

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | SATURDAY 3 | APRIL 2021

WEATHER



Max: 38°C
Min: 22°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Panguni 21
Tithi: Sashti
Star: Kettai/Moolam
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
Yamagandam: 1.30 PM to 3 PM

PRAYERS

Fajar: 4.55 am
Luhar: 12.18 pm
Asar: 3.39 pm
Maghrib: 6.21 pm
Isha: 7.32 pm

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+74,855)	(+581)
1,23,76,965	1,64,009

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+3,290)	
TN: 8,92,780	12,750

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

	13,06,10,726
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DEATHS

	28,45,464
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COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES	219
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worldometers.info

2 militants killed in encounter in J&K

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, APRIL 2

In less than 24 hours, two of the four militants involved in Thursday's attack at a BJP activist's home here and their accomplices were killed in a gunfight that took place in J&K's southern Pulwama district early Friday, the officials claimed.

At least 11 civilians were injured in clashes with the security forces near the encounter site. The security forces in their final assault detonated an IED to blow up the house in which they had been holed up. **P4**

India condemns use of violence in Myanmar

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

In its strongest statement yet on the situation in Myanmar, India on Friday said it “condemns any use of violence”, stands for the “rule of law” and “restoration of democracy” there, even as it “urged the release of political prisoners” by the ruling military junta there which had seized power in a coup two months ago. India said it was engaged in an effort to play a “balanced and constructive role” in response to the current situation in the north-eastern neighbouring country.

COUNTER

POINT



Bad news, sir! Your name is missing from the NRC list!

US, Iran to get back to nuclear talks

Brussels, April 2: The United States and Iran said on Friday that they would start indirect talks with other major world powers next week to try to get both countries back into an accord limiting Iran's nuclear programme, nearly three years after former President Donald Trump pulled the US out of the deal.

State department spokesperson Ned Price called the resumption of

negotiations, scheduled for Tuesday in Austria, “a healthy step forward.”

But Mr Price added, “These remain early days, and we don't anticipate an immediate breakthrough as there will be difficult discussions ahead.”

Mr Trump pulled the United States out of the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, and President Joe Biden has said rejoining the agreement is a priority for his administration.

The Biden administration and Iran have differed on any conditions for that to happen, including the timing of the lifting of US sanctions against Iran, and the stalemate on those points had threatened to pose a major foreign policy setback for the new Biden administration.

Agreement on the start of multiparty talks — being held to get Iran and the United States over their differences on conditions for

also said that crude supply should be market determined rather than artificially managed.

At the same time, he said India has noted announcements by OPEC and OPEC Plus to effect a slight easing of crude production cuts.

“India has been appeal-

ing to crude oil producing countries - OPEC and OPEC Plus, since the beginning of the year, to ease crude oil production cuts announced last year, as high crude prices hurt the consumption-led recovery of several countries including India,” Mr Bagchi said. — **PTI**

High crude price hurts recovery, produce more, India tells OPEC

New Delhi, April 2: India on Friday strongly pitched for easing cuts in crude oil production saying high oil prices are hurting the consumption-led recovery of several countries including it.

Spokesperson in the Ministry of External Affairs Arindam Bagchi

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said that the possibility of a lockdown in the state cannot be ruled out. Already curbs have been put in place in

Pune where curfew has been imposed from 6 pm to 6 am for a week during which restaurants, bars and shopping malls will be closed. Thackeray said the

■ **P4**

STATE NUMBERS CROSS 3K MARK

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 2

The daily case load of Covid-19 infection crossed the 3000 mark in Tamil Nadu on Friday when 3,290 persons tested positive for the virus. It is a jump from Thursday's 2,817.

Chennai continues to top the table with 1,188 cases. This is the second straight day the city has reported more than 1000 cases. Chengalpattu, one of the worst hit districts, added 280 more cases. Coimbatore has also reported 277 fresh cases.

SACHIN ADMITTED IN HOSPITAL

Mumbai, April 2: Batting icon Sachin Tendulkar has been hospitalised as a precautionary measure, six days after he tested positive for Covid-19.

“Thank you for your wishes and prayers. As a matter of abundant precaution under medical advice, I have been hospitalised. I hope to be back home in a few days...” Tendulkar, 47, tweeted.

Meanwhile, AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Friday went into self-isolation after her husband Robert Vadra tested positive for Covid-19. All her programmes in poll-bound states have been cancelled.

■ **P4**

DMK candidates' offices also raided

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR, D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, APRIL 2

Income Tax sleuths, supported by a contingent of CRPF personnel, stormed into the mansion of DMK president M.K. Stalin's daughter at Neelankarai in Chennai on Friday morning as the campaign for the April 6 elections to the state assembly shifted to overdrive with even Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking votes in the state.

As news of the raid spread, the house where Mr Stalin's daughter Senthamarai and her husband Sabareesan live saw hordes of DMK cadre and leaders gathering outside to express their resentment.

Though many DMK cadre were not allowed to reach the bungalow when the I-T sleuths were inside the house, the party supporters raised slogans against the Central government, creating a furore in the otherwise quite beachside locality.

Besides the house of Senthamarai, raids were also conducted simultane-



Security personnel outside DMK leader MK Stalin's daughter Senthamarai Stalin's residence during a raid by Income Tax, in Chennai, Friday. — **DC**

ously at houses and offices of others associated with the DMK. Apart from a few properties of the friends of Sabareesan, the premises of DMK Annanagar candidate Mohan's son Karthik were also raided.

I-T sleuths also entered the houses and offices of Karur candidate Senthil Balaji and his friends, Tiruvannamalai DMK MLA Annadurai and many others.

After the raid that went on till past 8 pm, the I-T department issued a press

release saying they conducted searches on three different groups and a few individuals. They were into various businesses ranging from distilleries, real estate, finance and were handling cash for political parties for the upcoming assembly polls, it said.

The searches conducted in Chennai, Coimbatore and Karur yielded several incriminating materials on tax evasion and the searches were still on, the release said. ■ **P4**

Stop it, party tells EC EVM found in Assam BJP MLA's wife's car

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, APRIL 2

The Election Commission on Friday suspended four polling personnel in Ratabari assembly constituency in southern Assam after they were found to have violated transport protocol for electronic voting machines (EVM) by taking a ride with a polled EVM in a private car, which they later found belonged to a BJP candidate's wife.

Though the EVMs were found intact, the commission has decided to do a repoll at the polling booth concerned as precaution. The incident also led to violence in Karimganj district where the incident came to light.

The presiding officer has also been issued a show-cause notice for violation of the EVM transport protocol.

■ **Full report P4**

SHAH ASKS POLL PANEL TO PROBE

Karimganj/Guwahati: April 2: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday sought an inquiry by the Election Commission in to the incident in which a polling team in Assam being found carrying an EVM in the vehicle belonging to the wife of a BJP candidate.

CONG THREATENS TO BOYCOTT POLL

Guwahati, April 2: The Congress on Friday said that the “open loot and rigging of EVMs” has to stop immediately. Assam Congress chief Ripun Bora also threatened that the party would boycott the election otherwise.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses a public meeting as part of election campaign in support of their NDA alliance party candidates ahead of Tamil Nadu assembly polls, in Madurai, Friday. — **PTI**

DMK alliance is a dynasty club: PM

DC CORRESPONDENT KANYAKUMARI, APRIL 2

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday accused the opposition in the state of reducing itself to a dynasty club when the NDA alliance in the state is focusing on development. The government at the Centre was working for the welfare of Indians irrespective of their caste and creed, Mr Modi said.

Speaking at a election meeting at Agastheeswaram in Kanyakumari district on Friday, Mr Modi

said senior leaders who worked shoulder to shoulder with Kalaigarnar M. Karunandihi now feel suffocated because of the presence of the ‘newly-minted crown prince’. “The same is the case with

Congress leaders,” Mr Modi said referring to the increased role DMK president M.K. Stalin's son Udhayanidhi Stalin plays in the party. “The mood of the people however is against political nepotism and entitlement,” the Prime Minister claimed.

Mr Modi accused the Congress-DMK alliance of catering to the welfare of the children and grandchildren of their leaders “while the NDA has been focusing on development and people's welfare”.

Kanyakumari being a coastal district which hosts one-third of Tamil Nadu's fishermen population, the Prime Minister enlisted the schemes being implemented under the Pradhan Manthri Matsya Sambada Yojana. **P4**

INDIA WANTS CHINA PULL OUT TROOPS EARLY

New Delhi, April 2: India on Friday hoped that China will work with it to ensure disengagement of troops in remaining areas of eastern Ladakh at the earliest, and asserted that de-escalation of tension alone will lead to restoration of peace and tranquility in border areas and provide conditions for progress of bilateral ties.

At a media briefing, Spokesperson in the ministry of external affairs Arindam Bagchi said the two sides continue to remain in touch through military and diplomatic channels on the issue.

He also referred to external affairs minister S Jaishankar's comments that a prolongation of the situation is in neither side's interest.

“We, therefore, hope that the Chinese side will work with us to ensure that disengagement in the remaining areas is completed at the earliest,” he added.

This, he said, would allow both sides to consider de-escalation of forces in eastern Ladakh as that alone will lead to the restoration of peace and tranquility and provide conditions for progress of the bilateral relationship. Mr Bagchi said there was a consensus that the two sides should now quickly resolve the remaining issues in the region. “The disengagement in Pangong Lake area was a significant step forward and it has provided a good basis for resolution of other remaining issues,” he said. — **PTI**

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The income tax department's raids on DMK chief M.K. Stalin's daughter Senthamarai and others on Friday were aimed to check "political cash distribution" in poll-bound Tamil Nadu, sources in the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said. Till now, 28 premises in Chennai, Coimbatore and Karur have been covered as part of the action, they said



OTHER STORIES

Paid holiday for workers on poll day

Chennai: In view of the Assembly elections on April 6, 2021, (Tuesday), a paid holiday shall be granted to all workers including daily wagers, temporary, permanent and contract employed in factories in Chennai district compulsorily by the factory managements under Section 135B of the Representation of the People Act 1951, to enable them to cast their votes, according to a press release from A. Kavitha, the Joint Director, industrial safety and health-III, Chennai, on Friday. Suitable action will be taken against factory managements who refuse to grant a paid holiday on poll day, the statement added.

FIR against BJP candidate

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 2

A first information report (FIR) been filed against Aravakurichi BJP candidate K Annamalai for threatening to beat up DMK candidate from Karur, Senthil Balaji, during an election campaign at the Bhoomadevam region near Lingamanayakanpatti in Aravakurichi constituency on March 31.

During the campaign, Annamalai, a former IPS officer of the Karnataka cadre, was seemingly angry over his inability to visit some localities in his constituency. So in a fit of anger he personally named Senthil Balaji and said that if he beat him up he would lose his teeth.

Annamalai had reportedly said that though he was a calm person in Tamil Nadu, he had a 'Karnataka face', meaning that he in Karnataka he was known for beating up people, perhaps as a police officer.

After acknowledging his alternative violent persona, Annamalai directed his anger at Senthil Balaji, who is also the DMK district secretary of Karur, under which Aravakurichi falls, as he suspected him to be behind the impediments he faced during his campaign trail as a BJP candidate in the election.

Based on the former IPS officer's remarks, Senthil Balaji filed a complaint with the Aravakurichi under IPC Sections 153 and 506 (1) and Information Technology Act Section 65.

Collector inspects GPS vehicles in Thanjavur

DC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR, APRIL 2

GPS was fitted to 204 vehicles and another 32 vehicles to be used for poll works in Thanjavur district on Friday.

M. Govinda Rao, Thanjavur district collector, inspected the fitting of GPS on the vehicles and pasting of slips indicating to which assembly segment they will be sent for use at the armed police grounds.

Rao said that 204 zonal teams have been formed and they were provided with vehicles. Now, their movement can be watched from the control room at the collectorate and by zonal officers, the collector said.

He also said that a sum of Rs 1.44 crore carried with proper documents have been seized so far in the district by flying squads and static surveillance squads. People can contact toll-free round-the-clock control room number 1950 and lodge complaints, the collector said.



Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami greets Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a during a campaign in Madurai on Friday. — DC

NDA govt lifted ban on jallikattu: Modi

DC CORRESPONDENT
MADURAI, APRIL 2

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday attempted to trigger the pro-jallikattu sentiment of the Tamils in favour of the NDA in the assembly election by claiming that it was his government at the Centre that lifted the ban on the bull fight event by clearing the ordinance brought by the AIADMK government in 2016.

