

SHORT TAKES

Man held for
extorting money
from women

New Delhi: A 28-year-old man was arrested in Uttam Nagar here for allegedly befriending women and duping them by extorting money on the pretext of some serious illness affecting his family members, police said on Friday. The accused, Mohit Goyal, demanded money from women by emotionally blackmailing them and changed his mobile number soon after receiving the amount from them, they said. The police said action was taken against Goyal after a woman approached them with a complaint alleging that the accused met her last year in October regarding a loan. After she became friends with him, he met her once with another person and asked her for money to treat his nephew, who is battling cancer. On emotional grounds, she then gave Rs 75,000 to Goyal, some in cash and rest through online mode. He also got two mobile phones financed in her name, took the delivery for himself and later sold it to another person and fled. Later, he sent a fake screenshot of the money transfer to the complainant when she demanded the money, the complaint stated. Based on the complaint, a case was registered under Indian Penal Code Sections 406 (punishment for criminal breach of trust) and 34 (acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention), said Santosh Kumar Meena, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka). During investigation, it emerged that the accused had kept changing his mobile number and location continuously. On the basis of a tip-off, a police team traced Goyal and arrested him on Wednesday from Uttam Nagar, he said.

NSUI holds protest
over unemployment

New Delhi: The Congress party's student wing, National Student Union of India (NSUI), organised the "Chhatra Adhikar March" on Friday to protest against rising unemployment in the country. Thousands of students and party workers from Punjab, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh gathered at the NSUI office here before beginning their march towards Parliament building raising slogans like "Naukri Do Ya Degree Wapis Lo" (give us jobs or take our degrees back). Demanding justice for the youth of India, who are "victims of increasing unemployment and no jobs scenario" in the country, the protest aimed at challenging the government's power and highlighting how it had failed the "expectations of the students", the NSUI said in a statement. The speakers at the protest noted that the Union government had been oblivious to the sufferings of the youth, caused by an all time high unemployment, scams in various exams, and inactive placement cells. The Bihar and UP teacher recruitment issue, pending results of various exams including, SSC Gd 2016, were also among issues that were noted at the protest. Addressing the protesters, Congress leader Udit Raj criticised the government's decision of "lateral entry" into central government departments, saying it was a "violent strike on the employment aspect of the youth". — *PTI*

Mercury down in
Delhi after light rains

New Delhi: A bout of light rains under the influence of a fresh Western Disturbance brought the mercury down by a few notches in the national capital on Friday. The Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, recorded 2.6 mm rainfall till 8:30 am in the morning and a drizzle thereafter. Dark clouds and gusty winds made the weather pleasant. The maximum temperature stood at 30.7 degrees Celsius. It was 35.2 degrees Celsius on Thursday, the highest this year so far, the India Meteorological Department said. The minimum temperature settled at 17.9 degrees Celsius, three notches more than normal. The maximum temperature is predicted to hover around 32 degrees Celsius over the next two days, the weather department said. — *PTI*



Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal with Dy CM Manish Sisodia at a function to celebrate 75 years of Independence with senior citizens in New Delhi on Friday. — *G.N. Jha*

Will tricolour be
hoisted in Pak if
not in India: Kejri

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday hit out at Opposition parties for opposing the Delhi government's decision to unfurl the tricolour across the city, asking "will it be hoisted in Pakistan if not in India". Addressing the Delhi Assembly, he said there should be no politics over patriotism and the country belongs to all. "In the Budget, we announced that we will unfurl the tricolour at 500 places across the city. Whenever we see the national flag, we are reminded of the soldier fighting at the borders. I fail to understand why the BJP and the Congress have been opposing the decision," Kejriwal asked. "They should support and appreciate the decision. There should be no politics over patriotism. The country belongs to all... I want to ask the BJP

will the tricolour be hoisted in Pakistan if not in India" he said.

Kejriwal said the Opposition parties were mocking the Delhi government for its announcement to bid for 2048 Olympic Games and increasing the per capita income to Singapore's level by 2047. "We will achieve it... We will approach the Centre and the Indian Olympic Association to bid for Olympics. We all will do it together," he said. The chief minister also said almost all states and the Centre presented "deficit" Budget in the last one-and-a-half months, but Delhi is the only "state" which has a "surplus" Budget in these difficult times. Kejriwal also alleged that the Congress and the BJP are opposing his government's announcement to send elderly to Ayodhya when Ram temple is ready.

Deshbhakti
Budget passed in
Delhi Assembly

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

The Deshbhakti Budget was passed on Friday in the Delhi Assembly. While responding to the discussion on Budget, deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia lauded the Deshbhakti Budget, reiterating that deshbhakti means to envision growth and progress for all in Delhi.

Mr Sisodia said: "We uphold the ideals of the Constitution while keeping Lord Ram in our hearts. For us, progress and growth of Delhi is deshbhakti. Educating students and teaching them is deshbhakti, accessible and quality schooling is deshbhakti, healthcare for all citizens and mohalla clinics, especially for our women of Delhi is deshbhakti, installing 500 tirangas and respecting those standing under the tiranga is deshbhakti. We don't believe in making people feel small, we believe that treating everyone equally and respecting all is deshbhakti."

Ghaziabad factory owner charred to death,
12 workers, child suffer severe burn injury

Ghaziabad, March 12: A fire broke out in a surgical equipment factory in which the unit owner died and several workers sustained severe burns in Sahibabad area here, police said on Friday. The factory belonging to Eifer Surgimed, a private surgical kit maker, in Sahibabad Site-4 industrial area got gutted in the fire on Thursday night leaving 14 people, including the owner, two women and a child, with severe burns. On Friday, factory owner Kunal Bahl, who

was in his early 40s, succumbed to his burn injuries, the police said. The blaze happened while the workers at the site were making a chemical that is used as an adhesive in surgical tapes. The incident took place on the ground floor of the factory when the workers were boiling the adhesive chemical that exploded due to excess heat. The injured were rushed to hospitals located near the factory from where some with critical burns were referred to

Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi. In a separate incident, a fire broke out at a garment factory in southeast Delhi's Okhla Phase 1 on Friday evening, a Delhi Fire Service official said. No injuries have been reported in the incident so far, he said. The fire department said it received a call about the blaze at 4.20 pm, following which 15 fire tenders were pressed into service. The cause of the blaze is not known yet, the official said. — *PTI*

'Reserve 5%
space for EVs
at malls, hotels
and hospitals'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

Delhi power minister Satyendar Jain has directed all buildings like malls, hospitals, hotels and office spaces having parking facilities with a capacity of more than 100 vehicles to reserve five per cent space for electric vehicles and charging points.

With this, the city can have more than 10,000 charging points for electric vehicles by December, a government official said on Friday. "Power minister Satyendra Jain has directed all buildings such as malls, shopping complexes, cinema halls, multiplexes, office spaces, hotels, restaurants and hospitals that have a parking capacity of more than 100 vehicles to set aside at least 5 per cent of it for EVs along with suitable slow EV chargers," he said. Building premises are expected to be given time up to December to upgrade and incorporate these facilities, he added. Under the Delhi EV policy, a subsidy of up to ₹6,000 per charging point can be availed by these complexes, the official said.

Enquiry panel to look into alleged
irregularities of funds in 12 colleges

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Friday issued directions to the directorate of higher education to set up an enquiry committee to look into alleged irregularities of funds in 12 city government-funded colleges.

According to a government statement, Sisodia said that the decision was made after noticing that these Delhi University colleges had not disbursed the salaries of

teaching and non-teaching staff and also that many colleges did not submit the utilisation certificates of the third quarter grants.

"If the colleges have not disbursed salaries, then what has been done with the funds with the college? What is the reason that utilisation certificates have not been submitted? The non-submission of utilisation certificates seems to indicate financial irregularities. It seems like an attempt to avoid scrutiny and

accountability," Sisodia said in the statement.

The enquiry committee will look into how the third quarter grants and existing surplus funds have been spent. "Strongest action needs to be taken against any financial irregularities by these Delhi government colleges," he said.

Meanwhile, Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) president Rajib Ray claimed that the Delhi government has now released the sanction letter of Rs

82,79,79,507 under salary head and an amount of Rs 9,50,90,500 under other than salaries' head.

On Thursday, thousands of DU teachers went on a strike to protest non-payment of salaries for the past six months.

The call for a university "shutdown" was given by DUTA on Tuesday as many employees of 12 DU colleges, which are fully funded by the Delhi government, alleged they had not received salaries and other dues for over six months.

Man opens fire to scare ex-girlfriend for
ignoring him, arrested from Haryana

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

A 32-year-old property dealer here was arrested for allegedly opening fire to "scare" his 21-year-old ex-girlfriend after she blocked his number and started "ignoring" him, police said on Friday.

The accused, Suresh Kadyan, is son of a retired army officer, they said, adding his friend Pawan (45) was also arrested for allegedly giving his licensed revolver which was used in the Wednesday evening incident, they said. Deputy commissioner of

police (West) Urvija Goel said the woman has been ignoring the man for the past few days and he became more aggressive after she blocked his number.

"During questioning, the accused revealed that he wanted to take revenge on his girlfriend. So he went to her house, but could not find her there. Then, he got to know that she had gone to her friend's house in Subhash Nagar. So, he reached there and fired in air to threaten them," she said.

Soon after the incident, the woman (the host) informed the police that

► **THE ACCUSED,** Suresh Kadyan, is son of a retired army officer. His friend Pawan (45) was also arrested for allegedly giving his licensed revolver which was used in the incident on Wednesday evening.

her friend's ex-boyfriend had gone to her house in a black car and fired in the air to scare them.

She further stated that her friend had borrowed some money from Kadyan when they were still in good relationship but after their break-up, he started demanding his money back

and threatened her with dire consequences, police said.

The DCP said a case was registered and through a technical surveillance, the registration number of the offending Scorpio car and the mobile number of the accused was obtained, leading to his arrest from Jhajjar in Haryana.

During further investigation, his friend Pawan was also arrested for giving Kadyan his licensed revolver, she added. The police have recovered the .32-bore revolver along with five live cartridges, one used empty cartridge and also seized the car.

► **Mobile suspected to have been used by organisation called Jaish-ul-Hind**

Delhi govt seeks report on
seizure of mobile from Tihar

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

The Delhi government has sought a report from the director general (DG) of Delhi prisons regarding the seizure of a mobile phone from Tihar Jail after the police approached the prison authorities in connection with the Mukesh Ambani bomb scare probe.

Tihar Jail authorities have seized a mobile phone which is suspected to have been used for operating a Telegram channel used to claim responsibility for terror acts/threats, the Delhi police said on Friday.

Delhi home minister Satyendar Jain told reporters that a probe has been ordered into the matter and action will be taken against anyone found to be at fault.

Mr Jain has also written to the DG (Prisons) in this regard and sought a report about seizure of the mobile phone from the jail.

On Thursday, a senior Mumbai police official said a Telegram channel, through which an organisation named Jaish-ul-Hind had claimed responsibility for placing an explosives-laden SUV near

AMBANI BOMB SCARE PROBE

► **TIHAR JAIL** authorities have seized a mobile phone which is suspected to have been used for operating a Telegram channel used to claim responsibility for terror acts/threats, the Delhi police said on Friday.

► **Delhi home minister Satyendar Jain** told reporters that a probe has been ordered into the matter and action will be taken against anyone found to be at fault.

Mr Ambani's residence in Mumbai last month, was "created in the Tihar area of Delhi."

The Delhi police's special cell had approached the Tihar Jail administration on Thursday after the new angle emerged, according to official sources.

"Based on information provided by the special cell, Tihar Jail authorities have seized a mobile phone from a jail where certain terror convicts are lodged. It is suspected that this phone has been used for operating Telegram channels used recently for claiming responsibility for terror acts/threats," DCP (Special Cell) Pramod Singh Kushwah said.

The officer said further investigation and forensic analysis will be done after

the mobile handset and details of the seizure are received from the Tihar Jail authorities.

The Mumbai police took the help of a private cyber agency to track the location of the phone on which the Telegram channel was created, the senior Mumbai police official said.

During the investigation, the location of the phone was traced near Delhi's Tihar Jail, he added.

A Mahindra Scorpio SUV with gelatin sticks was found parked near "Antilia," the multi-storey residence of Mr Ambani, in South Mumbai on February 25.

According to the police sources, the Telegram channel was created on February 26 and the messages claiming responsibil-

ity for placing the vehicle outside Mr Ambani's residence was posted on the Telegram messaging app late in the night on February 27.

The message had also demanded payment in crypto currency and mentioned a link to deposit the same.

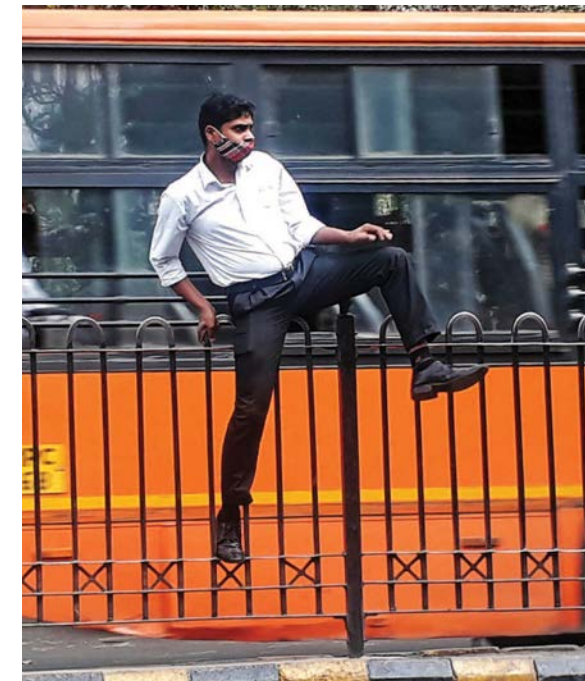
During the probe, the link was found as "not available," due to which the investigators suspected it to be mischievous, the official said.

