

SHORT TAKES

Covid: 175 cases in Delhi, 1 death

New Delhi: Delhi recorded 175 new Covid cases on Monday and the positivity rate rose to 0.44 per cent, according to data shared by the Health department. Another fatality pushed the death toll to 10,911, authorities said. The second phase of the Covid vaccination drive began across the country on Monday as elderly people received their first shots. The 175 new cases took the infection tally to 6,39,464, according to a health bulletin. The positivity rate of 0.44 per cent higher than 0.34 per cent recorded on Sunday with 197 new cases. The new 175 cases came out of the 39,733 test conducted the previous day. The active cases rose to 1,404 from 1,335 the previous day, according to the bulletin. The number of people under home isolation rose to 739 from 691 on Sunday, it said, adding over 6.27 lakh people have recovered. — *PTI*

Procurement of 300 e-buses approved

New Delhi: The Delhi transport corporation on Monday approved bids for procurement of 300 air-conditioned low-floor e-buses, a move hailed by Arvind Kejriwal who said his government was committed to switching public transport to electric mode. The 300 electric buses, after approval by the cabinet, will start arriving from October and the entire induction will be completed by next February, said transport minister Kailash Gahlot who chaired the board meeting. "Along with private vehicles, we are also committed to switch public transport to electric," CM tweeted. "Delhi will defeat pollution with the joint efforts of the people & the government. Our EV Policy will set a precedent for the world." The 300 low-floor air-conditioned buses would be equipped with state-of-the-art features like real-time passenger information system, CCTVs, panic buttons, GPS and other facilities, and will be friendly for persons with disabilities. — *PTI*

2 men arrested for snatching mobile

New Delhi: A 25-year-old man was stabbed to death allegedly by two people over a petty issue in east Delhi's Shahdara area, police said on Friday. The victim has been identified as Saalim. He was involved in several criminal cases, police said, adding that the incident took place on Thursday at Kanti Nagar. The two accused called Saalim to a place in Kanti Nagar. An argument took place between them during which the duo stabbed him with a knife. Later, they also hit him with a spade lying near the spot and fled the spot, a senior police officer said. Police said they have identified the two accused and teams have been formed to arrest them.

'HONOUR PROMISE OF GIVING FREE COVID-19 VACCINE'

New Delhi: Delhi Congress president Anil Kumar on Monday asked chief minister Arvind Kejriwal to honour his 'promise' of providing free Covid vaccination to the city residents. Vaccination of people aged 60 years and above and those with comorbidities in 45-59 years age group began at 192 hospitals including 136 private ones in Delhi on Monday. The cost of vaccination at private hospitals is ₹250 per dose while it is free at 56 government hospitals. According to Kumar, the Delhi government had said that there were 42 lakh people in the city who need to be vaccinated but if they are made to pay for it then most would abstain from taking the shots. "Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal had announced, days before the country embarked on a Covid vaccination drive, that Delhiites would be given free vaccine shots if the BJP government at the Centre failed to do so. He should honour his promise now," Mr Kumar said. All sections of people are struggling to earn a living following the Covid pandemic and the resulting lockdown, as many people have lost their jobs and means of livelihood. "Most people in Delhi are not in a position to pay for Covid vaccination which will result in a majority of them skipping it," he claimed. — *PTI*

■ 14.2-kg cylinder in Delhi now costs ₹819 as against ₹794

LPG price hiked again by ₹25, ATF price up 6.5%

New Delhi, March 1: Cooking gas LPG price was on Monday hiked by ₹25 per cylinder across all categories, including subsidised fuel and those available by Ujjwala scheme beneficiaries — the fourth increase in rates in a month's time.

LPG prices have gone up by ₹125 per 14.2-kg cylinder since the beginning of February, price data from state-owned oil marketing companies showed.

Also, jet fuel prices were hiked by a steep 6.5 per cent on the back of a rally in international oil prices.

A 14.2-kg cylinder in Delhi now costs ₹819 as against ₹794 at which they were supplied on Sunday.

The increase is applicable across all categories, including subsidised and non-subsidised users.

LPG is available only at one rate, market price, across the country. The government, however, gives a small subsidy to select customers.

However, this subsidy has been eliminated in metros and major cities through successive price increases over the past couple of years. So, in places like Delhi, there is no subsidy paid to customers.

Simultaneously, aviation turbine fuel or ATF price was hiked by ₹3,663 per kilolitre, or 6.5 per cent, to ₹59,400.91 per kl in the national capital, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

Monday said several users had complained of "sub-standard" driving range offered by the Nexon electric vehicle (EV).

"The government has decided to suspend subsidy on an EV car model, pending final report of a Committee, due to complaints by multiple users of sub-standard range performance," Mr Gahlot tweeted.

"We are committed to support EVs, but not at the cost of trust & confidence of citizens in claims by manufacturers," he said.

Last month, a show-cause notice was issued to Tata Motors by the transport department about a complaint from a user of Tata Nexon EV claiming it did not meet the promised range of 312 km on a single charge of its battery, officials said. The show-cause notice was issued after a complainant claimed that the model of the electric car purchased by him from a dealer at the Safdarjung Enclave and registered on December 3, 2020 had failed to provide the specified 312-km range on a single charge. — *PTI*

Delhi Transport minister Kailash Gahlot on

Toolkit case: Nikita Jacob moves Delhi court for anticipatory bail

New Delhi, March 1: Nikita Jacob, who is accused along with Disha Ravi in connection with allegedly being involved in sharing a "toolkit" on social media related to the farmers' protest, Monday moved a Delhi court seeking anticipatory bail.

The application moved by Jacob, who is charged with the case of sedition, is likely to come up for hearing Tuesday before additional sessions judge Dharmender Rana.

She had got transit anticipatory bail from Bombay High Court on February 17 for three weeks with direction to approach the court concerned in Delhi, where the case is lodged.

The court on February 23 had granted bail to climate activist Disha Ravi who was arrested by the Delhi Police from Bengaluru. — *PTI*

New Delhi, March 1: Day temperatures are likely to be above normal in north, northeast, parts of east and west India, the India meteorological department said Monday in its summer forecast for March to May.

However, it has forecast a likelihood of below normal temperatures in south and adjoining central India.

"During the upcoming hot weather season (March to May), above normal seasonal maximum (day) temperatures are likely over most of the subdivisions of north, northwest and northeast India, few subdivisions from eastern and western parts of central India and

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tomers since May 2020 and all LPG users pay the market price, which currently is ₹819.

An oil company official said a small subsidy is paid to customers in remote and far-flung areas to make up for the higher price arising from freight charges.

LPG prices were hiked first by ₹25 per cylinder on February 4, followed by a ₹50 per cylinder increase on February 15 and ₹25 raise on February 25.

Prices have been on the rise since December and rates have cumulatively gone up by ₹175 per cylinder.

Meanwhile, petrol and diesel prices were unchanged for the second day in a row after hitting an all-time high.

Petrol is priced at ₹91.17 per litre in Delhi and at ₹97.57 in Mumbai. Diesel

This is the third increase in jet fuel prices since February. Rates were increased by 3.6 per cent on February 16, and by ₹3,246.75 per kl on February 1.

The increase in rates will add to the margin woes of airlines who continue to operate flights at less than capacity, amid pandemic-driven travel restrictions.

Brent crude oil prices on Monday rose to \$65.49 per barrel — the highest in more than a year — on optimism in the global economy and on hopes for improving oil demand as vaccines are being rolled out.

Meanwhile, petrol and diesel prices were unchanged for the second day in a row after hitting an all-time high.

Petrol is priced at ₹91.17 per litre in Delhi and at ₹97.57 in Mumbai. Diesel

comes for ₹81.47 a litre in the national capital and for ₹88.60 in Mumbai.

The rates of regular petrol had last month crossed ₹100-mark at a few places in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, which levy the highest VAT on the fuel in the country.

Price of branded/premium or additive mixed petrol in Mumbai crossed ₹100 mark on Saturday. It comes for ₹100.35 a litre now. Higher taxes are levied on branded or premium grade petrol and diesel. In Delhi, the same grade fuel costs ₹94 a litre.

While petrol and diesel prices are revised on a daily basis, ATF and LPG rates are revised on the 1st and 16th of every month. Sometimes, LPG rates have seen mid-month revisions as well. Petrol price has gone up by ₹4.87 per litre in the last two months. Diesel rates have increased by ₹4.99 during the same period.

Central and state taxes make up for 60 per cent of the retail selling price of petrol and over 54 per cent of diesel. The union government levies ₹32.90 per litre of excise duty on petrol and ₹31.80 a litre on diesel. — *PTI*

Miss India Delhi 2019 Mansi Sehgal joins AAP

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAR. 1

Former Miss India Delhi Mansi Sehgal joined the AAP in the presence of party leader Raghav Chadha, the AAP said in a statement on Monday.

Speaking on the occasion, Ms Sehgal said she was "inspired by the honest governance of chief minister Arvind Kejriwal" and therefore chose to join the AAP.

According to her, for any nation to prosper, health and education are the two



Mansi Sehgal

main pillars and there has been a "tremendous change" in these fields in the last few years under the leadership of Mr Kejriwal. "Inspired by the honest governance of chief minister

Arvind Kejriwal and the hard work of MLA Raghav Chadha, I chose to join the Aam Aadmi Party and I feel that through clean politics we can bring about a substantial change in the world that we live in," Ms Sehgal stated.

Mr Chadha inducted Ms Sehgal into the AAP at Naraina Vihar Club in the presence of several residents. "I am delighted that the Aam Aadmi Party and Arvind Kejriwal instil confidence in young people to join politics and serve the people. The AAP family is

growing in leaps and bounds with each passing day. I welcome Mansi into the AAP family," Mr Chadha said.

Ms Sehgal is also a TEDx speaker, trained engineer, and an entrepreneur with her own startup, the party statement said.

Calling upon the youth and women to be an active part of politics and to join the AAP, Ms Sehgal said, "I would urge our youth and particularly our women to come and join us and bring about the change that we all wish to see."

Man killed, brother hurt as they object to youth riding bike rashly

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

A man was allegedly killed and his brother injured when they objected to a man riding his motorcycle rashly. The two sides got into a heated argument and the motorcyclist called his associates and attacked the brothers with a knife, police said on Monday.

The incident took place on Sunday night when Suraj Prakash Singh (30)

and his brother Chander (28) were on the way to buy fish from a nearby market. They objected to a man riding his motorcycle rashly. The two sides got into a heated argument and the motorcyclist called his associates and attacked the brothers with a knife, police said. Suraj died during the course of treatment at the DDU hospital here and

his brother Chander is stated to be out of danger, they said.

Chander, in his complaint, said that one Kaku was riding his motorcycle rashly. When he objected, they both had a heated argument following which Kaku called his associates. He then attacked Chander and his brother with a knife, police said.

Man, juvenile held for firing at cop

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

A 21-year-old man has been arrested and a juvenile apprehended days after a Delhi Police constable was shot at in outer Delhi's Bhalswa Dairy area, officials said on Monday.

A senior police officer said Yogesh Verma, a resident of Bakhtawarpur, along with a juvenile were nabbed in connection with the incident, they said.

The incident took place on February 25 when constable Sandeep and Bhupender of Bhalswa Dairy police station were

conducting checks at a police picket, they said.

The picket staff signalled three people, who were on a motorcycle with a defective number plate, to stop, police said. Although they had stopped their motorcycle, the pillion rider tried to escape.

When the police tried to catch him, he fell and fired at constable Sandeep while the other accused fired at Bhupender, who did not sustain any injury, according to police.

DCP (Outer North) Rajiv Ranjan Singh said late on Sunday night, they received information that

the accused — Verma and the juvenile — involved in the firing incident will come near sector-30 in Rohini.

When the accused came on a motorcycle, they were signalled to stop but they tried to escape.

"In the meantime, one of the accused opened fire at the police team which hit the bullet proof jacket worn by sub-inspector Sandeep Kumar. When the other policemen ran to catch them, the second accused also opened fire, which hit the bulletproof jacket of constable Ravikant.

Third round of samples from zoo test -ve for Avian influenza

New Delhi, March 1: All samples of bird droppings collected from Delhi Zoo in the third round of serological surveillance have tested negative for Avian influenza virus, authorities said on Monday. According to the officials, the National Zoological Park (NZP) had sent these samples to the National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases (NIHSAD), Bhopal, for checking.

"This is the second time when the serological surveillance results of NZP for Avian flu have come negative," an official said.

Earlier six serological samples of National Zoological Park sent to NIHSAD, Bhopal, on January 19 were found negative for avian influenza virus.

The fourth round of serological surveillance samples will be collected on March 4 by a team of Animal Husbandry (AH) Department of Delhi government and sent to NIHSAD. — *PTI*

"Constables Anil and Dinesh, who were part of the team, also fired back. The bullet hit the legs of the accused. During the encounter, both of them got injured. Immediately, both of them were shifted to Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Hospital for treatment," he said.

Police said Verma has been previously involved in eight cases of auto theft while the juvenile was wanted in two cases of attempt to murder.

Two country-made pistols and live cartridges were recovered from them, they added.