Addressing an election meeting participated by Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam in Madurai, Modi termed the DMK-Congress combine as an alliance with expertise in lying which does not do anything good for Tamil Nadu. He reminded about the ban imposed by the UPA government on jallikattu in 2011.

Referring to former union minister Jairam Ramesh, without naming him on his statement that jallikattu was a barbaric sport, Modi said the Congress and the DMK, without doing anything for the protection of ancient Tamil culture, now claim to be the champions of Tamil tradition.

"The Congress-DMK combine has mastered the art of doing nothing but spreading lies," alleged the prime minister, who suggested that Congress and DMK leaders should learn to control their lies as people were not fools.

The PM, reacting to the DMK campaign against the BJP and the AIADMK on the AIIMS hospital issue in Madurai, assured that the AIIMS project would be completed on time and added that once it comes into operation

Salem district an AIADMK fort: CM

DC CORRESPONDENT
SALEM, APRIL 2

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Friday asserted that Salem is a fort of the AIADMK. "In the last assembly elections, the AIADMK won 10 out of 11 seats in Salem, which can take pride as the chief minister's district. DMK president M. K. Stalin dreams for 24 hours to become the chief minister. People and AIADMK cadres can easily approach me. But DMK cadres cannot even touch the gate of Stalin's house," he alleged.

The chief minister was campaigning at Attaiyampatti for Veerapandi AIADMK candidate M Raja alias Rajamuthu.

"We have implemented many schemes in Veerapandi assembly constituency. We built a fly-

over at Ariyanoor on the Salem-Coimbatore National Highway and we provided roads in all parts of the constituency. Stalin does not know about Salem or about Veerapandi constituency. I went to each and every panchayat and town panchayats in the constituency. Now the entire DMK family including Stalin, Udhayanidhi Stalin, Kanimozhi and Dhayanidhi Maran are visiting Salem again and again. But they could not do anything and Salem will remain an AIADMK fort. Stalin said the AIADMK will vanish after this election. Stalin should see this crowd and will understand the power of AIADMK. The DMK was in BJP alliance in 1999-2004. But if we forge an alliance with them, they would criticize us," he added.

The common man in the southern districts would get quality health care. Modi also criticised that the Congress during the UPA government at the Centre did not even think of bringing AIIMS to Madurai.

Remembering the proud sons of the soil, Maruthu Pandiyas, Muthuramalinga Thevar, V. O. Chidambaram Pillai, Veerapandiakattabomma n, K. Kamaraj and N.M.R. Subbaraman, Modi did not leave a chance to invoke the pro-MGR sentiment of Madurai people in his speech. Calling

MGR as 'Maduraiveeran' after the MGR blockbuster movie of the same name, Modi said, "MGR's vision for an inclusive and prosperous society inspires us."

On the other side, picturing the Congress as an anti-MGR party, Modi said that it was the Congress government at the Centre in 1980 that dissolved the democratically-elected MGR government. "For MGR, people made him victorious in the next election," said Modi, who appreciated the Madurai people for their rock-like support to MGR.

IUML prez slams I-T raids on Stalin daughter's house

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, APRIL 2

Prof K.M. Kader Mohideen, national president of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), has strongly condemned the fascism of BJP Government at the Centre by utilising the income-tax department to initiate IT raids at the residence of DMK president M.K. Stalin's daughter, son-in-law and their five other premises and at the residence of Karthick, son of



Mohan, the Anna Nagar DMK candidate, just four days before the TN assembly election.

Kader Mohideen, in a

press release at Tiruchy on Friday, pointed out that various opinion polls have clearly indicated that Stalin will be the next chief minister of Tamil Nadu and under these circumstances,

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his cabinet colleagues who are undertaking a losing election battle for the AIADMK - BJP combine in every nook and corner of Tamil Nadu, decided to create panic among the opposition side.

BJP gives tough fight to Congress in Ooty

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, APRIL 2

After a gap of 20 years, the BJP poses a stiff challenge to the Congress in Ooty assembly constituency which is considered to be a Congress bastion.

With a bountiful nature wherein tea and tourism are the major lifeline, the ethnic Badaga community dominates the constituency.

In this election, the candidates of five major political parties, the Congress, BJP, MNM, AMMK and Naam Tamilar Katchi(NMK) are in the fray. While the MNM, AMMK and the NMK did not fare well in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and are

In this election, the candidates of five major political parties, the Congress, BJP, MNM, AMMK and Naam Tamilar Katchi(NMK) are in the fray. While the MNM, AMMK and the NMK did not fare well in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and are yet to prove their mettle in the assembly poll campaign, now it appears that the contest has narrowed down between the Congress and the BJP

yet to prove their mettle in the assembly poll campaign, now it appears that the contest has narrowed down between the Congress and the BJP. While the Congress won 7 out of the last 10 assembly polls, the BJP which put up a creditable show in 2001 in the DMK alliance lost to the Congress then. The BJP, now in the AIADMK alliance, is giving a tough fight to the

Congress.

The Congress has fielded its incumbent MLA, R. Ganesh, while planter M. Bhojarajan is contesting on the BJP ticket.

Though both candidates are polite and down-to-earth, Ganesh is a local man while Bhojarajan from Kotagiri is an immigrant to Ooty. Ganesh has been canvassing on his achievements over the past five years as an MLA.

However, the support extended by the Elava-Theeya community to the AIADMK front is likely to play spoilsport for Ganesh.

On the other hand, the BJP has made its electioneering electrifying and the promises of its leaders on fixing minimum support price for green tea leaf, including Badagas in the ST list and more funds for tourism development besides the sops announced by the AIADMK like free cable TV connection, washing machine, LPG cylinders and co-op farm loan waiver appear to have given an advantage to the BJP which is giving a tough fight to the Congress.

KAMAL A 'SUPER-NOTA', HIS PARTY WILL NOT WIN SINGLE SEAT: KARTI

New Delhi, April 2: Congress leader Karti Chidambaram on Friday dubbed Kamal Haasan a "super-NOTA" and said the actor-turned-politician's Makkal Neethi Maiaam (MNM) will not win a single seat in the Tamil Nadu Assembly polls as it is "not a sustainable political party".

The Congress MP from Sivagangai also slammed the AIADMK-BJP alliance and said the people of Tamil Nadu do not want a government which has any "stain, scent or shadow" of the BJP as its 'Hindi-Hindutva' agenda "irritates" them. In an interview with PTI, Karti Chidambaram also claimed that the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam-Congress alliance will win over 200 out of the 234 Assembly seats in the single-phase April 6 polls.

"People do not want a government which will not respect Tamil sentiments, Tamil language and Tamil heritage. They do not want a government which has any stain, scent or shadow of the BJP," Karti Chidambaram said. The 'Hindi-Hindutva' agenda of the BJP "irritates" the Tamil people and they do not want the BJP in any shape or form, he asserted. The Congress leader also claimed that despite Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visits to poll-bound Tamil Nadu and several top BJP leaders' aggressive campaigning, the BJP's "zero MLAs, zero MPs" status will remain.

"They will remain at zero MLAs and zero MPs. The prime minister can make as many trips as he wants to Tamil Nadu, but the BJP's Hindi-Hindutva policies will be roundly rejected by the people," he told PTI over phone while on the campaign trail seeking votes for the DMK-Congress alliance's candidates. Asked if Haasan and his outfit MNM will impact the polls, Karti Chidambaram

R.VALAYAPATHY | DC
TIRUCHY, APRIL 2

MNM founder Kamal Haasan's efforts to become a politician with a difference will become successful this time as the youth and educated voters prefer his party, claimed Dr Sidhu, the party candidate in Keelvelur (reserve) assembly constituency in Nagapattinam district.

Dr Sidhu, who hails from a doctor family in Thirupooni village near Nagapattinam, said that people are totally upset with the Dravidian parties, which he understand during his door-to-door campaign. His mother Dr S. Vetrivel, who served in the local primary health centre for about 27 years and retired as chief medical officer in the government hospital, Thiruthuraiipoondi, and looked after about 10,000 deliveries during her tenure will help him, hoped the dentist running a clinic at Velankanni.

As on date the battle is between Nagai Mali, the CPM-DMK front candidate and Dr Sidhu at Keelvelur as the ruling AIADMK is not fully

cooperating in the electioneering of Vadivel Rawanan of Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK). The PMK originally allotted the Keelvelur seat to Vedha Mugunthan, but subsequently replaced him with Vadivel Rawanan. Irked over this, Vedha Mugunthan and another PMK functionary Maruthiyar are still in the field as independent candidates. Others in the fray are Neethimohan (AMMK), Pon. Ilavazhi of Nam Tamilar Katchi, Muthazahan of Puthiya Tamilagam, Thamilarasana of BSP and Kalaiselvan, an independent.

There are total 1,79,264 voters including 91,578 women. The Dalits form the major chunk in the constituency followed by fishermen and other communities.

Dr Sidhu said the electioneering of his party picked up after the visit of Kamal Haasan recently. He attracted a large gathering, especially the common and educated voters. This apart, the MNM's symbol torch light reached well among the voters and Dr Sidhu hoped that this will also help him a lot.

said, "He (Haasan) is only a 'super-NOTA', he will not win a single seat and his is not a sustainable political party. They will only congregate for the elections and they will disperse after the elections."

The 'None Of The Above' (NOTA) option on electronic voting machines, was introduced in 2013. After the Supreme Court order in 2013, the EC added the NOTA button on the EVMs as the last option on the voting panel. On the key issues in the Tamil Nadu polls,

Karti Chidambaram said the main issue was that of ten years of "non-performance" of the AIADMK.

"The livelihood of the average person has not improved in Tamil Nadu. Then there is the rampant mis-governance and corruption by the AIADMK. It has favoured a few in giving out public contracts, there has been a huge siphoning of resources as well as poor quality of work by the public works department," the 49-year-old leader said. — PTI

Court dismisses contempt petition filed against chief electoral officer

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 2

Stating that the steps taken by the Election Commission reveal that there was a genuine drive to ensure that all polling personnel exercise their right to vote, the Madras high court has closed a contempt petition filed against the chief electoral officer, state of Tamil Nadu.

The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthil Kumar Ramamoorthy closed the



contempt petition filed by Tamil Nadu High-Higher Secondary School Graduate Teachers Association, represented by its Founder-President A. Mayavan, which

sought to punish the Chief Electoral Officer for having wilfully disobeyed the order passed by the court dated March 10, 2021.

The bench said in the order of March 10, 2021, this court recorded the Election Commission's submission that it was not possible for polling personnel to be allowed to vote electronically and postal ballots had to be resorted to for all personnel connected with the elections. Upon further noticing a document intitled as the handbook for the Returning Officer published by the

Election Commission in February 2019, the Election Commission was directed to ensure that all steps were taken to allow all personnel engaged in polling duty to exercise their franchise. The order also observed that though some mistakes could be condoned, "the Election Commission must try to ensure that the incidence of omission is below 10 per cent", the bench added.

The bench said in the light of assertion made by the Chief Electoral Officer on behalf of the Election Commission in a sworn affi-

davit, it cannot be said that the matter has not been attended to or that the right of the polling personnel to exercise their franchise has been violated, whether fully or otherwise. It was evident that nearly 60 percent of the Form 12's have been issued and nearly half of the postal ballots issued have been received back. A mere 114 Form 12's have been rejected and the number of rejected Form 12's across the State constitutes about 0.03 percent of the number of postal ballots issued, the bench added.



Velammal school students create a sand art as part of election awareness drive on Marina on Friday. — DC

SHORT TAKES

Toll fees increased at 24 plazas in TN

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 2

As the political parties slug it out during election season, the motorists received a shock as toll fees have been increased in the toll plazas across the State. The fees have been increased from Rs 5 to Rs 15 in 24 toll plazas from April 1.

The toll fee was hiked based on the wholesale price index in accordance with the provisions of National Highways Fee (Determination of Rates and Collection) Rules, 2008. The state has 48 toll gates set up by NHAI, and among them, user fee is revised in 26 toll gates every April 1, while the rest of the plazas undergo fee revision on September 1.

Condemning the fee hike, S. Praveen, a motorist, said the central government is working for the welfare of corporates. The authorities increased the fee without considering the woes of the motorists.

A cab driver Somu said, "Already we are hit by a steep rise in petrol and diesel prices. The Central government made Fastag mandatory from February 16. We are being fleeced in the name of Fastag. The authorities have not resolved Fastag issues." Another taxi driver Subramani said the Central government must stop increasing the toll fee and reduce them immediately. The fee hike came into force at 24 toll gates.

