





## SHORT TAKES

**1,829 arrested, 755 FIRs lodged: Govt on northeast Delhi riots**

**New Delhi:** As many as 755 FIRs have been registered and 1,829 people were arrested in connection with the northeast Delhi riots last year, the Centre informed Parliament on Wednesday. Minister of state for home G Kishan Reddy told the Rajya Sabha the investigation was carried out in all the cases based on facts and evidence, using the latest scientific techniques, and without any regard to the affiliation or identity of the accused.

Reddy said the Delhi Police conveyed that 755 FIRs had been registered in connection with the riots, out of which 62 heinous cases were investigated by the special investigation teams in the crime branch. One case is investigated by the special cell to unearth the criminal conspiracy behind the violence and the remaining 692 cases are investigated by the North East district police, the minister said in a written reply to a question. A total of 1,829 people have been arrested and charge sheets in 353 cases have been submitted in the court for trial, he added. The riots had erupted in northeast Delhi on February 24 last year after clashes between citizenship law supporters and protesters spiralled, leaving at least 53 people dead and also led to extensive destruction of property, including schools as well as religious places.

— PTI

**7 arrested for duping over 200 job seekers**

**New Delhi:** Seven members of a gang, who were allegedly running a fraudulent placement agency in west Delhi's Janakpuri, were arrested for duping over 200 people on the pretext of providing them jobs, police said on Wednesday. A raid was conducted at the placement agency's office in Janakpuri on Monday and seven people, identified as Shailendra, Himanshu Kohli, Mohd. Shadab Anis, Amit Kumar Karn, Sunita, Swati and Parul, were arrested. All the seven gang members were examined at the spot during which it emerged that through their online portal

GroupNaukri.com, they duped people after promising them jobs in India and abroad, especially Gulf countries, police said. The seven accused duped over 200 job aspirants across India, they said. According to two complaints lodged with police, the victims were duped of ₹52,000 and ₹40,000, police added. Deputy commissioner of police (West) Urvija Goel said the gang members used to change their office after every three-four months. The accused collected data of job seekers throughout India from their sources and lured the aspirants with lucrative offers. They used to ask aspirants to transfer a certain amount into their bank account and after getting the money, the accused blocked their numbers. All the seven accused have been arrested in connection with the case, she added. Data of more than 100 aspirants have been found in the documents/laptop seized from their possession, police said. — PTI

**Man dies 2 weeks after being set afire**

**New Delhi:** A 22-year-old man has died at a hospital here, two weeks after he was set on fire by some people following a dispute over playing loud music in Rohini's Begampur area, police said on Wednesday. According to the police, two friends of the victim, Saurabh, were playing loud music on February 22, and an argument broke out when he asked them to turn down the volume. Although locals intervened and managed to calm them down briefly, the accused later doused Saurabh with petrol and set him on fire, the police said. "He was admitted to the Safdarjung hospital with 70 per cent burnt injuries. Three persons were apprehended in connection with the case. Saurabh died during the treatment on Tuesday. Legal proceeding is underway and section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code is being added in the FIR," a senior police officer said. — PTI

■ Legislation will extend legal protection for scores of illegal constructions

**LS passes Bill to regularise 1,700 illegal colonies in Delhi**

**New Delhi, March 10:** Parliament on Wednesday passed the National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second (Amendment) Bill, 2021, to regularise unauthorised colonies.

While Rajya Sabha had passed the Bill on February 9 in the first leg of the Budget Session, Lok Sabha passed it on Wednesday amid Opposition ruckus over farm laws.

Minister of state (independent charge) of housing and urban affairs Hardeep Singh Puri said in Lok Sabha that the Bill would give protection to unauthorised colonies from sealing till December 31, 2023. "There is a public perception that the issue of unauthorised colonies has been delayed by some political parties when they were in office," Puri said while replying to a debate on the Bill. The House later passed the Bill by a voice vote.

Puri said the problem of

● Minister of state (independent charge) of housing and urban affairs Hardeep Singh Puri said in Lok Sabha that the Bill would give protection to unauthorised colonies from sealing till December 31, 2023.

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unauthorised colonies pre-dates the assumption of office by the Narendra Modi dispensation in 2014, but no previous government took this issue up with any degree of seriousness.

"In 1947, 17 per cent of India's population lived in cities. The population of Delhi was 8 lakh at that time.... The 1951 census showed Delhi's population at 22 lakh. The 2011 census showed Delhi's population at 1.6 crore. There will be another census this year and I expect the population

of Delhi to be close to 2 crore, if not higher," Puri said.

It is a matter of great shame that between 2006 when the process of regularisation started and 2014, all the governments which were in power in the city of Delhi did nothing, Puri said, and sought cooperation from parties to bring relief to the citizens of Delhi. Citing a letter received by his ministry from the Delhi government in 2019 seeking the extension of timeline for conducting survey of unautho-

rised colonies, Puri said that it is then the Modi government decided to bring this Bill.

The Bill replaces the Ordinance which was brought in December last year to extend protection from punitive action to unauthorised colonies, JJ clusters and constructions in Delhi's rural areas built on agriculture land for another three years till December 2023. The legislation will extend the legal protection for scores of illegal constructions and unauthorised colonies in the national capital from demolition or sealing till December 2023.

There are around 1,700 unauthorised colonies in Delhi. The NCT of Delhi (Special Provisions) Second Amendment Bill, 2021, is an extension of a similar law first passed in 2011. When the 2011 law had expired, the government had in 2014 enacted the law again to grant a fresh extension. — PTI



Tibetan Youth Congress activists being detained by police during a protest against the Chinese rule in Tibet on the commemoration of the 62nd anniversary of Tibetan National Uprising Day outside the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

**Security tightened along Delhi-UP border, RS told**

**New Delhi, March 10:** The Delhi Police has strengthened security along the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border to prevent any possible repeat of the violence that broke out during the farmers' tractor parade on January 26, Union minister of state for home G. Kishan Reddy said on Wednesday.

The minister's written reply in the Rajya Sabha came in response to a question from AAP member Narain Dass Gupta on

whether nails were fixed on the road at the farmers' protest site near the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border.

Reddy said the Delhi Police has informed that on January 26, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha broke the barricades, in violation of permission granted for taking out Kisan tractor parade on a mutually accepted route and it proceeded towards central Delhi despite being stopped at other

barricades inside the city and broke those barricades as well.

"In view of this experience, and the manner in which the protesting farmers used tractors as weapons for breaking the barricades and injuring policemen, the barricades at the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border were strengthened to prevent any possible repeat of the conduct displayed on January 26," he said. — PTI

**R-Day violence: Man who assaulted cop with spear among 2 arrested**

**New Delhi, March 10:** Two persons, including a 21-year-old man who assaulted a policeman on duty at the Red Fort with a spear on January 26, has been arrested in connection with the violence at the historic monument, police said on Wednesday.

With this, the total number of arrests made in connection with the case stands at 14, they said.

The police said that various teams of the Crime Branch Unit probing the case have been conducting

regular raids at different places in Delhi and Punjab.

Maninderjit Singh, 23, and Khempreet Singh, 21, who were actively involved in the violence, were arrested on Tuesday.

According to police, Maninderjit Singh, a Dutch national, settled in Birmingham, UK, was arrested at the Delhi airport while trying to flee from India on forged travel documents as Jarmanjit Singh. He originally belongs to a village in

Gurdaspur district of Punjab.

He was planning to fly first to Nepal from Delhi and then head to the UK. A look out circular was also issued by the police against him in connection with the case and he is also previously involved in two criminal cases, they said.

The other accused, a resident of northwest Delhi's Swaroop Nagar, who police said had assaulted a policeman on duty inside the well area

**Following 10 principles of 'Ram Rajya', says Kejriwal**

'AAP govt will send elderly for darshan after Ram temple is complete'

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10



Arvind Kejriwal

Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday announced facilitating free pilgrimage for Delhi's senior citizens to the Ram temple in Ayodhya and asserted that his government follows 10 principles inspired by the concept of 'Ram Rajya' to serve the people.

The 10 principles listed by him are providing food, education, medical care, electricity, water, employment, housing, security for women and honouring the elderly.

Kejriwal's announcement about the pilgrimage came a day after his Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government presented a Rs 69,000-crore budget themed on "patriotism" under which installation of 500 flag masts and programmes on the lives of freedom fighters are planned across the city. It also announced a "deshbhakti curriculum".

The AAP dispensation already has a

'Mukhyamantri Teerth Yatra Yojana' that allows senior citizens from Delhi to undertake a free pilgrimage. All expenses related to travel, food and accommodation are borne by the Delhi government.

Addressing the Delhi Assembly on Wednesday, Kejriwal took potshots at the Yogi Adityanath government over the alleged deteriorating condition of government-run schools in Uttar Pradesh.

He said that he saw on social media a video of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath inspecting a school in "Manish Sisodia-style". "I am happy that chief minis-

ters and ministers are visiting schools now," Kejriwal said.

The Delhi chief minister said his deputy, Sisodia, went to Lucknow recently to inspect an Uttar Pradesh government-run schools after a minister of the state "challenged" him. "But the minister chickened out and the UP Police stopped Sisodia from inspecting the schools himself."

"I am a devotee of Lord Ram and Hanuman. We have been following 10 principles inspired by the concept of 'Ram Rajya' to serve the people of Delhi," Kejriwal said during a discussion on the address to the House by the Lieutenant Governor earlier this week.

"We have taken many steps to honour our elderly, the most important being sending them on free pilgrimages. I want to tell all senior citizens in Delhi that I will send you to Ram temple in Ayodhya once the construction work is completed."

**370 Covid cases in Delhi in 24 hours, highest in 2 months**

**New Delhi, March 10:** Delhi recorded 370 new coronavirus cases on Wednesday, the highest daily count in nearly two months, even as the positivity rate rose to 0.52 per cent, according to data shared by the health department.

The death toll rose to 10,931 with three more fatalities, the latest health bulletin issued by the Delhi health department stated.

Delhi had recorded 320 new Covid-19 cases and four deaths due to the disease on Tuesday, breaching the 300-mark again after a gap of two days.

On Sunday and Monday, 286 and 239 cases, respectively, were recorded in the national capital. The city had registered 321 coronavirus cases and a death last Saturday, and 312 cases and a fatality on Friday.

A total of 585 cases were reported on January 1 and 384 on January 4. The daily count had dropped to 306 on January 11 and risen again to 386 on January 12, according to official figures.

The numbers had start-

ed to come down in February, and on February 26, 256 cases were recorded, the highest daily count in that month.

On Wednesday, 370 new coronavirus cases were recorded, taking the infection tally to 6,42,030, the bulletin said.

The number of active cases of the disease in the city rose to 1,900 on Wednesday from 1,812 on Tuesday, while the positivity rate rose to 0.52A per cent from 0.48 per cent on Tuesday.

Health experts and doctors have attributed this sudden rise to complacency in people and not following Covid-19 appropriate behaviour and a assuming all is well now.

The total number of tests conducted on Tuesday stood at 71,153, including 45,322 RT-PCR tests and 25,831 rapid antigen tests, the bulletin said.

The number of people under home isolation on Wednesday rose to 982 from 952 on Tuesday, the bulletin said, adding that over 6.29 lakh people have recovered from the infection till date.

— PTI

**4 BJP MLAs marshalled out of Delhi Assembly**

**New Delhi, March 10:** Four BJP MLAs were marshalled out of the Delhi Assembly during the ongoing Budget Session on Wednesday. The BJP MLAs demanded a discussion on alleged corruption in the procurement of buses by the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC).

Speaker Ram Niwas Goel told them he will allow a discussion on the issue on Thursday, but they persisted with their demand to hold it on Wednesday itself.

Goel adjourned the House for 15 minutes at 3.15 pm. As the House reassembled, the lawmakers again raised the demand for a discussion on the issue on Wednesday, after which the speaker directed Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA Vijender Gupta to be marshalled out.

Subsequently, three other MLAs of the saffron party — Mohan Singh Bisht, Jitendra Mahajan and OP Sharma — were also marshalled out of the House. The 70-member Delhi Assembly has eight BJP MLAs. — PTI



A vendor carrying balloons for sale in New Delhi on Wednesday. — G.N. JHA

**Prakash assumes charge as principal DG in I&B ministry**

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

Indian Information Service (IIS) 1988 batch officer Satyendra Prakash on Monday assumed charge of principal director general of bureau of outreach and communication under the ministry of information and



Satyendra Prakash

broadcasting. This is the highest post of IIS and is equivalent to the secretary to Govt of India.

Mr Prakash is known for his professional skills, administrative acumen and innovative work style.



