

# THE ASIAN AGE

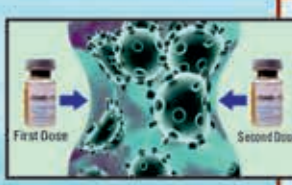
NEW DELHI THURSDAY 18 MARCH 2021

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## Fight Corona: Be aware and Participate in Vaccination Campaign



Both the corona vaccines are safe




Vaccination awareness for people of 45 years age (with comorbidities) and over 60 years of age



One ASHA & Aanganwadi worker for 200 households for vaccination awareness

**Vaccination campaign started on large scale**



Sh. Manohar Lal  
Chief Minister, Haryana

**Stay Alert, Stay Safe** | Information, Public Relations & Languages Department, Haryana | www.prharyana.gov.in | @Cmohry @DiprHaryana



A model displays a creation of designer Shintaro Nagamine at Tokyo Fashion Week on Wednesday.

— AFP

## 76-yr-old woman dies after being slapped by son

**New Delhi:** A 76-year-old woman died after she was slapped by her son following an argument between them in Dwarka here, police said on Tuesday. In the CCTV footage of the incident that occurred on Monday afternoon, the woman, Avtar Kaur, can be seen being slapped by her son on the face, after which she became unconscious and fell on the ground.

■ [More on Page 2](#)

## Cong alleges 'fraud' in Kerala voters' lists

**Thiruvananthapuram:** Opposition Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala on Wednesday alleged that there were widespread irregularities in the voters' list published for the Assembly elections in Kerala. The ruling CPM has been including thousands of fake voters in the list, he said.

■ [More on Page 4](#)

## Make FB, Google pay for news: Sushil Modi

**New Delhi:** Rajya Sabha MP Sushil Modi said in Parliament that the Narendra Modi government should enact a law, like what Australia has done, to make tech giants such as Google and Facebook share advertisement revenue with traditional news media, which he said was "in deep financial crisis".

■ [More on Page 4](#)



**Not MLAs, they are voters being taken to an election meeting!**

## WEATHER

**Max:** 33°C  
**Min:** 18°C  
**RH:** 28%  
**Rain:** 0%

**Forecast:** Sunny

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Uttarayana  
**Tithi:** Phalguna Shuddha Panchami till 2.09 am (Friday)  
**Star:** Bharani till 10.34 am  
**Variyam:** 12.08 am to 1.56 am (Friday)  
**Durmuhurtam:** 10.24 am to 11.12 am; 3.12 pm to 3.59 pm  
**Rahukalam:** 1.30 pm to 3pm

**SUNSET TODAY 6.31 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.26 AM**  
**MOONRISE TOMORROW 9.50 PM**  
**MOONSET TODAY 10.55 AM**

# PM warns states of 2nd Covid outbreak

*'We have to immediately stop the emerging second peak'*

AGE CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

Concerned over the emerging "second peak" of the Covid-19 pandemic in India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday stressed the need to take quick and decisive steps and warned if the pandemic's growth was not stopped now, a country-wide outbreak could occur.

Addressing a meeting of chief ministers to combat the fresh wave of the pandemic-induced deaths in the country, Mr Modi said though more than 96 per cent of cases in India had recovered, the high test positivity rate in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh was of huge concern. In all, 70 districts across India have seen a 150 per cent rise in the past few weeks.

"If we don't stop this right now, there could be a nationwide outbreak. We have to immediately stop the emerging second peak and take big and decisive steps," Mr Modi told the chief ministers.

"The self-confidence we gained in our corona fight should not turn into over-confidence. Our success should not be the reason for carelessness," he warned. The PM stressed that initiatives must be taken without



Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with the chief ministers on Covid-19 situation through video-conferencing in New Delhi on Wednesday.

— PTI

**If we don't stop this right now, there could be a nationwide outbreak. We have to immediately stop the emerging second peak and take decisive steps.**

— **Narendra Modi**

causing panic among the people.

Mr Modi remarked there was a need to identify mutants of coronavirus and assess their effects. He lauded the continually increased pace of vaccinations in the country and the vaccination rates crossing more than three

million vaccinations in a day. At the same time, he warned that the problem of the wastage of vaccine doses must be taken very seriously.

Mr Modi lauded the continually increased pace of vaccinations in the country and the vaccination rates crossing more than three million vaccinations in a day. At the same time, he warned that the problem of the wastage of vaccine doses must be taken very seriously.

■ [Turn to Page 4](#)

## Jorhat: 6 test Covid +ve after vaccine

MANOJ ANAND

GUWAHATI, MARCH 17

At least five persons in Upper Assam's Jorhat district were found to be Covid-19 positive after taking the first shot of the coronavirus vaccine while one person was infected with Covid-19 even after taking both doses of the vaccine.

Jorhat deputy commissioner Roshani A. Korati confirmed the report that five positive patients had taken one dose, and another patient had taken both shots. All other patients, except one who is under home isolation, have been shifted to Gauhati Medical College and Hospital for better care.

■ [More on Page 3](#)

## 4 held for not wearing masks on Alliance flight

**New Delhi, March 17:** Four passengers were handed over to the security agencies on Tuesday for not wearing masks properly onboard Alliance Air's Jammu-Delhi flight despite repeated warnings by the cabin crew, said senior government officials on Wednesday.

Aviation regulator DGCA had on Saturday asked airlines to de-board passengers who do not wear their masks "properly" despite repeated warnings.

As per the powers given by the directorate general of civil aviation's regulations, Alliance Air can classify the aforementioned four passengers as "unruly" and ban them from its flights for any period between three to 24 months, the government officials mentioned.

— PTI

# MP found hanging, suicide suspected

AGE CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

A BJP MP from Himachal Pradesh, Ram Swaroop Sharma, 62, who represents Mandi in the Lok Sabha, was found hanging from the ceiling at his official residence in New Delhi on Wednesday. The police said it seemed to be a case of suicide, but no suicide note was found.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief over Sharma's death and tweeted: "Shri Ram Swaroop Sharma was a dedicated leader, who was always committed to solving the people's problems. He worked tirelessly for the



R.S. Sharma

betterment of society. Pained by his untimely and unfortunate demise. A senior police official said a PCR call was made at around 7.45 am by his aide after the MP did not respond to knocks on his door. "A police team reached the spot and forced open the door and found Sharma hanging from a ceiling fan. He was taken to a hospital where doctors pronounced him dead on arrival," said a Delhi police officer.

■ [More on Page 2](#)



Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) activists stage a protest against the Government of NCT Delhi (Amendment) Bill 2021 at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Wednesday.

— PTI

# 8 killed in Atlanta massage parlour shootings

**Atlanta, March 17:** Shootings at two massage parlours in Atlanta and one in the suburbs Tuesday evening left eight people dead, many of them women of Asian descent, authorities said. A 21-year-old man suspected in the shootings was taken into custody in southwest Georgia hours later after a manhunt, police said.

The attacks began around 5 pm., when five people were shot at Youngs Asian Massage Parlour in a strip mall

near a rural area in Acworth, about 50 kilometres north of Atlanta. Two people died at the scene and three were transported to a hospital where two of them also died, Cherokee County Sheriff's Office spokesman Capt. Jay Baker said.

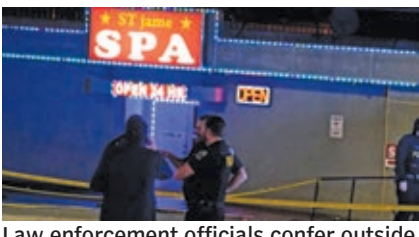
No one was arrested at the scene.

Around 5:50 pm, police in the Buckhead neighborhood of Atlanta, responding to a call of a robbery in progress, found three women dead from appar-



Robert Aaron Long

ent gunshot wounds at Gold Spa. While they were at that scene, they learned of a call reporting shots



Law enforcement officials confer outside a massage parlour following a shooting in Atlanta on Tuesday.

— AP

shot dead inside the business.

South Korea's foreign ministry said in statement Wednesday that its diplomats in Atlanta have confirmed from police that four of the victims who died were women of Korean descent. The ministry said the office of its consulate general in Atlanta is trying to confirm the nationality of the women.

The killings came amid a recent wave of attacks

■ [Turn to Page 4](#)

# No plan to appoint social media regulator: Prasad

*Govt had earlier announced checks on FB, Twitter*

**New Delhi, March 17:** The government on Wednesday informed Parliament that there is no proposal with the IT ministry to set up a regulator for social media.

Union IT and communications minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, however, said that the government has released Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, under the IT Act that specifies the due diligence to be followed by all the intermediaries, including the social media intermediaries.

"The social media platforms are enjoined to

develop a robust grievance redressal system. Presently, there is no proposal with the ministry of electronics and information technology to appoint a regulator for social media," Mr Prasad informed the Lok Sabha.

The government in February had announced sweeping regulations for social media firms like Facebook and Twitter as well as OTT players such as Netflix, requiring them to remove any content flagged by authorities within 36 hours and setting up a complaint redressal mechanism with an officer being based in the country.

— PTI

# SC: Cancellation of 3cr ration cards is too serious, Centre must reply

**New Delhi, March 17:** The Supreme Court on Wednesday termed the cancellation of around three crore ration cards by the Centre due to non-linking with Aadhaar card as too serious, and sought response from the central government and all states on the issue.

A bench of Chief Justice S.A. Bobde and justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian said this matter should not be treated as adversarial as it

is too serious a matter. The bench said the matter will be put up for final hearing. At the outset, senior advocate Colin Gonsalves, appearing for petitioner Koili Devi, said the petition deals with the larger issue. We see the problem at hand and I have dealt with this kind of matter in Bombay high court and I think this matter should be filed before the high court concerned, the CJI said.

— PTI





Hindu pilgrims perform rituals after taking a holy dip during the Gangasagar Mela.

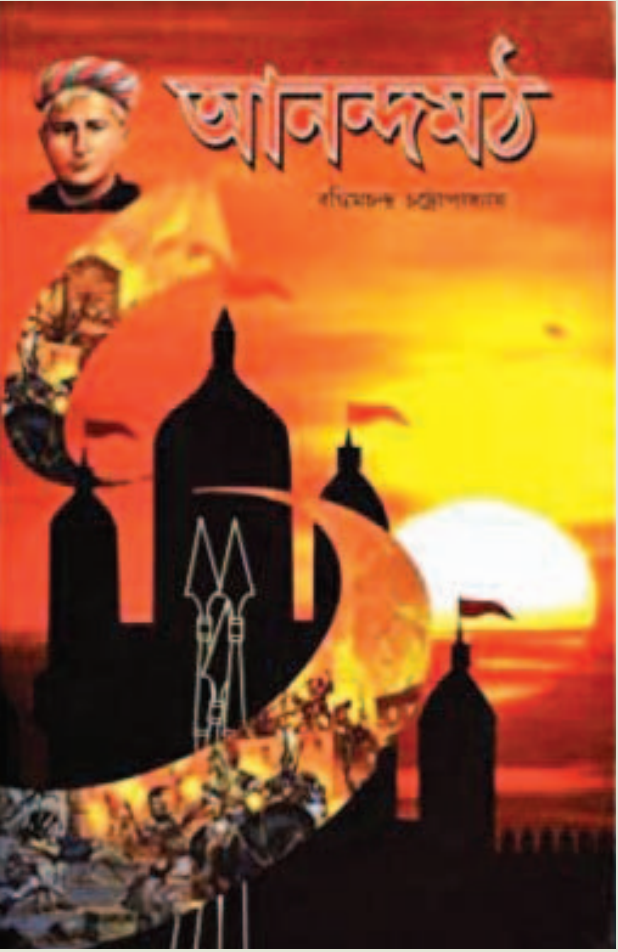
— PRITAM BADYOPADHYAY

# In West Bengal, the fight is for Hindu votes

All eyes are on the Matua community, an SC group with a population of over 3 crore. It dominates nearly 70 Assembly constituencies in the state.



Bharat Mata is a work painted by the Indian painter Abanindranath Tagore in 1905



SANJAY BASAK

In Bengal, it's a fight to claim the Hindus. The fight is for the revival of the long-lost tradition of "Hindu nationalism". It's a do or die contest between a "Hindu girl" and the custodians of "Hindutva". To counter the BJP's accusation of being soft on Muslims, TMC supreme and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee is invoking Durga, doing "Chandi Path" and even identifying herself as a "Hindu Brahmin girl".

With the BJP leading the charge, the repressed feeling of communalism has reared its head once again. As there's a race to consolidate the Hindu vote bank, the state's Muslims — who comprise 30 per cent of the population — are torn between the ruling party and the Indian Secular Front led by a radical and controversial cleric, Abbas Siddiqui, the Pirzada of Furufura Sharif. The high-voltage Bengal election campaign is actually a throwback to the first and second Partition of the region — in 1905 and 1947.

Joya Chatterji, professor of South Asian history, paints a vivid picture while writing about the 1947 Partition of Bengal in her book, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition (1932-1947)*: "In 1947, Bengal was partitioned again, following horrific clashes between Hindus and Muslims. On this occasion, however, hardly a voice was raised in protest. On the contrary, the second and definitive Partition of Bengal was preceded by an organised agitation, which demanded the vivisection of the province on the basis of religion."

Driving home her argument she adds, "This movement was led by the very same section of Bengali society that had dominated its national politics since the time of Bengal's first partition (1905): the so-called bhadralok or respectable people."

Much has been said about religious tolerance and secularism of the educated Bengali bhadralok. Much has been written about the liberal outlook of Bengal and its people and that caste system does not exist in Bengal. But history tells a very different story.

It is often claimed that the great divide between Hindus and Muslims surfaced with the first Partition of Bengal in 1905. However, Nitish Sengupta, academician, administrator, politician and author, in his book, *The Unmaking of the Nation-Bengal Divided: 1905-1971*, indicates that even before 1905, "socially the Bengali Hindu bhadralok looked down upon their Muslim neighbours... Not only was all cooked food thrown away as unclean when a Muslim entered the room but Muslim tenants were seated only on the floor on piris (low wooden seats) when they visited landlords offices, and not even allowed to smoke from the same hookahs as the Hindus..."

Even as the BJP stands accused of polarising the vote bank in the state, history shows



that Bengal was actually pivotal to the development of the idea of Hindu nationalism.

It was in Bengal that the first image of "Bharat Mata" and the word "Hindutva" were conceptualised. In 1905, when Bengal was Partitioned by the British, Abanindranath Tagore painted the first image of "Bharat Mata" — a saffron-clad woman dressed like a sadhvi. In one hand she held the Vedas, in the second she had rice paddy (signifying rich food of the land), in her third hand she held "rudraksha" and in her fourth hand she had a piece of white cloth. Bharat Mata, as painted by Abanindranath Tagore, offered, "Shiksha, Diksha, Anna, Vastra".