On February 28, another message from Jaish-ul-Hind surfaced on a social media platform, claiming that the organisation did not have any role in the incident.

The investigation in the case was initially conducted by the crime branch of the Mumbai police.

After the mysterious death of Thane-based auto parts dealer Mansukh Hiran, who was in possession of the SUV that was later found parked outside Mr Ambani's residence, the probe was transferred to the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS).

On Monday, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) took over the case related to the recovery of the explosives-laden vehicle.



A pedestrian crosses over a divider at Kasturba Gandhi Marg in New Delhi on Friday. — *G.N. Jha*

Delhi's Covid-19 positivity
rate far lower than in
Maharashtra, Kerala: Jain

New Delhi, March 12: Amid a sudden spike in daily Covid-19 cases in the city, Health Minister Satyendar Jain said on Friday the positivity rate in Delhi is still less than one per cent, "much lower" compared to the figures in Maharashtra and Kerala, and asserted that the city government was on a "full vigil" to combat the pandemic.

Delhi on Friday recorded 431 new Covid-19 cases, the highest single-day rise in nearly two months, while the positivity rate increased to 0.60 per cent, according to data shared by the health department.

The city recorded over 400 cases for the second consecutive day on Friday. The count on Thursday was 409.

Interacting with reporters outside the



Satyendar Jain

House of the Delhi Assembly, Jain said the figures of over 400 per day suddenly were "not alarming".

"The positivity rate in Delhi in November was about 15 per cent. It came down to less than five per cent first and then to less than one per cent, and for the last two months, it is still below 1 per cent, which is much lower than what is being recorded in cities in Maharashtra and Kerala," he said. — *PTI*

Covid-19: Delhi HC refuses
to postpone judicial exams

New Delhi, March 12: The Delhi High Court on Friday refused to postpone Delhi Higher Judicial Service Main Examination-2019, scheduled on March 13-14, till the Covid-19 vaccination drive is complete for lawyers.

A bench of Justices Siddharth Mridul and A.J. Bhambhani said the exam cannot be postponed at the eleventh hour as other candidates who have already arrived for writing the exam would be prejudiced. The court was hearing a petition filed by one of the candidates going to appear for the examination submitting

that the petitioner is suffering from severe medical conditions, leaving him at a risk of serious and life threatening complications if he contracts coronavirus.

Senior advocate Siddharth Luthra, representing the petitioner, said he was seeking postponement of the exam appearing physically as it would expose the candidate to medical risks. Advocate Ankit Jain, representing the high court administration, said examination will be conducted in three buildings of the high court and on each floor there will be not more than 36 candidates. — *PTI*

SHORT TAKES

'Metro Man' all set to contest from Palakkad in KeralaAGE CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
MARCH 12

"Metro Man" E. Sreedharan formally began his election work on Friday visiting Palakkad office of the BJP. With the "Metro Man" all set to contest from Palakkad in the forthcoming Assembly polls, the constituency will witness an interesting electoral battle this time. All eyes would be set on Palakkad as Mr Sreedharan takes on the hugely popular sitting MLA and youth congress state president Shafi Parambil. Shafi won twice from this seat, first in 2011 and in the last elections in 2016. He increased his margin of victory from 7403 to 17,483 votes in the last poll. BJP's Shobha Surendran came second securing 40,076 votes. The CPM was pushed to third place. The impressive performance of BJP in 2016 prompted the party to field Sreedharan from this constituency. Another positive factor for the "Metro Man" is that the BJP rules Palakkad municipality. When reporters asked him about formidable Congress opponent, Mr Sreedharan said with a smile, "We will contest against each other but we will not fight." To another question on entering politics a bit late in the day, he said, "It could not have happened earlier because I was working with the government. I worked for 67 years with the government and during that period got several opportunities to serve the nation. So there was no time or need for me to enter politics," he said.

HC frowns on CID, CBI probe delay in activists' murdersSHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, MARCH 12

The Bombay high court on Friday expressed concern over delay in commencement of trails in murder cases of rationalist Narendra Dabholkar and activist Govind Pansare. The HC directed the Maharashtra CID and the CBI to state clearly when their probes would be complete. A bench of Justices S.S. Shinde and Manish Pitale also asked why the trial in the rationalist M.M. Kalburgi killing case has already begun in Karnataka while the probe in these two older cases is incomplete. The state CID is probing the killing of communist leader Pansare while the central agency is probing the killing of Dabholkar, a well-known anti-superstition activist. In "sensitive cases", citizens of the country deserved to know when probe agencies would complete a probe and when the trial is likely to begin, the court said. Dabholkar was shot dead on August 20, 2013, in Pune, while Pansare was shot on February 16, 2015, in Kolhapur in western Maharashtra.

HC allows Parsi woman to contest panchayat pollsAGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, MARCH 12

The Bombay high court on Friday directed Bombay Parsi Panchayat (BPP) to allow a Parsi woman Zuleika Homavazir to contest its forthcoming polls as her proposer Rustom Jeejeebhoy is still on its voters list. The BPP had rejected her form on the ground that her proposer Jeejeebhoy has embraced Christianity. She will be the first woman to contest the BPP election. A bench of Justices S.J. Kathawalla and Vinay Joshi set aside a judgement of a single bench of HC and permitted Zuleika Homavazir to contest the polls scheduled for March 14 this year. Homavazir's nomination was rejected by the Panchayat Trustees on the ground that her proposer, Rustom Jeejeebhoy, had renounced the Parsi faith and converted to Christianity. A single bench of HC had upheld the trustees' decision earlier this year, following which Homavazir appealed before the division bench led by Justice Kathawalla. In her plea, she said Jeejeebhoy was a well known philanthropist and one of the founding members of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat.

■ DMK chief to contest again from Kolathur in Chennai, while son tries luck for first-time in polls

Stalin's son to contest from Karuna's seatG. BABU JAYAKUMAR
AND D. SEKAR
CHENNAI, MARCH 12

The DMK announced its full list of 173 candidates for the April 6 Assembly elections, which was a balanced mix of old and new faces, with the names of party president M.K. Stalin and Youth Wing secretary Udhayanidhi Stalin. Stalin will be contesting again from Kolathur in Chennai, while Udhayanidhi Stalin will be trying his luck for the first time from Chepauk-Triplicane constituency, which once elected the late M. Karunanidhi to the Assembly. The release of the list by Friday noon by Stalin evoked celebrations in several parts of the state even as party cadre and functionaries geared up for the campaign in their respective constituencies.

Stalin arrived at Anna Arivalayam to make the announcement with thousands of party cadre and aspirants waiting eagerly.

Earlier in the morning, the DMK president went to the Gopalapuram residence to pay homage to the portrait of his father and also call on his mother Dayaluammal. He then drove down to the resting places of C.N. Annadurai and Karunanidhi.

Stalin expressed the hope that the DMK would win overwhelmingly the April 6 elections, repeating the results of the 1971 elections that saw the 'Rising Sun' symbol emerging victorious in 184 constituencies.

Now, though the DMK is



Udhayanidhi Stalin, DMK president M.K. Stalin's son and party's youth wing secretary, being greeted by senior leader A. Raja in Chennai on Friday.

fielding only 173 candidates, a total of 187 candidates would be contesting in the 'Rising Sun' symbol.

Of the 173 DMK candidates, including 12 women, 124 of them will be directly confronting the AIADMK in the polls and 14 of them will be facing BJP nominees.

Almost all senior party leaders and 74 sitting MLAs have been chosen to contest the elections, apart from first timers.

Besides Udhayanidhi Stalin, the prominent among the first-time can-

didates are Dr N. Ezhilan, a doctor by profession who had been the voice of the party and the Dravidian movement in many platforms for quite some time, and Prabakar Raja, son of traders' association president Vikramaraja.

Handing over the Virugambakkam constituency to Prabakar Raja earned the ire of the local DMK leader, Danasekar, who visited Anna Arivalayam later in the day to express his resentment over the party decision.

KAMAL HAASAN SET TO CONTEST FROM COIMBATORE SOUTH

Chennai, March 12: Actor-turned politician Kamal Haasan would make his electoral debut, contesting from Coimbatore South constituency in the April 6 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections.

The Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) president made the announcement here on Friday, releasing the second list of 43 party candidates which included veteran politician Pazha Karupiah and yesteryear actor Sripriya who had paired with Haasan in many films in the 70s and 80s.

The party also named candidates for 18 constituencies in neighbouring Pudukcherry which also goes to polls on April 6 for its 30-member Assembly. Haasan, whose party is heading a three-party coalition in Tamil Nadu, will be up against the nominees of BJP and Congress, partners in the AIADMK and DMK led alliances respectively, in Coimbatore South.

Three years after floating the Makkal Needhi Maiam, 66-year-old Haasan is taking the electoral plunge. He chose not to contest the 2019 Lok Sabha elections while his party polled 3.7 per cent votes, entering the fray in 37 constituencies.

Remembering his late father Sreenivasan, Haasan, declared the chief ministerial candidate by three-party front.

**TMC demands high-level probe into 'attack' on Didi**

New Delhi, March 12: A TMC delegation met the Election Commission (EC) on Friday and demanded a high-level probe into an alleged attack on West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee in Nandigram while claiming that it was not an "unfortunate incident", but a conspiracy.

The six-member delegation of the Trinamul Congress (TMC) met the full EC team, including Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sunil Arora, for over an hour and submitted a memorandum to it, highlighting how BJP leaders in West Bengal had threatened the chief minister through tweets and other remarks.

"Injuries to Mamata Banerjee in Nandigram were not a result of an unfortunate incident but that of a conspiracy. The events leading up to the attempt on her life leave no doubt that the attack was part of a deep-rooted conspiracy," TMC MP Saugata Roy told reporters after meeting the EC. In the memorandum, the TMC has made allegations against Suwendu Adhikari, the BJP candidate from Nandigram.

"When an attempt was made on the life of Ms Banerjee, in which she was grievously hurt, to cover up the attack, eyewitnesses were planted, illustratively, eye-witnesses Chittaranjan Das and



TMC MPs come out of the Nirvachan Sadan after meeting the Election Commission of India in New Delhi on Friday.

— ASIAN AGE

Man who helped Mamata with ice wins ₹5K lotteryRAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MARCH 12:

A sweet shop owner, who had helped West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee with ice to heal her pain immediately after she got injured two days ago at Nandigram, the hot seat of the Assembly polls in East Midnapore, has won ₹5,000 in a lottery.

Nimai Maity, the winner, runs a sweet shop — Maity Mishatanna Bhandar — at Birulia Bazar in Nandigram where the TMC chief got injured

while standing out of the open door of her SUV during her poll campaign on Wednesday.

As the injured CM was writhing in pain in her legs, her security personnel were looking for ice. Mr Maity immediately offered it to them. Later Ms Banerjee was seen applying the ice on her injuries.

Mimai is one of those eyewitnesses who however claimed that Ms Banerjee was not attacked by anyone, puncturing her claims of a conspiracy.

Debabrata Das, who testified that Ms Banerjee's car was hit against an iron pillar, are associates of

Suwendu Adhikari, BJP candidate from Nandigram," the memorandum says.

— PTI

AMMK releases third list for April 6 TN polls

Chennai, March 12: The Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam, led by expelled AIADMK leader V.K. Sasikala's nephew T.T.V. Dhinakaran, on Friday released the third list of 130 candidates for next month's Assembly elections, taking its number to 195.

AMMK's allies include Social Democratic Party of India and Asaduddin Owaisi-led AIMIM and they have been allotted six and three seats, respectively. On Friday, Mr Dhinakaran released the candidates for 130 seats, adding to the 65 he has already named.

The party chief is contesting from Kovilpatti against local AIADMK strongman and information minister Kadambur Raju.

— PTI

SC: Poll commissioners can't be govt employeesPARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

In a major ruling aimed at upholding the independence of the Election Commission, the Supreme Court, on Friday, said that no person serving the government could be appointed as the election commissioner as they have to be independent and act independently.

Having held that no person serving the government or associated with it could be appointed as an election commissioner, a bench comprising Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman, Justice B.R. Gavi, and Justice Hrishikesh Roy said that the independence of the

EC cannot be compromised at any cost in a democracy and that giving additional charge of the State Election Commission (SEC) to a government official is the mockery of the Constitution.

The top court gave a direction to all states to comply with the constitutional scheme of independent SEC if they are in default.

The strong observation from the court came as it took a dim view of the Goa government for giving additional charge of state election commissioner to a secretary serving under it.

Describing it a "disturbing feature," that an officer serving under the

Goa government was given an additional charge as the state election commissioner, the court noted that this officer attempted to overreach the high court in holding elections to the panchayats in the state.

The court directed the SEC to issue notification for the Panchayat polls in Goa within 10 days and complete the election process by April 30.

The top court judgment came on an appeal against an order of the Bombay HC, which had set aside the election notification issued by the Goa State Election Commission in the municipalities of Margao, Mapusa, Mormugao, Sanguem, and Quepem.

