

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | SUNDAY 4 | APRIL 2021

WEATHER



Max: 34°C
Min: 27°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Panguni 22
Tithi: Saphthami
Star: Moolam
Rahukalam:
4.30 pm to 6 pm
Yamagandam:
12 noon to 1.30 pm
PRAYERS
Fajar: 4.55 am
Zohar: 12.18 pm
Asar: 3.29 pm
Maghrib: 6.20 pm
Isha: 7.32 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.21 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.03 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 00.12 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 11.48 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+89,129)	(+471)
1,24,76,468	1,64,612

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+3,446)
TN: 8,96,226

12,764

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

131,162,234

DEATHS

2,854,735

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
219

worldometers.info

Death toll in Myanmar resistance up at 550

Yangon: The civilian death toll in the crackdown by the Myanmar junta has reached 550 since the February 1 coup, a human rights group said Saturday.

Of those, 46 were children, according to Myanmar's Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. Some 2,751 people have been detained or sentenced, the group said.

Threats of lethal violence and arrests of protesters have failed to suppress daily demonstrations across Myanmar demanding the military step down and reinstate the democratically elected government.

Late Friday, armed plainclothes police took five people into custody after they spoke with a *CNN* reporter in a Yangon market, local media reported, citing witnesses. Two women reportedly shouted for help as they were being arrested. *Myanmar Now* reported, One police officer, who was carrying a gun, asked if "anyone dared to help them," a witness told the news service. — AP

COUNTER POINT



Happy to hear that our party will get 200 plus seats... but we are contesting only in 120 seats!

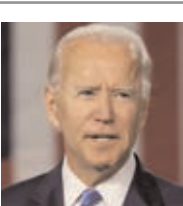
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Modi's vows are a sham: CPM leader Ramakrishnan



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Biden lifts curbs on ICC staff



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I'm obsessed with Rishabh, he is a match-winner: Ganguly



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Vol. 17 No. 8 Established 1938 | 8 PAGES | ₹4.00

Shah targets 'dynasty' as campaign sees high note

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR, D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 3

The penultimate day of electioneering for the April 6 polls saw a high pitch campaign across the state with BJP top honcho Amit Shah launching his broadside against the Congress-DMK alliance on Saturday at Teynampet in Chennai, accompanied by Khushboo Sundar and other candidates of the BJP-AIADMK alliance.

Mr Shah gave a call to the voters to reject the 'corrupt and dynastic' parties as he began his outing in Thousand Lights constituency, where BJP's Khushboo is pitted against DMK candidate Dr Ezhil Naganathan, a renowned medical practitioner.

Other candidates Saidai Duraisamy, Kandam, John Pandian and Ashok contesting in various city constituencies were also on board the van, from where Mr Shah delivered his speeches in Hindi, which were translated into Tamil.

Speaking at T Nagar, the Union home minister said development in the state can happen only if the AIADMK was elected back to power as the state need-



BJP top honcho Amit Shah campaigns for his Thousand Lights candidate Kushboo, along with other AIADMK candidates at Teynampet.

— DC

ed the support of the government at the Centre. He appealed to the people to bring in a double engine government for growth.

He said AIADMK leaders Edappadi K. Palaniswami and O. Panneerselvam had been doing a good job in bringing development to the state and that they did a good job in curbing the

spread of Coronavirus.

As Mr Shah's convoy meandered through the city roads, traffic snarls were reported in some places and many morning office-goers had a grueling experience on the hot day when the temperature was soaring through the day, touching up to 37 degrees Celsius.

Braving the heat, campaigners of all parties went about their business of catching up with voters even as all the top leaders took the road to reach out to the people. Chief Minister Palaniswami was in Omallur in Salem and DMK president M.K. Stalin came to Chennai in the evening. ■ P3

Beware of BJP's divisive politics, Didi tells people

DC CORRESPONDENT
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
KOLKATA, APRIL 3

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee continued to exchange barbs while electioneering in the state on Saturday, blaming each other for obstructing the state's progress. While Mr Modi alleged the "obstructionist mindset" of Ms Banerjee deprived West Bengal of industries and jobs, the Chief Minister asked people to be vigilant against the divisive politics of the BJP.

Mr Modi claimed the TMC supremo hurt people's self-respect by claiming they are attending BJP rallies after taking money. Referring to the Singur movement of 2006-08 that forced Tata Motors to move out its proposed



small car Nano's production unit from there, Mr Modi said the TMC used the place for political purpose and then left the people to fend for themselves.

Ms Banerjee, addressing an election rally in Raidighi in South 24 Parganas district, called upon Muslims not to "fall in the trap of a BJP-aided party from Hyderabad and its Bengal ally that are out to polarise votes." Her jibe was apparently aimed at Asaduddin Owaisi-led AIMIM and Abbas



Siddiqui's ISF. She also urged Hindus to be on the guard against the BJP's attempts to "instigate communal clashes" and called upon them to chase away outsiders sent to foment trouble in their respective localities.

Taking a dig at BJP leaders having lunch at houses of Dalits, she said, "I am a Brahmin woman. But my all-time associate is a Scheduled Caste woman who takes care of all my needs. She also cooks food for me."

PM mum on Pondy statehood: Stalin

Puducherry, April 3: DMK president M.K. Stalin on Saturday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had visited Puducherry twice to address election meetings of the NDA here but not once did he make any reference to the expectations of the people of the Union Territory regarding statehood.

"The Prime Minister has

not made any announcement on grant of statehood for Puducherry and also waiver of loans totalling ₹8,600 crore due to the Centre," Mr Stalin said, while introducing the candidates of the Congress, DMK, VCK and CPI, all in the Secular Democratic Alliance (SAD), fighting the April 6 polls.

By using the then

Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi, the NDA government at the Centre had dislodged the democratically elected government in Puducherry, he said.

The BJP is eyeing the Union Territory only to grab its natural resources under the Sagar Mala Scheme, which is a project to promote port development, he added.

Maoists kill 5 jawans in Bastar encounter

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY JDC
RAIPUR, APRIL 3

Five jawans were killed and 12 others injured when Maoists ambushed a search party of security personnel in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar district of Sukma on Saturday, police officers said.

The body of a woman Maoist was also recovered from the encounter spot, they said.

The encounter took place near Jonagunda village sit-

Two joint search parties were mobilised following intelligence inputs on presence of Maoists' battalion number commander Hidma

uated along the Sukma-Bijapur border when a joint team of security forces were out on a counterinsurgency operation, deputy inspector-general (DIG) (naxal operation) O.P. Pal said.

According to Mr Pal, joint search parties comprising

personnel of Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA), Bastaria Battalion of CRPF comprising exclusively of youths of Bastar, district reserve group (DRG) and special task force (STF) of Chhattisgarh police were out on anti-Naxal operation since Friday night following specific intelligence input on gathering of Maoist cadres in large numbers in the area. Drones spotted the Maoists' movement, sources said.

A senior police officer

posted in Bastar told this newspaper that two joint search parties were mobilised following intelligence inputs on presence of Maoists' battalion number one commander Hidma along with his militiamen in Terram area.

"Maoists laid ambush for one of the two search parties. A fierce gun battle ensued between them, leading to killing of a jawan of CoBRA and two security personnel each of DRG and Bastaria Battalion and injuries to 2 others.

COVID-19 SPIKE

State plans more curbs to bring down positivity rate

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 3

The state government is closely monitoring the spike of Covid-19 cases on a daily basis and is contemplating introducing more restrictions in line with the central guidelines to control the spread of the virus.

Chief secretary Rajeev Ranjan, who attended a review meeting chaired by Union cabinet secretary Rajiv Gauba on Friday, said in a release that 11 states which had reported a surge in new Covid-19 infections have been issued a new set of guidelines with a view to bringing down the positivity rate in states which had reported over 5 per cent.

It was decided to adopt 'increased and aggressive testing' in places which report higher infections though the positivity rate in TN has been below 5 per cent. Tamil Nadu, since March 5, has been witnessing a rise in fresh coronavirus cases and on April 2, the state had recorded 3,290 new infections, pushing the tally to 8,92,780 and deaths to 12,750.

Steps are being taken to identify those people who

No let up: India adds 89,128 new infections

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 4

India on Saturday recorded 89,129 new Covid-19 cases in a day, the highest daily rise in around six-and-half months, taking the nationwide tally of infections to over 1.23 crore, according to the Union health ministry data on Saturday. The death toll increased to 1,64,110 with 714 more fatalities in a day, also the highest since October 21.

The jump in cases reported on Saturday was the highest since September 20 last year when 92,605 new infections were recorded in a span of 24 hours.

Corresponding to the rapid surge in cases, the number of active cases too has registered a steady

increase for the 24th day in a row with the tally reaching 6,58,909, which is 5.32 per cent of the total infections. The recovery rate has further dropped to 93.36 per cent, the data stated.

The active caseload was the lowest at 1,35,926 on February 12 and comprised 1.25 per cent of the total infections.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,15,69,241, while the case fatality rate has dropped to 1.32 per cent, the health ministry data stated.

India's Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16 last year. It went past 60 lakh on September 28.

complexes reporting more than three cases were declared as 'micro containment zones', he said till April 2 there were 846 such zones in the state.

were in contact with primary contacts and treat them in isolation if they had contracted the contagion, he said.

Noting that residential

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IN BRIEF

Liquor shops witness heavy crowd as they would close for polls

From P1

He went around the constituencies of Sholinganur, Vellachery, Maduravoyal, Virungambakkam and Thousand Lights in his campaign van and canvassed votes for the candidates of his party and alliance parties. DMK Youth wing secretary Udhayanidhi Stalin, too, went around Chennai constituencies, including his own Chepauk-Tiruvellikeni. He addressed crowds at Madhavaram, Tiruvottiyur, Royapuram, Harbour, Egmore, Villivakkam, Ambattur and Anna Nagar.

In Royapuram, M.K. Tamilarasu, younger brother of Stalin, was also spotted going around the constituency seeking support for the DMK candidate.

Former City Police Commissioner and AIADMK candidate in Mylapore constituency, R. Natraj, was seen climbing up and down apartment blocks seeking votes from the residents living there.

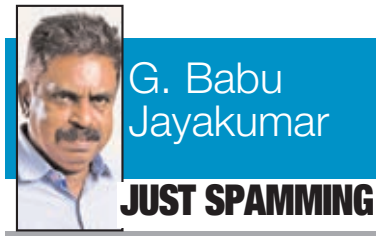
Meanwhile, many liquor shops witnessed a heavy crowd of customers as the shops would also close with the campaign on Sunday evening. Since the shops would not open till elections were over on April 6 evening, tipplers rush in to stock their requirements. DMK MP Kanimozhi was admitted to the Apollo Hospitals after she tested positive for Coronavirus.

Liver transplant done under microscope

Chennai, April 3: A liver transplant surgery performed under an operating microscope marked a significant development in the field of transplant surgery. The surgery, which can reduce post-surgical complications and ensures better outcomes for patients, was done at SIMS Hospitals (SRM Institutes for Medical Science)Vadapalani.

“Conventionally, liver transplants are done using magnifying glasses (surgical loupes) to enhance visualisation of tissues and blood vessels. We did this transplant under an operating microscope, which is a first of its kind in Tamil Nadu. Surgical microscopes are generally used for brain and microvascular surgeries in India and only very few centres in the country perform liver transplant surgeries like this,” said Dr. S. Vivekanandan, lead surgeon, liver transplant, SIMS. “The advantages of microsurgery technique over the conventional surgical methods are unquestionable and include the cleaner and smaller incisions, lesser haemorrhage, minimal tissue handling and a closer wound approximation. The microsurgical methods have shown superior results against procedures carried out conventionally, minimising the overall risk and post surgical complications and stress for the patients,” he added.