## SHORT TAKES

## Dandi March to be re-enacted in Guj

**Ahmedabad:** Ninety-one years after Mahatma Gandhi took out the Dandi March to break the salt law that shook the foundations of the British empire, 81 persons will embark on the same 386-km long foot-march from here on March 12 to celebrate the 75th anniversary of India's Independence, the Gujarat government said on Wednesday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off the yatra from Sabarmati Ashram on Friday. It will re-enact Gandhi's historic march to Dandi in South Gujarat, the government said in a release. It is part of the state government's programme to mark "Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav", it said. The Gujarat government's state-level high-powered committee's meeting chaired by chief minister Vijay Rupani was held on Tuesday to finalise the preparations to celebrate the 75th anniversary of India's Independence. — PTI

## Modi urges MPs to take part in Guj fest

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday requested MPs and all public representatives to take part in "Amrit Mahotsav" to mark India's 75 years of Independence, which will start from March 12 in Gujarat's Sabarmati Ashram. While addressing the BJP's parliamentary party meeting, which was held almost after a year, the PM informed that the grand festival to commemorate the 75th year of Independence will be held at 75 locations across the country for 75 weeks. Parliamentary Affairs minister Pralhad Joshi said the PM also gave a clarion call to the MPs to reach out to people and help in carrying out the Covid vaccination drive by the government. "The grand festival will be celebrated at 75 locations across the country for 75 weeks and will start from Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad in Gujarat from March 12," said the minister. The PM also asked all public representatives to take part.

## 2 Assam BJP MLAs resign from party

**Guwahati:** Two BJP MLAs of Assam on Wednesday said that they resigned from the party after they were denied tickets to contest the forthcoming assembly elections in the state. The two legislators, former deputy speaker Dilip Kumar Paul and Shiladitya Dev, also alleged that conspiracies were hatched against them by some leaders in the saffron party. On Sunday, BJP leader and cabinet minister Sum Ronghang joined the Opposition Congress after he was denied ticket from the Diphu constituency. — PTI

## SHIVRAJ TWISTS PAWRI LINE TO WARN LAND MAFIA

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
BHOPAL, MARCH 10

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan gave a spin to "Pawri ho rahi hai" trend, set off by Pakistani influencer, to send a message to the land sharks active in the state to 'wrap up'. In a recreation of the viral monologue, Mr Chouhan let out a war cry against the land mafias at an official event in Indore on Tuesday, saying, "Yeh main hoon, yeh meri sarkar hai, yeh meri prasasanik team hai aur aap dekho, bhoos mafia bhaag rahe hain (This is me, This is my government, this is my administrative team, and you see, the land mafias are fleeing the state). He tweeted a video of him delivering the one-liner with the hashtag #MafiaMuktMP. In another video clip posted in his Twitter wall, he says, "Tiger ab bhi zinda hai. Tiger shikar pe nikla hai (Tiger is still alive, tiger is on prowl)". The "Pawri ho rahi hai" trend, kicked off by Pakistani Instagram influencer and content creator Dananeer Mobeen, has inspired many netizens who included celebrities and politicians to make memes and videos featuring them. Political leaders were seen using catchy lines in public events and social media network sites in spin-offs to the viral video.

## 2 more MLAs join BJP ■ Didi files nomination from Nandigram

## Exodus continues from TMC

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI**  
KOLKATA, MARCH 10

Denied tickets in the West Bengal Assembly Election this time, two more sitting Trinamul Congress MLAs including a state minister joined the BJP on a day their party supremo and chief minister Mamata Banerjee filed her nomination as a TMC candidate contesting from Nandigram, the hot seat in East Midnapore, against her nemesis: Shuvendu Adhikari in his home turf.

The two sitting TMC MLAs are minister of state for North Bengal Development: Bachchu Hansda, who won from Tapan in South Dinajpur of North Bengal in the last two consecutive terms and Gouri Shankar Dutta of Tehatta in Nadia.

They, along with young Bengali actor Bonny Sengupta who is also the boyfriend of actor and TMC candidate of Krishnanagar North in Nadia: Koushani Mukherjee, were welcomed to the BJP by its state president Dilip Ghosh on Wednesday.

Their move came barely two days after five sitting TMC MLAs' defection to the saffron party for not getting tickets from Ms Banerjee. A day before, TMC Rajya Sabha MP Arpita Ghosh tried to placate Mr Hansda, a popular



West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee files her nomination for the Nandigram seat at SDO Haldia in Purba Medinipur on Wednesday. — PTI

tribal face, but failed.

Mr Dutta, whose son also joined BJP with him, alleged, "I was with the TMC since it's foundation days. After working for it over the last 23 years, I found on TV my name missing in its candidates' list. This is a humiliation. When TMC could not show courtesy to its old timers, it can not do any good to the mass."

Hours before the two TMC MLAs' defection, Ms Banerjee filled her nomination at the SDO office in

Haldia after leading a roadshow and offered puja at a temple in Nandigram where the CPI(M) fielded Meenakshi Mukherjee as the Congress-Left-ISF alliance candidate.

Unperturbed, Mr Adhikari however tried to woo the voters assuring them that he would help the people to get back their money they had invested in the multi-crore chit fund scams in which he once came under the scanner of the central agencies for his suspected role.

## Mamata outsider in Nandigram: Adhikari

**Nandigram:** Branding West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee as an outsider in Nandigram, BJP leader and her former protegee Suvendu Adhikari on Wednesday asserted that people duped by chit fund companies in the state would get back their money if the saffron party is voted to power. — PTI

## ■ Security of key leaders already increased

## Centre puts extra vigil on campaigning BJP leaders

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

Central intelligence agencies are closely tracking the "threat perception" to senior BJP leaders who are actively involved in either contesting or campaigning for the Bengal Assembly elections as the state is expected to witness largescale violence in the run up to the crucial elections. Most leaders like Kailash Vijayvargia, Suvendu Adhikari, Mukul Roy, Dilip Ghosh and others have already been provided security by central para-military forces.

West Bengal will have an unprecedented eight phase Assembly polling this time starting on March 27. With BJP launching a very aggressive campaign hoping to form the next government in the state it is being anticipated that violent clashes could erupt between the BJP and Trinamul cadre.

## BENGAL POLLS

■ **WITH BJP** launching a very aggressive campaign hoping to form the next government in the state it is being anticipated that violent clashes could erupt between the BJP and Trinamul cadre

BJP had done exceptionally well winning 18 Lok Sabha seats during the 2019 elections. Encouraged by this response BJP is now hoping to form the next government in West Bengal. Number of senior national BJP leaders and those from the state level are also campaigning hard in the run up to the Assembly elections.

In the past a number of violent clashes have been reported from different parts of Bengal where BJP and Trinamul workers have clashed. BJP has alleged that a number of their workers have been

brutally murdered by the TMC cadre. In one incident the convoy of BJP president J.P. Nadda was also attacked on outskirts of Kolkata allegedly by the TMC workers.

With this background a close watch is being kept on the threat perception of the BJP leaders involved in Bengal elections. Already a number of BJP leaders like Kailash Vijayvargia, Suvendu Adhikari, Mukul Roy, Dilip Ghosh and central Minister Babul Supriyo have already been provided security cover by central forces. "In view of the past violence triggered by TMC workers we are closely monitoring the situation in the State, specifically the threat perception. Following our inputs security would be provided accordingly to all political leaders campaigning in Bengal so that any untoward incident can be avoided during the poll process," a senior intelligence official remarked.

## Cabinet okays creation of PM health security fund

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi (PMSSN) as a single non-lapsable reserve fund for share of health from the proceeds of health and education cess.

The accruals into the PMSSN will be utilised for the flagship schemes of the health ministry including Ayushman Bharat — Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY); Ayushman Bharat — Health and Wellness

■ **THE MAJOR** benefit will be enhanced access to universal and affordable health care through availability of earmarked resources, while ensuring that the amount does not lapse at the end of financial year

Centres (AB-HWCs); National Health Mission and Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY) and also disaster preparedness, and responses during health emergencies.

"In any financial year, the expenditure on such schemes of the Health Ministry would be ini-

tially incurred from the PMSSN and thereafter, from Gross Budgetary Support (GBS)," official sources said.

The major benefit will be enhanced access to universal and affordable health care through availability of earmarked resources, while ensuring that the amount does not lapse at the end of financial year, they added. In the Budget speech 2018, the finance minister while announcing Ayushman Bharat Scheme, also announced replacement of existing 3 per cent education cess by 4% health and education cess.

## Sonowal's assets increased by 71% in 5 years

**Guwahati, March 10:** The total worth of Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal's assets, both movable and immovable, have increased by over 71 per cent since the last assembly polls in 2016, despite not having bought any new immovable assets.

Mr Sonowal, in his affidavit submitted as a BJP candidate from Majuli (ST) candidate for the 2021 Assembly polls in the state, has declared total assets worth over ₹3.17

crore as against over ₹1.85 crore in 2016, an increase of ₹1,32,26,475.

The 59-year old chief ministers' movable assets have increased to more than ₹1.14 cr in 2021 as against more than ₹70.44 lakh in 2016 while the immovable assets have shown a rise from ₹1.15 cr submitted in the last polls to over ₹2.02 cr.

His bank deposits have escalated more than three-fold to ₹38,02,498 in 2021 from ₹12,13,320 in 2016



S. Sonowal

■ **THE 59-YEAR** old chief ministers' movable assets have increased to more than ₹1.14 cr in 2021 as against more than ₹70.44 lakh in 2016.

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while the value of his insurance policies have swelled from ₹28,90,794 to ₹43,26,461. The chief minister owned shares in Oil India Limited (OIL) worth

₹8,77,500 in 2016 whose worth has risen to ₹13,04,697 this year.

His current cash in hand has, however, decreased to ₹39,030 from the ₹94,597, he

had in 2016. Mr Sonowal has not bought any jewellery during the last five years, declaring 30 gms of gold in both the polls whose value has however now increased to ₹1,35,000 from ₹1,00,000 in 2016.

In both the polls, the chief minister has declared household goods worth ₹1.90 lakh while he does not possess any vehicle as shown in the affidavits of both the Assembly elections. — PTI

## Chacko quits Cong ahead of polls, blames groupism

'There is no democracy left in Congress party'

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

The Congress on Wednesday received a jolt with its senior leader from the poll bound state of Kerala P.C. Chacko quitting the party. He sent in his resignation to the party chief Mrs Sonia Gandhi. He said, "I have quit Congress and sent my resignation to the party's interim chief Sonia Gandhi. I had been deliberating upon this decision for the past many days. I come from Kerala where there's no Congress party as such. There are two parties — Congress (I) and Congress (A). It's a coordination committee of two parties functioning as the Kerala Congress unit." The "A" group was headed by former CM Oommen Chandy and the "I" group by state chief Ramesh Chennithala and these groups had been active for many years, he said.

He further charged the Congress of not having internal democracy. "There is no democracy left in Congress. The list of candidates has not been discussed with the state Congress committee. There are no panels for any discussions on polls, winnability of candidates. There have always been factions in parties, even in the Congress, but there is no



P.C. Chacko

point anymore." He added. The Congress high command is already feeling the pressure from the letter writers group who wanted change in the party and the latest allegation from Mr Chacko has only added to its woes. His exit is a big and embarrassing one for the party in a state where its top leader and campaigner Rahul Gandhi is an MP.

Earlier Mr Chacko was fiercely loyal to the high command he even hit out at the letter writers also known as the G23. But now his stand changed and he said, "I did not join the G23 for the sake of the Congress but the questions they raised are extremely important for the party. What is happening in Kerala will cost the party in the election," Mr. Chacko has been a Lok Sabha MP also the chairman of the joint parliamentary committee on to probe the 2G spectrum allegations and AICC incharge of Delhi.

## Kerala polls: CPM names 83 candidates

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 10

The ruling CPM in Kerala on Wednesday announced 83 candidates for the forthcoming assembly polls in the state.

Chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan and his seven Cabinet colleagues figured in the CPM list. In a bid to introduce fresh faces, the party took a significant decision by dropping 33 sitting MLAs including five senior ministers of the outgoing Pinarayi Vijayan ministry. The sitting MLAs were dropped complying with the norm of keeping out legislators who had won two consecutive elections.

The five top ministers who have not been given party ticket this time are industries minister and No 2 in the outgoing Cabinet Mr E P Jayarajan, finance minister Dr Thomas Isaac, Law Minister Mr A.K. Balan, PWD minister Mr G Sudhakaran and education minister Mr C. Raveendranath.

## Will go to Kolkata, urge farmers to defeat BJP: Tikait

**Ballia (UP), March 10:** Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait on Wednesday said he will go to Kolkata this week to urge farmers to defeat the BJP in the West Bengal Assembly elections, but claimed he is not supporting any political party.

Farmers are distressed, and election will be discussed with them, Mr Tikait said, adding that he is not going to West Bengal to seek votes.

"I will go to Kolkata on March 13. The clarion call for a decisive struggle will come from Kolkata. We will talk to farmers there and urge them to defeat the BJP," the BKU leader said. He was in Ballia to address a 'Kisan Mahapanchayat'.

Replying to a query if he would meet West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, Mr Tikait said there was no such programme.