NORTHERN RAILWAY
E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tender No.: 27-TRD-NDLS-2020-21 Dated 12.03.2021

Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/Traction Distribution, DRM's Office, State Entry Road, New Delhi for & on behalf of President of India, invites open e-tender under single packet system for the under noted work:

1	Name of Work with its location	Design, supply, erection, testing & commissioning of 25 KV AC OHE modification work in connection with construction of integrated Transit Corridor Development Plan in & around Pragati Maidan Station.
2	Approx. Cost of work	Rs. 29,08,153.26
3	Earnest Money Deposit	Rs. 0/-
4	E-Tender Bid Online Submission Period	23.03.2021 (00.00 Hrs.) to 06.04.2021 (15.00 Hrs.)
5	E-Tender Bid Submission End Date & E-Tender Open Date & Time	06.04.2021 (15.00 hrs.)
7	Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	www.ireps.gov.in

572/21

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

RESTORATION OF TRAIN No. 02029/02030 NEW DELHI - AMRITSAR JN. SWARNA SHATABDI SPECIAL

It is notified for the information of all concerned that the service of train no. 02029/02030 New Delhi - Amritsar Jn. - New Delhi Swarna Shatabdi Special Express will be restored w.e.f. 13.03.2021.

All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table and stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTES App.

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"SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE"

INCREASE IN PERIODICITY OF KAMAKHYA - ANAND VIHAR (T) - KAMAKHYA EXPRESS SPECIAL

For the convenience of rail passengers, Railways have decided to increase the periodicity of train no. 02549/02550 Kamakhya - Anand Vihar (T) - Kamakhya Express Special as per existing Timings, Stoppages and Composition up to 30.06.2021 as per details given below:-

Train No.	From	To	Frequency	Period	Composition
02549	Kamakhya	Anand Vihar (T)	Daily	01.04.2021 to 30.06.2021	AC 2 Tier, AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved Second Seating.
02550	Anand Vihar (T)	Kamakhya	Daily		

The above Special Train will have the reserved accommodation only.

Note: All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

For any kind information such as detailed Time-Table and stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTES App.

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REQUIRES TEACHING & NON TEACHING STAFF

Applications are invited for selection / panel for the following posts in the category of contractual basis from eligible candidates for the Local Screening Board (LSB):-

Posts	Subjects	Qualification
PGTs	Physics, Commerce & Geography	Post Graduate with B.Ed in the relevant subject with min 50% marks & CSB Score Card of relevant subject.
TGTs	English, Maths, Science and S.St.	Graduation/Post Graduate with B.Ed in the relevant subject with min 50% marks & CSB Score Card of relevant subject.
PRTs		Graduation with D.E.Ed/ B.Ed having min 50% marks in each & ability to teach all subjects upto class V with Part 'A' with valid CSB Score Card.
Assistant Teacher		Graduation with D.E.Ed/ B.Ed in the relevant subject with min 50% marks & ability to teach all subjects upto class V especially Hindi
Special Educator		Bachelor's or Master's degree in special education or B.Ed. General with one year Diploma in Special Education.(Expert in dealing with children with intellectual disabilities and learning disabilities).
PRT Computer		B.Tech /M.Tech /BCA /MCA /M.Sc. in CS and CSB Score Card.
PTI (Female)		B.Ped/ M.Ped with min 50% marks and CSB Score Card of relevant subject.
Computer Lab Technician		Minimum 10+2 with one year diploma in computer hardware/software networking & maintenance of computer lab with minimum 3-5 years experience.
Counsellor		Graduation with Psychology /Master's Degree in Psychology with 03 years experience in counselling and guidance. Experienced in working with students.
Art & Craft		Graduate with Drawing and Painting/ Art/ Fine Arts with minimum 02 years full time diploma from a recognized institute.
Music Teacher		Graduate/ Post Graduation in/ with Music (Instrumental) from a recognized university.
Accountant		Should be graduate preferably Commerce graduate or 15 years Service as a clerk in the defence services. Computer literate, knowledge of double entry system of Accounting, Excel sheet and Accounting Software. Min 05 yrs experience as an Accounts clerk.
LDC		Graduate or ten years of service as a clerk, Computer literate, Knowledge of Computer MS Office with basic knowledge of accounting.
Receptionist		Graduate /Post Graduate, Computer literate with excellent communication skills and pleasing personality.
Science Lab Attendant		10+2 with Science and computer literate

Last date for submission of applications is 22 March 2021 on prescribed form available at school office/ website (www.apssrinagar.co.in). Applicant must submit his/her application duly accompanied with self-attested photocopies of all certificates & bank draft of ₹ 100/- in favour of Army Public School, Srinagar. Subject and computer proficiency test will be conducted for candidates and thereafter only short-listed candidates qualifying in written test in merit will be called for the interview telephonically. Please ensure your correct contact No. For further details contact between 10.00 a.m. to 03 p.m. on contact No.: 0194-2468224/ 8492936337/9682136337/9419159461/9906347599.

Date of interview tentatively will be 26 Mar 2021 (0900 Hrs onwards)

SHORT TAKES

Father accuses girl of 'defrauding' him

Bhubaneswar: An elderly man on Friday filed a police complaint alleging that his daughter transferred ₹40 lakh from his bank account to her account after forging his signature. The incident occurred in Odisha's Sundargarh district. As per the complaint, the man deposited the compensation amount that he received from the Union government as a MCL (Maharani Coalfields Limited) project displaced person, at a bank in Sundargarh town. In the meantime, the man's daughter married a youth from Kinjirikela area against her family's wish. Following this, the elderly man and his family did not allow his daughter to enter the house. Forging the man's signature, the daughter transferred ₹40 lakh from his bank account to her account.

VHP raises ₹2,500cr for Ayodhya temple

Bhopal: The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has so far raised ₹2,500 crores through contributions from devotees across the country for construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya. This was revealed by VHP national general secretary Milind Parande. Mr Parande said mobilisation of funds for construction of Ram temple have been carried out in different parts of the country and in some other countries. However, details on funds mobilised in other countries were yet to be compiled, he added. The VHP has raised ₹200 crore in MP for construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya. He said around 5.50 crore people belonging to 1.10 crore families in MP have made their contributions for the purpose.

2 KILLED, 27 HURT AS BUS FALLS INTO GORGE IN MP DIST

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHOPAL, MARCH 12

Two women were killed and 27 others injured when the bus in which they were travelling fell into a gorge in Madhya Pradesh's Chhindwara district early on Friday morning. The mishap took place near Manikhapa village on Chhindwara-Betul road, according to Chhindwara district collector Sourav Kumar Suman. The deceased were identified as Nandani Fazal Khan (20) and Rupali Asrathe (36), the police said. The driver of the ill-fated bus, plying between Bhopal and Chhindwara, lost control over it, leading to the tragic incident, preliminary investigation by the police has suggested. Chhindwara district superintendent of police Vivek Agrawal said a probe was on to ascertain the exact cause of the mishap. The injured were rushed to the nearby government hospital. However, a couple of them were shifted to a specialised hospital in Nagpur when their condition deteriorated. The state government has announced an ex-gratia of ₹4 lakh each to the next kin of the deceased. This was the second such incident in MP in the last one month. On February 16, as many as 52 people were killed when the bus in which they were travelling fell off a bridge into a canal in Sidhi district.

23,285 new Covid-19 cases, 117 deaths in India in last 24 hours

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

India reported 23,285 fresh coronavirus cases and 117 deaths in the last 24 hours with Maharashtra alone detecting 15,817 new infections. This was the highest number of Covid-19 cases in the state since January 2021 and comprises 61.48 per cent of the daily new cases. It is followed by Kerala with 2,133 while Punjab reported 1,305 new cases. Punjab finance minister Manpreet Badal is among the latest to have tested positive for Covid.

In a bid to check rising cases, city after city in Maharashtra are going under lockdowns. Maharashtra government had already announced to impose lockdown in Nagpur from March 15 to 21 and now in Parbhani

Lockdown curbs back in parts of Maha amid surge

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, MARCH 12

Mumbai city reported 1,646 new Covid infections registered in the last 24 hours, recording the highest single-day spike in months. Maharashtra too sustained its surge with 15,817 fresh Covid infections, which was the highest single-day spike ever since pandemic was declared.

Lockdown or restric-

district lockdown has been imposed from Friday night till Monday morning. Gujarat and Tamil Nadu too continue to report a

tions have been imposed in several cities or districts in the state in a bid to prevent the spread of the virus.

However, even as the state is experiencing the second wave of Covid, the Maharashtra Public Service Commission on Friday announced a new date for its preliminary examination under immense political pressure. The exam will be held on March 21.

the past 24 hours.

India's total active caseload reached 1,97,237 on Friday and is 1.74 per cent of the country's total positive cases.

The Union health ministry said the Centre is actively engaging with all state and UT governments, especially those showing an upsurge in daily new cases and with a high caseload of active cases. Officials said the Union government is regularly reviewing the status of Covid containment and public health measures with them.

Recently, the Centre rushed high-level public health teams to Maharashtra and Punjab to assist in Covid-19 control and containment measures in view of the recent spike in cases in these States.

Ukhand's new CM constitutes Cabinet, 11 mantris inducted

Dehradun, March 12: Uttarakhand's new chief minister Tirath Singh Rawat on Friday constituted his Cabinet inducting 11 ministers who were sworn in by the state governor.

Barring newly-appointed state BJP president Madan Kaushik, all other state ministers in former chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat's council have been made ministers in the new government.

The ministers were administered the oath of office and secrecy by governor Baby Rani Maurya in a simple function at the Raj Bhavan.

The swearing-in ceremony, which was held by a delay of around 25 minutes, was attended by CM Rawat, former CM Trivendra Singh Rawat, Vijay Bahuguna along with several MLAs and other prominent people.

Chief minister Rawat had been sworn in all alone on March 10.

Besides the old ministers in Trivendra Singh Rawat's government, four new faces were inducted into the Tirath Rawat's



Tirath Singh Rawat

council of ministers.

Out of 11 newly inducted ministers, eight have been made Cabinet ministers and three state ministers with independent charges.

The new faces in the Tirath Rawat's council of the ministers are MLAs Banshidhar Bhagat, Bishan Singh Chufal, Ganesh Joshi and Swami Yatiswaranand, respectively from Kaladhungi, Didihat, Mussoorie and Haridwar (Rural) Assembly segments.

Out of the four, Mr Bhagat, Mr Chufal and Mr Joshi have been made Cabinet ministers, while Swami Yatiswaranand has been made a state minister.

Uttarakhand with a 70-member Assembly can have a total of 12 ministers, including the chief minister, and with the induction of 11 ministers, Tirath Rawat's council of ministers has attained its full strength. —PTI

BJP MLA tries to end life in Odisha Assembly

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 12

Expressing his displeasure of irregularities in paddy procurement in the state, BJP MLA from Odisha's Deogarh, Subash Panigrahi, on Friday attempted suicide in the state Assembly.

The Legislator tried to consume sanitiser to end life when food supplies, consumer welfare and cooperation minister Ranendra Pratap Swain was replying to the House on the issue.

Several members, including the ruling Biju

Janata Dal's B.K. Arukha and Pramila Mallick, managed to prevent Panigrahi from taking the extreme step on the Floor of the House.

"We should raise the farmers' issue in the Assembly. But, such an act in the House is not acceptable," said BJD MLA Ananta Das.

Justifying his action, Mr Panigrahi said, "I had earlier told the state government that unless the grievance of the farmers is addressed, I will end my life. Nothing has happened... I had no other option than taking such an extreme step."

Opp. not backing farmers enough: Tikait

Jodhpur, March 12: BKU leader Rakesh Tikait on Friday suggested that Opposition leaders were not giving more support to the farmers' protest as they feared being targeted by the Narendra Modi government.

Addressing a farmers mahapanchayat at Pipar in Rajasthan's Jodhpur, the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader called the BJP-led government at the Centre a two-person regime that does not listen to anybody.

He also sought more support from the youth and said the agitation against the three new farm laws would go on till November for now.

Mr Tikait claimed the Pposition was in a poor state and not speaking on the farmers' issue.

Their old deeds are coming in their way and they are scared, in case they get entangled in any issue or investigation, he charged.

Targetting the Centre, the farmer leader said, "If there were a government,



dialogue would have been possible. But there is a two-person government in the country". He said this regime did not seek anyone's opinion.

SC seeks govt response on appointment of CBI director

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

The Supreme Court, on Friday, sought the Centre's response on a plea by NGO Common Cause seeking the appointment of a regular full-time CBI director instead of existing additional director Praveen Sinha — a Gujarat cadre IPS officer — also officiating as the investigating agency's chief.

The additional director is the number two position in the organisational hierarchy of the CBI.

Issuing a notice, a bench comprising Justices L. Nageswara Rao and S. Ravindra Bhat gave the Centre two weeks' time to reply.

Seeking the appointment of a regular full-time head of the premier investigating agency, NGO Common Cause has challenged the appointment of Praveen Sinha as interim-director of the investigating agency saying that his appointment as the officiating director was in the teeth of the Section 4A of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946, that provides mechanism for the appointment of the investigating agency's head.



Devotees participate in the annual chariot procession Rathotsavam at Srikalahasti temple in Chittoor district on Friday.

Shivraj likely to expand MP Cabinet after House session

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, MARCH 12

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan may go for expansion of his Cabinet after the ongoing Budget Session of the Assembly.

Mr Chouhan held discussions with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leaders in this regard a couple of days ago, a senior BJP leader in know of the development told this newspaper on Friday.

"The chief minister

awaits nod from the Central leadership to go ahead with his plan to expand his ministry," the BJP leader said unwilling to be quoted.

Sources said the chief minister has been lobbying hard with the central party leadership and the RSS to induct his loyalist and former minister Rajendra Shukla, an influential leader from the Rewa region, considered a stronghold of BJP.

The BJP had secured 32 out of 36 seats in the region in the 2018 Assembly polls in the state.

ence and in a way the RLSP has merged with the RJD".

The development comes barely a day ahead of RLSP's crucial national executive meeting in which Upendra Kushwaha was expected to announce his party's merger with JD(U).

Reports suggest that after JD(U)'s tally dropped to the third position in the 2020 Assembly elections, Nitish Kumar started working on a strategy to strengthen the party's organisational structure in the state by joining hands with Upendra Kushwaha who is considered a powerful Koeri leader in Bihar.