Much before the concept of Hindutva became associated with the Hindu rightwing, the term was coined in Bengal for the revival of Hinduism. In 1892, the term "Hindutva" was used by Chandranath Basu, a Bengali litterateur, in his magnum opus, *Hindur Prakrita Itihas* (Actual History of Hindus). This apparently is the "first recorded" use of the word "Hindutva". The website, Get Bengal (GB), states that the review of the book, carried by the vernacular section of the *Calcutta Review's* July 1894 issue, described it as a "work of Hindu revival". Basu was against religious conversion and "insisted that India shall not be a homeland to foreign religions like Islam and Christianity." In short, he believed in the concept "Hindu Rashtra".

Born in 1826, Rajnarayan Basu, an educationist, litterateur and intellectual, established Jaitya Gaurab Sampadani Sabha (Association for Achieving National Glory) in Medinipore (Midnapore), and Savjibani Sabha (Association for Regeneration) in Calcutta (now Kolkata) for promoting Hindu nationalism.

His writing, *Hindu Dharma Srestha* (The Superiority of the Hindu Religion) in 1879, was also on the lines of Hindu revivalism. It was in Bengal that Dharma Rakshini Sabha (Protection from Conversion) was founded in 1869.

The first congregation of Hindus took place in West Bengal. In 1867, Nabagopal Mitra, a playwright, poet, essayist and patriot, started a political and cultural festival called the "Hindu Mela." The



objective as stated in various articles was to "instil a sense of national pride among the people of Bengal and India." As records indicate, in 1875, Rabindranath Tagore, who was then 14-years-old, wrote his first published poem, *Hindu Melar Upahar* (Hindu Mela's Gift).

In 1853, Girish Chandra Ghosh founded the newspaper, *Hindoo Patriot*. During the 1857 mutiny, stories published in the paper indicated that the rebels "harmed their own cause by placing their trust in the leadership of Mughals."

"Vande Mataram", pronounced in Bengali as *Bande Mataram* (Mother I bow to thee), appropriated by the rightwing, was written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in 1876.

His novel *Anandamath* (in which he included the poem), written in 1882, is open to many interpretations. Writer Om Thanvi said in an article that the novel "celebrates Hindu religion, mocks Muslims and glorifies the British. 'Jai Jagdish Hare and Hare Murare Madhukaitabhare' are repeatedly invoked as slogans throughout the novel; 'Vande Mataram' is like a prop."

On Bankim Chandra, Joya Chatterji writes that he "aimed to restore the pride of educated Bengalis in Hinduism..."

It's not for nothing that Bankim Chandra has emerged as one of BJP's icons for Bengal polls. Not only did the BJP celebrate Bankim Chandra's birth anniversary, but Union home minister Amit Shah said the party follows Bankim Chandra's path of "cultural nationalism."

Much has been said about religious tolerance and secularism and liberal outlook of the educated Bengali bhadralok. But history tells a very different story. Nitish Sengupta writes, "Not only was all cooked food thrown away as unclean when a Muslim entered the room but Muslim tenants were seated only on the floor on piris (low wooden seats) when they visited landlords offices"

Bengali elite's disdain for the lower caste burst out in the open during the signing of the Poona Pact. It drastically reduced the upper caste Hindus' proportion of seats

lished by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Swami Vivekananda. Aurbindo Ghosh also founded Jugantar, another nationalist organisation.

After 1905, the simmering differences between Bengali Hindu bhadralok and Muslims came to the surface yet again when the Britishers introduced "Communal Award 1932". It was a proposal on minority representation. According to Joya Chatterji, "The Communal Award reduced the Bengali bhadralok to being an impotent minority in the legislative Assembly... For the first time in the history of Bengal's legislative features, Muslims were placed in a position of strength relative to the Hindus."

Advance, the mouthpiece of the Bengal Congress run by its leader Jatindra Mohan Sengupta, described the Communal Award as a "shameless surrender to communalists."

Liberty, the mouthpiece of Subhash Chandra Bose's faction, regarded it as a "slur on Indian nationhood." Chatterji writes: "Given the decline of bhadralok fortunes, the vehemence of the Hindu reaction is hardly surprising." She pointed out that the "bhadralok did not invoke standard nationalist critiques of British policies... instead their anger was directed against the group that they regarded as the Award's greatest beneficiaries, the Bengali Muslims."

Gradually as the influence of Bengal declined over national politics, the politics of bhadraloks became more sectarian. "In less than forty years, bhadralok politics had come full circle, moving away from nationalist agendas to more parochial concerns... shift from nationalism to communalism," Chatterji writes.

It is often said that caste system does not exist in Bengal. But to quote Sarbani Bandhopadhyay, assistant professor, St. Xavier's College, "Bengali middle class society is seen as casteless because caste violence lacks visibility." In fact, the word "chhotolok" (lesser people) is Bengali middle class' contribution to identifying lower caste.

ing lower caste.

The Bengali elite's disdain for the lower caste burst out in the open for the first time during the signing of the Poona Pact. (The Poona Pact was an agreement between Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on the reservation of electoral seats for the depressed classes in the legislature of British India government in 1930). In Bengal, the Pact drastically reduced the upper caste Hindus' proportion of seats from nearly 32 per cent to 20 per cent in the proposed legislature.

Jaya Chatterji writes: "The Pact also challenged the notional Hindu identity which had begun to emerge as a central idiom of bhadralok politics."

When Tamil political and social activist M.C. Rajah moved the Untouchability Abolition Bill in the Central Assembly in 1933, "every Hindu member from Bengal reacted violently against it," writes Chatterji.

Talking about Lata Biswas, a Dalit school teacher, Sarbani Bandhopadhyay writes, "Based on her (Lata's), narrative I would argue that caste is encountered in Bengal in mostly middle class spaces such as educational institutions, urban and no-urban." She argues that the "middle class bhadralok society has certain imagery about non-bhadralok beings, in particular the 'lowly' people, popularly known as chhotolok. They are seen as uneducated, lacking in culture, consciousness and agency, as docile and in perpetual need of bhadralok assistance. The bhadralok self is constructed and asserted through its other, in this case the marginalised castes. Lata disrupted this imagery."

Traditionally the backward votes always went to secular parties in the state. But with the BJP moving in, the politics of backwards has changed. Unlike other outfits in the state, which are dominated by upper caste Bengali Hindus, the BJP is led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who belongs to the backward class. This gives BJP an edge among the backward vote bank, which had always viewed the quintessential Bengal bhadralok with suspicion, a BJP leader claimed.

In the run-up to the polls, besides divisions on religious lines, the caste equation is also going to play a crucial role. While the Left and Congress does not hold much sway, the fight to corner the backward votes is between the BJP and TMC. All eyes are on the Matua community, an SC group with a population of over three crore. This community dominates nearly 70 Assembly constituencies in the state, particularly in north-south 24 Parganas, Nadia and north and south Bengal.

Meanwhile, as the Left and the Congress, backed by Pirzada, are merely playing the role to damage the "Hindu Brahmin girl", the BJP, which has managed to evoke the feeling of Hindutva among the Bengali middle class, has its gaze fixed on Nabanna — the seat of power.

It is often said that caste system does not exist in Bengal. But to quote Sarbani Bandhopadhyay, assistant professor, St. Xavier's College, "Bengali middle class society is seen as casteless because caste violence lacks visibility." In fact, the word "chhotolok" (lesser people) is Bengali middle class' contribution to identifying lower caste.



## SHORT TAKES

**'Respond to plea to upload daily court orders on website'**AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday sought response of the Centre and AAP government on a plea seeking direction to upload daily order sheets of all courts here in the prescribed time limit. A bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh issued notice to the central and state governments on the petition and listed the matter for further hearing on April 30. The court was hearing a PIL filed by petitioner advocate Sanser Pal Singh seeking to direct the authorities to implement the directions passed by the Delhi High Court and Supreme Court regarding uploading of daily orders in due time and to take appropriate action.

**Woman shot dead in north Delhi**

**New Delhi:** A 45-year-old Nepalese woman was shot dead allegedly by two assailants riding a bike on Wednesday at New Aruna Nagar in north Delhi's Timarpur area. Police said that police teams are scanning CCTV cameras in the area to identify the culprits and nab them. The deceased has been identified as Meena, who ran a shop of snacks and beverages with her husband in the locality. According to a senior police official, at around 7 AM Meena was at her shop when two unidentified men riding a motorcycle opened fire at her and fled from the spot. "The woman received bullet injury in her chest and collapsed. She was taken to a nearby hospital where doctors declared her brought dead," he said. The woman had been staying at a rented accommodation with her husband and her 12-year-old daughter for the last eight years. A case of murder was registered.

**2 cattle smugglers held after gunfight**

**Noida:** Two suspected cattle smugglers have been arrested after a gunfight with police in Greater Noida. One of the accused got injured in the exchange of fire while another had managed to flee the encounter site but was held eventually during a combing operation. "The gunfight broke out late on Tuesday night in Sector 151, near Jaypee Aman society. The accused were in a car when they were intercepted by Expressway Police Station officials, leading to a gunfight," Greater Noida Deputy Commissioner of Police Rajesh Kumar Singh said.

**Odisha: Truck driver fined ₹1K for not wearing helmet**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO  
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 17

A man in Odisha has been found to have been fined ₹1,000 for driving a truck without wearing a helmet, bringing serious embarrassment for the state's transport department. While the challan (receipt) was issued on December 24, 2020, the matter came to fore when vehicle owner Pramod Kumar Swain of G Jagannathpur in Ganjam district went to the local regional transport office (RTO) office recently for renewing the permit of the truck. "I was quite shocked to know that a challan pertaining to 'driving without helmet' was pending against the registered number of my truck. The permit was renewed after payment of the fine," said Pramod. The truck owner said the government should take steps to prevent issuance of 'wrong challans.' According to state transport minister Padmanabha Behera, there have been some instances of 'wrong challans' being issued to people and informed rectifications were made after receiving complaints. "Such mistakes should not happen. If there is any such instance, money will certainly be refunded to the people," the minister said on Wednesday. Prakash Mohapatra, a member of Road Safety Council of Odisha and transport technical expert, said many such mistakes took place in the past as some challan issuing authorities were not fully conversant with the electronic gadgets used for generating receipts.

■ LS member was suffering from various ailments, suicide suspected

**BJP MP from Himachal Pradesh found dead at his Delhi residence**

**New Delhi/ Shimla, March 17:** BJP MP from Mandi in Himachal Pradesh Ram Swaroop Sharma was found hanging from the ceiling in his official residence in New Delhi on Wednesday, police said.

Delhi Police PRO Chinmoy Biswal said his body was found hanging from a ceiling fan. He was taken to a hospital where doctors pronounced him dead on arrival.

Sixty-two-year-old Sharma had been suffering from various ailments. Prima facie, it appears to be a case of suicide, the police said, adding that no suicide note was found from the spot.

An inquiry is underway and the exact cause of his



Ram Swaroop Sharma

death will be ascertained after a post-mortem examination, the police said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief over the "untimely" death of the leader and praised him for working tirelessly for the betterment of society. "Shri Ram Swaroop

■ Born at Jalpehar village in Mandi district on June 10, 1958, Sharma was a two-time MP. He was elected to the 16th and 17th Lok Sabha from Mandi parliamentary constituency in 2014 and 2019 respectively. Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief over his "untimely" death.

Sharma was a dedicated leader, who was always committed to solving people's problems. He worked tirelessly for the betterment of society. Pained by his untimely and unfortunate demise. My thoughts are with his family and supporters in this sad hour. Om Shanti," PM

Modi tweeted.

Lok Sabha proceedings were adjourned till 1 PM after an obituary reference to Sharma.

Born at Jalpehar village in Mandi district on June 10, 1958, Sharma was a two-time MP. He was elected to the 16th and 17th Lok Sabha from Mandi parliamentary constituency in 2014 and 2019 respectively.

According to the police, a call was made to the Police Control Room (PCR) around 7.45 am by his aide after the parliamentarian did not respond to knocks on his door.

A police team reached the spot and forced open the door and found Sharma hanging from a ceiling fan. — PTI

**Odisha to sell 35,272 acres of temple land**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO  
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 17

In a move to augment funds for Jagannath Temple at Puri by selling the "unused" and "less used" assets of the deity, the Odisha government has initiated a process to sell at least 35,272 acres of land.

The lands to be sold are located in Odisha and in other states. This was informed by state law minister Pratap Kumar Jena in state Assembly. Temple owns 60,426.943 acres of land spread over 24 of the 30 districts of Odisha.

Odisha's three major political parties — the ruling Biju Janata Dal and the opposition Congress and BJP — have started preparations for the by-polls to Pipili Assembly constituency slated to be held on April 17.

The Pipili seat is lying vacant after the sitting MLA Pradeep Mahapatra passed away on Oct. 4, 2020.

— PTI

**Home minister asks Central forces to undertake detailed study Suggest measures to improve work condition of security forces: Shah**AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

Union home minister Amit Shah has directed central forces to undertake a detailed study and suggest corrective measures on improving work environment so that security personnel are not forced to resign or seek voluntary retirement. Between 2016-20 as many as 6,529 central para-military force personnel resigned while 40,096 opted for voluntary retirement. The highest attrition was reported in BSF as 1,708 personnel resigned while 20,249 opted for voluntary retirement.



Amit Shah

■ Between 2016-20 as many as 6,529 central para-military force personnel resigned while 40,096 opted for voluntary retirement. The highest attrition was reported in BSF as 1,708 personnel resigned while 20,249 opted for voluntary retirement.

This decision comes close on the heels of the home minister Shah earlier directing para-military forces to fill all pending vacancies, close to one lakh, before the tenure of the Modi Govt comes to an end in 2024. The move will create much needed job opportunities in the country also as unemployment

has shown a sharp increase during the Corona outbreak. Home ministry sources said the focus of home minister's direction was primarily on improving the working environment and condition of security personnel in police force so that they do not opt out of the service which in turn often leads to

a shortage of specialised manpower. The study to be conducted by para-military forces in consultation with experts from outside also will identify all problems areas due to which police personnel, including senior officers, take volunteer retirement or resign which often hampers functioning of security forces.

Once the report is submitted to the home ministry in the next three months, officials said a series of welfare measures would be taken with focus on "overall development and well-being of police personnel and their family members."

**In Assam's Jorhat, 6 test Covid +ve after taking jab**MANOJ ANAND  
GUWAHATI, MARCH 17

Amidst the ongoing hectic electioneering for the ensuing assembly elections in Assam, at least five persons in Upper Assam's Jorhat district have been found to be corona positive after taking the first shot of the anti-Covid vaccine and one person was infected with the coronavirus even after taking both the dose of the vaccine.

The deputy commissioner of Jorhat, Roshani A Korati also confirmed the report where five positive patients had taken one dose of the shot, while, the another patient has taken both shots.

