

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

VISAKHAPATNAM | TUESDAY | 9 MARCH 2021



WEATHER

Max: 35.4°C
Min: 23.6°C
RH: 84%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Haze.
Max/Min temp.
35/23 °C

NATION | 5

Mamata dares Modi
for a street fight

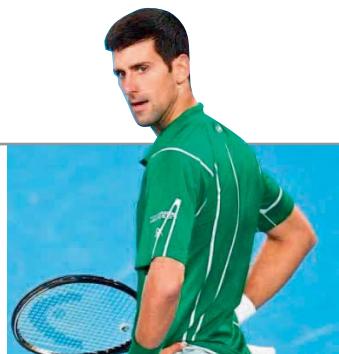


WORLD | 7

Markle reveals
suicidal thoughts

SPORTS | 8

Djokovic sets longest
top rank record



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Vol. 36 No. 284 Established 1938 | 16 PAGES | ₹6.00

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari; Uttarayana

Tithi: Magha Shuddha

Chaturdasi till 3.57 pm

Star: Pushyami till 10 pm

Varjyan: 7.17 am to 8.46 am

Durmuhurta: 6.49 am to

8.20 am

Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am

HIJRI CALENDAR

Rajab 24, 1441 AH

PRAYERS

Fajr: 5.50 am

Zohar: 1.30 pm

Asar: 4.45 pm

Maghrib: 6.15 pm

Isha: 8.15 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.05 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.10 AM

MOONRISE TOMORROW 2.30 PM

MOONSET TODAY 03.11 AM

COUNTER POINT



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

Attack on Saudi shoots up oil price

Bangkok: Oil prices rose on Monday as Saudi Arabian oil facilities were targeted by drone strikes just days after the largest crude exporting nations in the world said they would not increase output. Brent crude, the international standard, surpassed \$70 per barrel for the first time in over a year, gaining \$1.14 to \$70.47 a barrel. It surged \$2.62 on Friday. Recently Opec nations have to decided to continue supply cut.

Full report on Page 5

AP plans 'Gender Budget' for welfare of women: CM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy has announced plans to introduce a Gender Budget that will help in special allocation of funds for women welfare. AP will be the first state to do this, the CM said on Monday.

Taking part in an event marking International Women's Day at his camp office, the CM said the gender budget would help initiate a series of welfare schemes and developmental works for women. He laid stress on

ensuring equal rights to women in socio-economic and political fields. He referred to the existing welfare schemes like Amma Vodi, YSR Cheyutha, YSR Asara and Kapu Nestam with a total budget of ₹80,000 crore that his government had unveiled in the past 21 months.

He said the YSRC government paid special attention to empowerment of women and cited the law to provide 50 per cent reservation to women in all nominated posts and at work.

The Chief Minister, in virtual mode, inaugurated Women Help Desks at all police stations in the state along with Cyber Kiosks.

He launched the Sweeksha programme to create awareness among adolescent girls on menstrual hygiene, and flagged off a fleet of 900 Disha patrolling vehicles and 18 Disha crime scene management vehicles.

Reddy said the government would provide biodegradable sanitary napkins free of cost to girl students from Class 7 to 12 in all government schools from July 1.

HC pulls up TTD for headless panel on assets

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has observed that the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) forming a committee to look after its assets will not serve any purpose as long as the panel did not have a head.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice Arup Kumar Goswami and Justice C. Praveen Kumar held the hearing on the TTD case on Monday.

TTD counsel said it has constituted an eight-member committee including two retired high court judges M. Seetharama Murthy and K. Sreedhar Rao. Counsel also stated that the TTD has released a white paper giving details of its 1,128 immovable properties and uploaded such

and said this was of no use. He informed the court that the TTD mentioned Sringeri Sharada Peetham chief executive officer Gowri Sankar as the first name in the committee and placed the retired high court judges' names in second and third place. By doing so, TTD showed disregard to the two retired judges, counsel argued.

The court accepted the objections raised by counsel and opined that the committee without a head would serve no purpose. The order of priority given to the judges flouted the norms of protocol. The TTD mentioned Sringeri Sharada Peetham CEO as the first name in the committee and placed the retired HC judges' names later.

details on its website. However, petitioner's counsel Balaji Yelamajula contested the proceedings issued by TTD on December 9, 2020, appointing the committee with eight members without mentioning who its head would be,

COURT STAYS ELURU CIVIC BODY ELECTIONS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Monday issued a stay order on the conduct of elections to the Eluru municipal corporation.

A single-judge bench, headed by Justice DVSS Somayajulu heard a batch of petitions seeking an interim order to stay the March 10 polls to the Eluru civic body. They reasoned that the officials failed to rectify the anomalies in preparation of electoral rolls and provision of reservations. Seven gram panchayats surrounding Eluru were merged with the municipal corporation on December 31, 2019 and petitions were filed on the irregularities in delimitation of wards.

Page 2: Order wasn't compiled: Petitioner

YSRC CLAIMS IT WILL WIN 80 SEATS IN GVMC

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 8

Exuding confidence, YSRC ministers claimed that the party would win in 80 of 98 divisions in the GVMC elections, scheduled to be held on Wednesday. After campaigning came to end Monday evening, ministers Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao and K. Kannababu said TD would lose deposits in many divisions.

Full report on Page 2

India to begin 75th I-Day fete on Friday

PM asks people to rekindle freedom spirit

New Delhi, March 8:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said when India commemorates its 75 years of Independence, the country will take "bold steps" to achieve targets that seemed impossible at some point, and emphasised that celebrations should be based on public participation.

Speaking at the first meeting of the 259-member high-level national committee headed by him to commemorate 75 years of India's independence, Modi also said that the celebrations must reflect the spirit of the country's freedom movement and showcase its achievements to the world

since 1947.

The Prime Minister will launch the celebrations — coined as 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' — on March 12, the day Mahatma Gandhi launched the Dandi March from Gujarat's Sabarmati Ashram in 1930.

