

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | WEDNESDAY | 17 MARCH 2021



NATION | 5
P.C. Chacko
to join NCP



WORLD | 7
Haaland, 1st Native,
OKayed as Interior secy



SPORTS | 8
Sindhu eyes title at
All England Open

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WEATHER



Max: 38.0°C
Min: 21.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
38/21 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalgun Shuddha
Chaviti till 11.29 pm
Star: Ashwini till 7.30 am
Variyam: 6.20 pm to 8.08 pm
Durmuhurtam: 12 noon to
12.48 pm
Rahukalam: 12 noon to 1.30 pm
HJRI CALENDAR
Sha'ban 3,1442 AH
PRAVERS
(ROYAL MOSQUE)
Fajar: 5.40 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 4.30 pm
Maghrib: 5.48 pm
Isha: 8.30 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.08 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.13 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 8.36 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 22.17 PM

COUNTER POINT



Quick! Let us invite her to campaign for us before anyone else approaches her!

SHORT TAKES

Lower juvenile age, says panel

New Delhi: A parliamentary panel headed by Congress MP Anand Sharma has recommended to the government to consider bringing down the juvenile delinquency age from 18 to 16 in cases under the POCSO Act, noting that minor sexual offenders may commit more serious and heinous crime if left untreated and uncounselled. The report was submitted to the Rajya Sabha on Monday.

Upper limit for abortion raised

New Delhi: The Rajya Sabha on Tuesday passed the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020 to amend an old legislation for raising the limit for permitting abortions from the present 20 weeks to 24 for “special categories of women” including rape survivors, victims of incest, minors and differently-abled.

1L vacancies in paramilitary

New Delhi: There were 1,11,093 posts lying vacant across the Central Armed Police Forces and the Assam Rifles, with the majority of such vacancies at the constable-rank, the government informed the Lok Sabha on Tuesday. The recruitment process was hit by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, MoS home affairs Nityanand Rai informed the Lok Sabha.

Sinovac a must to visit China

New Delhi: The Chinese embassy in Delhi said on Tuesday that it has started issuing visas to travellers who have taken Chinese-made Covid-19 vaccine such as Sinovac on submission of vaccination certificate. The categories for which visas are being granted since Monday, March 15, include those going to China on employment contracts and their family members, foreigners who are family members of Chinese citizens or Chinese visa holders.

Tributes to Sriramulu



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy pays tributes to Potti Sriramulu on the occasion of his birth anniversary at the camp office in Vijayawada on Tuesday. Ministers Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy (right), Vellampalli Srinivas (second from left), and MLAs Malladi Vishnu (left) and Jogi Ramesh (centre) are also seen.

Don't displace without rehab: HC

PIL claims nearly one lakh Polavaram-hit will go homeless

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 16

Nearly one lakh families living in 371 habitations in the East and West Godavari districts will be displaced by the Polavaram project. Problem is also that some of the rehabilitation and resettlement centres being readied for them do not have proper amenities, the AP High Court has been told.

A PIL, said some 55 per cent of the total 1,88,012 project-affected people belong to scheduled tribes, 15 per cent scheduled

castes, 17.5 per cent backward classes and the rest are from the other categories. While they are forced to abandon their homes and hearths, there is no guarantee yet they will get due entitlements or even part payments. “This is causing them serious agony and trauma.”

Nearly 112 habitations would be displaced in the first phase covering a 41.15 meters plus contour while the remaining 259 habitations identified as submerging habitations over a 45.72 plus meters contour would be moved out in a

phased manner.

Taking note, the high court principal bench headed by Chief Justice Arup Kumar Goswami has directed the state government not to go ahead with the displacement of these people unless proper amenities as per law were provided at the rehab colonies. When government pleader C. Sumon tried to convince the court about this with an oral submission, the court asked him to submit it in writing.

The tribals, through the PIL, alleged that they were being forced to move to the

rehabilitation colonies even as these do not have bare minimum facilities. They said that at Devipatnam mandal, there was no grave yard attached to the rehabilitation colony. The tribals had to beg the local tehsildar to provide them a place to bury the dead, the PIL said.

The tribals also alleged that the authorities were demolishing their houses in several villages and were even warned against taking up any cultivation.

■ **Page 2: Rehab colonies have no toilets or water: PIL**

Parents worried as 10 more test Covid+ at TTD school

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, MARCH 16

With six more students along with four faculty members at S.V. Veda Patashala, in Dharmagiri at Tirumala, reportedly testing positive for Covid-19, the parents of other students are getting jittery.

Only last week, 57 students had tested positive at the school. When the school was reopened after the lockdown, all the 435 students had submitted negative RT-PCR reports for Covid-19.

On March 9, however, when a second round of rapid antigen tests was conducted on all students, 57 tested positive and were admitted at the SVIMS Hospital for treatment. In view of this, the TTD also carried out tests to the remaining 378 students

and 10 faculty and everyone tested negative.

When the TTD authorities conducted another round of spot rapid antigen tests, six more students and four faculty members tested positive on Monday. They were immediately taken to the SVIMS Hospital for treatment. They are said to be asymptomatic and doing well now.

Health minister Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas (Nani) inquired about the health of the students and faculty and instructed Chittoor district medical and health officer Dr M. Penchalaiah and SVIMS Hospital superintendent Dr R. Ram over phone to provide best treatment, according to a release from the minister's office.

On the other hand, over 1,000 employees of TTD were administered vac-

cine in 10 days and no one reported side effects. On Tuesday, TTD additional executive officer A.V. Dharma Reddy and Srivari temple chief priest Venugopala Deekshitulu also took their Covid-19 vaccines at Tirumala.

In the ongoing first phase, the employees who crossed 45 years and have comorbidities are being vaccinated; 302 employees took the jab in the TTD Central Hospital and while 710 at the Aswini Hospital in Tirumala.

Meanwhile, a 14-day partial lockdown was imposed at Kammapalli village of RC Puram mandal in Chittoor district, after five people tested positive for the virus. Around 37 cases were reported in the district by Tuesday morning. At present, there are 484 active cases in the district.

MLC TEACHERS POLL RESULT TO BE OUT TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA/KAKINADA, MARCH 16

All is set for counting of votes polled for electing two MLC to AP Legislative Council from teachers' constituencies of Krishna-Guntur and East-West Godavari districts. Counting will commence from 8 am on Wednesday. Authorities of Krishna-Guntur districts have made elaborate arrangements for counting of votes at the Andhra Christian College in Guntur. Fourteen counting tables have been set up. A tahsildar rank official will be counting supervisor for each table. A deputy tahsildar and two village revenue officers will function as counting assistants. Counting staff will work in three shifts, each shift lasting for eight hours.

We will protect interests of bank staff, says FM

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

Amid the ongoing strike of nine bank unions over the privatisation of public sector banks (PSBs), Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday assured that not all banks would be privatised. She, however, insisted that the proposed privatisation of banks is a well-thought-out plan of the government.

“I want to assure all stakeholders that it is not that the institutions are going to be closed or workers are going to be removed. Whether it is the salaries or scale or pension of employees, all will be taken care of. The interests of workers of such banks will be completely protected,” finance minister Sitharaman said

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the strike since Monday, leading to disruption in several banking services as over 10 lakh employees have joined the protests.

She further said that there are quite a few banks in the economy but we need banks that will be able to scale up.

“We have announced a Public Enterprise Policy and identified four areas where public sector presence will be there. The financial sector too is included in this. But, not all banks are going to be privatised. However, we need more banks of the size of State Bank of India to meet the aspirational needs of the country,” she added.

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The first, second and third elections after promulgation of the Constitution were held simultaneously. However, premature dissolution of some legislative assemblies in 1968 and 1969 caused discontinuation of holding simultaneous elections, it noted. The renewed emphasis on the concept of simultaneous elections was made in 1983 when the Election Commission brought out its first annual report.

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OTHER STORIES

HC DIRECTS SEC TO
DECLARE MPTC,
ZPTC RESULTSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 16

Andhra Pradesh High Court has set aside State Election Commission's order to review unanimous elections to MPTCs and ZPTCs and directed the SEC to declare their results immediately.

A single judge bench headed by Justice D.V.S.S. Somayajulu heard a batch of petitions on Tuesday filed against the commission's order directing district collectors to inquire into cases of forced withdrawal of nominations through MPTC, ZPTC contestants through coercion and threats.

The High Court directed that the election of such candidates, whose announcement has been held back, shall be immediately declared / certified as per Rule 16 and Rules 62 to 64 under Conduct of Election Rules, 2006. The court observed that it would be open for opponents of these candidates to file appropriate proceedings in the court / tribunal constituted under law.

Though the court appreciated the endeavour of SEC for its efforts to curb intimidation, it observed that the commission does not have the power to interfere and set aside the election. The court further said such power is given to the election tribunal constituted under the law. The court observed that Rule 66 proviso prohibits SEC from entertaining any complaint till declaration of results. It said neither the commission nor the district collectors can decide on such controversial issues once the election process is over.

Earlier, SEC's counsel N. Ashwani Kumar maintained that the commission could not be a mute spectator when allegations of fraud and coercion are made. The counsel said being a constitutional authority, SEC is bound to act.

Senior counsel C. V. Mohan Reddy pointed out that the role of SEC would become functus officio after formal declaration of results is made and it would then have no power to take any action.

GOVT COMMITTED
TO DEVELOP THREE
CAPITALS: BOTSADC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 16

Municipal administration minister Botsa Satyanarayana reiterated that YSRC government is committed to develop three capitals as announced by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, including Amaravati as the legislative capital, Visakhapatnam as administrative capital and Kurnool as judicial capital. He ruled out that booking of the case against Chandrababu Naidu was an act of vengeance against the previous TD regime.

BY-ELECTION TO
TIRUPATI LS
SEAT ON APRIL 17DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 16

Election Commission of India (ECI) has announced the schedule for conduct of by-election to Tirupati (SC) Lok Sabha constituency.

As per a press release issued by ECI on Tuesday, the by-poll will be on April 17. Gazette notification for the by-election will be issued on March 23. The last date for filing nominations by contestants is March 30. Scrutiny of nominations will be on March 31 and April 3 the last date for withdrawal of nominations. Polling will be on April 17 and counting of votes on May 2.

ECI said electoral rolls prepared and published on January 1, 2021, will be used for conduct of the by-election. EVMs with VVPATs will be used at all polling stations for smooth conduct of polls.

Electoral Photo Identity card will be the main document for identification of a voter. Alternate documents will be Aadhaar card, MNREGA job card, bank / post office pass-books with a photograph, health insurance smart card issued by union ministry of labour, driving licence, PAN card, Indian passport, pension document with a photograph, service identity cards with photographs issued to employees by central or state governments and PSUs, apart from official identity cards issued to MPs, MLAs and MLCS.

Consequent on announcement of Tirupati by-poll, Model Code of Conduct has into force with immediate effect in the district over which the parliamentary constituency is spread.



Workers busy in preparing the GVMC Council Hall at GVMC Main Building in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday. The GVMC Council Hall was not used in a big way for over nine years in Visakhapatnam.

— DC

State creates record in
MGNREGS workdays

Construction of 15.60 lakh houses to start on April 15

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 16

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy said on Tuesday that Andhra Pradesh has created a record in the national employment guarantee scheme by providing 2,427 lakh workdays by March 15 and paying nearly ₹6,000 crore to the workforce under the scheme.

The Chief Minister announced that construction of houses under the mega housing scheme Pedaladariki Illu would start on April 15. As many as 15.60 lakh houses would be constructed in the first phase of the housing scheme for the poor. The CM was holding a Spandana review meeting with district collectors and SPs.

During the meeting held on video conference mode, Jagan discussed with officials several matters and gave them the welfare calendar for April. MGNREGS works, house site patta distribution, Nadu Nedu in schools and anganwadi centres, creation of multi-purpose facility centers, construction of medical colleges, roads and buildings, the YSR Cheyutha, the Jagananna Thodu, the YSR Bhima, the YSR Asara Pragathi, the crop procurement scheme, and the schedules of the programmes for April were the major issues that came up at the meet.

The CM said he couldn't connect with district collectors over the past few weeks because of the civic elections. Once the remaining six days' process of MPTC&ZPTC elections is completed, focus could be laid on vaccination, administration and developmental activities, he said.

The CM congratulated district collectors for achieving a record in MGNREGS works by logging 2,472 lakh working days by March 15 and it would total 2,525 lakh working days by end of the financial year. Around ₹6,000 crore has been paid to labourers through this scheme.