It's an award for every Rajini fan



G. Babu Jayakumar

JUST SPAMMING

Rarely has a prestigious film honour smacked of politics as much the 2019 Dadasaheb Phalke award for actor Rajinikanth. Before some of you take umbrage and come down on me like a ton of bricks, let me explain. First, it was not just me, someone living in Chennai, who was cynical when the announcement was made by Union Information Minister Prakash Javadekar at New Delhi. The first question shot at the press conference was if the award had anything to do with elections. Of course Javadekar was honest enough to immediately say no and I believed him. Then when the newspapers came out the next day with the news, cartoonists, instead of regaling us with funny things as they were expected to do, brought back the same mindboggling question to the mind.

“How about conferring this award on him at a mega election rally?” So went the legend in one front page pocket cartoon, stirring the doubt that was put to rest by Javadekar the previous day. “This is bad politics. Why not for Amma?” That was asked by some rural folks at a tea shop in another cartoon. Then the next day came the editorials that mentioned about a ‘wrong timing’ for the award, making me realise that that I am not alone in thinking that there is politics behind the award.

The surmise is that the BJP feels that it can win over the hearts and votes of the multitude of Rajinikanth fans by announcing the award just as the State was gearing up to go to polls.

Currency notes fly during final hours of campaigning

G BABU JAYAKUMAR & D.SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, APRIL 3

As countdown for the close of campaign for the April 6 elections began, party workers went into an overdrive trying to win over the voters in their terrains not just with poll promises but allegedly also with hard cash since Friday night.

Apart from a few persons who were caught and handed over to the election flying squad, there were many workers who went about handing over currency notes to prospective voters with even rivals turning a blind eye as just a few hours were left for the campaign to end at 7 pm on Sunday.

Frequent power cuts in some localities were also attributed to money distribution with a Congress advocate, C Kanagaraj, even writing to the Chief Electoral Officer, alleging that power

was being snapped deliberately to facilitate ruling party workers to ‘bribe’ the voters.

However, most of the people caught with money did not wait for nightfall or the power to be cut. Rumours had it that DMK workers in some localities in Chennai were handing over ₹500 notes and that their AIADMK counterparts were more generous, giving away ₹1,000 to each voter.

According to sources, the money distributors landed in slum-like localities in groups of four or five, dispensing the cash in a jiffy and leaving the spot. Some were caught by the public but most of the time those left out by the visiting group were also seen demanding money.

Rumours of cash distribution happening in specific places had also put people on wild goose chases. In Erode, when AIADMK Minister K A Sengottaiyan went inside a

school amidst his hectic campaign, inadvertently triggering a gossip of money distribution.

But the flying squad that landed there found nothing.

However, in Coimbatore South, where BJP’s Vanathi Srinivasan is contesting the elections, 12 persons were caught, allegedly distributing cash, and an amount of ₹46,000 was seized from them. In Uthiramerur, ₹25,000 cash was seized from AIADMK men and in Virudhunagar four AIADMK members, including a woman were caught with ₹7 lakh cash.

In Ambur, DMK’s A C Vilwanathan was accused of distributing cash in his office as people were seen visiting it and in Harbour constituency, the election office of BJP candidate Vinod Selvam witnessed a furore when a group of women thronged the place.

With rumours floating that

Restrictions on political parties

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 3

All political party functionaries and workers brought for campaign from outside should leave the constituencies, where they are not voters, by Sunday 7 pm, the Chief Electoral Officer, Satyabrata Sahoo, said on Saturday.

Listing out the regulation that would in operation from Sunday 7 pm till the closure of polls, he said no one shall convene, hold or attend any public meeting or procession in connection with the election.

Displaying to the public any election matter by means of cinematograph, television or other similar apparatus, like, FM Radios, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, including electronic form of communication like SMS and internet, was also banned, he said.

Among the other things banned is propagating any election matter by holding any musical concert or any theatrical performance or any other entertainment or amusement.

Listing out the restrictions for candidates, Sahoo said that transporting voters to polling booths was not allowed, he said, adding that temporary election offices could be set up with just two persons manning them, that too only 200 metres away from polling booths.

Acid test for candidates of DMK and AIADMK in Coonoor

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC OOTY, APRIL 3

It is certainly an acid test for DMK candidate K. Ramachandran and AIADMK candidate D. Vinoth in Coonoor assembly constituency. No doubt, the high voltage contest in the Nilgiris is in Coonoor constituency. For K. Ramachandran (DMK) and D.Vinoth (AIADMK), both hailing from Badaga community, it is a ‘must win’ situation to keep their political fortunes live.

K. Ramachandran, a DMK stalwart here, won the 2006 polls in Gudalur and went on to become a minister in the then DMK regime. He won

the 2011 polls in Coonoor. When he was expected to contest again in Coonoor in the 2016 polls, he was denied a ticket which led to a furore and his supporters went to the extent of challenging the party leadership. But, he was pacified and this time has been given the ticket to contest again. He needs to win this time to prove his mettle and hold the DMK fort here.

For AIADMK candidate D. Vinoth, who is an immigrant to Coonoor from Ooty constituency, has witnessed a meteoric rise in a short span within the party, and is now local party district secretary in the Nilgiris. Though

he lost the 2016 polls in Ooty constituency, the AIADMK has fielded him in Coonoor this polls.

While Ramachandran (DMK) is a local man and a seasoned politician with a good track record, D. Vinoth (AIADMK) needs to take root in Coonoor constituency. As the contest is narrowing between these two candidates, Ramachandran is banking on his earlier achievements as minister and MLA, and the good support base for the DMK in Coonoor. AIADMK candidate Vinoth depends on the party’s achievements and the manifesto of the party to romp home.

AIADMK Christian candidates absent from Shah’s poll meet

ARULOLI M | DC TIRUNELVELI, APRIL 3

AIADMK candidates belonging to the Christian community and contesting the election in Palayamkottai and Radhapuram constituencies in Tirunelveli district, abstained from sharing the election campaign stage with BJP leader and Union home minister Amit Shah, on Saturday.

Though the venue of Shah’s election meet was located hardly a kilometre away from Palayamkottai constituency, AIADMK candidate for Palayamkottai, Gerald, did not turn up for the meeting, but his party colleague and AIADMK contestant for Nanguneri constituency, S. Ganesa Raja shared the stage with the BJP leader.

Though party leaders tried to

cover up Gerald’s absence saying he was busy with his election campaign, sources close to him said that Gerald, a born Catholic, has been instructed by his well-wishers including some Catholic clergy, not to share the stage with any BJP leader, especially leaders like Amit Shah who is generally viewed as a man against religious minority communities, especially Christians and Muslims. Hence, Gerald is said to have felt that appearing on the stage along with Amit Shah would result in the erosion of AIADMK votes in the minority dominated Palayamkottai constituency.

Radhapuram AIADMK contestant, S. Inbadurai, who also belongs to the Christian community, also abstained from participating in the Amit Shah meeting.

Collector scotches poll recall rumours in Karur

R. VALAYAPATHY | DC KARUR, APRIL 3

While electioneering in Karur constituency at its height here, there is a talk that election to the Karur assembly might be countermanded due to the counter allegations by the Transport minister M.R. Vijayabaskar seeking re-election from Karur and his opponent and DMK party’s Karur district in-charge, Senthil Balaji.

Besides many other reasons, the key reason for countermanding of polls

could be because both the AIADMK and DMK candidates had been leveling charges against each other, and also filed complaints with the Election Commission of India (ECI). The ECI had all on a sudden transferred Karur Collector and returning officer S. Mazarvizi and Superintendent of Police, Maheswaran, a couple of days ago, and appointed Prashant M. Wadnere as new Karur Collector, while Shashank Sai was appointed new

Superintendent of Police, Karur.

Apart from these two candidates, others in the fray are Mohanraj (MNM), Karuppaiah (NTK), Kasthuri Thangarajan (DMDK) and many other Independents. There are 2,44,174 voters including 1,28,321 female voters.

In the 2016 elections, Transport minister M.R. Vijayabaskar won the seat by defeating Subramanian of Congress (DMK front) by just 441 votes, but later the elec-

tion for Aravakkurichi constituency, Karur district, was countermanded. At that time, Senthil Balaji contested as AIADMK candidate against K.C. Palanisamy of the DMK, due to overall complaints of distributing money to voters by both sides.

Voters are now expecting that the same could be repeated this time also in Karur Assembly constituency. Official sources said Karur district is number one in the state which has filed a very

high number of complaints with the ECI that resulted in the transfer of both the Collector and th SP.

The new Collector Prashant M. Wadnere on Saturday said the election would go ahead as scheduled and as per law. He told newsmen here on Saturday that all poll arrangements for the four assembly segments in the district have been completed. He said that Static Surveillance teams and flying squads numbering 45, are maintaining

round-the-clock vigil, and the district administration would attempt to sort out all complaints immediately, besides ensuring that voters cast their votes in a safe and fair manner.

SP Shashank Sai said, “Apart from the local police, six companies of paramilitary forces have already arrived in the district and are engaged in bandobast duties along with local police. Two more companies of paramilitary forces are expected to arrive here.”

Modi’s vows are a sham: CPM leader

DC CORRESPONDENT PUDUKKOTTAI, APRIL 3

CPI(M) polit bureau member G. Ramakrishnan has raised doubt over Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s claim whenever he visited Tamil Nadu that he would be the saviour of Tamil culture, and pointed out that the same Modi had allocated a sum of ₹643 crore for Sanskrit and a meagre ₹29 crore for Tamil language, and asked how Modi would protect Tamil culture.

He also took strong exception over Modi citing Tamil epic “Thirukkural” and stating that he would protect agriculture, and recalled the four month of national-level struggle by farmers at New Delhi, against the three black farm laws of Modi. Hence, Modi’s promises are all a sham, he said.



S.Gokula Indira, AIADMK candidate for Anna Nagar assembly constituency, during campaign on Saturday.

—DC

हरिद्वार महाकुंभ 2021

WELCOME TO HARIDWAR KUMBH MELA

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- www.haridwarkumbhpolice2021.com
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OTHER STORY

Soldier eyes record of running 4,300-km in 50 days

Jammu, April 3: Indian soldier Naik Velu P is all set to make his 30th birthday memorable as he left for a mission to enter his name in the Guinness Book of World Records by running from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, a distance of about 4,300 km in under 50 days. Last year in June, Velu P became the first Indian ultra-runner to complete 1,600 km in just 17 days, a feat which is in the process of being entered as an Asian record.

"Naik Velu, serving as a Nursing Assistant in the 60 Para Field Hospital, is an ultra marathoner who is attempting a Guinness world record by running from Kashmir to Kanyakumari for a distance of about 4,300 km under 50 days," Udhampur-based Army Public Relations Officer (PRO) Lt Col Abhinav Navneet said.

To start this epic feat, he said Naik Velu, who is celebrating his 30th birthday on April 21, was flagged off from 92 base hospital at Srinagar on Friday with a heartwarming gathering of enthusiasts who accompanied him in his solo run for the initial five km carrying the national flag and boosting his morale.

"To cover this mammoth distance from Kashmir to Kanyakumari in 50 days, Velu would be running 70-100 km per day, crossing major towns, cities and states," Lt Col Navneet said. The PRO said Naik Velu has already won many ultramarathons, Tuffan runs and Stadium runs across India. After covering 200 km distance from his starting point, Naik left Udhampur headquarters at 7 am Saturday and is on way to Jammu, running 10 km per hour, he said.