Koeri forms about 10

per cent of voters in the state and is the largest OBC caste group after the Yadavs in Bihar.

However after the political development on Friday, analysts feel that the crossover may help the RJD to expand its OBC voterbase, especially among Kurmi and Koeri, popularly termed as "Luv-Kush" in the state.

Recalling the RLSP's series of protests against the Nitish Kumar-led NDA government in Bihar in the past few years, Tejashwi Yadav said that "earlier he used to raise his voice for the improvement of education in the state but now he is ready to forget everything and join hands with the JD(U)".

does not know how to break barricades. He termed the agitation a fight to save land.

"We will lose our land in the next 20-30 years and this would happen with every farmer of the country. We can save our land only by fighting the government," he claimed. He said a farmer loved his land more than his son.

Bharatiya Kisan Union Rakesh Tikait asked the gathering to sacrifice all comforts and support the agitation. —PTI

MHA cautions 4 N-E states over influx from Myanmar

New Delhi, March 12: The Union home ministry on Friday cautioned four Northeast states — Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh — bordering Myanmar against influx from the neighbouring country in view of the largescale protests following a coup there, and asked them to take appropriate actions as per law.

In a communication, the home ministry told the four states to guard against the influx of civilians and government officials from Myanmar and take all precautions to deal with any such situation, officials said. The four states were also told to take action as per the law if they found anyone entering India or trying to sneak into the country, they said.

The Mizoram government has recently said 16 people from Myanmar crossed over to India, of which 11 have claimed that they were police personnel.

After the entry of Myanmarese nationals, authorities of that country had requested the Mizoram administration to send back eight policemen. —PTI

Modi, Biden, others push for Quad's new vaccine initiative

■ Continued from Page 1

equitable access, to speed economic recovery and benefit global health. With steadfast commitment to the health and safety of our own people, we also recognise that none of us can be safe as long as the pandemic continues to spread. We will thus collaborate to strengthen equitable vaccine access for the Indo-Pacific, with close coordination with multilateral organisations including the World Health Organisation and Covax. We call for transparent and results-oriented reform at the WHO. We are united in recognising that climate change is a global priority and will work to strengthen the climate actions of all nations, including to keep a Paris-aligned temperature limit within reach.

They further said: "We look forward to a successful COP 26 in Glasgow. We will begin cooperation on the critical technologies of the future to ensure that innovation is consistent with a free, open, inclusive, and resilient Indo-Pacific. We will continue to prioritise the role of international law in the maritime domain, particularly as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

(UNCLOS), and facilitate collaboration, including in maritime security, to meet challenges to the rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas."

The leaders added: "As long-standing supporters of Myanmar and its people, we emphasise the urgent need to restore democracy and the priority of strengthening democratic resilience."

In New Delhi, briefing reporters on the summit, foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said it was decided India's manufacturing capacity was something that could be leveraged to make US vaccines. He said the financing for creation of additional capacities will come from the US and Japan while Australia will contribute to last mile logistics and delivery issues. Australia will finance countries which will receive the vaccines.

"In today's context, it is one of the most important initiatives. We are talking about huge investments in creating additional vaccine capacities in India for exports to countries in the Indo-Pacific region for their betterment. We are talking about producing a billion doses of vaccines by the end of 2022," he said.

Didi ignores doctors' advice

■ Continued from Page 1

diminished considerably in size and the ankle's condition shows marked signs of improvement. A new plaster has been applied."

He added: "The board, after looking into the chief minister's general and local wound condition, decided in favour of keeping her for another 48 hours for observation, but due to repeated requests decided to discharge her with appropriate advices and instructions. She has been advised for a review of the board after seven days. She was discharged because of her repeated requests.

"With certain restrictions, which has been explained to the chief minister, she will be able to move certainly. She has

agreed to obey all those restrictions."

Ms Banerjee, who on Thursday vowed to bounce back soon in her poll campaign, even on a wheelchair, expressed her wish to the doctors many times since morning to return home and urged them to release her as her nemesis, Suwendu Adhikari, filed his nomination as a BJP candidate against her in Nandigram during the day, with two Union ministers — Dharmendra Pradhan and Smriti Irani — campaigning for him.

According to sources, the TMC chief may release her party's manifesto, which was earlier scheduled on Thursday but was postponed, in the next few days. Meanwhile, a TMC

delegation led by MPs Sougata Roy and Derek O'Brien visited the Election Commission office in New Delhi and lodged a complaint about the lack of security for their party chief during her poll campaign.

They also drew attention to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's silence on what they called the "attack" on the CM and linked his recent sarcastic prediction during his last state tour of her "fall" with her scooty in Nandigram with the incident.

Countering them, a BJP delegation led by railway minister Piyush Goyal also met the Election Commission on Friday evening and demanded the appointment of a special observer for Nandigram.

Cong drops G-23 leaders from 'star campaigners' list

■ Continued from Page 1

who is not a part of the star campaigners' list takes part in the campaign, the entire expenditure of his campaign is added to the candidate's expenditure. The chasm between the change

seekers and the high command continues to increase. At the moment, the high command does not want to take any action against these leaders as it will cause public embarrassment to the party. All eyes are set on

May 2, when the results of the five state polls will be declared.

If the Congress does well, the change seekers may be an isolated group, but otherwise the pressure on the high command will increase hugely.

THE ASIAN AGE

13 MARCH 2021

Polls a serious business, spare us all the theatrics

Spectacles and theatrics are essential ingredients of Indian elections and our leaders never fail to deliver them. Most leaders, however, also see to it that such elements only add to the colour of the electioneering process and do not impact the democratic process adversely.

But the reports emanating from West Bengal of late have not been confidence-inspiring ones. Instead, they do the opposite. Chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday alleged that four to five men attacked her in Nandigram where she is contesting the Assembly election. She suffered injuries to her leg and neck. The picture of the woman chief minister with bandage and visuals of her describing the body pain went viral instantly, igniting passions all over the state. Her allegation that there was no security detail to protect her accentuated the situation.

That version, however, underwent a substantial change the following day when she explained what happened the previous day. There was no mention of an attack nor a conspiracy. But by then, the state had witnessed a series of clashes between her followers and those of the BJP which has emerged as the principal opposition to her party, the Trinamul Congress, this time around. There was also an attempt to blame the Election Commission of India that has virtually taken over the state's administration and shifted the state police chief and his deputy recently.

Fair and free elections where citizens vote peacefully and elect their representatives and rulers are one of the seminal pillars of a functioning democracy. Every institution of the state has a responsibility towards ensuring it; more so for politicians in power. Every election is fought in a highly charged atmosphere and party cadres would miss no chance to pounce on their opponents. It is for level-headed leaders to ensure that the ultimate goal is to create an atmosphere where every voter and her choice are respected. It is unfortunate that the West Bengal chief minister did not think through it before going public with a conspiracy theory.

In a democracy, people make their choices after processing information they receive. It is imperative that all those who are duty-bound to protect democracy and its institutions also ensure that the right information reaches the people and the wrong and fake do not. It is only in such a background that their decision would further the cause of democracy. Igniting passion based on religion or ideology or people's love for their leaders is easy but swaying people's opinion by good governance is not.

Politicians of all hues must be willing to place themselves for public scrutiny of what they have done or not done in the past while going to people seeking votes. Nothing should allow this process to be bypassed, for it will colour the very exercise and drain it of meaning. There must be no shortcuts to power.

The latest events send a reminder to the Election Commission, too: it is entering a minefield in the following days and no amount of caution and preparedness would be excessive in the conduct of the elections.

Biden shows the way

US President Joe Biden signed a historic US \$1.9 trillion Covid-19 relief package heralding a path breaking measure that sets very high standards for the world while showing it the way out of the pain of the pandemic as well as the economic recession that came in its wake. There is something for everyone in the plan, from vaccination eligibility for every American by May and the promise of normal family gatherings by July 4 and the reopening of schools. Considering how his predecessor Donald Trump had mishandled the Covid-19 crisis into making America the worst sufferer, Mr Biden has not just tread a truly effective path; he has chosen the best possible response to a global crisis.

The American Rescue Plan, passed despite partisan resistance from Republican legislators, would take total Covid-related expenditure on public health and the economy from December 2020 to nearly \$3 trillion or 14 per cent of pre-pandemic GDP. This puts in the shade what Barack Obama's administration did after the economic crisis of 2008. At a time when the Democrats were in a majority in the House as well as the senate, the US had come up with a less than US \$1 trillion response to the sub-prime induced economic crisis. This massive fiscal stimulus plan emphasises that the only way to get our life back and get the economy back on track is to beat the virus even if only time can tell whether the inflation risk is worth the gamble.

What Mr Biden left unsaid in his optimistic speech on the anniversary of the day Covid-19 was declared a global pandemic was what the US is going to do about the millions of doses of AstraZeneca vaccine sitting idle in its manufacturing facilities because it is yet to get FDA clearance whereas 70 countries have authorised its use already and many, including EU countries, desperately need vaccine doses. Also, the prioritising of the Pfizer vaccine has meant the US has clamped down on export of certain inputs that are inhibiting its manufacture in India, the world's largest vaccine "fill-finish" manufacturer. Mr Biden can do even more to help the world rid itself of the pandemic.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"Did the Lord God give us noses
For people to rub in our mistakes?
And did he grant us toeses
So we could stub them, for goodness sakes!"

And yes, he gave us mouths
To eat, drink and not be 'Loud'
And concealed bits and bobs —
Of which we are rightly proud."

— From Kabhi Kabhi Merey Ghar
Mey Polees Aajaatha Hein by
Bachchoo

My adventures with Oprah, the real queen of Yankeeland

Interviews with royals are like a virus plague, you don't want to catch them, but you can't avoid hearing all about them. The Queen of America, Oprah Winfrey, interviews Prince Harry and the Duchess of Sussex, the American actress Meghan Markle. I didn't watch the interview, but bits of it were forced on me wherever I looked — even intercut with news of the atrocities in Myanmar.

The most prominent pronouncement that this interview seemed to have yielded was Meghan's claim that before her son Archie was born, some unnamed Brit royal wondered

about, perhaps with some alarm or derision, how dark the baby's skin would be. The remark, if Meghan reported it accurately and without malice towards the royals with whom she has fallen out, was prompted by the fact that Meghan's mother is a "woman of colour" — if that's an accepted term. This was interpreted by Oprah and very many other people, including some panjandrum of the Commonwealth and several black US commentators, as a deeply racist concern. It can certainly be interpreted as such.

As Indians, gentle reader, we know that every grandmother and mother-in-law — and yes, very many fathers-in-law — have expressed the same anxiety. Their remarks haven't resulted in flurries in the newspapers or flutters and ruptures in the constitution of the Commonwealth. We take skin colourism as a nasty ingredient of our prejudices — which we shouldn't.

Years ago when Princess Diana died with Dodi-al-Fayed in a car accident in Paris, his father claimed that they had been murdered because Diana was pregnant with Dodi's child and the Duke of Edinburgh did

n't want the future King William to have a Muslim stepbrother or sister.

It's highly probable that this Mohammed al Fayed was unaware that in the fourteenth century Isabelle of Castile, a direct descendant of Princess Zaida of Seville, a woman of colour, who in turn was a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad himself, had married the Duke of York. From that Yorkist line, the present monarchy descends. So, Islam and Moorish skin colour are already somewhere in Archie's DNA.

The only royal interview I confess to watching was Prince Andrew being quizzed by the relentless Emily Maitlis about his paedophilia and association with the frolics and crimes of Jeffrey Epstein. My mild curiosity wasn't to do with royalty or how it would impact on the House of Windsor. I wondered if a British prince would face prosecution and jail and it was mildly amusing watching this idle icon of British tribalism sweat and squirm.

And now that poor Meghan, perhaps as a result of her "disclosures" in the Oprah interview, the victim in her own "confessions", has signed a \$100 million contract with Netflix, we

can all cry in chorus for her as she painfully stumbles and staggers all the way to the bank.

But enough of her — let's talk about me. I met Oprah or she met me when she was invited to a Channel 4 dinner and I worked there. It was a very select dinner and, I suppose, as the only editor of colour in the channel at the time, I was invited by our boss Michael Grade. We were served cocktails by uniformed barmen and then dinner in the boardroom by liveried waiters. No expense spared.

Oprah was seated at the head of the table with Michael and our beloved director of programmes, Liz Forgan. I was at the other end of the table and found myself sitting next to Oprah's press secretary lady. We chatted through the first course and she said they had watched a riveting programme the previous evening in which a white South African eleven-year-old had exchanged places and families with a black South African lad of the same age. I had to say it was my idea and my programme. She was fascinated and asked what else I planned.

I said one of the areas I wanted to venture into was to examine Jazz and

Soul as the classical music of Africa.

She was curious, if not hooked. "Which Soul and Jazz artists will you feature?"

"Depends on the thesis of the programme," I said. "We are working on it."

"Who are your favourites?"

"Today? I suppose Stevie Wonder and, by far the best for voice and technique belong, of course, to Aretha Franklin. Shame about her dress sense."

The lady laughed and put her hand on her mouth as she did. Was this sacrilege?