Kumaraguru's Yugam fest goes virtual

Coimbatore, April 2: Kumaraguru Institutions' Yugam, one of the biggest techno-cultural sports fests in South India, with an annual engagement of over 15,000 participants from 150+ colleges, has gone virtual this year where ultimate opportunities meet enchanting minds. International Search for Budding Minds, a Virtual Project Competition is slated to be hosted on April 15 and 16, 2021, in association with the Civil Engineering Alumni. The virtual Yugam '21 has been hosting a number of events on the national and global scale.

In the 40+ events in various fields, the notable ones include paper presentation, CAD Design Challenge, Virtual Line follower robot, Codeathon, AISA, India Quiz and Fusion art. Workshops in collaboration with Hariitha Techlogix, Nissan motor; L&T Technology Services, Ampere, CAD Solutions, Synapse Robotics, Keysight Technologies, Enthru Technologies and Zen Corp Techno Solutions (ZCTS), according to a press release.

HC enhances compensation from ₹30L to ₹83L to mishap victim kin

J.STALIN | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 2

Coming to the rescue of the legal heirs of a deceased, who died in a road accident, the Madras high court has enhanced the compensation awarded by the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal from ₹30 lakh to a whopping sum of ₹83 lakh.

A division bench comprising Justices Pushpa Sathyanarayana and S.Kannammal allowed the appeal filed by Kuruvani, wife of the deceased and her children Dhanya Sri and Monik.

When the deceased Palaniappa alias Palani Ayya was proceeding in a two wheeler from Boothalur-Thirukattupalli road to Vanarankudi, the driver of a lorry drove the vehicle in a rash and negligent manner, dashed against the two-wheeler. Due to said impact, the deceased sustained head injuries and died on March 5, 2017. On a claim petition filed by the legal heirs of the deceased, the Motor Accidents Claims Tribunal, Thanjavur, held that the accident had occurred due to the drunken driving of the deceased and



also because of the rash and negligent driving of the driver of the lorry and fixed the liability at 50-50. Further the Tribunal had held that since the deceased has not possessed valid driving license, 10 percent has to be deducted towards the award amount and awarded a compensation of ₹30.89 lakh. Challenging the same the appellants filed the present appeal.

The bench said the deceased was 39 years old on the date of the accident and he was a B.T Assistant in a government school. The accident occurred on March 2, 2017 at 11 a.m, which was a working day and in normal circumstances a teacher was not expected to take alcohol and go to school. In the post-mortem report no mention about presence of alcohol. When the Accident Register had mentioned about drunken driving, a chemical analysis for the content of alcohol should have been done. Having failed to prove that the

SHRC orders ₹3 lakh compensation to dead cab driver's kin

A ARUL PALANI | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 2

Two years after a 25-year-old cab driver committed suicide following constant harassment by police, the State Human Rights Commission has directed the government to pay a compensation of Rs 3 lakh to the driver's family members. Driver Rajesh Murthy shot a video of himself, shortly before his death, which went viral on social media and television channels.

Murthy worked for NTL Taxi service and killed him-

self due to harassment by police in the city. His body was found on the railway track near Maraimalai Nagar, on the outskirts of Chennai, on January 25, 2019.

After conducting a probe, Ramuthai, SI, Railway Police, Tambaram, sent the body for post-mortem and handed over Murthy's cell-phone to his relatives after deleting the video and photos. The relatives suspected foul play after finding the gallery empty. The family members recovered the video using software.

It was found that Rajesh himself recorded his statement about harassment by traffic policemen and the brother of the deceased gave a complaint to the police station to find out the truth.

Rajesh alleged that he was being pushed to suicide because of the "torture by Chennai city traffic police. Chennai police are the main reason behind my death. No one else," the driver said in a video.

The matter was taken up by the SHRC, which summoned Ramuthai, SI, Railway

Police, Tambaram, S.Perumal, head constable, Thirumangalam Traffic Enforcement and S.Thangam, SI, Traffic Control Room, Chennai. They denied the allegations against them.

SHRC member D Jayachandran said the behaviour of S. Perumal and S.Thangam is the main cause for suicide of Rajesh.

The commission directed the state government to pay Rs 3 lakh to the family members of Rajesh and recommended disciplinary action against the trio.

Chennai reservoirs: Water levels better than last year

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 2

Along with the temperature shooting up in Chennai, touching above normal level these days, the loss of reservoir water to evaporation has marked a rise. However, the water level is in a better position compared to the same period last year thanks to the unprecedented rainfall Cyclone Nivar had brought in last November.

According to the data provided by Chennai Metrowater, the total storage level of major reservoirs in the city now stands

at 9,337 mcf against the full capacity of 11,757. The water level in the same period last year was 6,384 mcf.

The water level came down by 1,675 mcf since February 18 when the level was 11,012 mcf.

The water resources department officials said they have planned to get a share of Krishna water to Chennai from Andhra Pradesh from next month as the evaporation level is high these days. The state has already received nearly 8.98 tmcft of Krishna water in two spells since last May. It was the highest share of water released since 2011.

The daily evaporation level, the officials say, is very high in Red Hills and Chembarambakkam reservoirs touching 40 mcf while dependence of the city on these reservoirs is high.

These two reservoirs meet nearly 550 million litres of total requirement in the city daily. On an average, the Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (CMWSSB) supplies about 830 million litres of water daily to the city. However, officials are confident to deal with the summer requirement.

At the 140 ft Poondi reservoir, the water level now

stands at 2,018 mcf. This is a dip from 3,101 mcf on February 18. The current water level in Chembarambakkam reservoir is 3,030 mcf, a dip from 3,325 on February 18.

At Red Hills, the water level has touched 3,032 mcf, a fall from 3,208 on February 18 against a full capacity of 3,300 mcf. The water level in Cholavaram stands at 770 which is also a decrease from 880 on February 18.

In Kannankottai Thervoykandigai reservoir, the water storage level is 487, a fall from 498 mcf in February.



Hot cross buns return with Easter season

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, APRIL 2

"Hot cross buns! Hot cross buns! one a penny, two a penny, Hot cross buns". It is quite difficult to forget this famous nursery rhyme on the hot cross buns, popularly known as Easter buns, would always give a joy to sing.

Of course, this famous bun with an extra puff, taste and flavour is available only during the Easter weekend. While the Corona crisis played spoil-sport with Easter celebrations last year, now this weekend the hills here have begun to see a couple bakeries coming out with hot cross buns to add traditional flavour to the Easter celebrations.

S. Rizwan, proprietor of Aazam Bakery at Commercial Road here, said that many Christians, locals and tourists buy hot cross

buns during Easter weekend.

"In this special bun we blend a mixture of dry fruits, raisin and spices with flour and bake it which gives a unique sweet taste. This mixture gives good energy too. It is now sold as Rs 25 per piece. It is good to see a baking product become a famous Easter weekend

delicacy. People buy them more on Good Friday and the sale would go up till Easter day. The bun marked with a cross, made up of maida, on the top brings it the name hot cross bun" he said.

Don Bosco, a Christian resident here, said hot cross bun makes one remember the history of Good Friday and Easter. While the cross on the bun signifies the crucifixion, the rich ingredients and sweet taste signify the resurrection, he said.

<<<<
"Hot Cross Buns" at Aazam Bakery in Ooty. —DC



Good Friday observed at Egmore church.

—DC

Ensure easy availability of Covid vaccine: Experts

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 2

Even as the state started vaccination for all aged above 45 on Thursday, amid a second wave of Covid-19, experts have suggested that vaccines should be made available to all interested people in an 'easy and fast' manner as immunisation can reduce the course of infection.

Dr Jayaprakash Muliyl, an eminent epidemiologist, told DC that taking vaccines could help the individuals to cut the impact of virus infection in their metabolic system.

"We have been able to maintain a low level of mortality rate compared to the developed world. It's a good sign that over 80 percent of infected people have recovered from the disease. It could further increase to 100 percent in the coming days. The severity level of the virus is also very encouraging

as over 80 percent of infected were mild cases. A city like Chennai, which has undergone a strong wave in the initial stages, has got the opportunity to have a significant amount of herd immunity to set in. So, the natural protection is still there. However, the vaccines, as per available data, could provide personal protection to the individuals, reducing the impact of virus in the body. Hence, it's important to make the vaccines available among public now", he said.

The serosurvey conducted on 26,135 samples by the department of health and family welfare across 37 districts in October-November last year had revealed that nearly one-third of the state's population (31.6%) had been exposed to Covid-19.

In Chennai, the seroprevalence has been recorded as 40.94 percent.

Samples were collected from 2,640 randomly selected participants aged above 18 years in 888 clusters.

Dr Raja, president, Indian Medical Association, Tamil Nadu, said the health department should consider setting up local level vaccination camps like the pulse polio immunisation programme to make vaccines available to the public easily.

"Today we are seeing low vaccine hesitancy among people compared to the initial days. So such camps can build trust among people to take vaccine jabs. Also, the current data shows that the public has less priority to private Covid vaccination centres when it comes to vaccination. So the government should make available more public centres to vaccinate people," he said.

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SHORT TAKES

GIRL RETURNING HOME GANGRAPED, ENDS LIFE

Meerut, April 2: A class 10 student committed suicide after she was allegedly abducted and gang-raped while on her way back from a tuition class, police said on Friday.

The girl belonging to a village under the Sardhana Kotwali area consumed poison after returning home on Thursday evening, said police adding she died in the hospital during the treatment.

Meerut's rural superintendent of police Keshav Kumar said four youths were involved in abducting and raping the girl and the police, on the basis of a suicide note left by the girl, have arrested two of the accused and have launched a manhunt to nab two others.

In her suicide note, the girl had named four men, including Lakhani and Vikas from a neighbouring village, besides two others.

Lakhani and Vikas have been arrested while the police are on the lookout for two others, the SP said.

After returning home, she narrated her woes to her parents and consumed some poisonous substance sometime later, prompting her parents to rush her to the SSD Global Hospital in Modipuram, where she died during the treatment.

NIA DETAINS 'MYSTERY WOMAN' SEEN WITH WAZE

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, APRIL 2

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has detained a "mystery woman" who was seen in the CCTV camera of a five-star hotel with Mumbai Police officer Sachin Waze.

The 'mystery woman' angle had emerged in the case on March 25, when CCTV footage of a five-star hotel showed her closely trailing Waze out of the hotel, where he had stayed for at least five days in mid-February.

Waze allegedly entered the hotel in an Innova on February 16 and left on February 20 in a Land Cruiser — both vehicles were later seized by NIA.

The agency was looking for this woman since the time the investigators saw her in CCTV footage. Finally, on Thursday night the NIA traced her location and accosted her at the Mumbai Airport and detained her. Later, a team searched her house in Thane district and was questioning her.

Initial investigation indicated that the woman was allegedly engaged in converting black money into white. According to the NIA, the woman was using currency note counting machines, one of which was found in one of the two Mercedes Benz cars used by Waze. The car was seized last month.

The NIA has claimed that Waze was running an alleged extortion racket from the room in the Nariman Point five-star hotel.

The agency has also claimed that Waze was helping a businessman to resolve some dispute and this person in turn booked the room in this hotel for Waze for 100 days at a cost of ₹12 lakh.

Waze used to check into it using a forged Aadhaar card and the fictitious name Sushant Sadashiv Khamkar. The probe also showed that Waze was operating out of room number 1964 of the hotel.

The booking was done through a travel agent by the businessman and Waze had stayed there in February while reporting for duty at the Crime Branch.

EVM transported in a private car of BJP candidate's wife, stirs violence

EC suspends four polling personnel in Ratabari (SC) for violating EVM transport protocol

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, APRIL 2

The Election Commission on Friday suspended four polling personnel in Ratabari (SC) Assembly constituency after they were found to have violated EVM transport protocol by taking a ride with a polled EVM in a private car, which they only later found belonged to a BJP candidate's wife.

Though the EVMs were found intact, the commission has decided to do a re-poll at the polling booth concerned in Ratabari (SC) as precaution. The incident led to violence in Karimganj district.

The presiding officer has also been issued a show-cause notice for violation of the transport protocol and a report on the incident sought from the EC's special observer in Assam.

The polling party, after completion of polling on Thursday, was returning in a convoy escorted by an armed escort.

In all, 1,300 vehicles were returning on the national highway NH8. Combined with the inclement weather, this led to traffic congestion on the highway.

As the relevant polling party was approaching Nilam Bazaar, its vehicle broke down at about 9 pm. Due to the traffic congestion and the prevailing weather condition, the party became detached from the convoy.

The party alighted from the vehicle and called up sector officer Ajay Sutradhar to apprise him of the snag. While the sector officer was arranging for an alternate vehicle, the polling party decided to arrange a vehicle on its own.

