





## SHORT TAKES

## Ghaziabad: 2 held for posing as cops

**Ghaziabad:** Two men were arrested on Tuesday for allegedly posing as police personnel and extorting money from auto drivers in Sahibabad area here, police said. Circle officer (Border) M.S. Alok Dubey told PTI that the accused were identified as Dinesh (27), a native of Moradabad district, and Sandeep (33) of Sardhana town in Meerut district. The duo were living in Kanawani village of Indirapuram in Ghaziabad district. They confessed to the crimes and also said they used to snatch and rob valuables from passersby enroute to markets. Five days ago, they had snatched bangles and a gold chain from a woman. Dinesh who was caught in police attire told the police that four months ago they had swindled a man named Vinod of Kanawani village on the pretext of providing jobs to him in the police department. — PTI

## Two men beaten to death by mob

**New Delhi:** Two men were beaten to death by a mob on Tuesday allegedly over the suspicion of theft at north Delhi's Azadpur Sabzi Mandi, police said. Police were informed about the incident around 7.30 am, they said. "Police reached Azadpur Sabzi Mandi where two men — Lokesh (24) and Bhaiya (24) — were found injured," deputy commissioner of police (northwest) Usha Rangani said. Both were taken to BJRM Hospital where they were declared brought dead, the deputy commissioner of police said. The bodies were sent for autopsy and further action is being taken, police said, adding that CCTV footages of the locality are being analyzed.

## 3 men arrested for fake robbery

**Ghaziabad:** A fake case of robbery was busted in Kavi Nagar area here after the main accused and two others were arrested, police said on Tuesday. Nitin, an edible oil factory accountant, was robbed while travelling in a car to deposit ₹10 lakh in a bank located in Rajnagar District Centre (RDC) in the middle of the city on the morning of March 1. After scrutinising the history of the present and past employees of the factory, a detailed investigation by the police and special weapons and tactics team (SWAT) led to the arrest of Nafees Khan, a driver, who was allegedly the mastermind. City SP (1st) Nipun Agarwal said two other accomplices — Bobby Kushwah and Mohit Rawat — have also been arrested while two others Suraj and Sunny are still at large. On the day of the fictitious loot, Khan had gone to Lucknow after hatching a conspiracy with the oil mill owner. — PTI

## AIR 'VERY POOR' IN GHAZIABAD, GREATER NOIDA

**Noida:** The average air quality deteriorated to reach "very poor" category in Ghaziabad and Greater Noida, and "poor" in Noida, Gurgaon and Faridabad, according to data issued by a government agency on Tuesday. Pollutants PM 2.5 and PM 10 also remained high in the air of the five immediate neighbours of Delhi, according to the air quality index (AQI) maintained by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). According to the index, an AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'. The average 24-hour AQI at 4 pm on Tuesday was 334 in Ghaziabad, 339 in Greater Noida, 293 in Noida, 277 in Faridabad and 272 in Gurgaon, according to CPCB's Sameer app. On Monday, it was 230 in Ghaziabad, 196 in Greater Noida, 192 in Noida, 174 in Faridabad and 204 in Gurgaon. The CPCB states that an AQI in "poor" category may lead to breathing discomfort to most people on prolonged exposure, while "very poor" may cause respiratory illness on prolonged exposure. The AQI for each city is based on the average value of all monitoring stations there. — PTI

## Delhi presents ₹69,000cr 'Deshbhakti Budget'

Free Covid vaccination for all; Education and health receive higher allocation

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 9

The Delhi government presented a ₹69,000 crore Budget themed on "patriotism" for financial year 2021-22 on Tuesday, announcing free Covid-19 vaccination to all in its hospitals in the coming phases of the ongoing inoculation drive.

Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, while presenting the Budget, said it is based on "deshbhakti" (patriotism) as it pays tribute to freedom fighters and hopes to work towards building the capital and the country as envisioned by them.

Mr Sisodia proposed to allocate ₹16,377 crore—one-fourth of the total Budget—for the education sector while the health sector got ₹9,934 crore.

He said that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government will celebrate the country's 75th Independence Day and organise programmes for 75 weeks, starting March 12. The city government has proposed to allocate ₹45 crore to install high masts to hoist the national flag at 500 places in the national capital.

Mr Sisodia said there will be a "deshbhakti period" in the city schools, adding that ₹10 crore each has been proposed for programmes on the lives of Bhagat Singh and B.R. Ambedkar during the 75-week "deshbhakti" celebrations.

He said an outlay of ₹50 crore has been made under the "Aam Aadmi Nishulk Covid Vaccine Yojana." Currently, vaccination at the hospitals run

by the Centre and the Delhi government is free for senior citizens and those in the 45-59 age group with comorbidities while an amount of ₹250 is being charged at private hospitals.

He also announced that special "mahila mohalla clinics" will be opened in Delhi from the next year and 100 such clinics will come up in the first phase.

He said smart health cards will be issued to every citizen in Delhi, adding that a health information management system is being implemented.

Mr Sisodia said that 100 specialised schools of excellence will be set up across the national capital and a virtual model school will be started in Delhi to promote and adopt technology.

"The Delhi government will also start universities for teacher training and law studies," he said.

One Sainik school was proposed in Delhi in the Budget. Besides, the AAP government has also decided to provide yoga instructors in colonies for which an amount of ₹25 crore has been allocated in the Budget. The city government said water supply will be ensured in all unauthorised colonies in the next two financial years. It also proposed to allocate ₹3,274 crore to the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) for the next financial year.



Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia at Vidhan Sabha in New Delhi on Tuesday. — G.N. JHA

## Delhi announces road infrastructure projects

**New Delhi, March 9:** The Delhi government on Tuesday announced new road infrastructure projects, including East-West corridor between Tikri and Anand Vihar, and corridor from the Signature Bridge to the IGI airport, to decongest the city's roads.

While presenting budget in the Delhi Assembly, deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said the government is waiting for the UTTIPEC's approval for the three big projects.

These are East-West Corridor (elevated and tunnel road between Tikri and Anand Vihar), the North

South Corridor (elevated and tunnel road from the Signature Bridge to the airport) and an outer road running parallel to the Yamuna from the Signature Bridge to Sarai Kale Khan.

Mr Sisodia said all preparations have been made for the beautification of 500 kilometre roads and it shall be carried out from this year onwards and added that ₹500 crore has been set aside of this.

"The construction of underpass at Ashram Chowk will be completed by June 2021 after which the traffic on Mathura

Road — Nizamuddin to Badarpur border and Ashram Crossing will ease out and there will be reduction in travel time, pollution level and savings of fuel. The government has proposed ₹35 crore for this project," the deputy chief minister said.

"PWD has always proven its efficiency & effectiveness in terms of giving Delhi a makeover. #DelhiBudget2021, this year puts extra focus on streetscaping, construction of roads and bridges. The promise of European standards is being turned into a reality by

@AamAadmiParty (1/3)," PWD Minister Satyendra Jain tweeted.

"With 73% achievement rate, PWD has delivered projects before time & within the allocated funds. The budget focuses on construction of underpasses, flyovers, transit corridors etc. 500 km of beautification of roads, is a milestone to be achieved this year. #DelhiBudget2021 (2/3)," he said.

In his tweets, Mr Jain also mentioned three big projects which have been announced by the government to make travel easier in Delhi. — PTI

## Govt allocates ₹3,090 crore for power subsidy scheme

**New Delhi, March 9:** Delhi residents will continue to avail subsidy on electricity as the Delhi government allocated ₹3,090 crore for its Special Electricity Subsidy Scheme on Tuesday.

Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia announced a total of ₹3,227 crore for the energy sector in the budget 2021-22.

The Delhi consumers at present get "zero power bill" up to 200 units of electricity and a subsidy of ₹800 for consuming 201 to 400 units of monthly electricity. Presenting the budget, Mr Sisodia said approximately 90 per cent of households in Delhi are availing the benefit of subsidy on electricity.

"The government also gives 100 per cent subsidy to the victims of 1984 riots for power consumption up to 400 units," he said.

The government also

extended the Special Electricity Subsidy Scheme to the lawyers' chambers within the court premises. Mr Sisodia also announced to reduce the fixed charge for agricultural connection to ₹20 per kWh from the earlier ₹120 kWh.

The Delhi government has proposed a sum of Rs 25 crore for a new scheme titled "Conversion of 11KV network from bare conductor to insulated conductor (under the Jagmagati Delhi Programme)".

The scheme shall ensure 24 hours uninterrupted power supply to Delhi residents, Mr Sisodia said.

The power distribution companies will also work to remove mesh of cables crisscrossing various parts of the national capital in the next five years to ensure safety of human lives and properties as well as to beautify the city, he added. — PTI

mentation of "possibly the world's most progressive" electric vehicle policy in Delhi since August 2020.

"Due to this, Delhi has also become an "electric vehicle capital"... The share of electric vehicles has increased from 0.2 per cent to 2.21 per cent. This is a major indication of the success of the e-vehicle policy," he said.

"The government is soon going to increase the number of charging stations for electric vehicles from 72 to 500. Rapid charging points are also being built along the lines of the city of London. We aim to have at least one e-charging station every three kilometres in Delhi," deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said. — PTI

## Delhi allocates ₹1,550cr for development of illegal colonies

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 9

The Delhi government on Tuesday allocated ₹1,550 crore in budget for the development of unauthorised colonies in the city.

Presenting the budget for the financial year 2021-22, deputy chief Minister Manish Sisodia, who also holds the portfolio of finance, said so far, construction work has been completed or is in progress in 1,345 out of 1,797 unauthorised colonies of Delhi.

For the development of unauthorised colonies, ₹1,550 crore has been allocated, he said.

Mr Sisodia lauded the efforts of Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) and said all the slums of NDMC, SDMC and EDMC have been declared "Open Defecation Free". It has provided 674 Jan Suvidha Complexes with 21,586 western seats.

The deputy chief minister said in 619 slums, 10,16,531 metre of concrete pavements and 250 kilometre of drains have been constructed.

Twenty-one slum development centres have also been built. Reiterating the government's commitment to providing "Jahan Jhuggi, Wahan Makaan", Sisodia said in Sultanpuri, the work of allotting 1,060 houses to the people living in the nearby slum settlements is in the final stage.

## Oppn. says Delhi govt's Budget visionless, directionless, hollow

**New Delhi, March 9:** Opposition BJP and Congress slammed the Delhi government's budget presented in Assembly on Tuesday, alleging it lacks vision and makes hollow promises to the people of Delhi.

The budget 2021-22 is "silent" on present and short-term planning for Delhi, but sells "dreams and hollow promises" of Delhi of 2047, city BJP president Adesh Gupta said in a press conference.

The Delhi government presented a ₹69,000-crore budget themed on "patriotism" on Tuesday under which installation of 500 flag masts and programmes on the lives of freedom fighters are planned across the city, and announced free

▶ The budget 2021-22 is 'silent' on present and short-term planning for Delhi, but sells 'dreams and hollow promises' of Delhi of 2047, city BJP president Adesh Gupta said in a press conference

Covid vaccination for all in its hospitals in the coming days.

Senior Congress leaders addressed a joint press conference where they termed the Kejriwal government's budget "visionless and directionless".

