Raju has thought since childhood that it would have been better if his bicycle would carry him places without him having to peddle.

In the current situation, wherein the fuel prices are increasing by the day, Raju,

● An extra freewheel was fitted to the rear wheel of the bicycle to connect it to the motor with a small chain. With the hold of an electronic accelerator at the handle, the bicycle can run at a top speed of 25 kilometres per hour.

● Raju has previously built several innovative machines like a low-cost weed cutter, groundnut breaker, solar pesticide sprayer

whose family survives on agriculture, finds it difficult to afford petrol for daily commute. When Raju



thought of a cost-effective solution to the problem, he found nothing but a bicycle. "Because of the easy-

going lifestyle we are used to, pedalling a bicycle seemed like an unlikely means of transport. So, I started working on ways to make it run on a battery," Raju said.

He used two 12 volts batteries which power a 24 volt DC motor.

An extra freewheel was fitted to the rear wheel of the bicycle to connect it to the motor with a small chain. With the hold of an electronic accelerator at the handle, the bicycle can run at a top speed of 25 kilometres per hour.

"One hour of charge and the bicycle can run between 20 and 25 kilometres. We

can switch between battery power and normal pedalling at any time. It cost me ₹10,000 to turn a normal bicycle into a battery-operated one. I am saving at least some amount of money that usually goes towards filling fuel in my two-wheeler," he added.

The villagers, who saw Raju gliding on his bicycle, are asking him to make their bicycles battery powered too.

Raju has previously built several innovative machines like a low-cost weed cutter, groundnut breaker, solar pesticide sprayer, solar mobile charger among others.

₹3.1cr looted in bank heist

Top cop Satyanarayana said thieves did not leave any evidence

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, MARCH 25

In a major filmy style bank robbery thieves broke into the State Bank of India (SBI) branch in Gunjapadugu village of Manthani mandal Wednesday midnight and looted ₹18.46 lakh cash and six kgs of gold worth ₹2.9 crore without leaving any evidence.

On Thursday morning, when the branch manager Prahlad Singh along with his staff entered the premises, they noticed that the bank was robbed by thieves who made a hole through the window at the backside of the bank.

On receiving a complaint, officials from Ramagundam police commissionerate registered the case and started investigation.

Commissioner of Police V. Satyanarayana, officer on special duty, Sharath Pawar, DCP Ravinder and Uday Kumar Reddy, ACPs Umendar and Narendar visited Gunjapadugu village and inspected the premises.

Speaking to press persons, the top cop said that a gang of thieves was



Police commissioner V. Satyanarayana inspecting the locker in a strong room of the SBI in Gunjapadugu village of Manthani mandal in Peddapalli district on Thursday.

involved in the bank robbery, which was a thorough professional job. On entering the premises, the thieves cut the cable wire of the alarm clock before entering into the

strong room and removed all batteries besides the cables attached to CCTV cameras. Police recovered hand gloves from the crime spot.

Satyanarayana said

eight teams have deployed along with the bank security wing and started a manhunt for the robbers.

It should be noted that Gunjapadugu came to

limelight when the High Court advocate couple Gattu Vaman Rao and P.V. Nagamani, who are the residents of the same village, were brutally murdered last month.

17 STUDENTS OF SWCE SELECTED FOR JEE MAINS

DC CORRESPONDENT
MANCHERIAL, MARCH 25

As many as 17 students of Telangana Social Welfare Centre of Excellency, Bellampalli, have been selected for JEE mains out of total 33 students who have attended for the exam.

Among the 17 students, Durgam Ranjith, studying second year, got 92.06 percentile while Rayanchu Pavan got 78.88, Dole Mallikarjun 74.88 and Velpula Anil 78.87 and Thati Saivarshith 73.56 and Elaganti Ajay kumar 72.17 percentile at the national level.

Telangana Social Welfare Residential Educational Society secretary R.S. Praveen Kumar appreciated Durgam Ranjith for his performance at the national level.

● Among the 17 students, Durgam Ranjith, studying second year, got 92.06 percentile while Rayanchu Pavan got 78.88, Dole Mallikarjun 74.88 and Velpula Anil 78.87 and Thati Saivarshith 73.56 and Elaganti Ajay kumar 72.17 percentile

Police resolves murder mystery of unidentified woman

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, MARCH 25

Karimnagar police on Thursday cracked the murder mystery of an unidentified woman who was murdered and thrown in a drainage canal at Court compound wall near bus stop two days ago.

The police identified the woman as a native of Lakshettipet village of Mancherial district and arrested her husband coming to primary conclusion.

According to the police, the alleged accused and the woman were in love. But the grandfather of the woman performed her marriage to another person. But for the past 10 years, the woman was living with the accused in Hyderabad.

Meanwhile, disputes erupted between two regarding extramarital affairs maintained by the woman.

In the early hours on

Tuesday, the accused accompanied by her came to Karimnagar. When the accused was trying to convince her, she ran away from him and got hit by a vehicle coming in the opposite direction.