The farmer leader said a call has already been made to defeat the BJP in the five Assembly elections scheduled to begin from March 27, but asserted that he would not support any political party.

Besides West Bengal, Assembly elections are going to be held in Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. Counting of votes will take place on



Rakesh Tikait

May 2.

Mr Tikait said the farmers' movement would continue and that he is ready to negotiate with the central government. "If the Indian government talks, we will talk," he added.

Replying to a question, the farmer leader said he had no intention to contest elections.

Addressing another farmers' gathering in Rasda, Tikait said a long fight will be fought and success will be achieved.

Earlier, at a "Kisan Mahapanchayat" in Sikandarpur, about 32 km from the district headquarters earlier, the farmer leader launched a scathing attack on the Narendra Modi government.

Without taking any names, he said "robbers" have to be driven out of Delhi.

In an apparent reference to the Prime Minister, he said, "He will prove to be the last emperor." — PTI

## Covid-19 concern: Sena targets BJP over crowded poll rallies

**Mumbai, March 10:** The Shiv Sena on Wednesday said that central government leaders were addressing crowded rallies in poll-bound states, while opening suburban trains for the general public in Mumbai was being blamed for the rise in Covid-19 cases in the metropolises.

An editorial in the Sena mouthpiece *Saamana* asked people to take care, saying otherwise a "lockdown is imminent".

It said a partial lockdown

has been enforced in some parts of Maharashtra, and many areas of cities like Thane and Nashik have been Covid-19 hot-spots. "Has the coronavirus been crushed under the huge crowds seen during campaigning for the West Bengal elections?" the Marathi daily sought to know.

It said people were not wearing face masks and not following physical distancing norms in poll rallies. — PTI

EX-SERVICEMEN CONTRIBUTORY HEALTH SCHEME (ECHS), STATION HQ BARAMULLA			
EMPLOYMENT NOTICE			
1. Applications are invited to engage the following staff on contractual basis at ECHS Polyclinic, Baramulla, J&K for a period of 11 months:-			
OIC Polyclinic	- 01.	Medical Officer	- 01.
Pharmacist	- 01.	Nursing Assistant	- 01.
Receptionist	- 01.	Clerk	- 01.
Lab Assistant	- 01.	Driver	- 01.
Safaiwala	- 01.		
2. For QR Terms and Conditions, Application form and Remuneration kindly visit our website: <a href="http://www.echs.gov.in">www.echs.gov.in</a>			
3. For details please approach or contact ECHS Polyclinic Baramulla at Tele No.: 01952234220. Last date for receipt of application will be 09 April 2021.			
4. Interview date & time will be intimated later.			
5. Candidates will bring original certificates/ degree, photocopy of testimonials/ experiences as applicable and two passport size photographs at the time of interview.			

SEARCH FOR MISSING BOY	
	General public is hereby informed that one boy Namely: Mohd Dastgeer, S/o Mohd Sageer, R/o H. No. B-2/212, Nand Nagri, Delhi, Age: about 25 Years, Height: 5'5", Complexion: Shallow, Face: Long, Built: Medium, Wearing: Blue colour T-shirt, Chocolate colour Jeans, Red colour Jacket
and Black Shoes in Feet, has been missing since 24.12.2020 from his house in the area of P.S. Nand Nagri, Delhi.	
In this regard a DD No. 87-A dated 08.02.2021, has been lodged at P.S. Nand Nagri, Delhi.	
Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out information about this boy but no clue has come to light so far. If any one having any information or clue about this boy kindly inform to the following.	
E-Mail: <a href="mailto:cic@cbl.gov.in">cic@cbl.gov.in</a>	SHO
Website: <a href="http://cbl.nic.in">http://cbl.nic.in</a>	P.S. Nand Nagri, Delhi
Fax: 011-24368639	Ph. 011-22829503, 8750870730
Ph: 011-24368638, 24368641	DP/589/NE/2021

SEARCH FOR MISSING	
	General Public is hereby informed that a girl namely Baby, D/o Mahender, R/o H. No. A-2/281, Nand Nagri, Delhi, Age: 19 years, Height: 4', Face: Round, Complexion: Wheatish, Built: Normal, Wearing: Pink colour suit-salwar, Pink Colour Jacket, and black Chappal in her feet has been missing from her home since 01.02.2021. In this regard a vide DD No. 38-A, dated 05.02.2021 has been registered at P.S. Nand Nagri, 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 any one having any information about this girl please inform undersigned.	
E-mail: <a href="mailto:cic@cbl.gov.nic.in">cic@cbl.gov.nic.in</a>	SHO
Website: <a href="http://cbl.nic.in">http://cbl.nic.in</a>	PS Nand Nagri, Delhi
Fax: 011-24368639	Ph.: 011-22137761, 8750870733
DP/572/NE/2021	

NORTHERN RAILWAY OPEN E-TENDER NOTICE	
Invitation of tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement Systems)	
The Sr. Divisional Engineer-IV, Northern Railway, Delhi Division for and on behalf of President of India invites E-Tender on prescribed form for the following work.	
1. Name of work with its location	CTR(P) 0.80 Kms from DN KM. 14.700 to 15.500 and TRR(P) 1.00 km from DN KM 24.000 to 25.000 on Delhi-Bhatinda section under Sr. DEN/IV. (NIT 53-20-21-W-IV)
2. Approx. cost of work	Rs. 28,56,083.22
3. Earnest money	Nil
4. Date and time of submission of tender and opening of tender	Bidding Start date for work no. Up to 15:00 hrs. on 26.03.2021 opening of e-Tender at 15:00 hrs. on 09.04.2021.
5. Website particulars, published e-tender, notice location etc. complete details of tender can be seen and website where the tender form can be downloaded	Above tender available on IREPS site i.e. <a href="http://www.ireps.gov.in">www.ireps.gov.in</a>
No. 128-W/260/Tender Notice/NIT 53-W-IV/2021 Date : 10.03.2021 542/2021	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	



SHORT TAKES

Self-immolation bid outside UP Assembly

**Lucknow:** A woman claiming to be a rape survivor was thwarted by police from attempting self-immolation in front of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly complex after she poured kerosene on herself. The woman, who said that she had filed a rape case in Sultanpur recently that the police there was not acting on, reached Gate No. 5 of the Assembly complex and tried to set herself on fire but was stopped by the police personnel at the spot. "The woman, a resident of Sultanpur, reached Gate No. 5 in the afternoon and poured kerosene on herself on the other side of the road near a temple. She was stopped before she could set herself on fire," commissioner of police D.K. Thakur said. The woman, according to Thakur, said the police in Sultanpur was not taking action even after registering an FIR, which led her to the act in the state capital. — PTI

Man chops off wife's palm, foot

**Bhopal:** A man chopped off her wife's left palm and left foot being suspicious of her character, police said on Wednesday. The incident happened late on Tuesday night when the victim, identified as Sangeeta (26), was sleeping along with her son. The accused, Preetam Rajput (28), attacked her with a sharp weapon and severed her left palm and left foot. Neighbours got alerted by the victim's screams and informed the police. The accused that was found brandishing the sharp weapon was overpowered and arrested. The victim was rushed to the hospital where she underwent surgery. According to the police, the accused was upset with his wife who is working in a private firm in Indore, for visiting home once in a fortnight. Her husband wanted her to visit home in weekends.

Cop part of Ambani threat case shifted

**Mumbai:** Relenting before the pressure from the BJP, the Maharashtra government announced the transfer of top police officer Sachin Vaze from the crime intelligence unit till the inquiry into the mysterious death of auto parts dealer Mansukh Hiren is completed. Sources said the decision was taken after NCP chief Sharad Pawar's intervention. "The state will conduct an impartial probe into the death of Mansukh Hiren. Vaze will be removed from the crime branch till the investigation is completed. The decision has been taken owing to the repeated demand from the opposition. We will take appropriate action against Vaze if he is involved," said home minister Anil Deshmukh in the Vidhan Parishad.

MITHUN GETS CENTRAL VIP SECURITY COVER

**New Delhi:** The Centre has accorded "Y+" VIP security cover to actor Mithun Chakraborty who recently joined the BJP, official sources said. They said the security cover will be provided by the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) that has a dedicated wing for this task, called the special security group (SSG). The 70-year-old actor had joined the BJP on Sunday at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's mega rally at the Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata. "Chakraborty has been given a 'Y+' cover and armed CISF commandos will accompany him during poll campaign in West Bengal," a senior officer said. Election to the 294-member West Bengal Assembly will be held in eight phases between March 27 and April 29. A threat perception report prepared by central security agencies recently recommended to the home ministry for a security cover to the national award-winning actor. BJP MP from Jharkhand Nishikant Dubey will also be accorded with a similar cover that involves about 4-5 armed commandos protecting the person. With these new inductions, the CISF now protects a total of 104 VIPs, including NSA Ajit Doval and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat. — PTI



9 dead, as many hurt in Himachal bus mishap

**Shimla, March 10:** Nine people were killed and as many injured as a private bus fell into a deep gorge in Himachal Pradesh's Chamba district on Wednesday, deputy commissioner D.C. Rana said. The DC said the accident occurred at Colony Morh in Bhanjraru of Churrah tehsil in the morning when the private bus bearing registration number HP73A 1316 and operated by Happy Bus Service fell into the gorge while going from Bondedi to Chamba. During the ongoing Budget Session of the state Assembly, chief minister Jai Ram Thakur told the House in the afternoon that he has ordered an inquiry to ascertain the exact cause of the accident. Expressing grief over the deaths in the accident, the chief minister informed the House that the bus fell into about a 200-metre-deep gorge near Colony Morh at 10.15 am. The injured have been rushed to Chamba Medical College, Thakur said. The DC said an inquiry into the causes of the accident would be carried out by the SDM Tissa. A total of 18 people were on the ill-fated bus. Of them, nine died while as many were injured, he said, adding three of them are critical. Revenue, police, health and fire department teams carried out the rescue operation. Immediate relief of ₹20,000 and ₹5,000 has been given to family members of the deceased and injured persons respectively, he added. — PTI

US DefSecy visiting India March 19-21

PAWAN BALI  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

US defence secretary general Lloyd J. Austin will visit India from 19 to 21 March, in first high profile visit from President Joe Biden administration. This is the first official overseas visit of new US defence secretary Austin. "I'll then travel to India to meet with my counterpart, Minister of Defense Rajnath Singh, and other senior national security leaders to discuss deepening the US-India Major Defense Partnership and advancing cooperation between our countries," tweeted Secretary Austin on Wednesday. "Looking forward to your visit, Secretary Austin," Mr Singh replied on Twitter. Secretary Austin will visit India along with Japan and South Korea. India would be the last leg of his maiden foreign trip. "Secretary of defence Lloyd J. Austin embarks on his first overseas trip Saturday, March 13, to visit US Indo-Pacific

3rd Scorpene sub Karanj commissioned into Navy

PAWAN BALI  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

The Indian Navy's third stealth scorpene-class submarine *INS Karanj*, which can destroy enemy ships with a precision-guided weapon was commissioned on Wednesday at the Naval Dockyard Mumbai. Six Scorpene submarines are to be manufactured by Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL), Mumbai, under programme Project-75 with a \$3 billion contract. These submarines are being manufactured under a technology transfer from the Naval Group of France. The two submarines of the ongoing Project-75 Scorpene programme at MDL, *Kalvari* and *Khanderi*, have already been commissioned into the Indian Navy. *INS Karanj* would form part of the Western Naval Command's Submarine fleet and would be another potent part of the command's arsenal. Former Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral V.S. Shekhawat, who was part



Indian Navy officers on board during the commissioning ceremony of P-75 *INS Karanj* submarine into the Indian Navy in Mumbai on Wednesday. — PTI

of the commissioning crew of the old *Karanj* and later the Commanding officer during the 1971 Indo-Pak war, was the chief guest for the ceremony. The crew of the erstwhile "*Karanj*", a Russian origin Foxtrot-class submarine which was decommissioned in 2003 were also special invitees for the ceremony. Admiral Karambir Singh, Chief of the Naval Staff, and other senior officers from the Indian Navy and defence ministry witnessed the com-

missioning ceremony. This year is being celebrated as the "Swarnim Vijay Varsh" which marks 50 years of the 1971 Indo-Pak war. Old *INS Karanj*, commissioned on September 4, 1969 at Riga in the erstwhile USSR, also took an active part in the conflict under the Command of then Cdr Shekhawat. In recognition of the valiant action of her officers and crew, a number of personnel were decorated, including Vir Chakra to the then commanding officer Cdr Shekhawat.