La Nina is associated with the cooling of the Pacific waters and El Nino is its antithesis. The phenomenon has an impact on the weather of the Indian sub-continent.

The India meteorological department said it will release the second summer forecast for April to June in April.

The India meteorological department last month had said the minimum temperature recorded in the country in January was the warmest for the month in 62 years. South India was particularly warm.

The month was the warmest in 121 years, with 22.33 degrees Celsius in south India, followed by

22.14 degrees Celsius in 1919 and 21.93 degrees Celsius in 2020 as the second and third warmest months.

Central India was also the warmest (14.82 degrees Celsius) in the last 38 years after 1982 (14.92 degrees Celsius), while 1958 with 15.06 degrees Celsius was the warmest in the 1901-2021 period.

According to the IMD, sky will be clear on Tuesday with mist in the morning.

Mainly clear sky. Mist in the morning. Strong surface winds with speed between 20-30 kmph during the day. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 29 and 12 degrees Celsius respectively," the IMD said. — *PTI*



Senior citizens wait to receive the first dose of Covid vaccine during the second phase of a countrywide inoculation drive in New Delhi on Monday. — *PTI*

Nine persons also received their second shots till late morning, the official said.

The second phase of the Covid-19 vaccination drive is slated to span 192 health facilities, including 136 private hospitals in the national capital on Monday, officials said on Sunday.

The vaccines will be administered free of cost at government hospitals and health centres, while up to ₹250 per dose will be charged at private health facilities including ₹100 service charge per dose.

Appointment for vaccination can be booked through the Co-WIN 2.0 portal. A mobile number cannot be used for making more than four registrations, officials said.

People within the age group of 45-59 years with comorbidities are required to produce a comorbidity certificate signed by a registered medical practitioner.

A total of 20 comorbidities have been specified for the purpose of vaccination, the officials said.

People eligible for vaccination also have to carry their photo identity cards, including Aadhaar card and voter card.

More than 80 per cent of Delhi police personnel have received the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine, officials said on Monday.

According to a senior police officer, a total of 66,246 police personnel have got the first dose of coronavirus vaccine till 7.00 pm on Friday.

SHORT TAKES

Stringent law soon over spurious liquor

Chandigarh: The Punjab government on Monday decided to amend its excise act, introducing the death penalty in cases where people die after consuming spurious liquor. The decision was taken by the Punjab Cabinet on Monday in the wake of a hooch tragedy in the districts of Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Tarn Taran, where several lives were lost due to the consumption of spurious liquor in July last year. The bill in this regard will be introduced in the ongoing Budget Session, according to a government release, which said the aim is to instil fear of law among the offenders and impose stiff punishment. A new Section 61-A has been inserted in Punjab Excise Act, 1914, according to which in case of death, the guilty shall be punished with death or imprisonment for life and shall also be liable to fine which may extend up to ₹20 lakh. — PTI

Fuel prices: Strike in Kerala March 21

Thiruvananthapuram: A 12-hour vehicle strike against rising fuel prices in the country would be held in Kerala from 6 am on March 2. All trade unions, except the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) which is affiliated to the BJP, would take part in the strike called for by the unions. The state-run KSRTC, private bus owners association and commercial vehicles would be off road, a press release from the Samyukta Samara Samithi of the unions said. The committee has requested all private vehicles also to stay off the road to express solidarity with the protest. "In 2014, when PM Narendra Modi first came to power, the petrol price was ₹75 per litre and diesel ₹57 for a litre. Now, the cost is above ₹94 and ₹89 respectively," the panel said. — PTI

Classes for 9 to 12 reopen in Kashmir

Srinagar: Thousands of students returned to classrooms on Monday as schools in Kashmir reopened for classes 9 to 12 after remaining closed for almost a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The students attended school for the first time since March 9 last year. Over 60 per cent attendance was recorded in most government schools but the exact figures would be known after all the records have been tallied, an official of the school education department said. Private schools recorded higher attendance as classrooms were bifurcated to ensure social distancing. Only those students were allowed to attend classes who had submitted the written consent of their parents. — PTI

ODISHA: ACID ATTACK SURVIVOR MARRIES FRIEND

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 1:

Acid attack survivor Pramodini Roul on Monday began a new innings of life after living in distress for years as she entered into the wedlock with her long time friend Saroj Sahu. The marriage ceremony was at her residence in Jagatsinghpur district in presence of family and friends. The 28-year-old Pramodini, who is called Rani, had got engaged to her longtime friend Saroj on Valentine's Day in 2018 in Lucknow. The couple had exchanged their rings in a glittering ceremony. As many as 20 acid assault survivors had danced to popular tunes of Bollywood to celebrate their love life. Pramodini's life changed forever on May 4, 2009, when a paramilitary jawan in Jagatsinghpur attacked her with acid after she rejected his marriage proposal. Then only 16-year-old, she suffered 80 per cent burns and lost her vision. She was in the intensive care unit (ICU) of SCB Medical College and Hospital, Cuttack, for nine months. In total, she spent five years in different hospitals. The survivor met the love of her life, Saroj, who was the medical representative, while undergoing treatment at a private clinic in 2014. Saroj left his job to give her support, more care and attention.

Politicians known to be thick-skinned, do you plan to use special needle, asks Modi before getting jab When PM's remark made AIIMS nurses laugh

New Delhi, March 1: Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked the nurses administering the Covid-19 vaccine to him on Monday whether they were planning to use some special thick needle as politicians are known to be "very thick-skinned", drawing laughter from the medical staff who immediately felt at ease.

Prime Minister Modi took his first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine at AIIMS in New Delhi.

Nurse P. Niveda, who hails from Puducherry, administered Bharat Biotech's COVAXIN to the Prime Minister, sources said. Another nurse, Rosamma Anil, was also there to assist in the vaccine administering process.

"When Prime Minister Modi arrived early in the morning, it was natural that the medical staff at AIIMS was perhaps a bit overawed by the situation," a source said.

Realising this, the Prime Minister instantly struck a conversation with them, asking their names and about their native places to put them at ease, they said.

Then to lighten up the atmosphere, he asked the nurses whether they would use a needle meant



NCP chief Sharad Pawar receives the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine at Sir JJ. Hospital in Mumbai on Monday.

for veterinary purposes. The nurses said no but did not fully understand the question.

Politicians are known to be "very thick-skinned", PM Modi quipped and asked if they were planning to use some special thick needle for him, according to the sources.

On hearing this, the nurses not only laughed but were also put at ease, the sources said.

The Prime Minister also posted a picture of himself taking the first dose of the

vaccine with a smile on his face.

Nurses Niveda and Rosamma Anil from Kerala can be seen in the picture.

The two nurses are also seen in other pictures released. In one of them, they are seen standing next to the prime minister posing for the photograph.

In another picture, while Ms Niveda is seen injecting the vaccine, the other nurse is seen helping in the process.

Nurse Niveda later told reporters that the Prime

Minister, after being administered the vaccine shot, remarked "Laga bhi diya, pata bhi nahin chala (Already done? I didn't even feel it)."

Ms Niveda said she has been working with the AIIMS for three years and is currently posted at the vaccine centre.

"We found out PM sir is coming for vaccination this morning. When I came here only then I got to know that sir is coming. It was really nice to meet sir," she said.

CM Shivraj says will get vaccinated today

Bhopal: MP health minister Prabhuram Choudhury was the lone member in the Shivraj ministry who got him vaccinated on the opening day of the second phase inoculation on Monday. Mr Choudhury, who got him vaccinated at a government hospital, hoped that his vaccination would help people shed their inhibitions for the anti-Covid vaccine. CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan said he would get himself vaccinated on Tuesday. Mr Chouhan and 7 of his ministerial colleagues had earlier tested positive for Covid-19.

Won't get 2nd dose, says Haryana mantri

Chandigarh: Haryana health minister Anil Vij on Monday said that he did not need vaccination against coronavirus as he has a "high antibody count". His comments came as the next phase of the Covid-19 vaccine drive was rolled out in the country for those above 60 years of age and above 45 years with comorbidities.

Nitish gets jab; Bihar to give free vaccines

NAYEAR AZAD
PATNA, MARCH 1

Bihar CM Nitish Kumar received the first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine on his 70th birthday on Monday and urged people to get vaccinated as per the Central government guidelines.

He also announced his government's decision to provide the vaccination free of cost, including at private hospitals in the state.

"Our government has decided to provide vaccination free of cost for the people of the state. This facility will also be made available at private hospitals. I, therefore, urge all those who are eligible to get vaccinated," the chief minister said.

The announcement comes on the day country started the second phase of its nationwide vaccination drive. The decision to provide free vaccination was taken on Sunday during a meeting chaired by Mr Kumar.

Free vaccination for

I am in good health after taking my first dose. Doctors have fixed March 31 for the second dose of vaccination for me.

— Nitish Kumar,
Bihar CM

Covid-19 was one of the key promises made by the NDA during the Bihar Assembly elections.

Mr Kumar, who took the vaccine at the state-run super-speciality hospital Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (IGIMS) in the presence of state health minister Mangal Pandey, said that "I am in good health after taking my first dose. Doctors have fixed March 31 for the second dose of vaccination for me".

He added that arrangements for vaccination for members of the state legislature have also been made at the hospital.

MP: Love jihad bill tabled in Assembly

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, MARCH 1

The controversial Freedom of Religion Bill, known in political parlance as the "love jihad" law, was on Monday tabled in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly.

The bill is likely to come for discussion in a day or day before being passed in the House, state parliamentary affairs minister Narottam Mishra said.

The state government enforced the Freedom of Religion Act on January 9 this year through an ordinance.

The law provides a maximum 10 years imprisonment and fine of ₹1 lakh to those involved in forcible marriage of

minor girls for the purpose of their religious conversion. The law also provides 5 years imprisonment to the religious leaders and organisations involved in such marriages.

The law declares to nullify the marriage if the couple failed to notify their religious conversion to the local district magistrates 2 months before their marriage.

The law also provides maintenance for the victims.

As many as 23 "love jihad" cases have been filed in the state under the law by February 11.

The Freedom of Religion ordinance of the MP government has been challenged in the Madhya Pradesh high court.



Former chief minister and Telugu Desam Party chief N. Chandrababu Naidu stages a sit-in protest at the Tirupati airport on Monday.

'You produce kids, why should govt pay for education'

Lucknow, March 1: An Uttar Pradesh BJP MLA was caught on tape asking a group of women why the government should bear the expenses of their children's education as it is they who produce them.

The remarks were allegedly made when a group of women approached Auraiya MLA Ramesh Diwakar for fee waiver in private schools during a public interaction in his constituency on Sunday.

"Bachchey aap paida karo aur rupiya hum dein (you produce the children, and we give the money)," the BJP MLA was seen telling the women.

Surrounded by women, the MLA adds, "For what are the government schools? No fee is charged there."

"Paissa humse mangne aati ho, ki wahan sifarish kar do (you come to us for money and recommendation)," he says, adding the government gives everything food and clothes.

One of the women in the crowd is also seen reacting to this, telling the MLA that it is the public who has elected him.

Reacting to the incident, BJP spokesperson Samir Singh said, "I am not aware of this issue, nor is the state leadership. But no one has the right to speak in an undignified manner to women."

"The BJP is the party which respects the 'sarv samaj'. In case of any complaint, the matter will be probed," he said.

Meanwhile, SP spokesperson Rajendra Chaudhary termed the comment by the MLA as unfortunate.

"This comment of the BJP MLA is unfortunate and condemnable, and this is the character of the BJP," he said. — PTI

Modi reiterates his govt working in interests of farmers PM talks of PPP to uplift farmers

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

Amid the raging controversy and farmers' agitation over the three farm laws, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday advocated for increased participation of the private sector in agriculture, especially in research and development.

"There had been much contribution by the private sector towards research and development in the agriculture sector but it is time to increase participation of the private sector in research and development in the agriculture sector. It should not be limited to just seeds, but a holistic

Contract farming is being done in some form or the other for a long time. Our efforts should be that contract farming should not just become a business but we should also fulfill our responsibilities towards that land.

— Narendra Modi,
Prime Minister

scientific ecosystem associated with one crop, the entire cycle," said Mr Modi while addressing a webinar on the implementation of Budget 2021 in the agriculture sector.

Addressing the concerns over contract farming (one of the three controversial farm laws is directly associated with

it), he said, "Contract farming is being done in some form or the other for a long time. Our efforts should be that contract farming should not just become a business but we should also fulfill our responsibilities towards that land."

Endorsing the provisions taken for the agri-

culture sector in Union Budget 2021, he reiterated that his government is working in the interests of the farmers.

"We have made reforms and started Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes worth ₹11,000 crore which will help the agro-industries. Ready to eat, ready to cook, seafood, and several other items are being promoted," Mr Modi said.

"It is the need of the hour to ensure farmers' produce get as many options in the market as possible.

"We have to integrate our agricultural produce into the global processed foods market," the Prime Minister added.

NIA arrests 4 accused of narco-terror

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, MARCH 1

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Monday arrested four persons from J&K allegedly involved in smuggling of heroin and other narcotic drugs worth million of rupees from across the LoC.