When the woman tried to escape, the accused held her and killed her with a stone and later threw her body in the drainage canal and left from that place.

The police by observing the CCTV footages at surrounding locations of Court Chowrastra and collecting the mobile call data of suspected, nabbed the person with whom the woman was in live-in relation for the past 10 years.

Commissioner of Police V.B. Kamalasan Reddy deployed special police teams which carried out investigation on all angles along with observing the CCTV footages and cracked the murder mystery within 48 hours.

Provide basic facilities to NREGA workers

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, MARCH 25

District collector K. Shashanka, on Thursday ordered the officials of the concerned department to provide all basic facilities that are required for the labourers at the workplace, which will be carried under National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGA) along with following the Covid-19 guidelines.

The collector inspected the works under NREGA, palle prakruthi vanam,

nursery, compost shed and vaikunta dhamam which are under progress at Nedunuru village of Thimmapur mandal of Karimnagar district.

He ordered the officials concerned to distribute the salary slips week-to-week to the NREGS workers without keeping them in pending and to provide pure drinking water, first aid box and temporary sheds keeping in view of severe heat condition prevailed in the district along with sanitisers and face masks.

MLC VANI DEVI CAR RAMS INTO ASSEMBLY GATE

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

The car of the newly-elected MLC, Vani Devi was damaged in a mishap after her Personal Security Officer (PSO) rammed the vehicle into the gate of the state Assembly complex on Thursday. Hyderabad city police commissioner placed the PSO under suspension.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Dudekula Salampasha S/o Dudekula Azeed Ahmed M/o. Dudekula Ameena (Old Names) R/o. H.No.4-69, Madhuramgar, Devanpally, Ward no.34, Kamareddy Town & Dist. Telangana State. Shall henceforth be known as "MOHAMMAD SALAM PASHA S/o. MOHAMMAD AZIZ AHMAD M/o MOHAMMAD AMINA BEGAM" (New names) for re-issue of passport. Cell. 9502118566.

NOTICE

I, DURGAM MAHESH NARAYANA (Vide Pass Port No. T5382390) Shall henceforth be known as DURGAM MAHESH S/o DURGAM NARAYANA for all purposes.

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DECCAN Chronicle

26 MARCH 2021

Calling the cops on Opp? Bihar ruckus probe must

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Welcome Justice Ramana

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

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

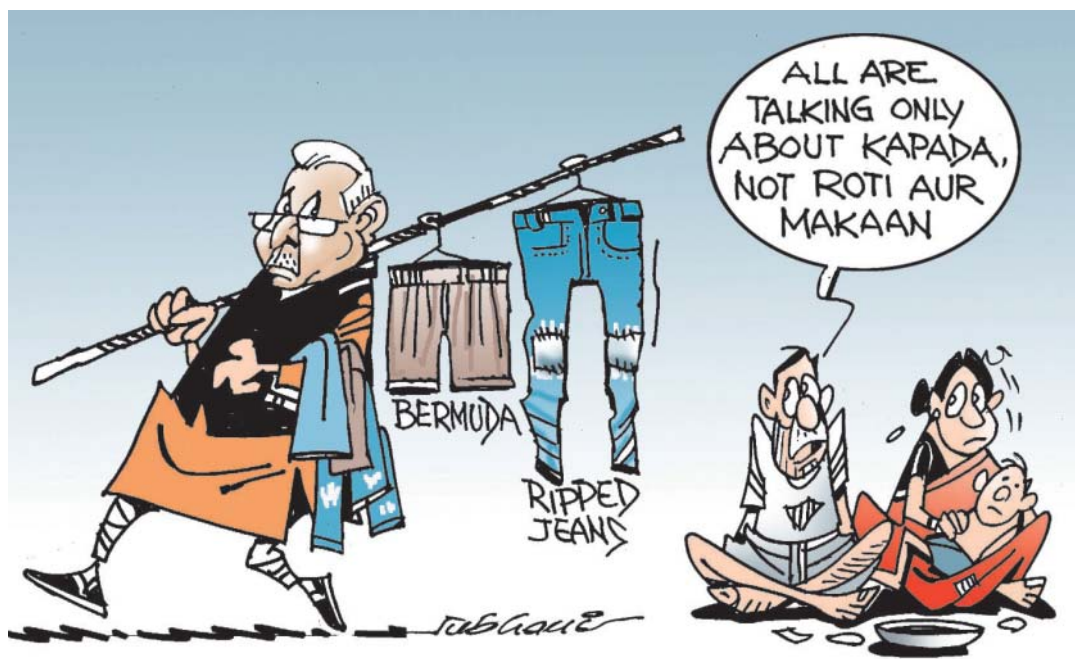
As several wise judges of the Supreme Court have pronounced, the procedure adopted in arriving at a decision is often of far greater significance to the ethos of instructions than the decisions themselves, and wise right decisions must still stand the test of transparency and fairness test of procedure.