At about 9.20 pm, the polling party hailed a passing vehicle and boarded it along with the EVM and other things, without checking the ownership of the vehicle. As reported by the polling party, they moved towards Karimganj and as they reached Kanaishil at about 10 pm, they had to slow down in the traffic. At this point, they were surrounded by a group of about 50 people which started pelting stones at them.

Meanwhile, in an unrelated development, in what may be a major setback for the BJP, its chief campaigner and Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has been banned from campaigning for next 48-hours ahead of the third and final phase of Assembly elections, which are due on Tuesday.



Union Home Minister Amit Shah during a roadshow in support of his party candidates ahead of 3rd phase of state assembly poll, at Barupur Paschim in South 24 Parganas district Friday.

DON'T NEED YOUR ADVICE, DIDI TELLS MODI

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, APRIL 2

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday dared Prime Minister Narendra Modi not to suggest her fighting from another seat in the ongoing Assembly election in the state. Exuding confidence once again of winning from Nandigram, the Trinamul Congress supremo also threatened to blacken his face while asking him to exercise his "control" on Union home minister Amit Shah alleging his provocation behind unrest.

"I do not belong to your party that you can control me and give a suggestion of fighting from another seat in the polls. When I have contested from Nandigram, I will indeed win there and blacken your face. I do not agree to work on your advice. I work on people's advice," Banerjee said at a TMC rally in Dinhat of Coochbehar of North Bengal.

She was replying to Modi's jibe about whether she had plans to fight from another seat in fear of losing in Nandigram to her nemesis Shuvendu Adhikari of the BJP.

Modi slams LDF govt's stand on Sabarimala issue

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 2

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday hit out at CPM-led LDF government in Kerala for what he called beating and harassing Ayyappa devotees during the Sabarimala agitation.

The Prime Minister, who began the last leg of his campaign for the forthcoming Assembly elections in Kerala, addressed a public meeting in Konni constituency in Pathanamthitta district. Modi began his speech by chanting *Swamiye Saranam Ayyappa* a couple of times.

The Prime Minister said he was happy to be in the land blessed by Lord Ayyappa. "The devotees who come to the hill shrine observe 41 days of penance which makes this place more blessed. Ayyappa has taught us how to do good for all," he said. Modi attacked the LDF government accusing it of attempting to destroy the culture. "They carried out mischief against the devotees. Instead of welcoming them with flowers,

● NARENDRA MODI said that the ideology which had been rejected internationally would not be allowed to trample the country's culture.

the devotees were welcomed with lathis as if they were criminals. For decades the Left government is portraying Indian culture in poor light," he said.

The Prime Minister recalled Dr B R Ambedkar's statement that there was no role for Communism in a democracy. He said Ambedkar went on to say that "communism is like forest fire, it destroys itself and everything. But I tell you that the BJP will stand against trampling of culture." Modi said that the ideology which had been rejected internationally would not be allowed to trample the country's culture. He said the BJP would take steps to protect the Sabarimala tradition and customs.

Modi came down heavily on the ruling LDF and opposition UDF in Kerala stating that the people

were fed up with the two fronts and wanted BJP's development agenda. "People are telling the UDF and LDF enough is enough. Now they are seeking BJP and NDA's development agenda. They relate to our programmes and policies," he added.

He claimed that the entry of highly respected professionals like 'Metroman' E. Sreedharan was a game changer in Kerala politics. "A man who achieved so much over the years, who made India's progress faster yet preferred BJP as a means to serve society," he said.

Taking a dig at the Congress and CPM, he said the political picture in West Bengal was clear to everyone. "Election after election, the Congress and left are getting closer. The logical step after such closeness is a full merger of Congress and the Left. They can call the new party CCP (Comrade Congress Party)," he said.

He said the LDF government had failed to show any forward looking programmes to solve the problems of people.

SHAH ASKS FOR EC PROBE AS CONG CRIES FOUL

Karimganj/Guwahati/New Delhi, April 2: Union home minister Amit Shah on Friday sought an inquiry by the Election Commission after a huge political row erupted over a polling team in Assam being found carrying an EVM in the vehicle belonging to the wife of a BJP candidate.

"Home Minister @AmitShah says @ECISVEEP must probe charges of EVM being found in the car of a @BJP4India candidate in Assam and take action against those who may be found responsible," Rahul Kanwal, news director of *India Today*, tweeted after an exclusive interview with Mr Shah.

The Election Commission said the presiding officer and three other officials have been placed under suspension for violation of the transport protocol.

"Although the seals of the EVM were found intact, it has nevertheless been decided to do a re-poll at No 149-Indira MV School of LAC Ratabari (SC) as an added precaution. A report has also been sought from the special observer," it said.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi attacked the BJP over the incident.

"EC's car breaks down, BJP's intentions are bad, the condition of democracy worsens," he said in a tweet in Hindi.

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said the EC needs to start acting decisively on reports of private vehicles transporting electronic voting machines, and a serious re-evaluation of the use of EVMs needs to be carried out by all national parties.

In a series of tweets, she claimed that every time there is an election, videos of private vehicles, usually belonging to BJP, caught transporting EVMs show up. Congress ally Badruddin Ajmal said the incident shows an attempt to "steal" EVMs as the BJP is losing the elections.

"Polarisation? Failed. Buying votes? Failed. Buying candidates? Failed. Jumble-baazi? Failed. Double CMs? Failed. Doublespeak on CAA? Failed. Loser BJP's last resort: steal the EVMs. Murder of democracy," he tweeted. *PTI*

I AM WINNING IN NANDIGRAM; CONTROL SHAH, DID TELLS PM

Dinhata (WB), April 2: Asserting that she was winning the election from Nandigram, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday hit back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said that she does not need his "suggestion" on contesting from any other seat.

The Prime Minister had on Thursday asked Ms Banerjee to clarify whether there is truth in the "rumours" that she was going to file the nomination for another seat going to the polls in the last phase, maintaining that the TMC chief has admitted defeat in Nandigram.

"I want to tell the Prime Minister to control his home minister first and then try to control us. We are not your party's members that you will control us," Ms Banerjee said at an election rally in Dinhata in the north Bengal district of Coochbehar.

"I am not your party's member that you will suggest me to contest from another seat. I have contested from Nandigram and will win from there," she added.

At a rally in Uluberia on Thursday, Mr Modi said that the people of Bengal are prepared if she goes anywhere else to contest, anticipating defeat in Nandigram, where she was up against BJP's Suwendu Adhikari, her former close aide.

Ms Banerjee, who began her north Bengal tour with the rally here, alleged that the election is not being conducted by the Election Commission but by Amit Shah, the Home Minister. She alleged the central forces were being used to intimidate the voters. "I want more than 200 seats, since anything less than that will mean they (BJP) will buy the 'gaddars' (traitors)," she said. *PTI*

INDIA CONDEMNS USE OF VIOLENCE IN MYANMAR

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

In its strongest statement yet on the situation in Myanmar, India on Friday said it "condemns any use of violence", stands for the "rule of law" and "restoration of democracy" there, even as it "urged the release of political prisoners" by the ruling military junta there which had seized power in a coup two months ago.

India said it was engaged in an effort to play a "balanced and constructive role" in response to the current situation in the north-eastern neighbouring country.

On the Indian Defence Attache in Myanmar recently attending an armed forces function of the ruling Military Junta, New Delhi said Indian diplomats "continue to discharge their regular diplomatic responsibilities" and that "nothing more should be read into this attending of event by our defence attaché".

CASES | SPIKE

Delhi rules out possibility of lockdown; MP imposes partial lockdown in 4 districts

Lockdown option not ruled out: Uddhav

FROM PG1

state government has increased testing to 2.5 lakh per day. The number of beds in hospitals too has been increased. The Chief Minister said the Covid-19 virus has mutated and become dangerous now, hence, people cannot let the guard down. He mentioned that huge crowd is being noticed in wedding and other functions. Mumbai recorded 8,648 cases and 20 deaths in a single day spike.

"I cannot rule out imposing a lockdown if the current Covid-19 situation prevails. People have become complacent. We are in a catch-22 situation — should we look at

economy or health? If this condition continues, I have told you already that in 15 days we will exhaust our infrastructure. In the next couple of days, I will give out strict restrictions guidelines. But I want to also tell you that I will be speaking to many more people. I want a solution about how to break this chain. I don't want lockdown but what's the solution?" Thackeray said.

On the other hand, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said there was no possibility of a lockdown in the national capital. Addressing a digital press conference on the rising Coronavirus cases, the Chief Minister said that the Delhi

government is not planning any lockdown in the wake of the fourth wave of Corona in the national capital. If there is a need for a lockdown in the future, a decision will be taken after consultation, he said. However, the fourth wave of Coronavirus in Delhi is less serious than the previous ones as there are fewer number of deaths and hospitalisations this time, CM Kejriwal added.

Meanwhile, the Madhya Pradesh government on Friday imposed partial lockdown in four districts in the state amid surge in Covid-19 cases. Lockdown has been imposed in urban areas in the districts of Ratlam, Chhindwara, Betul and

Khargone. The lockdown will be in force in the urban areas in these districts from 10 pm on Friday till six am on April 5.

Similarly, Chhattisgarh government on Friday declared total lockdown in Durg district for nine days from April 6 in the wake of surge in Covid cases in the district. The district has reported 996 positive cases in the last 24 hours.

Meanwhile, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi who was scheduled to campaign in Assam throughout the day on Friday had to cancel her public meetings at the last moment after her husband Robert Vadra tested positive for Covid-19.

STATE NUMBERS CROSS 3K MARK

FROM PG1

Four districts —Chennai, Coimbatore, and Chengalpattu continue to contribute the major share of cases reported in the state. The cumulative total from these districts is 1,745.

Total active case across the state also recorded a steady rise on Friday with 18,606 cases; the number was less than 6,500 in middle of last month. Chennai is the main contributor to this table adding 7,161 cases. The state also recorded

12 deaths, all of people with comorbidities. Seven people died in Chennai while Kanyakumari, Tenkasi, Thiruvannamali, Trichy and Kancheepuram districts recorded one death each.

The active cases continued to drop till the second week of February since May last year. But new outbreaks through the family clusters in the Chennai and neighbouring districts and Coimbatore become a reason for the fresh surge in the state.

2 militants killed in encounter in J&K

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, APRIL 2

In less than 24 hours, two of the four militants involved in Thursday's attack at a BJP activist's home here and their accomplice were killed in a gunfight that took place in J&K's southern Pulwama district early Friday, the officials claimed.

At least, 11 civilians including a woman were injured in clashes with the security forces near the encounter site, the witnesses and hospital sources said. The security forces in their final assault against the militants detonated an IED to blow up the house in which they had

been holed up.

Inspector General of Police (Kashmir range), Vijay Kumar, said that prompt investigations launched into the attack on the house of BJP activist Anwar Khan in Srinagar's Nowgam area in which one policeman Rameez Raja was killed led to the arrest of a couple of persons who had provided logistic support to the assailants.

During the interrogation, the accused identified the place where the two of the four militants involved in the attack were hiding. It was a private house located in Ghat Mohalla of Kakapora area in Pulwama.

Format C-1
(for candidate to publish in Newspapers, TV)
Declaration about criminal cases

(As per the judgment dated 25th September, 2018, of Hon'ble Supreme Court In WP (Civil) No.536 of 2011 (Public Interest Foundation & Ors.Vs.Union of India & Anr.)

