

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | THURSDAY 4 | MARCH 2021

WEATHER



Max: 37°C
Min: 18°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Maasi 20
Tithi: Shashti
Star: Visagam
Rahukalam:
1.30 pm to 3 pm
Yamagandam:
6 am to 7.30 am
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.14 am
Zohar: 12.27 pm
Asar: 3.34 pm
Maghrib: 6.18 pm
Isha: 7.29 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.18 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.24 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 11.17 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 11.05 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+16,931)	(+87)
1,11,56,254	1,57,471

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+489)
TN: 8,52,967 12,504

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

11,55,19,178

DEATHS

25,64,633

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
219

worldometers.info

Professor sentenced to death for killing

Chennai: The IV Additional Sessions Court, Chennai, awarded the death sentence to a private college professor on charge of murdering his wife. Enraged over insulting him over his finances he murdered her in a gruesome eight years ago. ■P2

Karnataka minister quits over 'sex for job' scandal

Bengaluru: Karnataka Water Resources Minister Ramesh Jarkiholi on Wednesday resigned from the state cabinet, following allegations of sexual harassment against him. ■P4

Army officer, jawan shoot themselves dead in J&K

Srinagar: An Army officer and a young soldier on Wednesday ended their lives by shooting themselves with their service weapons at two different places in Jammu and Kashmir. ■P4

COUNTER POINT



Now, we have introduced platform reservation to avoid overcrowding!

Top court dismisses PIL seeking action against Farooq

Disagreeing with govt not sedition: SC

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

The Supreme Court Wednesday said that expressing views that are contrary to the stand/position of the government of the day cannot be termed as sedition. It is not seditious to disagree with the government, said a bench comprising Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Hemant Gupta, junking a PIL seeking action against former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah for making a



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Mirwaiz Umar Farooq freed after 19 months



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CONGRESS MIFFED WITH DMK

TN alliances in turmoil over sharing of seats

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 3

Both the Dravidian majors were unable to finalise their alliances for the April 6 elections to the State Assembly as their coalition partners were digging their heels in and refusing to accept what was being offered to them. A dramatic realignment does not, however, seem possible.

While it looked that all differences were settled in the DMK camp on Tuesday night with the Congress representatives agreeing for 24 seats in principle, in the TNCC there was resentment over the low offer with functionaries saying that they were given 40 seats in the 2016 elections.

The issue may be sorted out on Thursday when TNCC leaders meet and take a final call on it, say party sources, expressing hope of saving the alliance. Yet a section of leaders in the TNCC was not in favour of continuing with the alliance if the DMK refused to give in to their demand.

IT'S COMPLICATED

IN THE TNCC there was resentment over the low offer (24 seats) with functionaries saying that they were given 40 seats in the 2016 elections. The issue may be sorted out on Thursday when TNCC leaders meet and take a final call on it, say party sources, expressing hope of saving the alliance.

Since the DMK itself is keen on contesting in as many as 170 or more seats, the allocation to allies is being cut quite drastically, say sources.



In Thoothukudi, founder of Samathuva Makkal Katchi, actor Sarathkumar, announced his party's tie-up with the MNM by accepting Haasan as the Chief Ministerial candidate.



It was the same case with the other allies, too, with all of them wanting at least 10 seats each. Since the DMK itself is keen on contesting in as many as 170 or more seats, the allocation to the allies is being sought to be cut drastically, say sources.

But the smaller parties, too, want to get recognition by polling adequate percentage of votes and they feel it can be achieved only by increasing the number of seats. So the VCK, CPM, CPI and MDMK are refusing to take what was being offered to them during the talks.

The DMK's offer to give

more seats if parties like the VCK and MDMK could contest in the 'rising sun' election symbol, too, has angered the allies as they want to maintain their individual identity and also aspire for recognition as State parties.

The same issue is also facing the AIADMK as its ally, the Tamil Maanila Congress, has upped it ante, demanding 12 seats. The problem that the AIADMK was facing of late with the BJP was on the identification of the seats, rather than the numbers.

Most of the seats that the BJP is eyeing at are also being sought by either the

PMK or certain AIADMK functionaries, who had expended their resources in developing the constituencies. The earlier hitch in the AIADMK-BJP ties has been ironed out with the BJP not insisting on the AIADMK accommodating the AMMK of TTV Dhinakaran.

Not only did BJP leader C.T. Ravi make it clear that it was for the AIADMK to take the call on uniting with the AMMK, Fisheries Minister D Jayakumar once again ruled it out on Wednesday, saying that the BJP had never interfered in the internal affairs of the party. ■P3



Emergency was a mistake, says Rahul Gandhi

New Delhi, March 3: Terming the Emergency that was imposed by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi a "mistake", Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said what happened during that period was "wrong", but it was fundamentally different from the current scenario as the Congress at no point attempted to capture the country's institutional framework.