The "celebrations can be divided into five sub-heads— freedom struggle, ideas at 75, achievements at 75, actions at 75 and resolve at 75", he said at the virtual meeting. He said that this festival of 75 years of independence should be a festival in which the spirit of the freedom struggle can be experienced.

"In this, there is also a tribute to martyrs of the

country and the resolve to make India of their dreams," Modi said.

Emphasising the need to

take stories of lesser known

freedom fighters to the people, he said, "We have to bring the contribution of every section to the fore."

Addressing the Rajya Sabha, Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge, said: "Petrol and diesel prices are nearly ₹100 per litre and ₹80 per litre respectively. LPG prices have also gone up

— and ₹1 lakh crores

have been collected by

putting excise duty/cess,

and because of that people in the entire country are suffering."

The Upper House had

to be adjourned twice

before being adjourned

for the day as the Oppo-

sition persisted with its

demands for a discussion

on the rising fuel prices.

The Opposition parties

claimed they will not

back down and continue

to keep raising the issue

of rising prices in both

Houses of Parliament.

During the Budget

Session's recess, protests

had been organised by

most of the Oppo-

sition parties demanding an

immediate rollback of

the hike in fuel prices.

OPPN DEMANDS ROLLBACK OF FUEL PRICE HIKE

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

The second part of the Budget Session of Parliament started on a stormy note on Monday with fiery scenes being seen in the Rajya Sabha. The Opposition parties, led by the Congress, demanded a discussion on the rising fuel prices.

Addressing the Rajya Sabha, Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge, said: "Petrol and diesel prices are nearly ₹100 per litre and ₹80 per litre respectively. LPG prices have also gone up

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AP student tops EWS in JEE Mains

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 8

Komma Sharanya from Telangana state topped the wo-men's segment. She scored 99.9990421. Another student from TS with the same score, Challu Vishwanath, became the state topper.

No student from the Telugu states scored the perfect 100 this year. Six students who scored the per-

fect 100 were Saket Jha from Rajasthan, Pravar Kataria and Ranjim Prabal Das from Delhi, Guramrit Singh from Chandigarh, Siddhant Mukherjee from Maharashtra, and Ananth Krishna Sidambi from Gujarat.

Page 2: Students can download March admit cards

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Freedom to choose:

■ Saving Amount: You can invest a lumpsum as small as Rs.1 lakh or any bigger amount for larger life goals

■ 4 Fund Options You can choose from 4 fund options as – Bond, Secured, Balanced and Growth

■ Switch freely You can move your money between fund options freely four times in a year to maximize returns

■ Withdraw when you need You can partially withdraw after 5th year onwards*

■ Life Cover Options Choose Life cover 1.25 times or 10 times of premium paid

Policy Benefits:

■ Guaranteed Additions: Enjoy guaranteed additions in addition to unit fund value*

■ Policy Maturity: Unit Fund Value

SHORT TAKES

5 YSRC NOMINEES ELECTED TO COUNCIL UNCONTested

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

Five YSRC nominees have been declared elected uncontested in the biennial elections to the Council by the MLAs.

In a statement issued here on Monday, the office of chief electoral officer said that in the biennial election held to the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Council by MLAs to fill up five seats, five YSRC nominees were elected uncontested.

They are: Balli Kalyanachakravarthy, Mohammed Karimunnisa, C. Ramchandra Ian, Srinivas Duvvada and Shaik Mohammed Iqbal.

In a separate development, YSRC nominee Challa Bhageerath Reddy was elected uncontested in the by-election to the Council from MLAs quota.

The office of chief electoral officer in a statement announced that Challa Bhageerath Reddy, YSRC nominee, was elected uncontested in the by-poll held to the AP Legislative Council by MLAs to fill up one casual vacancy.

STUDENTS CAN DOWNLOAD MARCH ADMIT CARDS

From Page 1

This year, a total of 6,61,776 candidates had registered for the JEE Mains, out of which 95 per cent of the candidates had appeared in the BE/BTech papers and 81.2 per cent appeared in BArch/BPlanning paper.

Candidates who have appeared in the JEE Mains 2021 February session examination can check their results online at jeemain.nta.nic.in.

The National Testing Agency will conduct the JEE main 2021 for the March session from March 15 to 18 at various centres. The admit card would be released soon. Candidates can download the hall ticket online at nta.ac.in, jeemain.nta.nic.in after its release.

The agency had conducted the JEE Main from February 23 to 26. More than six lakh candidates had registered for it. NTA had on March 7 released the final answer key.

CALL TO PREVENT POLLUTION OF ELURU CANAL

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

Chief secretary Adityanath Das directed the authorities to take measures to prevent pollution of Eluru canal and continue testing of drinking water for six more months.

The CS held a review meeting with several senior officials from various departments on Monday on measures taken up following mystery illness affecting 622 persons in Eluru and its surrounding areas last December. The meeting also discussed the reports submitted by the AIIMS, IIT, NEERI and others as the state government constituted a high-level committee headed by the Chief Secretary following the development of mystery illness affecting several people.

The CS asked the authorities not to allow washing of vehicles in the Eluru canal water and called for measures to supply potable water to the people. He directed the authorities to check the drinking water pipelines in the town.

The CS called for efforts to ensure that the farmers use only quality fertilisers and pesticides and felt the need to encourage them to opt for organic and natural farming.

SOMIREDDY TELLS GOVT TO REGULATE EDIBLE OIL PRICES

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 8

Telugu Desam politburo member Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy demanded the authorities to regulate the prices of oils and bring an order directing the oil companies to supply edible oils at Rs. 80 per litre, considering the day-to-day difficulties of the poor due to skyrocketing prices.

Speaking to the media here on Monday, the former minister alleged that the people living in coastal mandals of AP are facing problems because of the pollution from the oil refining companies and also due to the soaring prices.