Born on April 21, 1991 at Krishnagiri (Tamil Nadu) and having represented his state in athletics at the age of 13, Naik Velu joined the Army in December 2011 and his first achievement in the Army was a gold medal in cross-country 12.5 km in 2012. He subsequently shifted his interest to ultramarathons and brought many laurels to the Army by making many such records.

He has been representing the Indian team of Athletic Federation of India since 2016 and in September he would be representing India in the Stadium run at the world championship at Romania, for which he had won a trial run of 24 hour stadium running held at Bengaluru, Lt Col Navneet said. —PTI

Greens blame indifference of political parties Environmental degradation

T. SUDHEESH | DC CHENNAI, APRIL 3

A 66-page comprehensive Tamil Nadu Environmental Report card, prepared by a team of green activists, to draw the attention of political parties and policymakers to address environmental challenges, has criticised political parties for not having come up with a proper strategy to address the phenomenon of climate change despite the state facing serious land degradation and waste management issues.

The study team of three-decade-old city-based NGO "Poovulagin Nambargal" comprising K. Kavitha Muralidharan, M. Vetise-Ivan, V.Prabhakaran, L. Sathesh and P. Lokesh released the report card titled "The Path Behind and The Way Forward" on Saturday.

Raising concerns, the report said the political parties did not come up with their plans to a majority of environmental problems the state is facing simply because they are neither sensational nor controversial. Issues like sea-level rise, air pollution, land degradation, water pollution, land use, and land change need more attention in policy-making and space in political debates', the report said.

Mr. Prabhakaran, a member of the study team, told DC that they had prepared a model manifesto for political parties prior to the election notification and submitted to the all major political parties hoping that they would come up with a proper strategy to deal with these

A ARUL PALANI DC, CHENNAI, APRIL 3

Over the years, Tamil Nadu had witnessed a range of protests led by people and political parties as a result of which climate change and environmental conservation has become a matter of debate and discussion before the assembly polls. Regional parties like DMK, AMMK, and MNM have launched separate Environmental Wings.

Social activist Nityanand Jayaraman said, "The fact that major political parties feel compelled to condemn land degrading development projects like the

Kattupalli port expansion or the 8-lane expressway signals a significant shift in political culture, and a revival of agriculture rather than industry, as the defining identity of Tamil Nadu. This augurs well as long as this identity consciously sheds historic baggage of caste and works to ensure social justice, and the rights of other life forms and future generations."

"The DMK manifesto mentions plying smokeless CNG buses across Tamil Nadu, while AIADMK has promised to introduce 5,000 electric buses and free solar stoves for citizens. The report recalled that the agita-

tions of political parties had helped the government deliver rescue and relief measures promptly, during the floods in Chennai in 2015, drought in Chennai and other parts of the state in 2019, cyclones Varadha, Nivar and Burevi. Many political parties do not have a clear position on issues such as climate change, air pollution, conservation of the Western Ghats and wildlife, including elephants, and the involvement of political parties in these problems is low."

G Sundararajan of Poovulagin Nambargal said, "The leadership in Tamil Nadu still not understood the crisis that

Climate change is bringing to the state. The manifestos are proof that no political party has mentioned about climate change and the steps that the government would take to mitigate or adapt. The level of awareness amongst the public is also a contributing factor to this state of affairs. Along with human-led issues like industrial pollution, waste management, sand mining, Tamil Nadu is in danger of being impacted by extreme climate impacts like increased cyclonic activity, sea level rise, water insecurity, erratic rainfall patterns, drought and heat stress to name a few.



challenges.

"But none of the political parties has taken up our recommendations, including setting up of district level monitoring bodies under Disaster Management and effective segregation and disposal of solid

waste. One of the surprises in this election is the promise that came from Deputy CM O Paneselvam saying his party will not permit the proposed expansion of the Kaatupalli port. If the political leaders are able to come up

with such commitments, our future can be saved protecting the environment. This report card in fact a reminder to all political parties on the State environment which is being impacted by climate change and environmental

concerns raised over the last few years," he said.

Illustrating the state's environmental challenges that required urgent intervention by policymakers, the report card has pointed out that Chennai had lost two-thirds of its farmlands in the last 11 years. This is from a study by Anna University which revealed that agricultural land shrank from 52.14 sq km in 2005 to 18.28 sq km in 2016. While water bodies shrank by 12.54 sq km, around a third of the area in 2005, wetlands shrank from 14.37 sq km to 10.05 sq km. The size of the marshland was about 5,500 ha in 1965 but only 600 ha in 2013. The large-scale development of Pallikarai as a residential area and reduction of size has led to groundwater depletion in the neighbourhood as well, the report points out.

Consider application for starting college, HC rules

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 3

The Madras high court has directed the Director, Directorate of Town and Country Planning to consider and pass orders on the application submitted by a trust seeking building plan approval for starting an arts and science college at Kallakurichi. Justice B.Pugalandhi gave the directive while disposing of a petition filed by KPP Educational Trust.

The judge said the petitioner intended to commence a new college named Kalaivani College of Arts and Science at Kallakurichi and they have also applied for building plan approval through online to the Director, Directorate of Town and Country Planning on November 24, 2020. But the said application has not been processed so far and they filed the petition to direct the Director,

Directorate of Town and Country Planning to consider their application for grant of building plan approval within a stipulated time.

Yogesh Kannadasan, counsel for the petitioner, submitted that even though necessary fees for online application was duly paid on January 19, 2021 through Kallakurichi Treasury, the application of the petitioner was not processed by the authorities so far, the judge added.

The judge said, considering the facts and circumstances of the case and without expressing any opinion on the merits of the claim made by the petitioner, he directs the Director, Directorate of Town and Country Planning to consider and pass orders on the petitioner's application, submitted online on November 24, 2020 on merits and in accordance with law within a period of four weeks.

Mercury crosses 40' C in many districts

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 3

Many districts in the State continue to experience soaring heat levels with the mercury touching 40 degrees Celsius on Saturday. Dharmapuri, Salem, Tiruchirappalli, Vellore, Tiruttani and Karur breached the 40-degree mark.

Nungambakkam station in the city recorded a high of 38.3 Celsius and that was a bit of a relief because in the last couple of days, the city had been experiencing blistering heat with the maximum temperature shooting over 41 C.

The Meteorological Depa-

rtment has predicted that heat wave conditions would prevail over pockets in 27 districts across the State and Puducherry till Sunday. The number of districts that will experience blistering heat may reduce from April 4. Moreover, light rain with thunderstorms is possible till April 6 in isolated pockets of interior districts following convective activity.

The Met said the maximum temperature would touch 40 C till Sunday in Chennai. It warned people, particularly farmers, electoral candidates and voters, to avoid being outdoors between noon and 4 p.m.



(From far left)

Tirupur District Collector K.Vijayakarthekeyan inspect CCTV monitoring Centre installed in vote counting centre in LRG gov Arts and Science College in Tiruppur on Saturday.

State Election department organized voting awareness with Big Screen

DMK Party Harbour constituency candidate PK Sekar Babu to help group of women by pumping drinking water from corporation pipe during voting canvassing

High Court slams officials for lack of transparency in tender process

J.STALIN | DC CHENNAI, APRIL 3

Slamming the officials for not ensuring transparency while issuing tenders for road contract works, the Madras high court has quashed the tender notification issued by the Tiruppur Corporation commissioner for laying roads in the Corporation to the tune of Rs 20 crore. Justice B.Pugalandhi allowed the petitions filed by R.R.Palanisamy and R.Velusamy, Class II and III contractors respectively, which sought to quash the tender notification, dated December 24, 2020.

The case of the petitioners was that different road works from different areas were clubbed together as one package and thereby the volume of contract work has been increased with a sole object to eliminate competition in awarding contract work. As per this grouping, the other class of contractors cannot participate in the tender process. Ultimately a competition would be restricted with Class-I contractors alone, they added.

After perusing the counter affidavit filed by the Corporation, which explained the reasons for grouping the works as pack-

ages, the judge said all the grounds projected by the Corporation for grouping these road works as four packages appears to be made to favour a few contractors or to eliminate the competition in the contract works. To exploit the public money involved in the tenders, a few corrupt officials colluded with certain contractors and have created a situation in which the tender documents will be furnished only to selected contractors. Also, the tenders were floated without technical publication or notification and aimed at preventing certain contractors from submitting

the tender documents etc., the judge added.

The judge said the illegal money involved in these public contracts spoil Indian politics. In order to eliminate these irregularities in supply of tender documents, the State government has enacted the Tamil Nadu Transparency in Tenders Act in 1998 and the Tamil Nadu Public Private Partnership (Procurement) Rules were framed in 2012. But even then the irregularities in the public tender were not reduced.

The officers were finding out various ways to evade and eliminate healthy com-

petition in public contracts. The officers were notifying new tender conditions such as the persons who were participating in the tender process must possess all the equipment, that all the equipment must be certified by the officer concerned and must have experience of contract work for several crores.

In view of these conditions, even an IT topper who intends to take a contract to show his skill cannot participate in the tender. In road laying work or construction work, certain machineries may be required for one or two days, which can very well be hired. However, con-

ditions were imposed that the person must possess machinery and also must possess a certificate of its working condition from a particular officer. The particular officer will issue the certificate only to selected contractors and those persons having certificates alone can participate in the tender.

The officials were inventing new reasons or new novel ideas to eliminate the competition and were not ensuring transparency. There was a separate department functioning for ensuring the quality of the road works but even then the tenders have been floated every year for

relaying of the roads, the judge added.

The judge said it was true and was a settled position of law that the tender floating authorities can prescribe their conditions and requirements for the tenders. By taking advantage of the same, conditions were made in such a way to eliminate competition and to favour few individuals.

The money involved in these public contracts was the money of the tax payers and every authority was accountable for every rupee he spent for the public purpose. The officers have to show utmost response in concern-

ing with the public money. They can impose any number of conditions to ensure the quality of work and for the duration of the work. In the guise of executing the work in time bound manner. Also, the conditions stated in the Tamil Nadu Transparency in Tenders Act and the Tamil Nadu Transparency in Tender Rules were flouted.

In this case, the groupings of works have been made without any guidelines or with any reason or logic only to keep out competition. The reasons offered by the corporation were baseless without any statutory backing, the judge added

Yogi Babu is brilliant in political satire

Movie review

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

At a time when the people of Tamil Nadu eagerly await the 2021 state assembly polls with several political parties in the fray luring voters with their electoral promises, here comes the brilliant political satire Mandela. Helmed by debutant Madonne Ashwin, the film's plot revolves around the famous saying that "one vote can rock the boat".

Yogi Babu, the lead protagonist is the mainstay of the film. Set in Surangudi, a backward village in Tirunelveli, the village chief-tain (Sangili Murugan) has two wives and a son from each of them. The people in the village are divided into two caste groups.

Ilichavaayan aka Smile (Yogi Babu) is a homeless barber in the village who lives under a tree and runs errands for survival. His only aim is to realise his father's dream of building a saloon in the rural area. He saves money for the

MANDELA

CAST: Yogi Babu, Sheela Rajkumar

Direction: Madonne Ashwin

RATING: 3.75/5

same. However, when he goes to the post office to open an account, the newly joined postmaster Thenmozhi (Sheela Rajkumar) asks his original name, but Smile says he does not know. She decides to name him Nelson Mandela, as she feels he is similar to legendary leader Mandela. She then helps him to get ration, Aadhar and Voter ID cards.