In a conversation with Kaushik Basu, professor at Cornell University in the US and India's former chief economic advisor, Gandhi said he is all for internal democracy in the Congress, which fought for India's independence, gave the country its Constitution and stood for equality.

Asked about his views on the Emergency, he said, "I think that was a mistake. Absolutely, that was a mistake. And my grandmother {Indira Gandhi} said as much."

—Agencies

Sasikala bids adieu to politics

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 3



In a surprise move, VK Sasikala, the erstwhile confidante of J Jayalalithaa, announced that she was retiring from politics and said that she would be praying continuously for the return of Jayalalithaa's golden rule in the State.

Even her nephew and founder of AMMK, TTV Dhinakaran was vexed. He told the media that the announcement came as a bolt from the blue. Great expectations in some quarters of Sasikala storming the AIADMK citadel and establishing her supremacy have evaporated.

The announcement made through a typed message on a plain sheet of paper with her signature in Tamil, dated March 3, caused the raising of eyebrows for her previous statement came from her 'camp office' in a letterhead that had the AIADMK flag embossed boldly on the middle and identified her as the 'general secretary'.

During a seat-sharing talk in Chennai a few days ago, the BJP gave great importance to her by putting pressure on AIADMK leaders to accommodate Dhinakaran and Sasikala in their alliance, which was vehe-

mently resisted. The reason given by the BJP leaders was that the AIADMK votes would be split if AMMK was to stand alone.

In Wednesday night's statement, Sasikala repeatedly urged the followers of MGR and Jayalalithaa to be united in the coming elections and defeat DMK, the common enemy identified by Jayalalithaa herself.

She did not exactly say if she was referring to the AIADMK party of the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) as the one that would usher in the 'golden rule of Amma'. She thanked the followers of Jayalalithaa for supporting her and added that she would continue to give shape to the wishes of Jayalalithaa even after her death. Sasikala clarified that she had never aspired for any post or title or power and that she would be thankful to the Jayalalithaa's followers and the people of the State. ■P4

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SHORT TAKES

Notaries can renew certificate of practice online

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 3

Notaries appointed by the State government should submit applications for renewal of their Certificates of Practice, for extension of area of practice, for issue of duplicate certificate of practice and submission of annual return only through the web portal: tnnotary.tn.gov.in.

An application for renewal of Certificate of Practice of Notaries shall be submitted online in Form XVI to the appropriate Government before

six months from the date of expiry of its period of validity, an official press release said.

It said that the web portal has been launched by the State government for the purpose of submission of application for appointment, renewal of notary, extension of area of practice, issue of duplicate certificate of practice and for submission of annual return.

"Applications under the Notaries Rules, 1956, for the said purposes including for renewal of Notary will not be entertained through offline on and from the 10 March 2021," the release added.

Beedi workers petition PM

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 3

Beedi workers have demanded Prime Minister Narendra Modi not to go ahead with proposed amendments to Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, production, Supply and Distribution Act (COTPA), 2003.

In a statement they have stated that the Union Ministry of Health, on January 1, 2021, had proposed to add several stringent amendments to the already harsh rules of the COTPA. If these proposed amendments become laws, the 200 year old, 'Hand-Made in India' beedi industry, an indigenous cottage industry, will be at risk of closure, and the livelihood of over three crore workers will be affected.

Beedi workers across the country have been appealed the Prime Minister to save their livelihoods by keeping beedis out of the ambit of these new amendments to COTPA, or to have a separate legislation for them within COTPA which is sensitive to their product and situation, and distinct from the laws governing machine-made cigarettes and chewing tobacco.

In a statement they have stated that the Union Ministry of Health, on January 1, 2021, had proposed to add several stringent amendments to the already harsh rules of the COTPA

Schools in Puducherry re-open for full-day classes

Puducherry, March 3: All schools in Puducherry and Karaikal regions re-opened on Wednesday for full-day classes after being shut in view of the pandemic.

The students from standard I to XII would have classes as per school timings on all six days (Monday to Saturday) of the week, Director of School Education T Rudra Goud said in a press release.

The institutions remained closed from March last year in view of the Covid-19 situation. But, the government let students appearing for Class X and class XII public exams to attend classes for clearance of doubts and clarification on the subjects since October 6 last.

The students attended the classes after presenting consent letters from their parents. The territorial government re-opened colleges on December 17 for students of final year classes in arts and science colleges.

Lieutenant Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan visited the schools in and around Puducherry over the last few days to re-start the noon meal and breakfast schemes.

