

# THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI MONDAY 22 MARCH 2021



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**Prez Biden on his heels amid a surging migrant crisis on Mexican border**

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**Injured England pacer Archer ruled out of ODI series, may miss IPL too**

## DELHI AGE | 16

**Neha Dhupia will play role of ACP Catherine Alvarez in the upcoming drama, *A Thursday***



Vol. 28 No. 35 | 16 PAGES | ₹5.00



Actress Lara Dutt, showstopper for designer Sanjukta at FDCI Lakme Fashion Week, poses for photographs in Mumbai on Sunday. — PTI

## 2 arrested by ATS for Mansukh Hiran's 'murder'

**Mumbai:** Even as the NIA is in the process of taking over Mansukh Hiran's death case, the state ATS on Sunday arrested two persons for "murder" of Hiran. The case was initially registered as a suicide. After the arrests, the DIG Maharashtra ATS Shivdeep Lande took to social media on Sunday evening announcing that Hiran's death case has been solved. Lande posted a message: "The puzzle of sensitive Mansukh Hiran murder case has been solved." ■ **More on Page 4**

## 'Like a virus': Pope denounces racism

**Vatican City:** Pope Francis on Sunday denounced racism, likening it to a virus that lurks in waiting and only to emerge and show that "our supposed social progress is not as real or definitive" as people think. He tweeted as the UN marks the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. ■ **More on Page 6**

## Light rain likely in Delhi till tomorrow

**New Delhi:** Cloudy weather and light rain over the next two days is likely to bring the mercury down in Delhi by a few notches, the India Meteorological Department said on Sunday. The city recorded a maximum of 35.2 degrees Celsius, four notches above normal, on Sunday. ■ **More on Page 2**



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## WEATHER

Max: 32°C  
Min: 19°C  
RH: 43%  
Rain: 20%

Forecast: Partly cloudy

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Uttarayana  
**Tithi:** Phalguna Shuddha Ashtami till 8.57 am  
**Star:** Arudra till 9.22 pm  
**Varjyam:** Nil  
**Durmuhurtam:** 12.47 pm to 1.35 pm; 3.11 pm to 3.59 pm  
**Rahukalam:** 7.30 am to 9 am

SUNSET TODAY 6.33 PM  
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.21 AM  
MOONRISE TOMORROW 12.57 PM  
MOONSET TODAY 1.39 AM

■ 'Kick me if you like but I won't let you kick away Bengal's development'

## Sparks fly in Bengal battle as PM throws challenge to Didi

RAJIB CHOWDHURI  
KOLKATA, MARCH 21

Daring West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee to put her leg on his head and "kick" him, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made it clear on Sunday that he would not allow the Trinamul Congress boss to "kick" away the state's development any further.

Mr Modi's assertion came as Bollywood star Mithun Chakraborty, who joined the BJP recently, is likely to become a voter at Cossipore-Belgachhia Assembly seat in north Kolkata, where his relatives stay, so that he can be fielded by the saffron party as a heavyweight candidate to contest the polls.

Addressing a mega BJP rally in Bankura, the PM said: "I saw nowadays followers of Didi are making



Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets during a public meeting ahead of the West Bengal Assembly polls in Bankura on Sunday. — PTI

wall paintings on her. In the pictures, Didi is seen trampling on my head and playing football with it. Why are they insulting the rich culture and tradition of Bengal? I want to tell certain things clearly to her. I always keep my head bowing down to the service of 130 crore citizens of

the country as a mark of respect. This is the culture a great son of Bengal, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, taught me and my party." Sending a strong warning to Ms Banerjee, Mr Modi added: "So Didi, if you wish at all, you can keep your feet on my head." ■ **Turn to Page 2**

## Didi vows to kick BJP out of state, says she's 'gadha'

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA, MARCH 21

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday threatened to "kick out" the BJP from the state like a football in one shot in the Assembly elections. She, however, also called herself a "big" gadha (ass) for failing to understand the "qualities" of "loot, riot and murder" of the saffron party.

Boasting about her footwork, the Trinamul Congress supremo said at a campaign rally at Contai South in East Midnapore: "Khela Hobe. Khelte Hobe. Jitte Hobe (Game On. We have to play and win.) Those who are thinking that I can't do anything with one leg since another leg of mine is broken, should know that I can kick such a powerful shot with one leg that it will be bowled out of Bengal for ever."

Targeting the influential Adhikari family, she asked the TMC rank and file to also "kick out" all "traitors" who quit her party and joined the BJP out of the state. Ms Banerjee also dared Prime Minister Narendra Modi to apply his tricks on her.

"Yesterday the PM talked about conducting a DNA test of Bengalis to find out the roots of the BJP. Doesn't he feel ashamed of himself for not having faith in his own

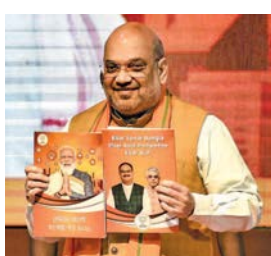
■ **Turn to Page 2**

## BJP promises 'Sonar Bangla' in manifesto, says will bring CAA

RAJIB CHOWDHURI  
KOLKATA, MARCH 21

Using its manifesto "Sonar Bangla Sonkolpo Potro 2021" to end the TMC's rule in West Bengal, the BJP on Sunday promised to implement the Citizenship Amendment Act in its first Cabinet meeting if it comes to power in the state.

Union home minister Amit Shah, releasing the manifesto in Kolkata on Sunday, with an eye on the votebank of Hindu migrants, also said the BJP would earmark Rs 10,000 as annual financial aid to each refugee family for five years and a month-



Amit Shah

ly pension of Rs 3,000 to Matuas and Dalpatis, while wooing Gorkha communities with recognition to 11 sub-tribes under the Scheduled Caste category.

Free public transport for women, a hike in widow pension from Rs 1,000 to Rs 3,000 and a 33 per cent

quota for women also found a place in the BJP's manifesto.

Other key sops include an end to infiltration, official language status of Bengali, implementation of the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi and Ayushman Bharat, building three new AIIMS in West Bengal (North Bengal, Jangal Mahal and Sunderbans), award of the Seventh Pay Commission hikes for state government staff, no fee for girls from KG to PG in government schools, Bengali to be made mandatory in school education till Class 10.

The BJP will also probe ■ **Turn to Page 2**

## Yechury targets Mamata, says Left-Cong-ISF will 'damage BJP more in Bengal than TMC'

SANJAY BASAK  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

The threat to Trinamul supremo Mamata Banerjee's return to power is not merely stemming from the BJP. Standing between her and victory is the "grand alliance" of the Left parties, Congress, and the India Secular Front, led by controversial Furufura Sharif shrine cleric Abbas Siddique. This alliance is likely to cut into the Muslim votebank of Ms Banerjee's Trinamul Congress and damage her prospects. This eventually may help the BJP to make significant gains. But the CPI(M) does not think so.

Speaking exclusively to

► **THE CPI(M) boss** made it clear that the primary objective of the Left was to "stop the communal forces", or in other words to "defeat the BJP". He argued that to "defeat the BJP, one has to defeat the TMC".

this newspaper, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury claimed the grand alliance "will damage the BJP much more than the TMC".

The CPI(M) boss made it clear that the primary objective of the Left was to "stop the communal forces", or in other words to "defeat the BJP". He argued that to "defeat the



Sitaram Yechury

BJP, one has to defeat the TMC". The reason he offered was that "the majority of anti-incumbency votes which were going to the BJP now would come to the alliance". In his view, the BJP would then be defeated and the TMC would be marginalised.

For Mr Yechury, the Left-Congress-ISF grand

alliance has been able to "mobilise secular Indians". He pointed out that the ISF had given tickets to candidates cutting across communities and caste. He blamed the TMC and the BJP for communal polarisation in the state and noted that in the now-famous mammoth Brigade Parade Ground rally earlier this month, Mr Siddique made everyone take the pledge that "hum Bharatiya hain". Mr Yechury said: "The ISF is also called the Indian Secular Front."

But does Mr Yechury see the possibility of the Left winning the elections? For him, after the humiliating ouster from West Bengal

■ **Turn to Page 2**



Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra during an election campaign rally ahead of the Assam Assembly polls in Sibsagar district on Sunday. — PTI



Senior Assam minister and BJP candidate Himanta Biswa Sarma during a roadshow ahead of the Assembly polls in Assam's Tinsukia district on Sunday. — PTI

■ Decision likely today ■ NCP boss wants Ribeiro probe

## Pawar hints top mantri in Maha may be forced to go

SONU SHRIVASTAVA  
with agency inputs  
MUMBAI, MARCH 21

Nationalist Congress Party supremo Sharad Pawar on Sunday indicated that Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh could be asked to step down in the wake of extortion allegations against him. Former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh has alleged that Mr Deshmukh had given a collection target of ₹100 crores per month to some Mumbai police officers, including Sachin Waze.

"Serious allegations have been made against the home minister by the police authority. Also, there are a series of lapses which are brought to the notice of the media... It also affects the reputation of the Mumbai police. I honestly feel there has to be an in-depth inquiry. The inquiry should be made by such a person who enjoys full respect in the police administration



NCP supremo Sharad Pawar addresses the media in New Delhi on Sunday on the allegations levelled against Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh. — PTI

and the public at large. I have spoken to chief minister Uddhav Thackeray about the developments," Mr Pawar said.

Asked about Mr Deshmukh's ouster from the Cabinet, Mr Pawar said it was the CM's prerogative. "The final decision on Mr Deshmukh will

be taken by Monday," he said.

Mr Pawar suggested the name of former Mumbai police commissioner Julio Ribeiro to probe the charges levelled by Mr Singh. The MVA constituents don't want the Centre to step in, therefore ■ **Turn to Page 2**

## Jaipur, 7 Raj cities to see night curfew

Cases shoot up to 43,846 in 24 hrs; 197 die

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

India on Sunday saw biggest rise in daily cases in four months as 43,846 fresh Covid-19 cases and 197 more deaths were reported in the last 24 hours. Among those to test positive was Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, who has been admitted to the AIIMS Covid-19 centre for observation. His parameters are normal.

In view of the rising numbers, Rajasthan has imposed night curfew in eight towns - Ajmer, Bhilwara, Jaipur, Jodhpur,

Kota, Udaipur, Sagwara and Kushalgarh — while markets will remain closed after 10 pm from March 22 in areas under all city municipal corporations. The Gujarat government has announced that Holi celebrations in the state will be restricted and no permission will be granted due to the surge in Covid-19 cases though "HoliKa Dahan" can take place with crowd restrictions. Maharashtra, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh account for 77.7% of the new cases. ■ **More on Page 4**

## Mizoram CM, Myanmarese minister hold 'virtual' talks

**Aizawl, March 21:** Mizoram chief minister Zoramthanga on Sunday held a meeting with Myanmar's foreign minister Zin Mar Aung on the current political situation and the hardships being faced by the Zo ethnic people in the neighbouring country, officials said.

Speaking at the virtual meeting, in which US-based Mizo leaders also participated, Zoramthanga expressed solidarity with the people of Myanmar.

"Had a fruitful meeting (online) this morning with Zin Mar Aung, Honble Foreign Minister, Myanmar. Our thoughts and prayers are with Myanmar in these trying times," the chief minister tweeted.

"It is our prayer that your sufferings and mental distress died down very soon," he added.

The two leaders discussed the current political situation in Myanmar amid a coup in February, an official at the Chief Ministers Office said.

The meeting was to extend solidarity and call for peace among the Zo ethnic people of Myanmar who have become victims of "persecution and atrocities" after the military junta took power in the neighbouring country, he said. — PTI

■ **More on Page 3**

## US Def Sec in Kabul, meets Ghani, as US reviews May 1 exit deadline

**Kabul, March 21:** US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin arrived on Sunday in Kabul on his first trip to Afghanistan as Pentagon chief, amid swirling questions about how long American troops will remain in the country.

State-owned Radio and Television Afghanistan and popular TOLO Television reported Austin's arrival in Kabul from India. He met with senior Afghan government officials, including President Ashraf Ghani.

According to the Washington Post, which was among the small group of U.S. media travelling with him, Austin



Lloyd Austin

said senior US officials want to see "a responsible end to this conflict" and "a transition to something else."

"There's always going to be concerns about things one way or the other, but I think there is a lot of energy focused on doing what is necessary to bring

about a responsible end and a negotiated settlement to the war," Austin said.

President Joe Biden said last week in an ABC News interview that it will be "tough" for the US to meet a May 1 deadline to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. But he said that if the deadline, which is laid out in an agreement between former President Donald Trump's administration and the Taliban, is extended, it wouldn't be by a "lot longer."

In response, the Taliban on Friday warned of consequences if the US doesn't meet the deadline. — AP

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## SHORT TAKES

**Committed to academic freedom: Ashoka univ V-C**

New Delhi: In a strong counter to the narrative building around the reasons for the exit of Professor P. B. Mehta, Ashoka University chancellor Rudrangshu Mukherjee has said the institution remains committed to academic freedom and intellectual independence while its board of trustees chairman Ashish Dhawan promised an open line of communication. Days after Mr Mehta, who had resigned as vice-chancellor of the university two years ago, chose to step down as a professor also saying that the founders made it “abundantly clear” that his association with the institution was a “political liability.” Mr Mukherjee wrote to the faculty and students stating that the institution’s founders have never interfered with academic freedom. Mr Dhawan, in a separate letter, said the board of trustees stand for free enquiry, academic freedom, and intellectual independence and that the university is committed to providing an environment of excellence. — PTI

**Woman kills boy on occultist's advice**

New Delhi: In a desperate attempt to conceive a child, a woman killed a three-year-old boy on the advice of an occultist, stuffed his body in a plastic bag and dumped it on the roof of a building in northwest Delhi’s Rohini, police said on Sunday. The 25-year-old woman, who has been arrested, told police that she was under a lot of pressure to conceive and was being taunted by her in-laws and relatives which led her to approach an occultist who suggested her to sacrifice a child to please the gods, they said. She then killed her neighbour’s son and stuffed his body in the plastic bag, police said. Neelam Gupta told the police that she got married in 2013 but did not have a child despite consulting doctors. So she consulted an occultist four years back at her native village in Uttar Pradesh’s Hardoi who then suggested that she should sacrifice a child if she wanted to conceive, a senior police officer said. The matter came to light on Saturday after the missing boy’s parents approached the police with a complaint following which a thorough search was carried out by the police to trace the child, the officer said. During the search operation, one of the staff noticed a bag on the roof of the adjacent house. When it was opened, the body of the missing child with injury marks on his neck was recovered. Prima facie observation revealed that the boy was strangled, the senior police officer said. Based on the statement of the child’s father, a case of murder was registered. During the course of the investigation, family members, relatives and neighbours were questioned and it was revealed that the child was last seen with one of their neighbours, he said. When questioned, Neelam initially tried to mislead the police but later confessed that she had killed the boy when he was playing alone on the roof, he added. — PTI

**2 held for killing 32-yr-old man**

New Delhi: Two people were arrested for allegedly killing a 32-year-old man over personal enmity in northwest Delhi’s Azadpur on Sunday, police said. Mohit (18), Amit Dubey (20) and their accomplice Rajnish (21) had allegedly killed Suresh alias Banwari on March 15 to take revenge from him for conspiring against one of the three accused. Suresh had sustained eight bullet injuries and was declared brought dead by doctors. Seven empty cartridges and one bullet lid were recovered from the crime spot, police said. On the basis of technical surveillance, all accused involved in the incident were identified and Rajnish was arrested on March 16, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Northwest) Usha Rangnani said. On Sunday, his two associates Mohit and Dubey were also arrested. “During interrogation, Mohit said he had become a target of local criminals over dominance in the area. On November 15, 2020, some people attempted to kill him in Azadpur and he suspected that Suresh must have been a part of the conspiracy. So to take revenge, he, along with his associates, killed him,” the DCP said. — PTI

**WORLD WATER DAY TODAY**

A woman is seen next to river Yamuna half-covered with foam due to pollution in New Delhi on Sunday. — AFP

**Commercial vehicle owners asked to convert half of their fleet to EVs**

New Delhi, March 21: Delhi transport minister Kailash Gahlot on Sunday urged commercial vehicle owners to convert half of their fleet to electric by 2023, saying a five per cent interest subvention scheme will be soon launched for them.