Local body elections are announced and since the panchayat head falls sick, his two sons (GM Sundar and Kanna Ravi), belonging to two different factions, want to contest. They start campaigning vigorously and realise that they have an equal number of votes from their respective castes and only a single vote is required to decide their success. And now arrives Mandela's Voter ID card and a rollercoaster



ride starts for Mandela. He becomes hugely sought-after overnight and both factions tempt him by offering freebies.

A major feature of the movie are Ashwin's well-etched characters and apt casting. Mandela is a milestone in Yogi Babu's career. He shines in every frame. Ashwin taps Yogi's innate comedy sense well and even a casual dialogue from him is entertain-

ing. And Yogi scores big time in emotional scenes as well. Sheela Rajkumar in a significant role is equally impressive.

Ashwin's research on the current political scenario reflects on screen. The narration is flawless and the film ends with an overwhelming climax. He is superbly aided by Vidhu Ayyanna's cinematography and Bharath Shankar's music.

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

Inspired by the likes of Baahubali, the Bakkiyaraj Kannan-directed Sulthan seeks to sweep the viewers with grandiosity. With solid writing and a fitting cast, the makers have aimed for an immense mass masala entertainer to keep us energised for the summer.

At the beginning, we are witness to the birth of a legend - Sulthan aka Vikram (played by Karthi) who is the son of dreaded gangster Sethupathi (Napoleon). His mother dies soon after the child is born. Sethupathi has 100 henchmen helmed by Mansoor (Lal) for whom murder is the way of life and they raise Sulthan.

Sethupathi promises the villagers from near Salem who approach him that he would rid the place of another ruthless thug named Jayaseelan (KGF Ram) who is seen as a pest in agricultural lands and for the farmers who plough them. Territorial disputes beget more violence and Sethupathi is fatally wounded in an encounter the very

SULTHAN

CAST: Karthi, Rashmika Mandanna, Lal, Napoleon

Direction: Bakkiyaraj Kannan

RATING: 3/5

next day. The local cops have had enough of this nuisance and the city commissioner (Hareesh Peradi) informs Sulthan that these criminals will be taken out systematically.

Naturally, leadership to bring these disorderly fellows into the fray falls upon Sulthan, a robotic engineer, who is now tasked with convincing these lifelong thugs to help out the farmers instead, which will also fulfil his late father's last promise to the villagers. Whether such a transformation occurs within the ranks forms the reminder of the film.

Sulthan is a carefully choreographed movie and despite having a familiar storyline, the high intensity action will keep you engaged throughout. Every



time Karthi is involved, the myth behind his character is amplified. On one hand, he has a strong bro-code with his rogue inmates while coming across as a literal god to the villagers. He hates violence but is physically required to fight for his survival.

Needless to say, it is Karthi who is the star of the show. His performance is satisfying and you feel drawn towards his character like a magnet. Rashmika who makes her debut does a fine job in a sensible role. The romance portions are also cute. Veteran Lal proves his versatility and Napoleon appears in a cameo.

Things do slow down however during the second half. Nawab Shah and KGF Ram have got to essay weak roles. The clichéd nature of their presentation is unimpressive. You don't really feel any impetus behind all of the bad guys. The entire second half gets monotonous with noisy scenes.

Technically, Yuwan Shankar Raja's background combined with the songs of Vivek-Mervin duo is a plus. Sathyan Sooryan does justice to all the action with his impressive camerawork. Action sequences are fresh and vibrant. Overall, Sulthan is watchable despite minor shortcomings.

SHORT TAKES

Man held for killing brother-in-law over money dispute

New Delhi: A 57-year-old labourer was arrested for allegedly killing his brother-in-law over a money dispute in north Delhi's Narela, police said on Saturday. The arrest comes after the body of Karan Kumar (36) with his face burnt was found inside a vacant flat in Narela. There were injury marks on Kumar's neck and hands, and his face was burnt to hide his identity. After investigation, police arrested the accused, identified as Panna Ram, from Sector 4 in Bawana Industrial area on Friday, deputy commissioner of police (outer north) Rajeev Ranjan Singh said. During interrogation, Panna Ram revealed that after the death of his wife, he married another woman. Kumar was insisting him to register his property in the name of the accused's son Vikas, police said. The accused had also borrowed ₹29,000 from Kumar and was unable to return the money. Kumar used to insult him in front of his family members and other relatives over the issue, police said. On Wednesday night, the accused consumed liquor with Kumar and when his brother-in-law got drunk, he killed him with an axe. After his death, he burnt the body and fled from the spot, police added.

— PTI

Mewat gang ATM robber arrested

New Delhi: A 24-year-old member of a Mewat-based gang of ATM robbers, who was carrying a reward of ₹50,000 on him, was arrested from Haryana, Delhi Police said on Saturday. The accused Shorab, a resident of Nuh district in Haryana, was wanted in 20 cases of uprooting or breaking ATMs in Delhi and Haryana, and looting ₹2 crore, they said. "Police were informed that Shorab was hiding in Rajasthan and would go to Mewat through Silkho Toll Plaza in Nuh district on Friday between 4 am and 5 am. A police team was deployed near the toll plaza. On seeing police, Shorab got down from a taxi and tried to escape, but was nabbed. Shorab disclosed that he along with six gang members, including kingpin Shahid, had uprooted eight ATMs in Delhi and Haryana in 2019. He was absconding for two years. From December 2020 to January 2021, Shorab along with is brother Liyakat and six others the gang had broken 12 ATMs and looted cash cabins, the police officer said, adding they used to spray black paint on CCTV cameras at ATM booths and broke open the machines with gas cutters.

— PTI

TN may tighten Covid-19 curbs

From page 1

He said there was sufficient amount of beds, ventilators, medicines and personal protective equipment gear. Services of '108' ambulances was also being utilised to treat Covid-19 patients without any delay, he said, adding people should adhere to the Covid-19 protocol laid down by the government. Since March 16 the state has collected Rs 2.58 crore as penalties from people violating the protocol. Mr Ranjan said those eligible (above 45) should get vaccinated. Till April 2, as many as 31.75 lakh people, including healthcare and frontline workers besides those engaged in poll related works and above 45, were vaccinated. Tamil Nadu has received 54.74 lakh vaccine doses from the Centre, he said. On deaths caused by the virus, Mr Ranjan said measures were taken to ensure that Covid-19 fatalities remain less in Tamil Nadu. The government has issued a circular to both government and private run hospitals to follow the "treatment procedures" as suggested by an expert committee, comprising medical experts from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, towards reducing the deaths caused by Covid-19, the chief secretary added.

St Stephen's campus turns Covid hotspot, 13 students test positive

A group of students including hostellers had gone on an educational trip to Dalhousie in Himachal

Delhi records over 3,500 Covid-19 cases for 2nd day in row, 10 deaths

New Delhi, April 3: The St Stephen's College campus' "inner perimeter" has been rendered out of bounds after 13 resident students and two staffers tested Covid-19 positive, according to a notice issued by the institute's principal.

The notice, issued on Friday, said necessary and stringent measures have been put in place by the dean's office to ensure isolation and social distancing for "all residents."

The dean of residence-cum-college chaplain and mass steward (security officer), both of whom have tested positive for coronavirus, had taken a group of students including hostellers of the Delhi college for an educational trip to Dalhousie in Himachal Pradesh in the last week of March.

"The inner perimeter of the college is out of bounds for all, unless specific clearance is given by the principal on a case-by-case basis. The outer perimeter of the college may be accessed by those with relevant and regular work after due process at the security counter," the notice read.

New Delhi, April 3: Delhi recorded 3,567 coronavirus cases for the second consecutive day on Saturday, while the positivity rate rose to 4.48 per cent, according to the health department.

With the new infections, the number of cumulative cases rose to 6,72,381, while 10 more deaths took the toll to 11,060.

The city had reported 3,594 cases on Friday, the highest daily count this year.

The positivity rate rose to 4.48 percent from 4.11 per cent a day before, amid a massive surge in cases recorded over the past few weeks.

On December 3, the city had recorded 3,734 cases

while on December 4 the count was 4,067, according to official data.

Delhi had reported 2,790 cases on Thursday, 1,819 on Wednesday, 992 on Tuesday, 1,904 cases on Monday and 1,881 cases on Sunday.

It had reported 1,558 cases on Saturday, 1,534 cases last Friday, 1,515 cases last Thursday, 1,254 cases a day before that and 1,101 cases last Tuesday, when it had crossed the 1,000-mark for the first time since December 24.

The number of active cases rose to 12,647 from 11,994 a day before.

A total of 79,617 tests, including 57,296 RT-PCR tests, were conducted a

day ago, the bulletin said.

The number of people under home isolation rose to 6,569 from 6,106 a day ago. The containment zones rose to 2,618 from 2,338 on Friday, it said.

The number of cumulative cases as on January 1 had stood at over 6.25 lakh and the total fatalities were 10,557.

The number of daily cases had started to come down in February.

On February 26, the month's highest daily count of 256 cases was recorded.

However, the daily cases began to rise again in March and have been steadily increasing since then.

— PTI



Covid-19 vaccination centre for media persons above 45 years inaugurated at UPHC Daryaganj in New Delhi on Saturday.

— G.N. Jha

2-yr-old succumbs to injuries as hospitals claim no bed available

New Delhi, April 3: A two-year-old boy fell from the roof of his house here and succumbed to head injuries, even as the family alleged that several hospitals in the national capital denied him admission claiming that "beds were full due to the coronavirus pandemic".

Krishna was playing on the roof of his house in Majnu Ka Tila area in North Delhi when he fell at around 2 pm, his father Bhuvinder said.

He said the family took the boy to nearby Shushruta Trauma Centre, which referred him to a prominent central government-run hospital, where authorities allegedly denied him admission claiming that "beds were full due to Covid-19".

"From there, we took our child to two more central government hospitals, which also said the same thing," Bhuvinder claimed.

The family then approached authorities at the Delhi government-run Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Hospital, but "did not get any help".

A senior official at LNJP said the family had come to the trauma centre, "but were sent to another hospital with a doctor as beds were full". "We finally returned to the Shushruta Trauma Centre, where the child was declared dead at around 9 pm," the father said.

— PTI

Constable's wife suicide case: Cross cases filed, say cops

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 3

The Delhi Police has registered cross cases in connection of the incident where a constable's wife hanged herself at her house in southwest Delhi's Ghitorni village, officials said on Saturday.

"We have registered cross cases. On the complaint of the deceased's family, case has been registered against constable Sushil for dowry death and on complaint of Sushil, a case of attempt to murder of his children has been registered against his wife," a senior police officer said.

On Thursday a Delhi Police constable's wife allegedly hanged herself at her house in Ghitorni village.

The couple's two sons, Samarth (3) and Shreshth (3 months), were found unconscious in the bathroom and were rushed to the Fortis Hospital in Vasant Kunj where they are undergoing treatment, the police said.

— PTI

Top cop bats for capsule courses to sharpen officers' investigative skills

New Delhi, April 3: Delhi Police commissioner S.N. Shrivastava on Saturday stressed on capsule courses for officers to sharpen their investigative skills and to keep them updated with the latest legal and scientific developments.

During a video conference with officers, the commissioner also reviewed the actions taken to implement Covid-19 guidelines, officials said. He also took stock of the law and order situation in the national capital during the meeting, they said.

Shrivastava reviewed cases related to Covid-19 guideline violations and the status of anti-coronavirus vaccination of

personnel in different police districts and units, the officials said.

"Cases of crime against women and kidnapping and those related to the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act were analysed along with other cases," Delhi Police additional public relation officer Anil Mittal said.

The disposal rate of cases was also discussed in the meeting, he said.