The CM said the government would construct 15.60 lakh houses in the first phase and directed the officials to complete the required process. He asked them to expedite the

Ministers, MLAs, officers told to
visit one constituency every dayDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 16

Chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy has directed the officials to ensure that the works on the first phase of the Nadu Nedu in schools are completed by March 31.

During a review with the district collectors, SPs and officials in the Spandana programme on Tuesday, the CM said 10 types of facilities are being provided in schools through Nadu Nedu and added that the paint works in the schools must be taken care of. He said Anganwadi centres are being revamped as YSR Pre Primary Schools under Nadu Nedu.

The CM gave a list of the welfare activities to be implemented in April. The Jagananna Vidyakanuka scheme will be implemented on April 9 and the volunteers across the state would be felicitated on April 13. The ministers, MLAs, collectors and SPs should visit one constituency every day and felicitate the volunteers with awards of Seva Mitra, Seva Ratna and Seva Vajra.

He said the YSR Zero Interest scheme for farmers would be implemented on April 16 and the same scheme for DWCRA women would commence on April 20. He said the Jagananna Vasati Devena would be implemented on April 27.

The CM said the state government has laid spe-

cial focus on children below six years and on pre-primary schools. He asked the officials to focus attention on identifying land for construction of permanent buildings and also on training for Anganwadi teachers.

Jagan Mohan Reddy said the government has been setting up one medical college along with a nursing college in each parliamentary constituency. Officials must speedily complete the process of identification and acquisition of land for these colleges. The state government is taking steps to start construction of medical colleges in six places — Puliwundula, Piduguralla, Amalapuram, Palakollu, Adoni and Machilipatnam — in April.

The CM said multipurpose facility centres are being set up under RBKs and 0.5 to 1 acre of land is required for each facility centre. He asked officials to identify the land and hand it over to the concerned department.

Facilities such as godowns, cold storages, and drying platforms should

like cement, steel and metal at low cost as the government purchases them in bulk. He asked officials to utilise the services of engineering assistants, digital assistants and welfare assistants in Village Secretariats as also of the Volunteers.

The CM said the construction of village/ward secretariats should be completed on a war-footing by May 2021. District collectors must focus attention on completing the construction of RBKs and

prepare works for construction of the houses and added that water and electricity facilities should be arranged in the layouts by April 15. The construction of houses will start on April 15, he stressed.

Jagan Mohan Reddy said a model house should be constructed in every layout and building materials should be provided to those who want to build the houses on their own. The beneficiaries will get construction materials

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Jagan Mohan Reddy said a model house should be constructed in every layout and building materials should be provided to those who want to build the houses on their own. The beneficiaries will get construction materials

like cement, steel and metal at low cost as the government purchases them in bulk. He asked officials to utilise the services of engineering assistants, digital assistants and welfare assistants in Village Secretariats as also of the Volunteers.

The CM said the construction of village/ward secretariats should be completed on a war-footing by May 2021. District collectors must focus attention on completing the construction of RBKs and

be provided at village level for ensuring better price to farmers. Officials must identify 10-15 acres of land in each constituency and the land would be used for food processing. Officials must create a special cell for the acquisition of the required land for National Highways projects.

He said insurance will be paid on April 6 to nominees of 12,039 people who have died naturally or in accidents, whose families are not enrolled in banks. He asked officials to arrange special DCC meetings to ensure every eligible person is benefitted through the Jagananna Thodu scheme.

The CM asked the district collectors of East Godavari and West Godavari to be well-prepared to ensure supply of irrigation water to every acre and they must co-ordinate these matters with water resources officials.

He said procurement of Rabi crop has been started and officials must ensure efficient use of the CM APP in crop procurement. He said that the 1907 call center should work efficiently. The registration process for procurement of paddy should be completed and the list of farmers who have completed cropping should be displayed for social audit under each RBK. MSP should be displayed in RBKs and officials must ensure the crops are procured at farm gates.

He said the distribution of leftover house site pattas should be completed soon. The new applicants should receive the patta in 90 days. Distribution of house site pattas to 11,334 newly identified eligible beneficiaries should be completed soon and verification of the remaining applications should be done fast. He also asked officials to speed up the identification and purchase of the required land for house sites from April.

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Notice to Naidu political
conspiracy, says TDDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 16

The Telugu Desam party on Tuesday objected to issuance of notice to party chief N. Chandrababu Naidu by the AP CID in the Amaravati assigned lands case, terming the action "politically motivated".

Party AP state president K. Atchannaidu said that assigned lands were taken with approval of farmers for the capital, according to norms and rules. He questioned whether YSRC MLA Alla Ramakrishna Reddy belongs to the SC or ST to file a case under the prevention of atrocities against SC and ST.

Responding to the news of notices being issued by CID to the former chief minister, Atchannaidu called the move an "act of vengeance" by the ruling YSRC.

Questioning if any former CM has been booked under the SC, ST PoA Act in the history of the country, he questioned if such

• Party AP state president K. Atchannaidu said that assigned lands were taken with approval of farmers for the capital, according to norms and rules.

a case could be registered based on a complaint from Alla Ramakrishna Reddy, who himself does not belong to the SC or ST community.

He said that the YSRC government was occupying lands assigned to poor farmers for cultivation to use them for the government's housing scheme for the poor.

Atchannaidu said that the then TD government had offered the same package to assigned land farmers in the capital, which was offered to general patta lands. He said that land pooling took place in 2015.

"It is vengeance to file a case against it now, and issue CID notices," he said.

He alleged that Chief

Minister Y.S. Jagan Reddy has a history of building houses on assigned lands, under which hundreds of assigned lands were confiscated in the name of housing. He further alleged that Mr Reddy has a history of using assigned lands in Idupulapaya for decades and has provided no compensation to the Vadarevu and Nizampatnam Industrial Corridor (VAN-PIC) land victim farmers till date.

Mr Atchannaidu claimed that Jagan's father Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy amended the Assigned Land Transfer Prohibition Act in 2007 to grab lands from poor and allowed them to be occupied by his henchmen. He recalled that Rajasekhara Reddy told the AP state Assembly as Chief Minister that 610 acres were being returned to the government after the matter came to light and then broke his promise by saying he will return only 300 acres.

NAIDU TURNED A-1 FIRST TIME IN
40 YEARS OF POLITICAL HISTORYDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 16

Signifying a change of season, Telugu Desam chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu has been named as first accused in a case — this, for the first time in his 40-year-long political innings. The case relates to the Amaravati assigned land scam.

Curiously, TD leaders used to call Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy as "A-1" (first accused) and YSRC Rajya Saba member V. Vijayasai Reddy as "A-2" vis-a-vis the quid pro quo case probed by the CBI in the past. TD leaders including Chandrababu Naidu

and party general secretary Nara Lokesh often used the term "A-1" when they referred to Jagan and A-2 to Vijayasai. Tables have now turned on the father-son duo.

The case against the former CM was filed by the state CID, which also made former TD minister Ponguru Narayana as A-2, the second accused.

Curiously, the CID did not refer to Chandrababu Naidu as Leader of Opposition or TD national president, in the notice it served on him on Tuesday. It lightly referred to Naidu as the "Kuppam MLA residing at Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad."

Lokesh: Jagan in sheer frustration
stooping to the lowest levelsDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 16

Telugu Desam national general secretary Nara Lokesh was provoked enough to accuse the Jagan Mohan Reddy government of "stooping to the lowest level" of filing an SC-ST Atrocity case against Chandrababu Naidu, and said this was done "out of sheer frustration over the deadlock in the capital shifting".

Lokesh said in a statement that Jagan Reddy's "silly cases" were "laughable" and would not cause any damage to the TD chief. "The CM might come out with any number of devious plans to kill Amaravati. However, the pious capital would save and preserve itself on the strength of justice and ethical values."

Lokesh noted that the courts had stated many times that there was no 'insider trading' in the Amaravati lands issue. "The YSRC tried very hard for over 21 months and finally failed to find evidence to book the TD chief in the capital lands cases. Now, they lowered

TD OBJECTS TO CID
NOTICES TO NAIDUDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 16

TD senior leader and party politburo member Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy took strong objection to the notices served by the CID to the TD chief. He lambasted the government for booking cases under 10 sections, including under SC, ST Act, while stressing that it is a heinous act of the government.

He observed that the YSRC was attempting to hound Naidu by booking cases as they did in the case of TD state president K. Atchannaidu a few months back.

themselves to the cheap level of threatening a former CM with an SC-ST atrocities case," he said.

TD leaders Varla Ramiah, P. Sudhakar Yadav, and K.S. Jawahar strongly objected to the CID notices and asked how an SC-ST atrocity case could be filed against Naidu.

YSRC DEFENDS CID SENDING NOTICE TO NAIDU IN LAND SCAM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 16

The YSRC has defended issuing of notice to N. Chandrababu Naidu in Amaravati assigned lands case.

Speaking to media here, civil supplies minister Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao alias Nani said the state government will

firmly deal with corruption. It will do justice to Dalits, whose lands had been deceptively taken over by Chandrababu Naidu. Nani asserted that the goal of YSRC government is to do justice to all sections of people.

Ruling party legislator from Mangalagiri Alla Ramakrishna Reddy

pointed out that the TD leaders had acquired lands assigned to Dalits in Amaravati at throwaway prices.

Then Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu also played a role by issuing a government order allowing assigned lands to come under the Land Pooling Scheme.

The Congress has also not yet made any announcement on its candidate, but the six-time MP and CWC special invitee Dr Chinta Mohan started campaigning a couple of days ago. Meanwhile, Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan said the party had sacrificed the seat for BJP. This has apparently dampened the spirits of his party workers, who are openly venting their anger over social media.

LS | SEAT

Suspense continues over BJP candidate even after Jana Sena sacrifices seat; Cong yet to take decision

YSRC fields Dr Gurumurthy as candidate for Tirupati bypoll

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 16

Soon after the Election Commission released the notification for the byelection to the Tirupati (SC) Lok Sabha constituency, the ruling YSRC announced Dr M. Gurumurthy as the party candidate.

The byelection was necessitated after the death of YSRC MP Balli Durga Prasad in September last year. The Opposition

Telugu Desam was the first to announce its candidate — Panabaka Lakshmi. The BJP has not yet named its candidate.

Dr Gurumurthy is a physiotherapist by profession and associated closely with Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy during his Praja Sankalpa Yatra. Even before the ruling party had officially announced his name, Dr Gurumurthy had opened his office in the city and was



Dr Gurumurthy

Panabaka Lakshmi

actively meeting party leaders and different groups in the seven Assembly segments which constitute the Tirupati constituency, seeking their support.

Panabaka Lakshmi is a four-time MP and former Union minister, lost the 2019 Lok Sabha election on a TD ticket. She has inaugurated the party's parlia-

• He opened his office in the city and was actively meeting party leaders

• She has inaugurated the party's parliamentary office in Tirupati

mentary office in Tirupati and completed a round of 'Dharma Parirakshana Yatra', mullied by the TD to protest against the spate of attacks on temples. She has toured all Assembly segments.

On the other hand, the BJP could only convince its alliance Jana Sena after a long time to field its own candidate. There is confusion over who the BJP candidate could be. BJP supporters expect th-

at Dasari Srinivasulu, a retired IAS officer, would be fielded in view of the state leaders forwarding his name to the central leadership. However, inquiries revealed the names of a few more persons who are in race for the BJP ticket: Karnataka former chief secretary Ratna Prabha, former central services officer Krishna Prasad and local leaders Munikrishnaiah, Dr D. Sree Hari Rao.

The Congress has also not yet made any announcement on its candidate, but the six-time MP and CWC special invitee Dr Chinta Mohan started campaigning a couple of days ago. Meanwhile, Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan said the party had sacrificed the seat for BJP. This has apparently dampened the spirits of his party workers, who are openly venting their anger over social media.

SHORT TAKES

CHARGESHEETS FILED ON 41 IN TUNI TRAIN CASE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 16

Chargesheets were served to all the 41 accused in the train burning case in Tuni when they appeared for hearing before seventh metropolitan magistrate court here on Tuesday.

The accused including noted Kapu leader Mudragada Padmanabham, Tuni MLA Dadiseti Raja and others appeared before the judge K. Suresh Babu.

However, the defence lawyer Ventrapragada Uma Maheswari moved a petition under Rule 37 of Criminal Rules of Practice, seeking the court permission to allow only a select few accused to be present before it for hearing instead of all the accused in the case. The court accepted it and posted the next hearing to April 6 when the trial in the case to begin. Meanwhile, one of the accused in the case G. Durga Rao hailing from Aina-villi in East Godavari attempted to commit suicide by consuming pesticide. However, he survived the attempt and attended the court hearing.

