

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

VIJAYAWADA | SUNDAY | 4 APRIL 2021

## WEATHER

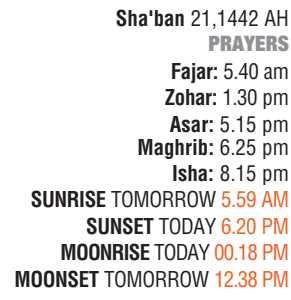


Max: 42.8°C  
Min: 26.0°C  
RH: 81%  
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Clear.  
Max/Min temp.  
42/26 °C

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Uttarayana  
**Tithi:** Phalguna Bahula Ashtami till 3 am (Monday)  
**Star:** Poorvashada till 2.07 am (Monday)  
**Variyam:** 12.02 pm to 1.36 pm  
**Durmuhurtam:** 4.48 pm to 5.37 pm  
**Rahukalam:** 4.30 pm to 6 pm  
**HIJRI CALENDAR**  
**Sha'ban** 21, 1442 AH  
**PRAYERS**  
**Fajar:** 5.40 am  
**Zohar:** 1.30 pm  
**Asar:** 5.15 pm  
**Maghrib:** 6.25 pm  
**Isha:** 8.15 pm  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.59 AM**  
**SUNSET TODAY 6.20 PM**  
**MOONRISE TODAY 00.18 PM**  
**MOONSET TOMORROW 12.38 PM**



Deccan Chronicle wishes its readers A HAPPY EASTER

## COUNTER POINT



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

## IN BRIEF

### Odisha Assembly turns free-for-all

**Bhubaneswar:** Odisha Assembly on Saturday witnessed an unpleasant scene when some opposition BJP members allegedly hurled slippers, earphones and papers targeting the Speaker's podium.



A huge branch of a tree collapses due to heavy rain at Lalithanagar in Visakhapatnam on Saturday. — DC

## Coastal dists to reel under heat

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 3

Thunderstorms lashed north coastal districts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam and East Godavari on Saturday evening bringing down the temperatures. An IMD report said southerly winds also caused the fall of temperature. Many districts in coastal Andhra Pradesh continued to reel under heat wave conditions, which, according to IMD reports, could continue till April 7. The report said that severe heat wave conditions prevailed over many places in Guntur, Prakasam, Nellore and Krishna district and some isolated pockets of Chittoor district. Nellore and Prakasam districts will experience

severe heat wave conditions from April 4 to April 7. On Saturday, Ongole and Kavali recorded the highest temperature in the State with 43.3 degrees Celsius. The departure from normal temperature was eight degrees in Kavali and 7.7 degrees in Ongole. Similarly Bapatla recorded 42.6 degrees and the departure from normal was 9.4 degrees. Sources in IMD said the departure from normal maximum temperature in Andhra Pradesh was the highest in the country. Meanwhile, a cyclonic circulation lies over Andhra Pradesh coast and neighbourhood at 2.1 km above mean sea level. The trough from Odisha to north interior Karnataka has become less marked.

## WORLD | 7

### B'desh to impose 7-day lockdown

deccanchronicle.com, facebook.com/deccannews, twitter.com/deccanchronicle

## SPORTS | 8

### Covid scare: Hyd, Indore likely standby venues

## TABLOID

### 'I am not an actor by accident, but by choice'



## TTD reinstates Deekshithulu, 10 priests retired by TD govt

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 3

Dr A.V. Ramana Deekshithulu along with more than 10 hereditary priests, who were forcibly retired from their respective posts by the previous TTD trust board during the erstwhile Telugu Desam regime in May 2018, is going to be reinstated to the positions they held prior to their retirement.

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has issued fresh orders reinstating the retired hereditary priests associated with the Lord Venkateswara temple at Tirumala, the Govindaraja Swamy temple at Tirupati and the Sri Padmavathi Ammavari temple at Tiruchanoor.

Going by the order, Dr Ramana Deekshithulu — in all probability — would be back as the chief priest of the Tirumala temple after a long drawn political and legal battle. The other hereditary priests associated with the Govindaraja Swamy temple and Padmavathi Ammavari temple would also join back their respective posts.

"Quashing all orders issued previously by the TTD board and in terms of the representation of Dr Deekshithulu and in compliance of the judgement of AP High Court, all Pradhana Archakas/Archakas belonging to erstwhile Mirasi families, who were

## TTD postpones Arjitha Sevas

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 3

In view of the increasing Covid-19 cases across the country, TTD has decided to postpone resuming Arjitha Sevas at the Tirumala temple. Earlier, the TTD trust board had resolved, during its board meeting held last month, to resume Arjitha Sevas in Tirumala temple from April 14 onwards.

However, with the Covid-19 second spell, TTD has decided to postpone the resuming of Arjitha Sevas in view of health security of pilgrims. After the situation turns to normalcy, the devotees will be informed prior about the resuming of Arjitha Sevas by TTD, a release from the temple body stated.

Meanwhile, the traditional temple cleansing

fete, Koil Alwar Tirumanjanam will be observed in this temple on April 6 in view of the Telugu New Year's Day Ugadi on April 13. On Tuesday, the temple, sub-temples inside Tirumala temple, puja utensils, roofs, walls, ceilings will be cleansed with an aromatic mixture called Parimalam, which will be sprayed all over between 6 am and 9 am.

While the cleansing process is on, the Mula Murthi (Presiding deity) will be covered with a white veil. After the cleansing process of the temple is completed, the veil is removed and the remaining rituals and pujas will be carried out to the presiding deity by the Archakas. After that the devotees will be allowed for darshan after the special pujas on that day.

retired in pursuance of a board resolution on May 16, 2018, were restored to their positions held by them prior to their retirement", the order stated.

The decision to reinstate the retired hereditary pri-

ests including Deekshithulu in their previous posts was taken by the TTD trust board under the chairmanship of Y.V. Subba Reddy. This move fulfilled the promise made by CM

Jagan Mohan Reddy to the

hereditary priests' families across AP in the run up to the 2019 elections, that he will reinstate their hereditary rights once he was voted to power.

Fulfilling the promise, the Jagan-led government passed a GO No.76, restoring hereditary rights or the retired priests in October, 2019, but the order could not be implemented entirely because of various reasons. However, the TTD has finally resolved to reinstate the retired hereditary archakas back into the TTD fold.

It may be recalled that following the allegations made by Ramana Deekshithulu that several precious jewels gone missing from the temple and also the claims he made of financial irregularities in TTD, the then trust board under the chairmanship of Putta Sudhakar Yadav, in May, 2018 had passed a resolution fixing up a retirement age for hereditary priests. Implementing the controversial resolution, the trust board forcibly made four chief priests including Dr Deekshithulu to retire. The TTD also implemented the same resolution at Tiruchanoor temple and retired hereditary priests including A.B. Seshadri and M.G. Murali associated with that temple in June, 2018.

■ Page 3: Archaka Samakhyia hails TTD

## 5 jawans killed in Maoist ambush

### Ultras too suffered 'huge loss' in Bastar: Cops

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC**  
RAIPUR, APRIL 3

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

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

The encounter took place near Jonagunda village situated along the Sukma-Bijapur border when a joint team of security forces were out on a counterinsurgency operation, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of police (Naxal Operation) O.P. Pal said.