Somireddy claimed that the cost of edible oil per litre was ₹80 during the TD regime and pointed out that it is touching ₹150-160 now in YSR rule, because the state government has no control on this sector.

Women's special



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy flags off to Disha vehicles from the Camp Office on Monday. Chief Secretary Adityanath Das, DGP Gautam Sawang, ministers T. Vanitha, M. Sucharitha, Women's Commission chairperson Vasireddy Padma, Disha Act Special officer Krithika Shukla, IPS officer Deepika M. Patil and others are also seen.

Parties, candidates get shock in Eluru municipal corporation

Many candidates spent heavily on campaigning, distributed allurements

Order wasn't complied: Petitioner

From Page 1

Based on petitions filed earlier stating that revision of electoral rolls was not done as per Electors Rules, 1960 and provisions of Representation of People's Act, 1950. The court in its earlier order issued on March 5, 2020, directed the district election and municipal corporation authorities to rectify the anomalies in preparation of electoral rolls and provision of reservation.

A single-judge bench, headed by Justice DVSS of Somayajulu heard a batch of petitions seeking an interim order to stay the March 10 polls to the Eluru municipal corporation. They reasoned that the authorities failed to rectify the anomalies in preparation of electoral rolls and provision of reservation.

Seven gram panchayats surrounding Eluru town were merged with the municipal corporation on December 31, 2019 and petitions were filed on the irregularities in delimita-

electoral rolls. When the State Election Commission asked the district and Eluru municipal authorities on the status, the officials are learnt to have informed the SEC that all anomalies were rectified and accordingly, the SEC notified the election to the municipal corporation on March 9, 2020 along with other civic bodies. However, during the hearing on Monday,

the court asked whether its earlier order to rectify anomalies in preparation of electoral rolls and other irregularities were addressed.

When the petitioners' counsel Nimmagadda Venkateswarlu informed the court its earlier order was not complied with, the court issued an interim order to stay the Eluru municipal corporation elections.

stion of wards.

The candidates and parties have campaigned aggressively and many of them were confident of a win. But, with just two days left for the polling, the High Court issued a stay order and abruptly

stopped the poll process on Monday afternoon.

Notably, many candidates had spent heavily on campaigning and even distributed allurements including liquor packs to voters and campaigners. The campaign was to end

on Monday night for the polls slated for Wednesday.

A leader of the ruling party, Thota Sudhir, said they were eagerly waiting for March 10. The court order came as a dampener. Sudheer's wife Hema Madhuri is contesting from ward 38 on behalf of the YSRC. YSRC leader Narendra was also upset. He said the prospects of the ruling party were good.

from ward 38 on behalf of the YSRC. YSRC leader Narendra was also upset. He said the prospects of the ruling party were good.

There are 50 divisions in Eluru Corporation in West Godavari district, of which single nominations were filed for three divisions.

The elections were to be held for 47 divisions.

SEC CALLS UPON VOTERS TO TURN UP IN LARGE NUMBERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

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The CS called for efforts to ensure that the farmers use only quality fertilisers and pesticides and felt the need to encourage them to opt for organic and natural farming.

CAST YOUR VOTES WITHOUT ANY FEAR, SAYS NAIDU

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

Telugu Desam supremo N. Chandrababu Naidu called upon the voters to cast their vote in the upcoming urban local body polls without any fear. The former CM Naidu, while taking part in the last leg of campaign in Guntur on Monday, cautioned the voters not to repeat the mistake in choosing their party to elect it to power in an oblique reference to the ruling YSR Congress in the last elections, saying that it would affect their lives.

He said that he was taking part in the campaign not to seek their votes but to remind them of their future. He turned critical on the ruling YSR Congress leaders and said that he would teach a befitting lesson to them at an appropriate time.

Somireddy claimed that the cost of edible oil per litre was ₹80 during the TD regime and pointed out that it is touching ₹150-160 now in YSR rule, because the state government has no control on this sector.

Will win 80 divisions, assert YSRC

Ganta campaigns for party candidates

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 8:

Exuding confidence, YSRC ministers claimed that the party would win in 80 of 98 divisions in the GVMC corporation elections, scheduled to be held on Wednesday.

After campaigning came to end Monday evening, ministers Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao and K. Kannababu told media persons that TD would lose deposits in many divisions. Knowing that the party would lose the elections, many TD candidates had withdrawn from the contest, they said.

Hearing the alarm bells, Chandrababu Naidu and his son Lokesh came running to Visakhapatnam, the ministers said.

They said people were yet to forget how TD was swept away in the general elections and the recent panchayat elections. Now the same situation will prevail in the municipal elections, Srinivasa Rao said.

Given to people of Visakhapatnam, they assured that the issue of Simhachalam temple lands would be settled soon, metro rail from Ayanpudi to Bhogapuram

would come up at a cost of around ₹8,000 crore, RK Beach from Bhimili to Bhogapuram and ₹2,000 crore for biotechnology park on 175 acres in which 50 companies would set up their projects.

"Steel plant will not be privatised and we will develop Vizag city in all respects," the ministers said and added that Visakhapatnam would become the capital of Andhra Pradesh.

Quoting Department of Personnel and Training Rules 2000, the Centre's nominee is believed to have noted that Rule 20 prohibits ad-hoc promotions even if the disciplinary or criminal prosecutions instituted against them are found to have been prolonged.

In their cases, only a review every three months is to be undertaken and efforts are to be made to expedite their completion.

Telangana High Court to quash the case against her.

The 1988 batch officer entered into service at a very young age and will have tenure up to 2026 if she is picked up as the head of the state bureaucracy.

Quoting Department of Personnel and Training Rules 2000, the Centre's nominee is believed to have noted that Rule 20 prohibits ad-hoc promotions even if the disciplinary or criminal prosecutions instituted against them are found to have been prolonged.