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

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

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

Subhani



Bengal to trigger domino effect in Indian politics?



Shikha Mukerjee

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If the Trinamul Congress manages to retain power, then the war for federalism, multi-party democracy and secular politics will get a shot in the arm

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

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

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

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

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

LETTERS

SCHOOL CLOSURE

The TS government's decision to close all educational institutions was wise (*TS shuts all schools, colleges, DC, March 24*). It is pertinent to note the increasing cases of Covid with educational institutions becoming a source of spreading the virus. The government must know the gravity of the situation and take steps before the second wave hits.

Uday Kiran Kankipati
Secunderbad

When educational institutes can be closed citing difficulty in keeping social distance, why are theatres being spared? How is social distance being maintained there? The minister must clarify. He pointed out that cinema workers were suffering. Can't he see private school teachers are also suffering from job loss? Will he take responsibility if Covid cases grow because of cinema theatres?

Deshavaina Kishan Prasad
Karimnagar

SSC, INTER EXAMS

It's unfair to cancel SSC and Inter exams this year also as it will derail plans of students to take other competitive exams (*SSC, Inter exams unlikely this year, DC, March 25*). The state government and the education authorities could have taken strict safety and hygiene measures and let students write their exams to move forward in their academic life.

Ather Roshan Arah
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Over 50 die in clashes: E. Pak at flash-point

NEW DELHI, MARCH. 25

With a renewed reign of terror by West Pakistani troops leaving at least 55 dead and more than 200 injured and with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declaring that the killing of unarmed civilians would not go unchallenged, Bangla Desh was at flash-point today despite President Yahya Khan's reported acceptance of all the four demands of the Awami League Chief.

Reacting to the conduct of the troops, which was seen as provocative bid to sabotage a constitutional settlement, Mr. Rehman asked Gen. Yahya Khan to order "an immediate cessation of Military operations."

Mahir Ali



Remembering the bloodbath 50 yrs ago which broke Pakistan into two

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Balochistan.

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

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

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

By arrangement with Dawn

SHORT TAKES

PARLIAMENT BUDGET SESSION ENDS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WILL NO LONGER CALL RSS 'SANGH PARIVAR': RAHUL

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

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

In a tweet in Hindi on Thursday, he said he no longer refer to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh as 'Sangh Parivar', united family. "I believe it is not right to call the RSS and associated organizations Sangh Parivar - there are women in the family, there is respect for the elderly, a sense of compassion and affection - which is not there in the RSS," he said on Twitter. "Now I will not call RSS 'Sangh Parivar'" the Congress leader added.

RAUT BATS FOR PAWAR AS UPA CHIEF

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

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

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

This statement drew sharp criticism from the Congress with leaders asking Mr. Raut to keep his views with himself.

Maharashtra Congress chief Mr. Nana Patole complained about Mr. Raut to the Maharashtra Chief Minister Mr. Uddhav Thackeray.

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

I-T raids on DMK candidate cause flutter in Tamil Nadu

Premises raided included college properties of Velu, his offices

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

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

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

Duraimurugan even said that he suspected the Election Commission of India to have a role in the raids. However, Chief Electoral Officer, Satyabrata Sahoo, when asked about it, told the media that the ECI has nothing to do with it. I-T officials raid premises based only on prior information, he said.

The various premises that were raided included the college properties of Velu, his offices in Chennai and Karur, his home and homes and offices of his friends and relatives. Since Velu, the DMK district secretary of Thiruvannamalai, is also contesting from the same constituency, Stalin was there to campaign for him.

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



DMK Youth Wing leader Udhayanidhi Stalin addresses an election campaign in support of DMK candidate Geetha Jeevan, ahead of Tamil Nadu Assembly Polls in Thoothukudi on Thursday.

Reacting to the searches, TNCC president K.S. Alagiri said that it was an attempt to paralyse Velu's campaign. Calling it a witch hunt, Alagiri said that the rise in popular support to the Secular Progressive Alliance had prompted the BJP to unleash I-T officials on candidates.

Calling it a murder of democracy, Alagiri said the BJP, having control over the I-T, ED and CBI, had misused the agencies in a bid to put down the Secular Progressive Alliance but would not succeed in its attempts.

MDMK general secretary Vaiko said such raids would not stop the victory of the alliance. Describing it as a joint conspiracy by the AIADMK and BJP, he condemned the raids and it was aimed at intimidating the political rivals.

Despite the news of the raids spreading, Stalin addressed a meeting describing Velu as a DMK leader who had earned the

Plea to close liquor shops in TN till polls dismissed

Chennai, March 25: The Madras High Court on Thursday dismissed a plea seeking a direction to the Tamil Nadu government to close all TASMAC liquor shops till April 6, when Assembly elections will be held in the state, to enable voters choose the right candidate without the influence of alcohol.