The Delhi government is working on a plan to allow electric goods carriers to ply on city streets at all hours, he said.

The minister also urged commercial vehicle owners to move from conventional to fully electric vehicle fleets under the ‘Switch Delhi’ campaign by 2025. Many companies are eager to switch to electric vehicles but struggling due to lack of financing, he said.

“The Delhi government has taken a pioneering step in reducing the rate of interest by introducing the interest subvention

scheme of five per cent which will be offered through the Delhi Finance Corporation (DFC). This scheme is at the advanced stage of drafting and will be announced soon,” Gahlot said.

The scheme can be availed by all range of vehicles and will ensure easy access of finance to fleet companies willing to upgrade their fleet to electric, he said.

Delhi’s Electric Vehicle policy provides the most favourable policy framework across India for commercial vehicles to transition to electric vehicles, including financial incentives, low-interest loan, and exemption from no-entry restrictions, Gahlot said.

In the seventh week of ‘Switch Delhi’ campaign, emphasis will be on creating awareness among commercial vehicle owners

operating fleets of two-wheelers, three-wheelers, cab aggregators, goods carriers and freight vehicles - thereby targeting a large group to adopt and promote electric vehicles.

“By switching to electric vehicle, the fleet owners would not only take a step towards ensuring the better air quality in the city but can save up to Rs 22,000 annually by switching to electric fleets,” he said.

Currently, there is a restriction on goods carriers to ply on the roads of Delhi during peak hours to avoid congestion.

To incentivise this transition, the Delhi government has taken the most progressive step under the Delhi electric vehicle policy to allow electric goods carriers to ply on the streets of the city at all hours, he said. — PTI

**Punjab govt failed on poll promises, says Kejriwal**

Chandigarh, March 21: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday hit out at the Amarinder Singh-led Punjab government, accusing it of not keeping its poll promises and deceiving people.

Addressing a Kisan Maha Sammelan organised by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) at Punjab’s Moga, he told people that his party will always stand shoulder to shoulder with the farmers protesting against the Centre’s three farm laws.

Kejriwal said four years ago, Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh had made big promises.

Captain Sahib had said smartphones will be given. Who got smartphones just raise your hands? Captain Sahib had said farmers’ loan will be waived. Whose loan has been waived just raise your hands, said Kejriwal.

Not even a single promise has been fulfilled, Kejriwal alleged.

— PTI

**■ Vehicles damaged ■ Security enhanced****Residents of Harijan Basti attacked by mob**

New Delhi, March 21: Some residents of the Harijan Basti here were allegedly attacked by a mob after a 22-year-old man of the locality married a woman from another community, police said on Sunday. Police personnel have been deployed in the southeast Delhi locality to thwart any untoward incident.

On Saturday night, 15 to 20 men entered the locality and, according to CCTV camera footage shared on social media, they broke flower pots, threw stones on houses, damaged vehicles and tried to break into houses, police said.

Three to four residents suffered minor injuries after they were allegedly attacked, they said.

Police said that the woman’s family members were against her relationship with the man, and angry about she getting married to him.

Following the incident, four men, including the woman’s brother, have been arrested, they said, adding that on Saturday night, the man, his wife and his family members were not present at Harijan Basti.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southeast) R P Meena said, “Senior officers visited the spot and

found that the woman had married against her parents’ wishes. The woman’s family members were involved in the incident.”

Though police personnel have been deployed at the locality, residents alleged that they still felt unsafe as members of the mob were still at large.

The couple got married on March 16 and a missing person report was filed by the woman’s family at the Sunlight Colony police station on Saturday, police said.

The man and the woman were called to the police station. The woman had given her consent to the wedding and after verification of documents and details, they were allowed to leave, a police officer said.

“We also interacted with families of both the parties. But the woman’s brother was upset with the wedding. On Saturday night, he along with others went to the man’s locality and created a ruckus. But the man’s family nor he and his wife were there,” he said.

The man’s mother told reporters that the woman’s family members had threatened them of dire consequences.

“My son married a girl from another community. They (woman’s family members) were against their relationship. They abused us and said they will not allow us to stay here. We were called to the police station on Saturday,” she said.

She said that her daughter-in-law was happy with the marriage. “However, after we returned from the police station, we got to know that they had vandalised property at Harijan Basti. We are all scared as they have threatened us of dire consequences,” she alleged.

Satbir, a resident of the locality, told reporters that he was inside his house when around 10.45 pm on Saturday, several men entered the area.

“They even damaged vehicles. They banged on the doors in an attempt to break them. They carried lathis and even attacked a few people from our locality. We are scared and need police protection,” he said.

Another resident said she was standing outside her house when the mob tried to attack her children.

She alleged that her daughter was with her and the men tried to grab her. — PTI

**Rajnath: Panna pramukhs are BJP’s strength**

‘Deploy them to win hearts’  
AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

Senior BJP leader and defence minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday told the city unit of the party to deploy ‘panna pramukhs’ across Delhi, as they are its biggest strength and can make it win in the national capital.

The ‘panna pramukh’ or page in-charge is the first point of contact for most voters in the BJP’s election management machinery.

Singh, who inaugurated the Delhi BJP’s executive committee meeting, said panna pramukhs should help create awareness about schemes and programmes started by the Narendra Modi government. The Modi government has a proven ‘track record in good governance and development... we have always done what we promise’, Singh told Delhi BJP leaders.

“Panna pramukh should be deployed in Delhi. I think it is the most important post and the biggest strength of the party... I can say it with conviction it can take the BJP to a win here,” he said.



Rajnath Singh



WICCI Delhi Human Rights Commission president Omita Unnarkar, vice president Priti Payal and members pose with former Delhi Assembly Speaker Yoganand Shastri during a talk show on mental health, ‘Kuch Kehna Hai’, in association with Pragya Foundation at The Grand Hotel in Vasant Kunj. The event was also attended by Dr Chandraketu Tewatia, director of Ayush NDMC, Naresh Kumar, ACP, Vasant Kunj, southwest Delhi, Dr Ajeet Singh Gulia, technical officer, radiation-therapy, AIIMS, Rekha Shankla from NDMC, Ms Rinzing, assistant commissioner of income-tax and Arun Roongta, president, Rotary Club.

**Narco-analysis testing facility to be operational soon: Officials**

New Delhi, March 21: The narco analysis testing facility in the national capital is expected to start soon and six experts from the Forensic Science Laboratory here underwent a week-long training session in Gujarat recently to equip themselves about the techniques involved in it, officials said on Sunday.

Officials at FSL, Rohini said after their return from Ahmedabad, the team also conducted two dummy exercises under the supervision of medical experts at the Dr Baba Saheb Ambedkar Hospital here where the narco-analysis testing facility has been set up.

The facility, which was

expected to start much earlier, could not commence due to various reasons, FSL officials said.

They cited the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic as one of the reasons that led to further delay, saying there were restrictions on physical movement while training institutes were also closed.

FSL director Deepa Verma said, “We are in the process of finalising the procedure and we expect the facility to start shortly. For this, we also organised a full-fledged training session for our experts. Our team was sent to Ahmedabad recently where they underwent training and based on the information

they got from the session, our experts are further preparing themselves.”

The direction for setting up a narco-analysis facility came in 2019 while the Delhi High Court was hearing a habeas corpus petition by a man seeking to trace his four-and-a-half years old son who had gone missing since August 4, 2018.

The court was left surprised when it was informed that no such facility was available in the national capital and the narco-analysis test had to be done in Gujarat following which it directed the AAP government to set up the facility here.

— PTI

**Delhi air quality remains under ‘poor category’**

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

It was a hot and humid morning in the national capital on Sunday, meteorological department officials said. The city recorded a minimum temperature of 16.2 degrees Celsius while the relative humidity was 87 per cent at 8.30 am, they said.

According to the officials, the maximum temperature is likely to settle around 35 degrees Celsius.

The weatherman has forecast partly cloudy sky with haze during the day. The air quality in the national capital was recorded in the “poor” category.

**Unregistered people can take Covid jabs between 3 pm and 9 pm: Jain**

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

Unregistered but eligible people in Delhi will be able to take Covid-19 vaccine jabs between 3 pm and 9 pm, Health Minister Satyendra Jain said on Sunday. Till now, unregistered beneficiaries were being inoculated between 3 pm and 5 pm, he said. Beneficiaries need to register themselves on Co-WIN portal to get jabs. Those who do not have access to the Co-WIN portal can go to the centre and take Covid-19 vaccines.

Only registered beneficiaries will be given vaccine shots between 9 am and 3 pm. The unregistered

► **ONLY REGISTERED** beneficiaries will be given vaccine shots between 9 am and 3 pm. The unregistered ones can take the jabs from 3 pm to 9 pm They just need to carry their Aadhaar card or any other valid identity proof, Mr Jain said.

ones can take the jabs from 3 pm to 9 pm. They just need to carry their Aadhaar card or any other valid identity proof, Mr Jain said. It has also been directed that all Delhi government hospitals increase the number of vaccination sites on their premises to at least

six and depute two vaccinators at each, he said.

On Friday, the Delhi government had issued an order allowing vaccination centres in the city to operate from 9 am to 9 pm, starting Monday. Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal had earlier said the number of vaccination centres will be doubled to 1,000 from about 500 at present spanning both government and private facilities.

On Sunday, the health minister said the Delhi government has been conducting aggressive testing and contact tracing and the recent spike in fresh Covid-19 cases will also be contained soon. Jain said district authorities and

the Delhi Police have been asked to take strict action against violations at markets and public places in view of the increase in the number of cases.

He appealed to people to take precautions during the Holi festival. “The number of cases had increased during the festive season last year. So, I appeal to everyone to stay safe,” he said. Delhi reported over 800 Covid-19 cases for the first time this year on Saturday as the positivity rate breached the 1 per cent mark after over two months. The city had recorded 425 cases on Tuesday. The cases have been steadily rising over the last few days.

**Delhi Prisons steps up efforts to tackle Covid-19 as inmates return**

New Delhi, March 21: The threat of coronavirus infection looms large in Delhi Prisons as it readies for the returning inmates who were granted parole last year amid the coronavirus pandemic outbreak.

According to jail officials, it will be difficult to maintain social distancing with the surge in the number of Covid-19 cases in the prisons.

They said the situation could be more difficult to manage when the inmates, who were granted parole during the pandemic outbreak last year, would return.

There are a total of 18,900 inmates in the Delhi Prisons comprising Tihar, Rohini and

Mandoli jails. However, the intake capacity of Delhi Prisons Department is 10,026 inmates.

The number of inmates will pass the 20,000-mark as more will come after their emergency parole lapse, a senior jail official said.

Meanwhile, the jail authority asserted that all steps are being taken to keep the Covid-19 situation under control.

The last time an inmate was tested positive for coronavirus was on January 14. After that, three more persons were found positive, but their condition was detected before they entered the jail.

No jail staff has been

found Covid-19 positive after January 9. Thus, the Covid situation inside the jails is very much under control. We will continue to take all the precautions, including wearing masks, maintaining social distancing and quarantining the new inmates, Director General (Prisons) Sandeep Goel said.

The jail authorities are alert and conducting tests as per the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) guidelines, another official said.

A total of 1,184 convicts and around 5,500 under-trials were released last year under the department’s decongestion drive amid the pandemic outbreak. — PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## Priyanka to address 'kisan panchayat'

**Lucknow:** Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra is likely to address 'kisan panchayat' in five eastern Uttar Pradesh districts after Holi, taking the fight against the Centre's new farm laws to the home turf of chief minister Yogi Adityanath. Priyanka Gandhi is likely to begin her programme in eastern Uttar Pradesh next month with a visit to the famous Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi, state party spokesperson Ashok Singh told PTI on Sunday. "Five rallies are proposed in Varanasi, Sonbadra, Gorakhpur, Mirzapur and Allahabad," he said. Mr Singh said the party general secretary's visit will enthuse cadres ahead of the panchayat election and the 2022 assembly polls. "The party will be contesting the panchayat elections and will put up a good show at the grassroots level," he claimed. — PTI

## Be more productive: Prez to engineers

**Rourkela:** President Ram Nath Kovind on Sunday exhorted budding engineers of the country to ardently follow their passions to be more productive and innovative in their career. Addressing the 18th annual convocation ceremony of National Institute of Technology (NIT) in Odisha's Rourkela, the President said, "I advise you to never judge your success only in terms of material gains. You don't have to limit yourself by the pressures of conventional notions of success and societal pressures. You need to figure out what you really want to do in your life. Choose to do what gives you satisfaction and meaningfulness. Do what takes you closer to your aspirations. Do what makes your families proud of you. Plan for yourself a fruitful and productive path ahead." He praised the institute for its achievements and also advised the students to undertake more research-oriented and innovative initiatives.