Meanwhile, except one patient who is under home isolation, all the other patients have been shifted to Gauhati Medical College and Hospital for better treatment.

Four senior citizens belonging to the Khound

**'India's vaccine supply has helped vulnerable nations'**AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

India's overseas vaccine supply and its broader "policies and conduct have emerged as a source of strength for the stressed and vulnerable nations of the world ... (who) see that there is at least one major nation that truly believes in making vaccines accessible and affordable to others in dire need", external affairs minister S.

and Saikia family of Atila Gaon in Jorhat have tested positive after taking the first shot of COVID. Besides frontline workers PSO of the general observer for Jorhat and CISF personnel have tested positive too.

"The four patients, two from Khound family (resident of Atila Gaon in

Jaishankar informed both Houses of Parliament on Wednesday.

Pointing out that "to date, we have supplied 'Made in India' vaccines to 72 nations", the EAM said "our ambassadors abroad feel every day the warmth of ordinary people across the world for India," adding that Parliament "should recognise the enormous feeling for India that our vaccine friendship initiative has generated".

Jorhat) and two from Saikia family (resident of Na-Ali in Jorhat), all above 60, were administered vaccine (first dose) on March 4 and tested positive on March 14 after they were tested for the virus following complaints of diarrhea and uneasiness," the health department sources said.

**MP towns tense after Cong leader shot dead**

No arrests so far, Cong activists ransack hospital

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY  
BHOPAL, MARCH 17

Local Congress leader in Madhya Pradesh's Chhatarpur district was shot dead by two motorbike-borne assailants, police said on Wednesday. The incident took place when the slain Congress leader Indra Pratap Singh Parmar was talking to his supporters at a hotel in Badamallhar in the district late on Tuesday evening.

"The Congress functionary and his supporters were sitting at a hotel when some unidentified people shot at him. He was rushed to Badamallhar hospital and later shifted to district hospital in Chhatarpur where he died during treatment late in the night," Chhatarpur

■ Although, motive behind the murder of the Congress leader was yet to be established, police suspected that the attack may be linked to disputes over recently held assembly elections in Badamallhar

district superintendent of police Sachin Sharma said.

Although, motive behind his murder was yet to be established, police suspected that the attack may be linked to disputes over recently held assembly elections in Badamallhar. Six people were booked for the Congress leader's murder.

However, no arrest could be made in connection with the incident so far. The SP has declared a reward of ₹10,000 to those

who could provide clues leading to the arrest of the six accused in the case.

The incident sparked tension in the area with the Congress activists ransacking the district hospital. The party workers staged demonstration in Badamallhar and Chhatarpur on Wednesday in protest against the murder of their leader.

Incidentally, the slain Congress leader's elder brother Bhagabat Singh who was a local sarpanch, was murdered six years ago. Madhya Pradesh Congress president and former chief minister Kamal Nath on Wednesday constituted a six-member team of party leaders to probe the incident and submit him a report.

**Kejri: Take back Bill on powers to L-G**AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday urged the Centre to take back the Bill that seeks to define certain roles and powers of the Lieutenant Governor of the national capital.

Speaking at a protest organised by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) against the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021 at Jantar Mantar here, the chief minister also alleged that the Centre wants to weaken his government through this bill. "I want to appeal to the Centre to take back the NCCTD Bill, don't cheat the people with this legislation," Mr Kejriwal said.

He said the BJP has brought the bill as it is scared of the AAP's reach in other states. "That is why they are trying to stop our development work in Delhi," he claimed.

The CM further alleged that BJP tries to buy



Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal and his Cabinet ministers hold a protest in New Delhi on Wednesday.

— G.N. JHA

MLAs of a ruling party to topple the government whenever it loses any election.

"BJP wants to rule Delhi mischievously just like a small kid who runs away with both bat and ball after losing a match. When they lose in polls, they buy ruling party MLAs and dismantle govt. They tried the same with Delhi MLAs but failed," he said, mounting his attack at the saffron party.

Delhi ministers, AAP MLAs and councillors took part in the protest at Jantar Mantar against the Bill which, according to the party, gives overarching power to the L-G.

**Gautam Buddh Nagar district schools asked not to hike fees**

**Noida, March 17:** Schools in Noida and Greater Noida cannot increase fees in the academic year 2021-22 owing to the Covid-19 pandemic situation, according to a Gautam Buddh Nagar district administration order.

The schools have also been directed to charge fees only on monthly

basis and not force or insist payment of fees on quarterly or half yearly or yearly basis on any student, stated the order by the District Fee Regulation Committee (DRFC). The decisions were taken during a meeting of the DRFC, chaired by district magistrate Suhas L.Y. on Tuesday. — PTI

**Set up board to examine X-Ray report of dead farmer: HC**

**New Delhi, March 17:** The Delhi High Court Wednesday directed Delhi health secretary to constitute a board of experts to examine the X-Ray report of 25-year-old farmer who died after his tractor overturned during the farmers' protest rally here on the Republic Day.

Justice Yogesh Khanna also asked the doctors of Maulana Azad Medical College here to prepare the X-Ray report from the original X-Ray plate which has been received by Delhi Police from the Uttar Pradesh police.

The high court said the report be examined by the board comprising medical and forensic experts as also a radiologist among others. The board shall be constituted by the secretary of health department of Delhi government, the high court said. — PTI

**SEARCH FOR MISSING**

NEHA

General Public is hereby informed that one girl **Neha**, D/o: Narender, R/o: H.No. D-35, E-46/131, Jhuggi Jain Mandir Dilshad Colony, Delhi, **Age:** About 14 Years, **Height:** 5', **Complexion:** Fair, **Built:** Thin, **Face:** Oval, **Wearing:** Red Colour Suit & Salwar has been missing from her house. In this regard FIR No. 108/21, Dated 12.03.2021, has been lodged at P.S. Seemapuri, Delhi.

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing girl but no clue has come to light so far. If anyone have any information about this missing girl please inform the undersigned.

Web-site : <http://cbi.nic.in>  
E-Mail ID: [cic@cbi.gov.in](mailto:cic@cbi.gov.in)  
Fax: 011-23011334  
DP/397/SHD/2021

SHO  
P.S. Seemapuri, Delhi  
Ph: 011-22599394, 22599397

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SHORT TAKES

No decision yet on NRC in nation: Govt

**New Delhi:** The Centre on Wednesday said it has not taken any decision on the nationwide rollout of the National Register of Citizens (NRC). Union minister of state for home Nityanand Rai was replying to a question in the Rajya Sabha on whether the Central government had any plans to implement the NRC throughout the country. "Till now, the government has not taken any decision to prepare the National Register of Indian Citizens at the national level," Mr Rai said in a written reply. The NRC was updated in Assam under the supervision of the Supreme Court. When the final NRC was published on August 31, 2019, a total of 19.06 lakh people were excluded out of the total 3,30,27,661 applicants, which created a ripple across India. The NRC is an Assam-specific data of bonafide Indian citizens living in the state. Replying to another question, Mr Rai said there is no provision of detention centres under the Citizenship Act, 1955 and the National Register of Indian Citizens. — PTI

'Rampant fraud in Kerala voters' list'

**Thiruvananthapuram:** The Opposition Congress on Wednesday raised serious allegations of fraud and irregularities in the preparation of voters' list in Kerala ahead of the April 6 Assembly polls. Citing the voters' list published by the EC on January 20 2021, Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly Ramesh Chennithala said bogus votes have been added extensively in each constituency across the state. There were instances of the name of a person being included in the voters' list of the same constituency five or six times, he told reporters in a press meet. "In most cases, same address and photo have been used for committing the fraud. In some other cases, minor changes have been made in the address and the photo," the senior Congress leader alleged. — PTI

Parties prepare for Pipili bypoll April 17

**Bhubaneswar:** Odisha's three major political parties — the ruling BJD and the Opposition Congress and BJP — have started preparations for the bypolls to Pipili Assembly constituency slated to be held on April 17. While the result of the bypoll will have little impact on the ruling party, it will have serious bearing on the future of the two opposition parties who have been trying hard to see a turnaround in their fates. In the 147-member Odisha Assembly, the ruling BJD now enjoys a massive majority of 112 members. The Opposition BJP has got 23, while the Congress has just nine. The CPI has one member while the other is an Independent legislator. The Pipili seat is lying vacant after the sitting MLA Pradeep Maharathy passed away on October 4, 2020.

8 people killed in Atlanta massage parlour shootings

■ **Continued from Page 1**  
against Asian Americans that coincided with the spread of the coronavirus across the United States. "Our entire family is praying for the victims of these horrific acts of violence," Gov. Brian Kemp said Tuesday evening on Twitter. A man suspected in the Acworth shooting was captured by surveillance video pulling up to the business around 4:50 pm Tuesday, minutes before the attack, authorities said. Baker said the suspect, Robert Aaron Long, of Woodstock, was taken into custody in Crisp County, about 240 kilometers south of Atlanta. Baker said they believe Long is also the suspect in the Atlanta shootings. Police said video footage showed the suspect's vehicle in the area of the Atlanta spas about the time of those attacks as well. That, as well as other video evidence, "suggests it is extremely likely our suspect is the same as Cherokee County's, who is in custody," Atlanta police said in a statement. Atlanta and Cherokee County authorities were working to confirm the cases are related. — AP

# Didi gives rally priority, skips PM meet on new Covid surge

Accuses Modi of stopping her govt from offering free vaccine to people

RAJIB CHOWDHURI  
KOLKATA, MARCH 17

Giving priority to her campaign for votes in the upcoming West Bengal Assembly polls, chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday skipped Prime Minister Narendra Modi's virtual meet with the CMs of all states on the fresh surge in Covid-19 cases.

In a vitriolic attack on the PM, the TMC chief accused him of preventing her government from offering the vaccine at free of cost to the people and making a false promise of giving free vaccine to win votes in the Bihar Assembly polls.

She also asked Mr Modi to give "less lectures" on the Covid, a day before his campaign rally in Purulia, one of the Jangalmahal districts with a thick tribal votebank now with the BJP, which is going to polls on March 27 in the first of the eight phases in the state.

At a time when the PM was at the meeting with the CMs, Ms Banerjee told a TMC rally at Gopiballpur in Jhargram, also in the Jangalmahal, "I want the vaccine to be supplied freely to the common people. But it is not in our hand. If the Central government does not give permission, it can not happen. I said I would pay for it to bear the cost as I want to give the vaccine freely to all. You give it to me. But Mr Modi is not giving it to us..."

Taking credit of her role during the outbreak nearly a year ago, she added, "We took good care of you during the Covid. You will be doing well in the coming days also. But remember, I am eager to give the vaccine freely while Mr Modi is not allowing it. Why is he not giving it? If I can offer polio, malaria and dengue vaccine freely to all, I can do the same in case of Covid vaccine too. We ask Mr Modi to give less lectures."



A man pushes an elderly woman on a wheelchair past a wall mural of West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee in Nadia district on Wednesday, ahead of the upcoming state Assembly polls. — PTI

## Fresh jolt to TMC, MP Sisir may join BJP at Modi's rally

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA, MARCH 17

In yet another blow to West Bengal CM and TMC supreme Mamata Banerjee, three-time MP of her party from Contai, Sisir Adhikari, is going to defect to the BJP next week.

The former Union minister will attend Prime Minister Narendra Modi's mega campaign rally in his Lok Sabha constituency on March 24 for his son and the saffron party's candidate Shuvendu Adhikari at Nandigram against the two-time CM.

On March 13, BJP MP Locket Chatterjee met the head of the Adhikari family and urged him to join the party at Mr Modi's rally on his wish.

Confirming his father's plan on Wednesday afternoon, Shuvendu told a BJP rally at Chandipur in East Midnapore, "All of you are familiar with Sisir Adhikari. Sisirbabu will be at the rally of Modiji. Please wait. I would also request him to

## EC removes candidate's husband, an IPS officer, from election duty

**Kolkata, March 17:** The EC on Wednesday removed actor-turned TMC candidate of Sonarpur South Lovely Maitra's husband — Soumya Roy, an IPS officer, from the Assembly election-related duty. He was recently removed from his post of superintendent of police of Howrah (rural) after

attend the rally of Amitji at Egra on March 21."

His confirmation comes after his father on Wednesday said, "Who said I am in the TMC? Does anyone say that? Since Shuvendu made a switch in December, some people are frequenting here from Kolkata along with dacoits and thieves. They are abusing me and my forefathers in loudspeakers. We do not know whose plate we ate in and enjoyed. But the people of Midnapore know we are

the BJP demanded his removal questioning his neutrality as his wife is contesting the polls. Mr Roy was replaced by Srihari Pandey. In a fresh order by the EC to the state government, Mr Roy has been asked to stay attached to the police headquarters, according to sources.

not *Bhogi* (those who enjoy power) and *Tyagi* (those who sacrifice)."

On his participation in the poll-campaign, the veteran TMC MP explained, "If my son wants, I will take the field for him though my health will not permit."

However, Sougata Roy, also a three-time TMC MP from Dum Dum, argued, "What is the surprise in Sisirbabu's presence at Mr Modi's rally? He earlier said he would go if his son allows him."

## Govt conspiracy to woo tribals away from rebels

# Naxals in Bastar region dismiss peace initiative

RABINDRA NATH  
CHOUDHURY  
BHOPAL, MARCH 17

The Maoists have rejected the peace initiative by a civil society group led by former BBC scribe Subhransu Choudhury to end decades long Leftwing extremism in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region, calling it a "conspiracy" by the government to woo tribals away from the rebels.

A press release issued by Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee (DKSZC) said a conspiracy was being hatched by way of peace initiative to distance the civil society members who espoused causes of tribals away from the struggling masses and also the tribals from the revolutionary movement.

"The peace initiative is nothing but a hoax and is a conspiracy by the government to drive a wedge between tribals and

THE CIVIL society group, comprising politicians, scribes & rights activists, was constituted in Raipur last month to bring Naxals and govt to the negotiation table to work out a lasting solution to the decades-old Maoist menace in Bastar

Maoists. We appeal the rest of the civil society members who have espoused the causes of tribals not to fall prey to the conspiracy (of the government)", the press release issued by spokesman of the DKSZC Vikalp said.

The civil society group, comprising politicians, scribes and civil rights activists, was constituted in Raipur last month to bring Naxals and government to the negotiation table to work out a lasting solution to the decades old Maoist men-

ace in Bastar.

The group launched a "Dandi March" in the line of that of Mahatma Gandhi in south Bastar district of Narayanpur on March 12, as part of a campaign to involve the local tribals in the peace initiative.

The march was scheduled to end on March 23 at Raipur, where the victims of Naxal violence and police atrocities were scheduled to interact.