The petitioner and simi-

lar minded persons can very well abstain themselves from consuming intoxicant materials to take the right decision, the first bench of the court said while dismissing the plea of advocate AP Sooriyaprakasam of Royapettah here.

A blanket direction cannot be issued in this regard, the bench of Chief

Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy said.

Liquor is sold through retail outlets of state-run Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC).

It may be recalled that Single phase polling to 234 Assembly seats in Tamil Nadu is scheduled on April 6.

praise of the late M. Karunanidhi. However, he did not make any mention of the raids. Velu is facing BJP's S. Thanigaivel in the polls.

Thursday's raids assume significance and they came soon after I-T sleuths searched several premises

of SRMU general secretary N. Kanniah and his son on Wednesday. Though nothing is known about any seizures made during the raids, the searches went on till the small hours of Thursday.

Both Kanniah and Velu have risen from humble

origins and are known for their dealings in money transactions through the companies they own.

While Kanniah is a trade union leader of railway workers' union, Velu, before entering politics during the MGR era, was a bus conductor.

Aasu calls people to reject BJP in Assam

MANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, MARCH 25

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

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

opment plank.

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

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

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

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

● THE POLL will decide the fate of 264 candidates.

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

in Assam, if voted to power.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bengal tops in political ad spend on Facebook

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

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

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

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

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

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

It also has constituency

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

After a record deployment of nearly one lakh troops for elections in West Bengal, Home

Ministry sources claim that more than 50,000 central security personnel will be deployed at more than 30,000 counting centres across Bengal on May 2. This massive deployment on May 2 counting day would be in addition to the one made by the local state police.

Top Home Ministry sources claimed that apart from violence during the elections, violence was also expected on the counting day, particularly in closely contested seats. Hence a detailed blueprint for security of counting centres has been prepared by the Election Commission in consultation with the Home Ministry.

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

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

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

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

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

KERALA | POLLS

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

BJP hopes to chug into Palakkad with 'Metroman'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pramod to take on the other two.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"My main focus and priority is development. The

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

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

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

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

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

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

through Sreedharan's candidature.

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

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

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

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

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

SHORT TAKES

MYANMAR
PROTESTS AGAIN
MET WITH FORCE

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

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

BALLISTIC
MISSILES FIRED
BY N. KOREA

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

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

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

ISRAELI POLL:
ARAB LEADER IS
KINGMAKER

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

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

CHINA RIFT: MORE
SHIPS DEPLOYED
BY PHILIPPINES

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

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

Military chief Gen. Cirilito Sobejana ordered the deployment of additional navy ships to beef up the country's maritime sovereignty patrols.

Suez traffic suspended

Facing 'extreme difficulty' refloating stuck vessel: Owners

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

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

Satellite pictures released by Planet Labs Inc show the 59-metre wide container ship wedged diagonally across the canal.

Japanese ship-leasing firm Shoei Kisen Kaisha said it owned the giant vessel and was facing "extreme difficulty" trying to refloat it. "In co-operation with local authorities and Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement, a vessel management company, we are trying to refloat (the ship), but we are facing extreme difficulty," Shoei Kisen Kaisha said in a statement on its website.

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

As shipping specialists warned it could take weeks to budge the vessel, the Suez Canal Authority announced it was "temporarily suspending navigation".

— AFP

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

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

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

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

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

Entire crew is Indian

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

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

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

Shoei Kisen Kaisha, the company's owner, said, "All the crew came from India", adding that it is safe and the company is

"trying to resolve the situation as soon as possible, but it proving to be extremely difficult".

On Tuesday, the 400 metre-long Ever Given got stuck diagonally across the Suez Canal, reportedly due to a major dust storm and strong winds.

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

The canal provides the shortest sea link between Asia and Europe. In case traffic in the canal isn't restored soon, expert say ship operators will have little option other than to

take the alternative route that involves travelling around the cape of good Hope, Africa's southernmost tip, and then to Europe. This route would increase the travel time by approximately two weeks.

Peter Berdowski, CEO of Dutch company Boskalis, which is trying to free the Ever Given, said it was too early to say how long the job might take. "We can't exclude it might take weeks, depending on the situation," Berdowski told the Dutch television programme "Nieuwsuur".

The Ever Given is a Panama-flagged ship that carries cargo between Asia and Europe. On Tuesday, it ran aground in the narrow, man-made Suez Canal dividing continental Africa from the Sinai Peninsula.

— AP

INDIA HAS LONGSTANDING TIES WITH RUSSIA: U.S. ADMIRAL

Washington, March 25: India has had a longstanding relationship with Russia for security cooperation and for armaments and the Biden administration should

encourage New Delhi to move away from Moscow rather than take the route of sanctions for the purchase of major defence equipment like the S-400 missile

system, Admiral John Aquilino, said during his confirmation hearing on Tuesday to be the next commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command.