Name and address of candidate:**L MURUGAN, DOOR NO: 353 ARTHI FLATS, GUJI FIRST STREET, ANNA NAGAR EAST, CHENNAI 600 102**

Name of political party : **BHARATIYA JANATHA PARTY**
(Independent candidates should write "Independent" here)

Name of Election **GENERAL ELECTION TO TAMILNADU LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, 2021**

*Name of Constituency : **_101 DHARAPURAM-SC**

I **L MURUGAN** (name of candidate), a candidate for the above mentioned election, declare for public information the following details about my criminal antecedents:

Sl. No	Pending criminal cases		
	Name of Court	Case No. and Status of Case	Section(s) of Acts concerned and brief description of offence(s)
1	Chengalpattu Police Station	Cr.no.- 3975 / 2020 Charges not framed	u/s 143,270 of IPC and u/s 51(b) of Disaster Management Act
2	Thiruthani Police Station	Cr.no.-2727 / 2020 Charges not framed	u/s 143, 341, 188, 269, 270 of IPC and u/s 51 of Disaster Management Act
3	Thiruvennainallur Police Station	Cr.no.- 637 / 2020 Charges not framed	u/s 143, 188, 269 of IPC .
4	Kallakkurichi Police Station	Cr.no.-2039/2020 Charges not framed	u/s 143, 269 of IPC, u/s 3 of Infectious Diseases Act and u/s 51 of Disaster Management Act.
5	Thiyagaduruvam Police Station	Cr.no.-1334 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 143, 188 of IPC, u/s 3 of Infectious Diseases Act and u/s 51 of Disaster Management Act.
6	Cuddalore pudhunagar Police Station	Cr.no.- 1240 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 143, 188, 269 of IPC, u/s 3 of Infectious Diseases Act and u/s 51 of Disaster Management Act.
7	AppanTirupathi PS	Cr.no.- 1359 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 143, 188, 290 of IPC.
8	Palani Town Police Station	Cr.no.- 1552 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 143, 341, 269 of IPC and u/s 3 of Infectious Diseases Act.
9	Karur Police Station	Cr.no.-1303 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 143, 341, 269 of IPC and u/s 3 of Infectious Diseases Act.
10	Erode North Police Station	Cr.no.- 1071 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 143, 341, 269 of IPC, u/s 3 of Infectious Diseases Act , u/s 51 (b) of Disaster Management Act and u/s 4 Tamil Nadu Open Places (Prevention Disfigurement) Act.
11	Hossur Police Station	Cr.no.-982 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 188, 270 of IPC and u/s 134 of The Tamil Nadu Public Health Act .
12	Salem- Sooramangalam Police Station	Cr.no.- 1548 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 143, 341, 269 of IPC, u/s 2&3 of Infectious Diseases Act , u/s 51 (b) of Disaster Management Act and u/s 4 Tamil Nadu Open Places (Prevention Disfigurement) Act.
13	Coimbatore - Rathinapuri Police Station	Cr.no.- 1323 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 143, 341, 269 of IPC.
14	Chennai - Esplanade Police Station	Cr.no.-1660 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 143, 188 of IPC and u/s 3 of Infectious Diseases Act.
15	Chennai - Esplanade Police Station	Cr.no.- 1661 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 143, 188 of IPC and u/s 3 of Infectious Diseases Act.
16	Chennai - Mambalam Police Station	Cr.no.- 532 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 143, 188, 269 of IPC, u/s 3 of Infectious Diseases Act and u/s 51(1) (b) of Disaster Management Act.
17	Chennai - C.M.B.D Police Station	Cr.no.- 792 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 147, 148, 188 of IPC and u/s 3 of Infectious Diseases Act.
18	Chennai - Thiruvottiyur Police Station	Cr.no.-5701 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 143, 188, 269 of IPC and u/s 3 of Infectious Diseases Act.
19	Chennai - C.M.B.D Police Station	Cr.no.-797 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 147, 148, 188 of IPC and u/s 3 of Infectious Diseases Act.
20	Chennai - NazarathPettai Police Station	Cr.no.-738 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 143, 269 of IPC , u/s 3 of Infectious Diseases Act and u/s 41(6) Municipal Police Act.
21	Chennai - NazarathPettai Police Station	Cr.no.- 739 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 143, 269 of IPC, u/s 3 of Infectious Diseases Act and u/s 41(6) Tamil Nadu Municipal Police Act.
22	Chennai - NazarathPettai Police Station	Cr.no.- 740 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 143, 269 of IPC, u/s 3 of Infectious Diseases Act and u/s 41(6) Tamil Nadu Municipal Police Act.
23	Madurai - Thiruparankundram Police Station	Cr.no.- 1505 / 2020, Charges not framed	u/s 269 , 270 of IPC.
B Details about cases of conviction for Criminal Offences			
Name of Court & date(s) of order(s)		Description of offence (s) & punishment imposed	
Nil		Nil	

"In the case of election to Council of States or election to Legislative Council by MLAs, mention the election concerned in place of name of constituency.
Note: (i) Details should be given separately for each case in separate rows.
(ii) The matter in newspapers should be in font size of atleast 12

Candidate's Representative
P.K.raj



DECCAN Chronicle

3 APRIL 2021

South India is different: Hopes rest on Left, DMK

Situated as they are in the peninsula, the southernmost states of India — Tamil Nadu and Kerala — go to the polls on Tuesday (April 6) to face another litmus test of their political insularity that has been instrumental in keeping national parties out or largely marginalised their roles in alliances dominated by powerful regional forces. While the Congress, facing an existential threat, is hoping to be a force to be reckoned with in Kerala while leading the LDF against the UDF, the BJP is piggybacking on the remnants of Jayalalithaa's AIADMK with the hope of gaining a foothold in the deep south.

The smaller Union territory of Puducherry, till recently ruled by Congress before it was displaced by defections engineered from the national capital, might still be the exception to the formidable image of a southern bulwark against the national ruling party since BJP has aligned with N. Rangasamy's AINRC and AIADMK. The former CM may be riding a wave of popular support in the wake of a near five-year misrule marked by innumerable governance issues in an awkward fight with Raj Nivas, invariably seen as a symbol of the capital's control freak nature.

In the absence of a conspicuous anti-incumbency wave in Tamil Nadu, the ruling AIADMK, led by CM Edappadi Palaniswami who has performed as an efficient administrator, including in the battle against Covid-19, may have begun to feel the campaign burden of carrying the BJP on its shoulders. It is the absence of the charismatic leader Jayalalithaa, who had foresworn allies in 2016 to emulate her mentor MGR in scoring a second successive victory to a "Lady versus Modi" campaign theme, which may weigh heavily against AIADMK.

The other Dravidian major DMK has similarly reduced the seats for the Congress in its alliance of Tamil forces aiming to recapture Fort St George. An assertion of a Tamil identity might see red over the income tax raids, conducted mostly against the Opposition parties and suggesting the misuse of central agencies in a battle for votes. A preference to place M.K. Stalin, who had stayed in his father M. Karunanidhi's shadow for decades on end, on the seat of power seemed well-indicated in popularity polls till A. Raja's indiscretion changed things somewhat.

A campaign that was running smoothly enough on promises to keep the State out of NEET, fight CAA imposition as it is symbolic of a law being thrust by the Union against people's wishes and such issues may have been marginally affected by Mr Raja's references to the CM's late mother. The CM milked it for sympathy dramatically as any seasoned politician would. The larger theme of this being another prestige fight between two Dravidian majors who have given Tamil Nadu a unique outlier status in national politics was still dominant.

The Congress' fight to stay relevant in the South might hinge on a good performance from DMK+ as the prospects of the LDF benefiting from Kerala historical plumping for the alternative in five-year cycles may be denied by the impressive record of CM Pinarayi Vijayan who has steered the government with a focus on the people's welfare. The fickle nature of voters' behaviour at the EVM notwithstanding, it does appear the South India is ready to show once again that it is a different world.

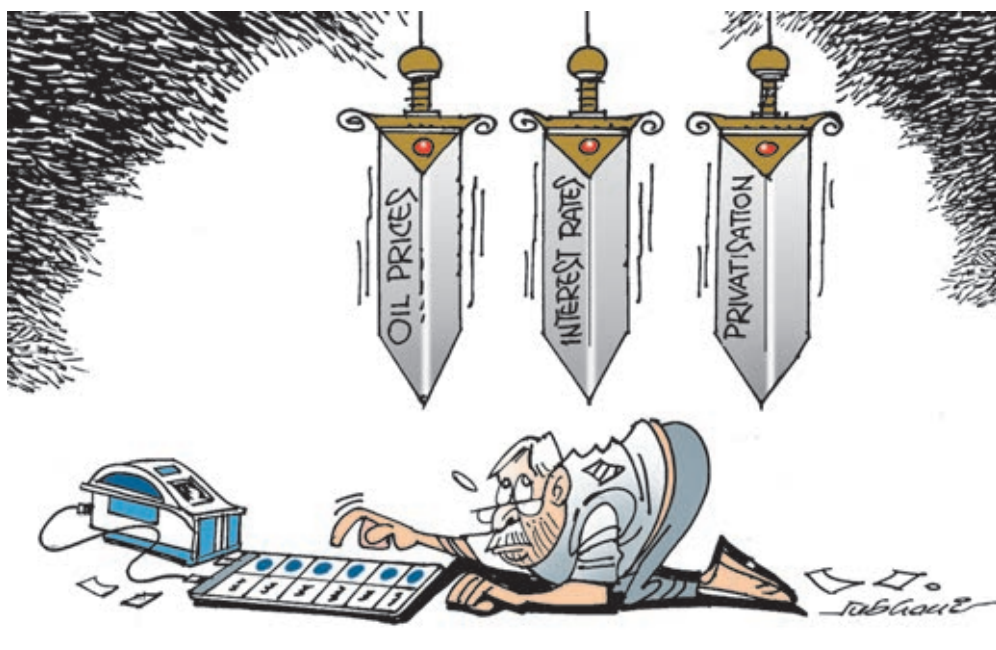
Right honour, wrong timing

There is no doubt that actor Rajinikanth deserves the Dadasaheb Phalke award for his rich repertoire of celluloid marvels. He is one actor in India whose fan following is so phenomenal that even now he is an artiste much sought after in the industry. Besides, his has been a spectacular journey of 45 years in filmdom. Starting as an anti-hero, he moved up the ladder step by step to touch the pinnacle of stardom with absolute grace.

Yet if the award gave rise to some doubts, it was in the timing of the announcement. And in no way can one blame Rajinikanth for the scepticism that descended on the state. The time chosen by the BJP government to announce a momentous decision like this was monumentally flawed. You do not proclaim an admiration for an artiste's greatness out of the blue when the state is in the throes of a bitterly fought election. And that when the superstar had distanced himself from the humdrum of the same election quite consciously. So many saw a crass political motive behind the BJP government's apparent recognition of Rajinikanth's cinematic talents and contribution.

Was it all aimed at influencing the voters of Tamil Nadu, particularly those who love Rajinikanth and his films, in favour of the ruling dispensation? Did the poor crowds that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other upcountry BJP honchos drew during their campaign prompt the ruling party at the Centre to come up with an idea as brilliant as handing over a prestigious award lying in their kitty to Rajinikanth? Or did it suddenly dawn on them that there is an actor in Tamil hinterland waiting to be honoured? Whatever it was, people in Tamil Nadu congratulated their superstar from the depth of their hearts before moving on to vote for the party and leader of their own choice.

Subhani



Will Didi's 'dadagiri' or BJP's 'dhanda' win Bong hearts?



Shobhaa De

As I key this in on April Fool's Day, I find I have completely run out of jokes! Even those crude Covid ones. There's nothing "hahaha ... HOHOHO" out there, and even our smartest, wittiest stand-up comics are struggling to come up with quips that make us laugh about the absurdity of it all. Black humour? I'll take it! Black, purple or polka dotted — who cares? I'm up for a giggle — I mean, watching the West Bengal polls, would have been amusing had it not been this ugly. I am sick to death of Didi's *dadagiri* — and the shabby tactics adopted by the BJP to counter her! At the moment Didi is winning the Big Bully race! This is a bit too rich, given that Amit Shah is India's biggest Dada... but cracking West Bengal is not all that easy, *Amitbhai*. Analysts can trot out all the numbers, charts and graphs at their disposal. Foreign observers of Indian origins can roll into the various districts to get a feel of what they believe is the ground level reality. Most of these experts are wealthy, well-meaning public intellectuals doing their job and filing detailed reports that nobody understands. But West Bengal operates with a logic all its own that defies standard deconstruction. Only one thing can be said with a level of certainty — Bongs are for Bongs. Simple!

For a true blue Bengali, it is only other 100 per cent Bengalis who make the cut — everybody else falls into the "outsiders" classification. Being born Bengali is the biggest binder — no matter where the Bengali lives. Even those Bengalis who have been away

from West Bengal most of their adult lives, identify passionately and exclusively with the Bengalis of their home state. They live Bong. Eat Bong. Think Bong.

At the moment, opinions on the outcome of the polls vastly vary, depending on which Bengali television channel is being watched. It is commonly agreed that the "elite" English channels are not giving the polls in West Bengal sufficient importance. Meaning, they are stupid enough to believe there is life beyond Bengal, and actually flash world news. The Suez Canal crisis over Hooghly hooliganism... It goes without saying, Bengalis do not watch Hindi channels, since Hindi is as good as a foreign language. This makes it a little difficult for those not blessed by Ma Kali to be born to Bengali parents (please understand — both parents have to be Bengali... we do not accept a concept called "half Bengali") to figure out the hyper sensitivities of voters. What are the actual dynamics dictating this fiery poll? It is not the economy — that's for sure. For most Bengalis, the crucial issue is a matter of their Bong identity. Is it intact or getting eroded? You can promise the Bengali just about anything — food, jobs, security, pros-

As the Next Gen figured ages ago, these old stodgy families who go on and on about 'class' — may have their comical version of 'class', but no money! They're broke! Most of them ran out of dosh two generations ago.