The Maoists have reminded the civil society group of the failure of such an initiative taken by the Concerned Citizen Committee (CCC) in undivided Andhra Pradesh in 2004 after the AP government then unilaterally withdrew from the peace process.

The Maoists have sought to create a conducive environment by suspending counterinsurgency operations in Bastar before taking forward such an initiative.

## Electoral roll, Aadhaar link under review: Govt

**New Delhi, March 17:** The Election Commission's proposal to link electoral roll with the Aadhaar ecosystem to root out multiple enrolments is under the consideration of the government, the Lok Sabha was informed on Wednesday.

In a written reply, law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said the poll panel has proposed to link electoral roll with the "Aadhaar ecosystem" with a "view to curb the menace of multiple enrolment of the same person at different places".

He said this would require amendments to the electoral laws. "The matter is under consideration," he said. He was asked about the current status of the EC's proposal to link Aadhaar with voter ID. He said the poll panel has stated that it has taken multiple meas-

ures for the security and the safety of the electoral roll data platform.

"Electoral roll database system does not enter into the Aadhaar ecosystem and the system is used only for the authentication purpose keeping a tight air-gap between the two systems. These measures effectively prevent theft interception and hijacking of the voter system," Mr Prasad said. He was asked about the manner in which the government plans to protect the data linked with Aadhaar and voter ID from being misused.

The poll panel has been pressing the government to amend provisions of the Representation of the People Act allowing EC to seek Aadhaar numbers of those applying to be voters and those who are already part of the electoral rolls. — PTI

## Cop destroyed proof after parking car near Ambani's residence NIA seizes docus from Waze house

SHAHAB ANSARI  
MUMBAI, MARCH 17

It was revealed on Wednesday that the kurta, worn by the person who is seen parking the explosive-laden SUV near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence, was set on fire using kerosene in order to destroy the evidence. In the meantime, the National Investigation Agency on Wednesday conducted searches at arrested police officer Sachin Waze's residence and seized computers and documents.

The fact about setting

kurta on fire came to fore when during the probe the NIA on Tuesday seized a black Mercedes car, which was being used by arrested police officer Sachin Waze, from a parking lot near the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus. From the car, ₹5 lakh cash, a note-counting machine, two number plates, some clothes and a kerosene bottle were recovered.

An NIA officer, on condition of anonymity, said that while investigating the purpose of the kerosene bottle kept in the car, it came to light that it

THE INVESTIGATING officers suspect that the person wearing the PPE kit and a kurta underneath, captured on the CCTV footage, on the day of the incident is Sachin Waze, although it is being confirmed

was used to set on fire the kurta, which the accused person had worn underneath the PPE kit while parking the Scorpio car near Ambani's residence on the night on February 25.

The investigating offi-

cers suspect that the person wearing the PPE kit and a kurta underneath, captured on the CCTV footage recorded at the spot i.e. at Carmichael Road, on the day of the incident is Sachin Waze, although it is being confirmed.

The NIA team wants to recreate the crime scene. A team of NIA officers on Wednesday evening took Waze along and visited some spots in Babulnath area of south Mumbai and later also took him to the Mahim Causeway near creek as part of the investigation.

## Income scheme for all, promises Didi's Trinamul

■ **Continued from Page 1**  
Samman Needhi scheme, which mandates an aide of ₹6,000 a year to small and marginal farmers.

The manifesto further noted that an additional 10 lakh medium and small and micro enterprises (MSMEs) would be added every year to increase the total number of functional MSME units to 1.5 crore.

"This is not a political manifesto, it is a development-oriented manifesto. This is a manifesto of the people, for the people, and by the people," Ms Banerjee said.

Besides, five lakh additional low cost houses are to be built under Banglar Bari Scheme in urban habitations to reduce slum population from 7 per cent to 3.65 per cent, 25 lakh additional low cost houses to be built under Bangla Awaz Yojana.

The TMC manifesto also promises piped drinking water facility to additional 47 lakh households.

## Engagement with China 'complex': Centre tells House

SRIDHAR  
KUMARASWAMI  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

India's engagement with China is "complex" and New Delhi will "continue discussions with the Chinese side to resolve the remaining issues along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh and achieve the objective of disengagement from all friction points", the Government informed Parliament on Wednesday.

The government said, "two sides were able to reach an agreement on disengagement in the North and South Bank of the Pangong Lake, which has been completed" but that "there are however still some outstanding issues with regard to deployment and patrolling at some other points along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh".

The government reiter-

ated that Chinese unilateral actions last year attempting to alter the status quo along the LAC in the Ladakh Sector have "seriously disturbed the peace and tranquility along the LAC".

The ministry of external affairs told the Lok Sabha, "India's engagement with China is complex. The two sides agree that the future direction of India China relations should be built upon respecting each other's sensitivities, concerns and aspirations. The two sides have also agreed to manage their differences and not allow differences on any issue to become disputes. As regards the boundary question, the two sides agree that pending final settlement of the boundary question, maintenance of peace and tranquility in the border areas is an essential basis for the overall development of the bilateral relationship."

# Mumbai police chief is shunted

■ **Continued from Page 1**  
was issued by the home department," a senior official requesting anonymity said.

On Wednesday evening, Mr Deshmukh tweeted, "Big decision of the government. Shri Hemant Nagrale will be the new Mumbai police commissioner. Shri Rajnish Seth will have the additional charge of the post of director general of police, Maharashtra."

He also added that, "Shri Sanjay Pandey will have

ON TUESDAY, Mr Thackeray had convened a meeting with all the coalition partners of MVA govt at his official residence in connection with the controversy arisen due to the arrest of API Sachin Waze

the responsibility of Maharashtra State Security Corporation. Shri Parambr Singh will have the responsibility of the Home Guard."

The minister had a meet-

ing with the chief minister earlier in the day. Mr Singh's transfer follows Monday's talks between Mr Thackeray and NCP chief Sharad Pawar, amid reports that Sachin Waze stage-managed the bomb scare on instructions from Mr Singh.

On Tuesday, Mr Thackeray had convened a meeting with all the coalition partners of Maha Vikas Aghadi government at his official residence Varsha in Mumbai in connection with the contro-

versy arisen due to the arrest of API Sachin Waze by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in connection with the recovery of explosives from a Scorpio parked near billionaire Mukesh Ambani's residence in February. In the meeting Mr Deshmukh gave details about the issue and made the government's stand clear that it had never defended Mr Waze and those responsible in this case would be punished.

## PM warns states of 2nd Covid outbreak

■ **Continued from Page 1**  
Uttar Pradesh to the tune of 10 per cent. He urged the chief ministers of the concerned states to immediately correct the drawbacks of planning and governance at the local level to reduce such vaccine waste.

The Prime Minister summed up that along with the above steps, the basic steps to prevent the spread of this infection

were wearing masks, maintaining physical distance, taking care of cleanliness, etc. He urged that there should be no laxity in such steps and that the people's awareness will have to be raised on these subjects.

Speaking on the districts that had seen a surge in the past few days, Mr Modi said it was worth considering that these were also the zones where the test-

ing and vaccination was comparatively less.

The Prime Minister called for increased RT-PCR tests for proper testing and tracking of the infection and a focus on smaller towns.

"Over 70 per cent of the tests should be RT-PCR. States should not rely on Rapid Antigen Tests," the PM said, referring to Kerala, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and UP. "We

have to be pro-active in test, track and treat strategy application," he stressed.

Mr Modi said that Tier 2 and 3 towns, which had escaped the first wave, were getting affected this time.

It would not take much for the virus to spread to villages from there, which would overwhelm the healthcare system of the country, he warned.



THE ASIAN AGE

18 MARCH 2021

Why does Centre want a ‘viceroy’ to run Delhi?

The Narendra Modi government plans to constitutionally aggrandise the office of the lieutenant governor of Delhi at the expense of the elected chief minister of the Union Territory. A proposed amendment to the National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1993, in this regard was moved in Parliament earlier this week.

Under the proposed scheme, the “Government of Delhi” would mean the L-G. This is a denigration of the existing arrangement under which the UT elects an Assembly whose leader assumes the office of chief minister and heads a council of ministers appointed by him, which constitutes the apex of the elected government.

The L-G, who is the representative of the Centre, functions under the advice of the council of ministers. The remit of the holder of this office is restricted to the three portfolios of land, police, and public order, which are the domain of the Union. In the UT’s wider administration — covering, for instance, fields such as education, health, power, water, transport, finance, general administration — it is the writ of the elected government that runs, barring municipal governance which comes under the Municipal Council Of Delhi (MCD) which has been partitioned into three geographical units.

**The proposed change in law introduced by the Modi government will effectively render the Arvind Kejriwal government superfluous, practically reducing the present Delhi Assembly — which was brought into existence in 1993 under the NCT Act — to a nullity**

now — will have an Assembly that has been neutered. It will no longer throw up a government elected by the people. In a way this takes us to British colonial times when the Viceroy, representing the Crown, held superior powers to that of an elected government in the post-1935 period.

To recall history, from 1952-56, Delhi had an elected Assembly and was a state. This was a time when the idea of state boundaries was evolving. The national capital was made a UT in 1956 under the States Reorganisation Act, but did not have an Assembly. The elected Assembly came in 1993 through the NCT Act and Delhi became partially a state.

Since the national government, Parliament, and diplomatic missions were located in the territory of Delhi, it was understandable, for practical reasons, that the Union should seek to have land, police and public order under its direct authority, as is the case with Washington DC and Canberra.

Occasionally, there was confusion over the question of authority — even minor friction — between the elected government of the UT and the Union, but this was nothing that wasn’t sorted out without fuss.

Former chief minister Sheila Dikshit won three elected terms and had little difficulty negotiating her way with BJP as well as Congress governments at the Centre. In contrast, current CM Kejriwal has given the impression of being calculatedly combative in order to enhance his popularity. For its part, the Modi government too, exploiting its control over the police and the all-India services, has played rough with the elected government. But political relationship between parties governing the Centre and the UT must not be permitted to diminish the constitutional status and institutional integrity of geographies.

China’s Catch-22 on vaccine

The decision of the Chinese government to ease visa restrictions, imposed during the peak of the pandemic Covid-19, is a welcome step that will speed up the return of life back to normalcy. However, its insistence that those who apply for a visa should have inoculated themselves with a Chinese-made vaccine defies logic and scientific principles, and reflects a total ignorance about the objective realities about the pandemic situation in the world.

Scientists in several countries have in the last few months come out with vaccines that can protect people from the deadly virus. Each one is certified by the national regulators concerned following universally accepted scientific norms on safety and efficacy, and hence it is grossly unfair for a country to set vaccination with a product made there as a precondition to enter that country. The humanity is not engaged in a war among the nations of the world but one against a virus. Every nation must realise that.

It is estimated that there are about 23,000 Indians who are waiting to return to China for various purposes including education and business. Given the fact that there is no availability of Chinese-made vaccines in India, they will have to wait for some more time. The Chinese side has explained that vaccine producers in other countries should file applications to competent authorities in China and the latter will make decisions in accordance with laws and regulations. There has been no timeframe or assurance on that either.

There are many countries that have no access to vaccine as its production has been concentrated in a few spots and most of it has been contracted by the rich nations. Vaccination for all must be a universal goal at present, and every nation, including China, should be part of it. China has an added responsibility as the SARS-Cov-2 virus that causes Covid-19 originated there. Unilateral actions by countries do not aid that endeavour.

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Sanjay Kumar



Women voters to play critical role in Bengal & TN elections

Of the many issues that may decide the fate of the West Bengal polls, one factor which may be critical in deciding if Mamata Banerjee is going to win her third election or there would be a change in West Bengal will be how women voters vote in that state. It is important to note that during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, of the total 42 candidates, Ms Banerjee fielded 17 women candidates, and of the total 22 victories of the Trinamul Congress, nine women got elected to the Lok Sabha. In these constituencies the TMC polled 48 per cent votes, compared to its state average vote share of 43 per cent. Even those women contestants who lost polled more than 35 per cent votes. Evidence from the surveys conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) also indicates women voting for Ms Banerjee in very large numbers in West Bengal. In the current Assembly election, the Trinamul Congress has fielded 50 women candidates out of the total 294 seats, keeping an eye on the women’s vote. If the women vote for the TMC as they had

voted for it in earlier elections, it could be advantage TMC, but a shift among women voters can put the TMC in a difficult situation.

In Tamil Nadu, this was true for the AIADMK as well when Jayalalithaa headed the party. One might think that the only explanation why women were voting for the TMC and AIADMK in large numbers was because these two political parties were headed by women leaders; but that may be too simplistic an explanation as the Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere could never get women’s support in such large numbers despite Mayawati heading the party. There must be other factors too that attracted women voters to these parties than just that they were led by women.

While the women’s vote hasn’t swung towards any other party as decisively as it has in favour of the TMC or AIADMK, Indian elections have seen a noticeable shift in the past decade. Women voters are turning out to vote in large numbers both in the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. The local body elections, especially those to elect panchayats, have

also seen a high turnout of women voters. Looking at this trend, discussion have begun on whether women have emerged as a new voting bloc for parties in India. It is true that women are voting in bigger numbers now compared to the past, but more important, there is also evidence of more women taking voting decisions on their own compared to the past. However, the voting pattern of women doesn’t suggest that, except for Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, women are emerging as a new social voting bloc in the rest of India.

There is clear evidence to suggest that more women are turning up at the polling booths than ever before. Data of the turnout across genders released by the Election Commission provides clear evidence for that. The men-women gap in turnout, that used to be around 9-10 per cent in the 1980s and 1990s, and much wider in the 1950s-60s, has not only narrowed down significantly, as seen in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls; in many states, the number of women voters surpassed men, which is a big turnaround in Indian elections. In the 2014 Lok Sabha polls there were

six states where women’s turnout was higher compared to men, and in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls the number of sates on this list increased to 16. The pattern of a rise in women’s turnout is not only visible in the Lok Sabha polls, it can be noticed even in the Assembly polls held in various states since 2014, including in the recent Assembly polls in Bihar in 2020, despite Bihar not being one of the states with a very positive gender gap in favour of women. It was also the first state to have witnessed this trend during the 2015 Assembly polls.