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The Chief Minister, however, decided to proceed with the promotion of Srilakshmi along with four 1991 batch officers G. Sai Prasad, Ajay Jain, R.P. Sisodia and Sumita Dawra.

TD workers led by Ashok were campaigning at Nagavamsapu Veedhi 14th division in Vizianagaram along with a large number of women.

Superintendent of police of Vizianagaram B. Raja Kumari denied

showed by news channels and social media platforms, Ashok was seen telling all to not shower petals on him. "Do you want to send me to hospital?" he asked them angrily. He repeated the question and allegedly manhandled a woman.

Local leaders and cadres who were with Ashok Gajapathi Raju were shocked and sent the woman away.

Ashok later told party workers that the woman did it on him deliberately. She has not been identified. Later, the campaign went ahead, led by Ashok Gajapathi Raju.

Former TD MLA from Vizianagaram Meesala Gita said if the incident was true it should be condemned in strongest terms.

Sajjala predicts YSRC win in ULB elections

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

YSR Congress state general secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy has predicted that the party would fare exceedingly well in the upcoming urban local body polls.

Speaking to media persons here on Monday the state government advisor said that they were confident of winning 90% wards and 100% municipal corporations and municipalities in the urban local body polls as the people in the state were supporting Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy. He said that they fared better than in 2019 in the recent gram panchayat elections by ensuring maximum gram panchayats to their party supported candidates.

Taking pot shots at Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu and Nara Lokesh for abusing people, he castigated actor and TD legislator Balakrishna for slapping a party supporter during his visit to Hindupur and faulted Ashok Gajapathi Raju for slapping a woman supporter. He said that frustration of the party chief has run into the party leaders and this was leading them to such atrocious behaviour.

SAJJALA REFUTES NEWS ABOUT THE CRISIS IN YSRC

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

YSR Congress state general secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy refuted the baseless news beamed by a national channel stating party crisis.

Sajjala said that the national channel was playing a story claiming that there was a revolt in the YSR Congress and the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy was holding a meeting with the core committee to resolve it. He said that they were shocked at the telecast of such a blatant lie and opined that the pride of five crore people in the state was at stake.

Maintaining that a series of welfare schemes initiated by their government reached 95% of the people in the state, he appealed to the people to support their party in the upcoming urban local body polls in the state. He stated that this was even more important if they wished to get their problems resolved.

Balayya stopped from campaigning in Hindupur

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MARCH 8

Film star and Hindupur MLA Nandamuri Balakrishna faced an embarrassing situation when a large number of YSRC cadres obstructed his vehicle from moving ahead at Mothukapalle in Hindupur municipality, which he is visiting for the second time. Ruling party workers contended that a repeat road show by actor-turned-MLA could not be permitted as per rules.

Balakrishna has been making hectic efforts to retain Hindupur for the second time, police had to intervene as both ruling and opposition party workers were present in large numbers, which could have led to clashes.

Police used mild force to disperse both the groups from the spot.

Balakrishna also celebrated the International Women's Day in Hindupur by cutting a cake in the presence of a large number of women, who all tried to feed the cake to the film star.

Organisers at the cake-cutting event took care to ensure that a situation did not repeat again when the MLA slapped a photographer for taking too many close-up shots.

BJP= B FOR BABU, J FOR JAGAN AND P FOR PAWAN, SAYS TULASI REDDY

Kadapa: PCC working president Dr N. Tulasi Reddy explained that BJP means B for Babu, J for Jagan and P for Pawan. TD, YSRC and Jana Sena have become puppets in the BJP's hands, he alleged. He spoke to the media at Vempalli on Monday. He alleged that these three parties were holding the interests of the state hostage at the centre for their selfish interests.

Gajapati 'manhandles' woman on Women's Day

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 8

While world celebrated International Women's Day, the scion of Vizianagaram and former Union minister P. Ashok Gajapati Raju allegedly manhandled a woman party worker during a campaign in Vizianagaram on Monday.

The incident shocked the entire region and activists condemned the action.

TD workers led by Ashok were campaigning at Nagavamsapu Veedhi 14th division in Vizianagaram along with a large number of women.

According to video clips shown by news channels and social media platforms, Ashok was seen telling all to not shower petals on him. "Do you want to send me to hospital?" he asked them angrily. He repeated the question and allegedly manhandled a woman.

The former minister's close relative Sanchita Gajapati Raju condemned the incident in her tweet. She said "What way to observe Women's Day! The patriarchal arrogance was manifest in Ashok. What more can we expect from a man like him," she said.

Former TD MLA from Vizianagaram Meesala Gita said if the incident was true it should be condemned in strongest terms.

SHORT TAKES

AP REPORTS 74 COVID CASES, TWO DEATHS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

Andhra Pradesh registered 74 fresh cases of Covid-19 and two deaths.

The state health authorities reported on Monday that out of 25,907 samples tested, 74 persons were infected with confirmed Covid-19. Out of a total number of 1,42,62,086 samples tested so far in the state, 8,90,766 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,82,581 were recovered while undergoing treatment and 1,009 are still active with the virus.

Among the daily Covid-19 cases, Chittoor registered the highest at 29, followed by 13 in Kurnool, eight in Krishna, seven in Srikakulam, five each in East Godavari and YSR Kadapa, two each in Guntur, Nellore and Visakhapatnam, one in Prakasam and zero cases in Anantapur, Vizianagaram and West Godavari.

Chittoor topped the state with regard to the cumulative active Covid-19 cases with 293 followed by 120 in Krishna, 79 in East Godavari, 72 each in Guntur and Visakhapatnam, 65 in Srikakulam, 62 in Kadapa, 58 in Anantapur, 53 in Kurnool, 49 in Nellore, 45 in Prakasam, 33 in West Godavari and eight in Vizianagaram.

Among the daily Covid-19 deaths, two cases, one each in Guntur and Nellore, were reported raising toll to 7,176.