— PTI

Biden eager to fix
immigration system

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

The US Citizenship Act of 2021 proposes a pathway to citizenship to 11 million undocumented workers, elimination of per country quota for employment-based green cards and work authorisation for dependents of H-1B foreign workers. "The president... believes that there should be faster processing, that our immigration system is broken at many levels and of the system and that he is eager for Congress to move forward with action there," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters on Wednesday at her daily news conference.

She was responding to

a question on the recent protest by Indian-American doctors who are seeking the elimination of the existing per country quota for Green Card, as a result of which the backlog for Indians now runs into several decades.

A Green Card, known officially as a Permanent Resident Card, is a document issued to immigrants to the US as evidence that the bearer has been granted the privilege of residing permanently.

The bicameral immigration bill, if passed by both the chambers of the Congress House of Representatives and the Senate and signed into law by President Joe Biden, would bring citizenship to millions of foreign nationals, including undocumented workers and those who came to the country legally. The legislation would also benefit hundreds and thousands of Indian IT professionals and their families. Responding to another question on the inordinate delay in the issuance of employment authorisation card to H4 and L2 visa holders, a significant number of

whom are Indian women, Psaki said that part of the reason the administration went to push for action on immigration on the Hill is to move forward with expediting the processing and doing that on several levels, including a number of the visas.

"So, that's part of the reason why we think that's such an important piece to move forward," Psaki said. An H-4 visa is issued by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services to immediate family members (spouse and children under 21 years of age) of the H-1B visa holders, most of whom are Indian IT professionals. The Biden administration has taken several steps to address the problems related to legal immigrants.

The citizenship bill sent by the White House to Congress includes providing new funding to the state and local governments, private organisations, educational institutions, community-based organisations, and not-for-profit organisations to expand programmes to promote integration.

— PTI

GIANT | VULTURES Yurok tribe considers species a sacred animal

Calif. condor can return to northwest

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

The project will be headed by the Yurok tribe, which traditionally has considered the California condor

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

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

The California condor is the largest native North American bird, with a wingspan of nearly 10 feet (3 metres). The scavenger was once widespread but

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

had virtually disappeared by the 1970s because of poaching, lead poisoning from eating animals killed by hunters and destruction of its habitat.

In the early 1980s, all 22

condors remaining in the wild were trapped and brought into a captive-breeding programme that began releasing the giant vultures into Southern California's Los Padres National Forest in 1992. That flock has been expanding its range while other condors now occupy parts of California's Central Coast, Arizona, Utah and Baja California, Mexico. The total wild population now numbers more than 300 birds.

A dozen adults and two chicks died last summer when a wildfire ravaged their territory in Big Sur.

— AP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,440.12	-1.51
Nifty 50	14,324.90	-1.54
S&P 500*	3,894.83	0.15
Dollar (₹)	72.62	-0.06
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.39	0.24
Euro (₹)	85.74	0.12
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,347▲44	0.09
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	62.12	-3.56
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.131	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.598	-0.016

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Automakers say production plunged in 2020

Global production of automobiles tumbled by 16% last year to a level last seen in 2010. With less than 78 million units sold, the auto sector faced "its worst crisis ever," said Fu Bingfeng, president, International Organization of Motor Vehicle Manufacturers. A breakdown of the organisation's data showed that in Europe, the drop in output was 21%, while in North America it fell by 20% and in South America by 30%.

67 coal blocks offered in second tranche of auction



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

Khatabook takes over Biz Analyst for \$10 million

Bengaluru-based fintech start-up Khatabook acquired Biz Analyst, a SaaS business management application, for \$10 million in a cash-and-equity deal. With this acquisition, Khatabook seeks to enter the next phase of growth and offer its over 10 million active merchants clientele premium value-added services. Biz Analyst provides solutions to SMEs using Tally accounting software to automate operations.

BMW launches motorcycle M1000 RR at ₹42 L

German luxury vehicle maker BMW Group launched its premium performance motorcycle model, BMW M1000 RR, in India with price tag starting at Rs 42 lakh, ex-showroom. Available as completely built-up units, the first 'M model' from BMW Motorrad in India can be booked now. The motorcycle is available in two variants—BMW M 1000 RR priced at Rs 42 lakh and BMW M 1000 RR Competition priced at Rs 45 lakh.



Policy mandatory for top 1,000 firms Dividend policy scope extended

FC BUREAU MUMBAI, MARCH 25

In a move to further strengthen corporate governance practices and disclosure requirements, markets regulator Sebi on Thursday decided that the top 1,000 listed companies should put in place a dividend distribution policy. "Requirement for formulation of dividend distribution policy by the existing top 500 listed entities has been extended to the top 1,000 listed entities on the basis of market capitalisation," the Securities and Exchange Board of India said in a statement after its board meeting.

In case companies hold their board meetings for more than one day, the financial results should be disclosed by them within 30 minutes of end of the board meeting for the day on which such results are considered, the Sebi said. Also, the regulator has decided to do away with the requirement to seek stock exchange's approval for change of name of a listed entity.