"Five jawans were killed and 12 others injured in the incident. Body of a woman Maoist was also recovered at the encounter site," Pal said.

According to Pal, a joint search party comprising personnel of Commando Battalion for Resolute

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

Drones spotted the Maoists' movement, sources said. A senior police officer posted in Bastar

told this newspaper that two joint search parties were mobilised from Sukma and Bijapur districts to launch anti-Naxal operation in Terram forest area following intelligence inputs on presence of Maoists' battalion number one commander

Hidma along with his militiamen in Terram area. "Maoists laid ambush for one of the two search parties at an open ground on the outskirts of Jonagunda village under Jagargunda police limits at around 12 in the noon. A fierce gun

battle ensued between them, leading to killing of a jawan of CoBRA and two security personnel each of DRG and Bastaria Battalion and injuries to 2 others".

"Body of a woman Naxal along with an Insas assault rifle was recovered at the encounter site," the police officer said, unwilling to be quoted since he was not authorised to speak to media.

Two Indian Air Force (IAF) helicopters were pressed into service to evacuate the injured jawans. All the injured jawans were airlifted to Raipur for medical treatment.

This was the second major attack on security personnel by Naxals in Bastar in the last 10 days.

On March 23, Maoists blew up a bus carrying DRG jawans in Kodanar area under Chhattisgarh's south Bastar district of Narayanpur by detonating improvised explosive

device explosion killing 5 jawans and injuring 14 others.

## More cadre revolt in TD on parishad poll boycott

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 3

Revolt within the Telugu Desam has been expanding to several parts of the state on Saturday after TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu announcement that TDP will boycott MPTC and ZPTC elections objecting to violation of norms by ruling YSR Congress.

Within 24 hours, several leaders have openly opposed the boycott decision. They asserted that they will take a decision on the issue according to wishes of local cadres and leaders.

Notification for MPTC and ZPTC election was first issued in 2020 but

### Pg 5 | BJP, Jana Sena euphoric after td skips polls

polling was postponed by then state election commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar following the Coronavirus pandemic. This was after candidates had spent huge sums to get votes from locals in the elections. Thus, Chandrababu Naidu's decision to now boycott elections has come as a shocker for TDP candidates. Most of them have decided to ignore their party chief's dictum.

In Mangalagiri segment, where Nara Lokesh lost

● WITHIN 24 hours, several leaders have openly opposed the boycott decision.

the election in 2019, TD leaders have decided to remain in election fray for the 18 MPTC and one ZPTC seat in Duggirala. TD leaders Pothineni Srinivas Rao, Guduru Venkata Rao and Unnam Jhansi Rani said chances of TD candidates winning are bright and local TD cadres are pressuring them to remain in fray. "We have to honour their wishes," the TD leaders remarked.

■ Page 5: Cadres unhappy with Naidu's decision

**BRAND POWER**



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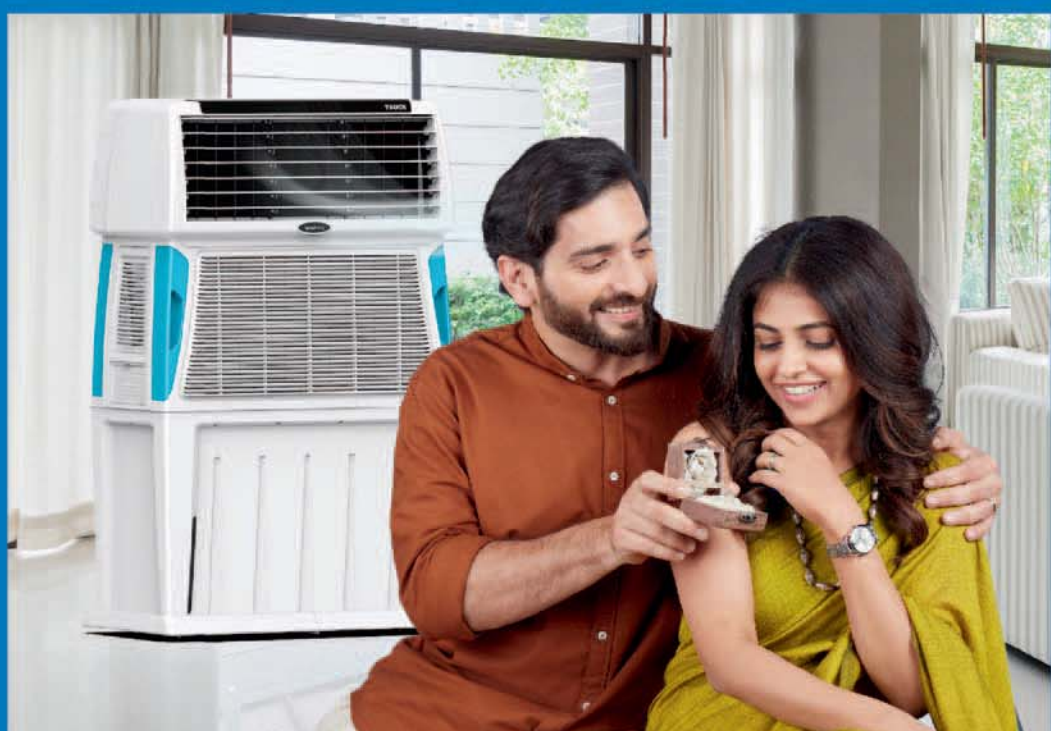
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## SHORT TAKES

## 70-year-old man dies by suicide

**Visakhapatnam:** A 70-year-old man died by suicide by jumping into a well at Korlam village under Sompeta mandal in Srikakulam district on Saturday. The deceased was identified as R. Neelaiah. The police are yet to ascertain the exact reasons behind the suicide but they suspect personal issues could have driven to take the extreme step.

## Man held for killing wife

**Visakhapatnam:** The Vizianagaram police arrested M. Ramesh for killing his wife at Ramabhadrapuram in the district. The police said that Ramesh killed his wife under the influence of alcohol and in a fit of rage. He tried to depict the death as suicide but later confessed to the crime, the police said.

## RESEARCH ON CATALYSTS FOR CO2 REDUCTION

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 3

Two projects have been sanctioned by the National Supercomputing Mission (NSM) of the Government of India to Prof. Ranjit Thapa and Dr Mahesh Kumar Ravva faculty members of SRM University AP. The project titled "Catalysts for CO2 Reduction to C2 Product: Descriptor to Database" has been sanctioned to Prof. Ranjit Thapa, Professor of Physics, SRM University - AP by National Supercomputing Mission (NSM), supported by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) in collaboration with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeiTy), Government of India.

Prof Ranjit Thapa said that project aimed to search for the best catalyst to convert CO2 into a useful product solving the problem of climate change due to the large production of CO2 through different sources. He explained that CO2 is a known greenhouse gas and the key reason behind global warming and climate change. Prof Ranjit Thapa stated that metal nanocatalyst on support materials can solve the problem and can increase the efficiency of CO2 reduction to C2 products, viz., ethylene (C2H4) and ethanol (C2H5OH).

## GANG HELD FOR PRINTING FAKE CURRENCY NOTES

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, APRIL 3

Chirala police apprehended six members of an 8-member gang involved in printing of fake currency notes in a house at Balasa Nagar in Chirala on Saturday.