## Ambulance collides with truck, 4 dead

**Bhubaneswar:** Four persons were killed while three others sustained critical injuries when an ambulance met with an accident on National Highway 55 near Jharapada in Angul district on Sunday morning. The ambulance, which was carrying a patient from Sambalpur to SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack, had a head-on collision with a gas tanker near Jharapada killing four persons, informed Angul superintendent of police (SP) Jagmohan Meena. Sources said the ambulance driver lost control over the wheels and rammed into the gas tanker. While all the four persons died on the spot, the injured were rushed to the District Headquarters Hospital, Angul. The three injured persons are currently undergoing treatment at the district headquarters hospital and their condition is stated to be critical. The police seized the gas tanker and detained its driver. Reports of Jajpur district said a woman and her son allegedly died due to electrocution at Nalipur village late on Saturday night.

## Congress plays local card in Assam

Promises to nullify CAA, ₹2000 per month for homemakers, give 5L govt jobs

MANOJ ANAND  
GUWAHATI, MARCH 21

Congress, which released its manifesto for Assam on Saturday, played strong local cards — promising to stop the implementation of CAA and safeguard indigenous identity of the people in Assam while promising a gaushala (shelter for cows) in every district.

The Congress manifesto has also promised 5 lakh government jobs, a monthly income of ₹2,000 to housewives, and 200 units of free electricity.

For tea garden workers, the Congress has promised a daily wage of ₹365.

Releasing the Congress manifesto at the party's office in Guwahati, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, while concluding his two-day long visit to Assam, said that his party will protect the idea of Assam that is being "attacked" by the BJP and the RSS.

"We are aware that RSS and BJP are attacking the diverse cultures of this nation. They are attacking our languages, history, our way of thinking, and our way of being. So, this man-



Priyanka Gandhi during an election campaign rally ahead of Assam Assembly polls in Jorhat district on Sunday. — PTI

ifesto provides a guarantee that we will defend the idea of the state of Assam," he said.

Terming his party's manifesto as the "people's manifesto," Mr Gandhi said that the manifesto contains the "aspirations of the people of Assam."

The Congress has also promised to waive off the debt for women who have taken loans from microfinance banks; to provide free of cost yarn, loom, and other equipment to weavers; free of cost state transport for all women; agricultural debt to be

waived-off for farmers; to revive two paper mills again; pension will be extended to the families of freedom fighters and martyrs of the Assam agitation; language movement and the CAA movement; land pattas to the landless who currently inhabit state-owned land; to resolve the D voter (doubtful voter) problems for minority groups like Gorkhas, religious minorities, Koch-Rajbongshi, linguistic minorities, and other ethnic communities.

The party has also promised to give ST status to six

communities—Tai Ahom, Moran, Motok, Chutia, tribes, and Koch-Rajbongshi.

The Congress party has also promised to give free lunch at ₹10 through the 'Aamar Pakhar' scheme for the organised and unorganised sector; to give the price of rice at ₹2,500 per quintal; to give financial assistance to holy places such as namghars, mandirs, mosques, churches, etc. that have attained the age of 50 years; to conduct state olympics annually; and to distribute kerosene and sugar publicly at minimum price.

The party further promised to create corpus funds for lawyers, electricians, sound artists, beauticians, and other artists; to extend model health insurance to organised and unorganised sector; to give R. G. Baruah award to a renowned journalist every year; and to set up mobile clinics in poverty stricken regions of cities and villages.

The Congress had been in power in Assam for 15 years at a stretch before being ousted by the BJP in 2016.

## Central forces to man all polling booths across Bengal

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

The Election Commission in consultation with the Home ministry has decided to go ahead with the deployment of Central paramilitary forces at all the 1,01,790 polling booths in West Bengal. The paramilitary forces will assist the local police in crowd management and checking of voter ID cards and other issues.

Incidentally, Trinamul had opposed the move saying the deployment of central forces at polling stations would scare the local population and in turn adversely impact the voter turnout.

Home ministry sources said the Election Commission has been holding regular interaction with its officials to discuss the security situation, particularly in West Bengal. There was fear among the Election Commission and the Home ministry that the state police may not necessarily ensure impartial voting, at least in some parts of the State.

Thus it was decided that this time paramilitary forces should have a greater role and deployment at all polling stations to not just manage the crowd but also check Voter or any other ID cards. In some sensitive areas Central paramilitary forces are also going to be deployed inside the polling booth for the safety and security of the polling staff.

On the other hand, a delegation of the Trinamul Congress had met the Election Commission a few days protesting the move of deployment of central forces at polling stations. Trinamul's argument is that Central forces may cause fear and intimidation among local villagers and voters in small-town and this may result in a lower voter turnout.

Pats Chhattisgarh CM for his pro-poor policies  
Rahul: Centre robbing farmers' rightsRABINDRA NATH  
CHOUDHURY  
BHOPAL, MARCH 21

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday renewed attack on the Centre over its 3 farm laws, saying that the Union government was trying to snatch away income and future of farmers to benefit a few big business houses in the country.

He was speaking at a function virtually organised by the Chhattisgarh government in Raipur to disburse cash benefits to the farmers and livestock owners under the 2 schemes of the Bhupesh government.

"We have fulfilled promises made to the farmers in Chhattisgarh (by waiv-



Rahul Gandhi

ing their crop loans). However, the Union government was heading in different directions. It has passed 3 laws which will snatch away the income and future of the farmers and benefit 2-3 business houses", he said.

Mr Gandhi patted the Bhupesh government for its pro-poor policies and

said he was happy that his party's governments in Chhattisgarh and other states were taking steps to uplift the economic conditions of farmers, labourers and the poor.

He launched a diatribe against the Narendra Modi government at the Centre saying that the measures taken by the Union government such as 'notebandi' and GST had caused huge job losses in the country.

On the other hand, the Bhupesh government pumped money into rural economy, which helped neutralise impact of crisis triggered by pandemic on the state economy.

Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel transferred ₹1104.27 crore into the accounts of 18.43 lakh

farmers as the fourth and last installment of Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyay Yojana under which guarantees minimum income guarantee to the farmers, on the occasion.

Mr Baghel also transferred ₹7.55 crore to the accounts of livestock owners under the Godhan Nyay Yojana under which the state government procures cow dung from the cattle-rearers at ₹2 per kg and hand them over to the women self help groups to produce vermi-compost.

While beneficiaries under Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyay Yojana have so far been paid ₹5627.89 crores, cattle owners have been paid total ₹88 crore under Godhan Nyay Yojana so far.

## TN CM to voters: Shun DMK, vote AIADMK

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUVANNAMALAI,  
MARCH 21

Addressing a poll meet at Arani on Sunday as he campaigned for AIADMK candidate former minister

Sevur S. Ramachandran, chief minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami urged the people to vote for the AIADMK candidate on the 'Two leaves' symbol, and help him win the poll with an explosive majority. Besides lauding Sevur S. Ramachandran as the son of the soil and the right candidate who was a champion of people's welfare, who used to carry the leadership all demands of the people and get them solved. A true follower of former chief minister J.

Jayalalithaa, Sevur S. Ramachandran has done a lot for the people of Arani said Palaniswami, and urged the electorate to give him one more chance to serve them.

Strictly toying the principles of former M.G. Ramachandran and J. Jayalalithaa, the AIADMK government, known as the 'People's government', has been doing its level best in all fields to meet the demands of the electorates and also fulfill its poll promises, said Mr Palaniswami.

"The progress made by the AIADMK government is reflected in the good roads, drinking water facilities and public infrastructures like bridges and various other facilities that we

see around. This region is dominated by the weavers' community, for whom the present government has implemented various welfare measures. To support the handloom sector and also workers of power looms, the AIADMK government had waived loans of ₹1 lakh of the total loans they had taken. Both the sectors will be provided ₹5,000 as monsoon allowance. The AIADMK government has been pushing the Centre to waive all taxes for the handloom sector, and also provide them yarn at subsidized rates. Besides forming a 'weavers welfare board', the government would also provide 'green houses' for 10,000 weaver families," said the chief minister.

## Mamata wants to make her bhatija Bengal CM: Shah

RAJIB CHOWDHURI  
KOLKATA, MAR. 21

Union home minister Amit Shah, on Sunday, directly accused West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee of getting the proceeds of "cut-money" extorted by her MP nephew, Abhishek Banerjee, from the poor in the state.

"That is why the Trinamul Congress supreme wants to make her bhatija (nephew) her successor to the chair of CM in the Assembly election this time," Mr Shah alleged.

"An amount of cut-money exists in every work here. It comes through tolalabji (extortion). Mamata Didi often asks about the value of ₹500. Didi, your concern is different. Cut-money of bhatija reaches you. But for the labourers of Bengal, ₹500 is a big amount. Mamataji wants to make bhatija the CM while Modiji wants to build a Sonar Bangla," Mr Shah told a BJP rally at Egra in East Midnapore, where three-time Trinamul Congress MP of Contai and former Union minister Sisir Adhikari defected to the saffron party.

He, however, looked hurriedly through his promises during a brief speech of around 13 minutes in front of what appeared to

■ **UNION HOME** said that an amount of cut-money exists in every work here. It comes through tolalabji (extortion). Mamata Didi often asks about the value of ₹500. Didi, your concern is different. Cut-money of bhatija reaches you. But for the labourers of Bengal, ₹500 is a big amount. Mamataji wants to make bhatija the CM while Modiji wants to build a Sonar Bangla

■ **SHAH DIRECTLY** accused Mamata Banerjee of getting the proceeds of 'cut-money' extorted by her nephew

be a thin crowd. The call for BJP bagging 200-plus seats out of 294 in the state was also missing in the address of Mr Shah in wake of low turnouts in the poll campaign rallies and a state-wide massive dissent within the party over the distribution of tickets, which had forced him to make an overnight stay in Kolkata last week to pull up the party leaders.

Joining the BJP at the rally, Mr Adhikari alleged, "The way I was thrown out of the party (TMC) while my family was heckled is very painful and sad."

He also hailed the leadership of the PM and Mr Shah.

## Sarma owns assets worth ₹1.7cr; family income up by ₹10cr in 5 yrs

**Guwahati, March 20:** NEDA convener and Assam finance minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has only ₹25,000 in cash, bank term deposits of over ₹50 lakh, and no bonds, shares or insurance policies.

The minister, in his affidavit submitted as a BJP candidate for the Assam Assembly polls from Jalukbari, declared that he does not own any immovable property or car, but has assets to the

tune of ₹1.72 crore - up from ₹1.02 crore in 2016.

His family income, however, has increased by more than ₹10 crore over the last five years, with his wife's assets alone having registered a hike of over ₹9 crore.

The collective wealth of the minister's family of four, which includes his two children, is currently worth ₹17.27 crore, up from ₹6.38 crore five years ago. — PTI

## PUBLIC NOTICE

Be it known that my clients Smt. Savita Katara and her son Sh. Prashant Katara both residents of A-1/271, Safdarjung Enclave New Delhi, having the same property mutated and inherited on the basis of will executed by Smt. Rajesh Katara. That apart from the above mentioned the other legal heirs of late Smt. Rajesh Katara are Sadhna Upadhyaya, Kalpana Gautam and Pooja Katara. Any person, other than the aforesaid 5 people, claiming to be the legal heirs of late Smt. Rajesh Katara may lodge objections (if any), with the undersigned within 2 weeks of publication of this notice at the address mentioned herein above.

Sd/-  
Parvez Bashista  
(LL.M. United Kingdom)  
Advocate, Supreme Court of India  
G-30, G5, Jangpura Extension  
New Delhi-110014

## Chennai: Gold worth ₹2.53cr seized, 6 held

**Chennai:** Gold weighing 5.55 kg hidden in wigs and worth ₹2.53 crore was seized in different incidents from six plane passengers who arrived here from Dubai on Sunday, said Customs officials. Besides gold, foreign currencies equivalent to ₹24 lakh were confiscated. The currencies too were hidden beneath the wigs, the officials said. — PTI

## SEARCH FOR MISSING



General public is hereby informed that one male namely **Arjun, S/o Rampal, R/o H.No.-14, Gali No. 3, Sarita Vihar, Mukundpur, Delhi, Age: 24 years, Height: Approx 6', Complexion: Shallow, Build: Medium, Face: Round, wearing Black Jacket, Black Pant and Black Shoes in feet, has been missing**

since 15.02.2021. In this regard a **DD No. 61A, dated 02.03.2021 has been registered at P.S. Bhalswa Dairy, Delhi.**

Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to trace out the male but no clue has come to light so far. If any one having any information about him please inform undersigned.

Website : <http://cbi.nic.in>  
E-mail : [cic@cbi.gov.in](mailto:cic@cbi.gov.in)

Fax: 011-24368639  
Ph. No. : 011-24368638, 24368641

DP/858/ON/2021

SHO

P.S. Bhalswa Dairy,

New Delhi

Ph: 011-27811933, 27811934

## PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED

See Section U/S 82 Cr. P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused **Mohit Mudgil, S/o Sh. Bhagwat Dayal Mudgil, R/o D-137, Extn.-2D, Nangloi Extn. Nangloi, Delhi** has Committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case **FIR No. 228/2018 U/S 33/58 Delhi Excise Act, P.S. Alipur, Delhi** and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said **Mohit Mudgil** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said **Mohit Mudgil** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused **Mohit Mudgil of FIR No. 228/2018 U/S 33/58 Delhi Excise Act, P.S. Alipur, Delhi** is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before **22.04.2021.**

By Order

Sh. Satvir Singh Lamba,

Ld. Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, North

Court No. 115,

DP/873/ON/2021(Court Matter)

## C'garh CM fulfills ₹5,600cr promise to farmers

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

The Chhattisgarh state government on Saturday fulfilled its promise of providing ₹5,600 crore to farmers in the state under the Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyay Yojana, a scheme to provide financial support to farmers.

Chief minister Bhupesh Baghel on Saturday, during a programme at his residence-cum-office in Raipur, digitally transferred ₹1,104.27 crore as the fourth and last installment of Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyay Yojana (RGKNY) into the bank accounts of more than 19 lakh farmers of the state, keeping the promise of financial aid to farmers under the scheme.

Also transferred was ₹7.55 crore as the 15th and 16th instalments of the Godhan Nyay Yojana into the accounts of cattle rearers. So far, ₹80.42 crore have



Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel chairs a meeting for the digital transfer of the fourth and last installment of RGKNY at his residence-cum-office in Raipur.

been paid to the cattle rearers.

Lok Sabha MP Rahul Gandhi in his virtual message congratulated the Chief Minister and his government for keeping up the party's promise.

"Today, we have fulfilled

the promise of providing ₹5,600 crore to the farmers of Chhattisgarh. At a time when the Central government has brought three laws which are against the farmers, I am happy that Chhattisgarh government has taken up the path of

helping the farmers, small businessmen, youths and poor people. This has resulted in strengthening the rural economy of the state by putting money in it. As a result, Chhattisgarh is not facing the problems that other states are witnessing.