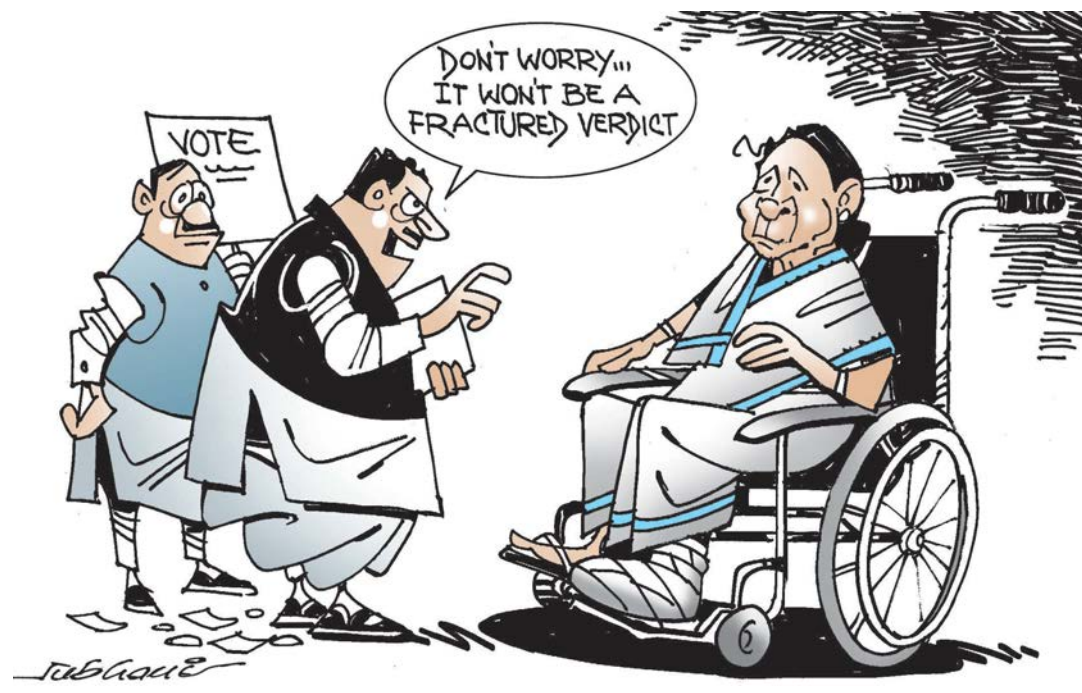
Then she shouted across the room to Oprah and walked over to her at the other end of the table and the two of them came rushing over to me.

"You must tell her what you just said," the press lady insisted, the amused shock still on her features. Oprah pulled up a chair. I repeated my, perhaps injudicious, remark.

Oprah laughed. "I won't say that's so cheeky, but right on the ball," she said — or words to that effect.

Our brief encounter didn't hit the headlines. Netflix hasn't offered me a cent.

Subhani



Gandhis have had it if Congress flops in May



Saeed Naqvi

Wide Angle

Mullah Nasrullah spread out his ornate carpet on the front lawn of his house. He did push-ups on the carpet to become strong enough to protect his house... Meanwhile, thieves from two separate gates behind him tiptoed into his house. Friendly neighbours at the front gate alerted Mullah that his house was about to be burgled by two gangs.

Mullah laughed at them with supreme nonchalance. "You are wrong that they are two gangs", he said. "They are together in this scheme and I know what they are up to."

"What are they up to?" asked the neighbours.

"If I run to chase out one group, the other will steal my carpet", said Mullah, rolling his eyes cunningly, and did another push-up.

The neighbours beat their breasts, even as they saw the burglars cart away every item in Mullah's house.

The Mullah story possibly has universal application, but caution may be in order before transposing it on Rahul Gandhi's athletic performance at the St. Joseph's Higher Secondary School in Mullugumoodubin, Tamil Nadu. He left a Class 10 student, Meroli Shenigha, panting for breath in a competition. Rahul, 50, did 14 push-ups in 10 seconds, something of a record.

A yen for physical fitness is in his DNA. For his great-grandfather, Jawaharlal Nehru, yoga was incomplete without an extended shishasana, or headstand. But while Nehru was private about his exercises, the great-grandson is demonstrative. Nehru may also have been proud of his Kashmiri Pandit heritage, but never of ritual religiosity. In his will, he wrote that he didn't want any rituals for his crema-

tion. His colleagues, more "Hindu" than him, thought it unwise to have the last rites of the country's first Prime Minister, a Pandit to boot, be concluded without the Vedic rituals.

Taking his cue from there, Rahul Gandhi's most reliable town crier, Randeep Singh Surjewala, declared him a "Janeudhari" Brahmin, a declaration that Rahul seems to have taken to heart, touching base with every temple in town. Not to be outdone, sibling Priyanka too has been wearing tilaks on her forehead, large enough for a "yogini". She has been dipping in holy rivers in severe cold. If her brother has added gymnastics to his repertoire, Priyanka has fallen back on ethnic tourism in fancy dress. With expert ease she plucked "two leaves and a bud" in Assam's tea plantations.

The Gandhi siblings are busting their guts to hold onto the carpet as in the Mullah story. As for the Congress Party (The House), senior members have already bolted and joined the BJP. The remainder are running helter-skelter because the Gandhi family is unwilling to show them the road ahead. It is possible that they themselves do not know.

The Gandhis' state of funk may have been enhanced last week by Gujarat where, contrary to the promise of 2017, the

The G-23 are at the moment afraid to strike. These hesitations may well give way to a day of the long knives in May after the results of the elections in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry are out.

Anything of a leftist hue, with the capacity to mobilise the people on a platform of roti, kapda, makaan... healthcare, universal free education, etc must be thwarted. Going by this criteria, the Congress is no threat.

Congress has been beaten to a pulp by the BJP in the local body elections. Indeed, new entrants like the AAP and Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM, have impressively opened their accounts.

The "G-23" Congress letter-writers are what rural folk in North India call "Shivji Ki Baraat", representing all manner of fauna. Ghulam Nabi Azad has been grieving since at least the 2019 elections: "They are not asking me to campaign". Those were days when Rahul, as Congress president, had resorted to practical politics — he would not be seen with Muslims during elections because that would enable the BJP to polarise the vote. What Rahul appears not to have learnt since then is the policies and strategy, not tricks, build a party's elan. When in the 2019 general election, the BJP won 303 seats as opposed to the Congress' 52, Rahul owned up to his responsibility and resigned as party president.

A chapter in the Congress' and the nation's political history was over. Or so one had thought. But no, his cohorts like Mr Surjewala would dance around him with deafening chants of a "Congress revival".

Kuchch to hotay hain Mohabbat mein junoon ke aasaar/ Aur Kuchch log bhi deewana bana detey hain (As it is, there are signs of monomania in obsessive love. Self-serving busybodies further enhance this streak).

Slowly, one saw him trek back from the political wilderness, to attempt, like Sisyphus, the climb again without ever bothering to ask — why is there so much focus on a leader with 52

members in a House of 545? Why does the media, which is owned by industrialists and controlled by the ruling party, heap such generous attention on the Gandhis?

Because they are no threat. Anything of a leftist hue, with the capacity to mobilise the people on a platform of *roti, kapda, makaan...* healthcare, universal free education, etc must be thwarted. Going by this criteria, the Congress is no threat. Policy differences between the BJP and the Congress are minimal. Foreign, economic, even social policies are more or less similar. The BJP's anti-Muslim stance is for Hindu consolidation. The Congress' studied neglect of Muslims serves the same purpose, only with better table manners. Also, the Gandhis and the residual Congress serve as an essential counterpoint in the BJP's musical score.

Essentially, the establishment has a high comfort level with two ruling class parties. One of them may be down and out, but it must remain in occupation of that slot. A vacuum will open up the chances of confusing, unknown amalgamations making a bid for power.

How long can the Mother, Son and his sister hang by a thread for sheer survival? The G-23 are at the moment willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike — just sending out hints but hesitating to go further. These hesitations may well give way to a day of the long knives in May after the results of the elections in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry are out. If the Congress does well enough to preserve its self-respect in even two of these five states/UT, the Gandhis may yet be able to keep the carpet. But should they be trounced in all five, well, they had better look out. Little wonder that the all-round uncertainties are promoting a buzz about a "national government", an absurd thought unless the RSS and India Inc show interest.

The writer is a senior journalist and commentator based in New Delhi

LETTERS

SINKING SHIP

This is with reference to the editorial, "Chacko exit" (Mar. 12). The Association for Democratic Reform's report says that 170 MLAs deserted the Congress during 2016-2020 but only 18 legislators left the BJP. Also, per the same report, 182 of the 405 re-contesting MLAs, who changed parties, joined the BJP. Only 38 joined the Congress. But 25 MLAs joined the Telangana Rashtra Samithi. The report noted that the fall of governments in Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Goa, Arunachal Pradesh and Karnataka state Assemblies was due to defections. It's indeed a wake-up call for the Congress Party.

Anshita Rochwani
New Delhi

QUOTA CULTURE

THE SUPREME COURT'S recent initiative to review the 1992 Indra Sawhney verdict capping reservations at 50 per cent will no doubt open up the Pandora's Box. In the name of inclusiveness, unbridled reservation actually creates inauspicious vibes of inequality. The justified 50 per cent cap has already been put under duress by some state governments to appease some section of society or the other at the altar of vote bank politics. A carte blanche to select communities for reservation will perpetuate discrimination and disenchantment.

Chanchal Nandy
Durgapur

KUDOS, MITHALI

CAPTAIN MITHALI RAJ on Friday became the second woman cricketer and the first from India to cross 10,000 runs in international cricket. Mithali's knock of 36 runs against South Africa in the third ODI took her career tally to 10,001 runs at an average of 46.73. The 38-year-old has so far scored 6,974 runs in ODI cricket, 2,364 runs in T20Is and 663 runs in Test cricket.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

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

SHORT TAKES

GURDEEP SINGH
TAKES OATH AS
PAK SENATOR

Islamabad: Gurdeep Singh from the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party took the oath on Friday as a Senator, becoming the first turban-clad Sikh representative in the upper house of Pakistan's Parliament.

Singh, from the party of Prime Minister Imran Khan became the first turban-clad Sikh representative from Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan's Senate on March 3. He defeated rival candidates on a minority seat by a huge margin in the election to the upper chamber of Parliament.

Singh secured 103 votes in the House of 145 whereas Jamiat Ulema-e Islam (Fazlur) candidate Ranjeet Singh secured just 25 votes and Asif Bhatti of the Awami National Party received 12. Forty-seven other Senators also took oath on Friday.

SA ZULU KING
GOODWILL
ZWELITHINI DIES

Johannesburg: King Goodwill Zwelithini, the traditional leader of South Africa's Zulu nation, has died aged 72 after being hospitalised for more than a month, his family announced on Friday.

Zwelithini had health problems related to diabetes, according to local news reports. Zwelithini, the eighth Zulu king, reigned for more than 50 years, making him the longest-serving Zulu monarch. As the traditional leader of the Zulu nation, Zwelithini did not hold political office but had considerable influence over the country's estimated 12 million Zulus, the largest ethnic group of South Africa's 60 million people.

King Zwelithini was an outspoken critic of the government's planned land redistribution policy, which could affect large tracts of land belonging to the Zulu nation. The Ingonyama Trust controlled by the king owns 29 per cent of the land of the KwaZulu-Natal province, about 28,000 square kilometers, or 10,811 square miles.

ISRAEL, GREECE,
CYPRUS HOLD
NAVAL DRILL

Jerusalem: The Israeli military said on Friday that it has conducted a joint naval exercise with Greece and Cyprus, in the latest sign of increased cooperation among three countries that increasingly view Turkey as a rival in the Mediterranean Sea.

It said the "Noble Dina" exercise, which was led by Israel and also included France, covered "anti-submarine procedures, search and rescue scenarios, and a scenario simulating battle between ships." The exercise was concluded on Thursday.

"Over the past week, the Navy led a large-scale exercise in which it implemented capabilities in underwater warfare, search and rescue, convoy escort and surface combat," Rear Admiral Eyal Harel, the head of Israeli naval operations, said. "These exercises are of paramount importance in strengthening the Navy's connection with foreign fleets who share common interests," he added.

WOMAN HELD
FOR ASSAULT
ON UBER DRIVER

San Francisco: A woman was arrested on Thursday on suspicion of pepper-spraying an Uber driver in San Francisco who was coughed at and insulted after he demanded a passenger wear a mask, police announced.

Malaysia King, 24, was arrested in Las Vegas on suspicion of assault with a caustic chemical, assault and battery and other charges. She was being held without bail.

It wasn't immediately clear whether she had an attorney to speak on her behalf. Arna Kimiai, 24, who also was sought in connection with Saturday's attack, indicated through legal counsel that she intended to turn herself in soon, a San Francisco Police Department statement said.

"The behaviour captured on video in this incident showed a callous disregard for the safety and wellbeing of an essential service worker in the midst of a deadly pandemic," Lt. Tracy McCray, who heads the Police Department's Robbery Detail, said in the statement.

WHO says AstraZeneca is safe

Severe allergy added to AstraZeneca vaccine side-effects, says EU regulator

Geneva, March 12: The World Health Organisation said on Friday there was no reason to stop using AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine after several countries suspended the rollout over blood clot fears.

The WHO, which said its vaccines advisory committee was examining the safety data coming in, stressed that no causal link had been established between the vaccine and clotting.

The UN health agency also said that after the injection of more than 260 million Coronavirus vaccine doses so far around the world, no deaths had yet been attributed to a Covid-19 jab.

Denmark, Norway and Iceland paused the use of the AstraZeneca jab as a precaution after isolated reports of recipients developing blood clots.

Italy and Austria have banned the use of shots from separate batches of AstraZeneca, and Thailand and Bulgaria said they would delay the rollout of the shot. A range of health authorities around the world have insisted the jab is safe, including the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and

Biden sets goal of July 4th to
'mark freedom' from Covid-19

Washington, March 12: US President Joe Biden has announced that all adult Americans will be eligible for Covid-19 vaccination by May 1 under an ambitious plan to get the country, worst-hit by the pandemic, closer to normal by July 4th, Independence Day.