The money obtained through the sale of the contraband locally and in other parts of the country would be transferred to a major militant outfit to help it in carrying out "terrorist activities" in the Valley, the agency claimed.

A statement issued by the NIA here said that the case of "narco-terrorism" was registered by it in June last year after the J&K police seized 21 kg of heroin and cash amount of Indian ₹1,35,89,850 from the members of a drug syndicate operating in the Union Territory.

The NIA said that the case was initially registered under an FIR filed on June 11, 2020.

Kishor has joined me as my principal adviser: Amarinder

Chandigarh, March 1: Punjab chief minister Capt. Amarinder Singh on Monday said poll strategist Prashant Kishor has joined him as his principal adviser.

"Happy to share that @PrashantKishor has joined me as my Principal Advisor. Look forward to working together for the betterment of the people of Punjab!" said Capt. Amarinder Singh in a tweet.

The development assumes significance as the Punjab Assembly elections are due early next year.

Currently, Mr Kishor's company, Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC), is assisting Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress (TMC) in the West Bengal elections.

Mr Kishor had handled the Congress poll campaign in the 2017 Punjab Assembly elections. The Congress in 2017 had stormed to power by bagging 77 seats in the 117-member Assembly.

Mr Kishor was the brain



Capt. Amarinder Singh



Prashant Kishor

behind Punjab Congress programmes like *Coffee with Captain* and *Punjab Da Captain* to drum up support for the party.

Last year, the Punjab chief minister had said Mr Kishor told him that he would be "quite happy" in handling the election campaign of the Congress in Punjab for the 2022 Assembly polls.

His claims had come amid media reports that Mr Kishor had said no to handling the party's campaign in the state.

Capt. Amarinder Singh had then even said

Congress president Sonia Gandhi had left it to him on roping in Mr Kishor for the party's poll campaign in the state.

The chief minister had then said that he had even asked his party MLAs whether they want Mr Kishor for the next Assembly polls.

"Out of 80 MLAs, 55 said yes, they want him," Capt. Singh had then said.

Mr Kishor had also managed Narendra Modi's campaign for prime ministership in the 2014 General Election.

— PTI

Cyber attack behind '20 Mumbai power outage

Mumbai, March 1: The massive power outage in Mumbai in October last year was caused by a cyber attack and it was an act of "sabotage", Maharashtra energy minister Nitin Raut said on Monday, citing preliminary information.

On October 12, a grid failure in Mumbai resulted in a massive power outage, stopping trains on tracks, hampering those working from home amidst Covid and hitting the economic activity hard.

Interacting with media

ON OCT. 12, a grid failure in Mumbai resulted in a massive power outage, stopping trains on tracks, hampering those working from home amidst Covid and hitting the economic activity hard

persons, Mr Raut said the state government, the Maharashtra Electricity Regulatory Commission and the Central Electricity Authority had set up separate committees to probe the cause of the power outage and their reports have been received.

We had then complained to the cyber cell and their report is awaited. But the preliminary information I have, there definitely was a cyber attack and it was a sabotage, he said.

Mr Raut, a Congress minister, did not share more details.

His comments came in the wake of a US company's report claiming that amidst the border tension in Ladakh last year, a Chinese government-linked group of hackers targeted India's critical power grid system through a malware. — PTI

Highly irresponsible to accuse with no sufficient proof: China

New Delhi, March 1: China on Monday reacted angrily to US media reports that cited a US cyber-security firm as saying that Chinese hackers carried out malware attacks on Indian power grids last year to warn India on the border issue, with Beijing describing the allegations as "fabrication" and adding that it is "highly irresponsible to accuse a particular party

with no sufficient evidence around". The Chinese embassy spokesperson in New Delhi quoted the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson in Beijing as saying, "As a staunch defender of cyber security, China firmly opposes and cracks down on all forms of cyber attacks. Speculation and fabrication have no role to play on the issue of cyber attacks."

SHORT TAKES

Sarada scam: ED summons TMC's Kunal Ghosh

Kolkata: The Enforcement Directorate (ED), which is probing the money laundering aspect of the Saradha chit fund scam, has summoned TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh for questioning. Sources in the agency said the former Rajya Sabha MP has been asked to reach the CGO Complex office of the ED at Salt Lake area of the city by 11 am on Tuesday. Ghosh, who is out on bail in the Saradha case, was suspended from the TMC in 2013 for alleged anti-party activities. He was later reinstated as the party spokesperson. The former MP headed a TV channel and a daily, which was funded by the now-defunct Saradha group.

2 minors die after being set on fire

Kanpur: Two children died and their mother received burn injuries after they were allegedly set on fire by their mentally unstable tenant in Uttar Pradesh's Kanpur Dehat district, police said on Monday. The incident took place in Nehru Nagar locality of the district on Sunday. The accused, Avneesh Prajapati (25), was hit by a truck while he was fleeing, they said. Prajapati allegedly poured kerosene on Archana (39), wife of corporator Jitendra Yadav, her daughter Akshita (4) and son Hanu (2) and set them on fire. Additional Superintendent of Police Ghanshyam said. After hearing their screams, the neighbours rushed to their house and doused the flames by putting blankets on them. Archana and her children were admitted to Ursula Horseman Memorial Hospital, he said. The children succumbed to their burn injuries on Monday, he added. Prajapati was hit by a truck while he was fleeing. He has been admitted to hospital. — PTI

2 Indian farmers held by BGB

Agartala: Two Indian farmers were held by Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) for allegedly smuggling contraband to the neighbouring country, the Tripura Police said on Monday. Four farmers of Karangichhara in the Khowai district went to cultivate their land on the other side of the fence on Saturday with permission of the Border Security Force (BSF) through gate number 26, they said. When BSF contacted BGB, they were informed that the two farmers left their land in the Indian territory and went 300 meters into Bangladesh and sold contraband. The two farmers held in Bangladesh are Rajib Debbarma and Gurupada Debbarma, police said. — PTI

SC to hear bail plea by Navlakha tomorrow

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

The Supreme Court on Monday agreed to hear on Wednesday the bail plea of the journalist-turned leftist human rights activist Gautam Navlakha who is in Maharashtra Police custody since April last year in the alleged Bhima Koregaon violence case in January 2018.

Navlakha has moved the top court against the February 8, 2021, Bombay High Court order dismissing his bail plea. The high court had said that it saw "no reason to interfere with a special court's order which had earlier rejected his bail plea."

Navlakha's bail plea will come up for hearing before a bench comprising Justice Uday Umesh Lalit, Justice Indira Banerjee and Justice K M Joseph. The police have charged Navlakha and other activists for allegedly making inflammatory speeches and issued provocative statements at the Elgar Parishad meet in Pune on December 31, 2017 that let to violence at Bhima Koregaon the next day.

Police charge is that the event was backed by some Maoist groups and Navlakha belonged to one of them. The case is currently under investigation by the National Investigation Agency (NIA).



Gautam Navlakha

My duty is to protect Tamil language & culture: Rahul

Nobody can rule TN other than Tamil people, says LS MP

AGE CORRESPONDENT
KANYAKUMARI, MAR. 1

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday said it was his responsibility to protect Tamil culture, language and history. Taking a dig at the Narendra Modi led Union government and the RSS of insulting Tamil culture, language and history, Rahul said: "As an Indian, it was his duty to protect Tamil culture, language and history, just as it was his responsibility to protect all religions and culture, language and history of all the states in the country."

He also said that he could not accept the RSS spreading hatred and division among the people, triggering hatred and contempt among the people. He said that he hoped that the state would get an independent chief minister after the election.

Earlier, Rahul visited the cemetery of former Kanyakumari MP and Congress leader H. Vasantha Kumar, at Agastheeswaram, and laid the foundation stone for a memorial there.

The Lok Sabha MP participated in multiple engagements in the district as part of his three-day tour of Tamil Nadu, ahead of the April 6 Assembly polls in the



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi does push-ups with a school student obliging her challenge at Mulagumoodu in Tamil Nadu on Monday. Gandhi is in the state for election campaign ahead of Assembly polls. — PTI

state which his party is facing in alliance with the M.K. Stalin-led DMK.

The Wayanad MP displayed his fitness when he effortlessly did multiple pushups, including one-handed, while he shook a leg with the students he interacted with, as accompanying Congress leaders Dinesh Gundu Rao and K.S. Alagiri joined him.

At a public address in Nagercoil in the district, Gandhi said history has shown nobody can rule Tamil Nadu other than the Tamil people.

"This election will show the same thing that only a person who truly represents the Tamil people can be a chief minister of Tamil Nadu," he said.

Sharma slams Congress tie-up with ISF in Bengal

New Delhi, Mar. 1: Senior Congress leader Anand Sharma on Monday slammed the party's tie-up with Indian Secular Front (ISF) led by Muslim cleric Abbas Siddiqui in West Bengal, saying it was against the party's core ideology and Gandhian and Nehruvian secularism.

He also said that the party "cannot be selective in fighting the communalists" and it must do so in all its manifestations, irrespective of religion and colour.

— PTI

Discord in LDF, seat sharing talks inconclusive

AGE CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAR. 1

Though the CPM had decided to strictly enforce the norm of not repeating MLAs who have won back to back elections, there are enough indications on the ground that this criteria would be relaxed in the case of senior ministers of the outgoing Pinarayi Vijayan Cabinet.

The Alappuzha district secretariat of the CPM has recommended the names of finance minister Thomas Isaac and PWD minister G Sudhakaran for one more time from Alappuzha and Ambalapuzha constituencies respectively considering their high chances of victory. If approved by the state leaders the coming election would be Sudhakaran's eighth and Isaac's fifth electoral battle.

With the CPM aiming for a repeat, the party does not want to take any chances by keeping its popular leaders out of electoral contests in the name of norms. Party sources said if the norms are enforced strictly then at least 28 sitting MLAs of

the CPM including 7 ministers will have to stay out of contest. As per norms finance minister Thomas Isaac, PWD minister G Sudhakaran, fisheries minister J Mercykutty Amma, local bodies minister A C Moideen, general education minister C Raveendranath, higher education minister K T Jaleel, industries minister P E Jayarajan and Law minister A K Balan should not be in the fray. Besides, Speaker P Sreeramakrishnan will also have to sit out.

The party feels that it would be suicidal to keep the ministers, especially those who have performed well, out of electoral fray in such a crucial election. However, the final decision on fielding the ministers will be taken at the state committee meeting to be held later this week.

Meanwhile, the seat sharing talks of ruling LDF remained inconclusive on Monday. The CPM top leadership had a one on one meeting with the leaders of the alliance partners at the party headquarters AKG Centre in Thiruvananthapuram. However, they could not reach any understanding.

■ More women, youth and leaders with clean image to be nominated

Bengal polls: TMC likely to drop several sitting MLAs

Kolkata, Mar. 1: The Trinamul Congress is likely to axe several sitting MLAs from its candidate list for the upcoming West Bengal elections, sources said on Monday.

The party is planning to nominate more youth, women, and leaders with clean image and acceptability in their area, they said.

Chief minister Mamata Banerjee met the party's 12-member election committee in the afternoon at her residence in Kalighat and brain-stormed over the nominations. "Today, the election committee authorised Mamata Banerjee to take the final call regarding selecting candidates," a senior TMC leader said.

Nearly 30 per cent of the 294 constituencies, including those of the 19 MLAs who have switched over to BJP, are likely to have new candidates, the sources said. "Reports by Prashant Kishor's I-PAC on every MLA and their constituencies are likely to play a key role in the candidate selection," another TMC leader, who was present at the meeting, said.

"How the MLAs have performed in the last five years, their image in the area and acceptability will be the main parameters. This time we won't be taking any chances," he added.

Another party leader said that elderly MLAs with age above 75 are likely to be dropped. "Stress will be given on nominating more woman leaders. Last time our candidate list had around 33 per cent woman candidates. This time it will go up further," he said.

In 2016, the TMC won 211 seats in the 294-member House. The Left-Congress



Trinamul Congress activists ride bi-cycles during a protest rally against fuel price hike in Kolkata on Monday. — PTI

■ AFTER HAVING a marginal presence in the politically polarised state for decades, the BJP has emerged as the ruling Trinamul Congress's main rival over the last couple of years

alliance had bagged 77 seats, and the BJP three.

The elections this time, which are seeing a stiff contest between the TMC and the BJP, will be held in eight phases, beginning with polling for 30 seats on March 27. Votes will be counted on May 2.

After having a marginal presence in the politically polarised state for decades, the BJP has emerged as the ruling Trinamul Congress's main rival over the last couple of years, managing to win 18 out of 42 seats in the Lok Sabha polls of 2019 and following it with inducting popular TMC MLAs, MP and ministers into the party.

Owaisi: AIMIM to contest polls in Tamil Nadu

Hyderabad, Mar. 1: AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi on Monday appeared unfazed over Indian Secular Front (ISF) leader Abbas Siddiqui supporting the Left-Congress alliance in the West Bengal elections, but said he would speak in detail on the issue at an "appropriate time".