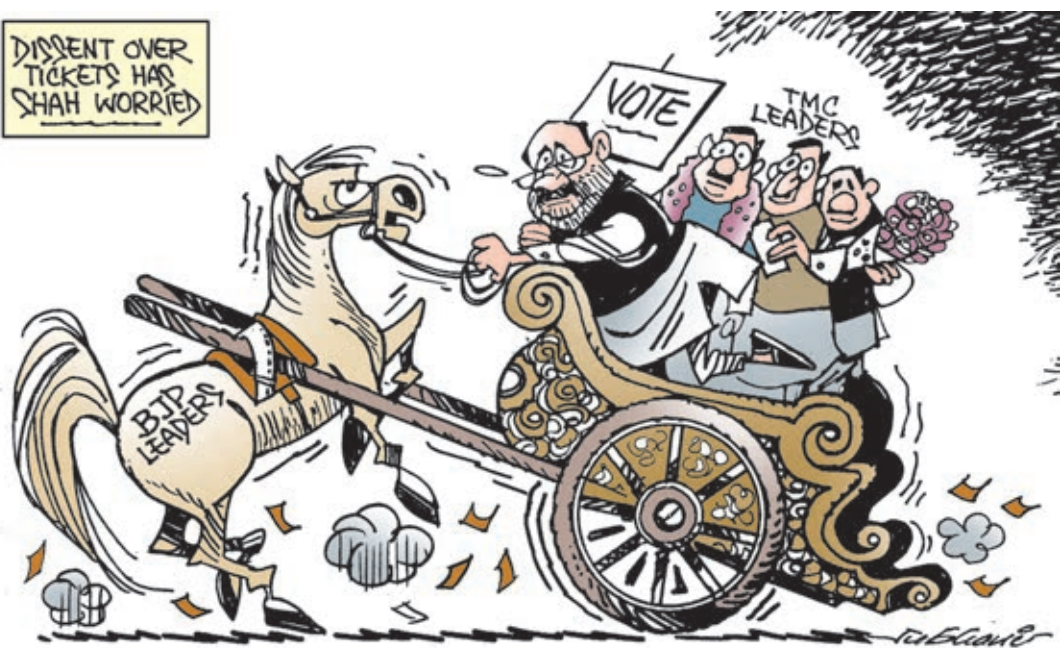
However, an increased turnout among women voters does not indicate that women are emerging as a vote bank in Indian elections, with their vote still divided between various political parties. Women voters tend not to vote en bloc like voters belonging to other social blocs often do, though some political parties do get more votes from women. A series of survey data collected during various Assembly polls in different states by Lokniti-CSDS suggests that the women’s vote has remained more or less equally divided between different parties in

different states though with a few exceptions. The data from these surveys indicates that women seem to vote more in favour of the BJP in states like Uttarakhand and the Jammu region of the erstwhile state of J&K, more in favour of the United Democratic Front in Kerala, for the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu and for Ms Banerjee’s TMC in West Bengal. While women’s turnout has risen in many Hindi heartland states, there is hardly any indication of their showing any preference or voting for any specific party.

If the women voters of West Bengal and Tamil Nadu vote the way they have voted in the past, it would give an edge to these two parties in the respective states. But one should not forget that there is no Jayalalithaa in Tamil Nadu now, and Ms Banerjee is up against a formidable BJP and is also facing a decade of anti-incumbency.

The writer is a professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and a political analyst. The views expressed here are personal.

Subhani



Let’s talk about racism... Fight it at home, abroad



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

External affairs minister S. Jaishankar was cornered as it were when the Opposition members in the Rajya Sabha, led paradoxically by the BJP’s Ashwini Vaishnav, raised the issue of Rashmi Samant, who was compelled to resign as president of the Oxford University Students Union after a big win, the first for an Indian, over the issue of some old tweets which were shown to be racist in content, especially because they made insensitive references to the Holocaust. But it would appear there was much more to it than the apparently offensive tweets, especially after she had apologised. There seems to have been some simmering resentment against the Indian student, and the suspicion became much stronger when a professor at the university made some references to her religion. British society has been trying for the past several decades to make itself over into a multiracial community, almost ever since the end of the Second World War, but it has not always been successful, despite several people of South Asian origin, including from India, having become the pillars of the establishment in the political and economic spheres. The leaders of the British establishment have of course been zealous about guarding the new identity of a more tolerant England. But the racism still simmers, and it creeps out in more ways than one.

The implosive interview of Meghan Markle, Duchess of Sussex, to American television superstar Oprah Winfrey, that referred to talk about the possible colour of her soon to be born child during her

first pregnancy in royal circles, have raised eyebrows and hackles in Britain, including in the British royal family, which was reflected in the response that Queen Elizabeth II had given.

It’s true, of course, that racism is not the kind of sensitive issue in India that it is in Britain, in the United States and even in European Union countries. But that does not mean India, despite its much-vaunted diversity, does not harbour the canker of racism. Racism is so deeply ingrained in the Indian psyche that it is a most well-guarded dirty secret, that even the most aware people do not seem to notice when its ugly face comes up. Discrimination based on colour is a habit of the mind among people across the length and breadth of Indian society. The rich betray it, and so do the poor, the educated and the uneducated, the cultured and the not so cultured let it out instinctively. A person of fair skin is considered beautiful, and it needs a deliberate and conscious thought to acknowledge the beauty of a person of dark complexion. If this is not racism, what is? This cannot be wished away because it is lodged deep in our mind, collective as well as individual. And it cannot be removed with mere pious intentions. There is an urgent need to con-

**Indians must talk openly and loudly about our racial attitudes. It is the adult biases that get passed on to children without either realising that a bad habit is being passed on from one generation to another.**

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stantly remind ourselves that it is an unfair attitude, and most of the time it betrays not only a total lack of sensitivity but also a strand of cruelty.

It will be argued that the preference for, and admiration of, fairer coloured people does not have the violent and ugly consequences that it has in white-majority countries like Britain, the United States, and many EU countries, where people of colour find it harder to get jobs, make friends across the racial divide and get what they deserve. On face of it, it seems that despite our weakness for the fair colour — various shades on light brown in the Indian context, we do not deny people opportunities. But the attitude remains offensive and hurtful.

There is a need for Indians to talk openly and loudly about our unconscious racial attitudes so that every time we unthinkingly make our racial judgment calls, we check ourselves. It is the adult biases that get passed on to children without either the adults or the children realising that a bad habit is being passed on from one generation to another. Most young people in India and elsewhere have been made aware of the need to protect the environment. Talk to any schoolgoing child, and he or she displays ecological sensitivity which has now become part of his or her mental make-up. We need a similar kind of education for us to consciously accept different racial and colour differences. In Europe, the colour bias is pronounced and aggressive. It is not so

bad in India. We do accept each other from different parts of the country with different complexions. But this bonhomie and good-natured attitude seems to break down when we come across people from the northeastern states. And it becomes positively ugly when we deal with people from Africa, or when we deal with African Americans from the United States. Indians who complain loudly and aggressively against the offensive behaviour of white people in the West fall into the same kind of behaviour at home when we deal with blacks and all non-white people — whether they are visitors or students.

An interesting and revealing aspect of Indians’ behaviour hinges on what we generally do when faced with a person of European descent and another when we deal with a black person. While Indians, despite the resentment of racism practiced by whites, we unconsciously behave like a white person towards us or towards blacks. It is an education in self-awareness. What India needs to more is be aware of this race factor in our national life. It is only when we confront our own demons that we will be able to fight the menace of racism in other countries where we go to study, work or live.

We should be clear in our mind that racism is a universal evil. It is practised not just in India, in Europe and America. It lurks in the attitudes of the Chinese and the Japanese, and it is there among the blacks as well. Pigment of the skin is a natural tint. It should not become the basis of discrimination among human beings. We need to educate ourselves on the issue, and to talk about it openly and candidly. We can do it only when we stop believing that there is no racism in Indian society.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

LETTERS

BRIBING THE VOTER

Apropos the editorial, “Competitive, compulsive: TN’s ‘poll freebie’ culture” (March 17), it is not Tamil Nadu alone that is guilty of this malpractice. When the Supreme Court asked the Election Commission to frame guidelines in July 2013 to curb it, all parties were up in arms. In fact, it was the Congress that loudly clamoured against it, saying that such a direction would not have legal standing. It argued that it is the prerogative of a government to decide what “social welfare measure” should be taken in a particular state or for a particular vote bank. This is even as promising freebies really amounts to bribing the voter.

M.C. Joshi  
Lucknow

MALE PERSPECTIVE

THE LONDON Metropolitan Police have faced intense criticism for its handling of a London vigil in memory of Sarah Everard, with officers accused of “grabbing and manhandling” women during clashes with the crowd. Over 70 per cent of women surveyed by UN Women UK said they had experienced sexual harassment in public spaces. However, women are not alone in feeling under threat on the streets; men are more likely to be the victims of violent crime involving strangers and acquaintances than are women.

Sankar Paul  
Chakdaha, West Bengal

NEW SPRINT QUEEN

GO DHANALAKSHMI! The 22-year-old from Tamil Nadu has beaten Dutee Chand and Hima Das in the women’s 100m finals in the Federation Cup to win the gold with a timing of 11.39 seconds, even if it is a tad slower than her personal best. This augurs well, not only for Tamil Nadu, but also for the nation. We sincerely hope that the government pitches in to take care of her needs as well as those of other budding athletes. Some of the MNCs, to, could also come forward to sponsor them instead of only promoting cricketers.

Janaki Mahadevan  
Chennai

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.



## SHORT TAKES

## ALLOW SAME-SEX MARRIAGE, SAYS JAPAN COURT

**Tokyo, March 17:** A Japanese court for the first time ruled Wednesday that same-sex marriage should be allowed under the country's constitution, a moral victory that does not have any immediate legal consequence but could bolster efforts for legalisation.

The Sapporo District Court said sexuality, like race and gender, is not a matter of individual preference, therefore prohibiting same-sex couples from receiving benefits given to heterosexual couples cannot be justified. "Legal benefits stemming from marriages should equally benefit both homosexuals and heterosexuals," the court said.

## GPS TAGS FOR UK BURGLARS, ROBBERS

**London, March 17:** Burglars, thieves and robbers released from prison will be made to wear GPS tags to track their movements in a world-first scheme to crack down on neighbourhood criminals, the UK government announced on Wednesday. Under the new rules, such offenders who have served a prison sentence of a year or more will be automatically fitted with a tag on release, allowing their whereabouts to be monitored by GPS satellites 24 hours a day for up to 12 months.

With more than half of those convicted of theft and burglary reoffending within a year and almost 80 per cent of cases resulting in no suspect being identified, the Ministry of Justice said the new scheme will be a vital extra source of intelligence to help police.

## FIRE FESTIVAL INCIDENTS KILL 10 IN IRAN

**Tehran, March 17:** Mishaps during an annual fire festival in Iran have left at least 10 people dead and hundreds more injured around the country, state TV reported Wednesday.

State TV reported the casualties Wednesday but news outlets including the semi-official *ISNA* said the deaths happened over a period of several weeks. Many of the deaths and injuries occurred during the production and preparation of firecrackers, according to reports. Officials said the casualties were the result of disregarding safety measures.

The annual festival begins on the Tuesday before Nowruz, the Iranian New Year, which will be celebrated on Saturday this year. The ritual dates to at least 1700 B.C. and is linked to Zoroastrianism.

## ST. PATRICK'S DAY: VIRTUAL FOR 2ND YEAR

**New York, March 17:** A largely virtual St. Patrick's Day is planned for New York City on Wednesday, one year after the annual parade celebrating Irish heritage became one of the city's first Coronavirus casualties.

Although the city's usual huge parade with floats and marching bands has been cancelled, a few dozen people are expected to march at 6 am to keep the tradition alive, a spokesperson for Mayor Bill de Blasio said. Then at 8:30 am there will be a live broadcast of the St. Patrick's Day Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral, according to the parade organisers' website. A virtual parade featuring clips of marching groups from past years will follow at 10 a.m.

## 58 KILLED IN BARBAROUS NIGER ATTACKS

**Niamey, March 17:** Fifty-eight people have been killed in "barbarous" attacks on a bus and nearby villages in Niger close to the country's border with Mali, the government said on Tuesday.

On Monday afternoon, "groups of armed, still unidentified individuals intercepted four vehicles carrying passengers back from the weekly market of Banibangou to the villages of Chinedogar and Darey-Daye," the government said in a statement read out on public television.

"The toll from these barbarous acts (is) 58 dead, one injured, a number of grain silos and two vehicles burned and two more vehicles seized," it added. No group claimed responsibility.

## Putin approved operations to help Trump against Biden: US

No evidence that any foreign actor changed votes or disrupted voting

**Washington, March 17:** Russian President Vladimir Putin authorised influence operations to help Donald Trump in last November's presidential election, according to a declassified intelligence assessment that found broad efforts by the Kremlin and Iran to shape the outcome of the race but ultimately no evidence that any foreign actor changed votes or otherwise disrupted the voting process.

The report released Tuesday from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence represents the

most detailed assessment of the array of foreign threats to the 2020 election. These included efforts by Iran to undermine confidence in the vote and harm Trump's reelection prospects as well as Moscow operations that relied on Trump's allies to smear Joe Biden, the eventual winner. Despite those threats, though, intelligence officials found "no indications that any foreign actor attempted to interfere in the 2020 US elections by altering any technical aspect of the voting process, including voter registration, bal-

## 'KILLER' PUTIN WILL PAY PRICE FOR ELECTION MEDDLING, SAYS BIDEN

**Washington, March 17:** President Joe Biden said Russia will "pay a price" for meddling in US elections and he agrees with the assessment that his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin is a "killer." In

an interview with *ABC News* broadcast on Wednesday, Biden was asked about a declassified US intelligence report that Putin tried to harm his candidacy in the Nov. 2020 election. — *AFP*

lot casting, vote tabulation, or reporting results."

The report is the latest official affirmation of the integrity of the election,

even as Trump supporters continue to make false claims of interference, from foreign or domestic actors, and refuse to accept Bid-



A woman wearing a mask to protect against Coronavirus walks past closed restaurants and shops in downtown Belgrade, Serbia, on Wednesday. — AP

## Three Covid-19 patients die in Dhaka Medical College fire

**Dhaka, March 17:** Three Covid-19 patients died in a fire at the Intensive Care Unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) here in the Bangladeshi capital on Wednesday, according to media reports.

The fire broke out at the Covid-19 dedicated ICU facility on the third floor of DMCH's new building at around 8 am," Zia Rahman from the Fire Service and Civil Defence (FS&CD) headquarters told the *Dhaka Tribune*.

All the deceased were on ventilator support. After being informed, five fire-fighting units rushed to the spot and doused the blaze. The fire had caused dense smoke inside the facility. We had to break the windows to let the smoke out and rescue the patients. Fortunately, the

other ICU patients were safely evacuated, he added. Including the dead, there were 14 patients at the ICU facility at the time of the fire.

DMCH, Director, Md Nazmul Haque said the patients were evacuated to the critical wards in an adjoining building. Three patients died during the evacuation, he said.

Preliminary reports suggest that the fire either started in one of the multi-patient monitors or a high-flow nasal cannula machine. The FS&CD headquarters has set up a four-member team to probe the fire. The probe report will be submitted in 15 days.