In his first prime-time address to the nation on Thursday since assuming office on January 20,

the WHO.

"AstraZeneca is an excellent vaccine, as are the other vaccines that are being used," WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris told reporters at a briefing in Geneva.

"Yes, we should continue using the AstraZeneca vaccine," she added, stressing though that any concerns over safety must be investigated.

"We must always ensure that we look for any safety signals when we roll out

Biden offered an ambitious plan to lift the country from the worst health crisis using a pair of upcoming dates: May 1, by which he will order states to allow all adults to receive vaccines; and July 4, when he said Americans can again celebrate Independence Day in person.

"After this long hard year, that will make this Independence Day something truly special, where

vaccines, and we must review them," she said.

"But there is no indication to not use it."

The EMA said on Thursday that there had been 30 cases of so-called thromboembolic events among five million people who had received the jab in Europe.

But European countries could still keep using the vaccine, the EU's drug regulator said.

Harris said that while a few countries had, as a

we not only mark our independence as a nation but begin to mark our independence from this virus," he said in his address, shortly after he signed a \$1.9 trillion Coronavirus relief package approved by the US Congress.

His speech also came a year after the outbreak was classified as a pandemic by the World Health Organisation.

— PTI

precaution, suspended the use of a specific batch of AstraZeneca vaccine distributed in Europe, based on reports of blood coagulation disorders, "a causal relationship has not been shown".

"Vaccination against Covid-19 doesn't reduce deaths from any other causes," she said.

"As of March 9, there have been over 268 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines administered since the start of the pandemic.

"No causes of death have been found to have been caused by Covid-19 vaccines to date." Harris said the WHO's advisory committee on vaccine safety, which meets at least every two weeks, systematically reviews any safety reports coming in.

Severe allergies should be added to the possible side-effects of AstraZeneca's Coronavirus vaccine after likely links were found to a number of cases in Britain, the EU's drug regulator said on Friday.

The development comes a day after the European Medicines Agency said it was investigating a separate issue of blood clots that prompted Denmark to suspend use of the jab, but said it remained safe to use. The Amsterdam-based EMA said it had recommended an update to the product information to include anaphylaxis and hypersensitivity (allergic reactions) as side effects.

"The update is based on a review of 41 reports of possible anaphylaxis seen among around 5 million vaccinations in the United Kingdom," it said in the highlights of the EMA committee that assesses the risk of medications.

— AFP

UK urges citizens
to leave Myanmar

Yangon, March 12: Britain on Friday advised its citizens to flee Myanmar, as ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi's lawyer rejected junta corruption claims against her as 'groundless'.

The military authorities are cracking down with increasing severity on daily protests against their February 1 coup, with at least 70 people killed according to the UN's top rights expert on the country.

The turmoil prompted Britain, the former colonial ruler, to urge its citizens to get out if they could, warning that "political tension and unrest are widespread since the military takeover and levels of violence are rising".

"The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office advises British nationals to leave the country by commercial means, unless there is an urgent need to stay," the British foreign ministry said.

The military — which has defended its takeover by citing alleged voting irregularities — in November elections won by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party — held a rare news

conference on Thursday accusing her of corruption. Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun said the detained chief minister of Yangon admitted giving Suu Kyi \$600,000 in cash, along with more than 11 kilograms (\$680,000 worth) of gold.

Suu Kyi's lawyer Khin Maung Zaw on Friday rejected the claims. "This allegation against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the state counsellor, is groundless, especially regarding the dollars and gold bars — it is the most hilarious joke of all," he said.

"I've never seen such an illegal mudslinging." Nobel peace laureate Suu Kyi faces other criminal charges including owning unlicensed walkie-talkies and violating Coronavirus restrictions by staging a campaign event in 2020, Suu Kyi — not seen in public since being detained on February 1 — has a court hearing on Monday.

— AFP

RUSSIA TO USE
PRISONERS FOR
ARCTIC CLEAN-UP

Moscow, March 12: Russia said on Friday it was considering sending prisoners to help clean-up the Arctic after a massive diesel spill hit a remote Siberian territory last year. The head of Russia's Federal Prison Service (FSIN), Alexander Kalashnikov, said that an agreement to that effect had been reached with the administration of the Arctic city of Norilsk.

"Russia's FSIN is looking into the possibility of getting convicts involved in the cleanup of the Arctic zone," Kalashnikov said at a meeting in comments confirmed by the prison service. He asked prison management officials, who are in charge of penal colonies in the Arctic, to "continue" working on the issue.

Located above the Arctic Circle, Norilsk is one of the world's most polluted cities.

Last year a fuel reservoir collapsed at a power plant operated by a subsidiary of metals giant Norilsk Nickel outside the northern city, with more than 20,000 tonnes of diesel polluting the local ecosystem.

Environmentalists say the spill was the worst such accident ever in the Arctic region and it could take years to clean up.

In December, Russia's prison officials publicly discussed using convicts in the efforts at a forum in Saint Petersburg.

FSIN official Elena Korobkova said at the time that Norilsk authorities had already made available premises to house a "correctional centre" for up to 56 people. Convicts could also be used to clean-up illegal waste dumps in the northern Arkhangelsk region, authorities have said.

Officials made no mention of possible incentives for prisoners such as reduced sentences or higher wages.

— AFP

Conserving Wildlife



People look at polar bears inside an enclosure at a newly-opened hotel, which allows guests a view of the animals from rooms in Harbin, northeastern China's Heilongjiang province, on Friday. Polar bears are listed as vulnerable species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

— AFP

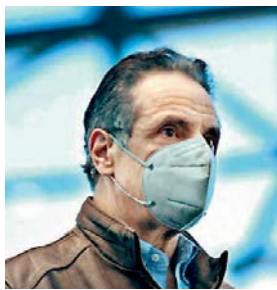
Cuomo faces impeachment inquiry

Albany, March 12: New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's grip on power appeared increasingly threatened on Thursday as a majority of state legislators called for his resignation.

Democrats launched an impeachment investigation and police in the state capital said they stood ready to investigate a groping allegation.

The firestorm around the Democrat grew a day after the Times Union of Albany reported that an unidentified aide had claimed Cuomo reached under her shirt and fondled her at his official residence late last year.

The woman hasn't filed a criminal complaint, but a lawyer for the governor said on Thursday that the



Andrew Cuomo

state had reported the allegation to the Albany Police Department after the woman involved declined to do so herself.

"In this case the person is represented by counsel and when counsel confirmed the client did not want to make a report, the state notified the police

department and gave them the attorney's information," said Beth Garvey, the governor's acting counsel.

An Albany Police Department spokesperson, Steve Smith, didn't immediately return a message, but told that police had reached out to a representative for the woman. The possible involvement of police comes as more lawmakers called on Cuomo to resign over alleged misconduct with women and allegations that his administration concealed how many nursing home residents died of Covid-19.

At least 121 members of the state Assembly and Senate have said publicly they believe Cuomo

should quit office now, according to a tally.

The count includes 65 Democrats and 56 Republicans. The top Democrat in the state Assembly, Speaker Carl Heastie, on Thursday backed a plan for its judiciary committee to launch an impeachment investigation.

The committee can interview witnesses and subpoena documents and its inquiry could be wide-ranging: from alleged sexual misconduct to Covid-19 outbreaks at nursing homes.

It won't interfere with a separate inquiry of sexual harassment allegations being conducted by state Attorney General Letitia James, according to Heastie and James.

NEW | RESEARCH

Study says that increased number of twins in poorer parts of the world is a cause for concern

Twin births at 'all-time high' worldwide

Paris, March 12: More twins — one in every 42 children born — are coming into the world than ever before, according to new research citing the rapid rise in medically assisted reproduction as a key factor.

Some 1.6 million twins are born each year, about a third more than four decades ago, according to a study on Friday in Human Reproduction.

"The relative and absolute numbers of twins in the world are higher than they have ever been

since the mid-twentieth century and this is likely to be an all-time high," said lead author Christiana Monden, a professor at the University of Oxford. The rise of assisted reproductive technology (ART) in developed countries since the 1970s, especially the United States and Europe, has contributed significantly to the rise in multiple births, the study found.

Mothers giving birth at an older age — when twinning rates are higher — is also a factor, as are

increased use of contraception, women choosing to start families later in life and lower overall fertility. Researchers gathered data from 165 countries from between 2010 and 2015, covering 99 per cent of the global population. For 112 of those nations twinning rates were also available for the period 1980 to 1985, making it possible to track changes over time.

In three quarters of the countries with data for both periods, twin births increased by at least 10

percent, the study found.

In Asia, the rate at which twins were born went up 32 percent, and in North America it jumped by 71 percent.

"In both periods, Africa had the highest twinning rates, and there was no significant increase over time," Monden said.

"This was most likely due to genetic differences between African populations and other parts of the world, he speculated.

There was a decrease in the number of twin births in only seven nations.

The increased number of twins in poorer parts of the world raise concerns, the study cautioned.

"More attention needs to be paid to the fate of twins in low and middle income countries," said co-author Jeroen Smits, a professor at Radboud University in The Netherlands.

In sub-Saharan Africa in particular, many twins will lose their co-twin in their first year of life, some two to three hundred thousand each year according to our earlier research."

— AFP



Representational image.

— AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,792.08	-0.95
Nifty 50	15,031.00	-0.95
S&P 500*	3,917.60	-0.55
Dollar (₹)	72.79	0.17
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.26	0.44
Euro (₹)	86.74	0.02
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,059*291	0.66
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	1.625	0.098
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.232	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.605	0.078

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Anti-dumping duty on Chinese ciprofloxacin Hcl

India has imposed anti-dumping duty on the Chinese antibacterial drug ciprofloxacin hydrochloride to guard the domestic industry against cheap imports following a recommendation by the Directorate General of Trade Remedies. The DGTR had concluded the product has been exported to India from China below its normal value. The duty imposed is in the range of \$0.91 per kg to \$3.27 per kg and will be levied for five years.

Ministry working on bringing jet fuel under GST



The civil aviation ministry is working on the airline industry's demand to bring aviation turbine fuel (ATF) under the ambit of GST and has taken up the matter with the finance ministry, civil aviation secretary Pradeep Singh Kharola said at a virtual event. ATF, which account for for 45-55 per cent of an airline's operating expenses, in India is among the world's highest and the industry has long been asking for its inclusion under GST.

PFRDA looking to sell assured return product

The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority is working on plans to introduce innovative retirement benefit products, such as one providing minimum assured return, to attract more subscribers, its chairman Supratim Bandyopadhyay said. "Apart from NPS and Atal Pension Yojana (APY), we propose to have some innovative products to attract more and more customers," he said.

Survey for Mumbai-Nagpur bullet train starts

The Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) survey for the preparation of detailed project report for the proposed Mumbai-Nagpur High Speed Rail Corridor started from Friday. The 736-km bullet train project is likely to link Shahapur, Igatpuri, Nashik, Mehkar, Malegaon, Pulgaon, Wardha and Kharpi, the National High Speed Rail Corporation Ltd said. It said the Li-DAR tech will provide data within four months.

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■ Cites lack of benchmarks and losses to MFs, banks FinMin asks Sebi to pull back AT1 bond circular

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MARCH 12

The finance ministry has asked Sebi chairman Ajay Tyagi to withdraw the proposed valuation norms for debt funds that would treat all perpetual bonds/ additional tier-I (AT1) bonds issued by banks as having 100 year maturity, according to several reports on Friday. Perpetual bonds have no maturity date and, therefore, payments theoretically continue forever. Experts say given the uncertainty around the issue there could be a rise in yields on AT1 bonds in the near-term and the appetite of the investors such as mutual funds could also get constrained thereby impacting issuance volumes. AT1 bonds have in the past been fraught with troubles as seen in the Yes Bank AT1 bonds debacle, in which investors lost their entire investment. Under the new guidelines issued by the Securities Exchange Board of India this week, mutual funds cannot invest more than 10 per cent of scheme corpus in debt instruments with special features such as perpetual bonds, and the exposure cannot not be more than 5 per cent to such debt instruments of the same company. In addition, the maturity of all perpetual bonds needs to be treated as 100 years from the date of issuance of the bond for the "purpose of valuation". The Department of Financial Services, in its

FINMIN TO INFUSE ₹14,500 CRORE IN BANKS UNDER PCA SOON

New Delhi, March 12: The finance ministry is likely to infuse Rs 14,500 crore in the banks that are under the RBI's prompt corrective action (PCA) framework in the next few days to improve their financial health. Indian Overseas Bank, Central Bank of India and Uco Bank are currently under this framework that puts several

restrictions on them, including on lending. The ministry has almost finalised the names of probable candidates for capital infusion, sources said. The infusion will be made in the next few days, the sources said, adding the biggest beneficiary of this round of capital infusion would be the banks that are under the PCA. —PTI

letter to the Sebi chief has argued that the guidelines could lead to large mark-to-market losses for mutual funds. No benchmark exists for 100-year bonds. "Considering the capital needs of banks going forward and the need to source the same from the capital markets, it is requested that the revised capital norms to treat all perpetual bonds as 100-year tenor be withdrawn. The clause on valuation is disruptive in nature. Instructions that reduce concentration risks on such instruments in MF portfolio can be retained, as MF have adequate headroom even with 10 per cent ceiling," the finance ministry said. The government argued that the Sebi norms could also affect capital raising by state-owned banks, forcing them to rely more on the government for capital.

"Over the long run, for all banks, not just PSUs, more equity dilution will take place (due to Sebi circular). This will lead to further depressed valuations," the letter said. It said panic redemption by mutual funds would impact the overall corporate bond market as mutual funds would resort to raise liquidity in debt schemes which could lead to higher borrowing cost for corporates at a time when the economic recovery is still nascent. Anil Gupta, vice president & sector head-financial sector ratings at Icrs Ltd said, "Given the uncertainty around the issue there could be a rise in yields on these instruments in the near-term and the appetite of the investors such as mutual funds could also get constrained, thereby impacting issuance volumes."