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

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



ANALYST CALL RECORDINGS TO BE MADE PUBLIC IN 24 HOURS

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

hours or before the next trading day. It also decided that written transcripts of post-earning conference calls should be made available on websites of listed companies and respective stock exchanges within five working days after such calls. —PTI

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

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

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

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

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

SOLAR PANELS TO COME UP ALONG NATIONAL HIGHWAYS

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 25

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

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

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

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

Urban women employment remains static in February

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 25

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

MARKET BLEEDS ON FRESH LOCKDOWN FEARS

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 25

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

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

pressure, as that may drag down global growth.

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

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

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

Small-cap Index down by 1.85 per cent.

Consumer focused stocks were the worst impacted by the fresh lockdown fears. The top losers among the sectoral indices included BSE Auto (-2.80 per cent), FMCG (-2.37 per cent), Realty (-2.55 per cent), Power (-2.83 per cent) and Consumer Durables (-2.28 per cent).

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

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

Inflation goal worked well, says Subbarao

New Delhi, March 25: Inflation targeting has worked well and the government must stay with it, and it is going to work well in the period ahead also, former RBI governor D. Subbarao said on Thursday. He also said low inflation contributes to sustainable growth.

Addressing a media event virtually, Subbarao further said the government's proposal to privatise some public sector undertakings (PSUs) is not akin to selling family silver but it is a route for putting India on a sustainable growth path.

"There is indeed no tension between growth and inflation in the medium term. A low inflation contributes to sustainable growth as it allows consumers and investors to make informed decisions. "...So, I believe inflation targeting has worked well and we must stay with it and it is going to work well in the period ahead," he said.

Under the current dispensation, the Reserve Bank of India has been mandated by the government to maintain retail



D. Subbarao

inflation at 4 per cent, with a margin of 2 per cent on either side. The monetary policy committee decides on policy rates keeping this target in mind.

The current medium-term inflation target, notified in August 2016, ends on March 31, and the inflation target for the next five years starting April is likely to be notified this month.

Commenting on the government's privatisation and asset monetisation programme, Subbarao said at the time of independence, there was a logic to invest in the public sector units because there was no private capital. Now, when there is no dearth of private capital, the government should focus its energies on investing in education, health and other people-centric areas. —PTI

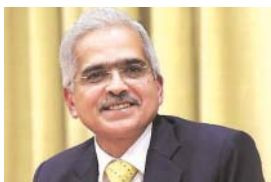
India will have a four-tiered banking sector in a decade

Mumbai, March 25: The Reserve Bank foresees a "competitive, efficient and heterogeneous" banking sector with four distinct sets of banks dominating the landscape over the next decade, its governor Shaktikanta Das said on Thursday.

There will be large banks having presence across the country and the world; mid-size banks present across the economy; small finance banks/regional rural banks/cooperatives to take care of the small borrowers; and digital players, he said.

The comments come days after the RBI appointed a panel headed by former deputy governor Shyamala Gopinath on bank licences to evaluate applications for universal banks and small finance banks. An internal panel had recently recommended allowing deep-pocketed corporates into the banking fray, something the RBI had been averse to for long. A final view on the controversial proposal is yet to be taken.

"The Reserve Bank is striving towards a more



Shaktikanta Das

LOCKDOWNS UNLIKELY: DAS

Mumbai, March 25: The rising Covid-19 cases are a matter of concern, but it may not impact the ongoing economic revival as one does not foresee lockdowns, RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said.

The economic revival will continue "unabated", Das said. "We have 'insurance' to protect economic revival like a fast-paced vaccination drive, greater ability among people to follow Covid protocols", and one does not see lockdowns as well. —PTI

competitive, efficient and heterogeneous banking structure. The licensing policies for universal banks, small finance

banks (SFBs) and payments banks are a step in this direction," Das said at an event.

He said at present, there are ten small finance banks and six payments banks which are operational. "I foresee four distinct sets of banking landscapes emerging in the current decade. The first set will be dominated by a few large Indian banks with domestic and international presence," Das said.

The second will be mid-sized banks with economy-wide presence, while the third set would encompass smaller private sector banks, SFBs, regional rural banks and co-operative banks, which may specifically cater to the credit requirements of small borrowers.

The fourth segment would consist of digital players who may act as service providers directly to customers or through banks as their agents or associates, he said, stressing that such players would increasingly emerge as "critical pieces" across all segments. —PTI

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 25

E-commerce companies expressed divergent views on FDI policy for the sector at a meeting with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on Thursday. While the FDI-funded e-commerce entities sought policy stability, some of the other players wanted changes and more clarity in the policy.

The ministry had called the meeting with the e-commerce players to understand if there was a need for clarity on the foreign direct investment policy in e-commerce.

FDI-funded e-commerce companies, including PepperFry, Swiggy, Amazon, Grofers and Flipkart asserted they did not need further changes in the FDI policy. Instead they needed stability in the policy.