It lacks a financial package to bail out small scale, household industries, shopkeepers and traders affected due to the Covid pandemic, they party leader said.

BJP MLAs, numbering eight in the 70-member

Delhi Assembly, staged a walkout after the budget was presented by Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, alleging "corruption" in bus procurement by the government.

The Delhi BJP president charged that the AAP government used the budget not for development but electoral benefit.

Every year, the Kejriwal government claims to be presenting a historic budget, but it fails to utilize the budgetary allocations for education, health, pollution and transport, he alleged.

"This must be the first state budget in the country which shows dreams to people about 26 years later, but is silent on deteriorating pollution and public transport situation in Delhi. — PTI



A policeman near the site of an accident after a collision between two trucks on the Eastern Peripheral Expressway near Kasna in Greater Noida on Tuesday. — PTI

## 3 dead, 12 injured in separate road accidents in Noida, Greater Noida

**Noida, March 9:** At least three people were killed and a dozen injured in separate road accidents in Noida and Greater Noida on Tuesday, according to police.

Two people died and five got injured in a collision between two trucks on the Eastern Peripheral Expressway in Kasna area, the police said.

A Gujarat-registered truck was parked along the expressway in which another truck, bearing a Haryana registration number, rammed it from

the rear, a police spokesperson said.

Three people had got severely injured and rushed to a government hospital where two of them were declared dead by doctors. One deceased has been identified as Amir-ul-haq while the identity of the other was yet to be ascertained, the spokesperson said.

Those injured have been identified as Suryabhan Singh, Ram Pharep, Aseer Ahmad, Surbhan and Mohit, the official said.

In the other incident, a

truck rammed into a private bus on the Dadri-Bulandshahr route, leading to injuries to two persons one of whom died, the police said.

The deceased has been identified as Mubaraq Khan, while the injured person is Munawwar, both from Bulandshahr district, the police added.

Another six people got injured when a speeding mini bus they were travelling in overturned while trying to overtake a vehicle on the Noida-Greater Noida Expressway. — PTI

## 103-year-old Noida man takes Covid-19 vaccine

**Noida, March 9:** A 103-year-old Noida resident was administered the Covid vaccine Tuesday, becoming the oldest person yet in Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar district to have got inoculated against the deadly coronavirus.

Mahabir Prasad Maheshwari was accompanied by seven senior citizen members of his family who took the vaccine too at a private hospital in the city.

"My father is feeling fit and fine," Maheshwari's eldest son Sudarshan Dayal (81) told PTI after he took the jab.

"My father's age as per official documents is 103

▶ MAHABIR PRASAD Maheshwari was accompanied by seven senior citizen members of his family who took the vaccine too at a private hospital in the city

years but he says he could be 106 or 107," he added.

He said there are 10 people in his joint family living in their house in Sector 12 of which seven "senior citizens" including himself went to Kailash Hospital on Tuesday to receive the vaccine shot.

Kailash Hospital spokesperson V.B. Joshi confirmed the first dose of

vaccination to the Maheshwari family.

Sudarshan said no one in his family here contracted Covid, whose first case was reported in the district in March 2020.

"We took all precautions as told by the government. We had switched to electronic means for ordering grocery and other domestic supplies. My father had an attendant but had stopped coming home during the lockdown and pandemic, and we were taking care of each other by ourselves," he said.

Maheshwari has three sons and four daughters — all of them above 60. He also dealt in stock market

until the lockdown was announced in March last year after which visitors were stopped from coming to their home, according to his son.

"By God's blessings, my father is active even at this age. Till last year, he kept himself engaged in stock trades. Even now he relishes a game of cards with his grandchildren and playing with great-grandchildren," Sudarshan, a retired chartered accountant, said of his centenarian father.

"He walks around from bedroom to drawing room and other spaces in the home by himself although we have an attendant for

his help. He used a walker for longer distances and has a wheel chair for outdoors," he added.

Maheshwari, who was born and brought up in Hapur when it was a part of the Ghaziabad district, moved to Noida in 1997 where he settled.

"We are thankful to Kailash Hospital, the government of India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for this vaccination process. We had been hearing negative rumours about the vaccine but turns out this is good for us. We hope Covid will soon be a thing of the past," Sudarshan said. — PTI



## IN BRIEF

## Odisha MLAs to face Covid antigen tests

**Bhubaneswar:** All MLAs will undergo antigen tests for Covid-19 to attend the second phase of the ensuing Budget session of the Odisha Legislative Assembly that will begin from March 12. The members who will test negative will be allowed to enter the House and take part in the Assembly proceedings, Speaker Dr Surjya Narayan Patro said on Tuesday. "During first phase of the budget session, MLAs and Assembly staff had undergone RT-PCR test. Those who had tested negative for the Covid-19 were allowed to attend the session and the members with positive reports had stayed away from the House. This time, there will be antigen tests for all the members and staff, the report of which will come out within five or ten minutes," Dr Patro added.

## Hiren's wife blames Vaze

**Mumbai:** The wife of Mansukh Hiren, the owner of the vehicle found near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence, has alleged that her husband was murdered by assistant police inspector Sachin Vaze. In her complaint, she also said that the vehicle in question was also in possession of Vaze since November 2020. Hiran's wife Vinla also claimed in her statement, copy of which is with this newspaper, that her husband told her that Vaze had asked him to get himself arrested and he would ensure his bail in a few days. The officer had resigned from the police force in 2007 and joined Shiv Sena in 2008. He was reinstated in the police department on June 6 last year.

## GOYAL REBUTS DIDI'S CLAIM OF NO RAILWAY HELP

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA, MARCH 9

Railway minister Piyush Goyal has refuted West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's allegation of non-cooperation by his ministry officials to the fire brigade in fighting the devastating fire which claimed nine lives at the Eastern Railways' office in New Koilaghat Building on Strand Road in Kolkata on Monday evening.

Four fire-fighters Girish Dey, Gaurav Bej, Aniruddha Jana, Biman Purakait, four railway staff RPF Constable Sanjay Sahni, deputy chief commercial manager Partha Sarathi Mondal, senior commercial clerk Shrawan Pandey and senior technician Sudip Das and an assistant sub-inspector (ASI) Amit Bhawal of the Kolkata Police boarded two lifts against the rule to reach the source of fire at the 13th floor of the high-rise.

Seven of them were charred to death in one elevator while two others died of suffocation inside another. Visiting the spot Banerjee accused "the railways of non-cooperation by not providing the building map to the fire brigade."

Early on Tuesday Goyal, mourning the loss of lives, tweeted, "Railway officials including the GM are at the site and are working in coordination with the state govt for rescue and relief efforts. We are committed to doing everything possible to ensure safety of all concerned. All possible assistance has been provided by the Railways to the state govt during this unfortunate fire accident. A high level inquiry consisting of four Principal heads of Railway departments has been ordered to ascertain the cause of the fire."

The inquiry report is expected in two weeks.



Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal along with BJP supporters arrives to file his nomination for the upcoming state Assembly elections in Majuli on Tuesday.

— PTI

# SC junks petition questioning 8-phase Bengal Assembly poll

Court also rejects objection to 'Jai Shri Ram' slogans raised by BJP

PARMOD KUMAR  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 9

The Supreme Court on Tuesday rejected a plea challenging the Election Commission's decision to hold Assembly elections in the State of West Bengal in eight phases. The PIL petitioner had also pointed to the BJP leaders raising religious slogan "Jai Shri Ram" during electioneering. Dismissing the PIL, Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde heading a bench also comprising Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian said, "We don't agree with you. We have read the whole case, dismissed."

Contrasting the election to West Bengal assembly in eight phases with other States — Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Union Territory of Puducherry and Assam, Sharma in his PIL by lawyer Manohar Lal Sharma had said that the while election in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry is being held on one day, in Assam it is in three phases.

Mr Sharma has asserted that the holding elections for West Bengal in 8 phases, is a violation of right to equality under Article 14 of the Constitution.

"No law has been framed yet empowering the Election Commission to adopt an unequal treatment of election among the 5 states as per their whim. Conducting election in 8 phases while in other states in 1 phase, .... is a clear case of violation of Art 14 of the Constitution of India,"

## Poll seizures: Assam breaks all records, items worth ₹18 cr seized

**Guwahati, March 9:** Assam broke all previous records in seizures of cash, liquor, drugs and other goods in the run-up to the Assembly polls with various agencies already confiscating over ₹18 crore worth of items and arresting around 110 people in the last 11 days, officials said on Tuesday.

The highest amount of seizures worth over ₹5.72 crore took place during the 24 hours, starting 9 am on Sunday, an official said. After the polls were

notified on February 26, all constituencies in Assam formed a minimum of three Static Surveillance Teams (SST) and Flying Squads (FS) each, with some even having six such teams each, he added.

"We have a minimum of 756 teams working across the state. The seizures by all state and central agencies along with SST and FS have crossed all figures of last elections," the official said.

Since the Model Code of

Conduct came into force, the agencies have seized an overall ₹18.31 crore worth of items till Monday, according to the daily seizure report of the Election Department, Assam.

It includes ₹4.27 crore in cash, liquor (3.58 lakh litres) worth ₹5.52 crore, ₹4 crore worth drugs and other narcotics substances, ₹1 crore worth precious metals such as gold and silver, and ₹3.52 crore of other items like different freebies. — PTI



Omar Abdullah

## OMAR TARGETS ADHIKARI OVER KASHMIR REMARK

**Srinagar, March 7:** National Conference leader Omar Abdullah on Sunday hit out at BJP leader

Suvendu Adhikari for his remarks that West Bengal will become like Kashmir if the Trinamool Congress came back to power in the state.

"But according to you BJP wallas Kashmir has become paradise after August 2019 so what's wrong with West Bengal becoming Kashmir? Anyway, Bengalis love Kashmir & visit us in large numbers so we forgive you your stupid, tasteless comment," Omar said in a tweet.

The former J-K chief minister was reacting to Adhikari's reported statement that West Bengal would become like Kashmir if the TMC returned to power in the assembly elections.

Mr Adhikari, a former TMC leader, is contesting against his former boss Mamata Banerjee from the Nandigram seat. — PTI

## Kamal's MNM signs 'MoU' with allies

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR  
and D. SEKAR  
CHENNAI, MARCH 9

Actor Kamal Haasan's Makkal Neethi Maiam, which has been scouting for allies to face the April 6 Assembly elections as a combine, finally decided on an alliance with the Indhiya Jananayaga Katchi of T.R. Parivendhar and All India Samathuva Makkal Katchi, founded by actor Sarathkumar.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by leaders of the three parties, more in the form of a business deal,

said that MNM would take a lion's share of 154 seats, while the IJK and AISMK will get 40 seats each.

The agreement, worded in English and have signatures of three witnesses, drew flak from many on social media as the general practice in the state is to have such deals written in Tamil with just the number of seats allotted for the parties mentioned in it.

But the MoU of Haasan spoke about objects and goals. It said that parties join together to bring in change in Tamil Nadu.

## DMK wraps up alliance with coalition partners

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR  
and D. SEKAR  
CHENNAI, MARCH 9

The DMK wrapped up its alliances with the various coalition partners on Tuesday by allotting three seats to the Kongunadu Makkal Desiya Katchi, led by E.R. Easwaran, whose candidates would be contesting the April 6 polls in the 'rising sun' symbol.