Nazmul said: "The ICU has been badly damaged. It will take time to resume operations." — *PTI*

## Vaccine is safe, assures Trump

**Washington, March 17:** Former President Donald Trump again urged people to be vaccinated against the novel Coronavirus, saying he would recommend vaccination to "a lot of people that don't want to get it, and a lot of those people voted for me."

In an interview Tuesday night on *Fox News*, Trump acknowledged that people were free to decide for themselves whether they would be vaccinated against Covid-19. "We have our freedoms and we have to live by that and I

agree with that also. But it is a great vaccine. It is a safe vaccine and it is something that works," he said.

Republican opposition to receiving the vaccine is strong. A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 42 per cent of Republicans say they probably or definitely will not get the shot, compared with 17 per cent of Democrats — a 25-point split. Trump has promoted vaccination before.

## Oli calls for meet as rift widens in ruling party

**Kathmandu, March 17:** Nepal Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli has called for a parliamentary party meeting of the ruling CPN-UML on Thursday as the rift between the two warring factions of the party widened with the rival group convening the national gathering of cadres despite warning of

disciplinary action against those attending it, according to media reports.

The meeting will take place at Baluwatar, the official residence of the Prime Minister, who is also the Chairperson of the party, Bishal Bhattarai, party's chief whip, was quoted as saying by *myRepublica* newspaper.

"All the party leaders who won elections with the symbol Sun' have been invited to the meeting," Bhattarai said.

The call for the meeting came as the Communist Party of Nepal-UML's rival faction led by Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhala Nath Khanal went ahead with the two-day national

gathering of the party's leaders and cadres that began on Wednesday.

Yogesh Bhattarai, a key leader belonging to the rival faction, said that at least 2,000 leaders and cadres of the party are expected to join in the national gathering being organised at the Sanepa-based Heritage Garden in

Lalitpur, the report said. Party's senior leader Madhav Nepal is expected to present a political report on the widening rift in the party and his faction's strategy for the coming days, it said.

The Oli-led faction had threatened to take disciplinary action against those who will attend the event

organised by the Nepal-Khanal faction on Wednesday and Thursday.

CPN-UML General Secretary Ishwar Pokharel, in a statement, directed the party leaders and cadres not to attend the factional gathering, arguing that the UML had not organised any such event. — *PTI*

## NASA | STUDY Using observations made by Mars rovers, the team focused on hydrogen

## Mars' 'missing' water buried beneath surface

**Washington, March 17:** Billions of years ago, Mars was home to lakes and oceans — but where all the water went to transform the planet into the desolate rock we know today has been something of a mystery. Most of it was thought to have been lost to space, but a new study funded by NASA proposes that it didn't go anywhere but is trapped within minerals in the crust.

"We're saying that the crust forms what we call hydrated minerals, so minerals that actually have water in their crystal structure," Eva Scheller, lead author of the new

paper in *Science*, said. In fact, Scheller's model suggests anywhere between 30-99 percent of the initial water remains trapped inside these minerals.

Early Mars was thought to have enough water to cover the whole planet in roughly 100 to 1,500 metres (330 to 44,920 feet) of ocean. Because the planet lost its magnetic field early in its history, its atmosphere was progressively stripped away, and it was assumed this was how it lost its water. But the authors of the new study believe that while some of the water did disappear, the majority remained.

● **MOST OF** it was thought to have been lost to space, but a new study funded by NASA proposes that it didn't go anywhere but is trapped within minerals in the crust.

Using observations made by Mars rovers as well as of meteorites from the planet, the team focused on hydrogen, a key component of water.

There are different kinds of hydrogen atoms. Most have just one proton in their nucleus, but a tiny fraction, about 0.02 percent, have both a proton

and a neutron, making them heavier. These are known as deuterium, or "heavy" hydrogen.

Because the lighter kind escapes the planet's atmosphere at a faster rate, the loss of most of the water to space would leave relatively more deuterium behind. But given how much water the planet is believed to have started with, and the current rate of hydrogen escape observed by spacecraft, the current deuterium-to-hydrogen ratio cannot be explained by atmospheric loss alone.

The study's authors instead say there was a combination of two mechan-

isms: The trapping of water in minerals in the planet's crust as well as the loss of water to the atmosphere.

"Anytime that you have a rock and it's interacting with water, there's a series of very complex reactions that form a hydrated mineral," said Scheller.

This process, called "chemical weathering," also takes place on Earth — for example, in clay, also found on Mars. But on our planet volcanoes recycle the water back into the atmosphere. Mars, however, doesn't have tectonic plates, making the change permanent. According to the teams'

simulations, the planet lost between most of its water between four to 3.7 billion years ago, which means "Mars was pretty much like we see how it is today for the past three billion years," said Scheller.

She added she was excited about what the Perseverance rover, which landed last month for a multiyear science mission on the planet, might be able to contribute to the area of research. "The Perseverance rover is actually going to investigate exactly these processes and reactions that cause the sequestration of water in the crust," she said. — *AFP*

## UN atomic body confirms new Iran centrifuges

**Berlin, March 17:** The United Nations' nuclear watchdog said Wednesday it has confirmed that Iran has begun operating a cascade of advanced centrifuges at an underground site.

International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Grossi told member delegations on Monday that Iran has "begun feeding a newly installed cascade of 174 IR-4 centrifuges" to enrich uranium hexafluoride gas up to 5 per cent U-235 uranium, the Vienna-based organisation said.

The use of the advanced centrifuges in the Natanz facility is another violation of the nuclear deal Iran signed with world powers in 2015, which allows it only to enrich with first-generation IR-1 centrifuges. The deal was meant to prevent Iran from building a nuclear weapon, which the country insists it does not intend to do. Tehran has said its nuclear programme is only for peaceful purposes. In his report to member nations, Grossi said an additional cascade of IR4 centrifuges has been

installed in the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant near Natanz. Tehran also has indicated it plans to install a second cascade in the Natanz facility, although installation has yet to begin, Grossi said.

After an explosion at the Natanz nuclear site in July which Iran said resulted from sabotage, Tehran said it would build a more secure, structure in the mountains around the area and has been moving its centrifuges below ground. Grossi confirmed in November that Iran had begun enriching with IR-2m type centrifuges at the Natanz site.

Iran announced last month that it had installed two cascades of IR-4 centrifuges, but it did not say where. Since the United States unilaterally withdrew in 2018 from the nuclear deal, Iran has steadily violated the restrictions set out in the agreement to put pressure on the remaining signatories — China, Russia, Germany, France and Britain — to provide economic incentives to offset new US sanctions.

— AP

## Peace with Pak will give India access to Central Asia: Imran

**Islamabad, March 17:** Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday said India will be benefited economically by having peace with his country as it will be able to directly access resource-rich Central Asia through it. Delivering the inaugural address at the launch of the two-day Islamabad Security Dialogue, Khan also said that his government after coming to power in 2018 did everything for better ties with India and it was for India to reciprocate.

"India will have to take the first step. Unless they do so, we cannot do much," he said. India last month said that it desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan in an environment free of terror, hostility and violence. India has said the onus is on Pakistan to create an environment free of terror and hostility. India has also told Pakistan that "talks and terror" cannot go together and has asked Islamabad to take demonstrable steps against terror groups responsible for launching various attacks on India.

The prime minister discussed Pakistan's vision of comprehensive national security, built on the

## ANTI-GRAFT BODY REOPENS MARYAM CASE

**Lahore, March 17:** Pakistan's anti-graft body on Wednesday reopened a money laundering investigation against embattled former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's daughter Maryam Nawaz and summoned her on March 26.

The National Accountability Bureau has accused Maryam of committing money laundering through investments of variable heavy amounts being the main shareholder of Chaudhry Sugar Mills. It said she was involved in money laundering with the help of some foreigners during 1992-93 when her father was the PM.

Maryam was sentenced to seven years in jail in July 2018 in connection with the case that pertains to the ownership of the Sharif family's posh apartments at Avenfield House, London. — *PTI*

pillars of traditional and non-traditional security, including his vision for economic prosperity and human welfare. — *PTI*



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,801.62	-1.12
Nifty 50	14,721.30	-1.27
S&P 500*	3,945.94	-0.02
Dollar (₹)	72.54	0.42
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.96	-0.65
Euro (₹)	86.37	0.18
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,519.60	0.13
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.61	-1.14
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.185	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.669	0.046

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

NCLAT directs liquidation of KS Oils, blasts NCLT

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has directed initiation of the liquidation process of integrated edible oil company K S Oils Ltd and set aside an NCLT order passed against it. Terming it "unfortunate", the appellate tribunal observed that even after the lapse of 981 days and repeated compliance by the resolution professional (RP) to initiate the liquidation process, the NCLT had not considered it.

Laxmi Organic gets subscribed over 107 times



Speciality chemicals manufacturer Laxmi Organic Industries' initial public offering was subscribed 106.79 times on the last day of subscription. The public offer garnered bids for 3,47,67,42,330 shares against 3,25,58,138 shares on offer, as per NSE data. The portion for qualified institutional buyers was subscribed 175.43 times, non institutional investors 217.62 times and retail individual investors 20.06 times.

CA Rover Holdings sells SBI Cards stake for ₹3,900 cr

CA Rover Holdings divested 4.25 per cent stake in SBI Cards and Payment Services Ltd for Rs 3,943 crore through an open market transaction. According to the bulk deal data, four crore shares of SBI Cards were offloaded by CA Rover Holdings at an average price of Rs 985.98 apiece. This translates to a deal value of Rs 3,943.92 crore. CA Rover Holdings is a subsidiary of Carlyle Group.

Craftsman Auto IPO subscribed 3.81 times

The initial public offering of auto component maker Craftsman Automation was subscribed 3.81 times on the last day of bidding. The Rs 824-crore offer attracted bids for 1,47,58,160 shares compared to 38,69,714 shares on offer, according to an NSE update. The category for qualified institutional buyers was subscribed 5.21 times, non-institutional investors 2.84 times and retail individual investors 3.43 times.

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■ Shunwei Capital sells out to Javagal Srinath, others Newgen investors buy Chinese stake in Koo

New Delhi, March 17: A bunch of Indian A-list entrepreneurs, including Flipkart CEO Kalyan Krishnamurthy and former Indian Cricketer Javagal Srinath, have bought out Chinese investors Shunwei Capital's stake in the parent firm of Koo, India's answer to Twitter. BookMyShow founder Ashish Hemrajani, Udaan co-founder Sujeet Kumar and Zerodha founder Nikhil Kamat were the others who bought out Shunwei's over 9 per cent stake in Bombinate Technologies Pvt Ltd. "Existing investors along with a bunch of individuals have bought out Shunwei Capital's minority stake in Bombinate Technologies Pvt Ltd, the parent company of Vokal



and Koo," the company said. It, however, did not reveal the financial details of the deal. Koo, which caught public attention after the government's tussle with Twitter over the removal of inflammatory contents, has crossed over 4 million downloads with about a million active users. Koo's investors include Accel Partners, 3one4 Capital, Blume Ventures, and Kalaari Capital. Additionally, global venture capital firm, Shunwei,

was also an investor in Bombinate Technologies. Shunwei Capital, which is led by a partnership team that includes people of Chinese origin, had invested in the earlier product of Bombinate, an app called Vokal. Since Bombinate has pivoted its primary business and focused on Koo, Shunwei committed to exiting the company and the deal concluding now. Srinath, former cricketer and fast bowler said, "I am very happy to be backing Koo—one of India's most talked-about social media platforms. The fact that they are building a platform to bring the voices of Indian language audiences onto the internet is commendable and as an Indian, I extend my support to them."

10 L Chinese CCTV cameras in govt offices

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 17

Around 10 lakh CCTV cameras from Chinese companies have been installed in government institutions and there are vulnerabilities associated with the video data captured by them, said the government. As per Industry estimates, around 10 lakh CCTV cameras from Chinese companies are installed in government institutions, Minister of State for Communications

and IT Sanjay Dhotre told the Lok Sabha. "There are vulnerabilities associated with video data captured through CCTV cameras being transferred to servers located abroad. The orders regarding filtering of URL and IP addresses issued by the government from time to time have been implemented in all the Internet Service Provider (ISP) / Telecommunications Service Provider (TSP) networks," minister said. The video surveillance

market has grown multi-fold in India in recent years with increased installation of CCTV cameras in institutions and individual homes. Chinese companies have around 70 per cent share of the Rs 6,800-crore video surveillance products market. Using an aggressive pricing strategy, Chinese companies like Hikvision and Dahua have grabbed a dominating share in the market. Further, a large portion of the components used by branded players and those

sold in the unorganised market come from China. "The dominant position of Chinese companies is also posing a major security risk. While data collection is largely risk-free, when it comes to data storage it has to be verified whether the storage happens in servers inside the country. Further, the analysed data should not go out of the country," Manu Tiwari, industry principal, industrial practice, Frost and Sullivan told Financial Chronicle.

Fieo online platform to help secure containers

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 17

Exporters' apex body Fieo has set up an online platform to resolve the issues related to container availability. In order to facilitate assessment of containers requirement, Fieo has developed a first level marketplace on which exporters can post their container demands online. The e-module will help in ground level assessment of container requirement and negotiated competitive quotes. The web link has been made live and exporters across the country have started posting their requirements. "On the first day, today, hundreds of exporters have approached us with container requirements. Most of the requests are for exports to South Asia, Europe and the US," said K. Unnikrishnan, deputy director general, Fieo. "We have also held discussions with most of the major shipping lines. In today's discussion, three shipping lines have

assured us to provide requested containers on time," he said. CSLA has said that it can supply containers to any part of the country within one to three days. Concor said it is providing containers in 24 hours. Fieo expects that the e-module will address the supply-side disruption posed by the container shortage. Increased procurement of containers by China and delay in return of containers from Covid-hit Europe has been hurting exports from India for the past few months. Meanwhile, the government told the Lok Sabha that the preparation of a new Foreign Trade Policy (2021-26) is underway. The current Foreign Trade Policy (2015-2020), announced for five years, was extended by a year due to the pandemic till March 31, 2021. In this regard, the government has already held meetings with various stakeholders, including states, export promotion councils and industry bodies.