OFFICIAL EXPLAINS LABOUR REFORMS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 8

Principal secretary, labour, highlighted the importance of recent labour reforms undertaken by the central government. In an interactive session organised by the National Human Resource Development Network, Visakhapatnam chapter in Visakhapatnam on Monday, she gave the background of bringing changes in labour legislation in the context of outdated colonial laws established seven decades back. The basic intention of these reforms is to reduce the compliance burden on employers and decriminalisation of non-compliances.

CHANGE OF NAME

Service No.15327762H, Rank: Lance Naik. MANMADA RAO GOTTAPOU: Resident of Sikhabada Village & Post, Jiyayammavalasa(M), Vizianagaram District. Here by submit that in my Army Records my wife name was mentioned as 'SANDHYA RANI' by over sight. But my Wife's Correct Name is 'GOTTAPOU SANDHYA RANI'.

Women's Day feat



Women from various organisations perform a dance during a procession marking International Women's Day near GVMC Gandhi Statue junction in Visakhapatnam on Monday. — P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

Unions to lay siege to RINL today, block NH

Finance minister announced that Centre will go ahead

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 8

Thousands of people blocked the National Highway 16 from steel plant main gate to Aganampudi junction, a six kilometre stretch, protesting against the announcement made by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament that the Centre was going ahead with the privatisation of the Visakhapatnam steel plant, on Monday.

Reports said soon after the announcement, the steel plant employees and local people gathered at the steel plant main gate and decided to block the national highway, said member of the Steel Plant Parirakshana Samithi, Dr B. Ganga Rao.

He said the agitation will continue from now onwards till the Central government revoked the decision.



Employees from the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant stage protest against the central government's move to privatize the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant by blocking the road from Aganampudi on the national highway in Visakhapatnam late on Monday.

— DC

issued by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Parliament.

The unions also warned of intensifying the agitation against privatisation all over the State, if the Centre went ahead

with their proposition. The State president of CITU Ch. Narasinga Rao asked the finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman to stop from making provocative statements on privatisation of the Steel Plant.

The minister on Monday announced in Parliament for the second time that the central government has decided to privatise the steel plant and the State government has neither any rights or part of it.

Rao said it was not true that the State government had no share in the company. The RINL has been giving ₹44,000 crore as taxes and dividends and it was the state government which acquired 22,000 acres of land from the farmers. In addition, the State government has been providing infrastructural facilities like water.

GOV TAKES PART IN A MEET ON ID CELEBRATIONS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

On Monday, sleuths of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) caught a village revenue officer (VRO) in Kurichedu village and mandal, Prakasam district, for demanding and accepting a bribe of ₹20,000 from a person for doing an official favour.

According to ACB, one D. Venkata Siva Rama Krishna from Kurichedu village lodged a complaint to the DSP, ACB, Ongole stating that VRO K. Venkata Nagaraju has demanded a bribe of ₹30,000. He alleged that he was asked to pay ₹20,000 as an initial payment for mutation and issue of Pattadar passbooks for the land to an extent of 2.65 acres in the names of his mother and brother.

The tainted amount was recovered, and relevant records were seized from the VRO's possession. He is being arrested and produced before Ld. Court of the Special Judge for SPE and ACB Cases, Nellore.

● First meeting of the committee held through video conference on 75th Independence celebrations

VRO arrested for taking ₹20k bribe

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 8

In this connection, the ACB sleuths laid a trap on Monday at about 11.40 am against the accused officer Venkata Nagaraju and caught him red-handed at his private room in Kurichedu Village. The chemical test conducted on the fingers of both hands of the VRO and inner linings of the pant rear pocket yielded positive results in the chemical test.

The tainted amount was recovered, and relevant records were seized from the VRO's possession. He is being arrested and produced before Ld. Court of the Special Judge for SPE and ACB Cases, Nellore.

● First meeting of the committee held through video conference on 75th Independence celebrations

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 8

The city police arrested a juvenile and his mother for committing theft of ₹25 lakh cash from his friend's house.

The 15-year-old, a Class X student of a private school, was addicted to online gambling and other vices.

He has a friend Rahul, who has been staying in the same locality (Adarsh Nagar near Old Dairy Farm) and used to visit him regularly.

The boy decided to take

the crime route to meet the vices and recently observed that Rahul's father kept huge amounts of cash in the house.

When Rahul and his father were away from home and his mother busy with other works, the boy went to the house and stole ₹8 lakh on February 8.

Similarly, on March 4, he sneaked into the house with a duplicate key and stole another ₹17 lakh cash.

Based on the complaint from Rahul's father, the Arilova police registered

a case and began investigating.

The investigation has revealed that the boy's mother purchased over ₹9 lakh worth of gold jewellery with the stolen money and the boy also purchased ₹6 lakh worth of cricket bats, bike and other valuables.

The boy was taken into custody and ₹2 lakh cash was recovered from his home.

The police have recovered another ₹14.84 lakh cash, gold jewellery worth ₹4 lakh and cricket bats, a bike, and few others.

58 SELECTED AS SCIENTIFIC ASSISTANTS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

Fifty-eight candidates have been provisionally selected for the posts of scientific assistants (physical, chemical and biology/serology) in the forensic science lab for Andhra Pradesh.

A function was held at Naval Science and Technological Laboratory (NSTL), Visakhapatnam and the chief guest was Dr Surya Lakshmi Chellapilla, ADRM (Operations), DRM Office, Visakhapatnam.

The celebrations were for-

KONKAN RAILWAY CORPORATION LTD.
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KRCL has published Employment Notifications as given below;

1) Employment Notification No. CO/P-R/01/2021 dated 25/02/2021. Post: Dy. Chief Engineer/Project in PML-13 on regular basis. No. of Posts : 02. Place of Posting: USBRL Project, Jammu & Kashmir.