Later, the Tuni MLA Dadiseti Raja alleged that they were implicated in the false case pertaining to the train burning case which occurred on Jan. 31, 2016 near Tuni in East Godavari.

MP SLAMS YSRC FOR HARASSING OPPN LEADERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 16

Former Tirupati MP Dr Chinta Mohan alleged that the union government moves to privatise the banks would result in an unprecedented financial crisis as public money to the tune of ₹50 lakh crore is in the banks while pointing to the possibility of bankruptcy.

He found fault with the AP government for targeting opposition leader Chandrababu Naidu while pointing to the cases filed against him by the police.

Addressing media persons in Gudur on Tuesday, the senior Congress leader observed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and AP Chief Minister Jaganmohan Reddy have been attempting to stifle opposition's voice.

He said Congress is the only alternative for BJP in the country while appealing to the electorate to support Congress in the ensuing by-election to the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat.

TTD SUBMITS ₹200 CRORE WORTH CHOULTRIES PLAN

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 16

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), which entered into an agreement with the Karnataka state government for the development of Karnataka choultries – a pilgrim amenities complex at Tirumala at ₹200 crores, has submitted all tender papers for the review and clearance of the judicial preview commission.

As per the agreement, TTD is set to construct an amenities complex at an extent of 7.05 acres, which the temple body leased out to the Karnataka state government at Tirumala. The Karnataka government, which was eager to land the project, has already deposited ₹100 crore to take up the works with the support of TTD. Upon completion of the construction works as per TTD's designs and standards, the 'Karnataka Choultries' administration will be handed over to the Karnataka state government.

Following the state government's directive to refer all projects worth over and above ₹100 crore to the judicial preview commission, TTD submitted the tender papers to the commission on Tuesday. The judicial preview commission is expected to ensure transparency in the tender process by examining the public's suggestions and objections through the TTD website before granting permission.

TTD officials stated that all the documents about the project are uploaded on Monday, March 15 on the websites - <https://judicialpreview.ap.gov.in> and on www.tirumala.org and appealed to the public to present their objections, if any, before 5 pm of Mar. 23 on the TTD website or by email to the Gudur based judicial preview commission — judgejpp@ap.gov.in.

Groundwater levels up by 4.01 metres in Nellore dist.

The rainfall was 1,305 mm as against the normal rainfall of 1,015 mm

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 16

Heavy rains during the water year 2020-2021 contributed to the increase of groundwater level to 4.43 metres as of February 2021 as against 8.44 metres in February last year at SPSR Nellore district.

During the water year, the rainfall was 1,305 mm as against the normal

rainfall of 1,015 mm to date from June last year.

The groundwater department has disclosed these details in the back-drop of the weeklong Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Department scheduled between March 16 and 22.

According to the department, Piezo Meters have been installed at 135 locations in SPSR Nellore district under a national

● **ANYONE POSSESSING smartphone can access the information on water levels through Piezo meters from a website** <http://www.apwrims.ap.gov.in> or <http://apsrgwd.ap.gov.in>

level Hydrology Project to detect the groundwater levels.

Before the advent of

Piezometers, groundwater wing used to depend on one among the potable water wells in each area to study the water levels. There were 79 such wells in the district before the Hydrology project was launched.

Anyone possessing smartphone can access the information on water levels through Piezo meters from a website <http://www.apwrims.ap.gov.in>

ov.in or <http://apsrgwd.ap.gov.in> or CM dashboard <http://core.ap.gov.in>

The information on water levels would help study the short term and long term changes in the water levels and identify the areas affected by the excess withdrawal of groundwater and contain the situation, groundwater department officials said.



Employees from various Public Sector Banks display placards during a protest meeting against the central government move on the privatization of Public Sector Banks near GVMC Gandhi Statue junction in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday.

— DC

AP sees 261 Covid cases, no death

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 16

Andhra Pradesh registered 261 fresh Covid-19 cases and no death in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported on Tuesday that out of 23,417 samples tested, 261 persons were infected with Covid-19. Out of a total number of 1,45,80,783 samples tested so far in the state, 8,92,269 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,83,505 were recovered

● **THE STATE health authorities discharged 125 Covid-19 patients after recovery in the last 24 hours. AP conducted Covid-19 tests on 2,73,048 samples per one million population and registered a positive rate of 6.12.**

while undergoing treatment and 1,579 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Coronavirus infections, Guntur reported the highest of 41, followed by 39 in Visakhapatnam, 37 in Chittoor, 34 in Krishna, 28 in East Godavari, 25 in Anantapur, 20 in Kurnool, 11 in Nellore, 10 in Kadapa, seven in

Prakasam, six in Srikakulam, three in West Godavari and zero cases in Vizianagaram.

With regard to the cumulative active Covid-19 cases, Chittoor continued to be the worst hit with 484 followed by 214 in Krishna, 193 in East Godavari, 154 in Guntur, 120 in Visakhapatnam, 72 in Prakasam, 66 each in

Anantapur and Kurnool, 60 in Kadapa, 59 in Srikakulam, 53 in Nellore, 22 in West Godavari and 16 in Vizianagaram.

No new Covid-19 deaths were reported, and the death toll remained unchanged at 7,185. The state health authorities discharged 125 Covid-19 patients after recovery in the last 24 hours.

AP conducted Covid-19 tests on 2,73,048 samples per one million population and registered a positive rate of 6.12.

Virus fear



With mild rise in Coronavirus positive cases, people in large numbers queue up to get tested for the virus at Sanjeevini Bus which was set up at Government ENT Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday.

TRIBUTES PAID TO SRI POTTI SRIRAMULU

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 16

The life sacrifice of Sri Potti Sriramulu for a separate state to Telugu speaking people was recalled during his 120th birth anniversary celebrations in Ongole and Nellore. Prakasam Collector Pola Bhaskar said Sriramulu was taken up the agitation, upset with the discrimination being faced by Telugu speaking people in Madras during the British regime.

He said the Government of India announced the formation of a separate state for Telugu speaking people with Kurnool as capital on 1 October 1953 and the combined AP state was formed in 1956.

AP sets up panel for liquor procurement

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 16

The state government has reconstituted a tender committee to be headed by the retired high court judge justice A. Gopala Reddy as its chairman to finalise the tenders for procurement of IMFL, foreign liquor and beer.

The state government issued an order here on Tuesday to reconstitute the tender committee with the chairman as its head and two others as its members. Retired IAS officer D. Varaprasad and chartered accountant Marideswara Rao Kasi Reddy to serve as members of the committee.

The tender committee is mandated to scrutinise the offers/tenders

received by the AP State Beverages Corporation Limited/commissioner of Prohibition and Excise on behalf of the government and negotiate with the offers. It has to recommend the price of various liquor brands to the APS-BCL for procurement of IMFL, foreign liquor and beer. The tender committee is entrusted with the task of fixation of price for such products/brands as and when referred to it by the Board during the course of Rate Contract Year. The Board of APS-BCL is permitted to refer to the committee such cases that do not fall within the guidelines laid down by the tender committee for fixation of the price of IMFL, foreign liquor and beer.

Farmers demand for paddy varieties

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 16

Farmers Associations demanded the state government purchase MTU 1010 variety of paddy stocks directly from the farmers during a round table meeting held at Nellore on Tuesday.

The meeting was held in the backdrop of harvesting in progress concerning paddy cultivated in about eight lakh acres this year in the district.

The participants felt that the guidelines on paddy procurement are not followed properly at the 200 odd Paddy Purchase Centres established in the district by the administration. They alleged that the lack of coordination between Rythu Bharosa Kendra and the PPCs have been causing inconvenience to the farmers. The farmers also found fault with the agriculture, marketing, and civil supplies departments

for not addressing their problems of paddy stocks lying with them.

The difficulties highlighted by the farmers during the meet include the shortage of gunny bags and rejection of paddy under the pretext of high humidity levels in paddy.

They alleged that 100-150 kg of paddy is levied per putty (850 kg), citing excess humidity in the grains. The farmers said they are forced to dispose of the stock for meagre prices because of a lack of storage facilities.

Lamenting over the PPCs stand against procuring MTU 1010 variety of paddy, citing the government's directions, farmers associations appealed to the officials to resolve the issue. President of Rythu Sanghala Samakhya A.V. Ramanaiah Naidu, AP Rythu Sangham executive body members P. Sriramulu, B. Venkateswarlu, Radhakrishna Naidu, and others were present.

FARMERS STALL LAND SURVEY FOR BHOGAPURAM AIRPORT

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 16

Farmers tried to stall the land survey for developing Bhogapuram airport in Vizianagaram district on Monday.

Learning about the arrival of revenue officials for conduct of sur-

vey for acquisition of land for developing the airport, farmers from Byreddipalem and Mudasarlapeta villages of Bhogapuram mandal, arrived there in large numbers and raised protest for giving merger compensation and demanded for relief as per the prevailing market value.

Funds sought for edu. institutions

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 16

Narasaraopet MP Lavu Srikrishna Devarayalu sought the union government to allot required funds for educational institutions of AP, which were sanctioned under AP Reorganisation Act 2014. Addressing during a discussion on education budget in the Parliament on Tuesday, he said that Central Government had given an IIT, IIIT, NIT, IIM, IISER, Central University, Petroleum University, Agricultural University, Tribal University, NIDM to AP. He said that sadly, not even a single university exc-

ept for AIIMS is functioning from its permanent campus. He stated that the fund utilisation for these Universities has been consistently low, and for Central University, AP, only ₹83 crores have been allocated since 2018-19, which show the poor allocation of funds.

MP Devarayalu lamented that the education needs of AP's students had been continuously ignored. He stated that the students were in senior secondary school when these institutes were promised. He further stated that these students had finished their higher education, but the Institutes are not completely functional.

HALF-BURNT BODY FOUND IN BUSHES

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 16

A half-burnt body of roughly 25-30-year-old male was found in the bushes between Turangi village-Pagadalapeta area near highway under Nadakuduru village limits in Karapa mandal.

According to police sources, some nearby locals spotted the body and informed the Village Volunteer. Initially, the Indrapalem police rushed to the spot and took up the investigation.

The police suspected that the youth was murdered on Monday afternoon or late night and brought to the bushes and burnt. Though there are CC Cameras near Ayyappa Swamy temple in Turangi, the spot is beyond their reach.

The police are publicising the incident in the nearby area for identification. Karapa Sub-Inspector D. Ramarao said that clues teams had gathered the clues, and special teams were deployed to trace the incident.

17,400 TONNES SAND STOCKS SEIZED

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 16

Special Enforcement Bureau team found 17,400 tonnes of sand worth ₹65 lakh at Pakkilanka 10 Open Sand reach in Tallapudi mandal of West Godavari District on Tuesday.

The Special Enforcement Bureau Additional Superintendent of Police C. Jayarama Raju said that the APM-DC had given permission to

ramp organisers for digging the sand with a depth of one meter. But, the organisers dug three meters of depth of sand and stocked it.

He said that on Tuesday, the APMDC officials, Andhra Pradesh Mines and Geology Department officials and Tallapudi police conducted raids on the sand ramp and found the irregularities. He said that criminal cases were booked against four persons on the issue.

FOUR BOOKED OVER VIRAL AUDIO CLIP

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 16

An audio conversation abusing two social groups went viral on social media, giving rise to discussions in Amalapuram in East Godavari District.

However, noticing the audio's seriousness and severity, Amalapuram DSP Madhava Reddy took cognisance of the video and took it up suo motu and booked cases against four persons. Madhava Reddy said that action would be taken

against all four and others involved in the matter as they used very foul language.

He appealed to all sections to maintain calm and peace. He said that due to Covid-19 severity, the police would not allow any form of agitations or processions in the Konaseema area. He assured investigation and strict action against those all involved in such propaganda. He said that the accused in the incident were identified, and special teams have been formed to trace them.

THREE-MONTH-OLD LEFT AT A CHURCH

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 16

A three-month-old baby was left at a church at Rajamahendravaram on March 5.

The baby was handed over to Sishu Gruha centre in Kakinada.

The women and child development department

officials said that the locals informed the district child welfare board about the presence of the baby.

The officials said that if the baby's parents or relatives do not contact the women and child welfare department within 30 days, the baby would be given up for adoption as per law.