GOVT IN FAVOUR OF RETAINING RBI'S INFLATION TARGET

SIDDHARTH SINGH MARCH 17

The government is likely to leave the inflation targeting band for its central bank unchanged, according to people familiar with the matter, while policy makers remain focused on rising prices amidst the rebound from the pandemic. A consumer-price inflation band tracked by the Reserve Bank of India is likely to be retained at the current 2-6 per cent range, said the people, who asked not to be identified. The framework is to be finalised by March 31. The government is mulling small changes to the system, including safeguard options that offer leeway in cases of exceptional events, they said, without providing further details. A spokesperson for the finance ministry declined to comment, while the RBI didn't immediately respond to an emailed request for comment. Volatile food prices and a sustained rise in global oil led consumer prices to exceed the upper band several times last year. —Bloomberg

India to cut Saudi oil, buy more from US

DEBJIT CHAKRABORTY & DHWANI PANDYA MARCH 17

Indian refiners plan to buy less oil from the Middle East in the coming months as Opec+'s supply restrictions makes US crude more attractive. Strong petrol demand due to people favouring private vehicles amid the pandemic and a slower recovery in diesel is also giving low-sulphur American grades an edge over heavier and more sour Middle Eastern varieties, officials at three state-run refineries said. State-run refiners, including Indian Oil Corp, the country's biggest crude processor, are planning to cut purchases from Saudi Arabia in May, and buy more from the US and on the spot market, according to the officials who asked not to be named. IOC has floated a spot tender seeking crude from West Africa, the Middle East, the US and Canada for April-May loading. Around 86 per cent of

New Delhi has repeatedly called for Opec+ to pump more crude to stop prices from rising too high, but its pleas have fallen on deaf ears, with Riyadh extending its supply cuts and raising premiums for its crude.

Indian crude purchases from Saudi Arabia dropped 36 per cent in January from the previous month, while US imports more than doubled, government data show. Reuters reported earlier that state-run refiners planned to cut purchases from the kingdom by a quarter in May. —Bloomberg

STOCKS FALL OVER RISING COVID CASES, FED MEET

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 17

The market fell over 750 points from the day's high of 50,561 points, worried over the rising Covid cases in India and the outcome of the US Federal Reserve meeting due on Wednesday night. The Sensex shed 1.12 per cent as the benchmark index closed below 50,000

mark, losing 562 points to 49,801.62 and all the sectoral indices closed in the red. The Nifty-50 closed 189.15, or 1.27 per cent, down at 14,721.30, marking the fourth straight session of decline. Investors lost close to Rs 3.5 lakh crore as BSE's market cap fell to Rs 203.71 lakh crore. Asian market indices closed flat to negative as

investors waited to see whether the US Federal Reserve would signal a faster path toward policy normalisation than previously expected. FPIs were net buyers of equities worth Rs 2,625.82 crore while the domestic institutions were net sellers by Rs 562.15 crore. FPIs were net buyers by Rs 2,674.82 crore even on Tuesday.

NPS assets grow 33% to ₹5.6 L crore

Total assets under management in NPS and APY				
Sector	Feb-20	Mar-20	Feb-21	Growth % YoY
Central government	1,39,294	1,38,046	1,77,240	27.24
State government	2,11,809	2,11,023	2,82,123	33.20
Corporate sector	41,715	41,243	60,030	43.91
All citizen sector	13,374	12,913	20,803	55.55
NPS Lite	3,807	3,728	4,284	12.53
Atal Pension Yojana	10,479	10,526	15,114	44.23
Grand total	4,20,479	4,17,479	5,59,594	33.09

Figures in ₹ crore

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MARCH 17

Regular fund flows from state and central government employees helped the assets under management (AUM) of the National Pension Scheme (NPS) rise 33 per cent year-on-year to Rs 5.59 lakh crore as of February 28, 2021 from Rs 4.20 lakh crore a year ago. State and central government employee funds constitute nearly 80 per cent of the total AUM for NPS. Similarly, 74 lakh subscribers were added during the 11 months of this fiscal. According to the latest data released by the Pension Fund Regulatory & Development Authority, the total subscriber base under various schemes of NPS rose to 4.14 crore by end-February 2021 from 3.4 crore in February 2020 showing a year-on-year increase of 22 per cent.

PFRDA chairman Supratim Bandyopadhyay told FC, "The central and state government employees were the first subscribers of NPS, having started nearly 13 years ago. Obviously, they constitute nearly 80 per cent of the total AUM under NPS as their contribution comes regularly. However of late, the retail growth has also picked up. A lot of corporates are also looking at transferring their employee funds that were parked under traditional superannuation funds to NPS as the returns are higher and it is more tax efficient." "Sixty per cent of your NPS corpus is tax-free at withdrawal stage while in superannuation fund only 1/3rd is tax free. Also, NPS is more cost efficient and gives you the flexibility to change your fund manager, change your fund allocation, etc," he added.

AtmaNirbhar Mahila Gold Loan launched



Vidya Balan

March 17: With an aim to empower the women of India and make them self-reliant, Muthoot FinCorp has launched Atmanirbhar Mahila Gold Loan—a unique gold loan scheme for women. This is an extension of Muthoot FinCorp's #RestartIndia Mission. The AtmaNirbhar Mahila Gold Loan scheme was launched by leading and versatile actor-Vidya Balan in a virtual event this week. AMGL offers maximum 'loan to gold' value and the lowest interest rate. Vidya Balan expressed her support for the cause and said, "Empowering women has become the fundamental aim for all of us in not only helping them achieve their dreams but also transform and boost their entrepreneurial spirit."

Business NOTE

ADB VENTURES INVESTS IN EV FIRM

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 17

Asian Development Bank's new venture arm has invested in an Indian electric vehicle (EV) manufacturer and an energy efficiency services provider as part of its efforts to spur innovations in cleantech space. In its first set of investments, ADB Ventures, which invests in early-stage technology companies, has invested in Euler Motors based in India. Euler is an EV manufacturer and fleet operator focused on last-mile commercial logistics. Euler Motors has raised \$9.4 million in Series A funding with participation by ADB Ventures, Blume, Inventus, and other investors. This is also the first investment by ADB Ventures in an EV firm.

IMMOBILE | PHONES Company skips introduction of new Galaxy Note this year Samsung warns of severe chip crunch

SOHEE KIM MARCH 17

Samsung Electronics Company warned it's grappling with the fallout from a "serious imbalance" in semiconductors globally, becoming the largest tech giant to voice concerns about chip shortages spreading beyond the automaking industry. Samsung, one of the world's largest makers of chips and consumer electronics, expects the crunch to pose a problem to its business next quarter, co-chief executive officer Koh Dong-jin said during an annual shareholders meeting in Seoul. The company is also considering skipping the introduction of a new Galaxy

Note—one of its best-selling models—this year, though Koh said that was geared toward streamlining its line-up. Industry giants from Continental AG to Renesas Electronics Corp and Innolux Corp have in recent weeks warned of longer-than-anticipated deficits, thanks to unprecedented Covid-era demand for everything from cars to game consoles and mobile devices. Volkswagen AG said this week it's lost production of about 100,000 cars worldwide. In North America, the silicon shortage and extreme weather have combined to snarl more production at Toyota Motor Corp and Honda Motor Co. The fear is the



crunch, which first hit automakers hard, may now disrupt the much larger electronics industry. "There's a serious imbalance in supply and demand of chips in the IT sector globally," said Koh, who oversees the company's IT and mobile divisions. "Despite the difficult environment, our business leaders are meeting partners overseas to

solve these problems. It's hard to say the shortage issue has been solved 100 per cent." Samsung, the world's largest smartphone maker, is working with overseas partners to resolve the imbalance and avert potential setbacks to its business, its co-CEO said. Its shares slid 0.6 per cent in Seoul on Wednesday, while suppliers and Asian chipmakers, including Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co and SK Hynix Inc, also fell. Chipmakers like Samsung and TSMC are at the forefront of a global effort to plug a shortfall in supply of semiconductors, the building blocks of a plethora of consumer gadgets. The deficit has

closed auto plants around the world and now threatens supply of other products. While the Korean company is the leading maker of made-to-order silicon after TSMC, it relies on external suppliers and manufacturers for parts like power management and radio chips. Larger-than-anticipated Covid-era demand for smartphones has also stretched stores of Qualcomm Inc's Snapdragon chips, the go-to processors for mobile devices. Qualcomm designs the chips, known as app processors, but relies on Samsung and TSMC to produce them and the Taiwanese chipmaker's capacity has been strained. —Reuters



## SHORT TAKES

## Pugilist Gaurav makes quarters

**New Delhi:** Commonwealth Games gold medallist Gaurav Solanki (57kg) advanced to the quarterfinals of the Bosphorus Boxing Tournament with a facile opening round win in Istanbul in Turkey. Solanki looked in complete control from the word go as he blanked opponent Arapov Aidos of Kazakhstan 5-0 to make the last eight. Sonia Lather also kickstarted her campaign on a winning note. The Haryana pugilist dominated her opponent Rosorio Milogros from Argentina before completing a 5-0 win in the women's 57kg. Lather will take on local favourite Surmeneli Tugcenaz in her second round match. Meanwhile, three other Indian pugilists suffered losses in their respective opening bouts. Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Naman Tanwar went down 4-1 against Turkey's Baki Yalcin Muhammed in men's 91kg while PL Prasad lost to Kazakhstan's Abdikadyr Damir 5-0 in the 52kg category. — *PTI*

## Debate on naming stadium after Pele

**Sao Paulo:** Brazilians would agree that Pele is the greatest football player ever, but they differ on renaming the historic Maracana tadium in his honour. The stadium's name could soon change if Rio de Janeiro Gov. Cludio Castro agrees to honor the three-time World Cup winner. He has until next week to decide after being authorised by the state's legislature to rename the Maracan as "Edson Arantes do Nascimento — Rei Pele." The stadium is officially named "Jornalista Mario Filho" for the Brazilian sportswriter credited with the idea to build such a colossus for the 1950 World Cup. If Castro agrees with the legislature, Filho's name will only stay on a nearby sports complex. Filho's grandson, Mario Neto, said that he recognizes the importance of Pele in Brazilian football culture but said the proposed change is "irrational." "There's no sense in removing my grandfather's name," Neto said on Monday. — *AP*

## India bag two equestrian golds

**Greater Noida:** The Indian team won two gold medals on the second day of the ITPF World Cup Qualifiers for Tent Pegging. The Indian team won the gold medal in Team Sword competition with 111 points. Nepal won the silver with 98 points and the bronze medal was won by Pakistan with 89.5 points. Dinesh G Karlekar, B. R. Jena, Mohit Kumar and Sandeep Kumar were part of the winning Indian team. In Individual Sword competition, Dinesh G Karlekar from India bagged the gold medal. Sandeep Kumar from India won silver and Muhammad Nasir Abbas from Pakistan and Golam from Nepal both won the bronze medals. Ahmad Afsar, coach cum manager of the Indian team, said, "I'm really satisfied with the way all the riders are performing in the competition so far. I hope our riders continue the good form on the final day tomorrow and eventually qualify for the World Cup." — *PTI*

## Lille digs deep to fade New Orleans

**Los Angeles:** Damian Lillard delivered a 50-point performance and led a remarkable fourth quarter comeback as the Portland Trail Blazers defeated the New Orleans Pelicans 125-124 on Tuesday. Lillard drained six three pointers and made 13-of-20 from the field with six rebounds and 10 assists to give the Blazers an improbable victory. — *AFP*

## Live on TV

**CRICKET**  
India vs England: Fourth T20 from 7.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

**BADMINTON**  
All England Open: Round of 16 matches from 3.30 pm on Star Sports 2 HD, Star Sports 3

**FOOTBALL**  
Europa League: Tottenham Hotspur vs Dinamo Zagreb from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 2; Arsenal vs Olympiacos from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 1; Shakhtar Donetsk vs Roma from 11.25 pm on Sony Six; AC Milan vs Manchester United from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2

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## Perform or perish

## India need to peg back England to stay in contention

**Ahmedabad, March 17:** India would aim to take the toss out of equation and put up a much improved all-round show against a formidable England in their bid to level the series in the fourth Twenty20, here on Tuesday.

The template of win the toss and bowl has been set in the series with the chasing team getting home rather comfortably. However, India skipper Virat Kohli has repeatedly stressed on the need to do well whether they are posting totals or chasing as part of their preparation for the T20 World Cup at home later this year.

In the two games they lost after batting first,



Indian captain Virat Kohli (right) along with his teammates during the third T20 match against England at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Tuesday.

## FOURTH | T20

India struggled in the powerplay, which impacted their final total despite one batsman (Shreyas Iyer and Kohli respectively) going on to make a significant contribution.

The express pace of Mark Wood and Jofra Archer has also made life tough for the Indians in the first six overs.

Going by Kohli's words post the third game, a third all-rounder alongside Hardik Pandya and Washington Sundar can be drafted into the side with the choice between uncapped Rahul Tewatia and Axar Patel.

Unlike the first game, Kohli's sublime 77 ensure

India did have some runs to defend but the bowlers hardly troubled the opposition batsman with Jos Buttler running away with the contest.

The team's number one spinner Yuzvendra Chahal has leaked runs both times India have set a target.

Hardik Pandya's return as a bowling all-rounder has been promising but he is yet to take a wicket.

Bhuvneshwar Kumar has kept things tidy in his comeback series but the team expects him to provide regular breakthroughs with the new ball. It will take a special effort from India to stop the number one ranked team from winning the series. — *PTI*

## Proteas women boss over India, claim ODI series 4-1

**Lucknow, March 17:** South Africa added salt to India's wounds by registering a five-wicket win over the hosts in the low-scoring fifth and final women's ODI to seal the series 4-1 here on Wednesday.

Mithali Raj played a captain's knock by hitting a well-crafted 79 not out but it was only enough to take India to 188 all out.

South Africa then rode on Anneke Bosch (58) and Mignon du Preez's (57) half-centuries to chase down the target in 48.2 overs.

The series marked India's return to international cricket after 12 months. They were naturally rusty to start with and by the end of the series, it seemed that they have a lot of work to do if they want to be title contenders for the World Cup early next year.

The batting needs more firepower and bowling concerns too need to be addressed.

"Clearly, we do need some camps before series. We were underprepared, coming from a gap. The batting unit tried to

improve consistently match by match. Our spinners need to improve," said Mithali.

For India, left-arm spinner Gayakwad picked up three wickets conceding just 13 runs off her 10 overs while Medium pacer de Klerk was the pick of the bowlers for South Africa with figures of three for 35. — *PTI*

**Brief scores:** India 188 in 49.3 overs (Mithali Raj 79; Nadine de Klerk 3/35) lost to South Africa 189/5 in 48.2 overs (Anneke Bosch 58, Mignon du Preez 57; Rajeshwari 3/13).

## ALL ENGLAND | BADMINTON

## Srikanth beaten by rookie Nhat

**Birmingham, March 17:** World champion P. V. Sindhu made an impressive start at the All England Badminton Championships but compatriots Kidambi Srikanth and Parupalli Kashyap suffered early exits after losing their respective opening round men's singles matches here on Wednesday.

The Indian women's duo of Ashwini Ponnappa and N. Sikki Reddy and men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty also progressed to the second round with straight game wins.

Sindhu gave a good account of herself as she covered the court well and dished out a disciplined performance to outwit world number 32 Sonila Cheah of Malaysia 21-11, 21-17 in 38 minutes.

Seeded eight, Srikanth lost to Ireland's unseeded player Nguyen Nhat 11-21, 21-15, 12-21.