According to Icrs, public sector banks raised Rs 18,000 crore through AT1 bonds in FY21 and Rs 10,200 crore in FY20. AT1 bonds were valued hitherto on the basis of a short-term instrument of similar G Sec. They will now be valued as 100-year bonds for which no benchmark exists, said the ministry. "Banks issue perpetual bonds to meet their capital adequacy requirements. If the circular is implemented, the ability of banks to raise further capital by issuing perpetual bonds will be limited. Secondly, since Sebi has capped the limit to invest in these bonds, the headroom available to mutual funds to further invest in perpetual bonds will be impacted. Thirdly, there will be a spike in the yields of perpetual bonds if the proposed valuation methodology comes into effect," said S.P. Prabhu, chief investment officer at Ageas Federal Life insurance. Meanwhile, mutual fund industry body Amfi has come out in support of the Sebi circular. "Amfi fully supports the need and spirit of the circular in capping exposure to perpetual bonds. Most of the MF schemes are well below the cap specified in the circular. In few of the schemes, where perpetual bond exposure is higher than the Sebi prescribed cap, grandfathering is kindly permitted by Sebi to ensure that there is no unnecessary market disruption," the Amfi said.

TESLA IN TALKS WITH TATA POWER FOR EV CHARGING INFRA

Bengaluru, March 12: Tesla Inc is exploring an arrangement with Tata Power to set up charging infrastructure for electric vehicles in the country, a television report said on Friday, citing sources. Shares of Tata Power rose 5.5 per cent to their best closing level since June 2014 after the report, which comes as the Palo Alto-based electric-car maker gears up for an India launch later this year with plans to import and sell its Model 3 electric sedan. Tesla will set up an electric-car manufacturing unit in Karnataka, according to a government document seen by Reuters. The talks between Tata Power and Tesla are in the initial stages and no arrangements have been finalised yet, the report said. Tata Power's electric vehicle charging business constantly explores growth opportunities but has not finalised any new agreements, the company said in a statement to stock exchanges. It also said the CNBC-TV 18 report was "factually incorrect", but did not elaborate. Tesla was not immediately available for comment. In January, the US electric-car maker incorporated Tesla Motors India and Energy Private Ltd with its registered office in Bengaluru. —Reuters

Cement sector to grow over 10%: ACC

New Delhi, March 12: (The domestic cement industry is likely to witness a growth rate of over 10 per cent in 2021 on account of demand revival, according to ACC Ltd. The government's spending on big infrastructure projects and affordable housing schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) with enhanced budgetary allocations would be "primary drivers of growth" for the cement industry, it said. The cement industry had witnessed a de-growth of 10-12 per cent due to the Covid-related disruptions. "The outlook for the cement sector in 2021 is robust, with growth estimated at more than 10 per cent Y-o-Y over that in 2020," ACC said in its latest annual report. The demand revival is likely to be led by the north, east and central regions, it said. "The primary drivers of growth will be infrastructure and affordable housing. Highways and roads, metro rail projects and dedicated freight corridors are expected to see increased levels of activity with sharply higher budgetary allocations in the next year," it added. The continued focus on affordable housing will also ensure healthy demand for cement in the coming year, said ACC, which is owned by Swiss building materials company LafargeHolcim. While talking about the company, ACC said in the



retail segment, individual home builders and ground plus three-storey buildings continue to remain its largest customer segment in terms of volume and profitability. "With growing urbanisation and rural empowerment, the demand from these sectors is expected to accelerate," said ACC in its Integrated Annual Report for the Financial Year ended December 31, 2020. In 2020, ACC's sales volume in cement sales grew by 11.6 per cent from 28.89 million tonnes in 2019 to 25.53 million tonnes. The company, which follows the January-December financial year cycle, had reported net sales of Rs 13,487 crore in 2020. ACC has an installed capacity of 33.05 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) and operates 17 cement plants and 9 captive power plants. The cement industry had witnessed a de-growth of 10-12 per cent due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, in the second half of 2020, the industry showed signs of early recovery, it said. —PTI

Gaming firm Nazara Tech's IPO priced at ₹1,100-₹1,101

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 12

The initial public offering of Nazara Technologies, a gaming and sports media platform, opens on March 17 and closes on March 19. The price band for the Rs 583-crore public offer has been fixed at Rs 1,100 to Rs 1,101 per equity share of Rs 4 face value. The company, backed by ace investor Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, is known for its games on World Cricket Championship, Chhota Bheem and Motu Patlu series. Apart from India, Nazara Technologies has a presence across emerging and developed global markets such as Africa and North America, and its offerings include interactive gaming, eSports and gamified early learning ecosystems. The public offer of 52.94 lakh shares is an offer for sale by promoter selling shareholder Mitter Infotech LLP and a bunch of investors selling shareholders, including IIFL Special Opportunities Fund. The shares will be listed on BSE and NSE.

SURYODAY SFB'S IPO OPENS ON WED.

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 12

Suryoday Small Finance Bank's initial public offering to raise Rs 582 crore opens on March 17. The price band for the IPO has been fixed at Rs 303 to Rs 305 per equity share of Rs 10 face value. Suryoday SFB is a new age bank that went live in January 2017 after running as a micro finance institution and NBFC for eight years. As of July 31, 2020, the company had 482 bank branches and a customer base of 14.3 lakh. The company operates predominantly in urban and semi-urban locations.

Mittal puts Liberty's Gupta on cash & carry

EDDIE SPENCE MARCH 12

ArcelorMittal SA will ask for cash up front to supply Sanjeev Gupta's GFG Alliance with steel amid fears about the group's financial situation. The company will change its payment terms for shipments to the finishing plants Gupta bought from it in 2019, according to a person familiar with the matter. It's likely to put further stress on GFG's cash flow as it tries to find alternative financing after the collapse of its biggest lender, Greensill Capital.

It follows a brief suspension of deliveries by the steel giant to some of GFG's plants, the person said. A spokesperson for the company's unit, Liberty Steel, said there was a "temporary issue" with one of its suppliers for some of its sites, but added it had been "successfully concluded using our normal commercial dispute procedures." ArcelorMittal is constructively working with Liberty Steel "to ensure continuity of the contract," it said in a statement. A spokesperson for GFG said the company wouldn't comment on



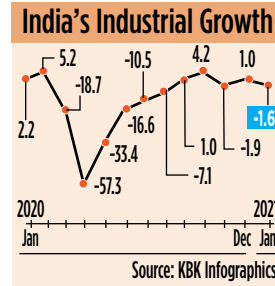
commercial arrangements. Greensill's collapse has raised questions about the financial health of Gupta's businesses, which were its biggest customer. GFG told Greensill in February that it would be insolvent without its funding, the financing firm

said in a filing. Worker unions have since raised concerns over the security of 35,000 jobs across Gupta's sprawling empire that has operations in 30 countries. GFG has hired PJT Partners Inc and Alvarez & Marsal Inc. to help it secure new financing, Bloomberg reported on Wednesday. Their first task will be to secure a debt standstill on the \$5 billion that GFG owes Greensill and other funds that bought its financial products, a person familiar with the matter said this week. —Bloomberg

Inflation up, industrial output down

FC BUREAU NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

With a rise in food prices, Consumer Price Index-based retail inflation surged to 5.03 per cent in February after falling to a 16-month low in January at 4.06 per cent while industrial output saw a contraction of 1.6 per cent in January. The poor performance of sectors like manufacturing and mining pulled down the Index of



Industrial Production that had registered a positive growth in December, gov-

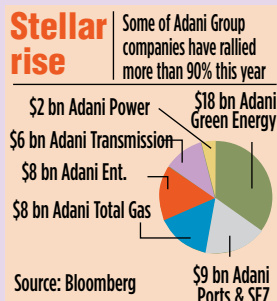
ernment data released on Friday showed. As per the National Statistical Office data, the rate of price rise in the food basket accelerated to 3.87 per cent in February against 1.89 per cent in the preceding month. CPI inflation in urban areas was at 5.96 per cent in February while in rural areas the general inflation rate was 4.19 per cent. The combined inflation rate was found to be 5.03

per cent. While retail inflation continued its upward trajectory, the IIP contracted in January. "The Quick Estimates of IIP with base 2011-12 stands at 135.2," the release said. As per the industrial output figure, electricity sector output grew 5.5 per cent while manufacturing contracted by 2.0 per cent. Likewise, mining output also contracted by 3.7 per cent.

Net worth jumps \$16.2 billion to \$50 billion Adani beats Musk, Bezos in wealth addition

P. R. SANJAI MARCH 12

Indian tycoon Gautam Adani has added more billions to his wealth than any one else in the world this year on the back of investor excitement around his ports-to-power plants conglomerate. The net worth of Adani, a first-generation entrepreneur who rarely speaks publicly, has jumped \$16.2 billion in 2021 to \$50 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. This has made him the year's biggest wealth gainer, beating even Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk, who have tussled in 2021 for the title



of world's richest. Shares of all Adani Group stocks, except one, have rallied at least 50 per cent this year. The surge in wealth dwarfs the \$8.1 billion added by Adani's compatriot Mukesh Ambani. It also underscores the ris-

ing heft of the self-made billionaire, who has lured investment from Total SA to Warburg Pincus. Adani has been rapidly expanding his conglomerate, adding ports, airports, data centres and coal mines in India, while doggedly proceeding with his controversial Carmichael coal project in Australia. "Adani has been consistently expanding its business in areas that are resilient to market cycles," said Sunil Chandiramani, founder and chief executive officer at Nyka Advisory Services. "Now with the entry in data centres business, the group has also

indicated its appetite for venturing into technology." Adani Enterprises Ltd signed a pact last month to develop 1 gigawatt of data centre capacity in India. Adani Total Gas Ltd. has jumped 96 per cent this year while the flagship Adani Enterprises has advanced 90 per cent. Adani Transmission Ltd is up 79 per cent. Adani Power Ltd and Adani Ports and Special Economic Zones Ltd have gained more than 52 per cent this year. Adani Green Energy Ltd, after rising over 500 per cent last year, is up 12 per cent so far. —Bloomberg

Top performing pension funds to 'guarantee' negative returns

FRANCES SCHWARTZKOPFF MARCH 12

After almost a decade of negative interest rates, one of the world's best-run pension industries is about to start guaranteeing clients a negative return. It's the latest sign that long-term subzero rates are forcing Denmark to reshape its finance industry. The country's banks have already taken a world lead in imposing negative retail deposit rates, while Danish homeowners have access to mortgages at negative

interest rates. Denmark's pension industry, twice the size of its economy and ranked the best in the world alongside that of the Netherlands, is now taking another step into uncharted territory. The Danish regulator has decided it's no longer feasible for funds to promise savers in guaranteed-return products that they'll get at least 1 per cent. So from July 1, funds will only be allowed to guarantee savers minus 0.5 per cent (Savers opting for riskier pension plans that track market rates aren't affected by the

change.) A negative return guarantee "is a weird concept," said Per Ploughmand Baertelsen, assistant director general at the FSA in Copenhagen. But that's what savers need to accept, if they want to place their money into products "with zero risk." The decision may accelerate a shift away from such guaranteed-return pensions in Denmark, which account for two-thirds of obligations to customers. The majority of premiums are now paid into products that are at the mercy of the market. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

No Canada, US Opens this year

New Delhi: The Badminton World Federation on Friday announced that this years US Open and Canada Open will not take place due to the Covid-19 "restrictions and complications" across the globe.

The US Open, a Super 300 tournament on the HSBC BWF World Tour, was slated to be played from July 6 to 11, while the Super 100 tournament in Canada Open was schedule for June 29 to July 4.

"The ongoing Covid-19 restrictions and complications left local organisers no choice but to cancel the tournaments," BWF said in a statement.

"The respective decisions of USA Badminton and Badminton Canada were made in consultation and agreement with the BWF," it added.

The cancellations follow the news that Badminton Asia has postponed its flagship event the Asia Championships. — *PTI*

Federer hopes for Wimbledon high

Doha: Roger Federer admitted his goal was to be "100 per cent" back in business by the time Wimbledon rolls around after the 20-time Grand Slam title winner saw his comeback from 13 months out with injury end in Doha on Thursday.

The 39-year-old squandered a match point and was knocked out of the Qatar Open by Georgias Nikoloz Basilashvili in his first tournament since losing to Novak Djokovic in the Australian Open semi-finals in January 2020.

Federer, who underwent two knee surgeries last season, secured the first set against world number 42 Basilashvili but eventually wilted and lost the quarter-final tie, 3-6, 6-1, 7-5.

It was just his second match of his return having also needed three sets to see off Britains Dan Evans on Wednesday. — *AFP*

Muguruza enters Dubai last four

Dubai: Garbine Muguruza overcame Aryna Sabalenka in a tight three-setter for a second consecutive week to storm into the Dubai semi-finals for a third time in seven appearances.

The Spaniard, a runner-up in Doha last week, bounced back from a set down to eliminate the third-seeded Sabalenka 3-6, 6-3, 6-2 and set up a showdown with Belgiums Elise Mertens. Earlier on centre court, Mertens, the No.10 seed, pulled off a miraculous comeback, saving three match points en route to a 5-7, 7-5, 6-0 success over Jessica Pegula. The world No.18, who was down 5-7, 2-5 before she turned things around, is into the 15th tour-level semi-final of her career.