I congratulate the people of the state and the government for this achievement," Gandhi said. The chief minister in his address said that after coming to power, his government had promised that farmers will get the actual price of their produce. Under the RGKNY, 19 lakh farmers were provided ₹5,627 crore as agricultural input assistance.

"Today I am satisfied that we have fulfilled the promise made to the farmers. We have proved that we do not make false promises," he said. Appreciating the schemes, Congress leader and Chhattisgarh in-charge P.L. Punia said that the Parliament standing committee on agriculture has also suggested the implementation of these schemes in all states.

The chief minister added that farmers have been paid ₹4,500 crore in three instalments under the scheme

before Saturday. The RGKNY was implemented from May 21, 2020, to provide agricultural input assistance to farmers and to increase production and productivity of major crops of the state.

Under the RGKNY, farmers cultivating paddy in Kharif 2019 were paid in installments directly into their bank account at the rate of ₹10,000 per acre on the basis of the acreage obtained through cooperative society. In all, under this scheme, 18.38 lakh farmers including 9.54 lakh marginal farmers, 5.60 lakh small farmers, and 3.21 lakh large farmers, have been paid ₹4,500 crore in three instalments as input assistance and 4,777 certified seed growers have been paid ₹23.62 crore in three instalments. In this way, ₹4,523.62 crore has been paid to a total of 18.43 lakh farmers in three instalments.



## SHORT TAKES

## WHAT KIND OF RAM RAJYA IS THIS, RAUT ON U.P. CASE

Mumbai, March 21: Expressing disappointment over the incident of a Muslim boy being beaten up mercilessly for drinking water at a temple in Uttar Pradesh, Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday asked what kind of 'Ram rajya' is this.

He said the incident showed that some people belittle India's image by indulging in communal polarisation.

"This incident happened in a land where a temple dedicated to Lord Ram is coming up. What kind of Ram rajya is this?" he asked in his weekly column "Rokhthok" in Sena mouthpiece *Saamana*.

"What kind of Hindu religion are we representing?" he further asked.

In West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee is called anti-Hindu because she refuses to chant 'Jai Shri Ram'. But denial of water to a young boy and mercilessly thrashing him is also anti-Hindu, Raut said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi touches upon different issues in his 'Mann ki Baat' radio programme.

"Hope he speaks on this issue too," he added.

"We are against Pakistan and not against Muslims. Communal polarisation is done to win elections in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam and West Bengal," he alleged.

## Sparks fly in Bengal battle

## ■ Continued from Page 1

Didi, you can even kick me. But listen to my words with all ears. I will not let you kick the development of Bengal any longer." He threw the challenge to the two-time CM after she boasted of her footwork despite her injured leg and threatened to "kick out" the BJP from the state like a football in the Assembly polls.

In his second campaign visit to the poll-bound state within 24 hours, the PM also wondered how TMC leaders could become malamaal (wealthy) by acquiring huge properties in the past one decade instead of ushering in any development and public welfare. Seeking to know the source of such funds, he also ridiculed Ms Banerjee for not having any satisfaction and still offering the slogan "Khela Hobe" (Game On) after playing with the state for 10 years.

"Like many BJP workers became martyrs during the TMC's rule, many leaders of Didi's party became malamaal. Big cars and houses! On whose money were they bought, Didi? Isn't it the money of the poor who were looted? Shouldn't Didi go out from power for this?" Mr Modi asked the crowd.

Tearing into the ruling TMC for blocking many Central projects in the state, the PM claimed: "The BJP moves on schemes while TMC survives on scams. A scheme is implemented irrespective of any government that has brought it. But the TMC somehow finds out ways for scams. The TMC's mantra is that scam is where scheme is. They have painted those schemes, which were supposed to be delivered through the state government to the people, in scams. They refused to implement schemes like Ayushman Bharat, PM Kisan Samman Nidhi and Direct Bank Transfer initiative because they could not do any scam in them."

## Yechury targets Mamata

## ■ Continued from Page 1

during the 2011 Assembly polls, the road to recovery has been slow. "The Left is starting from a low base," he said, adding: "People had written us off. Now everyone is talking about a three-cornered fight. One cannot ignore us. We are on the path to regaining what we had lost."

On the question of a hung Assembly, the CPI(M) general secretary was "not willing to speculate" at the possibility of the Left and Congress throwing its weight behind Ms Banerjee to stop the communal forces. He instead said that given the "communal nature of both parties, the TMC and BJP could come together to form the government".

Mr Yechury did not want to delve into the ongoing infighting within the Congress over the controversial ISF alliance. On Congress leader Anand Sharma saying the ISF alliance was against "Gandhian and Nehruvian secularism", Mr Yechury noted that West Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury has "replied to

that". Mr Chowdhury had hit back at Mr Sharma and accused him of "undermining the interest of the party and helping the BJP with such remarks".

Talking about reports that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was staying away from West Bengal following the ISF alliance, Mr Yechury said that it "has nothing to do with the alliance". He said that being an MP from Kerala, Mr Gandhi "is tied up there". Incidentally in Kerala, the CPI(M)-led LDF could possibly make history by returning to power for a second consecutive time.

Mr Yechury claimed the BJP has gained in West Bengal because of "high anti-incumbency". He felt the BJP gained tremendously in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls as the anti-incumbency against the TMC had "worsened". Mr Yechury claimed the TMC had "facilitated" the BJP's entry into Bengal.

With the BJP stepping up its Hindutva agenda, the chief minister has apparently "panicked", Mr Yechury said, adding: "She has panicked

and that's why she's going about doing Chandi Path." Mr Yechury argued that in the three decades of Left rule in West Bengal, communal forces were "kept under check... and now they have reared their ugly heads". Asked about the BJP's accusation of Mamata Banerjee "appealing" Muslims, Mr Yechury said "she appeared to be appealing them by wearing skull caps, (but) did nothing substantial for the community".

Mr Yechury does not believe the Left has lost its relevance in national politics. "The Left remains the only voice for the working class for the farmers, and raising the people's agenda," he said. He said while the Left "has been hit in electoral politics", it will again "regain its lost ground".

Reminded of reports that the Left has lost its relevance in West Bengal and has been written off, Mr Yechury said that was the "perception of today's media". He said some media houses had been trying to project the fight in West Bengal as a "bipolar" contest.

## ATS arrests two aides of Waze in Mansukh Hiran murder case

‘Very sensitive case solved’, claims ATS DIG Shivdeep Lande

SHAHAB ANSARI  
MUMBAI, MARCH 21

Even as the NIA is in the process of taking over Mansukh Hiran's death case, the state ATS on Sunday arrested two persons for "murder" of Hiran. The case was initially registered as a suicide. After the arrests, the DIG Maharashtra ATS Shivdeep Lande took to social media on Sunday evening announcing that Hiren's death case has been solved.

Without revealing any details Mr Lande posted a message in Hindi that, "The puzzle of very sensitive Mansukh Hiren murder case has been solved. I heartily salute all my colleagues in the ATS force who worked day and night and solved this case legally. This is one of the most complex cases of my police career."

The ATS is yet to reveal role and motive of accused persons in the murder case.

According to ATS, accused Naresh Dhare, a cricket bookie, had provided five fake SIM cards to Sachin Waze and suspended Mumbai police constable Vinayak Shinde.

Investigators also recovered three cellphones and eight SIM cards registered in Gujarat. But Hiren's missing gold chain, ring, watch and wallet are yet to be recovered. Shinde was part of the encounter specialist team before his conviction in Ram Narayan Gupta alias Lakhan Bhaiya fake encounter case. He was sentenced to imprisonment for life and he came out of jail on furlough in 2020. According to ATS after coming out of jail Shinde got in touch with Mr Waze again.

The case is connected to the probe into the explosive-laden car found near the Mumbai residence of Mukesh Ambani. The SUV was traced back to



BJP workers protest against Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh in Pune on Sunday, following the allegations levelled by former Mumbai police commissioner Parambir Singh.

## Raut says Bir's letter, Waze case tainted MVA's image

Mumbai, March 21: Shiv Sena leader Sanjay raut on Sunday admitted that the allegations made by former Mumbai police chief Param Bir Singh against minister Anil Deshmukh, and the Sachin Waze case have tainted the image of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in the state, and said all allies need to introspect if their feet are on the ground.

the trader and the suspended Mumbai cop Sachin Mr Waze, arrested by the NIA in the matter.

The ATS had called both the persons at their headquarters on Saturday for

Talking to reporters, he also said that "something needs to be rectified" and the ruling allies should come together to discuss how these stains can be washed off.

"Such allegations against the government or ministers are unfortunate and shocking. The contents (of Singh's letter) are sensational," he said. "The veracity of the letter's contents will be do-

questioning in connection with Hiren's death. They were placed under arrest the same day, ironically the probe of Hiren's murder case has been handed over to the NIA.

by the CM and Sharad Pawar. The MVA government has completed a year-and-a-half now and all allies need to introspect if their feet are on the ground," he said.

Raut said police administration is the backbone of any government. The backbone is symbol of pride and self-respect and the government should always strengthen it, he added.

Hiran's body was found in a Mumbai creek on March 5, days after the explosive-laden SUV was found on Carmichael Road on February 25, was traced back to him.

## PAWAR TRYING TO SAVE MAHA GOVT: FADNAVIS

Nagpur, March 21: Senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday said NCP chief Sharad Pawar was trying to save the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in view of allegations of corruption levelled by former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh against state home minister Anil Deshmukh.

Speaking to reporters here, Fadnavis contested Pawar's assertion that neither Uddhav Thackeray nor Deshmukh was responsible for reinstating controversial police officer Sachin Waze in the Mumbai police force last year.

## ■ China has the strongest military, followed by US, Russia 'India has world's 4th strongest Army'

New Delhi, March 21: China has the strongest military force in the world while India stands at number four, according to a study released on Sunday by defence website Military Direct.

"The USA, despite their enormous military budgets, comes in 2nd place with 74 points, followed by Russia with 69, India at 61 and then France with 58. The UK just about makes the Top 10, coming in 9th place with a score of 43," said the study.

The study said "ultimate military strength index" was calculated after taking into consideration various factors including budgets, number of inactive and active military personnel, total air, sea, land and nuclear resources,



Security personnel patrol inside the forest areas near Jharkhand-Bengal border at Chakulia in east Singhbhum district on Sunday.

salaries, and weight of equipment.

China has the strongest military in the world, scoring 82 out of 100 points in the index, it noted.

"Based on these scores, which account for budgets, men, and things like air and navy capacity, it does suggest that China would come out as top dog

in a hypothetical super conflict," it mentioned.

The world's biggest military spender with a budget of \$732 billion per year is the USA, it noted, adding that China comes second with \$261 billion, followed by India at \$71 billion.

"China would win by sea, USA by air and Russia by land" in this hypothetical conflict, it said.

"USA wins in an aerial war with 14,141 total airships vs Russia with 4,682 and China with 3,587. The Russian Federation wins in a land war with 54,866 vehicles vs USA with 50,326 and China with 41,641," it mentioned.

China wins in a sea war with 406 ships vs Russia with 278 and the USA or India with 202, it said.

Mukesh Ambani's residence. However, Mr Pawar pinned the blame on Mr Singh.

"The CM and the home minister had no role in Waze's reinstatement. That decision was taken by a committee headed by the then police commissioner," Mr Pawar said.

Mr Singh sent a letter to Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray from his email ID alleging that the home minister "had a target to accumulate Rs 100 crores a month".

The letter also cast

aspersions on the CM, deputy CM Ajit Pawar and NCP chief Sharad Pawar as Mr Singh had also apprised them about "political interference to his office".

Mr Pawar said the letter does not have information of actual collection of money and how much money was actually handed over to the home minister or his staff.

The NCP chief also claimed the state government will have no difficulty to complete its five-year term.

## Didi vows to kick BJP

## ■ Continued from Page 1

party? Will he conduct a DNA test to find out who were my parents and brothers and sisters? How dare you? How can you be so audacious? Come for the test. I will give you a solid reply," she thundered.

She went on: "Do you know I am a big gadha? I am calling myself a gadha because I could not understand that they have so many qualities like loot, riot and murder. They minted so much money that they have to flee from us to protect their wealth. Someone told me ₹5,000 crores, though I am not sure about it. They are crorepatists now. They maintain some goons."

## Pawar hints top mantri may be forced to go

## ■ Continued from Page 1

Mr Ribeiro's name has been suggested to counter the claims of unfair investigation by state agencies.

When asked if the CBI would probe this case, Mr Pawar said that Julio Ribeiro's name was above the CBI or any other agency.

The decision regarding Mr Deshmukh's resignation is likely to be taken by Monday after holding a meeting with Maharashtra NCP president Jayant Patil and deputy chief minister Ajit

Pawar by the NCP chief at his New Delhi residence.

Although the NCP chief also termed the allegations levelled by Mr Singh as "serious in nature", he also questioned the timing of the letter and sought to know why the officer spoke only after he was transferred.

In his eight-page letter to the CM, Mr Singh claimed that he had told Mr Thackeray, Mr Pawar and deputy CM Ajit Pawar about the "misdeeds" of Mr Deshmukh.

Though the NCP chief

didn't confirm Mr Singh's claims about "collection target", he admitted the officer had complained to him about political interference in the police. He also said Mr Singh had spoken of reports about his transfer, saying it would be an injustice to him.

The Maharashtra CM is also under pressure, specially because of the reinstatement of suspended police officer Sachin Waze, who has now been arrested for his alleged involvement in planting the explosive-laden car near

## BJP promises 'Sonar Bangla'

## ■ Continued from Page 1

corruption in Central funds allocated for Cyclone Amphan and other calamities and compensation, apart from providing compensation of ₹25 lakhs for each family which lost a member in political violence.

Earlier, Mr Shah lashed out at chief minister Mamata Banerjee and her MP nephew Abhishek

Banerjee at a BJP rally in Egra of East Midnapore, where three-time Trinamul MP of Contai and former Union minister Sisir Adhikari, the father Suwendu Adhikari, defected to the BJP.

He alleged: "An amount of cut money exists in every work here. It comes through Tolabaji (extortion). Mamata Didi often asks

about the value of ₹500? Didi, your concern is different. Cut money of Bhatije reaches you. But for the labourers of Bengal, ₹500 is a big amount. Mamataji wants to make Bhatije CM while Modiji wants to build a Sonar Bangla. Don't you know Bhatije? Now tell me whether Bhatije needs to be made the CM or a Sonar Bangla must be built."