Asked if he is disappointed or unhappy with the developments as he kept faith in Siddiqui, he said his work is going on expanding the party in states like Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and others.

Owaisi also said his party would contest the elections in Tamil Nadu. "We will definitely fight elections in Tamil Nadu. We had fought elections five years ago," he said. AIMIM's unit is working in Tamil Nadu, he added.

— PTI

DMK firming up ties, seat sharing deals with allies

G BABU JAYAKUMAR & D SEKAR
CHENNAI, MAR. 1

DMK president M.K. Stalin announced his grand plan for unveiling a 10-year vision document for the state in its public meeting to be held on Sunday even as his party started finalising seat sharing with its allies, one after the other.

Though the talks with the Congress ran into rough weather over the numbers, the DMK leaders assigned to hold talks with the alliance partners managed to bring around the MMK and IUML by offering them two and three seats respectively.

Delegations from the VCK and MDMK held talks on Monday and have agreed to return to the table after holding discussions with their leaders. But insiders say there was no big hitch on finalising



M.K. Stalin

the agreement though again the bone of contention is the numbers and the question of which symbol they will be contesting under.

Since the DMK would like its smaller allies to contest in its popular 'Rising Sun' symbol, most of the parties seem to have a different view on that. The IUML has already made it clear it would face the elections in its 'ladder' symbol, the MMK is yet to decide on what symbol to go for.

The two Communist par-

ties are expected to hold talks in the next couple of days and the Congress, too, whose State leaders were camping down south in view of Rahul Gandhi's visit to the southern district, will resume negotiations this week itself.

DMK is said to be keen on finalising the alliance by next week as the party is keen on making use of the ground that it levelled at Siruganur in the outskirts of Trichy for a magnificent State conference, earlier scheduled for March 14.

While the DMK had a grand plan to bring together the party's booth committees to Siruganur and brief them all on how to approach the coming elections to the Assembly, the announcement of the poll schedule and the kicking in of the Model Code of Conduct had led to the abandoning of the conference.

Allies angry, all is not well with AIADMK alliance

■ Continued from Page 1

whether the talks yielded substantial results. Negotiations with the DMKD, however, seemed to have hit a dead-end with the party leaders not meeting AIADMK leader and minister P. Thangamani at his residence on Monday. In Sunday's discussions, the demand placed by the DMKD for over 20 seats was rejected by the AIADMK.

If the DMKD snaps ties, the BJP might be offered a few more seats by the AIADMK. However, the dispute between the two parties is not likely to be resolved as the BJP is demanding some particular seats that the coalition leader is not agreeing to.

The BJP has identified and asked for certain constituencies where it sees a good chance for its

candidates. But many of those seats are in the Western Kongu belt, the AIADMK's citadel, which the party does not want to lose.

It is also rumoured that the BJP would like to accommodate T.T.V. Dhinakaran's AMMK in the alliance, which the AIADMK leaders are totally opposed to. While some sections of the BJP feel that by taking along Mr Dhinakaran's party they could enhance their vote tally, the AIADMK feels that it would weaken their party.

Though Mr Vijayakanth's present posturing indicates the party is willing to go it alone, there is also talk that the DMKD might drift towards Kamal Haasan's Makkal Neethi Maaim (MNM) which is open to the idea of forming a third front in the state.

Tejashwi urges Biharis living in Bengal to vote for Mamata

■ Continued from Page 1

impartially. I have full respect for the EC, but I do not want the BJP to control it."

Mr Yadav, asked why he was extending support to the TMC which is contesting the polls in West Bengal against its old ally Congress, said: "Our alliance (with Congress) is in Bihar. In Kerala, the LDF and Congress-led UDF are opponents."

The Left Front and the Congress have forged an alliance in West Bengal, while they are vying for power in Kerala.

West Bengal is home to a large number of Hindi-speaking people from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand, he said, adding that the RJD will provide "full support" to Ms Banerjee. "We will stand by

her wherever required," he said.

"The BJP and its allies came to power in Bihar through deception. I appeal to people from Bihar living here to support Mamata Banerjee," he said, asserting that the "double engine" government of the NDA in Bihar and the Centre had failed to deliver in his state.

Meanwhile, the Trinamul Congress has hinted it is likely to axe several sitting MLAs from its candidate list, sources said on Monday. The party is planning to nominate more youths, women and leaders with a clean image and acceptability in their area, they said.

Ms Banerjee met the party's 12-member election committee in the afternoon at her residence in Kalighat. — PTI

SC asks rape accused to marry victim

■ Continued from Page 1

high court order. The accused had repeatedly raped the victim when she was 16 years old and studying in 9th standard.

However, when things came to light, the accused's mother

dissuaded the victim's mother from reporting the matter to police. She assured that when the victim turns 18 she will be married to the accused. But that did not happen and a complaint was filed after a gap of two years.

THE ASIAN AGE

2 MARCH 2021

G-23’s Jammu conclave exposes Cong faultlines

The Jammu conclave on Saturday of the 23 Congress dissidents (G-23) who wrote to interim party president Sonia Gandhi in August demanding a “full-time and effective leadership”, as well as proper internal party elections, now appears to have fully emerged as a caucus reminiscent of the ginger group that the late V.P. Singh had formed with disgruntled Congressmen to take on then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The difference is that the anti-Rajiv dissidents challenged a PM, using the same ammunition as the rest of the Opposition, and in time became the principal Opposition. In the Lok Sabha polls that followed, Mr Singh ended up as PM through political stagecraft. This time the circumstances are very different. The Congress is in Opposition and is facing a very determined ruling party under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But, in Jammu, the G-23 have played their real hand.

It’s not clear if all the G-23 leaders will be in the Azad camp for Congress president when the party elections take place. Some of them apparently also see themselves as contenders.

Modi government’s move to constitutionally reduce J&K from a state to a Union territory. He did not question the ending of J&K’s autonomy, setting himself apart from the position taken by the Gandhis in Parliament.

It’s not clear if all the G-23 leaders will be in the Azad camp for Congress president when the party elections take place. Some of them apparently also see themselves as contenders. But what became evident was that the thrust of the Jammu conclave was against the Congress leadership, though names were not mentioned. The Jammu meet leaders noted that the Congress had become weak and they had come together to strengthen it. Their other objective was to campaign against the BJP. But not much was said about the BJP at the forum.

The G-23 had launched themselves through a letter to the interim chief (which arrived in newspaper offices before it landed with Mrs Gandhi) not long before the Bihar Assembly election. They held their first formal meet in Jammu weeks before Congress will be up against formidable challengers in the Assembly elections in West Bengal, Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, where the Congress government was practically toppled through the BJP’s manoeuvring recently.

After the Congress’ below par showing in Bihar, the caucus leaders sharply questioned the leadership. They would doubtless have the opportunity to do so again if their party fares poorly in the upcoming state polls and may even pray for the opportunity. However, it hardly behoves an official Congress spokesman in New Delhi, Abhishek Singhvi, to be critical of G-23’s Jammu show. The party election has been pushed from January-February this year to June — no doubt with the Assembly polls in view. But this was an executive decision, rather than one formally made consensually, including with the dissidents.

Biden lets Saudis off the hook?

America’s strategic interests seem to have prevailed even as US President Joe Biden reprimanded Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman by releasing an intelligence report saying the assassination of critic Jamal Khashoggi was carried out with the prince’s tacit approval. Mr Biden stepped back after suspending some arms sales, drawing criticism from his own party that he didn’t go the whole hog and sanction MBS, who goes scot-free for the sinister actions of his Rapid Intervention Force lackeys which pursues and silences dissidents at home and abroad.

In calling out the Crown Prince, who is the real power behind his ailing father King Salman, who still occupies the throne, Mr Biden merely sent out the political signal that he is different from Donald Trump and that Saudi Arabia can’t expect the same kind of cosy ties it enjoyed with the White House through Mr Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner, especially if it breaches human rights as brazenly as, say, Russia did with Alexei Navalny.

The Saudi-US pact goes back eight decades to the Franklin D. Roosevelt era when Americans gained access to cheap Saudi oil in exchange for protection under a bizarre security covenant between the world’s oldest democracy and the epitome of an Islamic monarchy. The tensions that came with the release of the intelligence report may only help push the kingdom further towards Russia and China, the latter already Saudi’s biggest trade partner.

The prince’s actions, which included detention of hundreds of princes and businessmen at a luxury hotel in 2017 aimed at consolidating his power base, may not have endeared him to a more liberal America with its faith in personal freedoms. Mr Biden’s moves since moving into the White House has been to reset America’s ties with many countries with the focus on first stamping out Mr Trump’s erratic and personalised style of handling foreign relations. Can Mr Biden propel America quickly enough into cherishing democratic values and human rights once again? That remains the key question.

THE ASIAN AGE

T. VENKATRAM REDDY
Editor in Chief

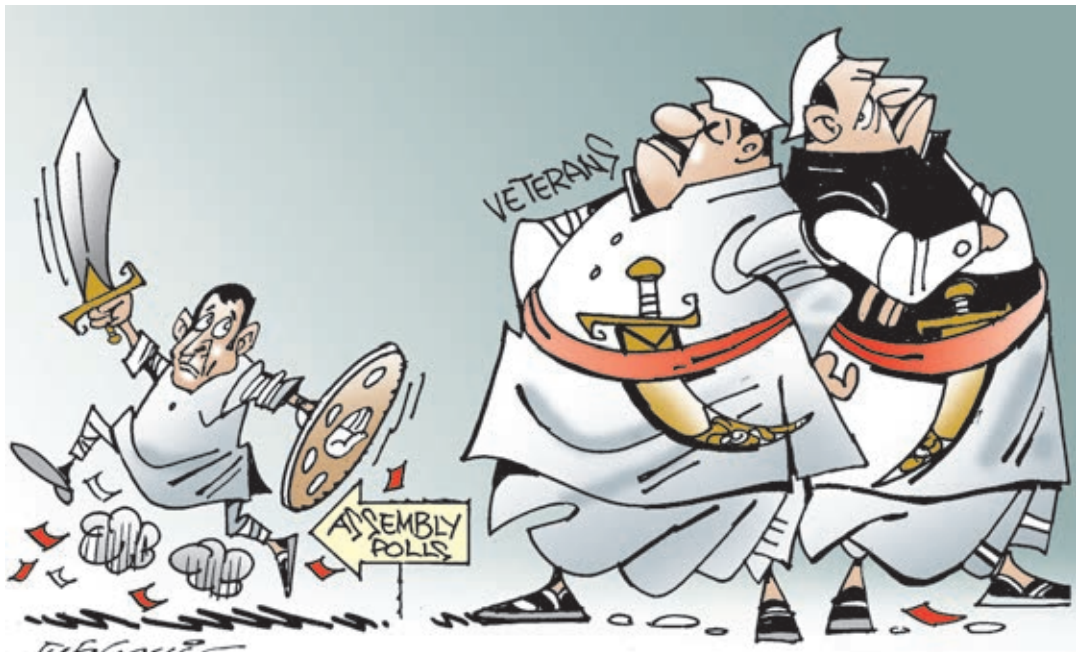
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Subhani



New online, digital code fails to empower users



Shashidhar Nanjundaiah

The new Information and Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 under Section 79 of the IT Act has created a flutter. The news media has paid extraordinary attention, space and time to it as it unfolded, and with good reason. Few people dispute the need for some kind of regulation of the digital media. But the debate is over whether it does what is needed. How empowering a tool are the new rules for the public, who are the ultimate users?

From the press statements of minister for information and broadcasting Prakash Javadekar and minister for information technology Ravi Shankar Prasad, it seems that the new rules seek to rein in the online media and the social media platforms by intervening in their content, and that the overarching objective is to get the digital platforms to be enveloped into “the law of the land”. (I draw a technical distinction between “online platform” from “digital platform” — the first is an unbundled series of news stories released across time, while the latter is a package, similar to a printed newspaper.)

Because the interpretations of sensitive laws of the land by government agencies — in regard to the freedom of expression versus sedition, for example — in recent years have been disputed, a certain amount of scepticism with regard to Rules 2021 should be expected. Experts have questioned whether the new rules even pass the test of constitutionality — in terms of rationale, purpose, proportionality, necessity, and possible impingement on people’s basic rights.

First, to tease out what is new in the rule. In its articulation, the rule seeks to empower the user’s voice, especially in case content is objectionable to them. The new rule changes the privacy protection norms that the social platforms seek to exercise by drawing a line between acceptable messaging and spreading objectionable messages. The mandating of age-appropriateness in the rule for the over-the-top (OTT) content certainly ensures that parents have the right to monitor which content is available to their child and which content could be abhorrent. International OTT channels do declare the customary caution about the nature of the content. The rule attaches online news to the conventional definition of news, making online-only news platforms adhere to the same Press Council of India and the Cable Act norms as the conventional media do. The rules mandate a self-regulatory mechanism, like the National Broadcasters’ Standards Association (NBSA). A three-tier redressal mechanism entails inter-ministerial oversight. Social media companies, or “intermediaries”, would need to disclose the originator of a “mischievous” message.