Party leaders were busy finalising the seat allotment, a laborious exercise since some of the constituencies are sought by more than one ally, with other party honchos too visiting Anna Arivalayam for the negotiations.

Though it might take a few more days for the seat allotment to be finalised, the DMK might announce its first list of candidates and constituencies on

Wednesday, it was rumoured.

Meanwhile, two small parties that were earlier in the AIADMK alliance, the Mukulathor Puli Padai led by actor Karunas and Manithaneaya Jananayaga Katchi of Tamimur Ansari, expressed their displeasure over the DMK not offering them any seats. The two parties had given letters expressing support to the DMK-

led front after breaking away from the AIADMK coalition on the hope that the DMK would at least offer one seat each to the two leaders.

While rumours started floating that the two parties had withdrawn their letters of support given to the DMK as they felt neglected by the DMK, Tamimur Ansari denied it.

Another Muslim party, Indian National League,

whose emergent State executive met in Chennai on Tuesday, also decided to extend support to the DMK-led front. It accused the AIADMK government of being subservient to the BJP at the Centre.

Meanwhile, DMK MP S. Jagthrakshan, who is in charge of Puducherry, came out with a statement denying speculations on his switching over to the BJP.

## Scindia 'dismisses' Rahul's CM offer

RABINDRA NATH  
CHOUDHURY  
BHOPAL, MARCH 9

Rahul Gandhi's offer of post of chief minister of Madhya Pradesh to senior BJP leader Jyotiraditya Scindia if he returned to Congress on Tuesday kicked up a storm with the latter calling it a misplaced concern.

"I wish Rahul ji had shown similar concerns when I was in Congress", Scindia, who quit Congress and joined BJP in March last leading to fall of 15-month-old Kamal Nath government, retorted while seeking to dismiss Gandhi's offer as misplaced concern.

Scindia said he would not like to comment further.

Gandhi had recently told youth wing leaders of Congress that had Scindia remained in the party, he would have certainly become chief minister (of MP). Scindia was now a 'backbencher' in the BJP. "Scindia will be chief minister only when he is in Congress", the former Congress president said.

Scindia's supporters here called Gandhi's statement as 'immature'.

"Gandhi is known for making immature statements. He is not taken seriously by people and his credibility in public is at the rock bottom. He has now been left with three options to restore his credibility by making Sachin Pilot, chief

minister of Rajasthan, T.S. Singhdeo, chief minister of Chhattisgarh and Navjot Singh, chief minister of Punjab, as he had promised them earlier", Scindia loyalist Pankaj Chaturvedi who quit Congress and joined BJP in March last, told this newspaper.

Gandhi's remarks on Scindia have raised eyebrows in Congress circle here also with a section of party leaders wondering if he was throwing a bait (to make Scindia chief minister) to woo him back to the Congress fold.

"Gandhi's statement creates an impression that something is cooking up between Scindia and Congress. But, I think it is an immature statement and may cause damage to the party in Madhya Pradesh. This may alert and antagonise two key leaders of Congress in MP, Kamal Nath and Digvijay Singh, both of whom are considered arch rivals of Scindia", a senior Congress leader here said requesting not to be quoted.

Interestingly, Congress MLA and former Union minister Kantilal Bhuria, considered a staunch loyalist of Singh, said Scindia would be taken back into Congress if he apologised in public for quitting the party.

"Bhuria's statement is nothing but a joke since the question of Scindia returning to Congress does not arise", Chaturvedi said.

**ANDHRA PRADESH STATE CIVIL SUPPLIES CORPORATION LIMITED**  
Regd. Office: 16-15/21, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Sri Sai Towers, Besides SIRS Company, Bandar Road, Vijayawada-520029.  
Lr.No. PDS/P2/1263/R/F2020-21  
Date: 09.03.2021

**TENDER NOTICE**  
EMPANELMENT OF SUPPLIERS THROUGH AP e-Procurement e-Reverse Auction PLATFORM FOR SUPPLY OF 3000 MTS OF FORTIFIED RICE KERNELS (FRKS) WITH THREE (3) MICRO NUTRIENTS FOR DISTRIBUTION UNDER PDS, ICDS, MDM IN ANDHRA PRADESH FOR SUPPLY IN 20KG BAG DELIVERY TO APSCSCL.

Andhra Pradesh State Civil Supplies Corporation Ltd., invites tender for appointment of Manufacturers/Suppliers for supply of Fortified Rice Kernel (FRK). For registration, interested Manufacturers/Suppliers of FRKs from all over India may visit [www.approcurement.gov.in](http://www.approcurement.gov.in) or [www.apscscl.in](http://www.apscscl.in) to view and download tender documents at free of cost.

The details and procedure for obtaining Digital Signature Certificates are mentioned in website [www.approcurement.gov.in](http://www.approcurement.gov.in) or contact the help desk of procurement portal, Phone numbers: 08645-246370/71/72/73/74.

Last date for online registration and completion of Formalities for the e-Reverse auction shall be up to 5.00 pm of 22.03.2021 and the tentative date of online e-auction through e-procurement auction platform would be on 23.03.2021.

Sd/- VC & MANAGING DIRECTOR

**NORTHERN RAILWAY**  
**TENDER NOTICE**  
(Through e-tendering)  
Tender No. 558-Sig-16-Tele-AMC-568  
Name of work with its Location  
Comprehensive AMC of Exchange installed at Residence of Honble MDSR, Digital/ISDN Telephone Exchange at Tikli Bridge, Rohatka stations & GM Directorate, Engineering branch Baroda house for three years  
App. Cost of the work (₹)  
₹ 630405 only  
Tender Document Fee (₹)  
₹ 0 (Zero) only  
Earnest Money Deposit (₹)  
₹ 0 (Zero) only  
Address of the office  
Senior Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer-C, Northern Railway, 3rd Floor, Annex-1, DRM Office, New Delhi-110055.  
Date & Time for upload the tender / closing date & time-  
28.04.2021 up to 15.00 hrs.  
Website particular & notice board location where complete details of the tender can be seen etc.  
See the Northern Railway website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) & Notice board at S&T branch, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, DRM office, State Entry Road, New Delhi-110055  
530/21

**PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON**  
(See Section 82 Cr.Pc.)  
Whereas complaint has been made before me that **Pramod @Hanuman, S/o Sh. Kanhaiya R/o A-53, Shyam Colony, Budh Vihar, Delhi-110086** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case **FIR No. 1054/15 u/s 380/411/34 IPC, P.S. S.B. Dairy, Delhi** and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused **Pramod @Hanuman** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused **Pramod @Hanuman** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).  
Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused **Pramod @Hanuman** of **FIR No. 1054/15 u/s 380/411/34 IPC, P.S. S.B. Dairy, Delhi** is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before **29.05.2021**.  
By Order,  
Sh. Vaibhav Mehta  
Metropolitan Magistrate-05, (North)  
Room No.114, First Floor, Rohini Courts, Delhi  
DP/837/ON/2021

**Noida**  
**New Okhla Industrial Development Authority**  
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida - 201301 (U.P.)  
Website : [www.noidaauthorityonline.com](http://www.noidaauthorityonline.com)

**E-TENDER NOTICE**  
E-Tenders are invited from eligible firms/contractors for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official website: [www.noidaauthorityonline.com](http://www.noidaauthorityonline.com) & <https://tender.up.nic.in>. Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc.

1. 35/SM(Jal)-II/ET/20-21, Strength of W/s (Demolishing and Dismantling of old RCC Over Head Tank Capacity 2000 KL in Sector-29), Noida. Cost-Rs. 10.77 Lacs.  
The above tenders can be uploaded by date 18/03/2021 upto 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date 19/03/2021 at 11.00 AM.

2. 81/SM(Jal)-II/ET/20-21, M/o W/s (Repair and rewinding of submersible motor pump set 40 HP in sector-22, 23, 24 and CGR-31) Noida. (For Two Years), Cost-Rs. 21.45 Lacs.  
The above tenders can be uploaded by date 25/03/2021 upto 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date 26/03/2021 at 11.00 AM.

Office:-  
Sector-37  
(YOGENDRA KUMAR)  
SENIOR MANAGER (JAL)-II  
Noida  
**CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA**

## BILATERAL TIES

## New Delhi advises British MPs to refrain from practising vote bank politics

# India fumes as UK House discusses farmers' stir

SRIDHAR  
KUMARASWAMI  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 9

In a stinging rebuke against the recent discussion in the British Parliament on the ongoing farmers' protests, India on Tuesday summoned and issued a demarche to British High Commissioner Alex Ellis to "strongly oppose the unwarranted and tendentious discussion on agricultural reforms in India in the British Parliament" on Monday on the grounds that "this repre-

sented a gross interference in the politics of another democratic country".

In a message dripping with sarcasm, New Delhi also "advised British MPs to refrain from practising vote bank politics by misrepresenting events".

This is the second Western nation to which a demarche has been issued by India in the past three months on the farmers' stir. In December last, India had similarly summoned the Canadian High Commissioner in New Delhi and had issued a demarche to Can-

ada for its "unacceptable interference" in India's internal affairs in response to recent comments made then by some senior politicians there including Canadian PM Justin Trudeau on the farmers' protests in some states in India. New Delhi had also warned Canada then that "such actions, if continued, would have a seriously damaging impact" on bilateral ties.

In a statement on Tuesday, New Delhi said, "Foreign Secretary (Harsh Vardhan Shringla) summoned the British High Commissioner

(Alex Ellis) and conveyed strong opposition to the unwarranted and tendentious discussion on agricultural reforms in India in the British Parliament. The Foreign Secretary made clear that this represented a gross interference in the politics of another democratic country. He advised that British MPs should refrain from practising vote bank politics by misrepresenting events, especially in relation to another fellow democracy."

Just last week, the British High Commissioner had te-

rmed the farmers' protests against the recently-enacted three Indian farm laws as an "internal issue of India", even as New Delhi had said last week that Indian diplomats in the UK are apprising the British Government as well as Members of Parliament and members of the civil society there about the concerned three farm Bills and also about the Indian government's efforts to resolve the issue in talks with farmers.

"This is an internal issue of India. We look at it. That is for India to resolve," the

British High Commissioner had told reporters last Friday, in reference to the ongoing protests by farmers predominantly from some of the northern Indian states.

"Things that happen in India have ripples in the UK," Ellis said, in an obvious reference to the large Indian-origin community and diaspora in the UK. He had also referred to a remark made by British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab in India in December last year that "your (Indian) politics are our (British) politics".