The commissioner emphasised conducting capsule courses for station house and investigating officers to sharpen their investigative skills and keep them abreast of latest legal and scientific aspects of investigation, police said. Mittal said

that appraisal of action plan vis-a-vis targets for each police station was also discussed.

The ongoing process of listing criminals and the strategy to keep a vigil on them were reviewed along with the action plan to keep a tab on jailed criminals and those out on bail, he said. Shrivastava asked officers to keep an eye on criminals whose bail or parole periods are nearing a close, Mittal said.

The commissioner examined the status of complaints in the Integrated Complaints Management System and asked officers to ensure speedy disposal. The status of usage of e-bat book was also reviewed.

FIR filed against Narsinghanand after complaint by AAP MLA

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 3

Delhi Police has registered an FIR against Yati Narsinghanand Saraswati for allegedly hurting religious sentiments of Muslims through comments against prophet Muhammad during a press conference in Delhi. The FIR was registered against Saraswati under sections 153-A and 295-A of the Indian Penal Code at the Parliament Street police station.

Comments made by Saraswati at a press conference in Delhi had gone viral on social media. Aam Aadami Party MLA Amanatullah Khan on Saturday submitted a complaint with the Delhi Police against Saraswati for allegedly hurting the religious sentiments of the Muslim community. He uploaded a video on



Narsinghanand Saraswati



Amanatullah Khan

social media where the MLA said that he has submitted a complaint regarding the incident.

"Taking cognisance of a video circulating on social media in the matter of a conference took place in press club, a case under relevant sections has been registered at Parliament Street police station and

investigation taken up," a senior police officer said.

Amanatullah Khan said: "The appeal is to take strict action against this impudence. People like Narasimhanand are not fit to live in the society. These people are spoiling the atmosphere of the country."

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DECCAN Chronicle

4 APRIL 2021



Shashi Warriar

Off the beaten track

Of ‘everyone’s friends’ & being a public enemy

The other day there was a message on WhatsApp that our MLA would be visiting the nearby Primary Health Centre, or PHC, the next day, and would be available to the public from 9:30 am to 9:45 am. His practice is to announce a time for the meeting to start, and turn up three hours late. In all fairness, he never specifies when he’ll leave, and is usually available until most of the people who’ve come to meet him have had their say, to one of his assistants if not to himself, so this was unusual.

Right, I thought hopefully, maybe we can get some of our problems solved. They made a formidable list: bad roads, a defunct sewage treatment plant, blocked gutters, missing street lamps, an unauthorised temple that plays painfully loud bhajans, and hillocks of garbage left by people who party on the beach nearby.

I arrived at the PHC a few minutes early to find some hopeful neighbours waiting. We were wondering when the MLA would arrive, given his habit of unpunctuality, when a police jeep with flashing lights turned into the PHC’s gate. It was his escort, closely followed by a large white SUV. The doors of the vehicles opened, and, to our immense surprise, there he was, our MLA in person, only a couple of minutes behind time!

Within moments the compound was swarming with his henchmen, and visitors waiting to see him. The henchmen were swaggering young men with strange haircuts, shiny shirts, and flashy cellphones, all clouded in *attar*. The visitors came in all shapes and sizes and ages, all clearly supplicants. As we watched, the MLA and his retinue, instead of heading for the entrance and the staircase to the first floor, where the meeting was supposed to be held, started walking towards the PHC’s backyard, to the accompaniment of clicking cameras.

When we followed, we saw a little hole dug in the ground near a tree, a few large stones laid out by it, and, beside them, the ingredients of a puja: flowers and such. My friend spoke to one of the henchmen, it emerged that the MLA had come to inaugurate an extension of the PHC. By now it was clear that we had been suckered into supporting a photo-op for the MLA, so that anyone who reported the event could claim with some truth that several hundred people attended it.

By dint of some vigorous pushing, my friend managed to get within earshot of the MLA, with me following closely. “Good morning,” he said. “The last time we met you promised to visit my neighbourhood after three days, and that was more than two years ago.”

The MLA smiled. “But I never asked you for votes, did I?” he asked. I could sense that my friend was close to an explosion, and so did some of the henchmen, who moved smoothly into position between their master and my friend, averting what might have been an unseemly shouting match. As we walked away, my friend said in disgust, “I wanted to ask him whether he’s MLA only for people who voted for him!”

Another neighbour joined us as we stood wondering what to do next. “Good you didn’t,” he said. “I’ve just spoken to his P.A. He’ll make sure I get a couple of minutes to speak to the boss.” Very sensible, no doubt, but it left a bad taste in the mouth, and I was about to say so when he continued, “Thanks for being here. I’ll take this onward. You don’t have to wait.”

My angry friend and I went home to stew, and, as the hours passed, I moved on to some of the other trivialities that fill in my hours. And then, towards half past four in the afternoon, there was another message on WhatsApp: The MLA will be in your area at 4:45pm.

A few minutes short of 4:45, I was on the road to the beach, as were the neighbours who turned up for the morning’s meeting. “He’s already here,” one of them said. “He’s at the beach, inspecting the garbage recycling plant.”

A good beach seems a strange spot in which to build a garbage recycling plant but then the ways of government are mysterious. I used to get worked up about it until I saw that the beach is in danger of disappearing thanks to erosion but no one else seems to bother about it and there are always more pressing issues to deal with so it had slipped to the back of my mind. I decided now to bring it up if I got the chance.

At ten to five, he turned up with his retinue of youngsters with strange haircuts, and some new men, older and rougher and far more obsequious. One of them I recognised: a contractor who built a kilometre of road nearby last year that disappeared with the first spell of heavy rain.

To my surprise, the MLA approached our group. “What can I do for you?” he asked.

I poured out my litany of problems, starting with the beach. He heard me out, then said, “The garbage plant is already there. We can do nothing about it. About your other problems, we will deal with them one by one, starting with roads.” He turned to the contractor I’d recognised, saying, “How much?”

So now it was clear we’d been suckered again. As I prepared to leave, one of the henchmen, misreading my mood, said, “See? He does what he can. He’s everyone’s friend.”

As I trudged home, I couldn’t but think of the old cliché: With friends like these, who needs enemies?

Shashi Warriar has written fairy tales, thrillers, a semi-fictional biography, satires, and a love story. Besides writing, he teaches strategic communication at a business school.

Subhani



If only BJP were as good at vaccination as it’s at election



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya’s View

The writing is writ large on the wall: vaccinate, vaccinate, vaccinate. We know now that the Covid virus is likely to attack in several waves. This has been seen in many countries, and is in evidence in ours too. To contain successive surges, we should, of course, retain our vigil on all health and social distancing protocols, but the real solution is to universalise vaccination and ensure its delivery in the shortest possible time.

The government I am sure is doing its best, but its best falls short, I am sorry to say, of the optimum. The first in the line to get the shot were health workers, and rightly so. However, a great number of these still remain vulnerable. There are around three crore healthcare and frontline workers. Of these, less than one-third have as yet received both the shots; and a little more than half have got the first shot. This is woefully short of target.

Senior citizens and those with co-morbidities were next in line. Here too performance is far below targets. It is estimated that there are 27 crore senior citizens and those with co-morbidities. But only three crore of these have been vaccinated, including some 78 lakh with co-morbidities. This is really slow going.

It is true that there could have been some vaccine hesitancy in the initial phase. Yet, this is hardly likely to have been that high in vulnerable senior citizens eager to get some protection, and in health workers who know that it is essen-

tial in their own self-interest to get the jab. One can understand greater reticence in rural areas, but a great many have still not been covered even in urban centres.

We need to know the reasons for this tardy pace. India, we are continuously told is not short of vaccines. Government spokespersons loudly proclaim with justifiable pride that we are the vaccine capital, producing 60 per cent of vaccines in the world. Nor do we lack experience in public health campaigns for mass vaccination. Our Universal Immunisation Program, which began in 1985, is today one of the largest and most successful programs in the world. We have the systems in place for such a campaign — Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN), National Cold Chain Management Inventory System (NCCMIC), and the National Cold Chain Training Centre (NCCTS). Thousands have by now been trained in managing stocks of vaccines at the right temperatures and monitoring their safe delivery across the country. Why then are we lagging behind in this highly critical vaccination drive, on which not only the health but the economy of our country is dependent?

In the absence of a ramped up vaccine campaign, several of the worst effected state governments are threatening lockdowns. As many doctors and health specialists have emphasised, lockdowns are hardly a solution, quite

apart from being impractical. We have seen the disastrous consequences of the first nationwide lockdown announced at a notice of four hours, which left millions of migrant workers on the streets walking hundreds and thousands of miles to their villages and hometowns without food, water, transport, money or health support. That lockdown, and the manner in which it was implemented, far from containing the spread of the disease, ensured that it spread with impunity.

Today, when the economy is just showing signs of a revival, a lockdown would be a fatal dampener to these green shoots of resurgence. It would also further aggravate the huge unemployment problem, the highest in years. As one worker said on national television, I would rather die of the virus than out of hunger for lack of a job. Undoubtedly, containment zones cannot be ruled out as a temporary measure, but generically spread out lockdowns, misinterpreted as a decisive response by panicky state governments, is hardly a solution. Even if lockdowns are announced, their efficacious implementation in a country like ours where people live cheek by jowl and in porous habitations, is virtually impossible. All lockdowns do is to give disproportionate powers to state agencies like the police.

The answer, therefore, is to put an expedited and effective vaccination

Even if lockdowns are announced, their efficacious implementation in a country like ours where people live cheek by jowl and in porous habitations, is virtually impossible

campaign in mission mode. For this, the government must get over its own vaccine hesitancy. The imperative is to universalise and go beyond this reticent step by step approach. Secondly, distribution problems must be urgently sorted out, since some states have complained that they are not getting an adequate supply of vaccines, while six per cent of vaccines are being wasted for lack of use. Thirdly, we need to approve more vaccines at the speed of light. Those global vaccines that have Indian collaborations need to be given the licence without the mandatory bridging trials. Regulatory hurdles need to be removed from vaccines such as Johnson & Johnson, Sputnik and Novavax. Fourthly, our vast previous experience of mass immunisation programmes should be aggressively harnessed to increase the pace and footprint of vaccination. There is a widespread network of anganwadi workers and health and education officials who should be roped in for this purpose. Fifthly, the private sector and civil society should be made partners in the ramped up vaccination drive. Sixthly, state governments, under close central supervision, should gird up for the task ahead, since much of the ground implementation is in their hands. And, lastly, Covid appropriate behaviour should be consistently advertised, and containment zones carefully identified and their isolation strictly monitored.

If the BJP, now in power at the Centre, could run the vaccination programme as efficiently as it seeks to run elections, we could perhaps see light at the end of this dark tunnel.

The writer, an author and a former diplomat, is in politics

LETTERS

MINDLESS SPEECH

DMK leader Udhayanidhi Stalin deserves to be complimented for adding a new dimension to allegations against political adversaries. He has used the names of departed souls like Sushma Swaraj and Arun Jaitley to cast aspersions at Prime Minister Narendra Modi. According to Udhayanidhi, Ms Swaraj and Jaitley had died because they were unable to handle the pressure and torture of the Prime Minister. Ms Swaraj’s daughter, Bansuri, has strongly condemned the deadly insinuation of the DMK’s ‘uncrowned prince’ and, in fact, even gone to the extent of praising how the PM had stood by her mother through thick and thin.