I would like to take a media literacy point of view here. In a social media world, the user is also a producer of messages. Media literacy has increasingly gained popularity in school and college curricula in several countries after the alarming rise and opiate-like popularity of fake news. Recently, the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism at the Arizona State University introduced a degree programme in media literacy that takes a train-the-trainer approach and teaches journalism students to further educate society. It empowers the user through an understanding of messages, modes and meanings. Among other functions, media literacy unlocks the user’s understanding of how to decode media messages — including what is omitted and unstated.

Fake news is a significant reason that media literacy has emerged strongly in the education curricula around the world. Facts and fiction are distinguishable quite simply — if you mix facts with fiction, the concoction can still be called fiction, but the other way around should not be acceptable. One would have expected the Rules 2021 to draw that distinction in an effort to stem fake news. In the long run, its mandate to identify — and punish, presumably — objectionable content may act as a threat and thereby a deterrent to fake news mongers. Handing itself the authority to know who the originator of an objectionable message is does empower the government to act against such individuals. But it misses the point on educating the user. The tiered approach of redressal would only empower users to the extent that social media platforms already allow — through complaints about content that one may find objectionable. There is no real way in which to prevent fake news or intimidation or national security threats because there is no scope for prior restraint in the current technology adoption.

standing of messages, modes and meanings. Among other functions, media literacy unlocks the user’s understanding of how to decode media messages — including what is omitted and unstated.

The word “media” in the term “social media” is totally misleading — it is merely media in a technology sense of the term. Yet it is an empowering tool like none other in recent history. People tend to use the social media as a public square, mixing facts and fiction, public and private. Other users exposed to the public discourse have been consuming and re-producing it, essentially dismissing the need for credible information, or for doing any kind of fact check. The new rule does not take care of this problem. How does a user distinguish between the credible and non-credible platforms?

So, the proposed rule on the social media “intermediaries” seems both perfunctory and off the mark. Is it because the real intent is to rein them into a more government-controlled content environment in the name of the “law of the land”, which are being adhered to anyway? In an ideal world, strengthening the hands of the user and empowering the government should be the same thing. But is it possible for a government to use the former as a front for the latter? The decryption-on-demand mandate is a powerful indicator that this could be the result, providing access to the government to whether what people are saying — and perhaps thinking — can be punished if found to be politically inconvenient.

The exemplary and now routine arrests of seemingly ordinary individuals who are seen to be endangering the nation’s sovereignty have spooked a large number of citizens. If the government’s intent is to provide more rights to its people, it must help soothe the nerves of people who are now confused about what to say on the social media. If the government’s intent is to provide more rights to its people, it must help soothe the nerves of people who are now confused about what to say on the social media.

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The exemplary and now routine arrests of seemingly ordinary individuals who are seen to be endangering the nation’s sovereignty have spooked a large number of citizens. If the government’s intent is to provide more rights to its people, it must help soothe the nerves of people who are now confused about what to say on the social media. If the government seeks to make genuine efforts through the Rules 2021, it must decontrol, not control, the information flow, but in parallel also launch a national drive to make the user more aware of the importance of real information, drawing a distinction between certified, credible platforms and opinionated individuals pretending to be the disseminators of information.

The writer has led reputed institutes of media and communications, and is the founder of “Being Responsible”, which promotes media literacy. The views expressed here are personal.

LETTERS

CORNERING MAMATA

In order to prod Mamata Banerjee into adopting a more stringent anti-BJP stance, the Congress-Communist combine has devised a novel strategy. They have started spreading the word that Ms Banerjee may join hands with the BJP if a hung Assembly emerges. They are drawing the attention of voters to the fact that Ms Banerjee was the railway minister during the rule of the first NDA government. However, if Ms Banerjee indeed does that, she will be shooting herself in the foot. For, isn’t Bengali sub-nationalism about the only ideology followed by her party?

Arun Malankar
Mumbai

MISGUIDED CODE

THIS REFERS to the editorial, “Code flawed, equates media, gossip, art” (March 1). The new guidelines are deeply unsettling as they will end up giving the government a good deal of leverage over online news publishers and intermediaries. This holds troubling implications for freedom of expression and the right to information. Apart from imposing compliance burden on digital publishers, this also opens the floodgates for all kinds of interventions. The potential for misuse is enormous.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

THE BIDEN FACTOR

THIS REFERS to “Imran welcomes ceasefire” (Feb. 28). Pakistan could well be suspect in this unlikely India-Pakistan thaw. Possibly, the prompt came from US President Joe Biden, who is trying to build a common phalanx against the growing Chinese influence in the subcontinent. Troubled by an economy mauled further by the pandemic, Mr Khan is vulnerable even as his generals would seem to have run out of steam. This welcome theme needs to be taken further and, to begin with, confidence-building measures across both sides of the Line of Control will set the course and the quality of our future relationship.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

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

Aakar Patel



As democracy endangered, India’s global reputation hit

The Washington Post’s editorial board has written that India’s claim of being a democracy should be put in question. This headline came after it summed up what was happening in India accurately across the spectrum of governance, from the farm laws being passed without voting in Parliament to young women being jailed because they edited an open-source document.

India’s ministry of external affairs did not put out a brave response to this, as it did earlier when a pop star that almost nobody in India had heard of wrote six words (“Why aren’t we talking about this?”) over a CNN headline on February 2. India’s brave soldiers like Akshay Kumar and Sachin Tendulkar did not respond to the Washington Post either, as they had done to Rihanna. Presumably the Prime Minister did not instruct his minions to react because he does not care about what the Washington Post writes, whereas the pop star has millions of followers.

The Economist, which is the world’s most respected magazine, has carried a headline in its latest issue which reads: “The Indian government’s pursuit of its critics is not just unfair, but hypocritical”.

Like the Post, this magazine is well-informed about what is going on in India. It says that the Narendra Modi government’s actions have made it globally look “mean and silly”.

The government had not responded to this either, though presumably it will have to do something. One reason is that The Economist has referred to the Indian government’s promotion of Gurujit Golwalkar through an official tribute earlier in February. The magazine told its readers that “Mr Golwalkar believed that Nazi Germany’s management of its Jewish problem represented a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by”.

Let us examine what the Washington Post has claimed, that we are not a democracy. The West doesn’t see democracy beginning and ending at the polling station. It has to be accompanied by civil liberties, fundamental rights and access to justice. All of these ingredients together form what the government structure, which they consider democracy.

In our case, we believe elections are democracy. But there is a problem here. India achieved freedom at the group level in 1947. Independence meant that control of the State was transferred

from a set of people led by foreigners to Indians entirely. This gave Indian citizens the space to determine how to govern themselves and write their own laws to enjoy individual freedoms and civil liberties.

Freedom at the group level meant essentially the right to vote. This was available, but restricted, in the British period too. Freedom at the group level liberated India from a system that already included voting rights, legislatures and lawmaking ability for Indians. It was on limited subjects, however.

After 1947 India should have focused on individual freedoms so that the exercise could be deepened. Here India stumbled. The State (meaning, the apparatus of government) did not relinquish its rights to citizens. It contested the space and asserted itself over citizens on essential freedoms.

The rights — to freedom of speech and expression; practice any profession or occupation; peaceful assembly; to form associations; freely practice and propagate religion; not to be deprived of life and liberty — do not exist in India today. These rights are fundamental, which enjoy a high degree of protection from encroachment by the State. But

they are not available to Indians today despite what the Constituent Assembly wanted. The State has taken them away and many never existed in the first place.

There are so many laws that regulate and criminalise free speech that it is difficult to know where to start. Sedition, criminal defamation and criminal contempt are a start. They don’t exist in the nations where our laws are derived from (India’s Constitution isn’t based on Manu Smriti, but the constitutions of other nations).

The Supreme Court in the 1950s ruled while the Constituent Assembly guaranteed freedom to practice “any” profession or “carry out any occupation”, it could not allow butchery of cows because that offended Hindus; and while the Constitution was supreme, Hindu sentiment was more supreme.

Protest (peaceful assembly) has been criminalised, right to propagation has been criminalised and so has the right to occupation. The freedom of speech is criminalised with sedition, criminal defamation and criminal contempt laws.

The State sought to regulate these freedoms by so-called “reasonable restrictions”, which overturned the

rights themselves. This was always the case in India. However, this government has pushed the rights of the State over the rights of Indian citizens to the point where it will crush individuals who stand up to the State. This is what the Washington Post and Economist are writing about. The reason the Indian government is silent on these accusations is that they are true.

We can tell a pop singer to shut up because she is a young woman. It’s slightly more difficult to tell the Washington Post and Economist to get lost, so silence is the next best option. What is left unsaid is that this is not something that will pass over. The Indian government’s continued actions and its refusal to reverse what it is doing to its citizens has come at a cost to India’s global reputation. We are too close to the story as it unfolds before us in real time today to be able to calculate what this cost is. But it is substantial, and entirely avoidable. It’s a different matter that the Indian government today does not care what it does to Indians as long as it can continue on its path.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

SHORT TAKES

KHASHOGGI FIANCEE
WANTS SAUDI'S
MBS PUNISHED

Istanbul: The Turkish fiancée of slain Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi said on Monday that Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman should be “punished without delay” over the murder. The United States on Friday declassified a report that publicly accused the crown prince of approving Khashoggi murder in the kingdom’s Istanbul consulate in 2018.

But the United States stopped short of applying sanctions against the 35-year-old de facto leader, known by his initials MBS.

“It is essential that the Crown Prince, who ordered the brutal murder of a blameless and innocent person, should be punished without delay,” Khashoggi’s fiancée Hatice Cengiz said in a statement posted on her official Twitter account in English and Arabic.

NEW WTO CHIEF
ACCEPTS SWISS
PAPER’S APOLOGY

Geneva: The first woman and first African to lead the World Trade Organisation on Monday welcomed an apology from a Swiss newspaper that had dismissed the seasoned international professional as a grandmother.

“It is important & timely that they’ve apologised,” Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said in a tweet.

The development economist took over as the new WTO chief on Monday after a long, high-powered career serving as minister of finance and foreign affairs in her native Nigeria and 25 years at the World Bank.

CUOMO AGREES
BEHAVIOUR SEEN
AS ‘FLIRTATION’

Albany: New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo acknowledged for the first time Sunday that some of his behaviour with women had been “misinterpreted as unwanted flirtation,” and said he would cooperate with a sexual harassment investigation led by the state’s attorney general.

In a statement released amid mounting criticism from within his own party, the Democrat maintained he had never inappropriately touched or propositioned anyone. But he said he had teased people and made jokes about their personal lives in an attempt to be “playful.” “I now understand that my interactions may have been insensitive or too personal and that some of my comments, given my position, made others feel in ways I never intended. I acknowledge some of the things I have said have been misinterpreted as an unwanted flirtation. To the extent anyone felt that way, I am truly sorry about that,” he said.

AUSSIE CABINET
MIN. ACCUSED
OF RAPE

Sydney: Australia’s Prime Minister rejected calls on Monday to suspend a cabinet minister accused of rape, saying the unnamed official “vigorously denied” allegations that have now been referred to police.

Scott Morrison — already under mounting public pressure to tackle what has been called a toxic sexist culture in Canberra politics — insisted the minister was innocent until proven guilty.

“Allegations of criminal conduct should be dealt with by competent and authorised agencies,” Morrison said, adding it was a “matter for the police.” Morrison recently received a letter detailing allegations that a man currently serving in the cabinet raped a 16-year-old girl in Sydney in 1988.

The woman took her own life last year. The man not been named publicly due to Australia’s defamation laws.

Morrison said he had raised the issue with the minister “who absolutely rejects these allegations.”

“It is the police, in a country where you’re governed by the rule of law, that determine the veracity of any allegations of this nature,” Morrison said in a testy exchange with journalists on Monday. “The police have had this matter referred to them. The individual involved here has vigorously rejected these allegations. And so, it’s a matter for the police.” Police said they had “received a complaint relating to an historic sexual assault,” but “will not be making further comment.”

Covid vaccine IP rights divides WTO

India, South Africa lead calls to waive rights, notion rejected by pharmaceutical giants

Geneva, March. 1: The World Trade Organisation faces calls led by India and South Africa to waive intellectual property rights for Covid-19 vaccines — a notion fiercely rejected by pharmaceutical giants and their host countries.

The WTO will thrash out the divisive issue at its general council meeting on Monday and Tuesday as its new head Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala takes up her post. Some countries see the waiver as a short-cut to ending the novel coronavirus that has hobbled the global economy.

The IP plan was filed by India and South Africa on October 2 and garnered support from a host of developing countries which — correctly — anticipated being left behind in the vaccination race.

The text proposes a temporary exemption from certain obligations under the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), so that any country can produce vaccines without worrying about patents.

The waiver would also cover “industrial designs, copyright and protection of undisclosed information”, and would last “until widespread vaccination is in place globally, and the majority of the world’s population has developed immunity”.

More than 80 countries support the proposal, including Argentina, Bangladesh, the DR Congo, Egypt, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan and Venezuela. Backed by NGOs including the medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF), they think it would facilitate timely access to affordable medical products for all countries in need.