2) Employment Notification No. CO/P-R/01C/2021 dated 01/03/2021. Post: Dy. Chief Engineer/Project on contract basis. No. of Post : 01. Place of Posting: Trivandrum, Kerala.

Candidates may see the details of notification, eligibility criteria etc., on the KRCL website www.konkanrailway.com at the link > Recruitment > Current Notification and apply accordingly.

Chief Personnel Officer

WOMEN'S DAY OBSERVED IN VIZAG

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 8

The International Women's Day was observed in several organisations, educational institutions and government establishments.

A function was held at Naval Science and Technological Laboratory (NSTL), Visakhapatnam and the chief guest was Dr Surya Lakshmi Chellapilla, ADRM (Operations), DRM Office, Visakhapatnam.

The celebrations were for-

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Candidates may see the details of notification, eligibility criteria etc., on the KRCL website www.konkanrailway.com at the link > Recruitment > Current Notification and apply accordingly.

Chief Personnel Officer

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IN BRIEF
**MP PASSES
ANTI-CONVERSION
LEGISLATION**

RABINDRA NATH
CHOWDHURY | DC
BHPAL, MAR 8

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

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

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

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

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

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

**SPECULATIONS
RIFE AS U'KHAND
CM TO MEET PM**

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

Amid growing speculations over a leadership change in BJP ruled Uttarakhand, chief minister Trivendra Rawat reached New Delhi to meet the party top brass. Mr Rawat met BJP president JP Nadda late evening.

Earlier during the day, Mr Nadda had met Union home minister Amit Shah in Parliament. BJP general secretary organisation BL Santhosh also attended the meeting, giving rise to speculations that it was related to the Uttarakhand issue. Mr Rawat is likely to meet PM Narendra Modi and Mr Shah on Tuesday. The CM also met BJP Rajya Sabha MP Anil Baluni before his meeting with Mr Nadda.

A section within the BJP state unit is of the view that going to polls, scheduled next year, with Mr Rawat as the CM can dent the poll prospects. This section of BJP leaders, including some ministers and MLAs are miffed with the CM over various issues, including administrative. However, those supporting Mr Rawat claim that the other faction is giving the opposition ammunition.

The opposition - Congress and AAP - lapped up the factional brewing in the ruling BJP camp and claimed that many dissenting BJP MLAs are in touch with them.

**SUSPENSION OF
10 AKALI MLAS
REVOKED**

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

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

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

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

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

**JOLT TO DIDI:
DENIED TICKETS,
5 TRINAMUL
MLAS JOIN BJP**

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, MARCH 8

Dealing another blow to their party supremo and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on the eve of the Assembly elections, five sitting Trinamul Congress MLAs on Monday joined the BJP after they were denied tickets by her this time.

Another Trinamul leader, Sarala Murmu, who had got a ticket to a seat she did not want to contest from, walked into the saffron party after she was replaced.

The five sitting MLAs who defected to the BJP are four-time legislator of Satgachia in South 24 Parganas and a close aide of Ms Banerjee, Sonali Guha, Sital Sardar of Sankrail, Jatu Lahiri of Shibpur in Howrah, Rabindranath Bhattacharya of Singur in Hooghly and Dipendu Biswas of Basirhat Dakshin in North 24 Parganas.

They made the switch to the saffron party in presence of its state chief and Midnapore MP Dilip Ghosh and national vice-president Mukul Roy, to whom many of them made a beeline after finding their names not in the TMC list.

The five MLAs took the drastic step after Ms Banerjee, while announcing the TMC candidates' list, had regretted having dropped so many sitting MLAs but assured that she would set up a Vidhan Parishad to accommodate the old guard like Ms Guha as Legislative Council members.

The ruling TMC received another jolt during day after it replaced Ms Murmu, who wanted to contest from Old Malda, citing her 'ill health', with Pradeep Baskey at Habibpur in Malda in the morning. Disgusted, Ms Murmu joined the BJP. Besides, the BJP also took control of the Malda Zilla Parishad by inducting its 14 members to its fold from the Trinamul Congress.

Leading a rally of women TMC candidates, including several Bengali film and TV actors in Kolkata on Women's Day, Mamata dared Prime Minister Narendra Modi to "compete with her on the road like a street fighter".

Kerala CM starts campaign with direct attack on Shah

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

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
MARCH 8

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

Mr Vijayan while addressing an election meeting in his constituency Dharmadom in Kannur district said that several agencies had adjudged Kerala as the least corrupt state. The home minister is trying to mislead the people by creating smoke-screen. You created a gold smuggling hub under the NDA regime? Isn't the main person who conspired gold smuggling a Sangh Parivar man?

He also took a dig at Mr Shah saying that he had not been in jail on the charges of murder, fake encounter, snooping, kidnapping.

"Amit Shah should remember that he faced such serious charges. People of Kerala know who Pinarayi Vijayan is. They have seen our work," he said.

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

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

He also took a dig at Mr Shah saying that he had not been in jail on the charges of murder, fake encounter, snooping, kidnapping.

"Amit Shah should remember that he faced such serious charges. People of Kerala know who Pinarayi Vijayan is. They have seen our work," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

Dharmadom.

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

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

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

Sources said that at the national executive meet-

MODI LIKELY TO ADDRESS 5 RALLIES IN KERALA

DC CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
MAR 8

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

The decision to field Abdullakutty has been taken in view of the peculiarity of the Muslim dominated Malappuram constituency. This is Abdullakutty's first election after joining the BJP. Earlier, he was MP twice from the CPM and later MLA from the Congress for one term.

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

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

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

Covid cases surge, recovery rate drops

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

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

The active cases also registered an increase for the sixth consecutive day and the active caseload increased to 1,88,747 which now comprises 1.68 per cent of the total infections. The recovery rate has dropped further to 96.91 per cent, the data stated.

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

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

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

With 14,278 new daily recoveries, India's recovery rate stands at 96.91%, while fatality rate remains unchanged at 1.41%.