The police team seized 170 numbers of ₹500 fake notes, 4 numbers of ₹200 notes, a ₹100 note and 4 numbers of ₹50 notes.

This is in addition to a computer, printer apart from several tools and stationary used for printing the notes.

The accused have been identified as N. Ravi, 40, G. Krishna Reddy 45, M. Madhusudhan Rao, 50, Kaki Annapoorna, 38, Soma Eswar Rao, 35, Soma Murali Krishna, 32, of Chirala, Jilla Siva Prasad 25 and Jilla Kiran, 29, of Mangalagiri.

## STUDENTS TELL AU TO KEEP HOSTELS OPEN

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 3

Students of various departments staged a dharna at the main gate of the Andhra University and later submitted a memorandum to the university registrar Prof. V. Krishn Mohan to keep the hostels open throughout the summer vacation. The university authorities issued notice to the students to vacate the hostels from April 6.

After the students launched the dharna, the registrar called their representatives and held talks with them.

The students told him that since they have to appear for competitive examinations, they wanted the hostels to continue during the summer vacation.



Students protest on Saturday



Firepersonnel controlling the flames at the Gunadala power station in Vijayawada on Saturday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

## State records 1,398 infections, 9 deaths

The highest addition of cases in a day after Nov. 14

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 3

Andhra Pradesh registered 1,398 fresh Covid-19 cases and nine deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported on Saturday that out of 31,260 samples tested, 1,398 persons were infected with the virus. Out of a total number of 1,51,77,364 samples tested so far in the state, 9,05,946 persons were infected with the virus and of them, 8,89,295 were recovered in the course of medical treatment while 9,417 are still active with the virus.

Among the daily Covid-19 cases, Guntur topped the state with 273, followed by 198 in Visakhapatnam, 190 in Chittoor, 178 in Krishna, 163 in Nellore, 96 in Kurnool, 75 in Kadapa, 51 in Srikakulam, 48 in Prakasam, 47 in Vizianagaram, 36 in Anantapur, 28 in East Godavari and 15 in West Godavari.

Chittoor found to be the worst hit with more number of cumulative active cases at 1,728, followed by 1,444 in Visakhapatnam, 1,414 in Krishna, 1,096 in Guntur, 732 in Nellore, 717 in East Godavari, 496 in Prakasam, 456 in Kurnool, 403 in Srikakulam, 298 in Anantapur, 291 in Kadapa, 188 in Vizianagaram and 154



A woman reacts while taking Covid vaccination in Vijayawada on Saturday.

— DC

## Covid protocol must in schools

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 3:

Minister for endowment Vellampalli Srinivas Rao asserted the need for bringing awareness about following the Covid-19 protocol among schoolchildren to contain the spread of the virus in educational institutions.

The minister conducted

inspections in various government schools in Vijayawada on Saturday and further checked the mid-day meals offered to students.

He assured about continuing of the welfare schemes and development programmes by the YSRC government and refuted allegations of opposition parties in this regard.

Mr Srinivas laid the foundation stone for ₹1.05 crore worth of development works at the Housing Board colony.

The minister said that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy aimed to develop Vijayawada into a model city under which municipal divisions will be developed as model divisions.

ery in the last 24 hours.

AP conducted Covid-19 tests on 2,84,220 samples per one million population and registered a positive rate of 5.97.

Among the daily Covid-19 deaths, nine died with two each in Guntur and Nellore while one each in Chittoor, Kadapa,

Kurnool, Prakasam and Visakhapatnam, jacking up the death toll to 7,234.

The state health authorities discharged 787 patients after recovery

in West Godavari.

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## DECCAN Chronicle

4 APRIL 2021



Shashi Warriar

Off the beaten track

### Of 'everyone's friends' & being a public enemy

The other day there was a message on WhatsApp that our MLA would be visiting the nearby Primary Health Centre, or PHC, the next day, and would be available to the public from 9:30 am to 9:45 am. His practice is to announce a time for the meeting to start, and turn up three hours late. In all fairness, he never specifies when he'll leave, and is usually available until most of the people who've come to meet him have had their say, to one of his assistants if not to himself, so this was unusual. Right, I thought hopefully, maybe we can get some of our problems solved. They made a formidable list: bad roads, a defunct sewage treatment plant, blocked gutters, missing street lamps, an unauthorised temple that plays painfully loud bhajans, and hillocks of garbage left by people who party on the beach nearby.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Subhani



## If only BJP were as good at vaccination as it's at election



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya's View

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

apart from being impractical. We have seen the disastrous consequences of the first nationwide lockdown announced at a notice of four hours, which left millions of migrant workers on the streets walking hundreds and thousands of miles to their villages and hometowns without food, water, transport, money or health support. That lockdown, and the manner in which it was implemented, far from containing the spread of the disease, ensured that it spread with impunity. Today, when the economy is just showing signs of a revival, a lockdown would be a fatal dampener to these green shoots of resurgence. It would also further aggravate the huge unemployment problem, the highest in years. As one worker said on national television, I would rather die of the virus than out of hunger for lack of a job. Undoubtedly, containment zones cannot be ruled out as a temporary measure, but generically spread out lockdowns, misinterpreted as a decisive response by panicky state governments, is hardly a solution. Even if lockdowns are announced, their efficacious implementation in a country like ours where people live cheek by jowl and in porous habitations, is virtually impossible. All lockdowns do is to give disproportionate powers to state agencies like the police.

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

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

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

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

### LETTERS

#### POLL PREDICTIONS

With Sasikala opting to be silent, AIADMK has to battle the DMK and has no discernible reason to lose power, unless the people discard Modi's BJP candidates (*South India is different, hopes rest on Left, DMK, DC, April 3*). The DMK, as usual, has towed itself with the vanishing Congress. In Kerala, several high-profile cases pitted against the LDF, have surprisingly strengthened the incumbent CM. In these two states, the role of the Congress and the BJP can be viewed as just a spoilsport.

Parthasarathy Mandadi  
Tirupati

#### TD POLL BOYCOTT

The 40-plus years experienced politician N. Chandrababu Naidu is wilting under the silent political onslaught of 40-plus-year-old Y.S.Jagan Mohan Reddy of YSRC. The former CM is apparently not able to cope up with the dismal and pathetic situation of his party staring at him. His reasons for boycotting polls could at best be labelled as lame excuses. All he and his party did during the past 21 months was disinformation campaign against the ruling party. TD would have been in a better position if the leadership thought of exposing the lacunae in the functioning of present AP government. Naidu appears to be bereft of ideas on how to resurrect his party for the 2024 elections.

Govardhana Myneedu  
Vijayawada

#### COVID VACCINE

Last year by this time with the nation under lockdown, everyone was eagerly waiting for the vaccine. After several clinical tests and permissions from various authorities and manufacturing and supply constraints, the vaccine has arrived. But the response from the public is poor. This is not expected by the respective governments. At a vaccination centre, the health workers are facing a lot of queries with regard to taking non-vegetarian food, alcohol and smoking, if vaccine is taken. However, it is not prudent to point out one's habits. Strange are the people's ways.