## SHORT TAKES

ED RAIDS PUNJAB  
MLA'S PREMISES IN  
LAUNDERING CASEAGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 9

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday conducted searches at the premises of rebel AAP MLA from Punjab Sukhpal Singh Khaira, his family members in a money-laundering case linked to the 2015 Fazilka narcotics trafficking case and a fake passport racket. According to sources searches were conducted at Khaira's residence in Chandigarh, five other locations in Haryana and Punjab and two places in Delhi. "Searches were conducted as per the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). During searches several incriminating documents and other evidences were recovered. Fresh evidences are being further scrutinised", sources said. The case pertains to the probe in the 2015 Fazilka (Punjab) drugs-smuggling case, in which 1,800 grams of heroin, 24 gold biscuits, two weapons, 26 live cartridges and two Pakistani SIM cards were seized from a gang of international drug smugglers by security agencies. The central agency recently filed a PMLA case in connection with the case, which was first lodged by the Punjab Police. "The drugs were smuggled through the India-Pakistan border and one of the kingpins of the syndicate is in the UK. "Sukhpal Singh Khaira was actively aiding and supporting the gang of international smugglers and enjoying the proceeds of crime," the ED has alleged. Khaira is a legislator of his own party — Punjab Ekta Party. He was elected to the state Assembly in 2017 on a ticket of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). The agency alleged that Khaira (56), the MLA from Bholath in Kapurthala district, is an "associate" of the drugs racket convicts and fake passport racketeers.

Shivraj showers  
sops on farmers

**Bhopal:** Shivraj government on Tuesday showered sops on farmers by announcing to provide interest free crop loans and slash tax on sale of agriculture implements in Madhya Pradesh. The decisions taken by the state cabinet here come ahead of civic body polls in the state, due in March-April this year. The state cabinet which met here under the chairmanship of chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan cleared the proposal to provide interest free loans to the farmers in the state, according to state home minister Narottam Mishra. However, the decision would apply only to the short-term crop loans taken from state cooperative banks. Earlier, crop loans were provided at 2 percent interest. In another decision, the state cabinet has decided to reduce tax on sale of agriculture implements in the state from the existing 10 percent to 1 percent. The measure may help farmers save at least ₹1.5 lakh per year each. The moves come ahead of civic body elections in the state, which are due in March-April this year.

RAWAT QUILTS AS  
U'KHAND CM, BJP  
SEEKS NEW FACE

■ **Continued from Page 1**  
process of the change of guard in the state.  
Earlier, before going to Raj Bhavan, Mr Rawat was closeted with his associates at the CM's residence, including Cabinet minister Madan Kausht and Mr Dhan Singh Rawat. After submitting his resignation, Mr Rawat addressed a press conference at his residence and said the party had "collectively decided" someone else should lead the state now. "I feel really honoured that my party gave me the opportunity to serve Devbhoomi for nearly four years," said Mr Rawat.  
He said that during his tenure, several steps were taken for the empowerment of women, including a recent ordinance giving ownership rights to women in the ancestral property of their husbands.  
State BJP chief Bansidhar Bhagat, Mr Dhan Singh Rawat, Vikas Nagar MLA and chief spokesman Munna Singh Chauhan, Cantt area MLA Harbans Kapoor and Dehradun MLA Sunil Uniyal Gama were also present at Mr Rawat's last press conference as chief minister.

DRDO develops  
Air Independent  
Propulsion tech  
for submarinesAGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 9

Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has demonstrated that it has capability to develop Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) System, which enhances the submerged endurance of the conventional submarines, several folds.  
AIP allows the submarine to remain under water for much longer periods and operate without the need for atmospheric oxygen. AIP makes a submarine more lethal as they are more manoeuvrable and make less noise than a nuclear submarine. However, nuclear submarine engine are more powerful.  
AIP is likely to be used in the next generation submarines and existing submarines when they come for upgrade. "DRDO has achieved an important milestone in the development of AIP System by proving the land based prototype on 8 March 2021," said DRDO. It said that the plant was operated in endurance mode and max power mode as per the user requirements. The system is being developed by Naval Materials Research Laboratory (NMRL) of DRDO.  
"Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) has a force multiplier effect on lethality of a diesel electric submarine as it enhances the submerged endurance of the boat, several folds," said DRDO. DRDO is using fuel cell-based AIP, which has merits in performance compared to other technologies.



A visitor clicks a selfie with the portraits of Mahatma Gandhi displayed inside the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad on Tuesday.

■ **In 24 hours 10.48 lakh people were vaccinated, 15,388 new cases**

## CEC, Nadda, Advani take Covid jab

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora, BJP president JP Nadda, veteran partyman L.K. Advani, actors Anupam Kher and Paresh Rawal were some of the people who took the first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine on Tuesday as overall immunisation figures in the country crossed 2.40 crores. In the last 24 hours 10.48 lakh people were vaccinated even as six states — Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Karnataka — continue to report a surge in the Covid-19 daily new cases. They cumulatively account for 84.04 per cent of the new cases reported in the past 24 hours.



In the last 24 hours, 15,388 new cases and 77 deaths were registered. On the other hand, four states — Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura — did not report any new Covid-19 cases.  
Dr PK. Misra, Principal Secretary to Prime Minister chaired a high level meeting to review the status and progress of Covid vaccination across States and UTs. The meeting was attended by Chief Secretaries and the officers involved in the vac-

cine with any state, including Rajasthan, where according to reports claimed was starting shortage of vaccine doses. Officials said Rajasthan has been supplied 37.61 lakh doses out of which only 24.28 lakh doses were consumed till Monday. "The Central government is regularly monitoring availability of vaccine supply in all States and UTs, and providing the doses as per their requirement and consumption pattern," officials said.  
Meanwhile, the director general of Civil Aviation has said that only those pilots and cabin crew who show no symptoms 48 hours after the Covid-19 vaccination will be allowed to resume flying duties.

EC removes  
Bengal's DGP

■ **Continued from Page 1**  
assignment, Mr Pandey was DG (administration).  
Sources said, meanwhile, that nine more IPS officers, most in the rank of superintendent of police in the districts, are also under the EC's scanner and are likely to be transferred.  
The EC, in a communication to chief secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay, made it clear Mr Virendra "should not be given any post which directly or indirectly relates to the conduct of the elections". It also told Mr Bandyopadhyay: "Compliance of the commission's order may be done immediately. Kindly inform the commission about the compliance latest by 10 am tomorrow."  
Sources in the bureaucracy said the BJP was unhappy at Mr Virendra's partial role.

Didi tells BJP: Don't play  
Hindutva card in Bengal

■ **Continued from Page 1**  
Nandigram among many seats, is on April 1. She said: "Khela Hobe (Game On). Make 'April Fool' of them by your votes on that day."  
Tearing into her opponent and former Cabinet colleague for branding her as an "outsider" in his home turf, the CM, who has coined the same slogan against the BJP, wondered: "Some people are calling me an outsider! I am from Bengal. How can I be an outsider? The only difference is my native place is Birbhum while yours (Suwendu) is Nandigram. Had I been an outsider, I should not have been the CM! An outsider cannot be a CM here."  
To strike a chord with

the locals a day before filing her nomination in Haldia, in the district, the TMC supremo further explained why she has chosen to fight from Nandigram.  
"Bhowanipore was my home seat. If I would have contested there, I would not have to do anything... When I last visited Nandigram, it was lying vacant. It had no MLA because he (Mr Adhikari) had resigned. I then asked you if I could contest here. I wanted to know your stand. You said it would be great. I saw your enthusiasm. Nandigram lives in both my eyes. That is why I selected it," she said, before giving an option to the gathering to ask her not to contest from Nandigram if

they do not like her.  
Ms Banerjee added: "I also led a land movement for a long time in Singur, which happened before Nandigram. Had the movement in Singur not happened, the same would not have been possible here also. It was my plan to contest either from Singur or Nandigram because both are the foundations of the movement."  
With Mr Adhikari's bhoomiputra (son of the soil) image on her mind, the two-time CM tried to woo the electorate with her closeness to Nandigram, saying she has rented a house for one year in the Assembly constituency, which she would visit for a stay in every three months.

## US sends draft peace pact to Ghani govt, Taliban

■ **Continued from Page 1**  
men quick territorial gains for the Taliban.  
Mr Ghani's first vice-president, Amrullah Saleh, said the President had received the letter and was unmoved by its contents. He said Mr Ghani was not ready to embrace the secretary of state's accelerated pace toward a settlement.  
We are neither concerned about the letter nor has it changed our position, Mr Saleh said. He thanked the US for its sacrifices and financial assistance over the past 20 years but said the Afghan government won't succumb to dictation.  
"We will make peace with dignity, but never... an imposed peace," he said at a ceremony on the anniversary of the death of a former defense minister. Mr Ghani has been accused by his political

opponents of trying to cling to power at all cost. Fawzia Koofi, one of only four women at the negotiation table in Doha, warned against haste and a May 1 withdrawal of US troops, saying it would cause chaos. She confirmed that all sides had received the US-drafted draft agreement.  
One thing that is important is that Afghan ownership and Afghan leadership must be respected, she said in a phone interview from Doha.  
The process should not be rushed.  
Mr Blinken's letter proposes a revised plan for a 90-day reduction in violence that would prevent the start of a spring offensive by the Taliban and would be followed by a permanent cease-fire laid out in the draft peace agreement.  
Both sides would stop

fighting within hours of the agreement being signed, according to the draft. The Taliban would remove all its military and military structures from neighbouring countries a reference to Pakistan, where the leadership currently resides. The draft agreement also calls for an independent commission to oversee cease-fire violations.  
The preamble of the US document says the draft peace agreement is intended to jump-start negotiations.  
It sets forth principles for governance, security, and rule of law and presents options for power sharing that could help the two sides reach a political settlement that ends the war, it says.  
The preamble portrayed the draft as a compilation of ideas and priorities of Afghans on all sides of the

political spectrum.  
The draft lays out an ambitious road map that protects the rights of all, guarantees elections, demands transparency and a fight against corruption and the illicit drug trade. It demands guarantees of non-interference from Afghanistan's neighbours and guarantees from Afghanistan that the country won't be used to attack or interfere with another.  
It proposes the establishment of a peace government that would oversee the writing of a new constitution and elections held immediately afterward. The new constitution is to protect the rights gained in the last 20 years since the toppling of the Taliban.  
According to the draft, the peace government would include separate, but equal branches,

including the judiciary, and executive branch.  
The draft also said there will be one national government, no parallel governments and no parallel security forces, which would mean an end to Taliban fighters and the many militias loyal to warlords holding sway in Kabul. It promises to protect Islamic values and while an independent judiciary would have the ultimate authority, the High Council for Islamic Jurisprudence would have an advisory role.  
The new peace plan offers a chance for a cease-fire, it offers a chance to bring the Taliban from the battlefield to the talks table to discuss thorny issues of religion and its role in (the state), without giving them all the power, said Torek Farhadi, former Afghan government adviser.

## NR Cong finalises Pondy..

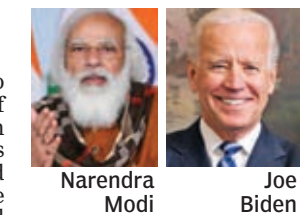
■ **Continued from Page 1**  
Vijayakanth, walking out of the AIADMK-led alliance in Tamil Nadu.  
The DMKD, the party founded by Vijayakanth, severed its AIADMK ties on an acrimonious note with its top leader and

brother-in-law of the founder, L.K. Sudhish, openly declaring that the AIADMK would lose its deposit in all the constituencies without his party's support.  
When the emergent meeting of the DMKD, called to

discuss the alliance question on Tuesday, decided to break away from the party that was not prepared to look into its demand for more seats, the party office plunged into immediate celebrations with the lighting of firecrackers.