भारत सरकार टुकसात / INDIA GOVERNMENT MINT
(AUNIT OF SPMCIL)
WHOLLY OWNED BY GOVT OF INDIA
I.D.A. PHASE II, CHERLAPALLY, HYDERABAD - 500 051
ई-मेल / e-mail- igm.hyderabad@spmcl.com; फोन / PHONE 040- 27261731-34
F.No. I-240/Per./EIO/2020-21/ Dated. 16.03.2021

NOTICE INVITING APPLICATIONS FOR EMPANELMENT OF INQUIRY OFFICERS

Applications are invited from Retired officers of Central Government, SPMCIL or other Central PSU's for empanelment as **INQUIRY OFFICERS** for the purpose of conducting departmental inquiries for a period of 03 years.

2. For further details with respect to Eligibility, Experience, Desirable Qualifications etc., applicants are advised to visit the website <https://igmhyderabad.spmcil.com> ~ > **Careers Tab**. Last date for submission of filled in applications is **30.04.2021**.

Deputy General Manager (HR)

NMDC Limited
(A GOVERNMENT OF INDIA ENTERPRISE)
'Khanij Bhavan', 10-3-311/A, Castle Hills, Masab Tank, Hyderabad - 500 028
CIN: L13100TS1958GOI001674

CONTRACTS DEPARTMENT

Tender Enquiry No: HO (Contracts)/NSP/TSC&HSM/OM/768 Dt: 17/03/2021

NMDC Limited, A "NAVARATNA" Public Sector Company under Ministry of Steel, Govt. of India, invites online bids from experienced domestic bidders for providing **Technological Assistance for Operation & Mechanical Maintenance of Thin Slab Caster, Tunnel Furnace & Hot Strip Mill (TSC & HSM)** for a period of 2 years for 3.0 MTPA Integrated Steel Plant at Nagarnar, near Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh State.

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For further clarification, the following can be contacted.

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Chief General Manager (Contracts)

DECCAN Chronicle

17 MARCH 2021

Competitive, compulsive: TN's 'poll freebie' culture

In Tamil Nadu the promise of freebies mark poll time and much of governance seems to revolve around delivering on populist measures that sustain vote banks favouring either of the Dravidian majors. The 2021 polls, slated for April 6, have triggered an even more frenetic push to promise freebies by the ruling AIADMK and the Opposition DMK, parties that have established a virtual duopoly in the 234-seat Assembly. The freebie culture has been ingrained in the psyche of the people of Tamil Nadu since the mid-1960s when the DMK came to power on top of a promise of three *padis* (measuring roughly 4.5 kg) of rice for a rupee, later watered down to one kg for a rupee due to financial constraints.

The 2021 freebie promise has been the most extensive on record with AIADMK offering a washing machine for each of about two crore families, besides a solar stove to go with the mixer grinder, fans and other household goods that went towards fulfilling Jayalalithaa's concept of easing the burden of housewives and working women of chores at home and winning them over. Besides white goods, laptops for students are free as well as data. Consider the promise of ₹1,500 a month for women, free TV cable service and affordable housing for the needy and it completes a comprehensive household package including free rations, condiments, spices and festival hampers that should ease lives. And for livelihoods there is an offer of one government job for each household, never mind if the government wage bill runs upwards of one lakh crore rupees.

The DMK's competitive offerings include ₹1,000 for women, 75 per cent reservation in private sector jobs for locals, a year's maternity leave and food, fuel and milk subsidies. How all the freebies add up is anyone's guess as the state is already burdened with public debt of ₹4.87 lakh crore as of March 31, 2020, on top of revenues earned from a highly industrialised state. There is even a promise of monetising housewives' work in the manifesto of fringe political player Kamal Haasan's party, which is to show how the aim for votes also somehow serves the purpose of creating a social net buttressed by health insurance and an almost free lunch that is nearly unique

There is even a promise of monetising housewives' work in the manifesto of fringe political player Kamal Haasan's party, which is to show how the aim for votes also somehow serves the purpose of creating a social net buttressed by health insurance and an almost free lunch that is nearly unique. There is no denying the state has been a forerunner in keeping students interested in learning in class through free education and midday meals.

The financial profligacy may create a burden that may never go away for seven crore people of the state. The concern for women, who constitute nearly 50 per cent of voters, does not, however, extend to political representation as the low number of seats, less than 10 per cent, allocated to them by major parties indicates. The outlier status of Tamil Nadu is further stressed as DMK and Congress promise to take state students out of the central medical entrance test NEET and emphasise their opposition to CAA as AIADMK, despite being in the NDA, has done too. Competitive freebie offers are a bizarre feature but that takes away only a little from the model welfare state Tamil Nadu has aspired to be and is in many ways a model for India.

Soul-search for Sarah

So dramatic — and disturbing — have recent events been in London in an overtly police versus citizen polarity that there is a risk that the demonstrations of women, and social media interventions by thousands of them following the kidnap and murder of a 31-year old woman, Sarah Everard, may end up being narrowly compartmentalised.

The London Metropolitan Police have arrested a policeman in the kidnap-murder case. Ms Everard was walking home from a friend's house to her own address on March 3 evening and apparently vanished. The remains of her body were found afterward. A large number of women gathered to lay flowers in her memory. The police, gathered in strength, manhandled the women, dragging some on the floor, tackling them violently, pinning some down.

The video of this is distressing. The police trotted out banality: unlawful gathering, Covid-19 restrictions. Not a word about men police attacking a peaceful assembly of condoling women.

In India, or in countries outside Western Europe and North America, such happenings will be criticised but will not be unusual. But in Britain?

The whole catechism of an advanced capitalist, liberal democratic, order-free speech, free assembly, gender parity, right to protest—went out of the window. In citizen versus state, the state was seen to be grotesque. The Everard story is well beyond being a common crime. It underscores violence against women in public places. According to a UN report, 70 per cent of British women complain of sexual harassment in public. The outpourings of anger, grief, even helplessness, of thousands of British women on social media in which they detail the lengths to which they go to keep themselves safe (taking longer but better-lit routes, wearing bright clothes for visibility), are compelling.

In this grim background is also discernible the spirit to challenge and change. As a movement, "Reclaim Our Streets" is catching on in Britain. There have been protest marches, one in Parliament Square. We need this in India too. Ask any girl or woman. Of course, London Police must be held to account as the police in urban India, both infamous for "institutionalised violence".

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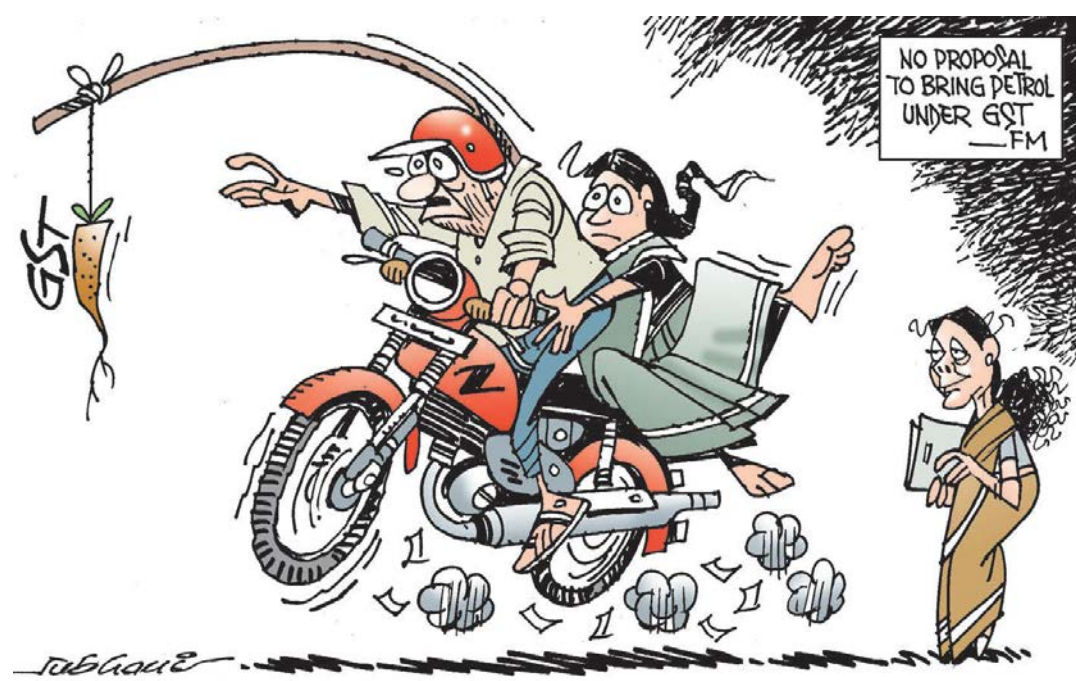
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Subhani



India needs hate crimes law on lines of Scotland



Sunanda K. Datta-Ray

Reflections

India, with its increasingly assertive majoritarian culture, would benefit from an equivalent of the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill that the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh's Holyrood House passed last week by 82 votes to 32, following the previous day's five-hour debate when legislators considered a raft of amendments. In a nutshell, the controversial new measure will extend protection to vulnerable groups and take a far stricter view of the offence of "stirring up hatred".

As Victoria Atkins, a junior minister in the British government, said in another context recently, the minorities and marginalised communities need such protection. Such Indian groups need it far more than quotas and reservations which, as wise observers have pointed out repeatedly, create a vested interest in backwardness. Indians who would qualify under Ms Atkins's definition are Muslims, the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Sikhs and people from the Northeast who do not fit into the common man's notion of the national stereotype. Myanmar's Rohingyas are a tragic illustration of the outsider in this sense, as were Jews and the gypsies in pre-World War II Europe.

"Through the passing of this landmark bill, Scotland's Parliament has sent a strong and clear message to victims, perpetrators, communities and to the wider society that offences motivated by prejudice will be treated seriously and will not be tolerated", declared Scotland's justice minister Humza Yousaf. Around 18 hate crimes are committed every day in the kingdom; 6,448 were recorded in 2019-20. "I am delighted Holyrood has backed this powerful legislation that is fitting for the Scotland we live in" Mr Yousaf added.

Although born in

Glasgow, Mr Yousaf is of Pakistani origin and can be expected to bring a measure of personal commitment to the cause of equal treatment for people of all creeds and colours. "The bill's passage has shown Holyrood at its very best — a collaborative, diverse and determined Parliament which we should all be proud of", he says. "Robust scrutiny has ensured we have met the right balance between protecting groups targeted by hate crime and respecting people's rights to free speech."

He has been at pains to reassure everyone that the new law will not try to instigate any kind of witch hunt. Nor will it curb free speech. Asked about racist jokes and drunken anecdotes, he was quick to stress that the "behaviour has to be threatening or abusive and intended to stir up trouble, so a racist joke is clearly not going to reach that threshold. There will be no prosecutions under the new law."

"If your unreconstructed uncle comes in, has too many sherries at Christmas dinner and says something they shouldn't do, which creates great offence to his bisexual niece, for example, that is not going to be prosecuted." He fleshed out the point by recounting an abusive tweet he had received but would ignore. "The beauty of the Hate Crime Bill is that you can say that all day long (not that I'd encourage it) and it would not be a criminal offence."

That may seem like a

The bill anticipates religious bigotry and defangs bigots in advance by abolishing the offence of blasphemy. Actually, modern Scotland is a liberal and civilised nation which has not known any blasphemy prosecution for over 175 years.

The 1968 Race Relations Act made it illegal to refuse housing, jobs or services to anyone on the grounds of race or national origins. The expectation was that the law would change people's outlook, and indeed, it has been transformed.

tolerant and sensibly lenient attitude to take. Yet, leniency can be mistaken for tacit official sanction or condonation. Nazi anti-Semitism did not spring up overnight. German and Austrian culture had a long history of anti-Semitic vituperations which may have concealed a real societal bias. Nirad C. Chaudhuri recalls a Bengali rhyme in which the people of Odisha and Bihar are presented in negative terms to illustrate insularity. Similarly, the English have "jokes" at the expense of the Scots and the Welsh.

Believing laughter to be the best antidote to hatred, the British once offered prizes to comedians who could tell jokes about their own communities. The 1968 Race Relations Act made it illegal to refuse housing, employment, or public services to anyone on the grounds of colour, race, ethnic or national origins. The deeper expectation was that the law would change people's outlook because the law-abiding British would avoid anything illegal. And, indeed, race relations and social attitudes have been completely transformed. The three Race Relations Acts (two others followed in 1976 and 2000) accomplished what the old laws could not.

Stirring up racial hatred has been an offence in Scottish — and British — law for decades. But the old laws were not regarded as providing adequate protection to minority groups. Hence Scotland's Hate Crime Bill was introduced in April 2020 following an independent review by Lord Bracadale, a distinguished Scottish judge, who recommended that all the old laws on the subject be consolidated into one new bill. The mea-

sure updates the list of entities protected by the law while also expanding the list. It also identifies new "stirring up of hatred" offences that apply to all the categories — age, disability, race, religion, sexual orientation, transgender identity and variations in sex characteristics — that the bill mentions.