P. Ramakrishna  
Rajahmundry

### 50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

#### More troops on way to Bangla Desh

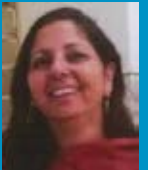
SHILLONG, April. 3 Martial Law authorities in East Pakistan today asked people living in the vicinity of military airports to quit their homes amidst reports that substantial troop reinforcements were on their way from the western wing.

The order to clear all areas within five kilometers of the airports before 0830 pm tomorrow came as Sheikh Mujibur Rehman's liberation forces kept up their pressure on short-rationed West Pakistani troops in several areas, reports from sources reaching here said.

With their supply completely cut and at all attempts of air-dropping food thwarted the West Pakistanis brought in their long range cannons.

Anita Katyal

Political Gup-Shup



### Personality cult infiltrates Left; leaked 'survey' rattles TMC

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

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

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

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

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

happens to be in May.

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

There has been radio silence since then.

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

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist



## SHORT TAKES

VPT AIMS AT  
ACHIEVING 80  
MILLION TONSDC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 3

Visakhapatnam Port Trust is aiming at achieving 80 million tonnes cargo handling during the current financial year. During the last financial year, the port handled 69.84 million tonnes, the second highest annual cargo throughout the history of port. The turnover was 72.72 million tonnes in the 2019-2020 financial year.

Addressing a press conference in Visakhapatnam on Saturday, VPT chairman K. Rama Mohan Rai said the port recorded an operating surplus of ₹698 crores and the net surplus before tax was ₹306 crores. A capital expenditure of ₹79 crores was incurred during 2020-2021 for various development works, he said. The port maintained third position among the major ports for the second consecutive year.

The chairman said VPT could restrict the decline to 4 per cent whereas it was 7 per cent in all other major ports.

The highest cargo handled was iron ore and pellets with 31 per cent increase. However, the port lost 45 per cent in import of steam coal and 27 per cent in coking coal.

Decline in economic activity led to less consumption of steam coal by the power sector and coking coal by the steel sector.

The chairman said, "The average waiting time of a ship improved to 1.15 hours during 2020-21 as against 1.22 hours recorded during 2019-2020."

BJP and JS euphoric  
after TD's poll exit

A total of 7,541 candidates from TD were in the fray

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 3

Telugu Desam's decision to boycott parishad elections is turned into a blessing in disguise for BJP, which has been ardently trying to strengthen its base in Andhra Pradesh to emerge as the main opposition party. Ever since the yellow party suffered humiliation in 2019, the BJP has been trying to take over as the main opposition party. They went in vain as TD successfully countered those efforts through various acts, including showing itself as the saviour of Hinduism. But now the BJP can gradually attract TD supporters into its fold.

The TD, BJP and Jana Sena boycotted the all-party meeting conducted by the SEC for the Parishad elections.

While TD announced that it would not contest, BJP decided to make good use of the opportunity. Even Jana Sena, which increased its performance in the recent municipal and Corporation elections, is also banking on the parishad elections to revitalise itself.

Around 7,295 candi-



Jana Sena Chief Pawan Kalyan waving to the public and party workers during a walkathon held in Tirupati on Saturday.

dates were in the fray for 7,321 MPCT seats in 13 districts. As many as 6,659 candidates were contesting from TD, 1,205 from BJP, 1,154 Jana Sena and 2,687 independent candidates for the MPCT elections.

Similarly, elections would be held for 526 ZPTC seats for which 526 candidates are from YSRC, 482 TD, 275 BJP, 168 Jana Sena and 641 independents. The YSRC won 2,217 MPCT seats unanimously, while 101 were won unanimously by TD, Jana Sena 4 and 49 MPCT seats unanimously by others. In all, 126 ZPTC seats were unani-

mous and all went into the YSRC kitty.

A total of 7,541 candidates from TD were in the fray in the MPCT and ZPTC elections and they are going to restrain from elections due to the party high command's boycott decision.

Senior political analysts stated that TD had 38-40 per cent, JS had 5% and BJP 1-2 per cent on the basis of 2019 Assembly elections. They said that the voting percentage of TD dropped to 30% in the recent local body elections but JS showed improvement. They stated that according to the

trends nearly 30% of voters are against the government hence they would choose an alternative party to cast their votes in the parishad elections. This will brighten the prospects of both BJP and JS, who can strengthen their base.

They recalled that the Hindutva trademark belongs to BJP but TD hijacked it in order to restrain BJP from consolidating its base. TD launched a series of protests on temple attacks, illegalities in Tirumala Tirupati and other religious issues.

Analysts opined that people would support those leaders, who will fiercely fight on their issues even in opposition. They stated that they could have won seats with 30% votes but staying away from the parishad elections would be a body-blow to the TD cadre and this could prove costly for the party in the future.

BJP AP president Somu Veerajulu said that they are contesting parishad elections to stake a claim as the 'real opposition party' in AP as people believe they can restrain the anarchic acts of YSRC.

Continue fight  
against GO No.  
2, says LokeshDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 3

Telugu Desam Party national general secretary Nara Lokesh called upon the Sarpanches to continue their fight against the GO No. 2 brought by the YSRC regime to deny the Sarpanches from their powers and responsibilities.

He claimed that the 73 and 74 amendments of the Constitution gave powers to the Sarpanches for the betterment of the local bodies.

Lokesh, on Saturday, extended his warm greetings to the sarpanches and ward members on their swearing-in in panchayat villages across the state. He lauded and reminded that the sarpanches would not be at the mercy of anybody as they have fought the elections and got elected. He commented that by doing so, the sarpanches rejected and fought against the fascist selection style leadership of CM Jagan Mohan Reddy in the name of unanimous results.

MLC Lokesh called upon the sarpanches to continue their fight against the GO No. 2 that was brought illegally by



Nara Lokesh

the YSRC government to deny their powers and responsibilities. Condemning the GO No. 2, he said that it was high time for the sarpanches to assert their rights, powers and responsibilities.

He claimed that the constitution has guaranteed these powers which nobody would be able to take away from them. He alleged that the Chief Minister, who had no faith in the local self-government, had brought in the GO No. 2 to diminish the role of the sarpanches in the village administration.

Lokesh urged the elected sarpanches to utilise the funds for the greater development of their respective villages.

Pawan turns star  
campaigner for  
BJP-Jana SenaDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 3

Jana Sena party chief Pawan Kalyan has turned star campaigner for the BJP-JS alliance in the Tirupati Lok Sabha by-election. He was the star attraction in the temple city on Saturday, taking out a massive rally of thousands of his followers.

Pawan Kalyan started his padayatra from MR Palli circle and headed for Sankarambadi circle. However, the JS chief changed his plans after a brief while and climbed atop a top-open vehicle. A huge crowd that gathered along the road made it difficult for him to continue his walkathon.

He reached the public meeting venue in the top-open car, waving to crowds on the roadsides

and from balconies and roof-tops. Traffic came to a standstill on the AIR bypass road and other connecting roads and police had a tough time controlling the situation.

Pawan Kalyan's padayatra was called a super success. As he hit the road to campaign for BJP, thousands of Jana Sena followers followed him. This would be a big boost for the saffron party, which has been campaigning in the parliamentary segment for a few days now in a weak manner, with only a few party leaders and workers to boost its campaign.

The BJP will now have to wait and watch how Pawan Kalyan's charisma can help the saffron brigade fulfill its dream of making inroads into AP politics by winning this by-election.