PM, Biden, other  
Quad heads will  
hold meet Friday

Meeting being seen as US' growing  
backing of India in Asia Pacific

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 9

In a strong message to China on the importance of freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region as well as to discuss Covid vaccine cooperation, the leaders of the four Quad nations including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Joe Biden along with the Japanese and Australian PMs will attend the "first Leaders' Summit of the Quadrilateral Framework on Friday in a Virtual format. The four leaders will have extensive discussions including on "regional and global issues of shared interest, and exchange views on practical areas of cooperation towards maintaining a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region", in a meeting that will no doubt be closely watched by Beijing.  
The meeting is further indication that the United States under the Joe Biden Presidency stands firmly with India in pursuit of common strategic objectives, particularly in the light of Chinese economic and military might in the region. India is also the foremost among the Quad countries to export Covid vaccines to needy nations, with China seen as the other main global competitor in this regard. There have been recent international news reports that New Delhi may be actively seeking support in the form of investment from the other Quad countries to fortify its position as a

Modi dials Japanese PM,  
hails joint bullet train planAGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 9

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday "reiterated his commitment to the successful implementation" of the Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bullet Train project which he hailed as "a shining example of the India-Japan bilateral strategic partnership". This was stated during a phone call with his Japanese counterpart Yoshihide Suga on Tuesday. In a testimony to the strength of the foundation Quad arrangement in the Indo-Pacific, the two leaders also emphasised that their engagement with like-minded countries such as Australia and the U.S. in the form of Quad consultations holds value

and agreed that these useful discussions must continue". PM Modi also invited Mr Suga "to visit India at the earliest for the Annual Bilateral Summit".  
In a statement, the MEA said, "Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had a phone call today with His Excellency Yoshihide Suga, Prime Minister of Japan. The two leaders expressed satisfaction at the positive momentum in India-Japan Special Strategic & Global Partnership in the last few years, guided by mutual trust and shared values. ... In this regard, they emphasised that their engagement with like-minded countries such as Australia and the U.S. in the form of Quad consultations holds value

and agreed that these useful discussions must continue".  
The MEA added, "Prime Minister Modi noted the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail (MAHSR) project as a shining example of India-Japan bilateral strategic partnership and expressed his commitment to its successful implementation. The two leaders further exchanged views on regional and global issues of mutual interest and concurred that the partnership between the two countries could play a pivotal role in addressing common challenges."  
New Delhi further said, "They (the two PMs) appreciated that bilateral exchanges were maintained over the last year despite the Covid-19 pandemic."

PM, Biden, other  
Quad heads will  
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would hit back if the DMKD leaders continued to speak disparagingly about the party.  
Urging the DMKD to reconsider, BJP leader Vanathi Seenivasan told the media in Chennai that the AIADMK should accommodate them. The DMKD's departure will, however, not affect the prospects of the alliance in any way, she said.



THE ASIAN AGE

10 MARCH 2021

Speed up vaccinations, refresh awareness drive

India has of late been witnessing a surge in the daily caseload of Covid-19 infections with the numbers going up for the last six consecutive days; it is above 18,000 in the last four days. The number of active cases has also registered an increase for five consecutive days. At present, six states — Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu — together account for more than four-fifth of the total cases now. Given the pattern of the virus spread, it is not before weeks if not days that the pandemic will create another wave that could force the nation to go in for another shut down.

India had on January 16 rolled out an ambitious vaccination plan that, in its first phase, sought to inoculate three crore frontline workers, including healthcare professionals. The target has now been met by two-thirds, with the number of people who have received at least one dose standing at 2.26 crore. The second phase, launched on March 1, seeks to inoculate 27 crore people aged above 60 and those above 45 with co-morbidities. As of now, nine lakh people who belong to these categories have been given the jab.

**Except the Union government and some states such as Kerala, none seems to have kept a tab on the numbers. Worse, the attitude of most states and the people there has been akin to a situation where the virus has ceased to be a threat.**

A realistic assessment of the spread of the pandemic and the speed with which the vaccination programme progresses calls for increased efforts on both the counts — a massive awareness campaign to stop the spread of the virus and a revitalised vaccination programme. The daily caseload numbers reached their peak in October and then started a downward journey. Except the Union government and some states such as Kerala, none seems to have kept a tab on the numbers. Worse, the attitude of most states and the people there has been akin to a situation where the virus has ceased to be a threat.

The world in general, and India in particular, are better equipped to take on the virus than we were a year ago. Our knowledge base has improved, the protocols are in place and the healthcare professionals are trained to handle even extreme situations. However, the people's attitude has become less than acceptable. The government must re-launch on a war footing the campaign focussing on the importance of social distancing, wearing of masks and hand hygiene. It must also revisit the restrictions on gatherings, especially social, political and religious ones, which can turn super spreader events.

India vaccinated more than 16 lakh people on Monday, the highest since the programme started. At the present rate, India will take another year to vaccinate at least half of the population. This is unacceptable. There may be many hurdles, from the shortage of raw material for vaccine manufacturing to the logistical issues to the technical glitches in the CoWin app, and the government must meticulously strive to remove them. It must also open up the programme for all sections of the population, co-opt as many institutions, and make the process easier. Unless we speed it up and cover a reasonable share of the population, we can't say goodbye to the uninvited guest.

The royal underbelly

The world is horrified at Meghan Markle and Prince Harry's revelation that racism towards Meghan was the principal reason they fled their royal home to find freedom in California. But it should not be so because systemic racism is stark reality, more so in the world of privilege that British royalty lives in. Harry's indictment of his own family for not fighting the racist attacks hurled at his biracial wife Meghan and his multiracial son Archie, whose skin colour was a matter of concern to the palace even before he was born, is a pointer to how institutionalised royal reticence is. A disparaging term like 'The Firm' may have been seen as appropriate even for an insider.

Oprah Winfrey's skills at bringing the angst out of celebrities by playing the agony aunt may have helped smear British royalty and its stiff upper lip with hate while a more defensive UK might see the story of a second sensational interview by an ex-royal after Diana's expose on BBC in 1995 in a different perspective. His marriage may have helped liberate Harry from the trappings of power and privilege and the service Harry has rendered his family is to save it from racism though his flight to the US may be seen in the UK as pique since Archie was denied a princely role and a place in the queue to the crown.

The alacrity with which Buckingham Palace ordered an inquiry against Meghan on charges of bullying staff comes in sharp contrast to its reluctance to probe Prince Andrew's links to the convicted Jeffrey Epstein and his shenanigans with underage girls. This should give more grist to Republicans in Britain as well as the Commonwealth, which Queen Elizabeth II heads by virtue of her record years on the British throne. Diana and Meghan did the democratic world a favour in boldly exposing the underbelly of the royal family, which by itself is an anachronism in the modern age.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Editor in Chief

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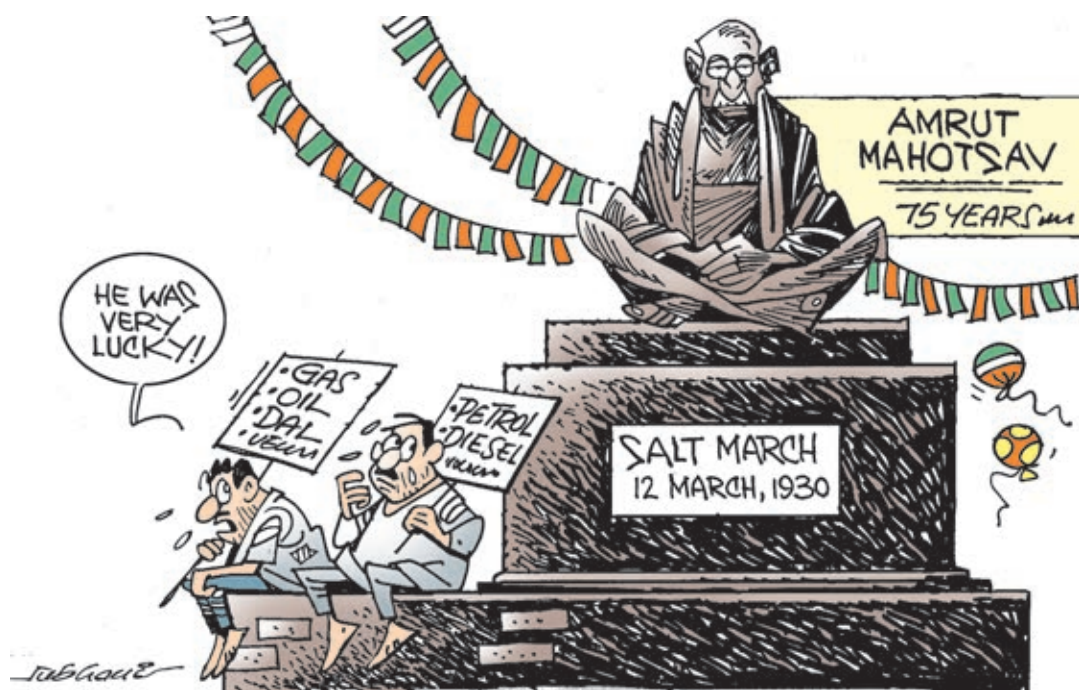
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Subhani



Modi's pan-Indian image won't help BJP win polls



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

The focus of the Assembly elections in four states and a Union territory — starting at the end of this month and spread over the whole of April — in West Bengal and Assam in the east, and Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Kerala in the south — has centred around West Bengal and the big question is whether the BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi will breach the final barrier, as it were, for the right-wing saf-ron party. It has turned out to be a battle between West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamul Congress and Prime Minister Modi of the BJP. As has become the norm with the Modi-centric BJP in the past seven years, the laurels for the victory always go to Mr Modi because the party is but a symbol for the most domineering politician in the country today. The reality, of course, is much more complicated and the magic factor of Mr Modi has huge limitations.

Though the party had won Assam in 2016 for the first time, the right-wing majoritarian sentiment in that state was well represented by the Congress and the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) from 1985 onwards. The breakthrough for the BJP in Assam in 2016 has nothing radical about it. Assam, however, poses its own set of challenges for the BJP this time round. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), with its vicious Hindutva slant, is a sore point in the state where Bangladeshi migrants — whether Hindu or Muslim — are the source of local resentment and discontent. The Hindutva rhetoric does not mean much here.

West Bengal remains the big prize in the east for the BJP. It has eluded the party with its majoritarian colours. The party considers this

election as the final push at the final frontier. That is why it has become much too loud and much too bitter. The CPI(M)-led Left Front and the Congress still remain marginal players. And the battle between Mr Modi and Ms Banerjee, despite the Prime Minister's pan-Indian standing, is reduced to a local tussle. If Ms Banerjee prevails, it will be a huge blow to Mr Modi. And the bets are hugely hedged in the matter.