P.G. Menon,
Chennai

The DMK youth leader, Udhayanidhi Stalin, while campaigning for the party and alliance partners, is reported to have challenged the Income-tax department to conduct raids at his premises, if it has the guts. Provoked by the raids at the premises of his sister and at other places, he must have dared the department like this. He must understand that it is because of the guts, grit and determination that the I-T department has conducted raids at his sister’s place. His challenge reeks of arrogance. If it has to conduct raids, the I-T department will surely accomplish the job.

V.S. Jayaraman,
Chennai

NEED CORONA CARE

The 16th legislative assembly election of Tamil Nadu is to be held on April 6 and, according to the Election Commission of India, 62.6 million people are eligible to vote, of which 40 lakh voters are attributed to Chennai. The elections come at a time when the city is struggling against a new swell of coronavirus cases — for instance, Chennai saw a 100% rise in fresh cases over a span of three weeks. One of the reasons for the new surge is thought to be ‘covid-19 fatigue’, which has resulted in lax discipline towards preventive guidelines and social distancing — the practice of wearing masks, washing hands and maintaining prudent distance seem to have largely gone out the window. In fact, the new cases are reported to be from workplace and family clusters, with the latter arising out of a failure to comply with home quarantine measures. No doubt, Chennai needs corona care by the end of this week.

M.R. Jayanthi,
Coimbatore

NO HOLI LOCKDOWN

THE CENTRE HAS asked the states to vaccinate those above 45 years within two weeks in view of the massive second wave of the coronavirus. My question here is two-fold. Granted that a full lockdown will be inimical to the economy, why did the Narendra Modi government, which is known for its putatively bold policymaking and, moreover, has massive support to boot, not call a single day’s lockdown on the occasion of a superspreader event like Holi? Now wait and watch.

Priyanka Mathur
New Delhi

Anita Katyal

Political Gup-Shup



Personality cult infiltrates Left; leaked ‘survey’ rattles TMC

The Opposition leaders refer to him derisively as “Kerala’s Modi” or “Copycat Modi”. This may be a classic case of sour grapes but there is no doubt that Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan’s ongoing poll campaign is not very different from that of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. As in the case of the Bharatiya Janata Party whose election campaigns revolve around Mr Modi, the Kerala Assembly election is all about Pinarayi Vijayan. Like Mr Modi, he invariably makes a rockstar-like grand and dramatic entry at his election rallies and keeps the crowds engaged with his fiery speeches. The student and youth wings of the CPI(M) are deployed in large numbers at each venue to whip up passions and generally set the mood for Mr Vijayan’s arrival while chanting cadres line the roads leading to the podium. Often, a fireworks display is also part of the welcome drill. The puritanical CPI(M) cadres must be cringing as the cadre-based Left parties generally have an aversion to building a personality cult but given their political marginalisation, the Marxists have no choice

but to accept that the party in Kerala has become a one-man show.

While Pinarayi Vijayan is on a roll, the Congress-led United Democratic Front is fighting hard to wrest the state from its chief political rival. However, it finds itself in trouble as doubts have arisen about its Christian support base. Unlike the past elections, the various Christian factions are learned to have told Congress leaders that they will not issue any advisory to its followers to vote for the grand old party. Though it is not openly supporting any party, the Church will not issue an appeal in favour of any party. The Christian community has been partial to the Congress in the past but the BJP has also been wooing it, especially the Jacobite Syrian Christians and Catholics. The saffron party is weaning them away from the Congress by convincing the community that the Congress is taking them for granted and neglecting them in favour of Muslims and Hindus. On its part, the Church wants to safeguard its interests as it

has land and other investments it has made across the state.

Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel and Rajasthan chief minister are a study in contrast. Both were given special duties in the poll-bound states — Mr Baghel was assigned to Assam and Mr Gehlot to Kerala. While Mr Baghel took on his assignment in mission-mode, Mr Gehlot has only made a cursory visit to Kerala, evincing little or no interest in the election even though former Congress president Rahul Gandhi is focusing all his energies on the Kerala poll. Mr Gehlot maintains he is busy with the by-elections in Rajasthan but it is being joked that Mr Gehlot is scared to leave Jaipur for fear that his bete noire Sachin Pilot may start plotting against him in his absence. Mr Baghel, on the other hand, has barely left Assam, immersing himself in the election, providing both funds and manpower from his state. Mr Baghel, it is said, is working overtime to retain his “gaddi” as his rival T.S. Singh Deo was promised the chief minister’s post midway during the five-year term, which

happens to be in May.

Keeping a firm eye on the crucial West Bengal Assembly polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi undertook a well-timed trip to Dhaka to mark fifty years of the liberation of Bangladesh. Though he did make a fleeting reference to Indira Gandhi’s role in liberating Bangladesh, Mr Modi managed to make the event all about him. The Congress, which should have and could have, made a big splash by recalling Indira Gandhi’s contribution to the neighbouring country’s freedom struggle, maintained a studied silence. In fact, Sonia Gandhi had even set up an in-house committee headed by former defence minister A.K. Antony and comprising senior leaders like Amarinder Singh and Prithviraj Chavan, to plan and coordinate the party’s programmes to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1971 Bangladesh war. This was last December but nothing has been heard from this panel. It met once but no one knows what activities were drawn up by the committee.

There has been radio silence since then.

There is no end to the twists and turns in the high-decibel West Bengal Assembly election. In fact, there is never a dull moment as charges and counter-charges between the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamul Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party fly thick and fast. In fact, violent clashes between their workers have become the order of the day. But over the past few days, the two parties have been locked in a battle over a “leaked internal election survey”, apparently commissioned by poll strategist Prashant Kishor, which shows that the Trinamul is losing. A gleeful BJP has obviously gone to town with this revelation but Mr Kishor’s outfit, IPAC, has tied itself in knots issuing a series of denials about its involvement in this survey. It is insisting that this is the handiwork of the BJP’s dirty tricks department or its IT cell.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

KAUSHIK MITTER Editor, R. MOHAN Resident Editor

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at: **Chennai:** SP 3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai 600032. Phones: (044) 22254747, 22254748 **Coimbatore:** 77 Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore 641009. Phone: (0422) 2231255, 2231256 **Hyderabad:** 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad 500 003. Phone: (040) 27803930-4. Fax: (040) 27805256. **Bengaluru:** 5th Floor, BMTIC Commercial Complex, 80 Ft. Road, Koramangala, Bangalore-560095. Ph: (080)4360500; Fax: 080-22960551/52/55 **Visakhapatnam:** Survey No. 1/3A Beach Road, Near Kallasaigiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam- 530 017. Phones: (0891) 2755285 **Vijayawada:** No. C 3 & 4, Patanata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.). Phones: (0866) 255284/255287, Fax (0866) 255234 **Rajahmundry:** Venagiri, Dhawleswarani Rd., Rajahmundry 533125. Phones: (0883) 2417208, 2417618 **Anantapur:** Thapovan Colony, Bangalore Bye-Pass Road, Anantapur 515004. Phones: (0854) 276903, Fax: 08554-276904 **Nellore:** Survey No. 52/72, Burnanpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemudugunta Panchayat, Nellore. Phone: (0861) 2348581/ 82, Telefax (0861) 2348580 **Karimnagar:** Survey No. 1341, Vavilalappally Colony, Jagtiyala Road, Karimnagar 505 001. Phone: (0878) 2228908; Telefax: (0878) 2220433 **Kochi:** No. 3-B, 3rd Floor, DD TRADE TOWER, Kaloor-Kadavanthara Road, Ernakulam, Ph: 0484-4039408 **Kozhikode:** No. 6/1002 E, First Floor City Mall, Opp. YMCA Kannur Road, Kozhikode - 673 001 Fax : 0495 4019018 **Thiruvananthapuram:** St Joseph Press Thiyacud post, Cotton Hills, Thiruvananthapuram-14, Ph: 0471-2735105/67, Fax: 0471-4016112 Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08ss

SHORT TAKES

BUILDING IN BANGKOK FALLS, 5 DIE

Bangkok, April 3: A Bangkok residence building collapsed on Saturday, killing at least four rescue workers and a resident, according to an emergency worker.

The three-story house was engulfed in flames around 6 am and the fire raged for about an hour before it was put out.

At around 7 am, as firefighters and rescue workers were moving through the razed structure in the Thai capital, it abruptly collapsed, killing at least five, including a resident.

EXPLOSIONS AT 2 SOMALI ARMY BASES KILL 9

Mogadishu, April 3: Simultaneous large explosions were heard in and around two Somali army bases on Saturday, with the military confirming at least nine of its people killed but asserting “heavy losses” among the attackers.

The al-Shabab extremist group claimed responsibility. Residents said the attacks occurred in Bariirre and Awdhegheh villages of Lower Shabelle region, 75 kilometres (46 miles) south of the capital, Mogadishu. Speaking to local media, General Odawa Yusuf Ragheh, the commander of the Somali National Army, confirmed the twin attacks but said al-Shabab had been repulsed with “heavy losses”.

ROBOT ARTIST SELLS ART FOR \$688,888

Hong Kong, April 3: Sophia is a robot of many talents — she speaks, jokes, sings and even makes art.

In March, she caused a stir in the art world when a digital work she created as part of a collaboration was sold at an auction for \$688,888 in the form of a non-fungible token. The sale highlighted a growing frenzy in the NFT market, where people can buy ownership rights to digital content. NFTs each have a unique digital code saved on blockchain ledgers that allow anyone to verify the authenticity and ownership of items. David Hanson, CEO of Hong Kong-based Hanson Robotics and Sophia's creator, has been developing robots for the past two and a half decades. He believes realistic-looking robots can connect with people and assist in healthcare and education.

MALI ATTACK KILLS 4 UN PEACEKEEPERS

Bamako, April 3: Four United Nations peacekeepers from Chad were killed in an attack by jihadists on their camp in Aguelhok in northern Mali and 19 others were injured, UN officials said Friday.

The UN mission in Mali said helicopters were dispatched to the scene to evacuate the wounded from the camp, which houses mostly Chadian peacekeepers. The mission said that the attackers suffered heavy losses and had abandoned several of their dead at the site of the attack. UN Secretary-General Guterres condemned the attack by armed elements in the strongest terms and commended the courage and bravery of the peacekeepers who robustly repelled the attack, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

Guterres reiterated attacks targeting peacekeepers may constitute war crimes.

EGYPT, ETHIOPIA, SUDAN RESUME TALKS ON DAM

Cairo, April 3: A new round of talks between three African nations began Saturday, officials said, aimed at resolving a yearslong dispute over a giant dam Ethiopia is building on the Nile River's main tributary. The three-day talks are taking place in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the current chair of the African Union.

The AU is mediating the negotiations between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Egypt's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that Cairo wants the negotiations to eventually lead to a legally binding agreement over the operation and filling of the dam's massive reservoir.

Foreign and irrigation ministers of the three nations were attending the talks, along with experts from the African Union.

Protest in London



Demonstrators taking part in a Kill The Bill protest against the Government's Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill while holding placards in central London on Saturday. — AFP

7 blood clot deaths after 18.1mn vax jabs

No evidence of a casual link, says UK medicine regulator

London, April 3: The UK's medicines regulator has confirmed seven cases of blood clot-related deaths in people who received the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine against Covid-19, but stressed on the safety of the jabs as there is no evidence of a causal link.

The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) said in its latest Yellow Card monitoring of the Coronavirus vaccine programme this week that of the 18.1 million people who had the Oxford vaccine in the UK, 30 people developed blood clots and seven had died as of March 24.

Its official advice continues to be that the benefits of the vaccine, which is also being produced as Covishield by the Serum Institute of India, far outweigh any risks.