Farmers call for 'Bharat bandh' Mar. 26

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

Farmers' unions protesting against the Central government's three new farm laws have called for a nationwide strike (Bharat bandh) on March 26. The day coincides with the completion of four months of farmers' protest at Delhi borders against the new agriculture laws. In addition to that, farmer bodies, trade unions would also be protesting against privatisation and fuel price hike on March 15. Thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab,

Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, have been camping at the Delhi border points — Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur — for over three months, demanding the repeal of farm laws and a legal guarantee on the minimum support price (MSP) for their crops. The protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that these laws would pave the way for the dismantling of the MSP system, leaving them at the "mercy" of big corporations. The government has, however, maintained that the new laws will bring better opportunities

to farmers and introduce new technologies in agriculture. Following the Red Fort violence, which sullied the image of the peaceful protest by the farmers, the farmers' unions are focussing more on spreading their message to other states through visits and mahapanchayat instead of staying put only at Delhi borders. So farmers from Punjab, Uttar Pradesh are coming to Delhi borders, the union leaders are touring other states and some of those who have been at the sites since November-December are going back

to take care of crops. On December 8, 2020, the protesting unions had called for a nationwide strike which received support from several political parties, including the Left, the Congress, the Trinamul Congress, the Rashtriya Janata Dal. On February 26, the Confederation of All-India Traders called a nationwide strike demanding a review of the provisions of the goods and services tax regime. Recently, the farmers observed the 100th day of their ongoing protest and said the protests will go on unless the laws are repealed.

Khattar govt comfortably sails through no-trust vote

**Chandigarh, March 10:** The BJP-JJP government in Haryana survived the floor test on Wednesday, comfortably defeating the no-confidence motion moved against it by the main opposition Congress.

The motion was defeated following division of votes. At the end of a marathon six-hour discussion on the motion, Speaker Gian Chand Gupta announced in the House that 55 members had voted against the motion while 32 legislators had backed it. In place of secret voting, which former chief minister B.S. Hooda had earlier demanded in the House, the Speaker first asked the members favouring the motion to rise from their seats and those against it were asked to stand. A headcount was done later. The 55 members who voted against the motion included 39 from the BJP, 10 of ally Jannayak Janta Party, five Independents and Gopal Kanda from



Chief minister Manohar Lal speaks on the no-confidence motion in the Assembly in Chandigarh. — PTI

Haryana Lokhit Party. The BJP has 40 members in the Assembly which includes the Speaker. Thirty members of the Congress and two Independents — Balraj Kundu and Sombir Sangwan — who had earlier withdrawn support, backed the motion. The opposition camp would have needed 45 members to win the no confidence motion. In the 90-member Haryana Assembly, currently having an effective strength of 88 members, the ruling BJP has 40 members, the JJP 10 and the Congress 30. Seven are

Independents, five of whom are supporting the government, while one member is of the Haryana Lokhit Party. While the ruling BJP-JJP was batting on a comfortable wicket with numbers on their side, moving the motion, the first no-trust vote which 16-month old Khattar government faced, Leader of Opposition Hooda claimed the ruling dispensation has lost people's trust. He also said it would expose those who were claiming to stand in favour of farmers if they vote against the motion. — PTI

Delhi HC stays ED summons to Mehbooba

'Don't press for ex-chief minister's appearance till court hears petition'

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10



Mehbooba Mufti

The Delhi high court on Wednesday gave an interim stay on summons issued by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Mehbooba Mufti. A division bench of Justices Siddarth Mridul and Hairam Bhambhani, who heard Ms Mufti's petition seeking a stay on the ED summons, posted the matter for March 18. The bench also directed the Central probe agency not to seek the former chief minister's personal appearance till then. The PDP leader had challenged the validity of the summons issued by the ED for appearing before it on March 15 without specifying the case she was being investigated in. She asked the court to quash the summons, her daughter Iltija Mufti said.

The summons was issued under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act but the case under which she was asked to appear was missing from the notice. In her petition before the high court, Mehbooba said she had not been informed if she is being summoned as an accused or as a witness. "The petitioner is not the subject of investigation, nor is she an accused, in any of the scheduled offences to the best of her knowledge," it said. Mehbooba, 60, who was released last year after more than a year in detention following the scrapping of Jammu and Kashmir's special status, was served notice to appear before the ED. Though the ED did not specify the case in which

she was summoned, officials indicated it could be linked to alleged financial irregularities in loans taken in the past from Jammu and Kashmir Bank. Senior leaders of the PDP such as Sartaj Madani and Naeem Akhtar are already under detention. Recently, Mehbooba Mufti and Omar Abdullah, of the National Conference, alleged that their movement was illegally restricted by security officials. The former chief minister also challenged the validity of Section 50 of PMLA under which she had been summoned and said the section was in violation of Article 14 (equality before the law or equal protection of the laws within the territory of India) and Article 21 (No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law). Under Section 50 of PMLA, "The director, additional director, joint director, deputy director or assistant director shall have the power to summon any person whose attendance he considers necessary whether to give evidence or to produce any records during the course of any investigation or proceeding under this Act."

In last 1 yr, DRDO carried out 28 successful tests

PAWAN BALI  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

In a major boost to indigenous development in defence sector, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has carried out 28 successful tests in the last one year. Last week, DRDO had successfully carried out a flight demonstration based on solid fuel ducted ramjet (SFDR) technology which would help in future development of Astra Mark 3 beyond visual range air to air missile, that can strike at a range of 350 kilometres. DRDO on Monday had demonstrated that it had capability to develop desi air independent propulsion (AIP) System, which increases the capability of conventional submarines to remain submerged for longer periods.

Recently DRDO has handed over a number of major weapons to armed forces which include Astra Beyond Visual Range Missile System, 10 m Short Span Bridging System, Indian Maritime Situational Awareness System (IMSAS), Heavy Weight Torpedo (HWT) Varunastra, Border Surveillance System (BOSS) and main battle tank Arjun Mk-1A. All systems designed and developed by DRDO are manufactured by the Indian industries which includes both public and private sectors entities. Some of the Defence Systems that are developed through such collaboration in last one year are Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS), Extended Range Pinaka System and Guided Pinaka Rocket System among others.

Tirath Rawat takes charge

■ Continued from Page 1 failed to pacify his detractors and the BJP leadership was wary that if no action was taken, the party could face the same fate as that of the then ruling Congress in 2016, when around a dozen of its MLAs had revolted. A former journalist and also a former BJP state unit chief, Tirath Singh Rawat is known for his simplistic and down-to-earth nature. In his parliamentary constituency, the first-time MP is popular for being very approachable. Mr Rawat was administered the oath of office by Uttarakhand governor Baby Rani Maurya at a simple function held at the Bhavan, Dehradun, in the presence of several dignitaries. The new CM was the only person who was sworn in on Wednesday, which means the members of his Cabinet will

be finalised and sworn in later. Earlier in the day, Mr Rawat was elected as the leader of the Uttarakhand BJP legislature party. His name came as a surprise to many as it was not among the nearly half-dozen names doing the rounds in the media over the past few days as contenders for the top post. As his name was announced as the legislature party leader, Mr Rawat's supporters burst into celebrations at the party office in Dehradun. After the celebrations at the state party office in the presence of senior leaders, MLAs and MPs, Mr Rawat went to Raj Bhavan to meet the governor and stake his claim to form the government. The new CM was congratulated by outgoing CM Trivendra Singh Rawat and the BJP cen-

tral observer and national vice-president Raman Singh. "I am a small party worker from a village. I had never imagined that I will be a given an opportunity like this by the party. I hope that with everyone's cooperation and blessings, I will fulfil the expectations from me," said the new CM as he thanked the party leadership. Mr Rawat had defeated his political mentor and BJP veteran B.C. Khanduri's son Manish Khanduri, who contested on the Congress ticket, by over three lakh votes to win from Pauri Garhwal in the Lok Sabha polls in 2019. Former Chhattisgarh CM Raman Singh, whose report to the central leadership set in motion the process of leadership change, said: "With the kind of challenges facing Uttarakhand, it has got a good leader."

Mamata hurt after attack

■ Continued from Page 1 play, she added: "It was definitely a conspiracy. The attack was deliberate. No police personnel were present there. Even the SP was not there. I will lodge a complaint with the Election Commission." Later the CM was seen being carried out by her security team from the front seat and put in the middle of the car. Without referring to the BJP by name, Trinamul spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said: "Some people do not like Ms Banerjee to win again." Questioning Ms Banerjee's version, Barrackpore BJP MP Arjun Singh wondered: "Who will attack her being the CM as well as the home minister of the state? How can someone attack the CM when a distance of 2 km is cleared for her movement wherever she visits? Moreover, she is a

caretaker only now. If there was really any attack on her, the IPS officers in charge of her security should be suspended immediately while those who attacked her must be hanged." He argued: "She always lies to draw sympathy which she did this time also because she knows she will lose the polls." Congress Lok Sabha leader Adhir Chowdhury also called Ms Banerjee's claims a "stunt" to swing the public mood back in her favour. Trinamul supporters took to the streets across West Bengal, protesting against the alleged attack on the chief minister.

TMC supporters raised slogans against the BJP and protested at various places, including Sovabazar and Chetla in Kolkata, and Bally in Howrah. Protests were also held at Asansol in Paschim Bardhaman, Jalpaiguri, North 24 Parganas, Bankura and Paschim Medinipur. "We will continue the protests as our leader was mercilessly attacked in Nandigram. Until now, TMC supporters were being attacked, but today they dared to attack the chief minister," a TMC supporter at the Chetla protest site said. In some areas, TMC workers also burnt tyres and blocked roads. A large number of TMC supporters gathered at the SSKM Hospital in Kolkata as Ms Banerjee was rushed to the medical facility from Nandigram. The TMC supporters raised "go-back" slogans as governor Jagdeep Dhankhar reached the hospital to visit Ms Banerjee. Similar slogans were also raised when Mr Dhankhar left the hospital.

PLA yet to quit

■ Continued from Page 1 Chinese troops had completed disengagement from Pangong Tso in eastern Ladakh after a nine-month standoff. India and China are now discussing the modalities of the second phase of the disengagement in Depsang Plains, Gogra, Hot Springs and Demchok. Adm. Davidson said the current state of the US-India relations presents a historic opportunity to deepen ties and solidify what he considers the "defining partnership of the 21st century".

Quad summit

■ Continued from Page 1 is that we will engage China from a position of strength. And we have spoken to any number of those strengths. To do so, it requires us to work with allies and partners. Again, our system of alliances and partnerships around the world are a core source of strength. That's precisely why they are the envy of competitors and adversaries the world over."



THE ASIAN AGE

11 MARCH 2021

Uncertainty deepens after US move on Afghanistan

The first concrete move from the US side under the new Joseph Biden administration would appear to have deepened uncertainties in respect of the unfolding situation in Afghanistan in the context of the withdrawal of all US troops by May 1 this year, the date set under the Doha accord that the previous Trump administration had reached with the Taliban in February last year.

Ostensibly, India has been brought upfront — along with Pakistan, Russia, China, Iran (the key regional powers) and the US — in fleshing out the roadmap under this approach. For now, however, this seems more notional than real, given the evident conceptual fragility of the idea.

In addition, without putting too fine a point on it, it needs to be underscored that Afghanistan president Ashraf Ghani has given the latest US proposal short shrift. This underlines the complexity of the Afghanistan dynamics, which is all at once imbued with military action, diplomatic moves, and the nursing of ambition by domestic political entities.

Besides, regional powers such as Pakistan, Iran and Russia — and in its own way China, which may be expected to be on the same page as Islamabad in lining up four square behind the Taliban — see a post-US role for themselves that could make life difficult for Afghanistan. It is with Iran that India may enjoy an appreciable measure of tactical congruence and will have to seek to enlarge this space.

In the circumstances, it may be in New Delhi's interest to carefully weigh the situation rather than be in the self-congratulation mode through media projections for being placed in the same bracket by the US as the other key regional powers which, unlike India, have a border with Afghanistan — even if on paper India has not enjoyed a place of such primacy before.

The new American ideas have been placed in peremptory fashion in a letter sent last week by secretary of state Antony Blinken to Afghanistan president Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, Afghanistan's principal peace negotiator with the Taliban. The Taliban as well as the leading political actors inside Afghanistan were made aware of the details by Zalmi Khalilzad, the US envoy for Afghanistan peace who hammered out the Doha accord last year, and has been kept on by President Biden as his point-man to oversee the end-game in Afghanistan.

The Blinken plan, which places New Delhi in a privileged category along with the other key regional players, envisages a UN-sponsored conference in Turkey in the coming weeks to ensure the emergence of a peace deal that will embrace all parties and make for the entry of the Taliban into Afghanistan's government structure as a 50 per cent partner through the device of an interim government.

In effect, such a plan proclaims that the Taliban will enter government with American blessing without contesting an election, although Taliban appears to have orchestrated unprecedented levels of violence for one whole year. President Ghani declared last Saturday, "Transfer of power through elections is a non-negotiable principle for us." It is to be seen what a stalwart such as former President Hamid Karzai — and others — make of the Blinken approach in contrast with that of President Ghani. For all concerned, this is like walking on shards of glass.