It is also noteworthy that the bill anticipates religious bigotry and defangs bigots in advance by abolishing the offence of blasphemy. Actually, modern Scotland is a liberal, secular and civilised nation which has not known any blasphemy prosecution for more than 175 years. But the authorities are taking no chances.

"I look forward to overseeing the implementation of this legislation which will ensure Scotland's justice system can bring perpetrators to account and provide sufficient protection for individuals and communities harmed by hate crimes," Mr Yousaf promises.

There is no reason why he should be disappointed provided freedom of speech is not curbed and justice is speedy and effective. India has not forgotten the 1968 Kilvenmani massacre when 44 Dalit men, women and children were burned alive, and an appeal court acquitted the convicted murderers on the ground that landlords of their status did not commit such crimes. A new law must also punish rumour mongering about beef, killing cattle and romance across religious borders.

India demonstrates that the law by itself is simply not enough. It must also be administered by politicians of goodwill and integrity.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

India has not forgotten the 1968 Kilvenmani massacre when 44 Dalit men, women and children were burned alive, and a court acquitted the convicted murderers on the ground that landlords of their status did not commit such crimes

LETTERS

YSRC'S CLEAN SWEEP

The clean sweep by the ruling YSR Congress and its large margin of vote share in the recently-held Urban Local Bodies polls is due to the speedy implementation of several welfare schemes and developmental works in record time by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy (*YSRC gets 53% vote, BJP, Jana Sena gain at TD cost, DC, March 16*). At the same time, the verdict shows that now expectations of the people are running high and the ruling party in AP needs to resolve vigorously the issues of 'Three Capitals of AP' and 'Visakhapatnam Steel Plant's privatisation by the Centre'. In these elections, the Jana Sena is just taking its first baby steps towards its future.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

MEAN OF AMIT SHAH

It's quite mean and unbecoming on the part of home minister Amit Shah for mocking West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee (*Shah mocks Didi campaign in wheelchair, DC, March 16*). After the immediate acrimonious outburst on conspiracy theory for her injury, Mamata retracted her allegations to a mere accident caused inadvertently due to the surging crowds around her. The issue should have rest there instead of raising all sorts of sarcasm by almost all BJP stalwarts as if to push her into Abhimanyu's *chakravayuh*.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Hymns from Gita over Dacca Radio

CALCUTTA, March. 16

The "Dacca Betar Kendra" for the first time in its history broadcast hymns from the Gita this morning amply substantiating Awami Leader Sheikh Mujibar Rahman's declared policy of secularism.

Another was special classes for patriotic songs. One of the songs begins thus: "its your land and my land — our soil. On it together — we are to it." Another songs runs: "crossing the days of darkness, we have reached the dawn of a new day. Unity is dignity, unity is strength. Fear of the journey has ended. We now move fearlessly, defiantly... we are the torch bearers of a new path, we want to embrace the new day."

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Fresh push for lateral entry of babus likely

Last year, Arvind Panagariya, former vice-chief of the government Niti Aayog, wrote in his book, *India Unlimited — Reclaiming the Lost Glory*, that Indian babus suffered from the socialist hangover, which has slowed down the pace of reforms the Modi *sarkar* wishes to introduce. To support his view, he cited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiative for lateral entry at the top levels of the bureaucracy. According to Mr Panagariya, babus slowed down the process to the extent that at the very end of his term only nine officers could be inducted from outside.

But the government has not given up, yet. It is making another push to induct 30 more private sector specialists into different government departments at the crucial decision-making level of joint sec-

retaries and directors on a contract basis. The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) will shortlist the candidates for interviews.

Prime Minister Modi has introduced the mechanism of recruiting fresh talent in the bureaucracy from the private sector during his first tenure. But the first round hasn't been the success that the government was expecting. It could recruit only nine of the 10 domain experts it had selected, and one of them, Arun Goyal, who had joined the commerce ministry as joint secretary, put in his papers barely a year later. It appears that far from changing the system, the lateral entrants are more likely to be subsumed by it. Further, a year after their appointment, the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) had issued a notice to the UPSC after a petition from whistleblower

Indian Forest Service (IFoS) officer Sanjiv Chaturvedi alleged irregularities in the recruitment of three of the nine lateral entrants by the government.

The government is catching flak already. Some Opposition leaders are calling for the policy to be withdrawn. Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhkar Azad has threatened to "gherao" Parliament, calling the government's move a violation of constitutional rights. Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Tejaswi Yadav has said that UPSC's lateral recruitment an injustice to the youth.

Will the Modi *sarkar* overcome the political resistance from outside and from the babus within who may try to defend their turf?

ED AND KERALA POLLS
The Enforcement Directorate (ED)

has reportedly registered a case against senior officials of the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB) for alleged FERA violations. But things get blurred around election time when the stakes are high. Questions are being raised about the timing of the probe, with the ruling LDF claiming the ED action as a "political conspiracy" by the BJP, which is trying hard to make a dent in the state.

Sources say that ED has served notices to KIIFB CEO Dr K.M. Abraham, former chief secretary of Kerala, and deputy managing director Vikramjit Singh, a serving IPS officer of the Kerala cadre. As it so happens, chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan is chairman of the board. Not surprisingly, therefore, the ruling party has linked the ED action to the forthcoming elec-

tions. The LDF leaders have said that the ED moved only after Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's statements against the Board.

The Centre has denied the allegations. It is being said that ED's investigations discovered that the board earned ₹2,100 crores by issuing bonds for infra projects, but the money was used by cultural, fisheries and tourism departments. Besides, the state government issued the bonds without the Centre's permission, which violated rules.

Politics, or not, the dust will only settle once the state elections are done with.

*Share a babu experience!
Follow dilipcherian@
Twitter.com. Let's
multiply the effect.*

SHORT TAKES

AMARINDER TO MEET SIDDHU AGAIN

Chandigarh, March 16: Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh is expected to meet former minister Navjot Singh Sidhu over lunch on Wednesday, amid speculations that the cricketer-turned-politician might be given an important role ahead of the 2022 state polls, official sources said.

This will be the second luncheon meeting between the leaders. The first such meeting had taken place in November last, seen as the first step to break the ice between the two sides.

Singh had then said that he and Sidhu would continue to have cordial meetings.

Another meeting between the two leaders assumes significance as the Congress central leadership has been trying to rehabilitate Sidhu who had resigned as minister after he was divested of the Local Bodies portfolio in 2019.

Congress leader and Punjab affairs in-charge Harish Rawat has been pushing for an important position for Sidhu. Rawat had met Sidhu on March 10. After the meeting, Sidhu had said, "was summoned by Harish Rawat ji. Had a cordial meeting."

For the past several weeks, party circles have been abuzz with the speculation that Sidhu could be re-inducted into the state cabinet with some key portfolios. There have also been talks of the possibility of appointing him as party state unit president.

NINE SAD MLAS FROM PUNJAB BOOKED

Chandigarh, March 16: Nine Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) legislators from Punjab have been booked for their alleged attempt to gherao and confront Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar outside the Assembly here last week, officials said on Tuesday.

The booked legislators are former ministers Sharanjit Singh Dhillon and Bikram Singh Majithia, Baldev Singh Khaira, Sukhwinder Kumar, Harinder Pal Singh Chandumajra, Kanwarjit Singh Barkandi, Manpreet Singh Ayali, Gurpartap Singh Wadala and N.K. Sharma.

The Shiromani Akali Dal termed the registration of case against its MLAs as an "unfortunate and undemocratic step".

The Chandigarh police registered the case against the SAD MLAs under relevant IPC sections including 186 (obstructing public servant in discharge of public functions), 323 (punishment for voluntarily causing hurt) and 341 (punishment for wrongful restraint), according to a copy of the FIR.

The SAD legislators had confronted Khattar outside the Assembly hall on March 10 and had demanded that a resolution be passed in the Haryana Assembly against the Centre's three new farm laws. Thereafter, the Haryana Assembly secretariat had decided to lodge an FIR against the group of Punjab MLAs for allegedly misbehaving with Khattar.

MAJOR FOREST FIRE RAGES ON IN ODISHA

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 16

A major fire broke out on Tuesday at Charikharia forest, adjacent to Chandaka Wildlife Sanctuary on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar. Fire services personnel rushed to the spot and started dousing the flame, which was reportedly spreading quickly towards the sanctuary. The reason behind the outbreak of fire was yet to be ascertained.

Similar fire was reported at Barunei hill forest in Khordha district, couple of days ago.

The forest fire in the Similipal National Park in Mayurbhanj district was brought under control few days ago, thanks to rainfall in the region. Reports from Similipal National Park in Mayurbhanj district said that though wildfire had been contained at most of the places, fire incidents were reported from Podadiha, Dubrigari, Jarada, Manikpur, Balma and Barehipani. The SNP which also houses the Similipal National Tiger Reserve has reported wildfire from more than 500 spots in the past two weeks. At most of the places, the wildfire got doused because a few spells of rain on March 10.



West Bengal CM and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, sitting on a wheelchair, addresses an election campaign rally ahead of Assembly polls in Bankura on Tuesday. — PTI

Dissent over tickets in Bengal has Shah worried

Takes party leaders in WB to task over low turn out in poll rallies

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 16

A growing and fierce revolt within the BJP over the distribution of tickets to most of the Trinamul Congress turncoats for the Assembly election in West Bengal and low turnouts in the party's poll campaign rallies forced Union home minister Amit Shah to return to the state instead of New Delhi from neighbouring Assam quietly on Monday night and pull up the party leaders for their role during a "marathon class".

Finishing his two-state visit on Monday afternoon, Shah went to attend a programme in the evening in Assam from where he was supposed to return to the capital later. However, he flew from Guwahati to Kolkata, checked into one of the two hotels, which have become favourite destinations for the party leaders for poll preparations in the city, at Rajarhat and chaired a night-long meeting.

There, according to sources, he came down heavily on the party func-

P.C. Chacko to join NCP

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 16

Veteran leader P.C. Chacko who quit Congress last week is all set to join NCP. Chacko, who arrived in New Delhi on Tuesday, called on NCP supremo Sharad Pawar to discuss his entry into the party. Pawar's party is a constituent of LDF in Kerala.

Before meeting Pawar he told mediapersons, "I

can't think of becoming a member of the CPM or the BJP. I wish to be with a party which has Congress culture. And while being in that party I would like to extend support to the Left Front," he said.

Chacko, 74, quit the party on Wednesday in protest against the intense groupism in the organisation.

Chacko, 74, who has held various crucial positions in the party, alleged that there was no internal democracy in the

tionaries, who painted a rosy picture of poll preparations to the top leadership, and sought their explanation over massive protests by the rank and file against distribution of tickets to the former TMC leaders throughout the day in the city including the party's election office at Hastings, which saw demonstration on Tuesday also, and the districts.

Mr Shah, sources added,

also expressed displeasure over thin crowd at Circus Ground in Jhargram which he had to address virtually from Kharagpur. He wanted to know the reason behind the flop show, sources said.

The prominent TMC turncoats, who are in the eye of storm in the BJP for getting tickets, include Rajib Banerjee at Domjur and his aide Mohit Ghanti at Panchla in Howrah,

Congress. He alleged seats had been divided between the "A" and "I" groups led by former chief minister Oommen Chandy and opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala respectively. The two factions had complete control over ticket allotment for each constituency. Under these circumstances there was no point in continuing in the Congress, he had stated after resigning from the party.

Rabindranath Bhat-tacharya at Singur and Prabir Ghoshal in Uttarpara. Besides demands of changing candidates at three more constituencies in South 24 Parganas and some other districts have been raised.

The sources pointed out that the number of ticket aspirants in BJP has gotten bigger than the required number of candidates while people in rural areas

Amit Shah is frustrated as his rallies have registered poor turnout. Instead of running the country, he is sitting in Kolkata and hatching conspiracies to harass TMC leaders. What do they want? Do they want to kill me?"

— MAMATA BANERJEE, West Bengal CM

remain busy in farming, instead of political rallies, this time of the year. But their arguments only fell flat before the former BJP chief. On Tuesday morning when BJP president J.P. Nadda landed in the city on a campaign tour, he also attended the second round of meeting by Shah.

While leaving the city later, Shah summoned Ghosh, Roy and others to Delhi at night for picking up suitable candidates for the remaining phases of the polls.