Panabaka questions  
SCS for PuducherryDC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, APRIL 3

Former union minister and Telugu Desam nominee for Tirupati Lok Sabha seat, Panabaka Lakshmi demanded that Prime Minister

Narendra Modi explain how BJP could promise special category status (SCS) for Puducherry in its manifesto after denying the same to Andhra Pradesh citing planning commission objections.

TD CADRES HEARTBROKEN WITH  
NAIDU'S DECISION TO BOYCOTT POLLS

FROM PAGE 1

YSRC MLA of Mangalagiri Alla Ramakrishna Reddy said TD cadres are unhappy with party chief's decision to boycott the polls and hence want to remain in fray.

Senior TD leader Bandaru Satyanarayana is continuing his election campaign in Pendurthi in support of TD candidates.

In Sabbavaram, TD cadres are asking leaders to continue fighting the elections for saving the party from further damage.

In Vizianagaram, former union minister P. Ashok Gajapathi Raju is trying to convince party high command to let TD people continue fighting the seats for which they have filed their nominations.

Senior MLA Gorantla

Buchaiiah Chowdary has stated that majority of cadres are opposing the boycott decision. Senior TD leader Jyothula Nehru has already submitted his resignation from the party opposing the poll boycott decision. Nehru maintains that the boycott decision will sink the TD ship in AP.

TD leaders of Ungutur Chintala Srinivas and Paturi Vijay Kumar said majority of cadres are opposing the boycott decision and wish to remain in fray.

They pointed out that TD had won the recent local body election in Ungutur. Hence, boycotting the parishad election is needless. They asserted that TD candidates will remain in fray from Ungutur and win the MPCT and ZPTC seats.

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**✓MATRIMONIAL BOY B.Tech Project Lead SMP Gazette officer parents invite alliance to their son, age 30Years, Height 5'6, working as project Lead in MNC, Hyderabad, Salary 15Lakhs PA. Divorced in short period, Girl should be Un-Married, Graduate below 28years. Please contact Fathia Darood followers only Ph/WA: 7373725929. (HYMM/2122/C00098)**

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**SM HYD parents invite Alliance for son never married MBA, 35yrs, 5'6", Sr.Manager in MNC, 1.4 lac p.m, own house, seeking simple beautiful girl min graduate respectable religious family. WA 9 9 4 9 7 4 3 2 8 2 . (HYMM/2021/C08472)**

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**ANDHRA SUNNI Muslim parents, settled in Hyderabad, invite proposal for their youngest daughter. MBA fair 5'3" 34yrs never married looking for well settled boy working in India. Contact on 7780747964, 9866312847. (HYMM/2021/C08475)**

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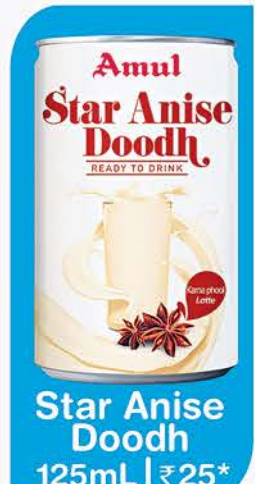
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1L | ₹70\*



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180mL | ₹10\*



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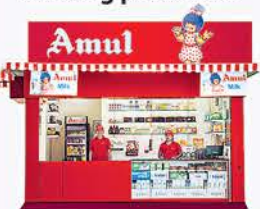


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## IN BRIEF

### PROF. SAIBABA'S SERVICE TERMINATED

**New Delhi, Apr 3:** Delhi University's Ram Lal Anand College has terminated the service of assistant professor G N Saibaba, who is currently serving life term in Nagpur Central Prison for alleged Maoist links.

According to a memorandum received by Saibaba's wife Vasantha on Thursday, his services have been terminated with immediate effect from the afternoon of March 31.

"The services of G N Saibaba, assistant professor, Ram Lal Anand College are terminated with immediate effect from the afternoon of March 31, 2021. Three months' salary has been paid in his savings bank account," said the memorandum undersigned by college principal Rakesh Kumar Gupta.

Gupta could not be reached for a comment even after several attempts.

Saibaba, an assistant professor of English, was suspended after his arrest by the Maharashtra Police in 2014. His wife and daughters were receiving half of his salary since the arrest.

Terming the latest development a "witch hunt", Saibaba's wife alleged that it was a "violation of employee's rights" and she would take the matter to court.

### FORMER J&K BANK CHAIRMAN ARRESTED

**DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, APRIL 3**

Jammu and Kashmir's anti graft agency on Saturday arrested former chairman of a semi state owned bank for allegedly being involved in tender fraud in housekeeping.

A spokesman of J&K Anti Corruption Bureau said Parvez Ahmad Nengroo, ex-chairman of Jammu and Kashmir Bank Limited, was arrested in connection with the investigation underway in a case pertaining to illegal allotment of tenders for housekeeping to a Mumbai-based Company M/S SILA Solutions Pvt. Ltd "by not following proper tendering norms as provided in the contract to the said firm despite not falling into the criteria of any such allotment".

He claimed that due to the improper tendering processes and ATM cleaning, undue addition of the management fee and other omissions and commissions detected during the course of investigation, the J&K Bank suffered losses to the tune of over ₹6.29 crores from the date of award of contract.

The ACB had earlier filed charge-sheet against Mr. Nengroo in connection with alleged illegal appointments in J&K Bank. As per the charge-sheet, the bank suffered a loss of more than ₹250 crore on account of salary paid to these "illegally appointed employees over a period of time".

### FAROOQ TESTS COVID POSITIVE, HOSPITALISED

**YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, APRIL 3**

Former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister and president of National Conference, Farooq Abdullah, was admitted to a hospital here on Saturday, days after testing positive for Covid-19.

Sources close to him said that 83-year-old Mr. Abdullah was taken to Srinagar's Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS) after he showed some health related signs and symptoms of concern.

However, his son Omar Abdullah said in a tweet, "Based on the advice of doctors to enable them to better monitor my father, he has been admitted to hospital in Srinagar". He also said, "Our family remains grateful to everyone for their messages of support & their prayers."

Senior Abdullah who is a Lok Sabha member representing home constituency Srinagar had tested positive for Coronavirus on March 30, four weeks after getting first Covid-19 vaccine jab.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was among the first who wished him a speedy recovery. He had tweeted, "Praying for the good health and speedy recovery of Dr. Farooq Abdullah Ji. Also praying for your and the entire family's good health Omar Abdullah Ji."

Meanwhile, J&K reported 501 fresh Covid-19 cases.

### ED ATTACHES ASSETS OF TMC LEADERS IN SARADHA CASE

**DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 3**

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has provisionally attached assets, worth several crores, belonging to Kunal Ghosh, former Raja Sabha MP from Trinamul Congress (TMC), Lok Sabha MP Satabdi Roy and Debjani Mukherjee as part of its money-laundering probe into the Saradha chit fund case.

In a statement issued here on Saturday, the ED said, "A provisional order for attachment of the movable and immovable properties has been issued under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). Assets belong to Kunal Ghosh, former Raja Sabha MP from TMC (CEO of Media Group Saradha), Satabdi Roy, Lok Sabha MP from TMC (brand ambassador in Saradha), and Debjani Mukherjee who is a director in Saradha Group of companies in Saradha chit fund case." Assets worth ₹600 crore have been attached in this case till now. The ED is probing the money-laundering aspect of the alleged ponzi scam since April, 2013.