When Didi needs funds, she doesn't waste a moment on these fine people — she goes straight to those who have the requisite lolly — the Marwaris of Kolkata. They are a pretty canny lot, and far from 'emotional'...

perity, rice and fish for life, sandesh on a daily basis — it still won't impress the Bong voter. Had all these basics mattered, West Bengal would not be where it is today — in such a monumental mess.

One has to understand the emotional quotient of the Bengali to figure out why self-punishment seems to hold such an appeal! There is no such creature as an "unemotional" Bengali! Anything can trigger off a dramatic and exaggerated outburst. Mamata Banerjee is the queen of histrionics — she knows exactly which buttons to press and when. Her timing is unbeatable and when she throws one of her infamous, mother of all public fits — wow! Playing to the galleries comes naturally to Didi — she revels in high decibel acts during which she attacks opponents using offensive, crass street language — the kind lapped up by her loyal constituency. Didi cares a flying eff for what the *bhadralok* intellectuals make of her low-level barbs. They can sniff and snort derisively for all she cares — she knows those lofty men and women are not her core supporters. She probably consoles herself at such rare moments of self-doubt, with the thought that they could not be Amit Shah/BJP fans either! Which may be about right!

The club "*kaalture*" in Kolkata is unique and specific — the members are mainly antiquated boxwallahs desperately hanging on to vestiges of the Raj, while sipping gimlets on the well-tend-

ed lawns. They have zero idea about the "other" reality. Till the shoe pinches, of course. So far, their pedicured toes have been spared. The reason being simple — these relics really don't matter to any political party! For all their inflated egos and self-importance, even Didi knows she doesn't need to court this lot.

Besides, as the Next Gen figured ages ago, these old stodgy families who go on and on about "class" — may have their comical version of "class", but no money! They're broke! Most of them ran out of dosh two generations ago. When Didi needs funds, she doesn't waste a moment on these fine people — she goes straight to those who have the requisite lolly — the Marwaris of Kolkata. They are a pretty canny lot, and far from "emotional", not being fully Bong-Bong. They are willing to play footsie with whichever *neta* can further their business interests. They had no problems getting into bed with the Commies — and flourishing. So it will be in this election as well. God knows what Amit Shah has promised the fat cats. This is how it works in Gujaland — and perhaps traditional Bongs don't quite get it. *Maar-peeet*, murders and threats, playing the communal card — all this is so passe. Didi can appease, appease, appease all she wants and say *namaz* in public five times a day to win over a large and influential Muslim votebank. But it is really the clandestine money deals, that have already been brokered (according to those who claim to be in the know!), which will be the significant game changers in this bloody battle. It's all about "bijness" and "dhanda" — something the *bhadralok* Bong-Bongs have still to master. Till the results in May — just keep watching the *khela*!

Readers can send feedback to www.shobhaade.blogspot.com

LETTERS

KUDOS TO RAJINI

Congrats to Super Star Rajanikanth, who has been rightly honoured with the prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke award. Of course, as usual, there will be some brickbats by opposition leaders, especially at this announcement on the eve of elections in Tamil Nadu. However, they coolly forget that they too had adopted such methods to please their own people, that too on the eve of elections, to garner some votes. It's easy to criticise, but difficult to practise.

Capt. N. Viswanathan, Coimbatore

As a megastar and a pan-India celebrity, actor Rajinikanth richly deserves the prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke award. For over four decades, Rajinikanth has been the most glittering star in the celestial sphere of Indian films, whose cult status reached the skies. The dichotomy between the reel Rajini with his style statements that turned trendsetters, and the real man with his absolute simplicity and no pretensions, is nonpareil. Symbolically, the gate for Rajinikanth's glory was opened in his debut film (Apoorva Raagangal) itself when he delivered his first dialogue in it by opening the gate of the heroine's house. It is a wonderful gesture on the part of the superstar that he dedicated the award to his bus driver friend Raj Bahadur, who spotted the acting talent in him and supported him during his struggling days.

R. Sivakumar, Chennai

DON'T BLAME CORONA

Apropos report Section 144 to enforce social distancing in TN Under section 144. Four or more should not assemble but one or two without face masks can still roam. Based on the experience of last year, it is wellnigh impossible to enforce such law on the arrogantly defiant citizens. The district collectors cannot impose section 144 strictly nor prevail upon the violators who show scant respect to governmental dictates. The best alternative is to ask the police department to tom-tom through mike-fitted vans, police personnel from each police station making dozens of sorties creating a scare among the public, with a warning 'if found without a face mask, sans practising social distancing you will be taken to task. Otherwise don't blame the coronavirus for its spread, blame ourselves.

A. Seshagiri Rao, Chennai

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Farrukh Dhondy

Cabbages & Kings



"All things vile and murderous Bacteria great and small Sent to plague and burden us, The Lord God made them all.

The Covid 19 Virus The mutant RNA Sent to kill or mire us The Lord God at his play?"

— From **The Waist Band** by Bachchoo

Signs of hope in UK's Batley, as teacher triggers extremist calls

Living in Britain all these decades, I hadn't heard of the West Yorkshire town of Batley. It's now very much in the news and in the public eye because in its grammar school a teacher brought cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, first published in the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, and displayed them to his pupils in a lesson about free speech. Without referring to Google or an atlas, I can confidently say that Batley sounds to me what one may call a mill-and-mosque town.

This definition arises from the fact that after the Second World War, the textile mills of the north of England suffered a shortage of indigenous labour and imported immigrants, in

very large number from Mirpur in "Pakistani" Kashmir and from what later became Bangladesh, to man the night shifts and settle in these towns. Thence the mosques and religion in these communities as a central, motivating and governing dimension.

Then came the government of "Iron Lady" Margaret Thatcher, which, in its thrust towards capitalistic globalisation, allowed international competition to shut down the British textile industry and devastate the coal mining sector. Bradford, Huddersfield and of course Batley suffered mass unemployment. But despite that disastrous setback four decades ago, this week's news about the protests outside the school have made public two facts which I find curious, if not encouraging.

But first, gentle reader, the story as it happened. A teacher in his late twenties, teaching religious studies to the 690 pupils of the school, warned a class that he was going to pose a moral question. He would show them a cartoon which some people would certainly find offensive. He would then tell them that because of that cartoon several people associated with the drawing of it and publishing it in a French magazine were murdered. The question

the pupils had to address was the moral rights and wrongs, the religious taboo on drawing pictures of the Prophet and the contrasting morality of murdering people who had perpetrated the cartoon.

This teacher was aware of the fact that Batley, just outside Bradford, had witnessed large-scale protests and book burnings in support of the Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa against Salman Rushdie's book The Satanic Verses. Some of the 13- and 14-year-old pupils told their parents about the lesson. An irate Muslim parent expressed his objections on the phone to the teacher. Soon there was a demonstration of 50 or so people outside the school.

The headmaster immediately suspended the teacher involved. Reports said the teacher felt threatened, apologised for showing the cartoon and went into hiding to avoid being confronted or even killed.

One of the leaders of the protests, a "preacher" named Mohammed Amin Pandor, called for the dismissal of the teacher from the school and the profession. This gentleman, Pandor, is a publicity seeker. He is a graduate engineer from Dewsbury and recently issued a fatwa against the Covid-19 vaccine. He said there

were "uncertain substances in the vaccines" and that "Allah has given a definite remedy for safety from every form of harm and disease". He urged his followers to shun the vaccine and recite a certain prayer three times. In 2017, Pandor accused Ephraim Mervis, the UK's chief rabbi, of telling Jews that it was permissible to turn Christians and Muslims into sex slaves! This year he was forced to apologise to Mervis for that offensive falsehood.

Pandor has made it known in television interviews that he opposes gay marriage and even demands that the popular TV programme Strictly Come Dancing be banned. He signed a letter to the newspapers attacking an article by a Muslim police commander which was headlined "We must reclaim Islam from the extremists" and declared himself in favour of this extremism.

While the protesters insist that they will continue to picket the school until the offending teacher is permanently dismissed and even barred from the profession, over 60,000 signatures have been collected in Batley for his immediate reinstatement.

I have no way of knowing who these signatories are, their location

or their religion. Are they all non-Muslims? Or are some of them Muslims who want to reclaim Islam from the extremists?

The encouraging, if curious, fact is that of the 690 pupils of Batley Grammar, 420 or so of them are "of ethnic origin". This means that the children and mostly grandchildren of the original, mostly Muslim, immigrants to Batley and Bradford have achieved the academic qualifications to gain competitive entry into this grammar school, that was founded in 1612. It implies that they are on their way to university and are guaranteed status in Britain's meritocracy.

Now 600 of the school's pupils have signed a petition in support of reinstating the offending teacher. Even if all the "non-ethnic or non-Muslim" third of the school's pupils have all signed, it still means that 330 of the "ethnic" pupils, certainly at least 300 of them from Muslim households, have taken a "liberal" attitude to the incident and the supposed offence.

Can we conclude that this generation of Batley Muslims are moving away from the extremism that their parents or grandparents clung to?

Pandor Saheb, the tide of tolerance threatens.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,029.83	1.05
Nifty 50	14,867.40	1.20
S&P 500*	4,019.87	1.18
Dollar (₹)	73.11	0.01
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.03	-0.26
Euro (₹)	85.99	-0.25
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,701,881	1.97
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.00	2.01
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.177	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.679	-0.067

* As of 8:30 PM/Thursday

Suzuki Motor Gujarat's 3rd plant starts production



Suzuki Motor Gujarat Pvt Ltd (SMG), a 100 per cent subsidiary of Japan's Suzuki Motor Corporation, has commenced production from third unit at its Ahmedabad-based manufacturing facility. SMG has started production from April 2021, Maruti Suzuki India said in a filing. With production starting at the Plant C, which has an annual production ability of 2.5 lakh units, the total ability of SMG will be 7.5 lakh units, it added.

■ Q4 imports jump 159% to 321 tonne Gold imports hit record in March

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 2

Gold imports in March touched a record 160 tonnes, surging 471 per cent compared to the same month last year. Imports in the March quarter were up by 159 per cent, as demand for the metal went up with the correction in prices. Lower gold prices saw increased stocking up as well as retail buying, leading to imports going up to 160 tonnes last month, a Reuters report said. Value-wise, March imports grew multi-fold to \$8.4 billion from \$1.23 billion a year ago. Even during pre-pandemic times, usual monthly imports range between 60 and 80 tonnes. According to Somasundaram P.R., managing director, World Gold Council India, imports closer to 160 tonnes were recorded in 2016. "These are gross export numbers. We will have to see how much of this goes for export purposes and how



much of it is dore," he said. According to him, price correction from the all-time high levels in August and stability in prices for some time helped gold buying. Gold prices have dropped more than 15 per cent from their highs. Further, stocking up for Akshaya Tritiya has been happening at the jeweller level. Investment demand has been already high during the March quarter. The March quarter too saw a record import of 321 tonne, which was 159 per cent higher than 124 tonnes imported in the same quarter last year.

Gold imports were 72 per cent higher in volume and 154 per cent in value during January and imports were 124 per cent up in value terms in February as well. In February, the government had slashed import duty on gold to 10.75 per cent from 12.5 per cent. This also supported gold buying. Gold was trading at a premium in March, indicating higher demand in the market. However, post Akshaya Tritiya, the demand in the retail market is likely to be lower and this could bring down the imports in April.