Zakia Ehsan Jafri — widow of Congress leader and former member of parliament Ehsan Jafri — has challenged October 5, 2017 order of Gujarat High Court upholding the magistrate court order rejecting Jafri's protest petition challenging the SIT report giving clean chit to top political leaders and state functionaries for the alleged larger conspiracy.

Ehsan Jafri was among the 68 people killed at Gulberg Society in Ahmedabad on February 28, 2002. Justice A.M. Khanwilkar heading a bench also comprising Justice Maheshwari and Justice Krishna Murari, in the order passed on Tuesday said, "Put this case for hearing on April 13. No request for adjournment will be entertained".

The hearing on Zakia Jafri's petition that is pending before the top court since 2018 was adjourned to April 13

After Waze's arrest, BJP wants Maha HM's removal

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 16

After the arrest of police officer Sachin Waze in the industrialist Mukesh Ambani security scare case, the Maharashtra BJP has now targeted State Home Minister Anil Deshmukh by demanding his resignation. The party has started a campaign highlighting his 'failure' to take action in several major crimes in the state.

The BJP on Tuesday started hashtag "#ResignAnilDeshmukh" on Twitter saying politics in Maharashtra has been criminalised. Citing various crime cases, the party asked Mr Deshmukh what action he has taken in these cases so far.

The saffron party has mentioned several cases like a woman being burnt alive at Hinghghat in Wardha district, the lynching of Sadhus at Palghar, the Pooja Chavan death case in which Shiv Sena minister Sanjay Rathod resigned, the controversial speech of activist Sharjeel Usmani at Pune etc to demand Mr Deshmukh's resignation.

Mr Deshmukh has found himself in the soup in the Ambani security scare case, in which an explosive-laden vehicle was found near the industrialist's residence Antilia on February 25. The vehicle belonged to auto parts dealer Mansukh Hiren, who was later found dead in a creek in Thane district on March 5. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested Mr Waze on March 13 in connection with its probe of this case.

However, Maharashtra

NIA COURT REJECTS WAZE'S PLEA ON ARREST

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 16

Controversial Mumbai police officer Sachin Waze could not get any relief from the special NIA court, as the judge dismissed his contention that being a police officer he was protected from arrest without a prior sanction.

The court, however, has partially allowed his plea seeking presence of his lawyer during interrogation but the lawyer could remain present at the distance where he can see Waze but his questioning is inaudible.

Waze's lawyer contended that as per a notification May 23, 1979 consent is required under section 45 (1) of the CrPC hence he demanded his arrest be declared illegal. One of the other reasons seeking his arrest as illegal was that he was not produced before the court within 24 hours of his arrest.

NCP chief Jayant Patil has ruled out the possibility of Mr Deshmukh's resignation. "There is no question of home minister being replaced. There is no cabinet reshuffle happening," Mr Patil said. Action would be taken against those found guilty in the case of the recovery of SUV as well as the mysterious death of Thane businessman Mansukh Hiran, he added.

SC to hear plea by Zakia on April 13

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

The Supreme Court on Tuesday fixed April 13 to hear a plea by Zakia Ehsan Jafri challenging the clean chit to the then Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi and others by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) for their alleged inaction in 2002 post-Godhra riots including attack on Gulberg society.

Zakia Ehsan Jafri — widow of Congress leader and former member of parliament Ehsan Jafri — has challenged October 5, 2017 order of Gujarat High Court upholding the magistrate court order rejecting Jafri's protest petition challenging the SIT report giving clean chit to top political leaders and state functionaries for the alleged larger conspiracy.

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The hearing on Zakia Jafri's petition that is pending before the top court since 2018 was adjourned to April 13

after senior counsel Kapil Sibal told the court to hear the matter sometime in April since several senior lawyers are busy in the Maratha reservation case being heard by a 5-judge Constitution Bench.

The SIT had filed the closure report on February 8, 2012, giving a clean chit to Modi and 63 others, including senior government officials, saying there was "no prosecutable evidence" against them.

The SIT in earlier hearings while raising preliminary objection to Zakia Jafri plea had opposed it saying "it is an issue of facts and for how long it can go on."

The court has also been told in the earlier hearings that there were concurrent findings of the magistrate court and the High Court as well rejecting Zakia Jafri's plea.

The SIT was set up by the top court, and it had come to the conclusion that no case was made out and the same was accepted by the magistrate and reiterated by the High Court.

The petition by Zakia Jafri has said that the High Court refused to interfere with the magistrate court order "despite large amount of documentation and contemporaneous evidence that existed which made out a triable case against all the accused."

FIGHTING | CORONA

India records 24,492 fresh cases of Coronavirus in last one day

Covid cases up, night curfew returns in MP, Guj

DC CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, MAR 16

Madhya Pradesh government announced to impose night curfew in Bhopal and Indore from Wednesday in the wake of sudden spurt in coronavirus cases in the state. The state government has also ordered closure of shops after 10 pm in 8 other cities in the state.

Chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan ordered the measures after reviewing the pandemic situation in the state at a high level

official meeting here on Tuesday. However, the duration of night curfew was yet to be decided.

The state government ordered closure of shops after 10 pm in the cities of Jabalpur, Gwalior, Ujjain, Ratlam, Chhindwara, Burhanpur, Betul and Khargone. The government has also barred celebration of Holi in public, but allowed the revelers to observe the festival individually. Madhya Pradesh has reported 797 fresh coronavirus positive cases in the last 24 hours taking

the tally of cases to 2,69,391. The death toll has reached 3,890 in the state.

Similarly, to contain the surge in Covid-19 cases, the Gujarat government on Tuesday decided to increase the night curfew timings in four major cities of the state by two hours. The curfew will now remain in force in Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara and Rajkot from 10 pm to 6 am, an official statement said. The curfew timings earlier were from 12 am to 6 am.

The decision was taken

on Tuesday in the core committee meeting of the coronavirus task-force headed by Chief Minister Vijay Rupani.

"The state government has decided to impose curfew from 10 pm to 6 am in view of the increasing cases of coronavirus," the government said in the statement. The restrictions will be in place till March 31, it added.

The Gujarat Cricket Association (GCA) on Monday said the next three T20 matches between India and

England will be played without any spectators at the Narendra Modi Stadium here in view of rising cases of coronavirus.

On Monday, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation also asked eateries, restaurants and malls in eight wards of the city to close down at 10 pm. Gujarat on Monday reported 890 new cases of Covid-19, taking its tally to 2,79,097. Last month, the state was reporting around 200 cases daily. Surat has been reporting

the highest number of Covid-19 cases in the state, followed by Ahmedabad, Vadodara and Rajkot, as per official data.

Meanwhile, India has recorded 24,492 fresh cases of the coronavirus in the last one day out of which 15,051 cases are from Maharashtra while 1,818 from Punjab and 1,054 from Kerala. Cases have also started rising in Delhi and Gujarat. The number of active cases in the country has increased to more than 2.23 lakh while 131 deaths were reported.



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TRUE STORY OF THE WORLD'S BIGGEST I.T. SCAM

WORLD WIDE
MARCH
19th
RELEASE



SHORT TAKES

PHILIP LEAVES HOSPITAL AFTER TREATMENT

London, March 16: Britain Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, on Tuesday left King Edward VII's Hospital in central London after a month since he had been admitted there and went on to have a "successful heart procedure".

The 99-year-old husband of Queen Elizabeth II was pictured being driven out in a black BMW after a 28-night stay, his longest spell in hospital. He was first admitted to the King Edward VII Hospital on Feb. 16 before moving to a National Health Service (NHS) specialist St Bartholomew's Hospital two weeks later, where he underwent a procedure for a pre-existing heart condition.

3 DIE WHEN CAR HITS 9 PEOPLE IN SAN DIEGO

San Diego, March 16: A driver plowed through a crowd on a sidewalk in downtown San Diego on Monday morning, killing three people and injuring six others, including two who are hospitalised in critical condition, police said.

The driver — whom authorities identified only as a 71-year-old man — appeared to be driving while impaired when his car suddenly veered off the street shortly after 9 a.m. near a community college and went up onto the sidewalk briefly before returning to the road, said San Diego Police Chief David Nisleit.

Nisleit said the driver identified himself to police and he was arrested. Earlier police had stated that he had tried to flee. Multiple ambulances responded to the scene near City College.

UGANDA OPPN LEADER ARRESTED

Kampala, March 16: Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine was arrested on Monday as he took part in a protest in the capital, according to a post on his Twitter page. The 39-year-old popstar-turned-presidential contender last week had called on Ugandans to "rise up peacefully and unarmed" against President Yoweri Museveni who won a sixth term in office following disputed elections in January.

"Bobi Wine arrested as he led MPs and other leaders in a peaceful protest against the abduction, torture and murder of his supporters," said the post. Around 15 MPs and activists from Wine's National Unity Platform political party took part in the protest which was quickly halted by police officers and soldiers.

DUTCH PM'S ELECTION LEAD SHRINKS

Amsterdam, March 16: The lead of Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte's conservative party in polls continued to shrink Tuesday, according to a new survey published ahead of the second day of voting in coronavirus-affected national elections.

Rutte's People's Party for Freedom and Democracy still retains a lead of some 10 percentage points over its nearest rival, the anti-immigration Party for Freedom led by anti-Islam firebrand Geert Wilders. According to the respected Peilingwijzer survey, Rutte's party is in line to win between 34 and 38 seats in the 150-seat lower house of parliament.

On the other hand, Wilders' party is forecast to win about 17-21 seats.

INDIA GIVES TRAINING AIDS TO LANKAN NAVY

Colombo, March 16: India's envoy in Sri Lanka has underlined the importance of close cooperation between the navies of the two countries as an essential part of the overall bilateral engagement, as he handed over training aids worth 22 million LKR (about ₹81,00,000) to the island nation's Navy for capacity building. High Commissioner Gopal Baglay, during a visit to the Northern and Eastern Provinces, formally handed over the training aids to the Commander Eastern Naval Area of the Sri Lanka Navy at a ceremony held on Sunday at the prestigious Naval and Maritime Academy (NMA) Trincomalee. Baglay reiterated the importance of close cooperation between the two navies.

Tokyo talks: US, Japan to share China worry

Tokyo, March 16: Japan and the United States joined forces Tuesday to criticise China's "coercion and aggression" in Asia as senior ministers from both countries held their first in-person talks since President Joe Biden took office in January.

Aside from the sharp rhetoric aimed at Beijing, the meeting in Tokyo and a planned stop next in Seoul are as much an effort by the Biden administration to reassure worried allies in Asia after four years of occasionally confrontational dealings with the Trump administration. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, after holding the so-called "two plus two" security talks with Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and their Japanese counterparts — Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi — said democracy and human rights in the region are being challenged and the United States will push with its partners for a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Blinken said the Biden administration is committed to work with US allies and those in the region as they face challenges from China and its ally North Korea, which is pursuing an illicit nuclear weapons programme. "We will push back if necessary, when China uses

N. KOREAN LEADER'S SISTER WARNS U.S.

Seoul, March 16: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's influential sister warned the United States against actions that could make it "lose sleep", state media reported Tuesday, as top Biden administration officials began a visit to key allies Tokyo and Seoul. Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Japan on Monday on their first overseas trip, aimed at rallying military alliances as a bulwark against China and cementing a united front against the nuclear-armed North.

— AFP

coercion or aggression to get its way," he said. In a joint statement released after the talks, the ministers shared strong worry over Beijing's human rights violations in Xinjiang, "unlawful maritime claims and activities in the South China Sea" and "unilateral action that seeks to change the status quo" over the Japan-controlled East China Sea islands that China also claims.

— AP

Myanmarese flee martial law area

Yangon, March 16: Residents of a protest flash-point district in Myanmar's biggest city fled on flatbed trucks and tuk-tuks Tuesday after security forces escalated the use of lethal force against anti-coup protesters, despite international appeals for restraint.

Much of the country has been in uproar since the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi last month, with hundreds of thousands taking to the streets to demand a return to democracy.

Police and soldiers have used tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds to subdue crowds in nearly daily crackdowns, along with blanket nightly internet shutdowns to stop protesters from mobilising. Monday saw fresh violence by security forces in several cities, leaving at least 20 dead, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), a local monitoring group that has been tracking arrests and fatalities.

It followed the deadliest day so far in the six weeks since the army deposed Suu Kyi's government, with the AAPP reporting 74 killed on Sunday after the violent suppression of anti-coup unrest across Myanmar.

Many of those deaths came from the impoverished Hlaing Tharyar township in Yangon, a garment-producing area in the commercial hub with mostly Chinese-owned factories — several of which were razed on Sunday. The junta reacted by imposing martial law over the area and five

other townships that are home to around two million people — more than a quarter of the sprawling city's population.