# THE ASIAN AGE

22 MARCH 2021

## Switch or status quo the only two options open for Kerala

With the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) releasing their manifestos, electioneering in Kerala is hotting up with the discussion hovering around whether the state will stick to its four-decade old practice of faithfully alternating between the two fronts or break it. The government led by chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan goes back to the people with a fair record of facing one too many issues which include two back-to-back floods, epidemic Nipah and pandemic Covid-19. As for the UDF, it hopes to cash in on the controversies the government landed itself in the election year including the gold smuggling case and allegations of irregularities in government appointments.

The LDF has claimed it met almost all the promises it had made in its 2016 election manifesto and hence hopes the one for this edition will not only catch the people's fancy but also inspire trust

The UDF is not far behind the Leftists when it comes to social security. A UDF government will introduce the Nyay scheme that Congress president Rahul Gandhi had announced in the manifesto for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. As per the scheme, every impoverished family will get ₹6,000 a month in their account. The UDF promises to raise the welfare pension to ₹3,000; a bit higher than what the LDF has promised. Health and education figure prominently on the UDF agenda, too. But unlike the Leftists, the UDF is open to the idea of privatisation of education. It promises to attract more investment by creating world-class infrastructure and by making processes easy. The UDF promises to bring in legislation to protect the customs and rituals at the Sabarimala temple, though the issue is pending before the constitution bench of the Supreme Court.

Kerala has not been very open to the BJP and its brand of politics though its vote share has gone up from six per cent in the 2011 elections to nearly 15 per cent in the 2016 elections. It has remained stuck at that point for the last five years, and the saffron party is now making all efforts to make an inroad into the minority vote bank, especially of the Christians, and the middle class. It has drafted some of the well-respected technocrats such as "Metroman" E. Sreedharan for the purpose. It is yet to be seen how the effort will pay off. For the time being, the party plays a marginal role in the state's politics and the question remains as to whether Kerala will follow its own pattern or create a new one in these elections.

## Team India in top form

Having come back twice in the series from a one-match deficit to beat England 3-2, Team India will go into the T20 World Cup later this year in a more positive frame of mind. The advent of players like Ishan Kishan and Suryakumar Yadav, who proved to be matchwinners in their debut series, means team composition problems may have been sorted out. In what seemed like a routine "win toss, bowl first and chase a target to win" series, Virat Kohli's men were forced to bat first at the business end of the series and still they won two key games in a row to take the Cup.

Team India's batting prowess against the white ball in all conditions is well-known. What was creditable was the batsmen delivered when the chips were down with the skipper putting up his hand to open the innings in place of the out-of-form batting star K.L. Rahul in the decider. Kohli anchored the series-winning effort rather than smashing the ball around as his opening partner Rohit Sharma was doing it well enough at the other end. Sachin Tendulkar had cottoned on to the idea that the best batsmen in the team should bat through most of the available overs in limited-overs cricket and Kohli has woken up to that now.

Attacking batting and clever bowling, as seen in the change of pace and denial of pace tactics used consistently in a sterling team effort was laudable, with Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Shardul Thakur outstanding in putting the leash on the England batsmen. The fact that England were a competitive side right through the series lends greater credence to this dress rehearsal for the T20 World Cup, which India hasn't won since sensationally shocking the world in the inaugural edition in 2007. Confidence in his team's combined abilities in a most unpredictable format of the game should be a morale booster for Kohli who, incidentally, has never won an ICC event as captain as opposed to MS Dhoni's phenomenal record in Cup events.

### THE ASIAN AGE

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Editor in Chief

Printer & Publisher: K. SUDHAKAR

THE ASIAN AGE office is located at: New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.

Published and Printed on behalf of and for

Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.

London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.

RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



# India and US: It's still the economy, stupid



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

Many observers and analysts have already commented on the fact that the first high-level visitor to India from the Biden administration in the United States happens to be US defence secretary Lloyd Austin. Keeping the defence and security relationship in focus serves both the Biden administration and the Narendra Modi government well at a time when the world's two biggest democracies are arguing about human rights and trade. Their shared concerns about China help bridge the differences on other fronts.

The same purpose of focusing on the security relationship and their shared views on the Chinese threat in Asia could have been achieved if US national security adviser Jake Sullivan had been the first visitor, but defence secretaries also double up as arms salesmen. Defence sales have remained at the centre of the bilateral relationship ever since George W. Bush's defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld and then defence minister Pranab Mukherjee signed the New Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship in 2005, defining the transactional underpinning to a strategic relationship.

China has for long been a factor in relations between India and the United States. What keeps changing is the equation in this geopolitical *menage a trois*. Even at a time when their bilateral relations were otherwise prickly and the United States and India were described as "estranged democracies", American military support to India when China attacked it in 1962 kept the relationship going. There was a brief interregnum, at the time of the liberation of

Bangladesh in 1971, when the US Navy entered the Bay of Bengal as an act of solidarity with Pakistan and in consultation with China.

When Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee wrote a letter to President Bill Clinton mentioning China as a factor in India's decision to conduct the Shakti nuclear tests in 1998, President Clinton promptly leaked the letter to Beijing, thus ingratiating himself with the Chinese leadership. China was then a major market and destination for US investment. US business interests drove its strategic policy and President Clinton was beholden to American business lobbies that were still enjoying their honeymoon years with China.

While President George W. Bush signalled a reset on China and affirmed India's nuclear status, President Barack Obama resumed America's flirtatious relationship with China. President Joe Biden has now made it clear that he will stay with the course set by his predecessor Donald Trump of seeking to contain China. The "New Cold War" is here.

There are, however, two dimensions to the emerging US-China Cold War. First, trade and investment policies. Second, Indo-Pacific security. India has differences with both China and the United States on trade and investment issues. Not surprisingly, therefore, President Biden chose to send his defence secretary as his first emissary to India. Mr Austin's visit has thus given both governments the opportunity to say nice things to each other within days after India's external affairs minister and the US secretary of state were able to participate in a gathering of friends called the "Quad". When

The US has been a factor for good in the economic revitalisation of Europe and East Asia during the Cold War. As a defence partner, its legacy has been less impressive.

the conversation shifts to trade, investments and human rights, the two nations will have to come to terms with the fact that both are "strained" if not "estranged" democracies, dealing with domestic challenges that have become dividers rather than bridges in their relationship.

The apologists for both governments have argued that it is just as well that the focus in the bilateral relationship is currently on defence and security and not on trade and investment, because that is where there is greater agreement. The question remains, though, whether the two governments would be able to narrow down their differences on trade, investment and human rights in the extra time they have bought for their partnership by first focusing on China, the Indo-Pacific region and defence matters.

Consider the fact that even during the tenure of President Donald Trump, a self-confessed friend of India and hailed as such by the Narendra Modi government, the United States was not prepared to address India's concerns on trade and investment related issues, even if it was quite happy to refrain from comments on human rights issues. Can one expect the Biden administration to be more accommodative than Mr Trump and his administration?

The question will be answered when the recently confirmed US trade representative Katherine Tai engages her Indian counterpart, commerce minister Piyush Goyal. During the Senate confirmation hearings last week, Ms Tai did not reveal her mind on India. Even

when references were made to India by several senators, Ms Tai chose to remain silent, except to say that she understood the fact that US should view relations with India in a wider context. It remains to be seen how the Biden administration will define its trade policies within that "wider context". It is useful to note that unlike some of President Biden's Indian American nominees, the Taiwanese American Ms Tai sailed through the Senate confirmation proceedings with both Democrats and Republicans confirming her appointment.

How the US defines its economic policy towards India is far more important than how it defines its defence and security policy. I say this for two reasons. First, consider the legacy of its post-war global leadership. The US has been a factor for good in the economic revitalisation of Europe and East Asia during the Cold War. As a defence partner, its legacy has been less impressive. It's economic support in the period between 1950 and 1980 helped Western European and the East Asian economies. Its military interventions in Asia and Latin America failed to improve the defences of its allies.

Second, for India, China is as much a defence and security threat as it has been an economic challenge. In fact, after the recent border standoff, it can be asserted that while India may have the military capability to deal with a Chinese threat, it does not as yet have the economic and human capital capability to deal with China's economic challenge. Hence, securing US support for India's economic rise is as important for India as strengthening its defence capabilities. It is the unveiling of US policy beyond defence and the security of the Indo-Pacific region that one is keenly awaiting.

The writer is an economist, a former newspaper editor, a best-selling author and former adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh

### LETTERS

#### WHAT HURTS INDIANS

The term, "republic of hurt", used by Pavan Varma ("Let it rip", March 21) is an apt description of the state of the nation today. We have become a nation whose sentiments get hurt too often and too easily at misperceived threats and slights, even from movies, television and works of art. However, we are not as hurt at injustice to women, exploitation of poor and corruption in every walk of life. Cultural values have become a millstone around our necks instead of liberating us!

Anthony Henriques  
Mumbai

#### DESHMUKH SAGA

THE UNSAVOURY SAGA of the alleged misdeeds of the Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh hardly comes as a surprise. What is also not surprising is the fact that he has been a part of every government in the state from 1995 onwards, except during the tenure of Devendra Fadnavis. One look at some of the portfolios he has handled like excise, PWD, food and civil supplies clearly betrays the kind of clout he might have wielded. And his party, the NCP, headed by none other than the wily patriarch Sharad Govindrao Pawar, has always chosen to look the other way. Sadly, Deshmukh is not the first politician to have been so exposed nor would he be the last.

Bhaskar Roy  
New Delhi

#### NOW BENGALURU

INDIA'S TECH-CAPITAL Bengaluru witnessing a four-fold rise in Covid cases in the past 20 days is a matter of concern. There were 1,186 fresh cases on Saturday. While there have been lapses in Covid management strategies, the authorities would do well to step up contact tracing and initiate tough measures on people who refuse to comply with the state government's guidelines. Already, cases are on the rise in the metropolises like Delhi and Mumbai, and the virus has even reached the rural ramparts. The second wave is upon us!

N.J. Ravi Chander  
Bengaluru

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Yash Pal Ralhan (Mar. 20). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

A.G. Noorani



## SC pawn in RSS opening move aiming to fulfil Mathura agenda

The long-expected event has happened as many had feared. On March 12, a bench of the Supreme Court comprising Chief Justice S.A. Bobde and Justice A.S. Bopanna issued notices to three ministries of the government of India — home, law and justice and culture on a petition filed by Ashwani Kumar Upadhyaya, a leader of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), challenging the constitutional validity of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, which came into force on Sept 18, 1991.

According to the act, "No person shall convert any place of worship of any religious denomination or any section thereof into a place of worship of a different section of the same religious denomination or of a different religious denomination or any section thereof. ... It is hereby declared that the religious character of a place of worship existing on the 15th day of August 1947 shall continue to be the same as it existed on that day."

The act did not apply to any

"place of worship which is an ancient and historical monument" or was covered by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites Act or Remains Act, 1958. Had this act been applied to the Babri Masjid promptly, the mosque would have been saved. The 1991 act says that nothing contained in it would apply to the Babri Masjid and to the litigation concerning it pending in the courts.

Other exceptions to the 1991 act are acquiescent in the conversion before this act came into force. Most important of all, the act will not apply to "any dispute with respect to any such matter settled by the parties amongst themselves before such commencement" of the Act of 1991. As it happens, dispute regarding one of the two mosques which the BJP and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) hope to destroy concerned Krishna Janamasthan at Mathura, Krishna's birthplace according to Hindu belief.

But the matter was settled nearly half a century ago by an elaborate,

detailed agreement on Oct 12, 1968. It sought to "settle the long-standing disputes between the Shri Krishna Janamasthan Sangh and the Shahi Masjid Eidgah Trust". Documents to authorise it by the parties were mentioned. A written iqarnama was registered. The signatories acted in a representative capacity at the instance of "both Hindu and Muslim communities". The core of the agreement was peaceful coexistence between the eidgah and the Krishna Janamasthan (birthplace.)

In Mumbai, there is a traffic island which houses a mosque, temple and a church. This spirit evaporated with the rise of Hindutva for political ends. The BJP rose from two seats in the Lok Sabha in 1985 to power in 1987.

This sordid game was long in the planning. The RSS set up the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) at Mumbai on Aug 29, 1984. In 1986 at Allahabad, a World Hindu Sammelan (conference) was held.

Eventually, the VHP adopted an 18-point code of conduct which

explicitly called for the 'liberation' of the birthplaces of Ram at Ayodhya and of Krishna at Mathura and also for the Kashi Vishwanath Mandir at Varanasi to be 'liberated' from the Gyanvapi Masjid.

In August 1990, L.K. Advani promised that if Muslims surrendered the Babri Masjid, the BJP would give up its demands for the other two at Mathura and Varanasi. Places of worship were being used as bargaining counters.

The 1991 act was praised by a five-member bench of the Supreme Court in the Babri Masjid case as recently as November 2019. Only a seven-member bench can overrule it now.

The issue, however, is more political than legal. The leader of the opposition in the UP Assembly and senior Samajwadi Party leader Ram Govind Choudhary said: "BJP and its forces that support it are busy in these kind of things — how to play with Hindu sentiments and encash it. All the more for all these years they could not and did not do

any public interest, welfare, development works. Price rise is unprecedented, unemployment has reached highest in 45 years. So they are back to usual tricks."

This is a replay of the tactics used in the Babri Masjid case. There is already a debate in the courts and on public platforms about the danger of political problems being discussed in courts of law. In this case, as in the Babri Masjid case, to the political dimension is added the vastly more charged dimension namely religion. This is not insuperable. In the Shaheed Ganj Masjid case in Lahore, the premier of Punjab Sikandar Hayat Khan refused to bring in legislation to override a hostile judgement of the high court. He was then a member of the Muslim League. Mohammad Ali Jinnah backed him completely. So did the council of the All India Muslim League. They were much smaller men who played around with the Babri Masjid case.

By arrangement with Dawn



## SHORT TAKES

METEOR STREAKS  
OVER CUBA,  
CAUSES BLAST

**Havana, March 21:** What is believed to be a meteor lit the sky over eastern Cuba and caused an explosion, scientists on the island said on Saturday. There were no reports of damage or injury.

The head of the National Seismological Service, Enrique Arango Arias, told the official Cubadebate news site that the phenomenon was noticed in the towns of Moa, Sagua de Tamo and Maisi.

He said the service's instruments "registered the expansive wave" of the explosion. Social media users reported seeing red and white light followed by an explosion at about 10:06 pm local time Friday.

PHILADELPHIA  
GUNFIRE KILLS 1,  
INJURES 5

**Philadelphia (US), March 21:** Gunfire at an illegal large gathering in Philadelphia killed one person, wounded five others and sent scores of people fleeing, authorities said.