Our rigorous review into the UK reports of rare and specific types of blood clots is ongoing. Up to and including 24 March, we have received 22 reports of cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST) and 8 reports of other thrombosis events with low platelets, out of a total of 18.1 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine AstraZeneca given by that date, the MHRA report said.

On the basis of this ongoing review, the benefits of the vaccines against Covid-19 continue to outweigh any risks and you should continue to get your vaccine when invited to do so, it said.

The regulator said that investigations are under-

Dhaka, April 3: The Bangladesh government on Saturday decided to impose a week-long nationwide lockdown from Monday as Covid-19 cases and deaths surged across the country. Road Transport Minister Obaidul Quader made the announcement at a media briefing in Dhaka on Saturday, the *Dhaka Tribune* newspaper reported.

Bangladesh on Friday logged 6,830 new cases, the

highest count in a day, taking the tally of infections to 624,594. The death toll climbed by 50 in 24 hours to 9,155, according to data released by the government.

In a bid to arrest the spread of the Coronavirus, the government has decided to enforce a seven-day lockdown from Monday as the Coronavirus cases and deaths are surging across the country, Quader, also the general

secretary of the ruling Awami League, said.

However, the order does not apply to utility and emergency services.

Factories will remain open and workers can work shifts by following hygiene rules, the report said. Every office and court will be closed during this lockdown but industries and mills will continue their operation on rotation. — PTI

OUR RIGOROUS review into the UK reports of rare and specific types of blood clots is ongoing. Up to and including 24 March, we have received 22 reports of cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST) and 8 reports of other thrombosis events with low platelets

MEDICINES AND HEALTHCARE PRODUCTS REGULATORY AGENCY REPORT

way to determine if there is a link or if the cases are a coincidence and reiterated that increased adverse reaction or ADR reports reflect the increase in vaccine deployment. — PTI

— PTI

Lanka tightens church security ahead of Easter

Colombo, April 3: Security at churches across Sri Lanka have been beefed up ahead of Easter, police said on Saturday, ahead of the second anniversary of the April 2019 coordinated attacks on tourists and minority Christian community in the country in which 270 people, including 11 Indians, were killed.

“We have tightened security of churches by deploying over 12,000 security personnel, Senior Deputy Inspector General and police spokesperson Ajith Rohana said.

The security personnel include 9,350 police officials and 2,542 troops from the tri forces (Army, Navy and Air Force), he said.

Rohana said some 111 churches in the western coastal town of Negombo would be provided security, along with 107 churches in the neighbouring coastal town of Chilaw and some 98 churches in the eastern town of Batticaloa. The St Sebastian's Church at Negombo's Katuwapitiya was the worst-hit in the Easter Sunday

blasts that rocked the island nation in 2019 with 114 people dying in the church attack.

As many as 270 people were killed and around 500 others injured when six near-simultaneous and coordinated explosions, carried out by local jihadist group National Thowheeth Jamaath (NTJ) linked to the Islamic State (IS), rocked three churches and three luxury hotels frequented by tourists in Sri Lanka on April 21.

While describing the horror scene at the St Sebastian's Church, a top priest had said that pieces of flesh were thrown all over the walls, on the sanctuary and even outside the church.

The church, built in 1946, is one of the many churches in Sri Lanka dedicated to St Sebastian who is considered a martyr in the Catholic Church history. The head of the church, Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, has recently expressed his disappointment over the probe in the blasts. — PTI

Argentina president tests +ve for Covid-19

Buenos Aires, April 3: Argentina's President Alberto Fernandez, who has been vaccinated against Covid-19, announced late Friday that he had tested positive for the deadly Coronavirus.

“At the end of today, after presenting a fever of 37.3 and a slight headache, I performed an antigen test, which was positive,” he tweeted, adding he was waiting for the results of a PCR test to confirm the diagnosis.

The president, who turned 62 on Friday, was in isolation as a precaution but said he was “physically well.”

“Although I would have liked to end my birthday without this news, I am also in good spirits,” he said.

Fernandez was inoculated with the Russian Sputnik V vaccine and had his second shot on February 11, sources in the presidency said.

Argentina is facing a second wave of the Coronavirus with a sustained rise in cases.

The South American country of 44 million inhabitants has recorded more than 2.3 million infections and over 55,000 deaths from Covid-19. — AFP

Biden lifts curbs on ICC staff

Washington, April 3: President Joe Biden on Friday lifted sanctions that Donald Trump had imposed on two top officials of the International Criminal Court, undoing one of the past administration's more aggressive moves targeting international institutions and officials.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a statement stressed that the United States still strongly disagreed with some actions by the court, which is a standing body based at The

Hague in the Netherlands charged with handling genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The United States is not one of the about 120 member countries of the court. “We believe, however, that our concerns about these cases would be better addressed” through diplomacy “rather than through the imposition of sanctions,” Blinken wrote.

The removal of the sanctions was the latest signal that the Biden administration is intent on returning

Death toll in Myanmar mounts amid protests

Yangon, April 3: Security forces in central Myanmar opened fire on anti-coup protesters on Saturday, killing at least two people according to local media. A human rights group said mounting violence since the February 1 military takeover has killed at least 550 civilians.

Of those, 46 were children, according to Myanmar's Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. Some 2,751 people have been detained or sentenced, the group said.

Threats of lethal violence and arrests of protesters have failed to suppress daily demonstrations across Myanmar demanding the military step down and reinstate the democratically elected government. The coup reversed years

of slow progress toward democracy in the Southeast Asian country.

Government forces fired at demonstrators in central Myanmar on Saturday, killing at least two people, the *Myanmar Now* news service reported. One video posted on social media showed a group of protesters carrying away a young man with what appeared to be a serious head wound, as gunfire sounded. His condition wasn't immediately known. At least seven people were injured in the shooting, two of whom sustained severe wounds and were taken into custody by soldiers, *Myanmar Now* said, citing a member of a local rescue team.

H-1B wage levels: US Labour Dept seeks public input

Washington, April 3: The US Department of Labor has sought feedback from the public in the next 60 days on determining the wage levels for the employment of various immigrants and non-immigrants, including those on the H-1B visas, the most sought-after work visa among Indian professionals.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows the US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. In a federal notification published on Friday, the US Department of Labor urged the public to respond to its request in the next 60 days.

The request by the department's Employment

and Training Administration follows a prior announcement by the department proposing an 18-month delay in the effective date of a final rule changing on calculating the prevailing wage levels for certain immigrants and non-immigrant workers.

Published in January 2021, the final rule affects employers seeking to employ foreign workers on a permanent or temporary basis through certain immigrant visas or through H-1B, H-1B1 and E-3 non-immigrant visas.

While the E-3 visa is one for which only citizens of Australia are eligible, the H-1B1 visa is for people from Singapore and Chile. The delay will give agency officials time to compute and validate prevailing wage data covering specific occupations and geographic areas, complete necessary system modifications and conduct public outreach. — PTI

Breach to delay Capitol fencing

Washington, April 3: The deadly breach of the Capitol's perimeter could delay the gradual reopening of the building's grounds to the public just as lawmakers were eyeing a return to more normal security measures following the Jan. 6 insurrection. Capitol Police officer William Billy Evans, an 18-year veteran of the force, was killed Friday when a man rammed his car into a barrier outside the Senate side of the

building. The driver, identified as 25-year-old Noah Green, was shot and killed after he got out of his car and lunged at police with a knife.

Their deaths came less than two weeks after the Capitol Police removed an outer fence that had cut off a wide swath of the area to cars and pedestrians to secure the complex after supporters of then-President Donald Trump had marched on the building Jan. 6. — AP

DATA | THEFT Third-party vendor Accellion closed ‘all known vulnerabilities’

University of Calif. victim of hack attack

Los Angeles, April 3: The University of California is warning its students and staff that a ransomware group might have stolen and published their personal data and that of hundreds of other schools, government agencies and companies nationwide.

A cybersecurity attack targeted a vulnerability in Accellion, a third-party vendor that is used to securely transfer files, the university said in a statement Wednesday. “We understand those behind this attack have published online screenshots of personal information, and

we will notify members of the UC community if we believe their data was leaked in this manner,” the university said.

The hacker or hackers also have been sending threatening mass emails threatening to publish data “in an attempt to scare people into giving them money,” the statement said. In an update Friday, the university system said the cyberattack affected about 300 organisations, “including universities, government institutions and private companies.” Other schools, including Stanford University's School of

Medicine and Yeshiva University in New York City, have reported that student and employee Social Security numbers and financial information were stolen and that some were posted online.

The information was obtained in December and January when hackers exploited a vulnerability in a 20-year-old Accellion file transfer service, various reports have said. However, some organisations said they only recently became aware of the breach. The *Baltimore Sun* on Thursday reported that private information of staff members and students at the

University of Maryland, Baltimore was posted online this week.

The school said a hacking group known as Clop gained access to Accellion in December, the *Sun* said. The University of Colorado and the University of Miami reported that files were accessed in January and included personal data and some health, study and research data. The Washington State Auditor's Office reported last month that information on nearly 1.5 million unemployment applicants had been stolen. — AP

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SHORT TAKES

Lanka stand firm to draw final Test

North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda: Sri Lanka's top-order batting held firm to ensure a draw and a drawn series against the West Indies on the last day of the second and final Test at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua on Friday. Set the daunting target of 377 and resuming at 29 without loss, the tourists reached 193 for two with a tops score of 75 by captain Dimuth Karunaratne and an unbeaten 66 by Oshada Fernando leading the resistance. After managing just 16 runs in three previous innings, Karunaratne's 25th Test half-century spanned over four hours. He faced 176 deliveries and struck nine fours before being trapped lbw by seam bowling all-rounder Kyle Mayers just before the end of the post-lunch period. — *AFP*

Brief scores (Day 5, stumps): West Indies 354 & 280/4 dec draw with Sri Lanka 258 & 193/2 in 79 overs (D. Karunaratne 75, O. Fernando 66 n.o)

Archers to get 2nd dose of vaccine

Pune: Olympic-bound Indian archers, who are based at the Army Sports Institute here, will get their second dose of Covid-19 vaccine next week before leaving for the upcoming World Cup Stage I in Guatemala City. The World Cup Stage I, to be held from April 19, will be the first tournament for the senior archers in Covid era. The archers will compete in three World Cups, with the third being a Olympic qualification before the Tokyo Games in July. As part of their vaccination drive, the ASI inoculated all the archers, which included the eight frontline Indians — Atanu Das, Tarundeep Rai, Pravin Jadhav and B Dhiraj (reserve) in men's and Deepika Kumari, Ankita Bhakat, Komolika Bari and Madhu Vedwan (reserve) in women's. — *PTI*

Olympic swim champ Clara dead

New York: Clara Lamore Walker, who swam for the US at the 1948 Olympic Games in London, won three national championships, and later in life set hundreds of national and world swimming records in several masters age groups, has died. Walker died on Friday of natural causes at an assisted living facility in North Smithfield, Rhode Island, according to her great-niece, Alyssa Kent. She was 94. She participated in the 200-metre breaststroke in the Olympics when she was 22 years old, but swore after her last heat that she was giving up competitive swimming for good, according to her biography on the International Swimming Hall of Fame website. In total, she set 184 world records and 468 national records as a masters swimmer, according to the website. — *AP*

Injured Tiger to miss Masters

Augusta, United States: Severe leg injuries in a February car crash ensured Tiger Woods won't be playing in this year's Masters on the 20th anniversary of his "Tiger Slam" victory at Augusta National. But the 45-year-old superstar, whose 15 major titles include five Masters green jackets, will have his legacy felt after suffering serious injuries when his car flew off the road and flipped several times during the Southern California accident.