Anyone arrested there faces trial by military tribunal, with sentences ranging from three years' hard labour to execution.

Myanmar law expert Melissa Crouch said the martial law declaration effectively gave complete control to military commanders and sidelined civilian administrators and judges.

"The use of martial law is extremely troubling and... represents a significant decline in the situation in Myanmar," the University of New South Wales academic said.

The AAPP said in a statement that even civilians who were not participating in anti-coup protests had died in cross-fire on Monday.

By Tuesday morning, local media outlet *The Irrawaddy* published photos of residents fleeing the township, crowding onto flatbed trucks stuck in columns of snaking traffic.

Some carried their pets on the back of motorbikes, while others crammed their belongings in vinyl bags on tuk-tuks.

"We can see the people on the roads for as far as one's eye can see," reported local outlet *Democratic Voice of Burma*.

A resident confirmed the mass exodus to AFP, saying that people wanted to leave at dawn and protesters removed makeshift barricades — erected to slow security forces down — to let them out.

— AFP

Sweden is latest country to stop using AstraZeneca vax

Country takes step amid reports of dangerous blood clots in some recipients

Berlin, March 16: Sweden on Tuesday became the latest European country to pause use of the AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine amid reports of dangerous blood clots in some recipients. The company and international regulators continue to say the vaccine is safe, however, and many countries elsewhere in the world are forging ahead with their vaccination campaigns.

The move by the Swedish Public Health Agency is pending an investigation by the European Medicines Agency. "The decision is a precautionary measure," Swedish chief epidemiologist Anders Tegnell said in a statement.

Germany, France, Italy and Spain were among countries that suspended use of the vaccine on Monday. AstraZeneca's formula is one of three vaccines in use on the European continent. But the escalating concern is another setback for the European Union's vaccination drive, which has been plagued by shortages and other hurdles and is lagging well behind the campaigns in Britain and the US.

The EU's drug regulatory agency will review experts' findings on the AstraZeneca shot and decide whether action needs to be taken. Much of Asia has shrugged off concerns about the AstraZeneca jab, with Thailand's prime minister receiving a shot at the start of the country's use of the vaccine on Tuesday. "There are people who have concerns," Prayuth Chan-ocha said after his vaccination. "But we must believe doctors, believe in our medical professionals."

Thailand initially was the first country outside Europe to temporarily suspend using the AstraZeneca vaccine. But Thailand's health authorities later decided to go ahead with it, with Prayuth and members of his Cabinet receiving the first shots. Indonesia suspended use of the vaccine

— AP



Workers clean the exterior of Bang Khae Market, after more than a hundred residents in the district tested positive for the Covid-19, in Bangkok on Tuesday.

— AFP

WHO: Vaccine rollout unaffected by concerns

Geneva, March 16: The UN health agency said its global rollout of Coronavirus vaccines remains unaffected even as a growing number of countries, especially in Europe, suspended use of AstraZeneca's vaccine on Monday amid concerns about blood clots in some people who received it.

The World Health Organisation says the AstraZeneca vaccines for its COVAX programme, which is shipping vaccines mostly to low- and middle-income countries, are being produced in India and South Korea — and the suspensions have been ordered over batches made in Europe. "We understand these are precautionary measures," WHO assistant director-general Mariangela Simao said.

"I would like to say this to countries from other regions that are not Europe: That the vaccines (at issue) so far are from European manufacturing not vaccines that are provided through the COVAX facility," Germany, France, Italy and Spain joined the growing list of mostly European countries — starting with Denmark last week — that temporarily halted use of the AstraZeneca vaccine in recent days to investigate cases of blood clots that occurred after vaccination.

Others include Thailand and Congo. "This does not necessarily mean these events are linked to vaccination," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a news conference.

— AP

HAALAND, 1ST NATIVE, OKAYED AS INTERIOR SECY

Washington, March 16: The Senate has confirmed New Mexico Rep. Deb Haaland as interior secretary, making her the first Native American to lead a Cabinet department and the first to lead the federal agency that has wielded influence over the nation's tribes for nearly two centuries. Haaland was confirmed by a 51-40 vote on Monday, the narrowest margin yet for a Cabinet nomination by President Joe Biden.

Four Republicans voted yes: Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan of Alaska, Susan Collins of Maine and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina. Democrats and tribal groups hailed Haaland's confirmation as historic, saying her selection means that Indigenous people — who lived in North America before the United States was created — will for the first time see a Native American lead the powerful department.

— AP

Will block Twitter in a month, threatens Russia

Moscow, March 16: Russian authorities said Tuesday they would block Twitter in a month if it doesn't take steps to remove banned content, a move that escalates the Russian government's drawn-out standoff with social media platforms that have played a major role in amplifying dissent in Russia.

Russia's state communications watchdog, Roskomnadzor, last week announced it was slowing down the speed of uploading photos and videos to Twitter over its alleged failure to remove content encouraging suicide among children and information about drugs and child pornography. The agency said Twitter has failed to remove more than 3,000 posts with banned content, including more than 2,500 posts encouraging suicide among minors.

The platform responded by emphasizing its policy of zero tolerance for child sexual exploitation, promotion of suicide and

drug sales.

On Tuesday, deputy chief of Roskomnadzor Vadim Subbotin argued that Twitter still wasn't complying with the demands of the Russian authorities. "Twitter doesn't react to our requests appropriately, and if things go on like this, then in a month it will be blocked, on an out-of-court basis," Subbotin told the Interfax news agency, adding that Roskomnadzor at this point "is not registering specific steps by Twitter to remove prohibited content."

Twitter did not respond immediately to an email request for comment. Authorities have criticized social media platforms that have been used to bring tens of thousands of people into the streets across Russia this year to demand the release of opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

The wave of demonstrations was the largest in years and posed a major challenge to the Kremlin. The authorities alleged social media platforms fa-

iled to remove calls for children to join the protests.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has urged police to act more to monitor social platforms and to track down those who "draw the children into illegal and unsanctioned street actions." The government's efforts to tighten control of the internet and social media date back to 2012, when a law allowing authorities to blacklist and block certain online content was adopted. Since then, a growing number of restrictions targeting messaging apps, websites and social media platforms have been introduced.

In 2014, authorities adopted a law requiring online services to store the personal data of Russian users on servers in Russia and have since tried to make Facebook and Twitter comply with it. Both companies have been fined, first small amounts of around \$50 and last year the equivalent of \$63,000 each.

— AP



Bidya Devi Bhandari

3 NEPAL EX-PMs DON'T ATTEND ALL-PARTY MEET

Kathmandu, March 16: Nepal's three former prime ministers on Tuesday boycotted an all-party meeting called by President Bidya Devi Bhandari to discuss contemporary issues amid the political crisis that has gripped the country.

Former premiers Baburam Bhattarai, Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhala Nath Khanal skipped the meeting called by President Bhandari at Shital Niwas, questioning her role in the row of the erstwhile Nepal Communist Party (NCP), *My Republica* newspaper reported. While both Khanal and Nepal belong to the rival faction of the ruling Communist Party of Nepal (UML), Bhattarai heads the federal council of the Janata Samajbadi Party.

They have publicly alleged that President Bhandari had failed to act as a custodian of the Constitution, supporting even unconstitutional moves taken by Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli who had dissolved the House of Representatives in December. PM Oli, CPN (Maoist Centre) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda, Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba, Chairman of Janata Samajbadi Party Mahanta Thakur, and former Chairman of Council of Minister Khil Raj Regmi attended.

— PTI

SIGNIFICANT | FIND

Most of the text is in ancient Greek, a widely used language at the time

Israel unearths 2K-yr-old biblical scroll fragments

Jerusalem, March 16: Israel on Tuesday unveiled fragments of a biblical scroll dating back some 2,000 years, in what experts described as the most significant such find since the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The artifacts were unearthed during excavations by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) in the Judean desert, which spans parts of southern Israel and the occupied West Bank. In a site known as the "Cave of Horrors," archaeologists found fragments of a scroll with a Greek translation of the Hebrew bible, the first such find since the early

1960s. "For the first time in approximately 60 years, archaeological excavations have uncovered fragments of a biblical scroll," the IAA said.

Oren Ableman, an IAA curator, said parts of the same scroll from the Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets were first discovered in the Cave of Horrors by Bedouins in the 1950s.

The Cave of Horrors took its name from the numerous skeletons found inside it and the treacherous terrain nearby.

Most of the text is in ancient Greek, a widely used language at the time, but the word Lord appears

● **OREN ABLEMAN**, an IAA curator, said parts of the same scroll from the Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets were first discovered in the Cave of Horrors by Bedouins in the 1950s.

in ancient Hebrew script.

Oren said that among the most striking features of the new fragments is a deviation with all other known versions of the Old Testament: in one passage, the word "gates" is replaced by the word "streets."

The significance of that deviation is "what we are

trying to discover now," he said. Yosef Garfinkel, head of the Institute of Archaeology at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, described the find as "exciting," telling it could enrich the "study of the history of the Greek translation of the bible."

The items were discovered in a cave believed to have been used by Jews rebelling against the Romans during the failed second-century Bar Kochba revolt.

The IAA compared the find to the extraordinary discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, some 900 manuscripts found between 1947

and 1956 in the Qumran caves above the Dead Sea in the West Bank.

They are some of the earliest biblical texts ever found. The Judea desert excavation also unearthed a cache of rare coins, a six-millennia-old skeleton of a child and a basket described by the IAA as "likely the oldest in the world", which been carbon-dated to 10,500 years old. "I shook for days," after the basket was found, IAA archaeologist Chaim Cohen said.

The woven basket was found remarkably intact, with a rock resting on its top — an indication that

its users wanted to keep the contents safe and intended to come back for them, Cohen said.

Organic material like the wood used for the basket typically decays, but this unprecedented discovery was preserved by the Judean desert's dry climate and protective conditions in the cave, he said.

Cohen added that very little is known about the society that lived in the area at the time.

"From this ancient period, we have nothing: We can tell, and I want to be very cautious, that they are likely nomads or half-nomads," he said.

— AP

SHORT TAKES

Mann books slot for Oly qualifiers

New Delhi: National champion Sandeep Singh Mann booked the 74kg slot in the Indian wrestling team for the upcoming Asian Olympic Qualifiers, edging out comeback-man Narsingh Pancham Yadav and seasoned Amit Dhankar in the trials, held here on Tuesday. The 74kg being the most competitive category, bouts were close despite absence of two-time Olympic medalist Sushil Kumar, who opted to skip trials, saying he was not prepared. Sandeep beat Dhankar 2-1 in the final bout, earning the right to be on the flight to Almaty, Kazakhstan where the Olympic Qualifiers will be held from April 9-11. Sandeep had got the better of Narsingh Yadav 4-3 in the semi-finals. Amit had made the final after winning his semifinal against Jitender Kinha on criteria. He scored the last point in the 3-3 tie to emerge winner. — PTI

Diya retains youth national TT crown

Indore: Defending champion Diya Chitale retained the youth girls title with a hard-fought win while Swastika Ghosh came from behind to claim her maiden junior girls crown at the UTT 82nd Junior and Youth National Table Tennis Championships here on Tuesday. Diya's 4-3 win was full of a character-assessment lesson for any youngster watching the match, as the Maharashtra paddler, down 2-3 and 3-5 in the sixth game, first built up confidence and then the points to outsmart Karnataka's Yashaswini Ghorphade. Meanwhile, Swastika, also from Maharashtra, claimed the junior girls title with a 4-2 victory over Haryana's Suhana Saini in the final. Suhana had everything going for her until the second game. She took the vital 2-0 lead, winning the second game on extended points. — PTI

Ankita, Sania to lead challenge

New Delhi: Country's best singles player Ankita Raina and veteran Sania Mirza will lead India in the next month's Billie Jean King Cup World Group Play-offs away tie against formidable Latvia as the AITA named a five-member team on Tuesday for the tournament. The team also have Karman Kaur Thandi, Zeel Desai and Rutuja Bhosale. The All India Tennis Association (AITA) selection committee picked the team after a virtual meeting on Tuesday. Riya Bhatia, who was a playing member last year, will be the reserve player of the team, which will be captained by Vishal Uppal. Unlike the Davis Cup, where doubles is played as third match after the two singles and before the two reverse singles, in the Billie Jean King Cup format, doubles is played as the last match. — PTI

LeBron leads LA Lakers rout

Los Angeles: LeBron James bagged his fourth triple-double of the season as the Los Angeles Lakers thrashed the Golden State Warriors 128-97 on Monday. James finished with 22 points, 10 rebounds and 11 assists as the Lakers dominated almost from start to finish for an impressive win on the road. Stephen Curry led the Golden State scoring with 27 points but the much hoped-for duel with All-Star game team-mate James never materialised as the Dubs struggled to contain the Lakers' offense. Montrezl Harrell had 27 points off the bench to lead the Lakers scoring while Kyle Kuzma finished with 17 points. — AFP

Live on TV

BADMINTON

All England Open: Round of 32 matches from 2.30 pm on Star Sports 2 HD, Star Sports 3

FOOTBALL

Italian League: Juventus vs Napoli from 11.15 pm on Sony Six, HD

Champions League: Chelsea vs Atletico Madrid from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2, Bayern Munich vs Lazio from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1

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BUTTLER HOUSE

Jos quickfire floors India in third encounter

Ahmedabad, March 16: Virat Kohli's brilliance wasn't good enough to paper over an otherwise inept Indian batting performance as England humbled the hosts by eight wickets in the third T20 International to take a 2-1 lead in the five-match series, here on Tuesday. Eoin Morgan unleashed his fast bowlers Mark Wood (3/31) and Chris Jordan (2/35) to restrict the hosts for 156 for six, which the visitors surpassed easily in 18.2 overs, riding on Jos Buttler's unbeaten 83 off 52 balls.