In Tamil Nadu and in Kerala, the BJP is a small player. It is reconciled to play second fiddle to the ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in Tamil Nadu and confined to the 20 Assembly seats allotted to it. It would have to ride to victory on the back of the AIADMK because it has no presence of its own. The BJP cannot hope to give wings to its Hindutva ideology in the state because the Dravidian politics — (anti-Hindi and indirect) anti-North Indian variant of Hinduism represented by the BJP) and the Hindutva nationalism, again a North Indian concoction — does not pass muster. Even the Congress, with its benign pan-Indian outlook, has become a small player in Tamil Nadu and it has been given just 25 seats in these elections by the dominant regional Opposition party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). After the death of the icons,

**The CAA, with its vicious Hindutva slant, is a sore point in Assam where Bangladeshi migrants, whether Hindu or Muslim, are the source of local resentment. The Hindutva rhetoric does not mean much here.**

**Unlike in West Bengal, the Left Democratic Front (LDF) led by the CPI(M) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) led by the Congress in Kerala leave no space for a new player with a north Indian ideology**

the DMK's Karunanidhi and the AIADMK's Jayalalithaa, it seemed the spell of Dravidian politics would end, and national parties like the Congress and new entrants like the BJP would become the big players. The seat allocation for the two national parties by the dominant regional parties is a clear indication that the local in terms of ideology outflanks the national in Tamil Nadu. Tamil and Dravidian nationalism are unlikely to fade away simply because the stars who represented them have died.

Unlike in West Bengal, the Left Democratic Front (LDF) led by the CPI(M) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) led by the Congress in Kerala leave no space for a new player with a north Indian ideology to break into the crowded political space in the country. Kerala is a complex mosaic of castes and communities, where the Nayers and Ezhavans on one hand, Christians and Muslims and the Communists jostle with each other. The Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh (RSS) has been fighting a fierce and bloody battle with the Marxists in parts of northern Kerala. Political violence is as rampant in Kerala as it is in West Bengal. The RSS and the Marxists have been hacking each other's cadres with ruthless regularity. The BJP has been trying to use the RSS' base to make headway, but it has not succeeded in any major way.

The dominant parties in all these poll-bound states are forced to reckon with the smaller political formations. In Assam, the BJP cannot afford to ignore the Bodos. When the Bodo People's Front broke away from the BJP-led

National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the BJP had to find place for the United People's Party Liberal, and the Congress has to accommodate the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) and Rajgor Dal. India is infuriatingly diverse for hegemonic national parties like the BJP and the Congress.

The Assembly elections are a time for the rest of the country to know how each state has its own identity and politics and that it is not a referendum for the ruling party at the Centre. It is this entrenched democratic pluralism that checks the free run of parties such as the BJP with their regimented mindsets forged in RSS shakhas. The BJP is struggling to come to terms with the political diversity and pluralism of this country. The authoritarian populism as practised by Mr Modi and his second-in-command, Union home minister Amit Shah, serve only as a stumbling block in the Assembly elections, especially in places like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and to a great extent in West Bengal and Assam.

Even in Puducherry, after engineering defections from the ruling Congress, the BJP did not find it very easy to come to power. The right-wing party is learning the hard way that multitudinous India is a multipolar political field. And there is no option but to adapt to India's political multiverse. This is why the majoritarian tyranny of the BJP kind has to give way to rainbow coalitions. Assembly elections in India are always a lesson in democratic politics.

*The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst*

**The party is learning the hard way that multitudinous India is a multipolar political field. There is no option but to adapt to India's political multiverse. Majoritarianism has to give way to rainbow coalitions.**

LETTERS

JINXED POST

Uttarakhand chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat resigned at a press conference on Tuesday. There have been reports of serious discontent from a section of the state BJP MLAs and MPs, who are bitterly opposed to the chief minister's style of functioning. In Uttarakhand, no chief minister, barring ND Tiwari, has completed a full term.

**Sankar Paul**  
Chakdaha, West Bengal

SHAME ON GIRIRAJ

UNION MINISTER and BJP leader Giriraj Singh has asked people of his constituency to thrash government officials if they don't listen to their grievances. Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar, a JD(U) ally of the NDA, along with Opposition leaders in Bihar have strongly condemned the minister's remark. Nonetheless, in spite of having all the might and means at his disposal, a minister of the central government asking the people of his constituency to take law into their own hands deserves more than that.

**M.C. Joshi**  
Lucknow

IN AMMA'S MOULD

IF V.K. SASIKALA'S grand road show to Chennai after her jail term was to showcase her standing, her tactical retreat now from the spotlight is perhaps to retain her party in one piece. She, ipso facto, is the pretender to the AIADMK high table. Rumoured to still have access to party funds, should the AIADMK do well in the Assembly elections, she can manage her numbers. On the other hand, a poor show discredits EPS the CM. Either way, it is she who stands to gain.

**R. Narayanan**  
Navi Mumbai

NO STOPPING DJOKER

NOVAK DJOKOVIC has added another feather to his cap by besting Federer's record for most weeks as the world's numero uno tennis player. With 311 weeks at the top, the Serb appears to be in prime form, and there is no stopping him. Djokovic reclaimed the top ranking from another acclaimed player Rafael Nadal in February 2020 and finished as year-end number one for the sixth time, tying the record set by Pete Sampras. More power to his elbow!

**N.J. Ravi Chander**  
Bengaluru

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

Dilip Cherian  
Dilli Ka Babu



Coalition karma takes babu to chief secy spot

A coalition alliance government creates its own special dynamics, which affects the bureaucracy uniquely. In Maharashtra, which has a three-party alliance, this was seen when the 1985-batch IAS officer Sitaram Kunte was named the state's new chief secretary. Sources say that Mr Kunte was ignored by the previous BJP government during whose tenure he was commissioner of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

His fortunes changed for the better in the Shiv Sena-led government of chief minister Uddhav Thackeray. However, while the chief minister and the Congress Party were said to be keen on his appointment, the National Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar was reportedly less than enthusiastic, initially. However, Mr Kunte

managed to make it to the top post, although he snuffed the chance of his batchmate Praveen Pradesh, who was widely expected to be appointed to succeed Sanjay Kumar.

Mr Pradesh had even returned from the UN in the hope of becoming the new chief secretary. Mr Kunte's elevation has led to the appointment of M.K. Srivastava, a 1986-batch IAS officer, in his previous office of additional chief secretary for home.

MIND THE 'S' WORD

A communique issued by T.M. Yanthan, commissioner and secretary to Nagaland governor R.N. Ravi, to chief secretary J. Alam, has directed the state government to warn officials that they could face penal and disciplinary action if they post "seditious or subver-

sive content" on social media. Apparently, it had come to the notice of the governor's office that "some government servants are indulging in seditious and subversive writings challenging the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country" on social media platforms.

Sources say that a copy of Mr Yanthan's letter has been also marked to Union home secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla. This suggests, they say, that the governor has kept the Centre in the loop and may even have been directed by Delhi to take action against government officials posting seditious content.

Apparently, this is the second letter from the governor's office to the state chief secretary. Last year, he had directed the state government to prepare a database of state government employees' family mem-

bers and relatives who were in "underground organisations".

However, ominous though it may sound, some observers feel that Mr Ravi is merely reiterating the conduct rules for government servants and people should not read too much into this. Your thoughts?

TENURE ROW

Who has the authority to take a call on the posting of officers of the director-general of police rank in Haryana? This has become a point of contention between Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar and his home minister Anil Vij. The officer at the centre of it all is DGP Manoj Yadava, a 1988-batch IPS officer, reportedly hand-picked by Mr Khattar for the post.

It appears that Mr Vij wants a change of DGP despite Mr Yadava having over four years of service

left. The minister recently directed additional chief secretary (home) Rajeev Arora to send a panel of officers to the UPSC to be considered for the next DGP. According to sources, once the minimum tenure of two years ends, the state government has the option of deciding to continue with the current DGP or replace the officer. In the present case, the government has extended Mr Yadava's tenure beyond February until further orders.

Sources say that Mr Khattar is unlikely to seek a replacement for Mr Yadava, who has done a long 15-year stint at the Intelligence Bureau (IB) before returning to his parent cadre. But Mr Vij, say sources, is sticking to his stance.

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## SHORT TAKES

## BIDEN HOPES TO BOOST OFFSHORE WIND

Washington, March 9: A huge wind farm off the Massachusetts coast is edging closer to federal approval, setting up what the Biden administration hopes will be a model for a sharp increase in offshore wind energy development. The Vineyard Wind project, south of Martha's Vineyard near Cape Cod, would create 800 megawatts of electricity, enough to power 400,000 homes in New England. If approved, the \$2 billion project would be the first utility-scale wind power development in federal waters. A smaller wind farm operates near Block Island in waters controlled by the state of Rhode Island.

## EVACUATIONS ORDERED AFTER HEAVY RAINS

Honolulu, March 9: Heavy rains have breached a dam on the Hawaiian island of Maui, and nearby residents in the community of Haiku are being evacuated, county officials said Monday.

The National Weather Service reported 13.2 inches (33.5 centimetres) of rain fell in the Haiku area of Maui's North Coast between 7 a.m. and 3 p.m. "Resources are being pushed into this area right now," Maui County Mayor Michael Victorino said during a live address on Facebook. "Ladies and gentlemen, this is a real flooding situation we have not seen in a long time. In fact, some of the residents have told me that this is the worst they've seen in over 25 years," he said.

## PHILIPPINE COPS, MAYOR KILLED IN LATEST VIOLENCE

Manila, March 9: Police killed a central Philippine city mayor and two of his aides, while two of the police officers were killed in the latest deadly violence involving the police force, officials said Tuesday. "I can only assume that this was a mistaken encounter," Brig. Gen. Ronaldo de Jesus, a regional police commander, said. The police were on routine patrol when they were fired upon Monday afternoon by security aides of Catbalogan City Mayor Ronaldo Aquino, who was being driven in a van in eastern Samar province, according to de Jesus. The police returned fire and killed Aquino and two of his aides, including a police escort, while the mayor's aides killed two of the police officers.

## 'PSYCHOLOGICAL TORTURE' IN IRAN: ACADEMIC

Canberra, March 9: A British-Australian academic imprisoned by Iran on a spying conviction said in a television interview broadcast Tuesday that she endured "psychological torture" during her more than two years behind bars. Kylie Moore-Gilbert, 33, returned to Australia in November after serving 804 days of a 10-year sentence. She was freed in exchange for the release of three Iranians who were held in Thailand. "It's extreme solitary confinement room designed to break you. Its psychological torture. You go completely insane. It is so damaging. I would say I felt physical pain from the psychological trauma I had in that room. It's 2-metre by 2-metre box," Moore-Gilbert told *Sky News*.

## CHINA PROBES IN-AIR STEWARD, PILOT BRAWL

Beijing, March 9: China's aviation regulator is investigating a reported fistfight between the captain and chief steward aboard a domestic flight. The Civil Aviation Administration of China said it took the reported incident extremely seriously. Any incident endangering flight safety would be "dealt with strictly under the law". Chinese media reports said the in-air brawl occurred on a February 20 Donghai Airlines flight. The captain became angry after emerging from the bathroom to find a first-class passenger waiting directly outside, and accused the steward of not fulfilling his duties by requiring the passenger to wait in their seat. The two then exchanged blows, leaving the steward with a broken hand and the captain a chipped tooth.