The gunfire erupted around 3:45 am on Saturday inside and outside a rental hall adjacent to Hot Pot Cuisine in north Philadelphia's Nicetown neighbourhood, police officials said.

A 29-year-old man was shot 14 times and was pronounced dead minutes later at Temple University Hospital, police said. Three men ages 33, 38, and 41 and a 30-year-old woman were also shot; all were stable at hospitals, police said.

Police Commissioner Daniel E. Outlaw told reporters that at least 150 people fled for their lives. She said that such large gatherings are illegal under Covid-19 orders.

EXPLOSION IN  
IRAN KILLS 1,  
WOUNDS 3

**Iran, March 21:** An explosion Sunday killed one person and wounded three others in the Iranian province of Sistan and Baluchistan, state TV reported, as details about the incident remained scarce.

The TV report described the explosion that struck a public square in the city of Saravan as a blind terrorist act that killed a pedestrian. It wasn't immediately clear who was behind the apparent attack.

Sistan and Baluchistan province is a well-worn trafficking route for drugs and petrol and has been the scene of occasional clashes between Iranian government forces and militant groups. The province is also where a Sunni separatist group affiliated with al-Qaeda and known as Jeish al-Adl, or Army of Justice, operates.

TURKISH POLICE  
DETAIN LEADER  
STAGING SIT-IN

**Istanbul, March 21:** Turkish police have detained a prominent pro-Kurdish party politician who was staging a day-long protest in parliament.

Omer Faruk Gergerlioglu, from the Peoples' Democratic Party, or HDP, refused to leave parliament after he was stripped of his status and immunity as lawmaker on Wednesday. The party said around 100 police officers entered parliament to detain him Sunday.

Video of his detention showed police officers dragging him away. The party, which is in the throes of a government crackdown, said Gergerlioglu was detained as he was performing his ablutions for morning prayers. "The police took him away in his pajamas and slippers," the HDP said.

PHILIPPINES: 200  
CHINA VESSELS  
AT REEF IN SCS

**Manila, March 21:** The Philippine government expressed concern after spotting more than 200 Chinese fishing vessels it believed were crewed by militias at a reef claimed by both countries in the South China Sea, but it did not immediately lodge a protest.

A government body overseeing the disputed region said late Saturday that about 220 Chinese vessels were seen moored at Whitsun Reef on March 7. It released pictures of the vessels in one of the most hotly contested areas of the waterway. The reef, which Manila calls Julian Felipe, is a boomerang-shaped and shallow coral region about 175 nautical miles west of Bataraza town in the western Philippine province of Palawan.

## US ups base security after Iran threat



A District of Columbia Fire Boat checks buoys in the waterway next to Fort McNair, seen in background in Washington. Iran has made threats against Fort McNair, a US army base in Washington DC, and against the Army's vice chief of staff. The threats are one reason the Army has been pushing for more security around the base, which sits alongside the bustling Waterfront district of Washington DC.

— AP

## US def chief arrives in Kabul

**Kabul, March 21:** US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin arrived Sunday in Kabul on his first trip to Afghanistan as Pentagon chief, amid swirling questions about how long American troops will remain in the country.

State-owned Radio and Television Afghanistan and popular TOLO Television reported Austin's arrival in Kabul from India. He met with senior Afghan government officials, including President Ashraf Ghani.

According to the *Washington Post*, which was among the small group of US media travelling with him, Austin said senior US officials want to see "a responsible end to this conflict" and "a transition to something else".

I think there is a lot of energy focused on doing what is necessary to bring about a responsible end and a negotiated settlement to the war.

— LLOYD AUSTIN  
US Defence Secretary

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the war," Austin said.

President Joe Biden said last week in an *ABC News* interview that it will be "tough" for the US to meet a May 1 deadline to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. But he said that if the deadline, which is laid out in an agreement between former President Donald Trump's administration and the Taliban, is extended, it wouldn't be by a "lot longer."

In response, the Taliban on Friday warned of consequences if the US doesn't meet the deadline. Suhail Shaheen, a member of the Taliban negotiation team, told reporters that if US troops stay beyond

May 1, "it will be a kind of violation of the agreement. That violation would not be from our side. ... Their violation will have a reaction."

Austin met with Ghani and according to a statement released by the presidential palace both sides condemned the increase in violence in Afghanistan. There was no mention of the May 1 deadline. Washington is reviewing the agreement the Trump administration signed with the Taliban last year and has been stepping up pressure on both sides in the protracted conflict to find a swift route to a peace agreement.

— AP

TIES SEVERED:  
N. KOREANS  
LEAVE MALAYSIA

**Kuala Lumpur, March 21:** North Korean diplomats vacated their embassy in Malaysia and prepared to leave the country Sunday, after the two nations cut diplomatic ties over the extradition of a North Korean criminal suspect to the US.

The North Korean flag and embassy signage have been removed from the premise. Two buses ferried the diplomats and their families to the airport, where they were seen checking in for a flight to Shanghai. Ties have been virtually frozen since the 2017 assassination of the estranged half brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Kuala Lumpur.

— AP

Man accused of 1 murder  
says he really killed 16

**Woodbury (US), March 21:** A man charged with beating to death a New Jersey resident he says sexually abused him as a child now claims he has killed a total of 16 people, including his ex-wife and three others in New Mexico, officials said.

Authorities have not corroborated that claim. Sean Lannon, 47, said he killed the four whose remains were found in a vehicle at an airport and "11 other individuals" in New Mexico, Alec Gutierrez, an assistant prosecutor in Gloucester County, New Jersey, said during a detention hearing Friday, NJ.com reported. Authorities said in court documents that Lannon made the admission

about 11 other killings are true and that they aren't aware of any missing-person or homicide reports that would fit his narrative. "Is it possible? Sure, it's possible. Is it probable? No, probably not," Chavez told the *Albuquerque Journal*, saying authorities would investigate.

It was a twist in a case that spans the country. A search for Lannon ended with his arrest in St Louis on March 10.

He was driving a car stolen from New Jersey victim Michael Dabkowski, who mentored Lannon and his twin brother through a Big Brothers programme in the 1980s, *NJ.com* reported.

Police Lt David Chavez in Lannon's hometown of Grants, New Mexico, said authorities have no indication that his claims

## Migrant surge: Biden on his heels

**Washington, March 21:** Somehow, they didn't see it coming. Within weeks of Inauguration Day on Jan. 20, the Biden administration had reversed many of the most maligned Trump-era immigration policies, including deporting children seeking asylum who arrived alone at the US-Mexico border and forcing migrants to wait in Mexico as they made their case

to stay in the US.

While the administration was working on immigration legislation to address long-term problems, it didn't have an on-the-ground plan to manage a surge of migrants. Career immigration officials had warned there could be a surge after the presidential election and the news that the Trump policies were being reversed.

Now, officials are scrambling to build up capacity to care for some 14,000 migrants now in federal custody — and more likely on the way — and the administration finds itself on its heels in the face of criticism that it should have been better prepared to deal with a predictable predicament.

"They should have forecasted for space (for young

migrants) more quickly," said Ronald Vitiello, a former acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement and chief of Border Patrol who has served in Republican and Democratic administrations. "And I think in hindsight, maybe they should have waited until they had additional shelter space before they changed the policies."

— AP

## TRUE | STORIES

## Book tracks alleged offenders wanted in India to stand trial

## Indian fugitives who escaped to the UK

**London, March 21:** A new book on some high-profile as well as lesser-known Indian extradition cases attempts to decode why the UK is considered a safe haven for those wanting to escape the law in India. "Escaped: True stories of Indian fugitives in London", released worldwide, tracks 12 cases involving alleged offenders wanted in India to stand trial for offences ranging from loan defaults to murder. The book, by London-based journalists and researchers Danish and Ruhi Khan, includes a recap of the more recent cases involving former Kingfisher

Airlines boss Vijay Mallya and diamond merchant Nirav Modi, wanted in India on fraud and money laundering charges, as well as some historic ones including those of former Indian Naval officer Ravi Shankaran and musician Nadeem Saifi.

"These 12 cases were chosen as much for the significance of the allegations against them as for the interesting arguments raised during their hearings and the observations made in their judgments," said Danish Khan. "We have studied in much detail many other extradition cases, have had long inter-

views with experts and pored over case laws and parliamentary reports to understand the principles underlying the extradition process that we explore in our last chapter," he said.

As journalists covering the recent court cases in London, the couple said they drew on their own observations and reporting and also dug into British archives, old newspaper records and parliamentary reports to review cases dating back to the 1950s that have had a significant impact on the India-UK extradition policy.

"We have used investigative reporting and eye-wit-

ness accounts to bring to life the stories of the flamboyant billionaire Vijay Mallya and diamond czar Nirav Modi. We have also made extensive use of the British archives and historical newspapers reports to bring into focus the less heard but extremely important and intriguing stories of other fugitives that throw a spotlight on India over the past seven decades — whether it is the underworld-cricket-Bollywood nexus or the Indo-Pak diplomatic wars," said Ruhi.

Among some of the past extradition cases is that of a key lieutenant of Dawood

Myanmar docs'  
march peaceful

## One person shot dead at a rally elsewhere

**Mandalay, March 21:** A peaceful march at dawn on Sunday by medical professionals in Myanmar's second biggest city kicked off another day of protests around the country against last month's coup. Security forces shot dead at least one person at a rally elsewhere.

With public protests getting ever more dangerous, anti-coup demonstrators in Mandalay acted early to minimize the risk of confrontation with security forces. The independent Assistance Association for Political Prisoners had verified 247 deaths nationwide linked to the post-coup crackdown.

The actual total, including cases where verification has been difficult, is probably much higher, it said. It also has confirmed that 2,345 people have been arrested or charged, with 1,994 still detained or sought for arrest. About 100 doctors, nurses, medical students and pharmacists, wearing the long white coats, lined up on a main road in Mandalay to chant slogans and proclaim their opposition to the Feb. 1 coup that toppled the elected civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi. The army takeover reversed the slow progress towards democracy that began when Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party won a 2015 election after five decades

Cops use tear gas  
to end Thai protest

**Bangkok, March 21:** Scores of people were injured and arrested in the Thai capital after police used water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets Saturday night to break up a rally by pro-democracy protesters calling for the release of detained activists, constitutional changes and reform of the nation's monarchy.

The rally outside Bangkok's Grand Palace was a continuation of student-led protests that began last year and have rattled Thailand's traditional establishment, which is fiercely opposed to change, especially with regard to the monarchy.

The rally organisers had said they planned to have demonstrators throw paper planes with messages over the palace walls.

The demonstrators, who numbered close to 1,000, managed to break through a barrier made of shipping containers outside the ceremonial palace stacked two high.

Police behind the containers responded first with warnings and then by shooting water cannons and rubber bullets.

Police drove the crowd back and while skirmishes continued, the crowds appeared to have dissipated by 10 PM.

— AP

of military rule.

Mandalay has been a major centre of opposition to the takeover. But in recent weeks, the numbers of protesters has fallen off in the face of lethal use of force by police and soldiers firing live ammunition into crowds.

Engineers in Mandalay on Sunday held what has been dubbed a "no-human strike," an increasingly popular tactic that involves lining up signboards in

streets or other public areas as proxies for human protesters. While Mandalay's early morning march was unmolested by security forces, at least one protester was shot dead in Monywa, another central Myanmar city, according to the online news site *Myanmar Now* and numerous social media posts. *Myanmar Now*, citing a doctor in Monywa, identified the victim as Min Min Zaw.

— AP

NEW SOUTH  
WALES HIT BY  
RAINS, FLOODS

**Sydney, March 21:** Australia's most populous state of New South Wales on Sunday issued more evacuation orders following the worst flooding in decades.

The New South Wales State Emergency Services responded to 640 calls for help on Saturday night, including 66 for flood rescues.

New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian said that hundreds of people have been rescued from the waters.

Evacuation orders have been issued at multiple locations on the Mid North Coast in the northeast of the state, which Berejiklian said was experiencing a one-in-a-100-year event, and whilst we don't think things will worsen on the Mid North Coast, definitely conditions will continue, so the rainfall will continue across the parts that have already been affected. Berejiklian also said that parts of Western Sydney are being hit by a one-in-50-year weather event, with some locations recorded more than 11.8 inches of rain since Friday morning, breaking records.

The Warragamba dam, west of Sydney, started overflowing on Sunday and so far 13 evacuation centres have been opened across the state. More evacuations are expected as the bad weather is forecast to last into the middle of the week. Local authorities are urging people not to drive.

— AP

**Islamabad, March 21:** Pakistan imposed a complete ban on travel from 12 countries, including South Africa, Rwanda and Tanzania, in a bid to curb the spike of Coronavirus cases as the country on Sunday recorded 3,667 new cases, taking the national tally to 626,802.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) notified a fresh list of countries categorised into A, B and C after emergence of South African and Brazilian strain of the virus and imposed a complete ban on travel from 12 countries, categorised as C.

The travel restrictions and a ban on inbound passengers from 12 countries will remain effective from March 23 to April 5. Botswana, Brazil, Columbia, Comoros, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Peru, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia have been placed in category C. The CAA in its notification said there will be a complete travel ban on inbound travel to

IMRAN, FIRST  
LADY HAVE MILD  
SYMPTOMS

**Islamabad, March 21:** Prime Minister Imran Khan and First Lady Bushra Bibi are feeling "comfortable with mild symptoms", his top communication aide said on Sunday, a day after they tested positive for the Covid-19. Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Political Communication Dr Shahbaz Gill, in a tweet in Urdu, said that the prime minister and the first lady are thankful to their well-wishers for their good wishes.

— PTI

Pakistan from category C countries, including withdrawal of exemptions earlier provided to certain categories of travellers like Pakistani passport holders.

— PTI

Rallies against  
Atlanta shootings

**Atlanta, March 21:** A diverse crowd gathered Saturday near the Georgia state Capitol to demand justice for the victims of recent shootings at massage businesses and to denounce racism, xenophobia and misogyny. Hundreds of people of all ages and varied racial and ethnic backgrounds gathered in Liberty Plaza in Atlanta, and in similar rallies across the country, waving signs and chanting slogans.

In Atlanta, they cheered US Sens. Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, and Georgia state Rep Bee Nguyen, the first Vietnamese American to serve in the Georgia House.

● IN ATLANTA, they cheered US Senators Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, and Georgia state Rep Bee Nguyen, the first Vietnamese American to serve in the Georgia House.

Another person was shot but survived. Investigators have said Long confessed to the slayings but said they weren't racially motivated. He claimed to have a sex addiction, which caused him to lash out at what he saw as sources of temptation, according to authorities. Police have said they're still working to establish a motive, including looking into whether the attacks can be classified as hate crimes.