“All Covid-19 health tools



Britain’s Prime Minister Boris Johnson bumps elbows with with Head Girl Hirah Hussain during his visit to St Mary’s C.E. Primary School in Stoke-on-Trent, central England on Monday, to see how their preparations are going ahead of students returning on March 8, after England’s third lockdown. — AFP

ALL COVID-19 health tools and technologies should be true global public goods, free from the barriers that patents and other intellectual property impose

SIDNEY WONG,
MSF’s co-director for
access to medicines

and technologies should be true global public goods, free from the barriers that patents and other intellectual property impose,” said Sidney Wong, MSF’s co-director for access to medicines.

The idea also has the backing of World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. “If not now, then when?”

Tedros said of the scheme on Friday, condemning the “serious resistance” against it. The International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations is strongly against the proposal.

“Taking away patents now or imposing a waiver wouldn’t give you a single dose more,” IFPMA chief Thomas Cueni told reporters last week.

“It wouldn’t empower you to get the vaccine because you still wouldn’t know how to roll them out on a large scale.” The United States, the European Union and Switzerland — home to major pharmaceutical firms — oppose the idea, along with other wealthy nations including Australia, Britain, Japan, Norway and Singapore. — AFP

FRANCE, GERMANY STRUGGLE TO
SELL ASTRAZENECA VACCINE SAFETY

Paris, March. 1: Already facing a daunting Covid vaccination challenge, French and German authorities are fighting to convince more people that a jab from the pharma giant AstraZeneca is just as effective as others.

Stocks of the vaccines from the British-Swedish firm are going unused in both countries, depriving officials of a crucial tool to help end a pandemic that has sparked a social and economic calamity on a scale not seen since World War II.

Only 273,000 AstraZeneca doses have been administered in

France out of 1.7 million received as of end-February, according to health ministry figures.

The poor take-up comes even as the target group for the jabs, health workers over 50 and people with other serious health risks, can get the vaccine directly from their doctor instead of waiting for appointments at vaccination centres.

Experts say it is also cheaper to produce than the two other vaccines approved for Europe, from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, and does not require ultracold storage, making it easier to deploy. — AFP

French ex-prez
Sarkozy guilty of
graft, to be jailed

Paris, March. 1: Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy was found guilty of corruption on Monday and handed a three-year prison sentence, in a ruling that deals a major blow to any lingering political ambitions.

The sentence includes two years suspended and the remaining one year would be converted into a non-custodial sentence, meaning it is unlikely Sarkozy will end up behind bars over this case.

He is almost certain to appeal and remains free, with no arrest warrant issued, but he faces several other corruption investigations over campaign financing and alleged influence peddling.

The sentence for seeking to illegally influence a judge is the latest twist in the tumultuous political career of the 66-year-old who remains a favourite for many on the right for his combative style and tough talk on crime and immigration.

The conviction is likely to undermine any attempted comeback to



Nicolas Sarkozy

frontline politics, an ambition he has denied, but which has been promoted by many supporters ahead of 2022 presidential elections.

Wearing a dark suit and tie, Sarkozy showed no emotion as the sentence was read out and he left court without commenting to waiting journalists before heading to his private office in central Paris.

“What a senseless witchhunt, my love Nicolas Sarkozy,” his wife, former supermodel and singer Carla Bruni, posted on Instagram, next to a picture of the couple embracing.

“The fight goes on, the truth will come out. #injustice.” — AFP

Trump hints at Prez re-run in 2024

Washington, March. 1: In his first public speech since leaving the White House, former US president Donald Trump has raised the climate issue while criticising his successor Joe Biden for rejoining the “very unfair” Paris Agreement, saying what good does it do when America is “clean” but China, Russia and India are not.

Speaking at the Conservative Political Action Committee in Orlando, Florida on Sunday, the 74-year-old leader, who left the White House on January 20, came down heavily on the Biden administration for putting the “United States back into the very unfair and very costly Paris Climate Accord without negotiating a better deal”.

“First of all, China does not kick in for 10 years, Russia goes by an old standard which was not a clean standard... but we get hit right from the beginning when it costs us hundreds of thousands and millions of jobs, it was a disaster... but they go back in.”

“We have the cleanest air and cleanest water... and what good does it do when we’re clean, but China is not and Russia is not and India is not, so they are pouring fumes... you know the world is a small piece



Former U.S. President Donald Trump addresses the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) held in the Hyatt Regency in Orlando, Florida. — AFP

of the universe and we’re trying to protect everything,” Trump said amidst applause from his supporters.

On February 19, the US officially returned to the historic Paris climate accord, 107 days after it left at the behest of former president Trump. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres had termed that decision as a “major disappointment for global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote global security”.

In the past also, Trump has criticised China, India and Russia for pollution. In October last year, he accused China, India and Russia of not taking care of their “filthy air” as he

justified America’s withdrawal from the landmark Paris climate agreement. “Look at China, how filthy it is. Look at Russia. Look at India. The air is filthy,” Trump had said during the final presidential debate with his Democratic challenger Joe Biden in Nashville, Tennessee. Days earlier while speaking to his cheering supporters at an election rally in North Carolina.

Donald Trump told conservatives Sunday he was considering running for president again in 2024, as he reasserted dominance over the Republican Party and warned of a “struggle” for America’s very survival. Echoing the

● **IN OCTOBER** last year, Trump had accused China, India and Russia of not taking care of their “filthy air” as he justified America’s withdrawal from the landmark Paris climate agreement.

grievance politics of his 2016 campaign and the harsh rhetoric of his one-term presidency, the 74-year-old fired up an enthusiastic crowd at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Orlando.

In a keynote speech — his first since leaving the White House on January 20 — he repeated his false claims that he won the election instead of President Joe Biden, and hammered establishment Republicans who voted against him in the latest impeachment drama.

But while he teased his future plans, he left the crowd guessing about whether he will challenge Biden in a rematch.

“With your help we will take back the House, we will win the Senate, and then a Republican president will make a triumphant return to the White House — and I wonder who that will be?” Trump said to a raucous cheer. — PTI

PROTESTS GO ON
IN MYANMAR,
DESPITE DEADLY
CRACKDOWN

Yangon, Mar. 1: Police in Myanmar’s biggest city on Monday fired tear gas at defiant crowds who returned to the streets to protest the military’s seizure of power a month ago, despite reports that security forces had killed at least 18 people around the country a day earlier.

The protesters in Yangon were chased as they tried to gather at their usual meeting spot at the Hledan Center intersection. Demonstrators scattered and sought to rinse their faces with water in vain attempts to ease the irritating effects of the gas.

In the capital, Naypyitaw, the country’s ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi made a court appearance Monday via videoconference, the independent Myanmar Now online news agency reported. It said she received a charge under Section 505(b) of the Penal Code for allegedly inciting unrest. Further details of the court appearance were not immediately available. — AP

300 RALLY IN
BANGLA TO
DENOUNCE
PRISON DEATH

Dhaka, March. 1: About 300 student activists rallied in Bangladesh’s capital on Monday to denounce the death in prison of a writer and commentator who was arrested last year on charges of violating a sweeping digital security law that critics say chokes freedom of expression.

The protesters marched through the Dhaka University campus and Dhaka’s streets toward the country’s Home Ministry to also demand the annulment of the digital security law and the release of seven student activists arrested during recent protests denouncing the death of 53-year-old Mushtaq Ahmed.

They broke a barricade by removing barbed wire fences on the way to the ministry, but were intercepted by a few hundred police officers outside the ministry in downtown Dhaka.

“The state must take responsibility. He has been killed, it was not a natural death. How come he was held for nine months in jail without any justice?” said one protester, Mahfuza Akhter.

“We want justice,” she said. There were no immediate reports of any violence. Ahmed’s death Thursday night sparked protests on streets and on social media, and prompted global human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, to urge Bangladesh’s government to conduct a thorough investigation.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, or CPJ, demanded that the government cancel the security act. — AP

BERLINALE | 2021

Winners to be announced on the last day, the Golden, Silver Bear trophies will be given in June

Virtual screenings, gender-neutral awards and Tina

SUPARNA SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MARCH. 1

Berlinale, the world’s biggest film festival which usually attracts close to 5,00,000 film fans to the German capital, opened quietly on thousands of laptops across the world on Monday morning and for five worthies at the plush Berlinale Palast theatre.

Sitting at a safe distance from each other in the 1,600-seater theatre were five former Golden Bear winners (the festival’s top prize which goes to the best film) who will pick this year’s winner from 15 films in the festival’s

Competition section.

The sixth jury member, Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof, could not make it. Rasoulof, who won the Golden Bear last year for *There Is No Evil*, a film on capital punishment in Iran, has been found guilty of making films that are a “propaganda” tool “against the system” and is under a travel ban. He will be watching films on his laptop.

Usually held for 10 days in February every year, the 71st edition of the International Film Festival of Berlin is a hybrid affair that’s been

cut short and split into two. From March 1-5, Berlinale will run virtually for film critics and industry across the world. The winners will be announced on the last day, but the Golden and Silver Bear trophies will be presented in person, in June, when organisers hope to invite stars for red carpet events and screen films for the public.

Another departure from the past is that this year the festival has gone “gender neutral” in terms of awards. Berlinale is the first international film festival that has replaced best actress and best actor prizes with awards for best lead and supporting performance. The jury is, quite literally, out on

whether this will be a unique way to showcase women’s talent or whether it will end up robbing actresses of yet another chance to be celebrated on the world stage.

Berlinale’s artistic director Carlo Chatrain, speaking about this year’s Competition section, has said that these are “deeply personal films that reflect the disruption brought on by the events of 2020”.

The films competing for the top prize this year are from Germany, France, Romania, Hungary, Mexico, South Korea and Japan. They were either shot or were in post-production during the pandemic.

Films outside the Competition section that

are set to have their world premiere at Berlinale include director Azazel Jacobs’ French Exit starring Michelle Pfeiffer, and the real-life thriller *The Mauritanian*, which stars Jodie Foster and Benedict Cumberbatch. Foster won the Golden Globe for best supporting actress for her performance in *The Mauritanian* on Monday.

Another film that has already created a lot of buzz is *Tina*, a documentary about the queen of rock’n’roll by Oscar winners Dan Lindsay and T.J. Martin (Undeafed). It features never-before-seen concert footage and interviews with the notoriously private 81-year-old superstar.



A still from the documentary *Tina*

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,849.84	1.53
Nifty 50	14,761.50	1.60
S&P 500*	3,898.07	2.28
Dollar (₹)	73.55	-0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.40	0.02
Euro (₹)	88.40	0.78
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	45,520*241	0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	65.02	0.93
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.209	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.426	-0.030

* As of 8:30 PM IST

SBI reduces home loan rates to 6.70%

State Bank of India said it has reduced interest rates on home loans by up to 10 basis points (bps) and is offering loans starting from 6.70 per cent rate. The new rates are based on loan amount and Cibil score of the borrower, and are available till March 31, 2021. The bank said the home loan interest rates will start from 6.70 per cent for loans up to Rs 75 lakh and 6.75 per cent for loans in the range of Rs 75 lakh-Rs 5 crore.

WTO to hold ministerial meet in late 2021



World Trade Organization members agreed to hold the next major ministerial meeting in Geneva, Switzerland in late 2021, delegates said. The biennial conference was originally set to be held in Kazakhstan last year but was delayed due to the pandemic. The WTO's director-general Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala who began work on Monday hopes the meeting will provide a venue for a deal on fisheries subsidies and WTO reforms.

Govt expects ₹3.39 L cr from maritime summit

The government is aiming to attract investment worth Rs 3.39 lakh crore during Maritime India Summit 2021 in various projects. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to inaugurate Maritime India Summit 2021 (MIS 2021) on Tuesday, which will be held virtually and is likely to be participated by many nations, including Russia, Uzbekistan, Qatar, Denmark, Iran, Afghanistan, and Armenia.

Credit demand may double to 9-10% in FY22

On the back of government and regulatory measures, which helped the economy to recover faster than expected, bank credit is seen growing 400-500 bps to 9-10 per cent in FY22, a Crisil report said. While bank credit growth had contracted 0.8 per cent in the first half of this fiscal, it recovered sharply in the third quarter by growing 3 per cent QoQ. In Q4, too, it should clock 3 per cent growth, Crisil said.

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■ Sales jump 12% at Maruti, 29% at Hyundai Cars regain speed, clock 24% growth in February

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, MARCH 1

Major carmakers on Monday reported robust double-digit sales in February, bringing cheers to the automakers depressed from the prolonged Covid pandemic that had hit them hard.

The top 10 carmakers who produce 97 per cent of the total domestic sales clocked a 24 per cent growth in domestic volumes in February at 298,694 units against 241,533 units sold in February 2020.

Maruti Suzuki, India's biggest car maker by sales, said it sales in February jumped 11.8 per cent to 1,52,983 units from 1,36,849 units it sold a year ago.