Quotas: Let Parliament decide

The Supreme Court has decided to open up the issue of capping the percentage of reservation in government jobs at 50 per cent and whether legislatures are competent to declare a particular caste to be socially and educationally backward. It has sought the opinion of states on the issue.

The court struck on the idea while hearing a petition on the legal validity of the Maharashtra Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Act, 2018, which granted 16 per cent reservation to people of the Maratha community in jobs and admissions. The Supreme Court said it would also hear arguments on whether the landmark Mandal verdict, which capped the quota at 50 per cent, should be re-looked at and referred to a larger bench.

Reservation is essentially a political question; its legal aspects are addressed by Article 15 (4) of the Constitution which empowers the State to make "special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes". It is for the executive and the legislature to decide on the modalities of such provisions with the larger aim of uplifting the underprivileged classes of people.

The court will get the opinion of the state governments based on the position of the parties that run them. There are parties that are uncomfortable with the very idea of reservation while there are others who believe there should be no cap on it. The seminal question is how much they will help the court address the issue of the power of the legislature to implement the constitutional mandate on reservation. The judiciary should ideally limit itself to seeing if the modalities the government introduces are consistent with the larger framework of the Constitution. It should resist the temptation of offering judicial solutions to political problems.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



Afghan trouble looming: Pak likely to make gains



K.C. Singh

US President Joe Biden, within two months of taking charge, has moved with speed to implement his domestic and international agenda. His predecessor's jibe dubbing him "Sleepy Joe" is proving totally wrong. Of concern to India is the United States pushing Afghanistan towards what the draft paper sent to all parties, including the Taliban, calls the "Afghanistan Peace Agreement". Simultaneously, US secretary of state Anthony Blinken wrote to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and senior statesman Abdullah Abdullah, urging acceleration of the entire peace process.

The Biden presidency has directly or indirectly impacted other South Asian developments too. India and Pakistan surprisingly announced restoration of the 2003 ceasefire agreement after two years of heavy exchanges along the Line of Control. India ignored its dictum that no de-escalation with Pakistan was possible till it abandoned the use of terror as an adjunct to diplomacy. Pakistan decided to withdraw its precondition that till India restored the status quo ante in Kashmir, normality couldn't be restored. The US role is more clearly manifest, observing its new exit strategy from the two-decade Afghan conflict.

That the US would treat Pakistan with greater deference than the Trump administration did became clear early after Team Biden began articulating its foreign policy priorities. The retention of Zalmay Khalilzad as US special representative for Afghanistan confirmed continuity rather than innovation in America's Afghan policy. President Trump fathered the deal with the Taliban and declared a complete US troop withdrawal by May 1, 2021. US troop levels are now down to 2,500. Thus, Mr Blinken's letters to the two top Afghan leaders and the draft peace agreement,

despite the letter which concedes "we have not yet completed our review of the way ahead", sets out the future path.

While the letter cajoled President Ghani to cooperate through subtle threats and doomsday scenario, the draft peace agreement specifies the next steps, under three sub-headings. One outlines the guiding principles for a new constitution and the future Afghan state. It envisions a multi-ethnic state and the protection of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The second spells out the possible shape of a transitional government that includes separation of powers. The President will be the commander-in-chief, apparently for the seamless integration of Taliban fighters in today's Afghan Army. He will also retain international relations, perhaps for better coordination with multiple foreign stakeholders, especially regional powers. The third is the need for a "permanent and comprehensive ceasefire".

Two immediate processes are envisaged. One, the United Nations will be urged to convene the foreign ministers and envoys from "Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India and the US". Separately, Turkey will be asked to host a "senior-level meeting of both sides" — the Afghan government and the Taliban, in coming weeks to "finalise a peace agreement". A controversy arose on whether Russia, perhaps on behalf of Pakistan and China, wanted India excluded from the regional group. The old Quadrilateral Coordination Group had the US, Afghanistan, Pakistan and China. Thus, India's inclusion is acceptance that the regional group would lack balance without India, as the interests of China, Pakistan and Russia mostly converge. In any case, India's development assistance to Afghanistan has been exemplary and appreciated by the ordinary Afghan.

Can India engage the Taliban, despite Pakistani objections? The Taliban too will need development aid, which even now is largely channelled in the rural hinterland through them as the government lacks access.

But the United States has unveiled the playing field by scaling back its military presence. The Afghan Army is unable to control anything more than the larger population centres. Even in Kandahar, the country's second-largest city with great symbolic significance for the Taliban, the land access is with the Taliban. Mr Blinken's letter ends with the warning that a US troop withdrawal by May 1 is a possibility and thereafter, even with US financial assistance for the Afghan Army, "the security situation will worsen and that the Taliban could make rapid territorial gains." This is a surrender to the Taliban-Pakistan interests even before a dialogue begins.

This perhaps explains the Pakistan Army accepting a ceasefire at the Line of Control with India. They can see the balance of forces in Afghanistan tilting in their favour. Thus, they are willing to put their Kashmir strategy on hold, trying through a dialogue and America's urgings for the status quo to be restored, while they consolidate their advantage in the west, especially by negating India's role in a post-Ghani Afghanistan. It would be delusional to assume the Pakistan Army has swallowed the altered status quo in J&K.

Indian options are circumscribed by mutated regional geopolitics compared to the late 1990s, after Kabul fell to the Taliban in 1996. First, India-Iran-Russia then had total convergence of strategic interests to ensure that the Taliban couldn't capture northern Afghanistan. The three coordinated to keep the Northern Alliance alive and the Panjshir valley free, while Ahmad Shah Masood lived. Iran's western border was still

blocked by an inimical Saddam Hussein. Today that alliance is one in name only, as shown by the controversy over Russia's role in barring India from the regional grouping. Moreover, Iran's primary strategic interest is in getting US and other sanctions lifted and retaining control over "Shia Crescent" that runs through Shia-majority Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Today the Iran-Taliban ties are workable if not warm, with the Taliban curbing its anti-Shia zeal for the larger strategic goal of reducing its dependence on Pakistan. Iran provides an alternative exit to the open seas, and both distrust the US.

The transition in Afghanistan will be tricky. Taliban tactics of fight-and-talk worked for them, particularly with the US broadcasting its military exit. Why will they accept a "permanent and comprehensive" ceasefire without gaining substantial control over the transitional government? The Afghan government needs money and air cover for special forces, about a quarter of the total army, well trained by the US and doing the critical fighting as the regular forces buckle. India might be able to finance but can hardly replace the US level of air cover with drones, armed helicopters and medivacs. Can India engage the Taliban, despite Pakistani objections? The Taliban too will need development aid, which even now is largely channelled in the rural hinterland through them as the government lacks access. But a constant negative will be the BJP's minority-bashing majoritarian politics and its Kashmir policy. Pakistan will count on that to keep India in the Taliban's bad books. As the US exits, India must redesign its approach to an altered AfPak salient. India's domestic and neighbourhood policies are scraping against each other. The looming Assembly elections, particularly in West Bengal and Assam, will show whether even the Indian masses are tiring of divisive and jingoistic politics.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh.

LETTERS

DESHBHAkti FETISH

This refers to "Delhi govt's 45-cr Deshbhakti budget for Tricolour" (Mar. 10). Politicians are an unenviable ot as they need to be constantly on their toes and stay innovative. Seven decades of an engineered secularism faded out in Ayodhya. Then came an ideological interlude after which, even as a *desh-droh* script is currently playing, adding to the nation's already abundant complexity, a *deshbhakti* budget is in with fanfare and the tri-colour fluttering on a 207-foot mast. We should quickly go for rechristening the Ahmedabad cricket arena as Bharat Stadium. Else, a bigger one will be sought to be built in Delhi.

R. Narayanan  
Navi Mumbai

SUVENDU'S LOGIC

ACCORDING TO Trinamul-turned-BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari, West Bengal would become another Kashmir if his former party is brought back to power! But hasn't Kashmir at last turned "Paradise" in August 2019 as soon as Article 370 got abrogated albeit unilaterally with the state's fragmentation and demotion to Union territory? So if the Trinamul's retention of power in the state guarantees "promotion" of "violent lawless" Bengal to "Paradise", what's the harm? Shouldn't the "nationalist" BJP support TMC for the sake of peace in Bengal which is also perhaps an integral part of India? Any answers, Mr Adhikari?

Kajal Chatterjee  
Kolkata

GOOD MOVE, CPM

THE RULING CPI(M) in Kerala, on Wednesday, released the list of candidates for April 6 Assembly elections, dropping five senior ministers and 33 sitting legislators. It is a wise decision to field many fresh faces to beat the incumbency factor. In the local body elections in December the CPM-led LDF got phenomenal success by fielding many youngsters.

Sankar Paul  
Chakdaha, West Bengal

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



Mahir Ali

Crippled inside: Royal family's racism isn't its biggest problem

I recall staying up late more than a quarter-century ago to watch Diana's BBC interview with Martin Bashir. I couldn't be bothered to repeat the experience with her son Harry and his wife Meghan Markle's "tell-all" chat with Oprah Winfrey.

Bashir has been accused of deception in obtaining the interview. It was nonetheless fascinating, as the first instance of a senior member of Britain's most elite institution laying bare the royal family's dysfunction. "There were three of us in this marriage," Diana complained about her husband's relentless infatuation with the woman his family didn't allow him to marry.

At least not until the princess of Wales succumbed to her injuries in a car crash two years later. Diana's status as an "outsider" has been compared with that of Meghan. The parallels are limited. The ill-fated Diana-Charles match was in effect an arranged marriage between a nubile teenager and a considerably older heir apparent, a decorative

decision rather than the culmination of a fairytale romance.

Diana may not have been blue-blooded, but she was the daughter of a trusted viscount and former royal equerry. Meghan is a biracial actress from the other side of the Atlantic with a divorce behind her. Both of them, one might say, left one dysfunctional family to enter another, but beyond that, the commonalities mostly reside in media hype.

Hundreds of millions of women, young or otherwise, experience trials and tribulations with their in-laws. The unfortunate experiences of Diana and Meghan don't even come close to the frequently fatal ordeals of targeted brides in the sub-continent. And there's no good reason why any one family's experience or ordeal should be elevated above others.

On the other hand, not every family doubles as a political institution. The Windsors are by no means globally unique in this respect, except insofar as at least the senior-most members of the family interfere in

political affairs. Just last month, a series of investigative reports in *The Guardian* pointed to a history of royal involvement in framing legislation, which shows the Windsors to be particularly wary of revealing the extent of their wealth.

The British royal family is symbolic of the feudalism that persists in a nation that purports to be a model democracy, boasting "the mother of parliaments". In several other countries there are debates about how the upper house of parliament is elected, and whether the process is democratic. In Britain the upper house is selected.

The proportion of hereditary peers has diminished in recent decades, but even life peers are appointed by the monarch, albeit usually on the advice of the government of the day. Mind you, the chamber — the only upper house in any bicameral parliament in the world to be larger than the lower house — includes the bishops and archbishops of the Church of England. As for the separation of church and state, suffice it

to say that the head of state — the monarch — is also the supreme governor of the Church of England. That's hardly a barrier, though, to un-Christian ideas and practices among the royal family.

Perhaps the most publicised "take-away" from Meghan and Harry's conversation with Oprah relates to racism. There was hostile speculation among one or more members of the royal family, apparently, about the skin colour of the couple's offspring. The duke and duchess (as they still are) refused to reveal the identity of the culprit/s, but made clear that it was neither the queen nor her husband — whose racist observations over the decades are infamous.

It may also be worth recalling that the present monarch is only a generation removed from an uncle who taught her to flash the Nazi salute. But neither the ideological inclinations nor the racial preferences of the royal family are the biggest issue. It's the feudal institution itself that's an absurd anomaly in

the 21st century, as its subjects — not just in Britain, but in Canada, Australia and New Zealand — will sooner or later realise, collectively or one by one.

To some people, this was clear centuries ago. Percy Bysshe Shelley was bold but hardly innovative in penning the sonnet *England in 1819*, in which he decried princes as "the dregs of their dull race, who flow/ Through public scorn — mud from a muddy spring".

Perhaps the most apposite precursor to the Harry-Meghan saga is that of another celebrity couple hounded out of Britain by racists 50 years ago. The same year, one of them put on record a bunch of timeless thoughts, including the verses: "You can go to church and sing a hymn/ You can judge me by the colour of my skin/ You can live a lie until you die/ One thing you can't hide/ Is when you're crippled inside."

By arrangement with Dawn



## SHORT TAKES

## U.S. 'HYPING UP' TAIWAN INVADE THREAT: CHINA

**Beijing, March 10:** China on Wednesday accused a top US commander of attempting to "hype up" the threat of an invasion of Taiwan to inflate Washington's defence spend and justify its own military chicanery in Asia.