"Its unbelievable to come back like this. I just didnt want to let it go, I just kept on fighting, and I think that was the spirit today," said Mertens. — *AFP*

India to play WC qualifiers in Qatar

New Delhi: India will play their remaining three FIFA World Cup qualifiers in Qatar as the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) decided to host the matches in centralised venues owing to the coronavirus-related travel and quarantine restrictions. As per the original schedule, the Indian team would have played against Qatar at home, Bangladesh away and Afghanistan at home, but the global pandemic has forced radical changes in the fixtures. — *PTI*

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Final — Mumbai City vs Mohun Bagan from 7:20 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

English Premier League: Leeds United vs Chelsea from 6 pm; Crystal Palace vs West Brom from 8:30 pm; Everton vs Burnley from 11 pm; Fulham vs Manchester City from 1:30 am (Sunday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

Italian League: Sassuolo vs Verona from 7:30 pm; Benevento vs Fiorentina from 10:30 pm; Genoa vs Udinese from 1:15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

UFC

Fight Night: Leon Edwards vs Belal Muhammad and other bouts from 6:30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2

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LIONS ROAR

Jason smashes 49 as England rout India in first T20



England's Jason Roy in action against India in their first Twenty20 in Ahmedabad on Friday. — *AP*

NUMBERS GAME

A TRIPLE CENTURY OF T-20 GAMES FOR KOHLI:
● Virat Kohli became fifth Indian and 31st player overall to complete a triple century of Twenty-20 matches. The first match of the five-Twenty-20 match series was 300th match in this form of cricket for Indian skipper.
● Kohli who made his T-20 debut for Delhi against Himachal Pradesh at Delhi on April 3, 2007 and took 13 years and 344 days to reach this landmark.
● Rohit Sharma (340 matches), M.S. Dhoni (331 matches), Suresh Raina (324 matches) and Dinesh Karthik (310 matches) are the other Indian to play 300 T-20 matches before Kohli.

— *S. PERVEZ QAISER*

SCORECARD

India: Shikhar Dhawan b Mark Wood 4, K. L. Rahul b Jofra Archer 1, Virat Kohli c Chris Jordan b Adil Rashid 0, Rishabh Pant c Bairstow b Stokes 21, Shreyas Iyer c Malan b Chris Jordan 67, Hardik Pandya c Chris Jordan b Jofra Archer 19, Shardul Thakur c Malan b Jofra Archer 0, Washington Sundar (not out) 3, Axar Patel (not out) 7, Extras (w-2) 2. **Total (for 7 wks, in 20 overs) 124.**
FoW: 2-1, 3-2, 20-3, 48-4, 102-5, 102-6, 117-7.
Bowler: Adil Rashid 3-0-14-1, Jofra Archer 4-1-23-3, Mark

Wood 4-0-20-1, Chris Jordan 4-0-27-1, Ben Stokes 3-0-25-1, Sam Curran 2-0-15-0.
England: Jason Roy lbw b Washington Sundar 49, Jos Buttler lbw b Chahal 28, David Malan (not out) 24, Jonny Bairstow (not out) 26, Extras (w-3) 3. **Total (for 2 wks, in 15.3 overs) 130.**
FoW: 1-72, 2-89.
Bowling: Axar Patel 3-0-24-0, Bhuvneshwar Kumar 2-0-15-0, Yuzvendra Chahal 4-0-44-1, Shardul Thakur 2-0-16-0, Hardik Pandya 2-0-13-0, Washington Sundar 2-3-0-18-1.

Ahmedabad, March 12: Indian batsmen had little to offer in the face of a regimented English bowling effort on a two-paced track as the hosts received an eight-wicket hammering in the opening Twenty20 International here on Friday.

Indian batsmen struggled to score freely before Shreyas Iyer showed the way with a dogged 67-run knock that took Virat Kohli's men to 124 for seven at the Narendra Modi stadium.

The home team could only manage 124 and in the absence of scoreboard pressure, England overhauled the target with ease in 15.3 overs to take a 1-0 lead in the five-match series.

The Indian batsmen never got the momentum going as England's pace-heavy attack, led by Mark Wood, used the extra bounce effectively to trouble them.

Most of the Indian batsmen went for flashy shots when placement would have served them well, as Iyer did later in the innings.

The world's biggest stadium played host to 67,000 fans, according to Cricinfo, way more than the 50 per cent capacity that was to be filled for the game in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Jason Roy scored a well-calculated 49-run knock while Jonny Bairstow's big hits showed there were no demons in the pitch as the Indians made it seem after being invited to bat by England skipper Eoin Morgan.

Roy struck the ball clean and hard to form a 72-run opening wicket stand with Jos Buttler (28), ending any hopes that the Indians harboured of getting back in the game.

The luxury of time allowed the England batsmen to play freely.

None of the Indian bowlers looked like ask-

ing tough questions to the visitors.

Roy was trapped by Washington Sundar but by that time England had

put 89 runs on the board. Bairstow (26) and Dawid Malan (24) took the side past the finish line.

— *PTI*

PAKISTAN NOT IN FAVOUR OF ASIA CUP THIS YEAR

Karachi, March 12: Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Ehsan Mani has conveyed to the PSL franchise owners that the games governing body in the country is not in favour of having the Asia Cup T20 event this year.

A PCB source said this was conveyed by Mani to the Pakistan Super League franchise owners on Thursday, after it was announced that the remaining matches of PSL 6 would be completed in June. Mani spoke about the Asia Cup after the franchise owners sought to know if the dates of PSL were clashing with the continental tournament. "Mani made it clear that their was little possibility of the tournament being held this year and it would be moved to 2023 due to the commitments of the participating teams," the source said.

Mani told the new dates for the Asia Cup would be decided at the next meeting of the Asian Cricket Council. — *PTI*

Margao, March 12: As many as 114 games, 295 goals, 87,811 passes and 7307 tackles later, the Indian Super League 7 will culminate with a heavyweight summit showdown between Mumbai City FC and ATK Mohun Bagan here on Saturday.

The match that lends meaning to every single touch taken so far, in what has been an exciting Hero ISL season, will be played at the Fatorda Stadium.

When Mumbai City FC take on ATK Mohun Bagan in the summit clash, there will be no more complex equations in play. The winner takes

home the trophy. Its as simple as that.

Few would argue that there is a better candidate for the final than these two - both Bagan and Mumbai have been head and shoulders above the rest throughout the season.

Both the teams come into the final with identical records, 12 wins and just 4 defeats in the league stage.

Despite a nervy penalty-shootout win over FC Goa in the semifinal, it will be Mumbai who head into the final full of confidence.

They did the double over Bagan in the league stage,

Giles feels IPL is very beneficial for England

London, March 12: The Indian Premier League has been extremely beneficial for us, says ECB managing director Ashley Giles, who feels English cricketers presence in the lucrative T20 tournament has helped the national team in achieving the number one rank in white-ball formats.

Earlier this week, England's star player Jos Buttler said that the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) had never asked him to skip the popular T20 event to be available for the Test series against New Zealand, which is set to clash with the final stages of the IPL.

"In my briefings with the players, I have encouraged players to think very carefully about what their programmes are. I have not directed them," Giles told in a Sky Sports show.



Ashley Giles

"We aren't forcing either way. The IPL isn't going anywhere. It has extreme benefits to us. From this group here, I think, we have 12 of the 16 players going to the IPL."

"Years ago we found it very difficult for players to get into the IPL to experience that tournament. Now all of our players are in high demand and its probably the big reason why we are number one in world in both white-ball for-

mats," Giles said.

There are 12 England cricketers, some with million dollar contracts, playing in the IPL. The players include Buttler, Ben Stokes and Jofra Archer for Rajasthan Royals, Moeen Ali and Sam Curran for Chennai Super Kings and Dawid Malan for Punjab Kings.

The IPL is slated to begin from April 9 with the final scheduled to be played on May 30, while England's opening Test against New Zealand begins on June 2.

"We have agreed for players to go to the IPL. Those two Test matches were arranged late, they didnt form part of the original schedule. We had agreed with the players and with the IPL that the players would be available right through the tournament and if they got to the later stages, they would be able to participate."

— *PTI*

BEDI DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITAL AFTER 24 DAYS

New Delhi, March 12: Legendary former India spinner Bishan Singh Bedi has been discharged after spending more than three weeks at a city hospital here following a bypass surgery.

The 74-year-old former India captain had undergone a bypass surgery at the capitals Sir Ganga Ram Hospital last month after he suffered a heart attack.

He subsequently also underwent an operation to remove blood clotting in his brain.

"He was evaluated and was found to be having all three vessels of heart critically blocked," the statement from the hospital read.

"He was stabilised and underwent Coronary Artery Bypass Surgery, which was performed by Dr Ganesh Shivnani and his team on 18 February 2021. He has been discharged successfully in a stable condition on 11 March 2021," it added.

— *PTI*

WOMEN'S | CRICKET

Raj first Indian to join 10k club

Lucknow, March 12: Veteran batter Mithali Raj on Friday became the first Indian woman cricketer and second internationally to complete 10,000 runs across all formats, drawing praise from some iconic names of the game and the BCCI.

The 38-year-old Mithali, who leads the Indian ODI team, joined England's Charlotte Edwards in the elite club.

Mithali achieved the feat with a boundary off Anne Bosch in the 28th over of Indias innings during the ongoing third ODI against South Africa here.

Mithali has amassed 663 runs in 10 Test matches with a best score of 214, while she has 6974 and 2364 runs from 212 ODIs and 89 T20 Internationals respectively. The figures add up to 10001.

"Heartiest congratulations Mithali on completing 10000 runs in International Cricket. Terrific achievement... Keep going strong!" master blaster Sachin Tendulkar tweeted.

After reaching the milestone of Friday, Mithali departed in the next ball, flicking a Bosch delivery



Mithali Raj

straight to Mignon du Preez at midwicket. She made 36 runs off 50 balls and hit five boundaries in the process.

BCCI secretary Jay Shah called the India captain an "absolute legend".

"Take a bow, @M_Raj03! What an achievement to be the first Indian woman cricketer to surpass the international 10,000-run mark. Absolute legend," Shah wrote on his Twitter handle.

Earlier, the Board too congratulated the veteran cricketer on reaching the milestone. IPL franchises Chennai Super Kings and Mumbai Indians also congratulated the seasoned cricketer. — *PTI*

Lee lords over India women in third ODI

Lucknow, March 12: South African opener Lizelle Lee single-handedly destroyed India's chances with a career-best unbeaten 132 as the home team lost by six runs via the Duckworth-Lewis (DLS) method in the rain-marred third womens ODI of the five-match series here on Friday.

Chasing 249, Lee starred for the visitors with her breathtaking knock that came off 131 balls and had 16 fours and two hits over the fence. South Africa now lead the series 2-1.

Lee kept South Africa abreast with the required rate, which eventually proved crucial after rain played spoilsport with the visitors at 223 for four in 46.3 overs, six ahead of India via the DLS method.

Earlier, Punam Raut struck a second successive

half-century — 77 off 108 balls — to power India to a fighting score.

South Africa were off to a decent start in their chase with the pair of Lee and stand-in skipper Laura Wolvaardt (12) adding 41 runs for the opening wicket. After Wolvaardt was cleaned up by off-spinner Deepti Sharma, Lara Goodall (16) and Lee took the innings forward with a 40-run stand for the second wicket. Mignon du Preez (37) too made a significant contribution as Lee kept South Africas chase alive by scoring the third century of her career. — *PTI*

Brief Scores: India 248/5 in 50 overs (Punam Raut 77, Deepti Sharma 36 not out, Mithali Raj 36; Shabnim Ismail 2/46) lost to **South Africa 223/4** in 46.3 overs (Lizelle Lee 132 not out; Julian Goswami 2/20).

Kjaers late leveller gives AC advantage

Paris, March 12: Simon Kjaers last-gasp equaliser gave AC Milan a dramatic 1-1 draw at Manchester United on Thursday, handing the Italian giants a great chance of reaching the Europa League quarter-finals.

Kjaer netted with a bullet header in the final seconds of stoppage time of the last 16, first leg encounter at Old Trafford, levelling the scores after Amad Diallo had opened in the 50th minute with his first United goal.

"This is a great result, we played really well, showed personality and I think we dominated," the defender told Sky Sport Italia after the match.

In a sign of the drop in standards at Old Trafford and the San Siro, the first meeting between two of the worlds most historic teams since 2010 was their first outside the Champions League knock-out stages.

Rangers, Ajax well placed Rangers are well placed to make the quarter-finals

● **Four-time European champions Ajax are almost guaranteed a place in the Europa League last eight after thumping Young Boys 3-0 in Amsterdam.**

after a 1-1 draw away to Slavia Prague.

Filip Helanders close-range finish in the first half left Steve Gerrards Rangers still in the hunt for a European trophy with the draw in Prague, days after winning their first Scottish League title in 10 years.

Four-time European champions Ajax are almost guaranteed a place in the last eight after thumping Young Boys 3-0 in Amsterdam through goals from Davy Klaassen, Dusan Tadic and Brian Brobbey.

Villarreal also look good to make the quarters thanks to a 2-0 win at Dynamo Kiev. — *AFP*

THE RESULTS

Manchester United (Diallo 50)	1	Granada (Molina 26, Soldado 76)	2
AC Milan (Kjaer 90+2)	1	Molde	0
Slavia Prague (Stanciu 7)	1	Tottenham Hotspur (Kane 25, 70)	2
Rangers (Helderer 36)	1	Dinamo Zagreb	0
Dynamo Kiev	0	Olympiakos (El-Arabi 58)	1
Villarreal (Torres 30, Albiol 52)	2	Arsenal (Odegaard 34, Gabriel 80, Elneny 85)	3
Ajax (Klaassen 62, Tadic 82, Brobbey 90+2)	3	Roma (Pellegrini 23, El Shaarawy 73, Mancini 77)	3
Young Boys	0	Shakhtar Donetsk	0