Georgia lawmakers last year passed a hate crimes law allowing additional penalties for certain offences when motivated by a victim's race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender or disability. A hate crime is not a standalone crime under Georgia law, but can be used to add time to a sentence of someone convicted of another crime.

— AP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,858.24	1.30
Nifty 50	14,744.00	1.28
S&P 500*	3,913.10	-0.06
Dollar (₹)	72.48	0.25
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.99	0.25
Euro (₹)	86.47	0.16
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,580▼168	0.37
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.04	1.20
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.193	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.730	0.001

\* As of Friday/Saturday

BioNTech sees lockdowns going by late summer

The US and many European countries will probably be in a position to end Covid-19 lockdowns at the end of summer, said BioNTech SE CEO chief Ugur Sahin. Overall, though, "it will take at least a year to get the situation under control worldwide," Sahin, whose company is Pfizer Inc's vaccine-making partner, told *Welt am Sonntag*. While virus mutations will emerge, "we are already preparing for that today."

Airtel adds 6.9 mn active users in Jan, extends gain



Bharti Airtel added 6.9 million active users in January, extending its market lead on this count even as Jio's active subscribers tally declined by about 3.4 million, Trai data shows. With this, Bharti's active subscribers rose to 336 mn, most of which was driven by total net adds, ICICI Securities said. Active subscribers declined for Jio after rising in the previous two months by 3.2 mn in Dec. and 5.4 mn in Nov, said JM Financial.

ITC can be used to discharge GST dues for March

The finance ministry said GST taxpayers can utilise the Input Tax Credit available in their credit ledger to discharge their GST dues for the month of March. Taxpayers are free to utilise the ICT available in their credit ledger, as permissible in law, to discharge their GST dues for March, the last month of this financial year, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) said in a statement.

Future moves division bench of Delhi HC

The Future Group has moved the division bench of the Delhi High Court against the order passed by the single-member bench, which has directed to stay its Rs 24,713 crore deal with Reliance Industries to sell its retail and wholesale business. Future Retail Ltd has now filed an appeal before the higher bench of the same High Court against the orders passed by a single-member bench of Justice J. R. Midha.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: T.Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

■ Year of Covid swells capital flow, investor numbers  
Pandemic boost for market

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, MARCH 21

One year of pandemic and lockdown seemed to have unlocked Indian Capital market's hidden potential in many ways, as the market grew to a far bigger size in these 12 months, thanks to the bull run in the global market.

Working from home and in search of little extra income, a new breed of retail investors joined the capital market in hordes last year, with their numbers swelling by more than 1.51 crore to over 6.36 crore, as per BSE data.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies crossed Rs 200 crore for the first time during this period.

The NSE average daily turnover in the capital market segment has been rising consistently month over month from Rs 47,917 crore in March 2020 to Rs 81,373 crore in February 2021.

The largest-ever foreign investment in a financial year has also taken place in FY21 with foreign portfolio investors investing Rs 2,77,752 crore in the equity market so far.

Retail investors' matured approach has led to some profit taking from equity mutual funds but due to consistent inflows from the foreign portfolio investors, it has not led to any negative impact on the market.

"SIP asset under management (AUM) as also retail equity folios, are at an all-time high at Rs 4.21 lakh crore and 8.07 crore, respectively, and overall net average AUMs is at all time high at Rs 32.29 lakh crore," as per the Association of Mutual



At \$36 bn, FPI inflows highest since FY13

FC BANKING BUREAU  
WITH AGENCY INPUTS  
MUMBAI, MARCH 21

Foreign portfolio investors have pumped in a record \$36 billion into equities so far this fiscal up to March 10, the highest since FY13, shows the latest data from the Reserve Bank.

According to analysts, the major factors driving the FPI flows are the abundant global liquidity, abysmally low interest rates in the developed world and the ultra-loose monetary policy being followed by the leading central banks.

There is a gush of liquidity in the global financial markets after the US this month announced a \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package.

"Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) made net pur-

chases in the equity segment so far this fiscal, while have been net sellers in the debt market during the period. Cumulatively, FPIs have pumped in a record \$36 billion into equities so far this fiscal up to March 10, which is the highest since FY13," said an RBI bulletin.

The report further notes that the quality of FPI inflows improved during the period, as category-1 foreign investors—comprising central banks, sovereign wealth funds, pension funds, regulated entities and multilateral organisation—increased their stake to a high 95 per cent of total equity assets at end-February compared with 87 per cent at end-December 2019.

Kshitij Purohit, product manager currency & commodity, CapitalVia Global

Funds in India's February 2021 data. It is also being said that retail investors are now directly investing in equities by unlocking profit from equity mutual funds. Consistent with mutual funds penetration in smaller cities and towns, the

new retail investors have joined from all parts of country during the pandemic as per the BSE data of registered investors. Though Maharashtra (31.29 per cent) is adding the highest number of over 3 lakh new investors every month, in states

like Telangana (75.69 per cent), Assam (73.32 per cent) and Mizoram (73.12 per cent) new investors were added at a faster rate during the past one year. New investors have been added from all states at the rate of 20 per cent to 75 per cent.

Research, said, higher oil prices are taking Indian economy down due to reduced household disposable income, which is trimming corporate margins, putting pressure on the USD-INR pair. On the other hand, higher US yields are raising the cost of financing in US dollars, which is increasing the cost of trades in the emerging markets...If US bond yields continue to rise along with rising oil prices, it can trigger outflows from Indian debt and even Indian equity.

Net FDI inflows jumped to \$44 billion, till end January, up from \$36.3 billion a year ago, driven by the massive inflows in November and December, with the last month of the year getting a record \$ 6.3 billion. But the inflows moderated in January.

AG and Vietnam's Vingroup JSC on possible sale of the smartphone business seemed to have failed, according to the report. LG Electronics' CEO said in January that all options were on the table for the loss-making operation. The company was said to have halted devel-

Trade deficit in engg goods narrows to seven-year low

SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, MARCH 21

Trade deficit in engineering goods in the current fiscal till February is the lowest in seven years. While narrowing of trade deficit is good news generally, this time the trend has not been quite healthy for the manufacturing sector.

With \$64.3 billion exports and \$72.9 billion imports, the trade deficit has come down to 8.62 per cent till February in FY21. The deficit was 24.6 per cent last fiscal till February. In fact for the past seven years, engineering trade has been witnessing double-digit deficit. The lowest deficit was recorded in 2014-15, at 6.6 per cent, as per the data from the Engineering Export Promotion Council.

However, the flip side to the low trade deficit is that most of the categories that recorded exports growth have been raw materials. Iron and steel exports grew 20.5 per cent between April and February against the previous fiscal. Similarly exports of copper and products rose 34.42 per cent, zinc and products 31.86 per cent and aluminium and products 8.74 per cent during the period.

Most of the categories of value-added engineering products, including industrial machinery, automobiles, auto components and parts and other products like railway transport goods, medical and scientific instruments, electrodes accumulators, bicycles and parts, cranes and lifts have recorded negative growth during the period.



The higher exports of basic metals and decline in value-added products have not been good for the manufacturing sector. While iron and steel exports were going up, manufacturers of value-added products were worried about the increase in steel prices and shortage of the metal throughout the year.

"It has not been an ordinary year. The trend is a reflection of the economic activity, which was marred by the lockdown during the initial months. Manufacturing activity is picking up and March could be a good month, as exporters try to push the shipments as much as possible at the end of the fiscal for the sake of their balance sheets and better credit availability," said Suranjan Gupta, executive director of EEPC India.

LG may close down mobile phone business

KYUNGJI CHO  
MARCH 21

LG Electronics Inc may shutter its mobile communication business rather than sell it, DongA Ilbo reports, citing an unidentified person in the electronics industry.

Negotiations with Germany's Volkswagen

opment last month of phones with a rollable display, and DongA said on Sunday that LG has shelved a planned first-half rollout of all new smartphones.

LG may share its decision on the business' fate with employees as soon as early April, the DongA report said. — Bloomberg

POTATO PRICES CRASH 50% TO ₹5-6 PER KG

LAXMI DEVI  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

Potato prices in both producing and consuming areas across India have crashed 50 per cent to Rs 5-6 per kg this year on account of good rabi (winter) crop, as per the government data.

While consumers are getting the key kitchen staple at very low prices now, farmers are struggling to even recover their production cost.

As per a food processing ministry analysis, the wholesale rates in 25 out of 60-odd key potato producing areas, spread over UP, West Bengal, Punjab, Karnataka, HP, MP, Gujarat and Bihar, were ruling 50 per cent lower on March 20 compared to the year-ago period.

In fact, wholesale prices of potato on March 20 were ruling below three years' average at Rs 6 per kg in Sambhal, UP, and Deesha, Gujarat.

In the year-ago period, wholesale potato prices were at Rs 8-9 per kg on a lower side. — PTI

Negative-yield quote causes flutter in Indian bond market

SUBHADIP SIRCAR  
MARCH 21

A negative yield was quoted for the first time ever on India's sovereign bond trading platform on Friday, traders said, triggering intense speculation about the motive.

The 6.17 per cent bond maturing in 2021 was offered at a negative yield of around 1.5 per cent, according to traders who saw the quote on the Clearing Corporation of India's Negotiated Dealing System-Order Matching, or NDS-OM, platform. They asked not to be identified as they aren't authorised to speak to the media.

While there's a total \$13.30 trillion of negative-yielding assets in the world, the phenomenon had been unheard of in an emerging market like India where the benchmark 10-year note trades at above 6 per cent.

Banks and financial institutions typically

have internal risk management systems that prevent occurrences like negative yields caused by manual errors. Traders therefore speculated that the system was manually overridden, which caused a negative yield quote.

The Clearing Corporation later in the day emailed traders to clarify that there was no change on its end to the way the system operates on inputting prices and the calculation of yields. Bloomberg News has seen a copy of the email.

Traders are concerned that if negative rates begin to show up in the Clearcorp Repo Order Matching System, or CROMS platform, it could make it costlier to short Indian bonds.

The strategy -- where traders bet against an asset and borrow it to cover their bets -- has been increasingly used in India after a record government borrowing plan caused a glut of paper. An

economist at State Bank of India—among the biggest holders of these notes -- last month exhorted the Reserve Bank of India to make short-selling costlier.

Currently, traders who wish to short Indian bonds need to use the CROMS platform to borrow the paper from banks against a short-tenor loan paying them as low as 0.01 per cent at times of high demand.

If the rate dips into negative territory, it would become costlier for traders to borrow bonds -- effectively imposing a penalty on short-sellers.

An email to CCIL on Saturday wasn't immediately answered. An email to an RBI representative outside of business hours Friday wasn't immediately answered.

The bond that was offered at a negative yield of around 1.5 per cent closed trading at 3.57 per cent on Friday.

— Bloomberg

DOUBLE TROUBLE

Japan's Renesas aims to resume production at damaged plant in a month

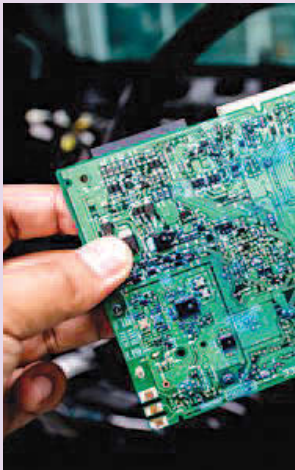
Automotive chip supplies to be hurt by factory fire

CHIKAFUMI HODO &  
YUKI FURUKAWA  
MARCH 21

A fire at one of Renesas Electronics Corp's semiconductor facilities will probably have a big impact on the supply of chips for the automobile industry, chief executive officer Hidetoshi Shibata said during an online news conference on Sunday.

One of the biggest suppliers of automotive chips, Renesas had to halt production at a Japanese plant on Friday after a fire broke out in one of its clean rooms, critical areas designed to keep impurities from contaminating semiconductors.

Shibata, speaking to reporters, said on Sunday that Renesas aims to resume production at the



plant within a month. The facility being offline for a month could result in a 17 billion yen (\$156 million) revenue loss, he said.

Global automakers were already struggling to keep

assembly lines operating amid a shortage of chips caused by booming demand for laptops, tablets and home electronics in the wake of the pandemic. The Renesas

fire will probably exacerbate an already-difficult supply situation.

Renesas has production facilities at six sites in Japan. The N3 building where the fire broke out is

home to 300-millimetre wafer production, which would make it one of the company's more advanced lines.

In 2019, Renesas was the third-largest maker of

automotive silicon. Toyota Motor Corp. is one of its biggest customers, according to Bloomberg supply chain analysis.

— Bloomberg



## SHORT TAKES

Para shooter  
Singhraj bags gold

**AI Ain, UAE:** India's Singhraj displayed his skills to win a gold medal at the AI Ain 2021 World Shooting Para Sport World Cup here. He bagged the top honours in P1 men's 10m air pistol SH1 finals.

Singhraj, the Sydney 2019 World Championships medalist, pipped Rio 2016 bronze medalist Sero Ibragimov by 2.8 points.

The final score read 236.8-234. In fact, after the penultimate final series, Ibragimov was leading by just 0.1 point.

In the final series, the Indian had better control as he shot a 9.9 and 10.4, while the Uzbekistan shooter managed 9.5 and 7.9 to settle for the silver. Turkey's former Paralympic champion Muharrem Korhan Yama took the bronze with 214.4 points.

Singhraj's gold also pushed India (one gold, one bronze) to the third place in the medals table behind Ukraine (three gold, three silver and a bronze) and the hosts United Arab Emirates (two gold). — *PTI*

Lee, Okuhara win  
All England titles

**Birmingham:** Lee Zii Jia put up an incredible show to emerge as the All England badminton men's singles champion, while Nozomi Okuhara secured her second All England crown after beating the Thai shuttler Pornpawee Chochuwong 21-12, 21-16 at BWF World Tour 1000 event on Sunday.

The 22-year-old Lee toiled for one hour and 14 minutes to dethrone Viktor Axelsen of Denmark 30-29, 20-22, 21-9 in a pulsating final at the Arena Birmingham on Sunday.

With the win, Zii Jia ended a four-year title drought for Malaysia to show that he is indeed the worthy successor of his senior Lee Chong Wei.

Chong Wei was the last Malaysian to win the title in 2017.

Lee shocked world number one Kento Momota to reach the last four and the 22-year-old suffered no dip in form as he comfortably saw off the unseeded Dutchman Mark Caljouw. — *Agencies*

Man City, Saints  
in FA Cup semis

**London:** Manchester City's quest for an unprecedented quadruple of trophies remains intact after seeing off Everton 2-0 to reach the FA Cup semi-finals on Saturday as Southampton also booked their place in the last four.