The US' top military officer in Asia-Pacific, Admiral Philip Davidson, on Tuesday said China could invade Taiwan within the next six years, as Beijing accelerates its moves to supplant American military power in Asia. "Some US people continue to use the Taiwan issue to hype up China's military threat," foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters in Beijing.

## PLAN TO ATTACK JEWS: MAN HELD IN SINGAPORE

**Singapore, March 10:** Singapore has detained a full-time national serviceman (NSF) for planning to carry out a knife attack against Jews at a local synagogue, according to a media report on Wednesday.

Singaporean Amirull Ali, 20, had also made plans to travel to Gaza, Palestine, to join the military wing of Hamas in its fight against Israel, the Internal Security Department said.

Amirull was self-radicalised with a deep hatred for Israel after being convinced that Palestinians were being oppressed in the Israel-Palestine conflict, the ISD said.

He was arrested on February 5 while he was an NSF, a compulsory military service for young Singaporeans in the Singapore Armed Forces.

## N. KOREAN TO BE EXTRADITED TO THE U.S.

**Kuala Lumpur, March 10:** Malaysia's top court ruled that a North Korean man can be extradited to the United States to face money laundering charges, rejecting his assertion that the US charge was politically motivated.

The Federal Court on Tuesday refused to accept Mun Chol Myong's arguments because it was not a trial, and agreed with a lower court that prosecutors had followed procedures, said defence lawyer Gooi Soon Seng.

Mun, who is in his 50s, has lived in Malaysia for a decade and was arrested in May 2019 after US authorities requested his extradition.

Malaysia's government approved the extradition, but Mun challenged the US bid.

## NON-MUSLIMS CAN USE 'ALLAH': MALAYSIA COURT

**Kuala Lumpur, March 10:** A Malaysian court ruled on Wednesday that non-Muslims can use the word "Allah" to refer to God, in a major decision in a divisive issue for religious freedom in the Muslim-majority country.

The High Court decision squashed a 35-year-old government ban on the usage of Allah and three other Arabic words by Christian publications, deeming the ban unconstitutional, said the plaintiff's lawyer, Annou Xavier. The government has previously said Allah should be reserved exclusively for Muslims to avoid confusion that could lead them to convert to other religions, a stance that is unique to Malaysia and hasn't been an issue in other Muslim-majority nations.

## YOUTHS ATTACK ATHENS PS WITH PETROL BOMBS

**Athens, March 10:** Greek youths protesting an incident of police violence attacked an Athens police station with petrol bombs and severely injured one officer on Tuesday.

The violence came during a march by several thousand people in the southern Nea Smyrni district. Greek media said dozens of people attacked a motorcycle police officer with stones and clubs, severely injuring him.

Earlier, police said they had confiscated quantities of petrol bombs at the beginning of the protest. They said several participants in the march were armed with iron bars. The march to the Nea Smyrni police station was in reaction to an incident on Sunday during police enforcement of virus lockdown measures in a square in the Nea Smyrni area.

## Royal remarks raise race issue in C'wealth

**Cape Town, March 10:** In countries with historic ties to Britain, allegations by Prince Harry and Meghan that an unnamed member of the royal family had "concerns" over how dark their unborn baby's skin might be have raised a thorny question: Do those nations really want to be so closely connected to Britain and its royal family anymore? It was expected the interview would expose more rifts in the royal family. Now it seems to be risking divisions within the "family" of the Commonwealth — an association of 54 countries, most of them former British colonies, held together by historic ties.

For decades, Queen Elizabeth II has been the driving force behind the Commonwealth. After the TV interview, shown in the US on the eve of Commonwealth Day, former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull cited it as another reason for the country to sever its constitutional ties to the British monarchy.

"After the end of the queen's reign, that is the time for us to say: OK, we've passed that watershed," Turnbull told Austr-

## UK TALK SHOW HOST QUILTS OVER MEGHAN COMMENT

**London, March 10:** British talk show host Piers Morgan has quit the show "Good Morning Britain" after making controversial comments about the Duchess of Sussex.

The UK's media watchdog said earlier Tuesday that it was launching an investigation into the show under its harm and offence rules after receiving more than 41,000 complaints about his comments on Meghan.

alian Broadcasting Corp.

"Do we really want to have whoever happens to be the head of state, the king or queen of the UK, automatically our head of state?" The value of the Commonwealth has been debated before, with critics questioning if countries and people once colonised — and even oppressed — should remain in such an association with a former coloniser.

— AP

## EU-UK ties dip over 'vaccine ban' comments

**Brussels, March 10:** Relations between the European Union and recently departed Britain took another diplomatic dip on Wednesday when the EU envoy in London was summoned to explain comments that Britain had issued a vaccine export ban. The United Kingdom was so irate about Tuesday's comments from European Council President Charles Michel that Britain had "imposed an outright ban on the export of vaccines," that it called in the ambassador for a morning meeting.

A British government statement said that it "has not blocked the export of a single Covid-19 vaccine. Any references to a UK export ban or any restrictions on vaccines are completely false." The spat comes against a background that the Covid-19 vaccination drive in Britain is seen as a huge success while that in the 27-nation bloc has been a major failure.

The United Kingdom has given about 35 per cent of its adults a vaccine shot while the EU is further back with 9.5 per

## PAK TO CLOSE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

**Islamabad, March 10:** Pakistan announced on Wednesday that all educational institutions in cities worst hit due to the Coronavirus pandemic will be closed down from March 15 for two weeks due to a surge in Covid-19 cases in the country.

Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood announced the decision after the National Command and Control Centre (NCOC) reviewed the Coronavirus situation at educational institutions.

— PTI

cent. Already uneasy bedfellows during Britain's 47 years of EU membership, thing got progressively worse since the 2016 referendum when the United Kingdom voted to leave the bloc. After acrimonious departure talks, the split became official last year.

— AP

## YAHYA SINWAR RE-ELECTED GAZA HAMAS CHIEF

**Gaza City, March 10:** Yahya Sinwar was re-elected Wednesday as the head of Hamas's political wing in Gaza, extending his tenure as the Islamist movement's de facto leader in the Israeli-blockaded Palestinian enclave, Hamas said.

Sinwar, a former commander of Hamas's military branch, served more than two decades in an Israeli prison before he was released in 2011 as a part of a prisoner exchange.

First elected to the post in 2017, he faced four challengers this time, including Nizar Awadallah, the former head of Hamas's advisory Shura Council. Hamas's overall chief Ismail Haniyeh, currently based in Qatar, congratulated Sinwar in a statement. "The movement's commitment to (internal) elections every four years confirms our deep faith in the principle of rotating power," Haniyeh said.

Sinwar's re-election comes ahead of May 22 Palestinian legislative polls. The Islamist group is considered a terrorist organisation by much of the Western world.

— AFP

## Protesters adapt tactics after Myanmar police use violence

Forces' crackdown has failed to slow protests against the Feb. 1 coup

**Mandalay, March 10:** Protesters against the military takeover in Myanmar carried homemade shields and moved with more caution and agility Tuesday, adapting their tactics to the escalating violence from security forces not reluctant to use lethal force to break up crowds.

In Mandalay, the nation's second-largest city, about a thousand demonstrators emerged onto the streets, those in the vanguard carrying shields marked with a three-fingered salute, the movement's symbol of defiance. They marched for just a few minutes before dispersing to avoid a possible confrontation with riot police. Another group made a mobile protest, driving through the streets on motorbikes.

Security forces trying to stop people from gathering have used water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets most often, but also have fired live ammunition at crowds. The crackdown has left more than 60 protesters dead but has failed to slow the widespread protests against the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

A school principal involved in the protest movement died Tuesday from unknown causes after being taken into custody by security forces, according to media reports and an activist who knew him. The death of Zaw Myat Lin in custody was the second in recent days.

— AP



Anti-coup protesters retreat from the frontlines after discharging fire extinguishers towards a line of riot policemen in Yangon, Myanmar, on Wednesday.

— AP

## ● MYANMAR SECURITY forces on Wednesday

raided the Mingalar Taung Nyunt neighbourhood in Yangon that houses state railway workers who have gone on strike to protest the coup. Photos, video showed officers blocking streets and people escaping. At least three arrests were reported.

## BIMSTEC MEET: LANKA INVITES MYANMAR FM, TRIGGERS ROW

**Colombo, March 10:** Sri Lanka has invited the new foreign minister of Myanmar's junta to the BIMSTEC ministerial meeting next month, triggering a controversy that it is endorsing the military coup in that nation. Sri Lanka has neither endorsed or rejected the recognition of the

military regime which topped Myanmar's elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi's government on Feb. 1, just as it was to start its second term. The coup reversed years of slow progress toward democracy after five decades of military rule.

Sri Lanka's FM Dinesh Gunawardena invited the

military regime's FM Wunna Maung Lwin, for a virtual meeting of the FMs of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand under the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) on April 1.

— PTI

## Biden administration will not defend Trump immigration rule

## FBI releases new video after bombs left at RNC, DNC offices

**Washington, March 10:** The FBI has released new video showing someone placing two pipe bombs outside the offices of the Republican and Democratic national committees the night before the Jan. 6 riot at the US Capitol.

The explosive devices were placed outside the two buildings between 7:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. on Jan. 5 and were located by law enforcement the next day.

outgrowth of the Biden administration's effort to undo Trump administration immigration policies. The new administration recently dismissed high court appeals over for-

mer President Donald Trump's effort to deny funding to so-called sanctuary communities.

The justices, at the administration's request, also put off cases they had

onal Committee headquarters nearby. The bombs were rendered safe, and no one was hurt.

The video, released Tuesday, shows a person in a gray hooded sweatshirt, a face mask and gloves appearing to place one of the explosives under a bench outside the DNC and separately shows the person walking in an alley near the RNC before the bomb was placed there.

— AP



Yusuf Raza Gilani

## PAK HC REJECTS PLEA AGAINST GILANI POLL WIN

**Islamabad, March 10:** The Islamabad High Court on Wednesday rejected a petition by Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party challenging former premier Yusuf Raza Gilani's upset win in the Senate elections, ruling that it was not appropriate to "unnecessarily drag" the judiciary in political matters.

Gilani, who contested the Senate election as a Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) candidate, defeated ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) candidate and Finance Minister Abdul Hafeez Shaikh by securing 169 votes against 164 votes by Shaikh on Wednesday, giving a major blow to Prime Minister Imran Khan who had personally campaigned for his Cabinet colleague.

The Opposition had demanded the prime minister's resignation after the debacle following which Khan decided to take a vote of confidence on Saturday which he won comfortably. The Islamabad High Court (IHC) heard a plea by PTI lawmaker Ali Nawaz.

— PTI

## No China role in Dalai succession: US

**Washington, March 10:** The Chinese government should have no role in the succession process of Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, the Biden Administration said on Tuesday.

"We believe that the Chinese government should have no role in the succession process of the Dalai Lama," State Department Spokesperson Ned

Price told reporters at his daily news conference.

"Beijing's interference in the succession of the Panchen Lama more than 25 years ago, including by 'disappearing' the Panchen Lama as a child and attempting to replace him with a PRC (People's Republic of China) government-chosen successor, it remains an outrageous abuse of religious

freedom," Price said.

Previous president Donald Trump in December had signed into law a bill which called for establishing a US consulate in Tibet and building an international coalition to ensure that the next Dalai Lama is appointed solely by Tibetan Buddhist community without China's interference.

It is the policy of the

United States to take all appropriate measures to hold accountable senior officials of the Chinese government or the Chinese Communist Party who directly interfere with the identification and installation of the future 15th Dalai Lama of Tibetan Buddhism, successor to the 14th Dalai Lama, the act said.

— PTI

## NEW | STUDY

During intervals without virus curbs, infection rates were four per cent higher

## Higher airborne pollen levels behind Covid risk

**Berlin, March 10:** Higher concentration of airborne pollen is associated with increased novel Coronavirus infection rates, according to a study that used data from 31 countries across five continents.

Researchers at the Technical University of Munich (TUM) and the Helmholtz Zentrum Munchen in Germany noted that people in high-risk groups can protect themselves by watching pollen forecasts and wearing dust filter masks. The team collected data on airborne pollen concentrations, weather conditions and SARS-CoV-2 infections, taking into

consideration the variation of infection rates from one day to another, and the total number of positive tests. The researchers also included data on population density and the effects of lockdown measures.

The study, published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, analysed pollen data from 130 stations in 31 countries on five continents. The team showed that airborne pollen can account for, on average, 44 per cent of the variation in infection rates, with humidity and air temperature also playing a role in some cases.

● **THE STUDY**, published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, analysed pollen data from 130 stations in 31 countries on five continents.

During intervals without lockdown regulations, infection rates were on average four per cent higher with every increase of 100 grains of airborne pollen per cubic metre, the researchers said. In some German cities, concentrations of up to 500 pollen grains per cubic metre per day led to an overall increase in infection rates of more

than 20 per cent, they said. However, in the regions where lockdown rules were in effect, the infection numbers were on average only half as high at comparable pollen concentrations, according to the study. The researchers explained that high pollen concentrations lead to a weaker immune response in airways to viruses that can cause coughs and colds. They noted that when a virus enters the body, infected cells usually send out messenger proteins, adding this is also the case with SARS-CoV-2.