The Saradha group allegedly cheated thousands of depositors, promising abnormally high returns on investments in its illegal schemes. Mr Ghosh, who is out on bail in the case, was suspended from the TMC in 2013 for alleged anti-party activities. Ghosh had earlier spent 34 months in jail and was in the custody of West Bengal Police and CBI. He was granted bail on October 5, 2016. The former TMC MP headed a TV channel and a daily, which was funded by the now-defunct Saradha group.

Several other leaders of TMC are under the scanner of the central investigation agencies, including ED, in the Saradha chit fund scam. The CBI has already summoned and questioned several TMC leaders in connection with the case. The CBI is also preparing to record the statements of several TMC leaders again in connection with the case.

## Odisha clamps night curfew

**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 3**

The Odisha government on Saturday decided to clamp night curfew restrictions in 10 districts which witnessed a surge in Covid-19 cases in the past four days.

As per a latest notification issued by the Special Relief Commissioner, the night curfew will be clamped in Sundergarh, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Bargarh, Nuapada, Bolangir, Kalandia, Nabarangpur, Koraput

and Malkangiri.

The night curfew restrictions will come into effect from April 5.

All the shops, commercial establishments, offices, institutions and movement of individuals shall remain closed/ prohibited between 10 PM and 5 AM, except for essential activities in these districts.

The district Collectors/ municipal commissioners shall issue orders for their respective jurisdictions, under appropriate provisions of law, such as Section 144 of CrPC, and ensure strict compliance.

## Covid cases at six-month high

**DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 3**

India on Saturday recorded 89,129 new Covid-19 cases in a day, the highest daily rise in around six-and-half-months, taking the nationwide tally of infections to over 1.23 crore, according to the Union Health Ministry data on Saturday.

The toll increased to 1,64,110 with 714 more fatalities in a day, also the highest since October 21.

The jump in cases reported on Saturday was the highest since September 20 when

92,605 new infections were recorded in a span of 24 hours. Corresponding to the rapid surge in cases, the number of active cases too have registered a steady increase for the 24th day in a row with the tally reaching 6,58,909, which is 5.32 per cent of the total infections. The recovery rate has further dropped to 93.36 per cent, the data stated.

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

# Modi advises Mamata to control goons of her party

## Modi mocks Didi, speculates she may leave the state for safe location

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, APRIL 3**

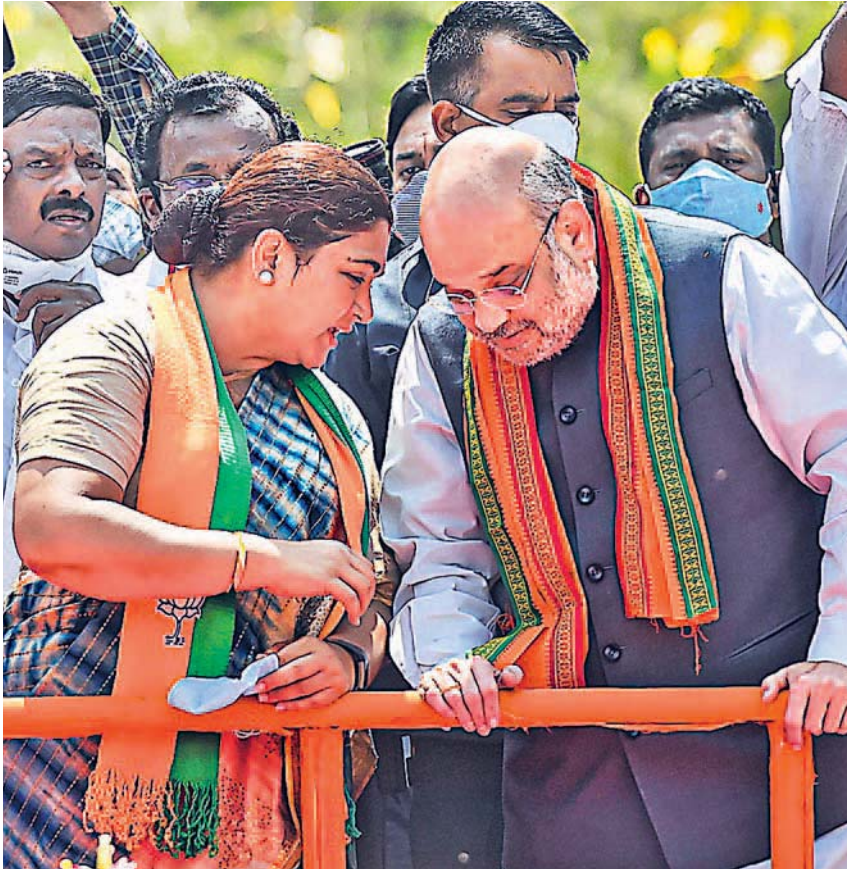
Prime minister Narendra Modi on Saturday accused West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee of abusing the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM), Election Commission (EC) and the central paramilitary forces over her failure to engineer 'Chhappa Vote' (rigging) for her victory in the ongoing Assembly Election.

Mr Modi also advised the Trinamul Congress supremo to "accept" her much awaited defeat and warned her to "control" the goons of her party referring to his presence in the state.

"If a player repeatedly raises questions on the umpire, it means there is something wrong in his game. In poll-battle, if someone blames EVM and EC, it means her game is over. Didi, defeat is in front of you. It is better if you accept it," Mr Modi told the two-time CM, over her allegations of foul play in the polling, from a BJP rally at Haripal in Hooghly.

Showing a mimicry of rigging with his two hands above his head, the PM later said at another campaign rally in Sonarpur of South 24 Parganas, "Didi, Chhappa Vote, Huh? You are abusing the EC and raising questions on the central forces for not getting a chance of engineering Chhappa Vote! Just recall how much you used to depend on bail in the case, was suspended from the TMC in 2013 for alleged anti-party activities. Ghosh had earlier spent 34 months in jail and was in the custody of West Bengal Police and CBI. He was granted bail on October 5, 2016. The former TMC MP headed a TV channel and a daily, which was funded by the now-defunct Saradha group."

A day after Ms Banerjee asked Mr Modi to "control" union home minister Amit Shah, the PM suggested her, "Aapni Nije TMC Goondader ke Samlan. Oderke Bolun Ekhane Modi Eesche. Ekhane Aar Goondagiri Cholbe Na. Bangla Chayna TMC Caderder Hingshar Khela. Bangla Chayna TMC Goondader Otyachar (You control TMC goons. Tell them, Modi has arrived here. No goondaism will be allowed. Bengal does not want the TMC cadres' game of violence. Bengal does not want atrocities by the TMC cadres.)"



Union Home Minister Amit Shah during a roadshow in support of BJP candidate Kushboo Sundar (L) ahead of Tamil Nadu Assembly polls, at Thyagaraya Nagar, in Chennai on Saturday.

## DEVELOPMENT CAN HAPPEN ONLY IF AIADMK WAS ELECTED BACK: SHAH

**G BABU JAYAKUMAR & D SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, APR 3**

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

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

medical practitioner.