The Indian states and Union Territories with the worst case fatality rate at present are Punjab (3.15%), Maharashtra (2.36%), and Gujarat (2.19%).

It may be noted that the rate in as many as 15 is higher than the national average.

Remarks on rape case last week misreported, says SC

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

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

Expressing dissatisfaction with the "misreporting" of the proceedings, Chief Justice heading a

bench also comprising Justice A.S.Bopanna and Justice V.Rama Subramanian said that "We have the highest respect for womanhood". "We have given highest respect to womanhood. We asked 'are you going to marry'". We didn't order (to) marry," the Chief Justice said.

The clarification from the top court came in the

course of the hearing of a petition by a 14-year-old girl from Haryana seeking court's nod for the termination of her 26-week-old pregnancy.

Agreeing with the bench that it was a case of misreporting, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said "You asked a question in a different context. You were quoted out of context."

Hiren's death case now to be probed by NIA

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, MARCH 8

over the case, there is something fishy about it. We are also investigating another matter, that of the suicide of MP Mohan Delkar. The opposition has no guts to speak about it as they know who calls the shots in union territories," he said.

A Scorpio car carrying 20 gelatin sticks was seized near Ambani's residence 'Antilia' in South Mumbai on February 25. Police had said it had been stolen from Airoli-Mulund Bridge on February 18.

Later, the police identified 46-year-old Hiren, an automobile accessories dealer, as owner of the said vehicle. He however, was found dead in a creek in district Thane in neighbouring Mumbai. He had gone missing around 5 hours before his dead body was found.

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

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

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

This is in contrary to the position in 2016, when BJP had projected the then union minister S. Sarbananda Sonowal as its chief ministerial face before the elections were held. "When there is no government, then the CM name is projected. When we are in government, then we do not project any name for the CM post," Dass said.



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DECCAN Chronicle

9 MARCH 2021

Regional power strong in TN, alliances ready

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

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

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

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

Heed Pope's call for peace

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

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

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

DECCAN CHRONICLE

K. SUDHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

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Stop meddle & muddle: Rework regional policy



Mohan Guruswamy

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

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

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

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

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

Our diplomats have tended to be overbearing with the smaller non-hostile neighbours, often treating them like errant schoolboys. This is the constant lament heard in the neighbourhood, whether it is in Colombo or Kathmandu. The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.

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

The most significant development of this century so far has been the rise of China as an economic powerhouse, with its military not lagging far behind. Former Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi, responding to criticism about China's assertiveness, just said: "China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and that's just a fact." Indeed it is, and at this point in time even India is much too small to be able to compete with it in its spree of chequebook diplomacy.

Most of India's regional neighbours are poor countries and if their adversity forces them not to look at Chinese gift horses in the teeth, then we must understand it. In other circumstances, we too might have done so too? Debt doesn't kill. I recall the dictum enunciated by Walter Wriston, the legendary Citibank chairman who told my class at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy over 40 years ago: "Countries don't go under, they just roll over".

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

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

LETTERS

WOMEN POWER

Telugu Desam president and former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, having totally lost credibility, is now questioning the voter about his/her *rosham* (pride). His campaign for the civic polls on behalf of his party makes it more comical than the one we witness in Telugu movies. Words like 'corruption', 'perseverance', etc., coming from him are like the Satan preaching the Gospel. The electorate, I think, would understand the predicament of Naidu by now and might simply ignore his utterances as nothing but comic relief.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

NO COBRAS PLEASE

Eating humble pie, Sasikala declaring her disinterest to be active in politics for the upcoming Assembly elections of Tamil Nadu is tactically a good move for the AIADMK. Her involvement would have lead to a disintegration of support base, weakening the ruling party's stake at the hustings. It would have helped the rival DMK to sail through. Now, the opposing camps are looking equal forces, with a slight tilt of winning probability towards the DMK camp.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Peaceful civil disobedience in East Pak

NEW DELHI, MARCH 8 Sheikh Mujibur Rehman's writ rather than President Yahya Khan's seems to run in East Pakistan today as a non-violent civil disobedience movement got under way to force the military rulers to lift the Martial Law and hand over power to the elected representatives.

While Radio Pakistan in its national bulletins backed out news from the east wing except for a long official report giving casualty figures of last week's disturbances, Dacca Radio played a recorded version of the Awami League leader's speech of yesterday which described the east wing's struggle as "a fight for liberation".

Aakar Patel

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

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

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

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

The government appeared to

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

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

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

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

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

"image correction" but improving performance through governance.

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

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

hardly accurate.

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

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

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

SHORT TAKES
PHILIPPINE COPS KILL 9 IN RAIDS ON REBELS

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

THREE DEAD IN KENTUCKY OVERDOSES

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

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

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

FIVE BALOCH ULTRAS KILLED IN PAKISTAN

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

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

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

UN SAYS FIRE IN YEMENI MIGRANT CENTRE KILLS 8

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

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

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

SEDITION CHARGE AGAINST MORE THAI ACTIVISTS

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

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

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

Meghan alleges royal racism in tell-all

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Myanmar forces kill 2 protesters

AUSTRALIA ENDS DEFENCE TIES WITH MYANMAR

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

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

country's military seized power, and security forces have responded with ever greater use of lethal force and mass arrests. The coup and its violent aftermath have led foreign governments and international organizations to impose measures against Myanmar's military leaders.

— AP

20 dead in E. Guinea blasts

Sweden sentences woman for taking child to IS area

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She also told the court that she had become interested in religion after the death of a close relative.

"She intended to move to Syria with her son and settle there permanently, and took her son away from his father in an arbitrary manner," said the court statement.

In 2017, when the Islamic State's reign began to collapse, she fled from Raqa — the city that was known as the capital of the so-called IS "caliphate" — and was captured by Syrian Kurdish troops, the *Sydsvenska* daily wrote.