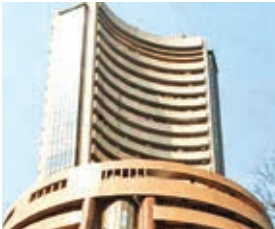
Oil price: Govt escalates stand-off with Saudi

NIDHI VERMA NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

Indian state refiners are planning to cut oil imports from Saudi Arabia by about a quarter in May, in an escalating stand-off with Riyadh following Opec's decision to ignore calls from New Delhi to help the global economy with higher supply. Two sources familiar with the discussions said the move was part of the government's drive to cut dependence on crude from the Middle East. Indian Oil Corp, Bharat Petroleum Corp, Hindustan Petroleum Corp and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd are preparing to lift about 10.8 million barrels in May, the sources said on condition of anonymity. State refiners, which control about 60 per cent of India's 5 million barrels per day (bpd) refining capacity, together import an average 14.7-14.8 million barrels of Saudi oil in a month, the sources said. India imports more than 80 per cent of its oil needs and relies heavily on the Middle East. Indian refiners could not cut April oil imports from Saudi Arabia as nominations were placed before the Opec+ decision in early March, the sources said, adding that plans for May were preliminary and final May nominations would be known in early April. — Reuters

MFs turn equity buyers after nine-month gap

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, APRIL 2



After nine months of profit-taking, mutual funds have turned net investors in the equity market in March. Mutual funds were net buyers of equities by Rs 2,476.45 crore last month, according to data from the Securities and Exchange Board of India. This trend reversal augurs well for the equity market, now largely supported by foreign portfolio investors and other domestic institutions like insurance, pension funds and banks. MFs were net sellers by a humble amount of Rs 501.50 crore in equities in June 2020, but as redemptions from equity-oriented funds picked up pace from the second half of the year over the sharp market rally, they began

to offload equity assets worth above Rs 9,000 crore every month from July onwards. Barring September (-Rs 4,134.37 crore), redemptions began to rise month by month—October (-Rs 14,491 crore), November (-Rs 30,760.07 crore) and December (-Rs 26,427.83 crore)—as market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty-50 began to make new highs almost every day. But redemptions eased from January onwards to -Rs 13,031.78 crore in January and -Rs 16,306.03

crore in February, as inflows started in select mutual fund schemes. On the fixed income side May 2020 (Rs 10,699 crore) onwards, mutual funds are investing in debt instruments, as investors, after booking profit in equity mutual funds, seemed to have reinvested the money in safer debt mutual funds. From June onwards Mutual funds were investing upwards of Rs 20,000 crore in debt instruments—June (Rs 41,364.71 crore), July (Rs 31,897.85 crore), August (Rs 25,780.28 crore), September (Rs 17,004.97 crore), October (Rs 31,975.11 crore), November (Rs 20,349.35 crore), December (Rs 23,368.42 crore). Debt investments by MFs moderated in January (Rs 11,831.74 crore) and February (Rs 8161.78 crore).

E-way bills touch new high in March

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 2

Around 7.12 crore e-way bills were issued in March, the highest monthly generation since its introduction in 2018. The monthly issuance of 7.12 crore was 75 per cent higher than 4.06 crore issued in the same month last year and 11.5 per cent higher than 6.38 crore in February 2021. On March 24, 2021 alone, 27.86 lakh e-way bills were generated, which was the highest in a day in the last three years.

E-way bills had seen their lowest generation in May 2020 at 2.51 lakh. Even in April, only 84.53 lakh bills were issued. However, by June e-way bills had moved up above one crore. Data on movement of goods on National Highways, as indicated by the FASTag and E-way bill volumes, recovered to pre-pandemic levels in September 2020. Since then, the bills have remained higher than the year-ago months. In 2020-21, a total of 61.7

crore of bills were generated, which had come closer to 62.9 crore in FY20 despite the pandemic impact. A total of 180.34 crore e-way bills have been generated in the last three years. E-way bills have to be generated for the movement of goods of value more than Rs 50,000, from one place to another, including multiple states. The E-way bill has helped in reducing the transport time in movement of the goods. It was launched on April 1, 2018.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES

DOCS COMPLETE HEART SURGERY DURING HOSP FIRE

Moscow: A team of doctors successfully completed open heart surgery inside a Russian hospital that caught fire on Friday as firefighters battled the flames from the outside, regional emergency services said. The wooden roofed building in the far eastern city of Blagoveshchensk caught fire and 60 patients were evacuated as it filled with smoke. But a team of eight doctors performing the operation on the ground floor carried on. "We had to save this person and we did everything," Valentin Filatov, head of the cardio surgery unit, said in an interview with state television.

JIHADIST SUSPECT BLOWS UP SELF, CHILD IN TUNISIA

Tunis: A suspected foreign jihadist blew herself and her little girl up with an explosives belt as security forces closed in in mountains of central Tunisia, the interior ministry said on Friday. It said the child she was carrying died on the spot and another small girl was wounded Thursday as the woman detonated the belt in the remote Mount Selloum area of Kasserine near the Algerian border, a known jihadist hideout. It said the woman's husband was also killed in the operation. National guard and army units the same day "eliminated" Hamdi Dhouib, a senior member of the outlawed Jund al-Khalifa, which is linked to the Islamic State (IS) group, in Mount Mghila, also in Kasserine, the ministry said in a statement.

Holy week



Archbishop of Paris Michel Aupetit carries the holy cross at the Way of the Cross ceremony during the Good Friday as part of the Holy Week celebrations, from the Sacre Coeur Basilica in Paris on Friday. — AFP

Russia massing troops, says Ukraine

Kiev, April 2: President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Moscow of building up troops on Ukraine's border and his top ministers discussed the escalating security situation with Western allies. He spoke after Ukrainian and US officials this week reported Russian troop movement in annexed Crimea and on the Russian-Ukrainian border, near territories controlled by Moscow-backed separatists. "Muscle-flexing in the

form of military exercises and possible provocations along the border are traditional Russian games," Zelensky said in a statement. He accused Moscow of seeking to create "a threatening atmosphere" as Kiev hopes to resume a ceasefire brokered last year. This week, Moscow and Kiev blamed each other for a rise in violence between government forces and Kremlin-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine, which has

undermined the ceasefire. Zelensky said 20 Ukrainian servicemen had been killed and 57 wounded since the start of the year. The military announced Thursday that a Ukrainian soldier was wounded in an attack it blamed on separatists. On Thursday, US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin called his Ukrainian counterpart Andriy Taran, the Ukrainian ministry said, adding that Washington said it would "not leave

Ukraine alone in the event of escalating Russian aggression". And Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba discussed the "aggravation by the Russian Federation of the security situation" on the frontline with his Canadian counterpart Marc Garneau. Ukraine's military intelligence accused Russia of preparing to "expand its military presence" in separatist-controlled eastern Donetsk and Lugansk regions. — AFP

Israel deal will be helpful: Saudi FM

Normalisation move with Israel depends on progress of peace process, says minister

Riyadh, April 2: Normalisation with Israel would bring "tremendous benefit" to the region, the Saudi foreign minister has said, but such an accord with the kingdom would depend on progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Under the "Abraham Accords" brokered by former US president Donald Trump last year, four Arab countries — the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan — agreed to normalise ties with the Jewish state. But Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said on Thursday that any deal with Saudi Arabia was "very much dependent on progress with the peace process". "I think normalising Israel's status within the region would bring tremendous benefit to the region as a whole," he said during an interview.

- Gulf powerhouse Saudi Arabia has repeatedly affirmed its decades-old policy of not establishing formal ties with Israel until a deal is reached to resolve the conflict with the Palestinians.
- Israel has long rejected engaging with the Arab Initiative. Last year, the scheme was essentially killed off completely by close Saudi ally the United Arab Emirates normalising ties with Israel, with the assistance of the Trump administration.
- The two countries have no official diplomatic ties.

in 2002, at the peak of the Second Intifada. It demands Israel withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which it occupied in 1967, and allow for the establishment of a Palestinian state in return for normalisation deals with Arab states. Israel has long rejected engaging with the Arab Initiative. Last year, the scheme was essentially killed off completely by close Saudi ally the United Arab Emirates normalising ties with Israel, with the assistance of the Trump administration. Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco all followed suit, in deals that failed to address the Palestinian issue or Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and its settlement expansion. The UAE claimed Israel had promised to suspend its plans to annex parts of the West Bank, though annexation had already been shelved due to international pressure and a lack of US support. Like other Arab countries around the Gulf, Saudi Arabia has forged strong clandestine ties with Israel in recent years. The two countries have no official diplomatic ties, yet Saudi de facto leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman reportedly met Netanyahu in secret last November. — AFP/Agencies

S. Korean prof's car never took to road

Yongin, South Korea, April 2: Decades before the race to build a self-driving car became a multi-billion-dollar contest between tech giants such as Tesla and Google, a South Korean professor built an autonomous vehicle and test-drove it across the country — only

for his research to be commissioned on the scrapheap. Han Min-hong, now 79, successfully tested his self-driving car on the roads of Seoul in 1993 — a decade before Elon Musk even founded Tesla. Two years later, it drove 300 kilometres (185 miles) from

the capital to the southern port of Busan, on the most heavily-travelled expressway in South Korea. Footage from the period shows the car barreling down a highway, with no one behind the wheel. A 386-chip-powered desktop computer, complete with monitor and

keyboard, is placed on the passenger seat. Han is sitting in the back, waving at the camera. "It felt extraordinary," said the affable inventor. "The workload was very heavy," but he and his team "had an enormous passion as it was something others

hadn't done yet, something that hadn't come out in the world yet". At the time, South Korea was more focused on heavy industry, such as steel and shipbuilding, with the average Korean not yet familiar with cellphones. The country was yet to

become the tech powerhouse it is today, and was still pursuing imitation rather than innovation. On one occasion, Han was told: "Why develop a new technology when you can always pay for it?" Han's projects were seen as dangerous. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

Ronaldo armband sold for \$75,000

Belgrade: The captain's armband that Cristiano Ronaldo angrily threw to the ground during Portugal's World Cup qualifier in Belgrade last week has been sold to an unidentified bidder for 64,000 euros (\$75,000) at a charity auction, Serbian state TV reported on Friday. A Serbian humanitarian group put the blue armband up for online bidding to raise money for medical treatment for a 6-month-old boy suffering with spinal muscular atrophy. The auction didn't pass without controversy as some participants tried to disrupt the process by putting up unrealistically huge sums. The fake bidding triggered public outrage with authorities pledging to find and punish the culprits. Moments before last Saturday's match with Serbia ended in a 2-2 draw, Ronaldo walked off the field. While heading to the dressing room before the final whistle, Ronaldo angrily threw down his armband near the touchline. After the match, it was picked up by a firefighter on duty and given to the charity group. — *AP*

Aggrieved Lucas to play for Boca

Buenos Aires: Arsenal's Uruguay international midfielder Lucas Torreira, who is on loan at Atletico Madrid, says he wants to leave Europe and play for Boca Juniors. Torreira said he came to the decision after his mother died of Covid-19 earlier this week. "The night my mother died, I told my representative that I don't want to play in Europe any more and I want to come to Boca," Torreira told *ESPN*. "It's not a violent emotion, it's not a crazy decision because of my mother. I've always said I want to play for Boca. I'm dying to play for Boca and I will always say that," he added. Torreira returned to Uruguay last weekend to be with his ill mother, who died in the early hours of Tuesday. "We have to stop the myth, it's not all about Europe. I want to be close to my home, to my family," he said. — *AFP*

New hearing date for banned Yang

Paris: The Court of Arbitration for Sport said Thursday that a new hearing for Sun Yang, the Chinese swimming star who had an eight-year ban for doping overturned last year, will be held in May. "A new hearing will take place during the week of 24-28 May 2021," CAS said in a statement. Switzerland's federal supreme court overturned the ban on Yang, who was accused of destroying a blood vial with a hammer when collectors visited his home in September 2018, over alleged bias towards the triple Olympic champion. The new hearing takes place just two months before the rescheduled Tokyo Olympics are held. However, the Swiss federal court agreed with the swimmer's lawyers who argued that the president of the CAS panel, Italian Franco Frattini, had previously made anti-Chinese tweets. They claimed the Twitter statements were racist in nature. — *AFP*

Brooklyn's Green stings Hornets

Los Angeles: Jeff Green scored a team-high 21 points as the Brooklyn Nets became the first Eastern Conference team to win 20 home games this season with a 111-89 rout of the Charlotte Hornets on Thursday. Kyrie Irving tallied 15 points and 11 rebounds and Landry Shamet and Tyler Johnson scored 17 and 15 points respectively off the bench for the Nets, who won despite missing all-star James Harden. Harden suffered a hamstring injury Wednesday and sat out the fourth quarter in the team's come from behind win over the Houston Rockets. But the Nets didn't need Harden, or injured Kevin Durant for that matter, as they stormed to a 32-11 lead after the first quarter. — *AFP*

KNIGHTS GEAR UP

KKR desperate to turn fortunes post tough transition

Kolkata, April 2: Two-time IPL champions Kolkata Knight Riders will be striving for consistency in their bid to recreate old magic which has been lost during a difficult phase of rebuilding after Gautam Gambhir's departure.

Be it the opening combination, middle-order or finding a finisher, KKR struggled for stability in the last edition in the UAE, while a change of captaincy at the halfway stage did not help them either.