These proteins, known as antiviral interferons, signal nearby cells to escalate their antiviral defences to keep the invaders at bay. Additionally, an appropriate inflammation response is activated to fight the viruses, according to the researchers.

However, the researchers said, if airborne pollen concentrations are high, and pollen grains are inhaled with the virus particles, fewer antiviral interferons are generated. The beneficial inflammatory response itself is also affected, they said. The study suggests that high concentration of pollen can lead to an increase in the number of respiratory illness-

es, including Covid-19.

Whether individuals are allergic to the different pollen types is irrelevant, the researchers said. "You cannot avoid exposure to airborne pollen," says Stefanie Gilles, first author of the study. "People in high-risk groups should, therefore, be informed that high levels of airborne pollen concentrations lead to an increased susceptibility to viral respiratory tract infections," Gilles said.

The researchers noted that when studying the spread of SARS-CoV-2, environmental factors such as pollen must be taken into account.

— PTI



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,279.51	0.50
Nifty 50	15,174.80	0.51
S&P 500*	3,900.17	0.64
Dollar (₹)	72.91	0.02
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.12	0.22
Euro (₹)	86.63	0.24
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,286▲112	0.25
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.85	0.49
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.247	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.540	-0.004

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Telecos can instal only govt approved gears

The amended telecom licence norms will enable the government to control the installation of network equipment from non-trusted sources. With effect from June 15, telecom operators will be required to take permission from the National Cyber Security Coordinator (NCSC) for up-gradation of existing networks. The NCSC can impose conditions for the procurement of telecom equipment.

Over 1.54 L gram panchayats have high-speed net



Over 1.54 lakh gram panchayats are now ready to provide high-speed broadband services under the BharatNet project, telecom minister Ravi Shankar Prasad informed Parliament. Out of 5,97,618 inhabited villages in the country, a total of 5,58,537 villages have 3G or 4G mobile wireless coverage. BharatNet project is being implemented to connect all the GPs (about 2.5 lakh) by broadband/high-speed infra, he said.

Easy Trip Planners IPO subscribed 159 times

Easy Trip Planners' initial public offering was subscribed 159.33 times on the last day of subscription. The Rs 510-crore issue received bids for over 240.27 crore shares against more than 1.50 crore shares on offer. The category meant for qualified institutional buyers (QIBs) was subscribed 77.53 times, while those for non-institutional investors 382.21 times and retail individual investors 70.40 times.

Joyalukkas, IBM tie up for e-com in 11 countries

Joyalukkas, a leading jewellery retailer, has collaborated with IBM Global Business Services to design, develop and deploy a new cloud native e-commerce platform across 11 countries, including the UAE, USA, UK, Singapore, Malaysia, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Oman. IBM has developed for Joyalukkas a cloud enabled e-commerce platform for the retailer's evolving jewellery business.

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■ Restrictions on bank end after 4 years

IDBI Bank out of PCA framework

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MARCH 10

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday announced that it has decided to take LIC-owned IDBI Bank out of its prompt corrective action (PCA) framework following an improvement in its financial performance.

This follows a review of IDBI Bank by the Board for Financial Supervision in its meeting held on February 18, the RBI said.

IDBI Bank was placed under the PCA framework in 2017 over its high bad loans and negative return on assets.

In the latest quarter, as of December 31, 2020, IDBI Bank's gross bad loans stood at 23.52 per cent of gross advances.

"The performance of IDBI Bank Limited, currently under the Prompt Corrective Action Framework (PCAF) of RBI, was reviewed by the Board for Financial Supervision (BFS) in its meeting held on February 18, 2021," the apex bank said in a release.

"It was noted that as per published results for the quarter ending December 31, 2020 the bank is not in breach of the PCA parameters on regulatory capital, Net NPA and Leverage ratio," the RBI said.

The central bank said that IDBI Bank has provided a written commitment that it would comply with the norms of minimum regulatory capital, Net NPA and Leverage ratio on an ongoing basis and has



- ▶ IDBI Bank was placed under the PCA framework in 2017 over its high bad loans and negative return on assets
- ▶ The bank has met three out of four key criteria needed to exit the PCA
- ▶ Its net NPA has stayed under 6% for 5 quarters

apprised the central bank of the structural and systemic improvements that it has put in place which would help the bank in continuing to meet these commitments.

"Taking all the above into consideration, it has been decided that IDBI Bank Limited be taken out of the PCA framework, subject to certain conditions and continuous monitoring," the RBI said.

The bank has met three out of four key criteria needed to exit the PCA. Its net NPA has remained under 6 per cent for five consecutive quarters, capital adequacy ratio has remained above the regulatory minimum of 11.5 per cent for five quarters with Tier 1 capital ratio above 8

per cent. Its leverage ratio stood at 5.71 per cent at the end of the third quarter, above the 4 per cent threshold under the PCA.

Under the PCA framework, the RBI takes regulatory action if a bank overshoots the prescribed limits on bad loans or fails to comply with capital adequacy ratios. In simple terms, if the financial and operating indicators of a bank weaken below a prescribed level, the PCA could be triggered where the RBI may require a bank to take mandatory corrective actions such as raising capital levels, restricting dividend payments, and restricting branch expansions or face restrictions on management compensation, among other measures.

Arunachalam moves NCLT against Murugappa

FC BUREAU CHENNAI, MARCH 10

Continuing her fight against the Rs 38,000-crore Murugappa Group, Valli Arunachalam, daughter of former Murugappa Group chairman M.V. Murugappan, has approached the NCLT Chennai, seeking a waiver of the minimum shareholding requirement for filing a case against the group for alleged mismanagement and oppression.

Her family owns 8.21 per cent in Ambadi Investments, the flagship company of Murugappa Group. But only a party with at least 10 per cent shareholding can move a case on grounds of oppression and mismanagement.

If the waiver is granted, Arunachalam can sue group holding company Ambadi Investments for alleged oppression and mismanagement. Earlier, she had sent a legal notice to Murugappa family members after she was denied a board seat at Ambadi Investments.

Murugappa Group is a family-run business conglomerate that never had a female member from the family on the board. Arunachalam has been fighting for this for the last three years.

Arunachalam's plea for equal representation in the company's affairs has been denied since her father's demise a few years back.

Malls set to sport Trusted Shopping Centre mark

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 10

If all goes according to the designs of a shopping centres' body, malls and shopping centres that comply with standard safety and hygiene standards will soon sport a 'Trusted Shopping Centre' tag, which will help customers to step into the complex with confidence.

The Shopping Centres Association of India (SCAI) has launched a certification programme for malls and shopping centres, but all the retailers are very enthusiastic about the proposal fearing high compliance cost.

The association has launched consumer-centric certification under the existing IRF Trusted Mark Certification scheme, which is a third-party certification on cus-



tomer service metrics and benchmarks, and will be audited by National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies under the Quality Council of India.

The certification scheme will incorporate 'new normal' checklists like compliance of safety and hygiene measures by retailers and shopping centres. These checklists will be based on guidelines of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and standard operating procedures (SOPs) specifically devel-

oped by respective trade bodies for retailers across all formats, categories and channels.

"The Indian market has 650 large and over 1,000 small shopping centres offering organised retail environment to shoppers and this 'Trusted Shopping Centre' mark certification...has been introduced to step ahead in setting global best practices towards customer services," said Amitabh Taneja, chairman, SCAI.

But some retailers don't find value in the certification. "All the retailers in a mall will have to adhere to the standards. There will also be a cost involved in getting the certification. I don't think customers come to a mall on the basis of certification. We don't see much value in it," said a retail chain executive.

NTPC's 217 MW floating solar plants by June

FC BUREAU HYDERABAD, MARCH 10

State-run power major NTPC's southern region is gearing up to commission about 217 MW floating solar capacity, including floating plants of 100 MW at Ramagundam, this summer, a senior official said on Wednesday.

In a virtual interaction, NTPC regional executive director (south) C. V. Anand said, the capacity involves three projects in the region; "100 MW at Ramagundam, 25 MW at Simhadri, Visakhapat-



nam, 92 MW at Kayamkulam, Kerala. So, these are the floating solar we have taken up right now," he said.

A 230 MW ground solar project is also being established at Ettayapuram near Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu, according to a com-

pany release.

"Time schedule for floating solar is somewhere this financial year beginning, say May-June; by the time this all will be commissioned," Anand said.

Floating solar, he said, is a new concept and it does not require additional land.

He said the projects utilise existing water reservoirs of the company at its plants.

NTPC said the company has a significant presence in the southern region with a total installed capacity of 9125 MW.

US ban on Chinese cotton opens long-term opportunity for India

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 10

The US ban on import of cotton from China's Xinjiang has opened up an opportunity for Indian cotton products. However, import duty on cotton and delay in announcing RoDTEP rates is affecting the competitiveness of Indian cotton products in the global market.

The US had announced an import ban on all cotton and tomato products from western China's Xinjiang region in January over allegations that they are made using forced labour of detained Uighur Muslims. Xinjiang accounts for 60 per cent of China's cotton products exports. China has a leading 36 per cent share of global textile exports and the ban will have a major impact on Chinese exports.

"This is a big opportunity for other textile exporters, including India. India being a strong player in cotton, it has to grab this opportunity, else it will lose out to countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia and Vietnam," said Kailash Lalpuria, executive direc-



tor and CEO, Indo Count.

According to Sanjay Jain, an industry veteran, garments and home textiles stand to gain from China's loss. We have a potential to double the exports of value-added cotton products. We will have to invest in world-class manufacturing facilities and increase capacities to grab this opportunity. Increased investments in garment units will help increase production in six months," he said.

However, Indian cotton products are not competitive enough in the global market and the recently imposed import duty on raw cotton has made domestic products even more costly. The recent Budget had imposed 5 per cent basic customs duty and another 5 per cent Agriculture Infrastructure

and Development Cess on cotton.

The cotton textile industry has to import extra long staple (ELS) cotton, organic cotton and contamination-free cotton to the tune of 10 to 12 lakh bales per year. India produces just 3 per cent of its consumption and has to import the deficit to meet the consumption requirements.

"This imported cotton is used for making premium products with high levels of value addition. Increase in the raw material cost will make our products costlier compared to that of our competitors," said Lalpuria.

Further, exporters are not able to price in refund under the RoDTEP scheme in their products, as the rates have not been announced. "The previous MEIS scheme was stopped and the RoDTEP scheme was introduced on January 1, 2021. It has been more than two months now and the government has not announced the rates for different products. Without knowing the rates, we are not able to quote the prices," said Jain.

INDIAN TECH STOCKS PLAY CATCH WITH US TECH RALLY



RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 10

Indian tech stocks rallied on Wednesday after mammoth overnight gains of 3.69 per cent in the US tech stock index Nasdaq Composite and 4.03 per cent in Nasdaq 100, as US bond yields trended lower after a well-received US debt auction and the path cleared for a \$1.9 trillion Covid-19 relief bill.

IT stocks outperformed Sensex and Nifty's gain of 0.5 per cent. The BSE IT Index gained 1.58 per cent while NSE's Nifty IT Index gained 1.67 per cent.

Mid-cap IT stocks gained more than the large-cap IT names.

The top gainers among Nifty IT Index were L&T Infotech (6.30 per cent), Coforge (earlier NIIT Technologies) (5.82 per cent), Mindtree (5.38 per cent) and Mphasis (3.43 per cent).

The large-cap gainers included Wipro (1.57 per cent), Infosys (1.56 per cent) and HCL Technologies (1.42 per cent).

"With Technology stocks doing well on the Nasdaq stock market, the day clearly belonged to Midcap IT as the street demonstrated increased appetite today for Technology," said S. Ranganathan, head of research, LKP Securities.

"Global cues were positive as bond yields pulled back following a well-received US debt auction, thus easing concerns about rising inflation. The US House of Representatives voted to advance President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion Covid-19 relief bill, clearing the way for the measure to be considered on Wednesday, when it is expected to pass," said Siddhartha Khemka, head-retail research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

QUANTITY | PLAY

High share of raw materials in exports trimming realisation

Plastic exports lag in value addition

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 10

In plastic exports, India has been able to grab a slot in the top-10 global ranking in volume terms. However, its ranking falls into the top-20 when it comes to value of trade, indicating a huge gap in value addition. Industry experts say a high share of raw materials in exports is the main reason for India's lower ranking in value terms.

The country occupies seventh position in the global ranking behind major exporters like China, the US and Germany in plastic goods shipping when considered volume-wise. But in value of exports, the



country drops steeply to the 18th position, according to a study by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, or Unctad.