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

Speaking at T Nagar, Shah said that development in the State can happen only if the AIADMK was elected back to power as the State needed the support of the government at the Centre. He appealed to the people to bring in a double engine government for growth.

He said Edappadi K Palaniswami and O Panneerselvam had been doing a good job in bringing development to the State.

## RAHUL: MODI DOESN'T HAVE A PROBLEM WITH THE LEFT FRONT

**GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 3**

With just a day left for the campaigning to end for the Kerala Assembly polls, most top leaders of the BJP, Congress and Left are criss crossing the state.

Union home minister Amit Shah addressed election meetings in Rahul Gandhi's constituency Wayanad.

"Rahul was the MP of Amethi for 15 years. But he didn't do anything for the people of Amethi. I have not seen a tourist politician like Rahul Baba. Just look where Amethi is and where Wayanad is. He has come here only for tourism. Nothing is going to happen in Wayanad's development," he said.

The BJP leader said for the Congress and Gandhi family, people were just like banks and governments were like money banks. At an election meeting in Koyilandy, about 80 km from Shah's venue in Meenangadi in Wayanad, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"The prime minister wherever he goes says Congress mukt bharat. When he gets up in the morning he says Congress mukt bharat, while going to bed in the night he again says Congress mukt bharat. But he never says CPM mukt bharat. Why does the PM never say CPM mukt Bharat," he asked.

Rahul said the prime minister somehow does not have a problem with the Left front. "We are a unifying force. But like BJP-RSS, the CPM is also a divider of society," he said. CM Pinarayi Vijayan slam-med Prime Minister Narendra Modi for allegedly creating a fake picture of Kerala's development model.

# BJP lawmakers hurl shoes at Speaker's podium in Odisha

**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 3**

The opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) members on Saturday allegedly hurled shoes, earphones and dustbins at the Speaker's podium in Odisha Legislative Assembly.

Three lawmakers of the BJP - Jayanarayan Mishra, Mohan Majhi

and Bishnu Sethi - were suspended by Speaker Dr Surjya Narayan Patro for the remaining period of the ongoing Budget Session of the Assembly.

Ruckus broke out after the Speaker Dr Patro refused to allow an adjournment motion on the topic 'mining business determining the politics in Odisha' brought out by Congress.

Joining the chorus, BJP

MLAs also created pandemonium demanding a discussion on the matter. Later, shoes, headphones and other items were hurled at the Speaker's podium.

"Congress had brought the adjournment motion on mining scam and no discussion was possible after the Speaker rejected the proposal. The government today passed some Bills which is unfortu-

nate. I came to know that shoes were hurled at the Speaker's podium which is not acceptable and I condemn it," said senior Congress leader Narasingha Mishra.

BJP MLA Jayanarayan Mishra said, "The way the Speaker is managing the function of the Assembly is not appropriate as all the rules and norms are being thrown to wind."





## SHORT TAKES

## BUILDING IN BANGKOK FALLS, 5 DIE

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

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

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

## EXPLOSIONS AT 2 SOMALI ARMY BASES KILL 9

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

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

## ROBOT ARTIST SELLS ART FOR \$688,888

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

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

## MALI ATTACK KILLS 4 UN PEACEKEEPERS

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

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

Guterres reiterated attacks targeting peacekeepers may constitute war crimes.

## EGYPT, ETHIOPIA, SUDAN RESUME TALKS ON DAM

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

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

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

## Protest in London



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

## 7 blood clot deaths after 18.1mn vax jabs

No evidence of a causal link, says UK medicine regulator

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

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

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

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

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

The regulator said that investigations are under-

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

Bangladesh on Friday logged 6,830 new cases, the

highest count in a day, taking the tally of infections to 624,594. The death toll climbed by 50 in 24 hours to 9,155, according to data released by the government. In a bid to arrest the spread of the Coronavirus, the government has decided to enforce a seven-day lockdown from Monday as the Coronavirus cases and deaths are surging across the country, Quader, also the general

secretary of the ruling Awami League, said.

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

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

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

**MEDICINES AND HEALTHCARE PRODUCTS REGULATORY AGENCY REPORT**

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

## Argentina president tests +ve for Covid-19

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Biden lifts curbs on ICC staff

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

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

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

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

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

## Death toll in Myanmar up

**Yangon, April 3:** Security forces in central Myanmar opened fire on anti-coup protesters on Saturday, killing at least two people according to local media. A human rights group said mounting violence since the February 1 military takeover has killed at least 550 civilians. Of those, 46 were children, according to Myanmar's Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. Some 2,751 people have been detained or sentenced, the group said.

Threats of lethal violence and arrests of protesters have failed to suppress daily demonstrations across

Myanmar demanding the military step down and reinstate the democratically elected government. The coup reversed years of slow progress toward democracy in the Southeast Asian country.

Government forces fired at demonstrators in central Myanmar on Saturday, killing at least two people, the *Myanmar Now* news service reported. One video posted on social media showed a group of protesters carrying away a young man with what appeared to be a serious head wound, as gunfire sounded. His condition wasn't immediately known. — AP

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

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

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows the US companies to employ foreign workers in special occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. In a federal notification published on Friday, the US Department of Labor urged the public to respond to its request

in the next 60 days.

The request by the department's Employment and Training Administration follows a prior announcement by the department proposing an 18-month delay in the effective date of a final rule changing on calculating the prevailing wage levels for certain immigrants and non-immigrant workers. Published in January 2021, the final rule affects employers seeking to employ foreign workers on a permanent or temporary basis through certain immigrant visas or through H-1B, H-1B1 and E-3 non-immigrant visas.

While the E-3 visa is one for which only citizens of Australia are eligible, the H-1B1 visa is for people from Singapore and Chile. — PTI

## Breach to delay Capitol fencing

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

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

Their deaths came less than two weeks after the Capitol Police removed an outer fence that had cut off a wide swath of the area to cars and pedestrians. — AP

## Lanka tightens church security ahead of Easter

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Calif. varsity hack attack victim

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

A cybersecurity attack targeted a vulnerability in Accellion, a third-party vendor that is used to securely transfer files, the university said in a statement Wednesday. "We understand those

behind this attack have published online screenshots of personal information, and we will notify members of the UC community if we believe their data was leaked in this manner," the university said.

The hacker or hackers also have been sending threatening mass emails threatening to publish data "in an attempt to scare people into giving them money," the statement said. In an update Friday, the university system said the cyberat-

tack affected about 300 organisations, "including universities, government institutions and private companies." Other schools, including Stanford University's School of Medicine and Yeshiva University in New York City, have reported that student and employee Social Security numbers and financial information were stolen and that some were posted online.

The information was obtained in December and January when hack-

ers exploited a vulnerability in a 20-year-old Accellion file transfer service, various reports have said. However, some organisations said they only recently became aware of the breach. The *Baltimore Sun* on Thursday reported that private information of staff members and students at the University of Maryland, Baltimore was posted online this week.