## Unrest in Algeria



Policemen stop Algerian protesters from advancing down a street during an anti-government protest in the capital Algiers on Tuesday. — AFP

## CDC: VACCINATED PEOPLE CAN MEET WITHOUT MASKS

New York, March 9: Fully vaccinated Americans can gather with other vaccinated people indoors without wearing a mask or social distancing, according to long-awaited guidance from federal health officials. The recommendations also say that vaccinated people can come together in the same way such as in the case of vaccinated grandparents visiting healthy children and grandchildren. The guidance is designed to address a growing demand, as more adults have been getting vaccinated and wondering if it gives them freedom to visit family members, travel, or do other things like they did before the Covid-19 swept the world last year. — AP

## E. Guinea explosives death toll rises to 98

Dakar, March 9: The death toll from a series of explosions at a military barracks in Equatorial Guinea rose by dozens to at least 98 killed after more bodies were recovered, the government said Tuesday.

The blasts on Sunday in the Mondong Nkuantoma neighbourhood of the coastal city of Bata also wounded at least 615 people, authorities said. The government said that 316 of the injured have been discharged and 299 remain in care in various hospitals in the city.

More than 60 people were also rescued from under the rubble by the civil protection corps and fire service, the government said. President Teo-

● **THE GOVERNMENT** said that 316 of the injured have been discharged and 299 remain in care in various hospitals in the city. More than 60 people were also rescued from under the rubble.

doro Obiang Nguema said the government will hold an emergency meeting to look into how victims can quickly receive aid from Equatorial Guinea before international aid arrives. Investigations into the blast have begun, he said in a Tuesday statement. The president initially the explosion was due to the "negligent handling of dynamite" in the military barracks and the impact

damaged almost all the homes and buildings in Bata. The vice president, who is also charged with defense and security, Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue, said Tuesday that investigations so far showed the fire may have begun when a farmer set fire to his plot to prepare it for food production and a breeze spread the flames to the nearby barracks where the high-caliber ammunition was stored. Images shown on state TV showed plumes of smoke rising above the explosion site as crowds fled. Roofs of houses were ripped off. Equatorial Guinea was a colony of Spain until it gained its independence in 1968. — AP

## NY AG names team that will probe Cuomo

Albany (US), March 9: New York Attorney General Letitia James on Monday appointed a former federal prosecutor and an employment lawyer to investigate allegations that Gov. Andrew Cuomo sexually harassed female aides.

Joon Kim, who was the acting US attorney for the Southern District of New York for parts of 2017 and 2018, will join the employment lawyer Anne Clark, in conducting the probe, the attorney general's office said. "There is no question that they both have the knowledge and background necessary to lead this investigation and provide New Yorkers with the answers they deserve," James said in a statement.

The lawyer for Charlotte Bennett, one of the aides making an accusation, said the selection of the two to carry out the probe showed James was taking the matter "very seriously." "We are encouraged by the experience and background of the attorneys who will be investigating Charlotte's claims," attorney Debra Katz said in a statement. As a top federal prosecutor in Manhattan,

## Floyd death: Pause on jury pick for former cop

Minneapolis, March 9: The judge overseeing the trial of a former Minneapolis police officer accused in the death of George Floyd on Monday paused jury selection for at least a day while an appeal proceeds over the possible reinstatement of a third-degree murder charge.

As hundreds of protesters gathered outside the courthouse to call for the conviction of Derek Chauvin, Judge Peter Cahill said he does not have

jurisdiction to rule on whether the third-degree murder charge should be reinstated against the former officer while the issue is being appealed.

But he said prosecutors' arguments that the whole case would be impacted was "tenuous." Cahill initially ruled that jury selection would begin as scheduled on Monday, but prosecutors filed a request with the Court of Appeals to put the trial on hold until the issue is resolved.

The judge then sent the potential jurors home for the day, while prosecutors tried to contact the appellate court.

Cahill took a recess to give the Court of Appeals time to respond, but planned to bring attorneys back into the courtroom Monday afternoon to deal with other matters.

Cahill said he would proceed with the trial unless the higher courts told him to stop. — AP

## JUDGE ENDS CASE AGAINST BREONNA BF

Louisville, March 9: A judge in Kentucky has signed an order permanently closing a criminal case against Breonna Taylor's boyfriend, who shot a police officer during the deadly raid that killed Taylor. Prosecutors dismissed an attempted murder of a police officer charge against Kenneth L. Walker in May, about two months after Taylor's death.

But prosecutors left open the opportunity to revisit the charge against Walker if new evidence surfaced. Taylor was fatally shot by police who burst through her door with a narcotics warrant on March 13, 2020. She and Walker had settled in for the night when police arrived and knocked down the door. Walker said he thought an intruder was breaking in and he fired a single shot that struck an officer in the leg. — AP

## FBI ARRESTS TWO FOR JAN. 6 CAPITOL RIOT

New York, March 9: Two men wanted in the deadly riot at the Capitol were arrested over the weekend, including one who reportedly served as a bodyguard to former President Donald Trump's longtime political confidant Roger Stone, federal authorities said Monday.

Roberto Minuta breached the Capitol grounds and "aggressively berated and taunted US Capitol police officers" during the Jan 6 insurrection, the FBI said in court papers.

Minuta, 36, of Hackettstown, New Jersey, had been "equipped with military-style attire and gear, including apparel emblazoned with a crest related to the Oath Keepers," the FBI said, referring to the far-right anti-government militia. The *New York Times* identified Minuta as one of six people who provided security to Stone. — AP



Prayuth Chan-ocha

## THAI PM SPRAYS SCRIBES WITH DISINFECTANT

Bangkok, March 9: Politicians are often accused of sanitizing the news. On Tuesday, Thailand's prime minister sanitized members of the press. After fielding a slew of questions from journalists at his weekly news conference in Bangkok, the famously mercurial Prayuth Chan-ocha sprayed back — with disinfectant.

Riled by a final question about a possible Cabinet reshuffle, he told reporters to mind their own business, then grabbed a container of alcohol mist and doused the front row before sauntering off.

The quick-tempered former army commander, who overthrew the elected government in a 2014 coup, is known for his unpredictable behavior. In the past, he's spoken to a media scrum while fondling the ear of one of the reporters and flung a banana peel at camera operators. After an event in 2018 he declined to speak to the media, and instead set up a life-size cutout of himself. "Ask this guy," he said and walked away. — AP

● **IN THE past**, the former army commander spoke to a media scrum while fondling the ear of one of the reporters and flung a banana peel at camera operators. — PTI

## NEW STUDY

## It will have far-reaching impact on agriculture, human health, environment

## N. Hemisphere summers may last half the year

Beijing, March 9: Summers in the Northern Hemisphere may last for six months by 2100 without efforts to mitigate climate change, which could have far-reaching impacts on agriculture, human health and the environment, says a study.

The research, published in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters*, found that the Mediterranean region and the Tibetan Plateau have experienced the greatest changes to their seasonal cycles. The researchers noted that the four seasons arrived in a predictable and fairly even pattern in the Northern

Hemisphere during the 1950s. However, climate change is now driving dramatic and irregular changes to the length and start dates of the seasons, which may become more extreme in the future under a business-as-usual climate scenario, they said.

"Summers are getting longer and hotter while winters shorter and warmer due to global warming," said lead author Yiping Guan from the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The researchers used historical daily climate data from 1952 to 2011 to measure changes in the four seasons' length and onset in the

● **THE RESEARCH**, published in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters*, found that the Mediterranean region and the Tibetan Plateau have experienced the greatest changes to their seasonal cycles.

● **CLIMATE CHANGE** is now driving dramatic and irregular changes to the length and start dates of the seasons, which may become more extreme in the future under a business-as-usual climate scenario.

Northern Hemisphere. They defined the start of summer as the onset of temperatures in the hottest 25 per cent during that time period, while winter began with temperatures in the coldest 25 per cent. The team used established climate change models to predict how seasons will

shift in the future. The study found that, on average, summer grew from 78 to 95 days between 1952 to 2011, while winter shrank from 76 to 73 days. Spring and autumn also contracted from 124 to 115 days, and 87 to 82 days, respectively. Accordingly, spring and

summer began earlier, while autumn and winter started later. If these trends continue without any effort to mitigate climate change, the researchers predict that by 2100, winter will last less than two months, and the transitional spring and autumn seasons will shrink further as well.

Numerous studies have already shown that the changing seasons cause significant environmental and health risks," Guan said. The researchers said, for example, birds are shifting their migration patterns and plants are emerging and flowering at

different times.

These phenological changes can create mismatches between animals and their food sources, disrupting ecological communities, they said. Seasonal changes can also wreak havoc on agriculture, especially when false springs or late snowstorms damage budding plants, according to the researchers.

With longer growing seasons, humans will breathe in more allergy-causing pollen, and disease-carrying mosquitoes can expand their range northward, they said.

— PTI



quick  
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,025.48	1.16
Nifty 50	15,098.40	0.95
S&P 500*	3,891.38	1.83
Dollar (₹)	72.92	0.46
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.35	-0.03
Euro (₹)	86.84	0.13
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	43,996.35	0.07
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.77	-0.69
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.206	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.544	-0.050

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

E-invoice must  
for biz with over  
₹50 cr turnover

The Centre has made it mandatory for businesses with over Rs 50 crore turnover to generate e-invoices for B2B transactions from April 1. Under GST law, e-invoicing for B2B transactions has been made mandatory for companies with turnover of over Rs 500 crore and Rs 100 crore from October 1, 2020, and January 1, 2021. E-invoicing will be extended to companies with turnover over Rs 50 crore from April 1, the CBIC said.

GST fraud of over  
₹20,100 cr found  
in Nov.-Jan.: FM



The government has detected GST fraud of Rs 20,124 crore between November 9, 2020 and January 31, 2021, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said. A special drive against unscrupulous entities for availing and passing on input tax credit (ITC) fraudulently on the strength of fake/bogus invoices is being carried out, she said in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha. She said 2,692 cases were booked by the officers.

Anugrah Stock  
fined ₹90 lakh  
for fund abuse

The Sebi slapped a fine of Rs 90 lakh on Anugrah Stock and Broking Pvt Ltd for violations of norms. The order follows a joint investigation carried out by Sebi, BSE, NSE and CDSL between April 2017 and Sept. 2018. "It is established that the noticee failed to segregate client's funds inter-se and/or between clients' funds and its own funds, misutilised the funds of clients, pledged the securities of clients... Sebi said.

Nd for setting  
up plastic parks  
in two states

The Centre has given 'in-principle' approval for establishing two new plastic parks in Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh, chemicals and fertilisers minister D.V. Sadananda Gowda said in Parliament. Gowda, in his written reply to the Lok Sabha, said the Centre had received requests from seven states—Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, UP, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh and Goa—for setting up new plastic parks.

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■ Firms keen on hiring apprentices  
Worst-hit sectors  
back in job mkt

SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, MARCH 9

Some of the worst pandemic-hit sectors have re-entered the job market this year, but with a tight fist. Travel & hospitality and beauty & wellness, which were battered by the lockdowns and subsequent travel restrictions, are back in the job market with intentions to hire apprentices.

With companies focusing on cost optimisation, large-scale apprenticeship has become the new trend in the post-pandemic job market. Out of the 18 sectors reviewed by Teamlease Services for its Apprenticeship Outlook Report for January to June 2021, more than 16 were keen on hiring apprentices. This is because apprentices are paid stipends, and not wages as in case of regular employees, and usually stipends are far less than regular wages.