On the other hand, players like Reliance Retail, Jio, Snapdeal, Tata Cliq and Nykaa wanted changes to be made in the policy. They sought clarification on the changes already made in the policy and its implementation. The ministry asked the

players to file their recommendations within a week for a decision on the issue.

Earlier, minister of commerce and industry Piyush Goyal had informed Parliament that he had received complaints about the operations of some of the e-commerce companies.

The Confederation of All-India Traders had complained to the ministry that some of the FDI-funded e-commerce companies have been flouting the FDI norms. It wanted the government to ensure that the current e-commerce norms provide a level-playing field for all stakeholders. It also asked the government to take corrective actions to ensure that no e-commerce company, big or small, Indian or foreign-funded, should violate the law under any circumstances and treat India as a dumping yard.

However, the Retailers Association of India, representing the organised retailers, wanted the FDI rules applicable to retail to be the same across channels and formats. Also, the rules for products should be the same for all channels with no special rules.

Mega infra DFI NaBFID gets House nod

New Delhi, March 25: Parliament on Thursday passed a bill to set up the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) to fund infrastructure projects in the country, with finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman asserting that its audited accounts will be placed before both the Houses every year and they will have "oversight" of the institution.

The Rajya Sabha passed the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) Bill, 2021 by a voice vote on Thursday. The bill was passed in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

Later, financial services secretary Debasish Panda said at an event that the development finance institution (DFI) should be

operational in the next four-five months.

Participating in a debate on the bill in the Upper House, some members raised the issue of lack of parliamentary oversight of the institution and demanded that the proposed legislation be sent to a select committee for scrutiny.

Replying to the debate, Sitharaman explained, "Every year audited accounts (of this bank) will come to each House of Parliament... so the institution is in-built in the bill."

Section 26 of the bill provides, "The Institution shall furnish to the Central Government and the Reserve Bank within four months from the date on which its accounts are closed and balanced, a

copy of its balance-sheet and accounts together with a copy of the auditor's report and a report of the working of the Institution during the relevant year, and the Central Government shall, as soon as may be after they are received by it, cause the same to be laid before each House of Parliament."

Thus, the NaBFID will be answerable to Parliament. The bank will support the development of long-term non-recourse infrastructure financing in India, including development of the bonds and derivatives markets necessary for infrastructure financing.

Sitharaman said a five-year tax break is provided to private development finance institutions to ensure enhanced flow of funds. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

Saina makes Orleans quarters

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

Ira Sharma, ranked 162, also made it to the quarterfinals after beating Bulgaria's world no. 71 Mariya Mitsova 21-18, 21-13 in 32 minutes. The 21-year-old Indian is likely to clash against Denmark's Line Christophersen next. — *PTI*

Vasek loses cool, match in Miami

Miami: Vasek Pospisil's anger boiled over in a foul-mouthed rant referencing ATP Tour chairman Andrea Gaudenzi on Wednesday as the Canadian went down in three sets in the first round of the Miami Open. American qualifier Mackenzie McDonald advanced with a 6-3, 4-6, 6-3 victory over Pospisil, who swatted a ball out of court, smashed a racket and incurred a verbal abuse point penalty on set point of the opening set — a display that had him later offering an apology on Twitter. Pospisil pulled himself together to win the second set, but McDonald, ranked 120th in the world, bounced back to seal the match and set up a second-round meeting with 18th-seeded American John Isner. — *AFP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

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

FORMULA ONE

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

TIGERS ON PROWL

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

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

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

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

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

Kohli has not had Ravindra Jadeja's services for close to three months but neither Axar Patel in Tests, and now Krunal Pandya in the ODIs, have let the team miss him.

Meanwhile, England will look to level the series and stay alive in the contest. England have a lot to ponder on and injuries to skipper Eoin Morgan and batsman Sam Billings, have only added to their woes. Morgan has been ruled out of the remaining matches while Billings will miss Friday's game. All-rounder Ben Stokes was firm in his belief that England do not have too many reasons to worry despite the disappointments. — *PTI*



Suryakumar Yadav (left) and India captain Virat Kohli celebrate an England wicket during the One-Day International series in this file pic.

I will be back stronger, says sidelined Shreyas

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

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

"Shreyas iyer has exited the bio-bubble," the BCCI

said on Thursday ahead of the second ODI here.

Earlier in the day, Iyer vowed to come back from the injury even stronger.

"You know what they say, the greater the setback, the stronger the comeback. I shall be back soon," Iyer tweeted.

"I've been reading your messages and have been overwhelmed by all the outpouring of love and support. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to everyone," he said.

The 26-year-old Iyer is also unlikely to play for English county side Lancashire in their one-day tournament.

Lancashire had on Monday announced the signing of Iyer for the tournament starting on July 23.

Iyer suffered the injury in the eighth over of the England innings when he dived on a drive hit by Jonny Bairstow off pacer Shardul Thakur.

He looked in tremendous pain as he left the field clutching his shoulder.