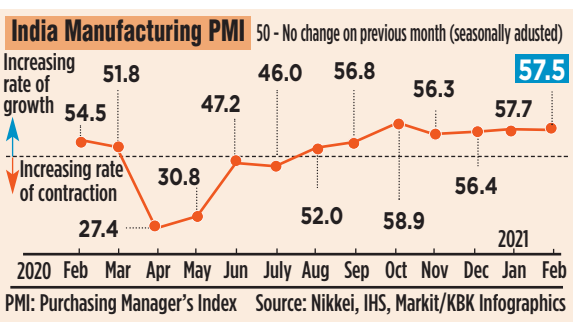
Sales at its rival Hyundai, the second largest carmaker, also rose 29 per cent to 51,600 units, up from 40,010 units.

Tata Motors reported an 119 per cent jump in sales to 27,225 units, up from 12,430 units.

Korean brand Kia Motors logged a 7 per cent rise in volumes to 16,702 units against 15,644 units.

Mahindra and Mahindra, the SUV specialist, also reported 41 per cent jump in sales last month to 15,391 units, up from 10,938 units a year ago.

Japanese carmaker Toyota registered a 36 per cent sales growth last month. It sold 14,075 units compared to 10,352 units in February 2020. Toyota attributed this sales growth to new launches like Innova Crysta and



Mfg PMI stays in expansion zone

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

Strong demand and increased output helped India's factory activity to stay in expansion for the seventh straight month in February. Although the Nikkei Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index, or PMI, compiled by IHS Markit, eased slightly to 57.5 in February from 57.7 in January, it remained well above the 50-level separating growth from contraction.

"Better demand conditions and successful marketing campaigns reportedly underpinned a fur-

ther increase in new orders during February. Although easing from January, the pace of growth remained sharp in the context of historical data," IHS Markit said.

Pollyanna De Lima, economics associate director at IHS Markit, said, "Indian goods producers reported a healthy inflow of new orders in February, a situation that underpinned a further upturn in output and quantity of purchases. This was evident from a quicker rise in outstanding business and another decline in inventories of finished goods."

Fortuner facelift and Fortuner Legender in January.

French car brand Renault posted 26 per cent growth in February volumes to 11,043 units against 8,784.

The company has started dispatches of their latest model Kiger to its showrooms. Honda Cars sold 28.3 per

cent more cars at 9,324 units last month, up from 7,269 units it sold last year.

Sales at MG Motor registered its best-ever monthly retail at 4,329 units last month, marking a growth of 215 per cent compared to February 2020. China's SAIC-owned British carmaker registered this

GST COLLECTIONS SEE 7% YoY RISE AT ₹1.13 L CRORE

FC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

For the fifth month in a row, the goods and services tax (GST) mop-up crossed the Rs 1-lakh crore mark in February. GST collections in the month stood at Rs 1.13 lakh crore, which is 7 per cent higher year-on-year but lower than the all-time high of nearly Rs 1.20 lakh crore recorded for January, government data showed on Monday.

"Out of the total GST for the February month, the Central GST was Rs 21,092 crore, State GST was Rs 27,273 crore, Integrated GST was Rs 55,253 crore (including Rs 24,382 crore collected on import of goods) and compensation cess was Rs 9,525 crore (including Rs 660 crore collected on import of goods)," the finance ministry statement said.

It said the government settled Rs 22,398 crore to CGST and Rs 17,534 crore to SGST from IGST.

growth on account of robust demand for Hector facelift, Hector Plus, and Gloster.

Riding on the success of the Magnite SUV, Nissan Motor saw 313 per cent growth in February volumes to 4,244 units as against 1,028 units sold in the same month last year.

IDBI BANK TO SET OFF ₹45,580-CR LOSSES AGAINST SECURITIES PREMIUM ACCOUNT

New Delhi, Mar. 1: LIC-controlled IDBI Bank will set off its accumulated losses worth Rs 45,586 crore against the balance in the securities premium account, according to the bank's draft scheme.

Its accumulated losses (or debit balance of profit and loss account) at the end of March 31, 2020, stood at Rs 45,586 crore. They were at Rs 44,739 crore as on December 31, 2020.

The accumulated losses as on March 31, 2021, shall be ascertained after the audited financial statements are approved by the bank's board, said the lender.

The bank's authorised share capital is Rs 25,000 crore.

The issued, subscribed and paid-up share capital is worth Rs 10,752.40 crore and the security premium is of Rs 50,732.27 crore.

IDBI Bank said the balance standing to the credit of securities premium account of the bank as per audited financial statements for FY20 and as on April 1, 2020, it is Rs 49,669 crore.

This balance as on December 31, 2020, stood at Rs 50,718 crore as per the unaudited financial statements.

Last month, its board had approved a proposal for setting off the bank's accumulated losses by April 1, 2021, in full or partially, by using the balance in the securities premium account. —PTI

₹77K crore bids for spectrum on Day 1

New Delhi, March 1: India's first auction of spectrum in five years attracted Rs 77,146 crore of bids on the opening day on Monday, with Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel, and Vodafone Idea participating in the bidding process—a response that the government said was better than expected.

There were, however, no takers for spectrum in 700 MHz and 2500 MHz bands on the first day, and the auctions will conclude on Tuesday.

About 2,308.80 MHz of spectrum, that carry telecom signals, in seven bands worth nearly Rs 4 lakh crore at the reserve or start price, was offered for bidding in the auction that began on Monday.

Communications minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said Rs 77,146 crore worth of spectrum was bid on the first day but there were no takers for the airwaves in the premium 700 MHz as also 2500 MHz bands. The response from players and the bids received surpassed government's internal estimates that had anticipated bids worth Rs 45,000 crore.

"The winning bids that have come till 6 PM today is Rs 77,146 crore. We thought since there are only three players, and spectrum replacement is happening...our estimation was that the bids will touch about Rs 45,000 crore, but it is a matter of assurance that it has gone as high as Rs 77,146 crore," Prasad said.

The bidder-wise details were not available immediately. A total of 2,308.80 MHz spectrum is being



put to auction, out of which there have been bids for 849.20 MHz so far, an official release said.

Bids were received in 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1800 MHz, 2100 MHz and 2300 MHz bands, as players gave the prized 700 MHz band a miss on the first day of auctions.

"Total value of spectrum put to auction was about Rs 4 lakh crore. In this, 700 MHz band was a costly band, and that cost itself is Rs 1.97 lakh crore," the minister said adding that the government will take a call on 700 MHz band, used for 5G, in case it remains unsold in the ongoing auctions.

Excluding 700 MHz and 2500 MHz bands, the bidding accounted for 60 per cent of the spectrum that was put to auction.

The 700 MHz band went unsold during the 2016 auctions, too. During 2016, when there were seven bidders, the spectrum sold was 41 per cent by quantity and 12 per cent by value of the total spectrum put to auction. The corresponding figures in the 2021 spectrum auction so far are 37 per cent and 19 per cent respectively, with three participants. —PTI

BPCL to sell NRL stake to OIL, EIL for ₹9.9K cr

New Delhi, March 1: Privatisation-bound Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) on Monday said it will exit Numaligarh refinery in Assam by selling its entire stake to a consortium of Oil India Ltd and Engineers India Ltd for Rs 9,876 crore.

The sale of Numaligarh Refinery Ltd clears the way for privatisation of India's second-largest fuel retailer.

In keeping with the Assam Peace Accord, the government had decided to keep Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL) in the public sector. As part of this, BPCL was to sell its entire 61.65 per cent stake to state-owned firms.

A consortium of Oil India Ltd, Engineers India Ltd and the Government of Assam expressed interest in buying the stake and the BPCL board on Monday approved the sale.

"The board of directors of BPCL at the meeting held on March 1, 2021, has approved the proposal for sale of entire equity shares of 445.35 crore held by BPCL in NRL to a consortium of OIL and EIL and to Government of Assam,"

the firm said in a filing to the stock exchanges.

Total consideration will be Rs 9,875.96 crore.

The consortium of OIL and Engineers India Ltd is likely to acquire 49 per cent and the rest 13.65 per cent will be sold to the Government of Assam.

NRL operates a 3 million tonnes per annum oil refinery in Assam.

OIL currently holds 26 per cent equity in NRL while the Government of Assam has around 12.35 per cent.

Department of Investment and Public Asset Management secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey in a tweet said, "privatisation process of BPCL moves ahead with BPCL Board deciding to exit from NRL at a consideration of Rs 9,875.96 cr for its 61.65% stake with transfer of control. OIL, EIL and Government of Assam will be picking up the stake".

Post-NRL sale, BPCL would be left with three refineries at Mumbai, Kochi (Kerala) and Bina (Madhya Pradesh).

The government is selling its entire 52.98 per cent stake in BPCL.

—PTI

FINOLEX LENDS HELPING HAND TO WOMEN

Hyderabad, March 1: Finolex Industries (FIL) through its CSR partner Mukul Madhav Foundation (MMF) has been working for women's upliftment in Mahara-shtra and Telangana.

MMF and FIL in 2019 had identified 312 widow farmers and taught them the best farming practices, soil testing and selling techniques post-harvesting. Further, 100 women farmers in rural Maha-rashtra were taught mechanised farming and crop productivity enhancement techniques. These farmers are now training 1,000 fellow women farmers.

FIL and MMF have been working closely in Palghar, Maharashtra since 2017 where they have completed the construction of over 500 toilets for the tribal villagers. In 2019 MMF extended its work to build safe, hygienic and equipped menstruation homes for women.

Business NOTE

SBI MF's international fund to tap top S&P 500 firms

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 1

SBI Mutual Fund on Monday announced the launch of SBI International Access-US Equity FoF, an open-ended Fund of Fund scheme that would invest in mutual fund schemes /ETFs that invest in US markets. The new fund offer that opened on March 1 will close on March 15.

The underlying scheme of investment would be Amundi Funds-US Pioneer Fund. Amundi Funds-US Pioneer Fund, (domiciled in Luxembourg) bench-

marks with the S&P 500 Index and has assets under management of \$2.5 billion as of January 31, 2021.

The top 10 holdings as of January 31 are Microsoft, Apple, Alphabet, Amazon.com, Visa, Analog Devices, International Flavours and Fragrances, Elanco Animal Health, Mastercard and Schlumberger.

The top 5 sectors in which the scheme is invested in are IT, consumer discretionary, health care, financials, and industrials.

Amundi Funds-US Pioneer Fund has given

year to date return of 3.95 per cent. During the last five years the fund has given returns of 22.57 per cent (2020), 30.40 per cent (2019), -2.21 per cent (2018), 21.05 per cent (2017) and 9.08 per cent (2016).

Vinay M. Tonse, MD & CEO, said, "SBI International Access - US Equity FoF is the first international offering from our fund house and gives an opportunity to investors to get an exposure to the well-diversified US market, which has the largest market capitalisation and is a core component of major global indices.

MINISTRY SAYS NO MALWARE IMPACT ON POWER SYSTEM

New Delhi, March 1: The Ministry of Power on Monday said there is no impact on operations of Power System Operation Corporation (Posoco) due to any malware attack and that prompt actions are taken on advisories issued against such threats.

The ministry was responding to a study by a private US company which suggested that a China-linked group targeted India's power grid system via malware.

nies," said Cyfirma chief executive Kumar Ritesh, formerly a top cyber official with British foreign intelligence agency MI6.

He said APT10 was actively targeting SII, which is making the AstraZeneca vaccine for many countries and will soon start bulk-manufacturing Novavax shots.

"In the case of Serum

This study raised suspicion whether last year's massive power outage in Mumbai was a result of the online intrusion.

However, the ministry did not mention about the Mumbai outage in its statement.

A Chinese government-linked group of hackers targeted India's critical power grid system through malware, Recorded Future, a Massachusetts-based company, said in its latest study. —PTI

Institute, they have found a number of their public servers running weak web servers, these are vulnerable web servers," Ritesh said, referring to the hackers.

"They have spoken about weak web application, they are also talking about weak content-management system. It's quite alarming." —Reuters

Box office collections drop 85%

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 1

Total box office collections of Indian film industry were down 85 per cent in 2020 compared to the previous year. The box office collections in 2020 stood at Rs 861 crore against Rs 5,613 crore in 2019—a drop of 85 per cent. In fact, in 2019, the collections had grown 30 per cent, from Rs 4,422 crore in 2018, as per a report by Care Ratings.

The fall in collections can be attributed to the significant fall in movie releases during the year to 75. Out of these, just 7 films were released between November 15 and December 25, which clocked total revenues of Rs 36 crore. The remain-



ing 68 films were released between January 1 and March 13 and generated box office revenues of Rs 825 crore. In the previous year, 246 movies had clocked collections of Rs 5,613 crore.

An analysis of financials of 44 companies in the film production, distribution and entertainment industry showed total expenditure also declined by nearly three-fourths, which helped minimise

losses for players. The industry's loss at the net level stood at Rs 403 crore in Q1 FY21, which reduced to Rs 288 crore in Q2 and to Rs 71 crore in Q3 FY21.

Minimal electricity and water charges and reduction in employee costs through measures like layoffs, retrenchments and reduction in salaries led to lower operational cost.

Other overheads were controlled with contractu-

al obligations like house-keeping and security being suspended during lockdown. Also, rent and common facility charges stood nil due to the invocation of force majeure under the respective lease agreements due to the pandemic and engaging with developers to seek waiver for lockdown period and reduced rent / revenue share post opening.