Live on TV

CRICKET

South Africa vs Pakistan: Second ODI from 1.30 pm on Star Sports 1

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Southampton vs Burnley from 4.30 pm; Newcastle vs Tottenham from 6.35 pm; Aston Villa vs Fulham from 9 pm; Manchester United vs Brighton from 12:01 am (Monday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

Regd. No.
TNENG/2010/35692

Printed & Published by
K. Sudhakar on behalf of
Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited
and Printed at
Deccan Chronicle Presses situated
at SP 3, Developed Plot, Industrial Estate,
Guindy, Chennai - 600 032.
RNI Registration No: TN ENG/2005/14987
Ph Nos: 22254747, 22254748, 22254750,
22254751
Editor: **KAUSHIK MITTER**

COVID SCARE

10 Wankhede ground staff test +ve; Hyd stand-by venue for IPL

Mumbai, April 3: The BCCI remains hopeful of conducting the scheduled IPL matches in Mumbai from April 10-25 despite a massive surge in Covid-19 cases in the city and 10 members of the Wankhede Stadium staff testing positive for the deadly virus.

Indore and Hyderabad have been kept as stand-by venues for the IPL in case the Covid situation spirals out of control. Mumbai is scheduled to host 10 games of the cash-rich league. With in excess of 47,000 cases on Friday, Maharashtra is looking at a potential situation of mini-lockdown. Of equal concern to the organisers is the number of groundstaff at the Wankhede going up from 8 to 10 between Friday evening and Saturday morning.

If that wasn't enough, around six members of the event management team have also tested positive for Covid-19 and have been sent to isolation.

"Yes, it was 8 positive cases yesterday as far as ground-staff are concerned. Today two more positive cases have emerged and all 10 have been sent back home and are isolated.

"We are bringing fresh ground-staff from the Mumbai CA ground in Kandivali for preparations. Also 6 to 7 event management staff hired by BCCI have also tested positive," a senior Mumbai CA official said.

When a senior BCCI office-bearer was asked about the situation, he admitted that BCCI is indeed concerned.

"Look, even if there is a lockdown, the teams are in bio-bubble and also it's a closed-door event. So we are still confident that IPL games in Mumbai will be held as per schedule with DC playing CSK on April 10 on the second day of the tournament.

"But Hyderabad and Indore are there on stand-by in case the situation goes out of hand," the office bearer said on Saturday.

"Delhi Capitals ad Punjab Kings for example are taking turns to train at the Brabourne Stadium and Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) ground. KKR is training in Navi Mumbai at the DY Patil before they leave for Chennai," the official informed. — *PTI*

SMITH REACHES MUMBAI TO JOIN DELHI CAPITALS

Mumbai, April 3: Star Australian batsman Steve Smith on Saturday joined the Delhi Capitals squad and will undergo a mandatory seven-day hard quarantine.

The 31-year-old, who was released by Rajasthan Royals, was acquired by Delhi Capitals for ₹2.2 crore at the IPL auctions in February.

"2 monumental icons in one frame. Welcome to the DC family, @stevesmith49," the franchise tweeted a picture of the Australian with the Gateway of India in the frame.

The team has already started its training camp. Smith and compatriot Marcus Stoinis will hardly get time to train before DC's opening game against the Chennai Super Kings here on April 10 as the two will undergo a week of hard quarantine.

The prolific right-hand batsman, who joined the Rajasthan Royals franchise in 2019, captained the side in the 2020 edition in the UAE, where they finished last. — *PTI*



Daniel Christian of the Royal Challengers Bangalore plays a shot during a practice session in Chennai ahead of the upcoming edition of IPL.

— RCB

RCB look to end title drought

● **Balance issues in the squad, injuries and over reliance on Virat Kohli and AB de Villiers marred RCB's chances to win the title last season.**

has already confirmed that he will be opening the innings.

Partnering Kohli will be the highly-talented Devdutt Padikkal who impressed everyone last season and is in red-hot form. Young wicketkeeper-batsman Mohammad Azharuddeen, who had a staggering strike-rate of 194.64 in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, and New Zealand's Finn Allen are other attacking options at the top. De Villiers and Maxwell add the fire-power to the mid-

STRENGTHS

RCB have assembled a strong batting line up on paper. Run-machine Kohli

dle-order while Sachin Baby, Daniel Christian and Washington Sundar add to the depth.

WEAKNESSES

The RCB pace department does not inspire confidence. Navdeep Saini and Mohammed Siraj lack the experience of bowling with the white ball and have a propensity of leaking runs. Jamieson has struggled in T20s and has no experience of playing in India. Other options include medium pacer Harshal Patel, and the

Australian trio of Christian, Daniel Sams and Kane Richardson.

OPPORTUNITY

The presence of several big-hitters in the team could go in RCB's favour while chasing big totals.

It is also the perfect opportunity for Maxwell to set the tournament ablaze. He has been a disappointment in the IPL.

THREATS

Maxwell is a vital cog in RCB's grand scheme of things this season. If he tanks with the bat, it could have disastrous consequences for the side.

The over-reliance on Kohli and de Villiers continued last year despite big signings. — *PTI*

Jannik storms into Miami final

Miami, April 3: Italian teen Jannik Sinner rallied past Spanish seventh seed Roberto Bautista Agut at the Miami Open on Friday to book a meeting with Hubert Hurkacz in the biggest final of his young career.

Sinner, who reached last year's French Open quarterfinals, defeated Bautista 5-7, 6-4, 6-4 to become only the fourth teen to reach the men's final in the 36-year history of the ATP Miami Masters.

Poland's Hurkacz, seeded 26th, won his second straight match over a top 10 player, beating Russian fourth seed Andrey Rublev 6-3, 6-4.

Coming off a quarter-final win over second-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas, Hurkacz became the first player to take a set off Rublev at the tournament.

Sinner, 19 and playing only his third Masters 1000, joined 1990 champion Andre Agassi, 2005 runner-up Rafael Nadal and 2007 winner Novak Djokovic as Miami teen finalists. Sinner took his eighth career triumph over a top-20 rival and ensured he will rise into the ATP's top 25 next week, although he nearly smashed a racquet in a tense second set.

Sinner seeks his third career ATP title after last year at Sofia and February in an Australian Open tuneup at Melbourne.

Bautista missed out on his second career ATP Masters 1000 final after 2016 at Shanghai, where he lost to Britain's Andy Murray. Bautista broke Sinner to open then saved two break points and held for a 2-0 lead. But Sinner broke back at love in the sixth game to level at 3-3.

The Spaniard broke again for 6-5 when Sinner netted a backhand and he held to claim the set on his second ace after 51 minutes. In the second set, Sinner saved four break points in the seventh game to hold but sent a backhand wide on his first break chance in the eighth games as Bautista held for 4-4. — *AFP*

City CLIPS

Pranav wins title

V. Pranav of Velammal Vidyalaya Mel Ayanambakkam won the 68th Tamil Nadu state open Fide-rated chess championship organised by Tirunelveli district chess association at Tirunelveli.

Raja scores three goals

V. Raja scored three goals to help Indian Bank trounce Tamil Nadu Postal Hockey by 6-1 in the Shri N. P.V. Ramasamy Udayar Hockey Cup.

Results: Indian Overseas Bank 3 (Rafeeq 2, Muthuselvam) bt Loyola College; Indian Bank 6 (V. Raja 3, Somanna, Stalin Abhilash, Pavan Madiwalal) bt Tamil Nadu Postal Hockey 1 (Yogesh); Integral Coach Factory 4 (Rahul Yadav, Dhanush, Ashwin Kujur, Suresh) bt GST & Central Excise, Chennai 1 (Tamilarasan).

I'M OBSESSED WITH RISHABH, HE IS A MATCH-WINNER, SAYS GANGULY

New Delhi, April 3: BCCI president Sourav Ganguly says he is "obsessed" with Rishabh Pant's game and calls the swashbuckling India wicketkeeper-batsman "an absolute match-winner". The former India captain added that he loves watching the likes of Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma bat.

"There are some fantastic players and I think as President of the Board I should not say who is my favourite player. All are favourite to me but I enjoy

Kohli, I enjoy Rohit Sharma," Ganguly said. "I am obsessed with Rishabh Pant because I think he is just an absolute match-winner. Jasprit Bumrah is good, Mohammed Shami is good, I like Shardul Thakur a lot because he has got the courage and guts. There is immense cricketing talent in India. When (Sunil) Gavaskar was there people used to think what will happen after him, then came (Sachin) Tendulkar, (Rahul) Dravid, Anil

Kumble. When Tendulkar, Dravid left, Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Rishabh Pant took over," he said.

"There is so much talent for cricket in India that I think it will produce world beaters in every generation," he added.

Ganguly, who was picked for India's tour of Australia in 1992 but didn't get a single game, recalled how that experience Down Under and the hard work that followed in the subsequent years made him a better cricketer. — *PTI*

Captain Pant will be under microscope this IPL



Ayaz Memon
Over The Top

The IPL starts in less than a week, with the usual brouhaha considerably diminished because of Covid fears, but with expectations high as always. There have been some last-minute drop outs because of the pandemic threat (Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Marsh, Josh Phillippe), but the vast majority of overseas players contracted by various franchises are playing. This highlights the importance of the IPL

within the cricketing fraternity and in the sport. After the IPL became an instant hit in its very first season in 2008, several leagues have come into existence, but none matches its appeal.

Money, of course, is a major factor — if not the biggest in this. The salary cap for IPL franchises is 7-8 times larger than the next best league, which means more moolah for players and other stakeholders. But money apart, it's also

the high adrenaline ambience, the manic following by fans which makes the IPL special.

Players, after all, are performing artists. While they want to optimise their earnings, they also crave for attention. The IPL bags the most number of eyeballs and is the most discussed and debated cricket tournament.

Defending champions Mumbai Indians start as favourites considering their track record and the fact that less than six months back they had won the title in the UAE. But all other teams are in serious contention.

One of the attributes that makes the IPL not just attractive for fans, but also extremely competitive, is how even is the spread of

talent. Yet, of the eight teams, Royal Challengers Bangalore, Punjab Kings and Delhi Capitals have never won the title, which also shows that only having talent is not good enough to win.

While every team looks equal on paper, what makes the difference between winning and losing is the mental toughness and attitude of players. In a tournament that is played at frenetic pace, mental toughness and attitude of players become even more critical.

Among teams, I am particularly interested in how Delhi Capitals and Rajasthan Royals shape up this season. Young Rishabh Pant, who has enjoyed a glorious international season, has been appointed

captain of DC after Shreyas Iyer injured himself. Pant will be under the microscope on two counts: whether captaincy affects his batting form, and also how well he can carry the team, flush with many senior players.

If he succeeds on both counts, the swashbuckling youngster could soon rise a notch higher in Indian cricket hierarchy.

In some ways, though not quite to the same extent, Sanju Samson will also be under scrutiny. He replaces Steve Smith as captain and will have players of the class and experience of Jos Butler and Ben Stokes playing under him.

How he gets the best out of these senior pros, as well as a line-up of Indian players, is not the only

examination Samson will be under. Also in the RR team is Chris Morris, the most expensive buy in the last auction. While the onus is on Morris to justify the high price tag, so much will also depend on how the captain deploys him.

On the technical side, interestingly, the BCCI has chosen to remove the umpire's 'soft signal' proviso, in likely deference to India captain Virat Kohli's objections during the recent series against England. The ICC Technical Committee in its meeting last week did not tackle the 'soft signal' matter directly, but upheld the 'umpire's call' (which would be tantamount to almost the same thing) in DRS with some improvisations.

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