Commonwealth Games gold medallist Kashyap went down in straight games to top seeded Japanese Kento Momota 13-21, 2-22 in 42 minutes.

However, the men's doubles team of Rankireddy and Chirag defeated the Indo-English duo of Aniruddha Mayekar

and Nikhar Garg 21-7, 21-10 in their first round match.

Also, the Indian duo of Ashwini Ponnappa and N. Sikki Reddy got the better of Thailand's Benyapa Aimsaard and Nuntakarn Aimsaard in straight games, 21-14, 21-12, in a women's doubles match that lasted 30 minutes.

## PRE-MATCH DRAMA

Earlier, the Indian badminton contingent had been cleared to participate in the Championships after the players, who had tested positive for Covid-19, returned negative in retests conducted by the governing body (BWF) on Wednesday.

Three Indian shuttlers and a support staff had tested positive on Tuesday while a few were awaiting confirmation on their inconclusive samples, leaving the players without much practice ahead of the tournament.

In an email to team managers on Wednesday, the Badminton World Federation and Badminton England also informed that "following further investigations and testing, all team members have been returned to the draw having successfully retested negative." — *PTI*

## VIRAT LEAPS TO FIFTH SPOT IN T20 RANKINGS

**Dubai, March 17:** Following his stellar performance in the ongoing series against England, India skipper Virat Kohli on Wednesday broke back into the top of the ICC T20 batsmen rankings.

Kohli, a formerly top-ranked batsman in the format and currently number one in ODIs, gained one slot and a massive 47 rating points after unbeaten knocks of 73 and 77 in the second and third matches against England, to be placed fifth.

K. L. Rahul remains the top-ranked Indian batsman at the fourth spot despite three failures in the series so far. Shreyas Iyer is up 32 places to the 31st spot while Rishabh Pant gained 30 spots to be ranked 80th.

Among bowlers, all-rounder Washington Sundar is up two places to 11th while seamers Shardul Thakur (up 14 places to 27th) and Bhuvneshwar Kumar (up seven places to 45th) have also gained. — *PTI*

## INDIA BATTING COACH BATS FOR RAHUL

**Ahmedabad, March 17:** Three cheap dismissals can't change the fact that K.L. Rahul is India's "best T20 batsman" and it won't be long that one shot or one innings will get him back to his best, batting coach Vikram Rathour said, promising support for the struggling opener.

Rahul got out without scoring in two of his last three innings while he managed just one run in the series-opener. A part of it could be attributed to no game time since the end of T20 series in Australia early December.

"Anybody can have a lean phase and K. L. has been our best batsman in T20 format. He is averaging 40 plus with a strike rate of 145 and 3 failures doesn't change the fact that he is the best batsman we have in this format," Rathour said.

"This is the time when we need to support him and I am absolutely sure he will come back out of the lean phase," the batting coach spoke in the same vein as Kohli did at the presentation ceremony.

However, Rathour did agree that rustiness could be a reason and all it would take is one good shot to get back into the groove. — *PTI*

## HOLI SPECIAL TRAINS - 2021

In order to clear extra rush of passengers during the Holi Festival, Railways have decided to run the following Festival Special Trains as per schedule given below:-

04032/04031 ANAND VIHAR (T) - VARANASI JN. - ANAND VIHAR (T) - SUPERFAST EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (TRI WEEKLY)					10	
Train No.: 04032				Train No.: 04031		
ARR.	DEP.	↓	STATIONS	↑	ARR.	DEP.
----	18:15		ANAND VIHAR (T)		09:30	----
08:05	----		VARANASI JN.		----	19:30

**DAYS OF RUN:** 04032 from Anand Vihar (T) from 22.03.21 to 31.03.21 (Wed., Fri. and Mon.) and 04031 from Varanasi Jn. from 21.03.21 to 01.04.21 (Tue., Thu. and Sun).

**STOPPAGES:** Moradabad, Bareilly, Lucknow, Rai Bareilly Jn., Amethi, Partapur Jn. & Bhadohi Stations.

**ACCOMMODATION:** AC 3 Tier.

04034/04033 H. NIZAMUDDIN - TRIVANDRUM CENTRAL - H. NIZAMUDDIN SUPERFAST EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN					02	
Train No.: 04034				Train No.: 04033		
ARR.	DEP.	↓	STATIONS	↑	ARR.	DEP.
----	05:00		HAZRAT NIZAMUDDIN		22:40	----
04:55	----		TRIVANDRUM CENTRAL		----	00:30

**DAYS OF RUN:** 04034 from Hazrat Nizamuddin on 26.03.21 (Fri.) and 04033 from and Trivandrum Central on 31.03.21 (Wed.).

**STOPPAGES:** Mathura Jn., Bharatpur Jn., Sawai Madhopur, Kota Jn., Ratlam Jn., Vadodara Jn., Bharuch Jn., Surat, Vapi, Dahadu Road, Vasai Road, Panvel, Ratnagiri, Karmali, Madgaon, Karwar, Udipi, Mangalore Jn., Kannur, Kozhikode, Shoranur Jn., Thiruv., Ernakulam, Town, Kottayam, Kayankulam Jn. & Kollam Jn. Stations.

**ACCOMMODATION:** AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved 2nd Seating.

04036/04035 ANAND VIHAR (T) - JOGBANI - ANAND VIHAR (T) SUPERFAST EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (DAILY)				24 Trips	
Train No.: 04036		↓ STATIONS ↑		Train No.: 04035	
ARR.	DEP.			ARR.	DEP.
-----	08:10	ANAND VIHAR (T)		20:45	-----
07:50	-----	JOGBANI		-----	20:30

**DAYS OF RUN:** 04036 from Anand Vihar (T) from 19.03.21 to 30.03.21 and 04035 from Jobgani from 20.03.21 to 31.03.21.

**STOPPAGES:** Ghaziabad, Aligarh, Tundla, Kanpur Central, Prayagraj Jn., Mirzapur, Pt. Deendyal Upadhyay Jn., Dildar Nagar, Danapur, Patna, Begusarai, Khagaria, Naugachhia, Katihar, Purnia, Araria, Court & Forbesganj Stations.

**ACCOMMODATION:** AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved 2nd Seating.

04038/04037 H. NIZAMUDDIN - H.S. NANDED - H. NIZAMUDDIN SUPERFAST EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (WEEKLY)					04 Trips
Train No.: 04038				Train No.: 04037	
ARR.	DEP.	STATIONS		ARR.	DEP.
----	23:15	HAZRAT NIZAMUDDIN		10:10	----
21:40	----	H.S. NANDED		----	11:05

**DAYS OF RUN:** 04038 from Hazrat Nizamuddin from 25.03.21 to 01.04.21 (Thursday) and 04037 from H.S. Nanded from 27.03.21 to 03.04.21 (Saturday).

**STOPPAGES:** Mathura Jn., Agra Cantt., Gwalior, Jhansi, Bina, Bhopal, Habibganj, Itarsi, Khandwa, Malkapur, Akola Jn., Washim, Hingoli Deccan & Purna Jn. Stations.

**ACCOMMODATION:** AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved 2nd Seating.

02445/02446 NEW DELHI - SHRIMATA VAISHNO DEVI KATRA-NEW DELHI SUPERFAST EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (DAILY)			22 Trips		
Train No.: 02445			Train No.: 02446		
ARR.	DEP.	↓ STATIONS ↑	ARR.	DEP.	
----	20:50	NEW DELHI	06:55	----	
08:05	----	SHRIMATA VAISHNO DEVI KATRA	----	19:55	

**DAYS OF RUN:** 02445 from New Delhi from 20.03.21 to 30.03.21 and 02446 from Shrimata Vaishno Devi Katra from 21.03.21 to 31.03.21.

**STOPPAGES:** Panipat, Ambala Cantt., Ludhiana Jn., Jalandhar Cantt., Pathankot, Kathua, Jammu Tawi, Ram Nagar J.K. & Udhampur Stations.

**ACCOMMODATION:** 1st AC, AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved Second Seating.

04998/04997 BATHINDA - VARANASI JN. - BATHINDA SUPERFAST EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (WEEKLY)					04 Trips
Train No.: 04998		↓  ↑  STATIONS	Train No.: 04997		
ARR.	DEP.		ARR.	DEP.	
----	21:05	BATHINDA	16:50	----	
16:40	----	VARANASI JN.	----	21:20	

**DAYS OF RUN:** 04998 from Bathinda from 21.03.21 to 28.03.21 (Sun.) and 04997 from Varanasi Jn. from 22.03.21 to 29.03.21 (Mon.).

**STOPPAGES:** Rampura Phul, Barnala, Dhuri, Patiala, Rajpura, Ambala Cantt., Yamuna Nagar, Saharanpur, Moradabad, Bareilly, Lucknow & Sultanpur Stations.

**ACCOMMODATION:** AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved Second Seating.

04608/04607 SHRIMATA VAISHNO DEVI KATRA - VARANASI JN. - SHRIMATA VAISHNO DEVI KATRA EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (WEEKLY)				04 Trips
Train No.: 04608		↓	Train No.: 04607	
ARR.	DEP.	STATIONS	ARR.	DEP.
---	18:45	SHRIMATA VAISHNO DEVI KATRA	09:20	---
22:15	---	VARANASI JN.	---	06:35

**DAYS OF RUN:** 04608 from Shrimata Vaishno Devi Katra from 21.03.21 to 28.03.21 (Sunday) and 04607 from Varanasi Jn. from 23.03.21 to 30.03.21 (Tuesday).

**STOPPAGES:** Udhampur, Jammu Tawi, Pathankot Cantt., Jalandhar Cantt., Ludhiana, Ambala Cantt., Yamuna Nagar, Saharanpur, Moradabad, Bareilly, Lucknow & Sultanpur Stations.

**ACCOMMODATION:** AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved 2nd Seating.

04424/04423 H. NIZAMUDDIN - LUCKNOW - H. NIZAMUDDIN SUPERFAST A.C. EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (WEEKLY)					04 Trips
Train No.: 04424				Train No.: 04423	
ARR.	DEP.	↓ STATIONS ↑	ARR.	DEP.	
----	20:10		H. NIZAMUDDIN	05:45	----
04:20		LUCKNOW			21:20

**DAYS OF RUN:** 04424 from Hazrat Nizamuddin 22.03.21 & 29.03.21 (Monday) and 04423 from Lucknow 23.03.21 & 01.04.21 (Thursday).

**STOPPAGES:** Ghaziabad, Moradabad & Bareilly Stations.

**ACCOMMODATION:** 1st AC, AC 2 Tier & AC 3 Tier.

## City, Real cruise into CL quarters

**Budapest, March 17:** Pep Guardiola told his Manchester City players to forget their previous Champions League failures after cruising into the quarterfinals with a 2-0 win over Borussia Moenchengladbach on Tuesday that sealed a 4-0 aggregate win.

The Champions League is the one trophy that has remained elusive to Guardiola during his five years in Manchester with City failing to ever get beyond the last eight under the Catalan. But the runaway Premier League leaders will get the chance to break that barrier next month as they showed why they are the bookies' favourites for the competition with another classy performance in Budapest.

Early goals from Kevin De Bruyne and Ilkay Gundogan killed off any hope of a fightback from the Germans as City

## THE RESULTS

<b>Manchester City</b> (De Bruyne 12, Gundogan 18)	2
<b>Borussia Moenchengladbach</b> (Manchester City win 4-0 on aggregate)	0
<b>Real Madrid</b> (Benzema 34, Ramos 60-pen, Asensio 85)	3
<b>Atalanta</b> (Muric 83)	1
(Real Madrid win 4-1 on aggregate)	

recorded a 24th win in their last 25 games.

Meanwhile, Real Madrid avoided another early Champions League exit on Tuesday by beating Atalanta 3-1 to win the tie 4-1 on aggregate and reach the quarterfinals for the first time in three years.

Sergio Ramos converted a penalty after Karim Benzema continued his scoring streak as Marco Asensio fired in a third for Madrid. — *AFP*

04422/04421 ANAND VIHAR (T) - LUCKNOW - ANAND VIHAR (T) SUPERFAST A.C. EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (WEEKLY)					04 Trips
Train No.: 04422		↓  STATIONS  ↑	Train No.: 04421		
ARR.	DEP.		ARR.	DEP.	
----	20:10		ANAND VIHAR (T)	05:45	----
04:20	----		LUCKNOW	----	21:20

**DAYS OF RUN:** 04422 from Anand Vihar (T) 24.03.21 & 31.03.21 (Wed.) and 04421 from Lucknow 23.03.21 & 30.03.21 (Tue.).

**STOPPAGES:** Ghaziabad, Moradabad & Bareilly Stations.

**ACCOMMODATION:** 1st AC, AC 2 Tier & AC 3 Tier.

04924/04923 CHANDIGARH - GORAKHPUR - CHANDIGARH EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (WEEKLY)					04 Trips	
Train No.: 04924		↓	STATIONS	↑	Train No.: 04923	
ARR.	DEP.				ARR.	DEP.
----	23:20		CHANDIGARH		15:30	----
17:15	----		GORAKHPUR		----	22:10

**DAYS OF RUN:** 04924 from Chandigarh on 18.03.21 & 25.03.21 (Thu.) and 04923 from Gorakhpur on 19.03.21 & 26.03.21 (Fri.).

**STOPPAGES:** Ambala Cantt., Yamuna Nagar, Saharanpur, Moradabad, Bareilly, Lucknow, Gonda & Basti Stations.

**ACCOMMODATION:** AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved 2nd Seating.

04426/04425 H. NIZAMUDDIN - PUNE - H. NIZAMUDDIN SUPERFAST A.C. EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (WEEKLY)				04 Trips
Train No.: 04426		↓  STATIONS  ↑	Train No.: 04425	
ARR.	DEP.		ARR.	DEP.
----	21:30	H. NIZAMUDDIN	05:35	----
21:25	----	PUNE	----	05:15

**DAYS OF RUN:** 04426 from H. Nizamuddin on 23.03.21 & 30.03.21 (Tuesday) and 04425 from Pune on 25.03.21 & 01.04.21 (Thursday).

**STOPPAGES:** Mathura, Kota Jn., Ratlam, Baroda, Surat, Vapi, Vasai Road, Kalyan & Lonawala Stations.

**ACCOMMODATION:** 1st AC, AC 2 Tier & AC 3 Tier.

04412/04411 ANAND VIHAR (T) - GAYA - ANAND VIHAR (T)					08	
SUPERFAST EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAIN (BI WEEKLY)					Trips	
Train No.: 04412		↓	STATIONS	↑	Train No.: 04411	
ARR.	DEP.				ARR.	DEP.
----	23:10		ANAND VIHAR (T)		15:25	----
15:30			GAYA		----	23:45