Skipper Kohli had mistakenly said at the toss that his team led 2-1 but Morgan, in his 100th T20 International appearance, made sure that opposite happened. Buttler showed his mastery in white ball format after Kohli single-handedly carried the team to a reasonable score with an unbeaten 77 off 46 balls.

Buttler in the Powerplay pounced on Shardul Thakur and Yuzvendra Chahal in successive overs and England were never in danger of falling behind the run-rate after that.

He played the pacers and spinners with comforting ease, playing reverse slog sweeps interspersed between the lofted straight hits into the empty stands. In all, Buttler hit five fours and four sixes.

More than the Buttler's blade, the difference between two sides was the sheer pace generated by England pacers after Morgan won another good toss.

Mark Wood rocked the Indian top order during the Powerplay overs and even Kohli's magnificence wasn't good enough to save the night for the 'Men In Blue'.



England's Jos Buttler (right) congratulated by batting partner Dawid Malan after scoring half century against India in the third T20 at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Tuesday. England won by 8 wickets. — AP

SCORECARD

India: Rohit Sharma c Jofra Archer b Mark Wood 15, K.L. Rahul b Mark Wood 0, Ishan Kishan c Jos Buttler b Chris Jordan 4, Virat Kohli (not out) 77, Rishabh Pant run out (Jos Buttler/Sam Curran) 25, Shreyas Iyer c Malan b Mark Wood 9, Hardik Pandya c Jofra Archer b Chris Jordan 17. Extras (b-1, lb-5, w-3) 9. **Total (for 6 wks, in 20 overs) 156.** **FoW:** 7-1, 20-2, 24-3, 64-4, 86-5, 156-6.

Bowler: Adil Rashid 4-0-26-0, Jofra Archer 4-0-32-0, Mark Wood 4-0-31-3, Chris Jordan 4-0-35-2, Ben Stokes 2-0-12-0, Sam Curran 2-0-14-0.

England: Jason Roy c Sharma b Chahal 9, Jos Buttler (not out) 83, Dawid Malan st Pant b Washington Sundar 18, Jonny Bairstow (not out) 40. Extras (b-4, lb-2, w-2) 8. **Total (for 2 wks, in 18.2 over) 158.** **FoW:** 1-23, 2-81.

Bowling: Bhuvneshwar Kumar 4-0-27-0, Shardul Thakur 3-2-0-36-0, Yuzvendra Chahal 4-0-41-1, Hardik Pandya 3-0-22-0, Washington Sundar 4-0-26-1.

India women look to end series on a winning note

Lucknow, March 16: The series already out of their grasp, the Indian women cricketers, who are struggling to put together a cohesive team show, will have pride at stake when they clash with South Africa women in the fifth and final ODI, here on Wednesday.

Barring the convincing nine-wicket win in the second match, the Indian women have barely fired in unison while the South Africans, who have already clinched the series 3-1, have excelled as a team.

To be fair to the home side players, they were a bit rusty as they are playing their first international series after more than a year due to

● **Barring the convincing nine-wicket win in the second match, the Indian women have barely fired in unison while the South Africans, who have already clinched the series 3-1, have excelled as a team.**

the Covid-19 pandemic while South Africa recently beat Pakistan 3-0 at home.

The Indian team also missed the flair of young Shafali Verma at the top of the order and the experience of Shikha Pandey in bowling department. Indian spin-

ners, save Rajeshwari Gayakwad (5 wickets from 4 matches), were a big let down on the slow tracks and that has played a big part in India's series loss when the South Africans chased down 249 and 267 in the third and fourth matches.

Senior leg-spinner Poonam Yadav could not get a single batter out in the four matches she has played so far. Veteran pacer Jhulan Goswami continued to be the pick of Indian bowlers as she topped the bowling charts with eight wickets from the three matches she has played but she did not get much support from her colleagues except for spinner Gayakwad. — PTI

UAE players get 8-yr ban for corruption

Dubai, March 16: The ICC on Tuesday slapped eight-year bans on United Arab Emirates (UAE) cricketers Mohammad Naveed and Shaiman Anwar Butt for their attempted role in trying to fix matches in the T20 World Cup qualifier in 2019.

The bans are backdated to October 16, 2019, when they were provisionally suspended for attempting to corrupt matches and found guilty of breaching global body's Anti-Corruption Code.

The 33-year-old former captain and right arm pacer Naveed has played 39 ODIs and 31 T20 Internationals for his country, while 42-year-old middle-order batsman Butt has played 40 ODIs and 32 games in the shortest format.

"Mohammad Naveed and

Shaiman Anwar represented their adopted country, the UAE at the highest level in cricket," Alex Marshall, ICC General Manager — Integrity Unit, said in an ICC release.

"Naveed was the captain and leading wicket taker. Anwar was the opening bat. Both had long international careers and were well versed in the threat from match fixers.

"That they both chose to engage with this corrupt activity was a cynical betrayal of their positions, their teammates, and all supporters of UAE cricket."

Naveed was also found guilty of breaching the following two counts of the Emirates Cricket Board Anti-Corruption Code for Participants of the T10 League 2019:

— PTI

ALL ENGLAND | CHAMPIONSHIPS

Best chance for Sindhu to excel

Birmingham, March 16: World champion P.V. Sindhu will look to shrug off her demoralising Swiss Open final defeat and take advantage of a depleted field when she spearheads India's challenge at the prestigious All England Open Badminton Championships, beginning here on Wednesday.

Sindhu looked a pale shadow of herself in her defeat against Carolina Marin, going down without much fight as she struggled to contain errors.

Carolina, the three-time world champion from Spain, though has pulled out of the prestigious tournament due to an injury, taking some shine off of the event.

Also missing in action will be the Chinese, Koreans and Chinese Taipei shuttlers, who decided not to compete in the Super 1000 event as it is not part of the Tokyo Olympic qualification period.

It affects the quality of the competition but also provides the 19-member Indian contingent an opportunity to go deep in the draw and recapture the trophy which has been won by just two Indians so far — the legendary Prakash Padukone (1980) and P. Gopichand (2001).

While former world number one Saina Nehwal had

● **Carolina Marin, the three-time world champion from Spain, though has pulled out of the prestigious tournament due to an injury, taking some shine off of the event. Also missing in action will be the Chinese, Koreans and Chinese Taipei shuttlers.**

a runner-up finish in 2015, Sindhu's best finish was a semifinal in 2018 but none of the other Indian shuttlers have been able to go deep in the tournament till now.

Sindhu will again be one of the top contenders but Saina is nowhere near her best with just two quarter-final finishes to show in the last two years.

Among other Indians, former No. 1 Kidambi Srikanth and young men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, currently ranked 10 in the world, had a good run in Swiss Open and will look to put their best foot forward.

Fifth seed Sindhu will kick off her campaign with a clash against Malaysia's Soniia Cheah. — PTI

DHANALAKSHMI PIPS DUTEE FOR 100M GOLD, HIMA DISQUALIFIED

Patiala, March 16: National record holder Dutee Chand was beaten to second place by S. Dhanalakshmi, while Hima Das was disqualified after a false start in a much-anticipated women's 100m sprint final in the Federation Cup Senior National Athletics Championships here on Tuesday.

The 22-year-old Dhanalakshmi of Tamil Nadu took the gold by clocking 11.39 seconds ahead of Dutee (11.58) of Odisha to become the fastest woman of the championships on the second day of competitions at the NIS Campus.

Another Tamil Nadu runner Archana Suseendran was third in 11.76.

This was after Hima, who was running in the shorter sprint races of 100m and 200m instead of her pet event 400m, was disqualified after a false start.

The much-anticipated final did not live up to the expectations as Hima was shown the red card, while Dutee and Dhanalakshmi did not come anywhere near the Olympic qualification mark of 11.15 seconds.

Dhanalakshmi had qualified for the finals as the fastest runner with a time of 11.38 in the preliminary round on Monday and she did not make any improvement in her timing on Tuesday. The same was in case of Dutee, who had run 11.51 on Monday. — PTI



Barcelona's Lionel Messi scores against Huesca in their Spanish League match at the Camp Nou Stadium in Barcelona on Monday. — AFP

Messi levels Xavi's record in Barca win

Madrid, March 16: Lionel Messi scored a spectacular goal the same night he equalled Xavi Hernandez's appearance record for Barcelona, the Argentinian inspiring his team to a 4-1 win over Huesca on Monday.

Messi tied Xavi's 767 games in all competitions for Barca and marked yet another milestone with a brilliant brace, a curling effort in the first half flying in off the crossbar at Camp Nou before a late shot nestled in the corner.

Antoine Griezmann had earlier followed suit with another impressive shot into the top corner before Huesca pulled one back, Rafa Mir converting a doubtful penalty on the stroke of half-time.

But Messi helped Barca pull away, sending in a cross for Oscar Mingueza to head in and then scoring

his second as the Catalans moved to within four points of league leaders Atletico Madrid.

Messi's performance had all the key elements of the 33-year-old's genius. In a game that celebrated his longevity, he showed his class with perhaps his best goal of the season, his creativity with an assist and his consistency, by making it 13 consecutive campaigns that he has reached 20 La Liga goals.

Barcelona, meanwhile, continue their own excellent form, with 11 wins and a draw from their last 12 matches putting them within sight of Atletico, who they still have to play at home in May.

"You're (Messi) still breaking records," said Luis Suarez. "I think this one says a lot about you as a player and what you represent for Barca." — AFP

Yadav rues India's poor spin attack

Lucknow, March 16: Senior bowler Poonam Yadav on Tuesday admitted that a below-par show by the home spinners was a huge factor in India's ODI series defeat against South Africa and they are still figuring out how the performance can be improved on non-supportive surfaces.

The Indian women's team, known for their strong spin attack, was let down by their tweekers in the five-match series which the visitors have already clinched 3-1.

Apart from Rajeshwari Gayakwad, who snared five wickets in four matches, the other spinners have failed to leave an impact.

"We beat South Africa in South Africa and also when they came here. But our spin attack hasn't been that successful now," Yadav said.

"So, we talk about what we can work on in the practice sessions. We discuss that if the wicket isn't assisting then next what? When the wicket

RAUT BREAKS INTO TOP 20 AMONG BATTERS

Dubai, March 16: Following her brilliant performance in the ongoing one-day series against South Africa, India's Punam Raut broke into the top 20 among batters in the latest ICC women's ODI rankings, released on Tuesday.

Raut, who has held a career high ranking of 13th, jumped eight places to 18th after scores of 62 not out, 77 and 104 not out in her last three matches.

Opener Smirit Mandhana remains the top ranked Indian batter

isn't helping what changes can we make, we are focussing on that," added the leg-spinner.

However, Yadav is hopeful that India would fare better in the three-match T20I series, starting Saturday. "In T20s we will try to do better. Maybe we

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Punam Raut

at the seventh spot, followed by her skipper Mithali Raj, who is

were'n't able to implement our plans in ODIs. But we are working on it and will improve in the matches ahead."

The diminutive Yadav has been unable to pick a single wicket in the four matches she has played in five-match series so far.

"Being a senior player the role I have in the team I haven't been able to fulfil in these matches but going ahead I will try and perform as per the needs of the team. Because in T20 you can't go in for wickets, you go to contain (the batter)." — PTI