Here's is a SWOT analysis of the side that will take on Sunrisers Hyderabad in their season-opener in Chennai on April 11.

STRENGTHS

In Eoin Morgan, his first stint as full-time KKR captain, the Purple Brigade have got one of the most astute brains of the white-ball format.

The English World Cup-winning skipper was one of the brightspots for the team in 2020.

KKR have made some smart additions to their squad in the mini-auction, apart from retaining their core of the side — 17 players — despite a disappointing season.

By bringing back Shakib-Al-Hasan and Ben Cutting, they have got the much-needed back-ups for the Windies duo of Narine and Russell, who failed to fire last season.

KKR will also be buoyed by the smash-hit international debut of Prasad Krishna, who took 4/54 in the first ODI against England in the recently-concluded series. This would also mean KKR would have a settled pace attack spearheaded by Pat Cummins with Lockie Ferguson as back-up.

WEAKNESSES

Once their strength, KKR of late has struggled in the spin department. Kuldeep Yadav is a shadow of his past and returned with just one wicket in



Dinesh Karthik of Kolkata Knight Riders plays a shot during a net practice session on Thursday ahead of the upcoming edition of Indian Premier League. — *Twitter*

five matches, of which he was not given the ball in one. One of the architects of their twin triumphs in 2012 and 2014 under Gambhir, Sunil Narine is also floundering. It was another mystery spinner, Varun Chakravarthy a Tamil Naud architect-turned-cricketer who took up the responsibility in Narine's absence but his fitness has come under the scanner time and again as it remains to be

seen how he shapes up for the IPL.

OPPORTUNITIES

Having decided to step away from being captain to "focus on his batting", Dinesh Karthik too will look to make amends in 2021. Then there are the seasoned duo of Shakib-Al-Hasan and Harbhajan Singh who too will look to make most of the limited opportunities that come their way on slow tracks on offer in Delhi and

Chennai. KKR have two interesting uncapped new signings in Venkatesh Iyer and Vaibhav Arora, who too will look to grab opportunities.

THREATS

KKR would need good start from opener Shubman Gill to give better starts this year in the Powerplay overs. Gill consumed a lot of deliveries upfront in most games which did create pressure on middle-order. — *PTI*

Shreyas to go under the knife on April 8

Mumbai, April 2: India batsman Shreyas Iyer is set to undergo a surgery on April 8 for his shoulder injury which had ruled him out of the last two ODIs against England and the entire IPL.

The 26-year old Iyer had suffered the injury during the first ODI against England in Pune on March 23 when he dived on a drive hit by Jonny Bairstow off pacer Shardul Thakur.

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

"Shreyas will get operated on April 8 for his shoulder injury," a source said.

Iyer is likely to be out of action for a minimum of four months. He had signed up with Lancashire but now is unlikely to play for the English county side in their one-day tournament starting on



Shreyas Iyer

July 23. "You know what they say, the greater the setback, the stronger the comeback. I shall be back soon," Iyer had tweeted.

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

Iyer was replaced by Rishabh Pant as skipper for the upcoming edition beginning on April 9. — *PTI*

Sachin hospitalised as a precautionary measure

Mumbai, April 2: Former India captain and batting icon Sachin Tendulkar has been hospitalised as a precautionary measure, six days after he tested positive for Covid-19.

The 47-year-old took to *Twitter* to announce the development on Friday.

"Thank you for your wishes and prayers. As a matter of abundant precaution under medical advice, I have been hospitalised. I hope to be back home in a few days. Take care and stay safe everyone," Tendulkar wrote.

Tendulkar had tested positive for the dreaded infection on March 27 and was in home isolation ever since.

"He is doing fine and has been admitted for normal (course of) treatment," a source close to Tendulkar



Thank you for your wishes and prayers. As a matter of abundant precaution under medical advice, I have been hospitalised. I hope to be back home in a few days. Take care and stay safe everyone.

— SACHIN TENDULKAR cricket legend

said. The batting great, who was part of India's historic World Cup win in 2011, also wished his teammates on the 10th anniversary of the victory.

"Wishing all Indians & my teammates on the 10th anniversary of our World Cup win," he tweeted.

Besides Tendulkar, former India all-rounder Irfan Pathan, his elder

brother Yusuf and S Badrinath — all of whom had recently participated at the Road Safety World Series Challenge — have so far announced that they have tested positive for Covid-19.

Tendulkar had led the Indian team to victory in the veteran's tournament in Raipur where crowds were allowed inside the stadiums. — *PTI*

BABAR BELTS TON AS PAKISTAN NICK PAST SA IN 1ST ODI

Centurion (South Africa), April 2: A century by Babar Azam set up a three-wicket, last-ball win for Pakistan in the first ODI against South Africa at SuperSport Park on Friday.

The Pakistan captain hit a stroke-filled 103 off 104 balls but his dismissal started a collapse in which fast bowler Anrich Nortje took four wickets in four overs.

Rassie van der Dussen hit 123 not out, his maiden international century.

But South Africa's total of 273 for 6 did not seem enough as Babar and Imam-ul-Haq (70) put on 177 for Pakistan's second wicket.

BRIEF SCORES

South Africa 273/6 in 50 overs (Rassie van der Dussen 123 n.o, D. Miller 50) lost to **Pakistan 274/7** in 50 overs (B. Azam 103, Imam-ul-Haq 70, A. Nortje 4/51).

Barty on a roll, in Miami final

Miami, April 2: World No.1 Ashleigh Barty bucked the upset trend at the Miami Open on Thursday, rolling into the women's final as men's second seed Stefanos Tsitsipas was toppled by Hurbert Hurkacz.

Australia's Barty fired 27 winners in a 6-3, 6-3 victory over fifth-seeded Ukrainian Elina Svitolina to return to the title match of a tournament she won when it was last held in 2019.

Barty will face Canada's Bianca Andreescu, who reached her first final since winning the 2019 US Open title by beating Greece's Maria Sakkari in three sets, 7-6 (9/7), 3-6, 7-6 (7/4).

Barty has gone from strength to strength since saving a match point in her opening victory over Slovakian qualifier Kristina Kucova.

"Every single match I felt like I've done something a little bit better, and that's all you can ask," said Barty.

But Greece's Tsitsipas was left trying to explain a "self-explosion" after he squandered a commanding lead in a 2-6, 6-3, 6-4 quarterfinal loss to 26th seed Hurkacz of Poland — the

latest in a string of upsets that saw men's top seed Daniil Medvedev and No. 3 Alexander Zverev bow out along with women's No. 2 Naomi Osaka.

Tsitsipas admitted it was a crushing outcome in a tournament where the absences of superstars Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer and his own recent solid form seemed to offer him a chance to shine.

Tsitsipas exited the tournament after a tense encounter that saw the 22-year-old Greek given a time violation after the second set for taking too long to change his shirt and headband.

The World No.5 was also reportedly involved in a tense exchange with officials before the match after refusing to share a golf cart with Hurkacz used to ferry players to the court.

There was no sign that incident had unsettled Tsitsipas early on, however, as he dominated a one-sided first set to win 6-2.

Tsitsipas then quickly broke Hurkacz at the start of the second on the way to a 2-0 lead. But just when it appeared the match was heading for a brisk conclusion, Hurkacz finally found his range. — *AFP*



Ashleigh Barty of Australia returns to Elina Svitolina of Ukraine during the women's singles semifinal of the Miami Open tennis tournament in Miami Gardens, Florida, on Thursday. Barty won 6-3, 6-3. — *AP*

City

CLIPS



SPFA, winners of a summer football tournament.

Vignesh, Prag do it for SPFA

Hosts Sabir Pasha Football Academy emerged champions in the SPFA summer tournament held at Ambattur ITI grounds on Friday. They beat YMFC 2-1 in the final. Riding on Sandeep's goal, YMFC were leading 1-0 for the most part of the match before SPFA netted back-to-back goals in the last five minutes. Vignesh and Pragadeeswaran scored a goal each for the winners.

Awards: Best player of the tournament: Pragadeeswaran (SPFA). **Top goal scorer:** Sandeep (YMFC). **Best goalkeeper:** Niranjana (Puzhal FC).

Kamalanathan stars in United's win

B. Kamalanathan's 5/14 helped United CC 'A' script a big win over SK XI in the first division of the Villupuram DCA league championship.

Brief scores: I-Division: United CC 'A' 270 in 49.2 overs (M. Nirubankumar 35, D. Suresh 30, T. Deeparasu 60, B.Kamalanathan 50) bt SK XI 92 in 22.1 overs (B. Kamalanathan 5/14; S. Senthilkumar 3/17); Kallakuruchi CC 202 in 49.1 overs (M. Vinoth 35; N. Raja 79) bt Sunny Sachin CC 129 in 37.3 overs (V. Sakthivel 26).

Gandhinagar to meet MCC in final

Gandhinagar Club 'A' ousted last year finalist Ransa Sports Club 'A' 2-1 in the semifinals of the 'A' zone SANMAR-TNTA Chennai city club league championship.

In another match, Madras Cricket Club 'A' defeated Anna Nagar 'K' Block 'B' 2-0 to reach the final for 17th consecutive time. They will now lock horns with Gandhinagar Club in the final at the MCC next week.

Results: Gandhinagar Club 'A' bt Ransa Sports Club 'A' 2-1 (Mohamed Riaz Ansari/Dhananjay Athreya bt Nishanth Panneer/R.S. Mohit 7-6 (7-5), 6-2; Arjun Rathnam/Gokul Anand lost to Preeth Kumar/Anush Rajasekaran 6-4, 3-6, 3-6; K.P. Balakumar/Aadith Prasad bt Shrinath Aravamudhan/Krishna Teja Raja 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7-5); Madras Cricket Club 'A' bt Anna Nagar 'K' Block 'B' 2-0 (Somdev Devvarman/G. Rajesh bt Nishanth Madhivanan/Vijayakumar Rajasingh 6-0, 6-3; Mohammed Fariz/Elwin Antony bt Ramprakash Ravishankar/Rajesh Doraisamy 6-1, 6-1).

ICF beat CHA

Integral Coach Factory beat Chennai Hockey Association U-21 by 6-0 in the Shri N. P.V. Ramasamy Udayar Hockey Cup.

Results: Indian Bank Chennai 2 (Raja, Pavan Madivalar) bt SRM IST Chennai 1 (Ranjith); Integral Coach Factory 6 (Sahil, Purthiv, Surender, Suraj Minz, Deepauk, Surya Prakash) bt Chennai Hockey Association U-21.

Regd. No.
TNENG/2010/35692

Printed & Published by
K. Sudhakar on behalf of
Deccan Chronicle Holdings
Limited and Printed at
Deccan Chronicle Press situated at
No 2/22, Sengallapalayam Road,
N.G.G.O Colony Post,
Kurudampalayam Village,
Coimbatore - 641 022. RNI
Registration No: TNENG/2010/35692
Ph No : 2231252, 253, 255, 257 & 358
Editor: KAUSHIK MITTER

Harrity, Hana triumph

Chennai, April 2: American Todd Harrity defeated top seed Mahesh Mangaonkar of India in a five-game thrilling tie to win the men's title in the second HCL-SRFI Indian Tour - Chennai Leg 1 at the Indian Squash Academy here on Friday.

The second seeded US player won 11-9 11-6 7-11 2-11 11-0 for a memorable win. Harrity, at 52, ranked five spots below the Indian player, started in whirlwind fashion and went two games up.

Unfazed by the two-game deficit, the 27-year old Indian raised his level of play and pocketed the third game in seven minutes. In the fourth, Mangaonkar was in full flow and wrapped it up 11-2 in just six minutes. But then Harrity raised his level of play and made short work of the top seed to secure the title in 51 minutes.

In the women's final, Egypt's Hana Moataz, the second seed, made short work of her compatriot Malak Kamal, winning 11-3 11-9 11-5 in 22 minutes.

Moataz, ranked 74, was in dominant form and never allowed Kamal any opportunities.

The PSA Challenger Tour event,



Egyptian Hana Moataz (second from left) and American Todd Harrity (second from right) pose with their trophies. (left) P. Saikrishnan (International Abilympics player) was the chief guest. Cyrus Poncha, secretary of SRFI, is also seen.

earlier scheduled to begin on March 27, had to be postponed after two players tested positive for COVID-19 and the tournament got underway on March 29.

RESULTS: Final: Women: Hana Moataz (Egypt-X2) beat Malak Kamal 11-3 11-9 11-5. **Men:** Todd Harrity (USA-X2) beat Mahesh Mangaonkar (India-X1) 11-9 11-6 7-11 2-11 11-0.