The lag in value compared to volume is prominent in intermediate forms of plastics, intermediate manufactured goods, final manufactured goods and synthetic textiles. In the case of

intermediate forms of plastics, it is 6th in volume of exports but 15th in value.

"The problem lies in value addition. While our total exports are valued over \$11 billion, almost \$6 billion comes from export of raw materials and about \$5.5 billion from finished goods. When more than 50 per cent of our exports consist of

raw materials, their trade will fetch lesser value compared to countries which ship finished goods," said Deepak Ballani, director general of All-India Plastic Manufacturers' Association.

According to Ballani, the industry understands that it should focus on value addition, as it brings better revenues for the exported goods as well as create more jobs. "However, we are not able to compete with countries like China, which can churn out products much faster than us."

There are over 50,000 units producing plastic products and 95 per cent of them are micro, small and medium enterprises.

Procuring the latest technology both in terms of software and equipment is a pain point for these smaller companies. Further, they are not able to attract adequate finance for adapting the latest technologies and scaling up production.

Moreover, better prices in the international market forces the raw material and intermediate product makers to rather export their goods than sell them locally to the manufacturer of finished goods.

Higher duty on some of the raw materials is also affecting the competitiveness of the manufacturer of finished goods. The pandemic has further worsened the shortage of raw materials.



## SHORT TAKES

## Hyderabad FC rope in Hitesh

**Hyderabad:** Young midfielder Hitesh Sharma has signed a two-year contract extension with Indian Super League (ISL) side Hyderabad FC, the club said on Wednesday. "I am really proud and happy to have signed this contract with Hyderabad FC," said Hitesh. "I believe that we have the best players, the best management and the best coaches we can ask for at the club and I hope to continue the hard work for years to come," he added. The 23-year-old, who joined Hyderabad FC in January 2020, played a crucial role in the side's fight for a place in the top-4 this league campaign. He made 15 appearances (13 starts) and grew into a regular in the first team under head coach Manolo Marquez this season. He played a total of 1,060 minutes in the season, which remains his busiest league campaign in his career. — PTI

## Mohammedan SC held by Punjab

**Kolkata:** Punjab FC snatched a remarkable 3-3 draw after Mohammedan SC scored two goals in as many minutes in the second half in a thrilling I-League clash here on Wednesday. Chenchu Gleytshen's brace was cancelled out by Faisal Ali and Pedro Manzi strikes in the second half. Azharuddin Mallick then gave Mohammedan the lead again only for Ashish Jha to score the equaliser for Punjab in the 88th minute. Punjab FC showed intent and played like they had to prove something, in the opening minutes of the match. In the 34th minute, Chenchu headed home from inside of the box after he was found by a Pritam Singh cross. Punjab FC wasted little time in the second half and doubled their lead just seconds into the half. In the 46th minute, Chenchu was found by a cross and the forward unleashed a swirling finesse shot that crashed into the back of the net. — PTI

## Indian team set for Le Mans race

**New Delhi:** Racing Team India is set to become the first all-Indian-driver team to race in the iconic 24 Hours of Le Mans, after having been granted a provisional entry for this year's edition of the twice-round-the-clock classic. The team, which features an all-Indian driver line up of Narain Karthikeyan, Arjun Maini and Naveen Rao, will compete in the LMP2-AM category of the iconic race. The No. 74 car will be prepared and run by Eurasia Motorsport, making it a true-blue Asian effort. Padma Shri awardee and India's first Formula One driver Narain Karthikeyan said, "This is a proud moment not just for our team, but for our nation as a whole. Racing at Le Mans with an Indian team is a dream I have nurtured since 2009 when I first visited the Circuit de la Sarthe. I would like to thank all of our sponsors and partners, and especially the ACO and the Asian Le Mans Series team."

## Sharath crashes in quarterfinals

**Doha:** Veteran Sharath Kamal bowed out of the World Table Tennis Star Contender series after going down in straight games to World No. 12 Dmitrij Ovtcharov in the men's singles pre-quarterfinals here on Wednesday. Sharath, ranked 32nd, lost 9-11 8-11, 6-11 to the German in a lop-sided contest. Sharath showed consistency in the first game against Dmitrij, who recently won the WTT Contenders title, and came close. But he could never get under the skin of a man who was in superb form. He looked good again the second but could not overcome the blues. In the end, the third game was so easy for the German that he didn't need to make any extra effort to complete the task. Dmitrij will take on Swede Anton Kallberg in the quarterfinals on Thursday. — PTI

## Live on TV

## CRICKET

**Vijay Hazare Trophy:** Semifinal from 9 am on Star Sports 1, HD

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## NATS AND BOLTS

## Varun fails fitness test as injured Natarajan is at NCA

**Ahmedabad, March 10:** Leg-spinner Varun Chakravarthi's failure to clear fitness tests has ruled him out while pacer T. Natarajan is racing against time to be battle-ready, making him doubtful for at least the early part of India's five-match T20 series against England starting here on Friday. Chakravarthi has repeatedly failed to clear the fitness test at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru while yorker specialist Natarajan is yet to join the squad here due to an apparent "shoulder niggle".

"Varun Chakravarthi was selected because he recovered from his shoulder injury that ruled him out of the Australia series. He did his rehab at the NCA and started throwing normally."

"However, he has failed to clear the YoYo test mark stipulated for a 2km run at least twice," a senior BCCI source said.

The question now being asked is why did the Chetan Sharma led committee select such a player, who, after the month of October, hasn't played even one competitive game for his state Tamil Nadu.

"We can understand he was doing his rehab during Mushtaq Ali (T20 Championship). But then again, he didn't play a single Vijay Hazare Trophy game. How do you assess his match fitness based on games that he played five months back? I guess Varun Chakravarthi is a lesson for selectors," said the source.

"If a player is generally not maintaining the standards set by this Indian team, his bowling alone can't be a criteria for selection," the source added.

It is learnt that Rahul Chahar will be inducted in the squad as he is already in the bio-bubble since the start of the Test series.

In case of Natarajan, the NCA medical staff is trying to get him fit or at least the later part of the



India pacer T. Natarajan in this file photo

series. Rahul Tewatia is training with the Indian team in Ahmedabad as he awaits his second fitness Test results.

## INDIA LEAP TO NO.2 IN T20 RANKINGS

India climbed a spot to second in the latest ICC men's T20 International team rankings ahead of a five-match series against top-placed England beginning on March 12.

England are seven points ahead of India, who were third before the away series against Australia. Australia's 2-3 loss to New Zealand in a recent five-game series pushed the side below India with just one point.

In the T20 batting chart, India batsman KL Rahul lost a place to be at the third spot but skipper Virat Kohli retained his sixth position. — PTI

## Southampton to host the India vs Kiwis WTC final

**Dubai, March 10:** The International Cricket Council on Wednesday formally announced that Southampton will host the inaugural World Test Championship final between India and New Zealand in June and a limited number of fans could be allowed if the easing of lockdown in the UK continues.

"Should the UK government's phased easing of Covid-19 lockdown measures proceed as planned, it is anticipated that a limited number of fans will be allowed into the Hampshire Bowl to watch the final," the ICC statement read.

Initially, the final was supposed to be held at the Lord's but the ICC Board and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) decided to change the venue to ensure that the fixture could be staged safely with the potential impact of Covid-19 minimised for all involved.

"In selecting the Hampshire Bowl, the ICC drew on ECB's experience of delivering a full summer of bio-safe international cricket in 2020."

"The venue provides world-class playing and training facilities, giving both teams the best possible environment in which to prepare," the ICC said.

"The ICC WTC final is the pinnacle event in the Test calendar and is intended to be a week-long celebration of the oldest form of the game," Geoff Allardice, ICC General Manager, Cricket said. — PTI

## BHUVI WILL PLAY VITAL ROLE IN T20 WC: LAXMAN

**New Delhi, March 10:** Former India cricketer VVS Laxman feels Bhuvneshwar Kumar will play a vital role in India's T20 World Cup campaign later this year and the pacer's workload management needs to be prioritised.

"I still feel great and happy that Bhuvneshwar has regained fitness because he's such an important bowler, especially in white-ball cricket for India," Laxman said on *Star Sports*' 'Cricket Connected'.

"Apart from Jasprit Bumrah, if there's anyone in that Indian bowling line-up who has got the experience of bowling not only with the new ball but also at the death."

"He is such an important member, we have to look after Bhuvneshwar Kumar the fast bowler because he will be playing a very important role, come November when the World Cup will happen," Laxman added.

India's best white-ball exponent at his peak form, the Uttar Pradesh seamer last played a T20I in December 2019.

"For him to be 100 per cent fit, I think a lot of priority and prominence has to be given to manage the workload and the injury of Bhuvneshwar Kumar," Laxman further added. — PTI

**He is such an important member, we have to look after Bhuvneshwar Kumar the fast bowler because he will be playing a very important role, come November when the World Cup will happen.**

— VVS LAXMAN former India player

## Bach back as Olympic boss

**Lausanne, March 10:** International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach promised to deliver a "safe, secure" Tokyo Olympics this year as he was re-elected for a second term on Wednesday. As he opened the IOC Session, Bach said it was no longer a question of whether the Olympics, which were postponed last year as the coronavirus pandemic spread around the globe, would take place but in what conditions they will be held.

"Tokyo remains the best prepared Olympic city ever and at this moment, we have no reason to doubt that the opening ceremony will take place on July 23," Bach said.

"The question is not whether, the question is how these Olympic Games will take place. "The IOC is working at full speed together with our Japanese partners and friends to make the postponed Olympic Games a safe manifestation of peace, solidarity and resilience of humankind in overcoming the pandemic."

Bach said his aim was to create "a safe, secure and fair environment for all the athletes".

The local Japanese organisers are due to announce by the end of the month whether foreign



Thomas Bach

spectators will be allowed to attend the Games, although it is widely reported that they will be barred due to Covid-19 concerns.

Bach, 67, received unanimous backing in the election for IOC president in which he was the sole candidate, with 93 of the 94 valid votes from IOC members in favour of his re-election.

"Thank you very much from the bottom of my heart for this overwhelming vote of confidence and trust," said Bach, sending out a 'virtual' hug to his supporters.

"This is more overwhelming given the reforms and difficult decisions we had to take."

"It's touching me deeply and also makes me humble," the German said, describing his first eight-year mandate as "not so easy". — AFP



Dortmund's Erling Haaland celebrates after scoring his side's second goal against Sevilla during their Champions League match in Dortmund, Germany, on Tuesday. — AP

## Porto end Juve campaign in CL

**Turin (Italy), March 10:** Cristiano Ronaldo's Juventus crashed out of the Champions League in the Last 16 for the second year running on Tuesday, losing to 10-man Porto on away goals despite winning the second leg 3-2 in Turin.

Sergio Oliveira's extra-time free-kick sent twice former winners Porto through to the quarter-finals as the tie finished 4-4 on aggregate.

Leading 2-1 from the first leg in Portugal, Oliveira's first-half penalty increased Porto's advantage but Juventus levelled the tie through two goals from Federico Chiesa, which came either side of Porto striker Mehdi Taremi's red card.

Oliveira then rifled home a low free-kick on 115 minutes, which passed through the legs of Ronaldo, with Adrien Rabiot's header in reply coming in vain for Juventus.

Juventus' Champions League heartache stretching back 25 years continued, falling in the first knockout round the second consecutive year after losing to French club Lyon last season.

## HAALAND'S BRACE TAKES DORTMUND TO QUARTERS

Erling Braut Haaland scored twice as Borussia Dortmund held off a late Sevilla fightback to reach the Champions League quarterfinals with a 'crazy, amazing' 5-4 aggregate win after a frantic 2-2 second-leg draw.

Haaland, who also netted a double in Dortmund's 3-2 Last 16 first-leg victory, tapped in a first-half opener and scored a retaken penalty after the break behind closed doors at Signal Iduna Park. Sevilla Youssef En-Nesyri scored a 69th-minute spot-kick and a last-gasp equaliser but daring Dortmund clung on. — AFP

## FEDERER RETURNS TO COURT, FACES EVANS IN QATAR OPEN

**Doha, March 10:** Roger Federer will face Britain's Daniel Evans in the second round of the Qatar Open on Wednesday as the Swiss great makes his comeback after a 13-month break.

Federer, who has had two operations on his right knee since playing at the Australian Open last year, is a three-time champion at the Doha tournament and has a 26-3 record at the complex.

The 30-year-old Evans saved 16 of the 18 break points he faced to overcome French player Jeremy Chardy 6-4, 1-6, 6-2 on Tuesday. Evans has lost all three of his previous meetings with Federer, a 20-time Grand Slam champion.

South African qualifier Lloyd Harris dug deep to upset seventh-seeded Stan Wawrinka 7-6 (3), 6-7 (6) 7-5 over two hours and 40 minutes later Tuesday, and sixth-seeded David Goffin beat Filip Krajinovic 6-4, 6-4.

Also, there were wins for Vasek Pospisil and Marton Fucsovics. — AP