While manufacturing, automobiles and ancillaries and retail are the leaders in hiring apprentices, more services sectors are now taking baby steps in the job market.

The hiring intents of travel & hospitality and beauty & wellness were at -10 per cent and -5 per cent, respectively, in the previous half-year between July and December 2020. They have now made a remarkable turnaround with a growth of 34 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively.

"What is very interesting to note is the current pro-



jections, which not only indicates an overall increase in hiring, but the fact that sectors like travel and hospitality as well as beauty and wellness which were adversely hit by the pandemic, are now showing aggressive turnaround in their apprenticeship hiring sentiments," said Sumit Kumar, vice president-NETAP, TeamLease Skill University.

However, the hospitality industry is not in full agreement with the survey, dismissing it as a city-specific trend. "It is not a general trend. The hospitality sector is far from a significant recovery and that will happen when international travel and MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) segments pick up. But companies in places which have reported lesser pandemic cases and increased flow of domestic travellers could be hiring apprentices. With limited revenue and high operational cost, hospitality companies are looking at ways for cost optimisation by avoiding tradition-

al HR practices and going for apprentices," said Jaison Chacko, secretary general of the Federation of Hotels and Restaurants Association of India.

According to the Teamlease report, around 41 per cent of the employers are keen on hiring apprenticeships in the January-June period, 8 per cent higher compared to the previous half year. There is buoyancy towards the concept of apprenticeship and more than 58 per cent of the companies reviewed were keen on increasing their apprenticeship hiring.

More employers are realising the merit of the apprenticeship model to build a robust pipeline of employable talent, it said.

"In fact, from 2018, to now, we have seen a 2.5 per cent annual growth in employers, who are willing to increase their apprentice intake. This positive momentum has happened despite the dip in the labour market during the Covid-19 lockdown," said Kumar.

MUTUAL FUND AUM  
HITS ₹32.3 L CR  
DESPITE ₹10K CR  
EQUITY OUTFLOW

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, MARCH 9

The asset under management (AUM) of the mutual fund industry touched a new all-time high of over Rs 32.29 lakh crore in February on continued bull run in the equity market post-budget and the return of investors to hybrid funds and ETFs amid divergent trends.

Data released by the Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi) shows despite higher outflow of Rs 10,468 crore (Rs 9,253 crore in January) from pure equity funds for the eighth month in a row and debt fund inflow of a mere Rs 1,734 crore, mark-to-market gains in equity-oriented funds and inflows from systematic investment plans (SIPs) helped the average AUM for February to rise to Rs 32.29 lakh crore.

Hybrid funds and exchange traded funds, including gold ETFs, saw inflows worth Rs 4,702 crore and Rs 3,898 crore, respectively.

N. S. Venkatesh, chief executive, Amfi said: "SIP AUMs as also retail equity folios, are at an all-time high at Rs 4.21 lakh crore and 8.07 crore, respectively, reflective of continued disciplined approach adopted by the retail mutual fund investors."

However, the monthly SIP contribution for February 2021 has come down by Rs 495 crore (to Rs 7,528.14 crore) owing to less number of working days in February and the shortfall would get accumulated and reflected in March 2021 monthly data, the Amfi chief executive said.

Foreign investment  
is good for women

SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, MARCH 9

Foreign investment is good not just for the economy but for women as well. Foreign direct investment (FDI) and the operations of multi-national enterprises (MNEs) tend to have a positive influence on the economic well being of women.

According to a UN study involving India and Bangladesh, increased FDI and operations of MNEs are associated with higher employment of women and positive social improvements in India.

MNEs influence gender equality in host countries directly through employment practices and indirectly through spillovers in local labour markets. On an average across developing countries, foreign affiliates employ about 5 percentage points more female administrative workers than local firms, finds a report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Unctad).

In South Asia, multinational enterprises have higher shares of female ownership, female managers and female workforce composition, especially for the production workforce, than local enterprises, basically because of laggard domestic policies toward women.

In South Asia, an area of the world with poor policies and practices regarding women, it appears that an expansion of foreign investment may help with female empowerment, says the Unctad.

The Geneva-based body studied the situation in



Bangladesh and India to understand this phenomenon. In the Bangladeshi textile and garment industry, firms with FDI hire significantly more female administrative workers and production workers than domestic firms. This is true even after controlling for firm size, location and industry type. The same holds in India, where FDI improves gender outcomes in terms of employment. This result is confirmed from both the household- and firm-level panel data.

In India, increased FDI is associated with higher employment of women, particularly unskilled women. In addition to the positive impacts of foreign investment on female employment, research has shown important positive social improvements for women in terms of reductions in crime and delayed marriage and childbearing with the expansion of foreign investment.

Increased FDI decreases the probability that a woman is married or has children at age 20. This supports the argument that FDI can impact not only female employment but also women's family life decisions.

The report also looked at India's foreign investment liberalisation in the 1990s to explore the role global integration plays in enhancing female empowerment. Areas of the country with a stronger foreign presence reported declining number of rapes, showcasing a positive social spillover from multinational enterprises.

Meanwhile, a Moody's report said closing gender gaps widened by the pandemic could help boost the recovery of emerging economies and improve their credit ratings.

Major emerging economies have increased measures to help women, who have been disproportionately hit by the pandemic as lockdowns forced many to leave their jobs to take care of their children. Help includes direct cash transfers, training and credit lines for female business owners, Moody's Investors Service.

Implementing similar measures coupled with more structural changes to secure women's access to education and employment could bring sustainable recovery with improvements in productivity and consumption in developing nations, it said.

Life insurers report  
strong growth in Feb.

FALAKNAAZ SYED  
MUMBAI, MARCH 9

A recovery in the demand for unit-linked insurance plans (ULIPs), led by a rally in the capital markets, and a strong demand for non-participating savings product helped private life insurance companies clock strong 23 per cent year-on-year (YoY) growth in individual new sales in February 2021, higher than 7 per cent YoY growth in January.

The industry posted a 17.8 per cent YoY growth and LIC grew at 9.4 per cent YoY in February compared to a decline of 45 per cent in the public sector behemoth's business in January 2021. For April 2020 till February 2021, private players' individual new business fell 1.6 per cent YoY to Rs 3.72 lakh crore. The same for the industry fell 7.5 per cent to Rs 6.34 lakh crore.

Private players market share on individual weighted received premium (WRP) basis (an



international formula that takes into account 10 per cent of single premium but gives 100 per cent weightage to regular premium) improved 270 basis points month-on-month to 64 per cent in February 21 versus 62 per cent in January 2021.

LIC's market share stood at 40 per cent in FY21 YTD. During FY21 YTD, SBI Life (14 per cent) remained the largest private insurer in terms of Individual WRP followed by HDFC Life (9.5 per cent), and ICICI Prudential Life at 7.2 per cent.

Among listed players, SBI Life Insurance posted a strong rebound of 53

per cent YoY growth in February after showing muted trends for many months.

ICICI Prudential Life too posted a growth of 6.3 per cent after reporting a consecutive decline for the past 13 months. The resilient performance continued at Max Life up at 32 per cent YoY. However, the growth momentum in HDFC Life slowed, up 16 per cent YoY versus 24 per cent in January 2021.

"We expect premium growth to rebound over FY22 after seeing tepid trends, with ULIPs showing a revival. Players continue to focus strongly on non-participating traditional plans and protection segment," said Motilal Oswal Institutional Equities in a report.

Mid-sized players reported strong growth, with Bajaj Allianz/Kotak Life reporting a growth of 43 per cent/29 per cent. Birla Sun Life grew around 13 per cent.

JUNKING | JUST-IN-TIME

Suppliers require to stockpile chips for two-six months

How Toyota thrives when chips are down

NORIHICO SHIROUZU  
MARCH 9

Toyota may have pioneered the just-in-time manufacturing strategy but when it comes to chips, its decision to stockpile what have become key components in cars goes back a decade to the Fukushima disaster.

After the catastrophe severed Toyota's supply chains on March 11, 2011, the world's biggest automaker realised the lead-time for semiconductors was way too long to cope with devastating shocks such as natural disasters.

That's why Toyota came up with a business continuity plan (BCP) that required suppliers to stockpile anywhere from

two to six months' worth of chips for the Japanese carmaker, depending on the time it takes from order to delivery, four sources said.

And that's why Toyota has so far been largely unscathed by a global shortage of semiconductors following a surge in demand for electrical goods under coronavirus lockdowns that has forced many rival automakers to suspend production, the sources said.

"Toyota was, as far as we can tell, the only automaker properly equipped to deal with chip shortages," said a person familiar with Harman International, which specialises in car audio systems, displays and driver assistance technology.



Two of the sources who spoke to Reuters are Toyota engineers and the others are at companies involved in the chip business.

Toyota surprised rivals and investors last month when it said its output would not be disrupted significantly by chip shortages even as Volkswagen, General Motors, Ford, Honda and Stellantis, among others, have been forced to slow or

suspend some production. Toyota, meanwhile, has raised its vehicle output for the fiscal year ending this month and jacked up its full-year earnings forecast by 54 per cent.

The source familiar with Harman said the company, part of South Korea's Samsung Electronics, was experiencing shortages of central processing units (CPUs) and power management integrated circuits as early as November last year.

While Harman doesn't make chips, because of its continuity deal with Toyota, it was obliged to prioritise the carmaker and ensure it had enough semiconductors to maintain supplies of its digital systems for four months,

or more, the source said. The chips in especially short supply now are microcontroller units (MCUs) which control an array of functions such as braking, acceleration, steering, ignition, combustion, tire pressure gauges and rain sensors, the sources told Reuters.

However, Toyota changed the way it buys MCUs and other microchips after the 2011 earthquake, which caused a tsunami that killed more than 22,000 people.

In the aftermath of the quake, Toyota estimated its procurement of more than 1,200 parts and materials might be affected and it drew up a list of 500 priority items that would need secure supply in the future.

—Reuters

AIR INDIA  
EMPLOYEES BID  
DISQUALIFIED



RAGINI SAXENA  
MARCH 9

A group of Air India employees has been ruled out of a bidding process to take control of the loss-making national carrier, as the government moves ahead with its years-long attempt to offload the airline.

"I write to you with a heavy heart on the outcome of our bid to acquire Air India," the airline's commercial director Meenakshi Malik wrote in a letter to employees dated March 8. "We have been unsuccessful in qualifying to the next phase of the 'Disinvestment Acquisition process.'"

Citing a letter from EY (earlier Ernst & Young), which is advising the government on the sale, Malik said the group didn't meet eligibility requirements. They include submitting three years of audited financial statements for foreign consortium members and being an appropriately regulated foreign investment fund. The group of employees partnered with a Seychelles-based fund for the bid.

Tata Sons Ltd, the holding company of the conglomerate that owns an 84 per cent stake in AirAsia India, is among the remaining bidders.

SpiceJet Ltd promoter Ajay Singh and two other investors have also shown an interest in acquiring Air India, a media report said last month. Singh is seeking a 100 per cent stake with support from investors, including a foreign fund, according to the report.

Debt-ridden Air India has been up for sale since 2017. The government extended a bid deadline last year.

—Bloomberg