She managed to escape to Turkey where she was arrested with her son and two other children she had given birth to in the meantime, with an IS foreign fighter from Tunisia, the daily wrote. She was extradited from Turkey to Sweden. — AP

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

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

— AP

MYTHICAL ANGELS

Seven hail from Afghanistan who are receiving posthumous honours

15 nations' women feted by Jill Biden for courage

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

who want to enjoy life's simple pleasures. Some of these women have spent their lives fighting for their cause. Others are just starting out on a journey they didn't ask for, Biden says. Remarks prepared for the ceremony, which were obtained by The Associated Press.

Some were called to service, and some couldn't escape it, Jill Biden says. They are fighting for their own lives and for their children. They want to right the wrongs of our past, to build a brighter future for everyone. They aren't immune to fear. No one is.

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

You see, courage isn't

really found, Biden says. "It doesn't conjure away

our doubts. It's an intentional decision made."

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

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

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

worth fighting for," Biden says.

Touching on the past year, the first lady says the pandemic shows how the things that connect us, our love for family and friends, our hope that we will be together soon transcend language and distance.

She says that diplomacy, at its best, is a recognition of this connection and that the United States, under President Joe Biden's leadership, will support women around the world.

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

everywhere who light our way, Biden says in her prepared remarks.

For 15 years, we have honoured women around the world who have made the extraordinary choice to fight for something bigger than themselves.

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

— AP

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

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

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

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

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

Seoul's foreign ministry said the two sides had reached an agreement "in principle" without specifying the agreed amount. "The government will resolve a gap that has lasted for more than a year through a swift signing of an agreement," it said in a statement.

The new deal must still be approved by the South Korean legislature. US President Joe Biden has vowed to revive frayed US alliances under his predecessor to counter the challenges posed by Russia, China, Iran and North Korea.

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

CHINA PLAN TO INSTAL PATRIOTS NOT PURGE OF OPPN: LAM

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

Critics say the radical overhaul of the city's already limited democratic system will demolish what remains of the pro-democracy opposition and ensure only loyalists remain, an argument that Lam rejected on Monday.

The improvements to the electoral system are not designed to favour someone, it is designed to ensure that whoever is administering Hong Kong is patriotic," Lam, a pro-Beijing appointee, told reporters after returning from the gathering in Beijing.

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

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

SHORT TAKES
Bajrang takes gold, No.1 rank

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

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

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

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

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

Mumbai pip Goa for historic final

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

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

One of the highlights of the thriller was when both coaches decided to substitute their goalkeepers with the contest heading into the penalty shootout. Goa brought on Naveen Kumar while Mumbai raised some eyebrows when they decided to field Phurba Lachenpa in place of skipper and one of the best goalkeepers of the season.

Amrinder Singh. But, as it turned out to be, the Sikkimese gloveman survived the battle of nerves, helping Mumbai City book a place in the final for the first time.

Sharath, Sathiyan and Batra in Rd 2

Doha: Ace Indian paddlers Achanta Sharath Kamal, Sathiyan Gnanasekaran and Manika Batra started their campaign at the WTT Star Contender Doha on a winning note by progressing into the second round of their respective singles categories, here on Monday.

Sharath struggled in the initial stages as he lost the first game against Brian Afanador before the world no. 32 recovered well to seal the match 8-11, 11-8, 11-7, 11-1 against the Puerto Rican in the first round.

World no. 37 Sathiyan was also trailing 0-2 in his opening match before making a remarkable comeback to pull off a sensational 9-11, 7-11, 11-7, 11-4, 11-4 victory against France's Emmanuel Lebesson.

Commonwealth Games gold medallist Batra notched up a comfortable 11-5, 11-9, 11-9 win against Chinese Taipei's Hsieh-Tzu Cheng in the first round.

Team LeBron dominate All-Star

Atlanta: Damian Lillard nailed a game-ending three pointer from just inside half court as LeBron James improved to 4-0 as an NBA All-Star Game captain with a 170-150 win over Team Durant on Sunday.

Giannis Antetokounmpo captured the Kobe Bryant MVP Award going a perfect 16-of-16 from the field for a game high 35 points in Atlanta.

James improved to 4-0 in All-Star games he has served as a team captain. He finished with four points in just 13 minutes of playing time. — AFP

Live on TV

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

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

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

Regd No.J/VM-RNP/72
Printed and Published from Visakhapatnam by K. Sudhakar
on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Deccan Chronicle Press, Survey No.1/3A, Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Rope Way, Sector-9, M.V. P. Colony, Visakhapatnam-530017, Phones: 255233/255234/2553806, Fax: 2755285, Grams: CHRONICLE, Editor: Kaushik Mittra, RNI Registration No.44813/85.

CATCH 20-20!

Team management in dilemma to choose players for series

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shikhar Dhawan

K.L. Rahul

Deepak Chahar

Shreyas Iyer

Bhuvneshwar Kumar

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

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

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

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

Iyer and Suryakumar Yadav are also jostling for a place.

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

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

Similarly, in the pace

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

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

Yuzvendra Chahal, Washington Sundar and Axar Patel are the three spinners expected to feature in the playing XI on the sluggish Motera tracks.

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

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

Blown away in opener, India eye turnaround

ICC WOMEN EVENTS TO HAVE MORE TEAMS FROM 2026

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

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

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

as a unit. Barring Kaur, Raj and Deepi Sharma to a certain extent, none of the batters could apply themselves on a decent batting surface.

The spinners, who are traditionally considered

India in October. He has argued that England captain Michael Vaughan has argued that England Test skipper Joe Root should also get to pick his best players irrespective of ECB's rotation policy, just like limited overs leader Eoin Morgan "gets what he wants".

In a column for Telegraph, Vaughan wrote

England fielded a weakened team in the four Tests against India with the likes of Jos Buttler and Moeen Ali returning home in the middle of the series only to be back for the limited overs leg of the tour.

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