The school said a hacking group known as Clop gained access to Accellion. — AP

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## SHORT TAKES

## Lanka stand firm to draw final Test

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

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

## Archers to get 2nd dose of vaccine

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

## Olympic swim champ Clara dead

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

## Injured Tiger to miss Masters

**Augusta, United States:** Severe leg injuries in a February car crash ensured Tiger Woods won't be playing in this year's Masters on the 20th anniversary of his "Tiger Slam" victory at Augusta National. But the 45-year-old superstar, whose 15 major titles include five Masters green jackets, will have his legacy left across the famed layout. Woods is recovering at home in Florida after suffering serious injuries when his car flew off the road and flipped several times during the Southern California accident. Hours of surgery were required to repair his shattered lower right leg and ankle, including a rod inserted into his tibia and the use of screws and pins to stabilize the joint. — *AFP*

## Live on TV

## CRICKET

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

## FOOTBALL

**English Premier League:** Southampton vs Burnley from 4.30 pm; Newcastle vs Tottenham from 6.35 pm; Aston Villa vs Fulham from 9 pm; Manchester United vs Brighton from 12.01 am (Monday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

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Printed and published from Vijayawada by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Deccan Chronicle Holdings Press, No. 6 & 4 Patnamata, Industrial Estate, VIJAYAWADA. RNI Registration No. 45061/90. Editorial: 2655962, Fax: 2655234. Board: 2655284, 2656207, 2655185. Grams: CHRONICLE. Editor: Kaushik Mitter

## COVID SCARE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## SMITH REACHES MUMBAI TO JOIN DELHI CAPITALS

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

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

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

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

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

## RAHUL LEADS IN CHESS TOURNEY

**Hyderabad, April 3:** International Master Rahul Srivathsav is in lead with 7 points after seven rounds at the Telangana State Senior Fide Rated Chess Championship being organised by Telangana State Chess Association at Lal Bahadur Stadium.

Rajsekhar B is a close second with 6.5 points.

Bharat Kumar Reddy Poluri, Kheerthi Ganta and Sreehith Reddy are third with 6 points each.

Aditya Varun, Shaati Majumder, Shanmukha Pulli, Krishna Karthik, Arnav Pradhan, Aravind PVS, Raghav Srivathsav, Sarath Chandra, Irondia Akash Kumar, Md Bashiq Imrose and Chidvilash Surapaneni are behind with 5.5 points each.



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

## RCB look to end title drought

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

**STRENGTHS**

RCB have assembled a strong batting line up on paper. Run-machine Kohli has already confirmed that he will be opening the innings. Partnering Kohli will be the highly-talented Devdutt Padikkal who impressed everyone last season and is in red-hot form. Young wicketkeeper-batsman Mohammad Azharuddeen, who had a staggering strike-rate of 194.54 in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, and New Zealand's Finn Allen are other attacking options at the top. De Villiers and Maxwell add the fire-power to the mid-

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

## WEAKNESSES

The RCB pace department does not inspire confidence. Navdeep Saini and Mohammed Siraj lack the experience of bowling with the white ball and have a propensity of leaking runs. Jamieson has struggled in T20Is and has no experience of playing in India. Other options include medium pacer Harshal Patel, and the

Australian trio of Christian, Daniel Sams and Kane Richardson.

## OPPORTUNITY

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

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

## THREATS

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

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

## SINNER PACKS OFF BAUTISTA, IN MIAMI FINAL

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

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

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

Coming off a quarter-final win over second-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas, Hurkacz became the first player to take a set off Rublev at the tournament. Sinner joined 1990 champion Andre Agassi, 2005 runner-up Rafael Nadal and 2007 winner Novak Djokovic as Miami teen finalists. Sinner took his eighth career triumph over a top-20 rival and ensured he will rise into the ATP's top 25 next week, although he nearly smashed a racquet in a tense second set.

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

● **Italian teen Jannik Sinner stifled Roberto Bautista Agut 5-7, 6-4, 6-4 in the men's singles to set up the title round against Hubert Hurkacz.**

## WEST BROM HUMILIATE CHELSEA 5-2

**London, April 3:** Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel suffered the first defeat of his reign as struggling West Bromwich Albion took advantage of Thiago Silva's red card to earn a stunning 5-2 win on Saturday.

Tuchel had overseen a 14-match unbeaten run in all competitions since replacing the sacked Frank Lampard in January. But that impressive start came to an embarrassing end as West Brom ran riot at Stamford Bridge.

Christian Pulisic put Chelsea ahead early in the first half, only for Thiago to get his marching orders moments later for a second booking. That proved the turning point as Albion's Matheus Pereira struck twice in first half stoppage-time.

Mbaye Diagne grabbed West Brom's third goal and Callum Robinson netted twice to leave Tuchel shell-shocked.

Mason Mount's reply was no consolation as Chelsea's bid to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top four finish in the Premier League suffered a blow. — *AFP*

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

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

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

Kohli, I enjoy Rohit Sharma," Ganguly said.

"I am obsessed with Rishabh Pant because I think he is just an absolute match-winner. Jasprit Bumrah is good, Mohammed Shami is good, I like Shardul Thakur a lot because he has got the courage and guts. There is immense cricketing talent in India.

When (Sunil) Gavaskar was there people used to think what will happen after him, then came (Sachin) Tendulkar, (Rahul) Dravid, Anil

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

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

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

## Swans swing into semis with final push

**DC CORRESPONDENT**

HYDERABAD, APRIL 3

Team Swans dominated the sixth round of the Hyderabad Premier Golf League on Saturday at the Hyderabad Golf Club to surprise their rivals and surge into the semifinals.

And they did it in style, flying to the top of the overall leaderboard with an aggregate of 1005.25 points.

The Markenzo Fairways finished second with 1002.88 points while the Civet Rangers (995.75) and Villaggio Highlanders (992.62) followed to make the Last Four stage.

In the semifinals to be played at the Boulder Hills Golf Club on Friday, Swans will be up against the Highlanders while the Fairways will cross clubs with Rangers.

In Saturday's sixth round, the Swans rose to the top with 215.25



Team Swans celebrate making the semifinals of the Hyderabad Premier Golf League as the scores are announced on Saturday.

points, chased by the Fairways with 212.75 points. The Rangers (210.75) and Centro Eagle Hunters (208.5) made up for the third and fourth places while the King's Warriors, who were lead-

ing for most part, finished fifth with 207.25 points.

In the individual play, R. Siva Kumar of Swans led with 40.75 points, followed by Akram Khan of Kings Warriors (39.5). Sameer

Mahindra of Villaggio Highlanders (39), Jassi Birgi of Synthokem Swing Kings (39) and Ranganath Maramraju of Civet Rangers (38.75) followed.

## TEAM LEADERBOARD (OVERALL)

- Swans 1005.25 points.
- Markenzo Fairways 1002.88.
- Civet Rangers 995.75.
- Villaggio Highlanders 992.62.

## TEAM LEADERBOARD (SIXTH ROUND)

- Swans 215.25 points.
- Markenzo Fairways 212.75.
- Civet Rangers 210.75.
- Centro Eagle Hunters 208.5.
- King's Warriors 207.25.

## INDIVIDUAL PLAY (SIXTH ROUND)

- R. Siva Kumar (Swans) 40.75 points.
- Akram Khan (King's Warriors) 39.5.
- Sameer Mahindra (Villaggio Highlanders) 39.
- Jassi Birgi (Synthokem Swing Kings) 39.
- Ranganath Maramraju (Civet Rangers) 38.75.

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