On Tuesday, the BCCI had stated, "Shreyas Iyer subluxated (partially dislocated) his left shoulder in the 8th over while fielding. He has been taken for further scans." — *PTI*

NUMBER GAME

INDIA HAVE WON THREE OUT OF FIVE ONE DAYERS AT PUNE:

● India have won three and lost two in five one day internationals at Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium, Pune where the second match of the series will be played on Friday (March 26).

● England, on the other hand, have lost both one day internationals played here. They lost to India by three wickets with 11 balls remaining in the first encounter between the two sides on January 15, 2017. In the first one day international match of the current series, hosts defeated England by 66 runs on Tuesday.

● Virat Kohli's 122 off 105 balls with eight fours and five sixes against England on January 15, 2017 is the highest individual score at this ground.

● Jasprit Bumrah took four wickets for 35 runs against West Indies on October 27, 2018 is the best bowling performance at this ground. Prasidh Krishna's four for 54 on debut in the first match of the series is the second best bowling here. In five previous matches, the team batting first have won three times while two victories were achieved on chasing the target.

— *S. PERVEZ QAISER*



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

Golden girls top pistol team event

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

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

The host nation's team will take on third-placed USA in the final.

There was positive news for India after that unprecedented act, as the triumvirate of Chinky Yadav, Manu Bhaker and Rahi Sarnobat shot a total of 17 to beat Poland's Joanna Iwona Wawrzonowska, Julita Borek and Agnieszka Korejwo, who managed to score 7.

"In individual competitions if we make mistakes, we are losing the points, nobody else. But here, we feel a little more responsible. It is very different from qualification, it is hit or miss here, but, in qualification, every shot counts in a different way," Sarnobat said.

The team gold came only a day after Yadav, Bhaker and Sarnobat swept the individual final by winning all the medals on offer on Wednesday.

The victory in this event consolidated India's position at the top of the pecking order with 21 medals, including 10 gold, six silver and five bronze.

Earlier in the day, India's Anjum Moudgil, Shreya Saksena and Gaayathri Nithyanadam claimed the silver medal in the 50m rifle 3 positions team event.

The Indian rifle team shot 43 in the gold medal showdown to finish behind the Polish team, which scored 47 to grab the top prize.

— *PTI*

Olympic torch relay begins

Iwaki (Japan), March 25: The Tokyo Olympics torch relay got underway on Thursday after a year's Coronavirus delay, with officials hoping it will be a "ray of light" after the problems caused by the pandemic.

Spectators were barred from the departure ceremony and first leg over ongoing fears about the coronavirus, which forced the 2020 Games' historic postponement a year ago.

But they will line the rest of the route during the 121-day relay, which will criss-cross Japan and involve 10,000 runners before the torch lights the Olympic cauldron on July 23.

Organisers are hoping the relay will dispel doubts about holding the Games during a pandemic, and Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashimoto called the flame "a ray of light at the end of the darkness".

"This little flame never lost hope and it waited for this day like a cherry blossom bud just about to bloom," she told the ceremony at Fukushima's J-Village sports complex, which was a base for responding to the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Azusa Iwashimizu, one of Japan's 2011 World Cup-winning women's footballers, was the first to carry the rose-gold, cherry blossom-shaped torch, accompanied by former teammates.

She passed the flame to Fukushima high school student Asato Owada, who like all the runners wore an official white tracksuit with a red diagonal stripe.

A handful of fans, wearing their compulsory masks, watched the relay from its second section. But with cheering and large crowds banned for virus safety, the loudest sound came from clicking cameras. "I think it somewhat lacks excitement because there are rules. I think more people would have come and there would have been more excitement if there wasn't coronavirus," Tetsuya Ozawa said in the town of Naraha.



Above: The torch is lit by a member of Japan's women's football team during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Torch Relay Grand Start in Naraha, Fukushima prefecture, on Thursday. The torch relay began its 121-day journey across Japan and is headed toward the opening ceremony in Tokyo on July 23.

Below: Members of the Spa Resort Hawaiians Dancing Team 'Hula Girls' perform during an opening performance on the first day of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic torch relay. — *AP*



But 10-year-old Tsumugi Sugeno was thrilled nonetheless. "This will be a great memory. I want to become a professional baseball player and play at the Olympics," he said.

Organisers were making final preparations for the relay last year when the virus prompted the unprecedented decision to postpone the Games, as sport around the world

ground to a halt.

A year on, the pandemic is still in full swing despite vaccine roll-outs, and many in Japan fear the Olympics will cause a spike in cases.

Overseas spectators are barred from the Games, and limits are likely on domestic fans, so the relay is seen as a vital opportunity to build positive momentum.

The Fukushima launch also puts the spotlight back

on the northeastern region of Tohoku that was affected by the 2011 quake, tsunami and nuclear disaster.

The Games were initially billed as the "Recovery Olympics", showcasing reconstruction in the region. The relay will pass through some towns that remain only partially open to the public, as radiation decontamination continues. — *AFP*

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