City were far from their flowing best at Goodison Park, but goals in the final six minutes from Ilkay Gundogan and Kevin De Bruyne booked City's place in the semi-finals for the fourth time in five seasons.

Pep Guardiola described the clash as the toughest his side have had since November as they recorded a 25th win in 26 matches in all competitions.

"It was the toughest game since the last international break we had," said Guardiola. City won the domestic treble of Premier League, FA Cup and League Cup for the first time in English football history two seasons ago and are firm favourites to repeat that feat.

Saints cast aside their Premier League struggles to ease past Bournemouth 3-0 to reach the semi-finals. — *AFP*

James injury  
rocks LA in loss

**Los Angeles:** LeBron James faces an indefinite layoff after suffering an ankle injury as the Los Angeles Lakers slumped to defeat against the Atlanta Hawks on Saturday. Lakers superstar James collapsed to the Staples Center court in agony after a collision with Atlanta's Solomon Hill in the second quarter of the Hawks' 99-94 win. *ESPN* later reported that an MRI scan revealed a high ankle sprain and that James faced an "indefinite" injury layoff. Depending on the severity, high ankle sprains can take anywhere from a few weeks up to several months to recover from. — *AFP*

## Live on TV

## SHOOTING

**World Cup:** 10m Air Rifle Mix Final from 10 am on Sony Six, HD

Published by K. Sudhakar and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002, and printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C-9, Sector - III, Noida - 201301.

**Editor** — T. Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 57290/94, Price in Nepal - Nep. Rs. 20.00 per copy.

## WORK IN PROGRESS

## Rohit says it's early to talk about batting line-up for World Cup

**Ahmedabad, March 21:** India vice-captain Rohit Sharma feels it is still too early to finalise the team's batting line-up for the upcoming T20 World Cup and skipper Virat Kohli opening alongside him in the series decider against England was only a tactical move.

Before Rohit's media interaction, Kohli said that he will open in the upcoming IPL and would also like to bat at the top of the order in the T20 World Cup at home later this year.

"It is still long time to go for the (T20) World Cup, so early days to talk about how our batting will look like. We have to sit and analyse what suits the team the most," said Rohit after the series win.

"Today was a tactical move because we wanted to play an extra bowler and wanted to leave one batsman out. Unfortunately it was KL (Rahul) which was very tough."

India replaced an out-of-form Rahul with pacer T. Natarajan to have an extra bowling option for the crucial game.

"KL has been one of our key players in limited overs, especially in this format. Looking at current form, the team management decided to go with the best 11. Having said that, it doesn't send any signal that KL will not be considered or anything like that."

"This was just for one particular game. Things might change as we go closer to World Cup."

Before the series, Kohli had said that Rohit and Rahul were India's first-choice opening pair.

"We do understand his (Rahul's) ability and his contribution at the top, what he's done for us. So, yeah, I'm not going to rule out anything or neither will I say that this is the preferred batting lineup for a World Cup.

"There is still a good amount of time left with IPL in between. So, you know, good enough time for us, at that point in time to judge what will be the best possible eleven for us," added Rohit.

Though Kohli said after the series win that the World Cup squad is more or less sorted, Rohit felt the management is flexible on that front.

On Kohli opening with him regularly, he added:



Rohit Sharma in action against England during the fifth Twenty20 in Ahmedabad on Saturday. — *AP*

"It was good for us to win this game with that batting order. But again, everything will depend on what the captain is thinking at that particular time. I'm sure we need to sit and analyze and think about what will be the right thing to do for the team. And if it means he has to open with me so be it."

"The combination, getting the right players in as somebody who's in good form, giving him an opportunity. Those are the things that really matter, and I think we'll be focusing on that come the World Cup. We just finished the T20series, so I don't think Virat will open in the ODI series." — *PTI*

Morgan urges Eng players  
to take advantage of IPL

**Ahmedabad, March 21:** Captain Eoin Morgan wants England's IPL-bound players to make the most of the opportunities in the upcoming T20 league as they prepare themselves for the T20 World Cup to be held in India later this year.

The T20 World Cup is scheduled to be hosted by India in October-November this year and Morgan expects English cricketers to take full advantage of the IPL, starting April 10.

"Taking advantage of the upcoming IPL is going to be huge," Morgan said after their



Eoin Morgan

36-run defeat to India here on Saturday night.

"As a team and individuals we don't want to stand still, we want to continue to move forward. Any opportunity guys get at the IPL, you

want to try to make the most of it," said Morgan, who is the skipper of Kolkata Knight Riders.

England will be at home all summer, taking on New Zealand (two) and India (five) in seven Tests between June and September before they get to play white ball cricket in Bangladesh and Pakistan in the build up to the T20 World Cup in India later this year.

"So I think the experience over the next couple of months is probably the most valuable, and then having the time to work on your game after that," he said. — *PTI*

England greats feel India  
favourites to win T20WC

**London, March 21:** Depth in the team and playing in home conditions make India the favourites to win this year's T20 World Cup, believes former England skipper Mike Atherton.

Even without the services of all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja and fast bowlers Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami, India beat world no. 1 side England in the five-match T20I series 3-2 on Saturday.

"They probably have more strength in depth because of the IPL and the T20 cricket they play and the fact that they have just beaten England without probably three main bowlers," Atherton said on Sky Sports.

"Put all those things together, and the fact that they are playing at home, they are the team to beat."

The T20 World Cup is scheduled to be held in India in October and November this year.

KOHLI & CO.  
REACH PUNE  
FOR ODI LEG

**Pune, March 21:** The Indian cricket team arrived here for the final leg of the ongoing series against England, which comprises three ODIs, beginning with the first game on Tuesday.

After claiming the four-Test series 3-1, India on Saturday clinched the five-match T20 series by 3-2 margin at the refurbished Narendra Modi Stadium.

It is reliably learnt that the Indian team, led by skipper Virat Kohli, arrived here by a Chartered Flight from Ahmedabad at around 4.45 PM.

The three ODI matches are to be played at the MCA stadium in Gahunje, on the outskirts of the city, on March 23, 26 and 28, sans spectators.

Karnataka pacer Prasidh Krishna, all-rounder Krunal Pandya and Suryakumar Yadav were included in India's 18-member squad which was announced on Friday.

Apart from Kohli, the Indian squad also comprises Rohit Sharma, Shikhar Dhawan, Shubman Gill, Shreyas Iyer, Hardik Pandya, Rishabh Pant and bowlers led by Bhuvneshwar Kumar.

India had suffered a 1-2 loss in the ODI series in Australia last year. — *PTI*

INJURED ARCHER RULED OUT  
OF ODI SERIES, MAY MISS IPL

**Ahmedabad, March 21:** An injured Jofra Archer was on Sunday omitted from a 14-member England squad for the three-match ODI series against India starting in Pune on Tuesday.

Archer will also miss the beginning part of this year's Indian Premier League, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said on Sunday.

England captain Eoin Morgan on Saturday had revealed that Archer was likely to pull out of the ODI series and the ensuing IPL as the star pacer's elbow injury has worsened.

A statement from the

ECB said that "Archer is returning to the UK for further management and investigation of his right elbow injury."

"He has been deemed unfit for selection for the ODI series that features matches on 23, 26 and 28 March," the ECB said.

Three additional players — Jake Ball, Chris Jordan and Dawid Malan — who were a part of the T20I series. — *PTI*

**ENGLAND ODI SQUAD**  
Eoin Morgan (captain), Moeen Ali, Jonathan Bairstow, Sam Billings, Jos Buttler, Sam Curran, Tom Curran, Liam Livingstone, Matt Parkinson, Adil Rashid, Jason Roy, Ben Stokes, Reece Topley, Mark Wood.

India rule in 10m  
pistol team events

## ■ Two more Indian shooters test +ve

**New Delhi, March 21:** Skeet shooter Ganemat Sekhon won her maiden senior ISSF World Cup medal after a dominant India claimed both the gold on offer by some distance in the men's and women's 10m air pistol team events respectively here on Sunday.

Sekhon bagged the women's skeet bronze on the third competition day of the tournament.

Before that, the terrific trio of Yashaswini Singh Deswal, Manu Bhaker and Shri Nivetha won the top prize in the women's team 10m air pistol event.

Then, the team of Youth Olympics and Asian Games gold medallist Saurabh Chaudhary, Abhishek Verma and Shahzar Rizvi bagged the yellow metal in the men's event, comfortably beating Vietnam 17-11 in the final.

Away from the sporting action, the number of Covid-19 cases rose to six after two more Indian shooters tested positive for the highly contagious virus.

The Indian women shot 16 in the gold medal round to finish way ahead of Poland's Julita Borek, Joanna Iwona Wawrzonowska and

● **The terrific trio of Yashaswini Singh Deswal, Manu Bhaker and Shri Nivetha won the top prize in the women's team 10m air pistol event at the ISSF World Cup.**

Agnieszka Korejwo, who managed 8 at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range.

The home team topped the second qualification with a total score of 576 while the Polish women shot 567.

In the first qualification, the Indians aggregated 1731, following scores of 290, 287, 288, 287, 293 and 287 over six series.

Poland's sequence of scores read 286, 283, 286, 286, 286 and 287 for a total of 1701.

In the men's final, Vietnam were represented by Dinh Thanh Nguyen, Quoc Cuong Tran and Xuan Chuyen Phan.

Chaudhary and Co. led the qualification part two with a total score of 579 while the Vietnamese managed 565.

The Indian men aggregated 1750 in the first qualification while Vietnam scored 1708. — *PTI*



India's Yashaswini Singh Deswal (from left), Shri Nivetha and Manu Bhaker pose with their gold medals after winning the women's team 10m air pistol event at the ISSF World Cup in New Delhi on Sunday.

India women slump  
to T20 series defeat

**Lucknow, March 21:** Indian women dished out a superb batting effort but their bowling colleagues failed to step up as South Africa women registered a series-clinching six-wicket win in a last ball thriller in the second T20 International here on Sunday.

Shafali Verma (47) blasted six fours and two sixes in her 31-ball innings and forged a 79-run stand with Harleen Deol (31) to set the foundation while Richa Ghosh provided the late charge with a 26-ball 44 not out to help India post a competitive 158 for 4 after being put in to bat.

Chasing the target, Lizelle Lee smashed a 45-ball 70 studded with 11 fours and a six, while Laura Wolvaardt slammed an unbeaten 39-ball 53 as South Africa romped home in the last ball. — *PTI*

Defending the total, left-arm spinner Rajeshwari Gayakwad got rid of Anne Bosch (2) early but Lee starred in two crucial partnerships, adding 58 with skipper Sune Luus (20) and then 50 with Laura to keep them in the hunt.

Defending 19 off 12 balls, Harleen dismissed du Preez (10) in the first ball but she conceded two fours, leaving Arundhati Reddy nine to defend in the last over.

Needing six off last two balls, Reddy bowled a no ball which changed the complexion of the game as Laura took the team home in the last ball. — *PTI*

**Brief scores: India 158/4 in 20 overs** (Shafali Verma 47, Richa Ghosh 44 not out, Harleen Deol 31; Nonkululeko Mlaba 1/27) **lost to South Africa 159/4 in 20 Overs** (Lizelle Lee 70, Laura Wolvaardt 53 not out; Rajeshwari Gayakwad 1/20).

## Series win shows India's Cup preparation is on right track



Hemant Kenkre  
Silly Point

**I**ndia's 3-2 win against England in the recently concluded Twenty20 International series was very fulfilling for skipper Virat Kohli. Particularly their show in the last two matches in which the team defied the odds that were laid out against them. For starters, against the first three matches, it looked like the team which won the toss will win the game, as putting the opposition in and batting second seemed par for the course. In the five-game series held at

Ahmedabad, England skipper Eoin Morgan won the toss four times, electing to field each time.

Kohli got lucky (for a change) in the second match which turned out to be an emphatic win for India, batting second. It was an 'Oh my God' moment for Indian fans when he bumped fists with Morgan after the coin had flipped England's way in the fourth encounter making the visitors favourites to win the match, and the series. India's coming back from behind, in that

match, not only kept them alive in the series but raised their hopes for the bigger challenge that lies ahead this year.

The series against England was labelled by many as a 'dress rehearsal' for the ICC T20 World Cup that is to be played in India starting October this year, and rightly so. The ICC rankings for teams in the T20 format show India, at number two, a few points behind England who lead the table. This series, therefore, was a preparation for the top two ranked teams in conditions that they would encounter in the world event and one that would be watched closely by other teams to find clues that will help them challenge the rest of the field.

The result of this series

has given the team management's (not just India and England) lots to learn and churn for the top billed T20 event to follow. For India, the 3-2 win may seem close if one considers the result but the way they came into the series post their loss in the third match will make them feel that they are on the right track in their preparation for T20WC.

After their 36-run victory in the decider, Kohli was ecstatic calling it a 'complete game' for his team. And, the reason for Kohli's statement was obvious. The result was a culmination of the learnings the team management had taken while the series was on. Winning on pure form or the lack of it from the opposition is one thing while a victory while over-

coming the challenges and odds is another. The 'completeness' of India's series triumph was seen the way they rose to various demands of the occasion which included bowling last on pitches that improved as the game progressed, battling the dew factor (an important element) and handling England's pacers.

Jofra Archer and Mark Wood, both bowling between the 140-150 kilometres per hour (kph) band had the Indian top order batters in tatters in the first three matches with the former becoming the man of the match in the first game. The final match saw the Indian batting rising up to the pace challenge and using it to their advantage with the English speedsters going

for plenty while the hosts put up a formidable score. The dew factor, which heightened in the last two matches, was dealt with firmly by the hosts who played six bowlers in the last one, bowling well concealed slower ones.

Two more factors, came in from lessons learnt by team India as the skipper decided to open the innings henceforth after giving regular opener KL Rahul enough chances to shake off his rust. The *piece de resistance* for the Indian team came not from their batsmen (Suryakumar Yadav's effervescent show notwithstanding) but their bowlers — Shardul Thakur and Bhuvneshwar Kumar in particular. While Thakur sealed his place with his wicket taking ability, the experienced

Bhuvneshwar was the real McCoy taking 2 wickets for 15 runs on a belter of a pitch sending the dangerous pair of Jason Roy and Jos Buttler back in the pavilion.

The Indians with a win in the T20 contest, back on their Test series accomplishment look to be preparing well for the T20WC challenge. The team is well balanced with a strong bench strength. Kohli inadvertently let out that they may have two more T20 series (New Zealand and South Africa, in all probability) before the WC which will help them iron out whatever deficiencies they may have but the statement has been made. For now, hosts India are certainly the favourites for the oncoming T20WC.