The central government gave its nod to reopen cinemas for audiences from October 15, 2020 onwards with 50 per cent seating capacity. However, reopening cinemas was at the discretion of various state governments. Still, most movie producers are not at ease with theatre releases of their content.

SHORT TAKES

Varun, Malvika win in Uganda

New Delhi: Indian shuttlers Varun Kapur and Malvika Bansod registered hard-fought wins to clinch the men's and women's singles titles respectively at the 2021 Uganda International in Kampala. Varun had to sweat it out to get the better of seventh seeded Sankar Muthusamy 21-18, 16-21, 21-17 in the men's singles final, while second seed Malvika notched up a come-from-behind 17-21, 25-23, 21-10 victory over compatriot Anupama Upadhyaya in the women singles summit clash. The junior world no. 2 Varun, who has been a consistent performer on the junior circuit and clinched his sixth title earlier this year, won the first game convincingly before losing the second. However, the 17-year-old looked in complete control in the decider and wrapped up the match comfortably in his favour. — *PTI*

Sayali clinches sub-junior TT title

Indore: Sayali Wani of Maharashtra outwitted Haryana's Suhana Saini 4-3 to emerge champion at the 82nd Cadet & Sub-Junior National Table Tennis Championships here on Monday. Top-seeded Suhana led 3-2 but goofed it up in the crucial sixth game, allowing her Nasik rival to inch ahead. Sayali courageously saved a match point at 9-10. And when she made it 10-all, she grabbed the first chance to go 11-10 up before finishing the game and match in style. In the Cadet Girls' final, M. Hansini notched up a 4-2 victory over Tamil Nadu's Ananya Muralidharan. What stood out on the day was Hansini's better reading of the situation. On the other hand, Ananya relied too much on her backhand blocks and drives. Rarely did she employ her forehand while Hansini was adept at doing both. — *PTI*

Vijender's next pro bout in casino ship

New Delhi: Indian professional boxer Vijender Singh's next bout, his first since November 2019, against a yet-to-be-announced opponent will take place in Goa on the rooftop deck of a docked ship on March 19. The 35-year-old reigning WBO Oriental and WBO Asia Pacific Super Middleweight champion defeated Ghana's former Commonwealth Champion Charles Adamu in Dubai to claim his 12th successive win in November 2019. He has not competed ever since. "Vijender Singh is set to make his return to the ring on March 19... The first-of-its-kind fight will be held on the rooftop deck of the Majestic Pride Casino Ship — who have been roped in as the venue partner," his promoters IOS Boxing Promotions said in a statement. Vijender said he is looking forward to the experience. "It is something that has never happened before in India and I am glad to be part of this unique professional match," Vijender said. — *PTI*

Churchill survive late Kerala scare

Kolkata: Churchill Brothers survived a last-minute scare to beat 10-man Gokulam Kerala FC 3-2 and extend their lead atop the I-League table here on Monday. Luka Majcen's brace (26th, 87th) and Kingslee Fernandes' goal (53rd) helped Santiago Valer's side stretch their lead at the top of the standings to five points. Kerala made a dominant start to the game, and created a couple of chances in the opening three minutes, but Vincy Barretto and Philip Adjah were unable to get their shots away from inside the area. — *PTI*

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

Italian League: Lazio vs Torino from 11 pm; Juventus vs Spezia from 1.15 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

English Premier League: Manchester City vs Wolverhampton Wanderers from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

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FULL THROTTLE Kohli & Co. back in nets ahead of final Test

Ahmedabad, March 1: Big guns Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and Ajinkya Rahane went full throttle at the nets as the Indian cricket on Monday trained in earnest for the upcoming fourth and final Test against England.

The fourth Test starts here on Thursday.

Captain Kohli, his deputy Rahane and senior opener Rohit were seen batting at the nets in a video posted by the BCCI on Twitter.

The three senior players drove, pulled and flicked against the fast bowlers and spinners at the Narendra Modi Stadium here.

Head coach Ravi Shastri was seen interacting with Rohit and Kohli before the two star batsmen sat together for a discussion.

Left-arm spinner Axar Patel, who bagged 11 wickets in India's thumping win in the pink ball third Test at the same venue, was seen rolling his arms over at the nets against some of the world's best batsmen.

They were also seen fielding with Rahane, standing next to Rohit in the second slip position, taking a one-handed diving catch to his right.

The Kohli-led Indian team lost the first Test in Chennai by 227 runs, but bounced back with a 317-run hammering of the visitors in the second Test.

In the previous match, India shot out England for 112 and 81 to wrap up the Test inside two days on a challenging Motera track.

The Indian team had a full-fledged practice session here on Sunday as well.

Leading 2-1 in the series, India will be without top pacer Jasprit Bumrah in the final Test. — *PTI*

● **Left-arm spinner Axar Patel, who bagged 11 wickets in India's thumping win in the pink ball third Test at the same venue, was seen rolling his arms over at the nets against some of the world's best batsmen.**



India's Axar Patel at a training session in Ahmedabad on Monday, ahead of the fourth and final Test against England starting on Thursday. — *BCCI*

Hogg bats for Ashwin's ODI return

Sydney, March 1: Former Australia all-rounder Brad Hogg has called for Ravichandran Ashwin's inclusion in India's ODI squad, saying the senior off-spinner is a wicket-taker who also adds depth to batting.

Replying to a tweet by a fan, Hogg said Ashwin would be a great addition to Indian side in the 50-over format.

"I think it is a great option, gives the batting line up extra depth allowing the top order to be more aggressive at the top," Hogg said in reply to a tweet by a fan asking if Ashwin can make a come-



R. Ashwin

back to ODI cricket.

"And he is a wicket taking option with the ball, as well as economical. Get him back in. #INDvENG

#Cricket," Hogg tweeted.

Ashwin, who has featured in 111 ODIs and 46 T20Is, besides 77 Tests, has been out of India's

TRESCOTHICK IS ENGLAND'S NEW BATTING COACH

London, March 1: England on Monday appointed former opener Marcus Trescothick as the new batting coach of the national team, besides roping in Jon Lewis and New Zealand's Jeetan Patel as bowling and spin bowling coaches on permanent basis.

These three are part of the four new appointments to England's coaching set-up, which is being headed by chief coach Chris Silverwood. The team is currently touring India and is down 1-2 in a four-match Test series.

Trescothick will take over from Jonathan Trott, who replaced South African Jacques Kallis in the ongoing tour. Kallis had played the role of a batting consultant for England in Sri Lanka.

Trescothick, who scored over 10,000 international runs across formats between 2000 and 2006, is expected to take up his new role in mid-March after stepping down from his position as assistant coach at Somerset.

Patel, who is currently working as a consultant, has agreed to a permanent position as spin-bowling coach after a number of short-term stints with England. — *PTI*

limited overs side for a few years now. He last appeared in an ODI game in June 2017.

The 34-year-old played a major role in India's historic Test series victory in Australia earlier this year. In the third Test against England last week, he became the fourth Indian to take 400 Test wickets.

The fourth and final Test between India and England begins on Thursday in Ahmedabad. The hosts lead the series 2-1. After the Test series, the two teams are scheduled to play five T20Is and three ODIs. — *PTI*

KOHLI IS LIKE MODERN DAY HERO: WAUGH

Mumbai, March 1: Australian great Steve Waugh feels that Virat Kohli is like a "modern-day hero" who represents the "new attitude of India" of taking everything head on with a mind set of nothing is impossible. In a 60-minute documentary titled, "Capturing Cricket: Steve Waugh in India", the former Australia captain said that Kohli is loved by the fans for his attitude of not being intimidated by an opposition.

"What they love about Kohli is that it's like the new attitude of India, get stuck in, don't be intimidated. Anything is achievable and possible. He's like the modern-day hero," Waugh said. — *PTI*

UTTARAKHAND ENTER KNOCKOUT ROUND

In Chennai, Uttarakhand thrashed Sikkim by 145 runs to remain unbeaten in the Plate group of the tournament, and clinch a spot in the knockout phase, pipping Assam by virtue of a better net run-rate. Assam completed their engagements with a crushing 182-run win over Mizoram. — *PTI*

SAURASHTRA MAKE QUARTERFINALS

In Kolkata, Saurashtra suffered a shocking 62-

run loss at the hands of Services but still managed to finish as Group E toppers and qualified for the knock-out phase.

Saurashtra finished with 16 points, four clear of Chandigarh whose direct qualification hopes were dashed with an eight-wicket loss to Jammu & Kashmir at the Jadavpur University second campus in Saltlake.

People seem to forget that if you're going to India, you should expect that. You are going to spin land. You should basically prepare yourself to know what you're going to encounter. — **VIV RICHARDS** West Indies batting legend



good length and everyone thinks that's a problem for batters," he reasoned.

The 68-year-old pointed out that playing in India has mostly been about tackling quality spinners and that England may not have done their homework properly ahead of the tour.

Weighing in on the

Sindhu, Saina eye Swiss treat

Basel (Switzerland), March 1: Reigning world champion P.V. Sindhu will be eager to return to the podium as former winner Saina Nehwal looks to regain her touch in the season-opening Swiss Open tournament beginning here on Tuesday.

Indian men's singles players, too, have tasted success in this tournament with Sameer Verma, H.S. Prannoy and Kidambi Srikanth emerging victorious in 2018, 2016 and 2015 respectively and B. Sai Praneeth finishing runners-up in the last edition.

All four will be looking to relive the moments and extend India's good run at the \$140,000 event which will also resume the extended Olympic qualifying period.

It was here at St. Jakobshalle venue that Olympic silver medallist Sindhu had claimed the world championship gold in 2019, her last title before the Covid-19 pandemic disruption.

The 25-year-old from Hyderabad, seeded second, will look to go the distance again as she opens her campaign against Turkey's Neslihan Yigit.

Sindhu didn't have a good outing in the three events in Thailand recently but the road to the quarterfinal here looks smooth for the Indian where she is likely to confront fifth seed Thai Busanan Ongbamrungphan, an opponent she had beaten at the Toyota Thailand Open in January. Two-time former winner Saina, too, is in the same half but the senior pro will have to overcome players like Korea's sixth seed Sung Ji Hyun and fourth seeded Danish Mia Blichfeldt — whom she is likely to meet — to set up a semifinal face-off with Sindhu.

All eyes will also be on world number 10 men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty after their semifinal finish at Toyota Thailand Open.

The Indian pair, seeded second, would look to stretch its good run, especially after a month-long training session under new doubles coach Mathias Boe of Denmark. — *PTI*



Tottenham's Gareth Bale (right) celebrates after scoring against Burnley in an EPL match at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London on Sunday. — *AP*

United draw another blank, Spurs win big

London, March 1: Manchester United were left frustrated by a VAR penalty controversy in their 0-0 draw at Chelsea, while the revitalised Gareth Bale struck twice in Tottenham's 4-0 rout of Burnley on Sunday.

Second-placed United had hoped to close the gap on Manchester City with a victory at Stamford Bridge. But instead they now sit 12 points behind the Premier League leaders as their title hopes fade following a run of one win from four games.

Chelsea boss Thomas Tuchel is unbeaten in nine matches in all competitions since replacing the sacked Frank Lampard, but the stalemate was a blow to his team's top-four challenge.

The biggest talking point of a dour clash came in the first half when United's appeal for a penalty was rejected by referee Stuart Attwell after he consulted the pitchside monitor

THE RESULTS

Chelsea	0
Manchester United	0
Tottenham (Bale 2, 55, Kane 15, Moura 31)	4'
Burnley	0
Sheffield United	0
Liverpool (Jones 48, Bryan 64-og)	2

when Callum Hudson-Odoi appeared to handle in a challenge with Mason Greenwood.

After five defeats in their previous six league games, Tottenham eased the pressure on Jose Mourinho with a significant contribution from Bale, who made just his third league start of the season.

The Wales forward's most impressive display since his season-long loan move from Real Madrid gave him four goals in his last four appearances. — *AFP*

ATLETICO HOLD RIVALS AT BAY WITH TIGHT VILLARREAL WIN

Madrid, March 1: Atletico Madrid bounced back from recent poor form with a hard-fought 2-0 win at Villarreal on Sunday that allowed the La Liga pace-setters to extend their lead to five points.

An own goal from Alfonso Pedraza and Joao Felix's powerful strike gave Atletico a precious win after a wobble which had allowed Barcelona and Real Madrid to gain ground in the title race.

Diego Simeone's side had come into the match off the back of a Champions League last 16 defeat to Chelsea and a league run in which they picked up just five points from their previous four

matches. However the win ensures Atletico hold second-placed Barca at bay and crucially keeps the gap between them and rivals Real Madrid at six points ahead of next weekend's local derby.

Atletico opened the scoring thanks to Pedraza's odd own goal, which came after long VAR check to see if Stefan Savic, who was initially credited with the goal, had strayed off-side for Thomas Lemar's cross.

Earlier Real Betis moved above Villarreal as they maintained their bid for European football next season thanks to Juami's strike which earned them a 1-0 win at Cadiz. — *AFP*