She partook of the meals in a school in Kaleetherthalkuppam on Tuesday and re-started the breakfast scheme in the Thiruvalluvar Government Girls Higher Secondary School and in the Savurirayulu Naicker Government Primary School Wednesday. — PTI

Lieutenant Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan visited the schools in and around Puducherry over the last few days to re-start the noon meal and breakfast schemes



Kancheepuram district collector Mageswari Ravikumar participates in election awareness programme in Chennai on Wednesday. — DC

Filing report on Chennai water bodies' protection Despite NGT ultimatum, govt seeks more time

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 3

Even though the National Green Tribunal (NGT), southern zone, Chennai gave an ultimatum to come up with a long-term plan on February 24 to protect the water bodies in the city from pollution and encroachment, the state government has sought more time to file the report.

An order issued by the NGT on Wednesday, based on the online hearing held on February 24, said that Mr. Mani Gopi, the counsel representing the state government, had sought more time due to the technical difficulties in submitting the report. According to the order, the counsel had submitted before the tribunal that they had received the report but due to the technical difficulties, they could not upload the same and if some more time is granted, they would be able to file the report as directed by the tribunal.

"Considering the circumstances, we - the bench headed by K. Ramakrishnan (judicial

An order issued by the NGT on Wednesday, based on the online hearing held on February 24, said that Mr. Mani Gopi, the counsel representing the state government, had sought more time due to the technical difficulties in submitting the report

member) and Saibal Dasgupta (expert member) - feel that time can be granted till March 9 for filing the report', the order says.

Meanwhile, the tribunal in the order issued on January 27 had said that if the officials would not comply with the directions, then those who are responsible for the same would be compelled to face the consequences as provided under Section 25 and 26 of the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010.

The case regarding the pollution of Buckingham Canal, rivers Cooum and Adyar in and around Chennai is a repeated failure of the regulating authorities to perform their duty resulting in largescale and continuous

damage to the environment and public health.

Based on an order dated February 13, 2019, the NGT had directed a committee, headed by the chief secretary, constituted for the purpose of protecting Cooum, Adyar and Buckingham Canal to convene the meeting fortnightly for a period of next three months and thereafter, on monthly basis, to review the progress in the matter and submit a quarterly progress report to the tribunal.

Even after a year, no such report had been filed by the committee that prompted the tribunal to take up the matter on November 20 last year. Based on this, the tribunal granted time till January 22 to file a report.

It may be recalled that the tribunal in the previous order had observed that unless certain immediate measures are taken, the pollution in the Buckingham Canal, through which untreated sewage reaches the sea, will affect the marine ecology, apart from causing health issues.

Prof gets noose for killing wife

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 3

The IV Additional Sessions Court, Chennai, awarded the death sentence to a private college professor on charge of murdering his wife. Enraged over insulting him over his finances he murdered her in a gruesome eight years ago.

According to V Muralikrishnan, Additional City Public Prosecutor, V. Kannan completed M Sc, MBA and P hd and was working in a private engineering college in Kavaraipettai on the outskirts of the city. He was head of the department of business management and was described as a soft spoken professor by his students.

With the blessings of family members and elders, he married Mohanammal from Mettur on November 2,

In a fit of rage, he picked up a boulder and attacked Mohanambal's head. After she fell down, he sat on her slit her throat. Mohanambal died on the spot

1998. Mohanambal seems to be from an affluent family. The family was living in an apartment in Anna Nagar. They were blessed with a daughter.

Since the beginning Mohanammal was abusing him for his finances and not earning enough money. She abused him repeatedly during their 14-year-long wedlock.

Unable to take insult further, he decided to murder her. On December 16, 2012, they went shopping at T Nagar and Marina beach. They returned home after a quarrel. In the small

hours on the next day, they developed a heated altercation. Mohanambal allegedly pushed Kannan. Angered over this he slapped her and she retaliated by scratching his cheeks. In a fit of rage, he picked up a boulder and attacked Mohanambal's head. After she fell down, he sat on her slit her throat. Mohanambal died on the spot. Thirumangalam police registered a case. When the matter was taken up before the court, Kannan was produced before the Judge, IV Additional Sessions Court, A.R.V. Ravi on Wednesday.

Judge A.R.V. Ravi said the prosecution proved the case beyond reasonable doubt. Accused Kannan has been convicted and sentenced to death for offences committed under section 302 IPC. The accused shall be hanged by neck till death.

Customs seizes gold and gadgets worth ₹1.88 cr

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 3

The Chennai air customs on Wednesday seized 3.42 kg gold worth ₹1.60 crore and iPhones, Apple watches, airpods, cigarettes worth ₹28 lakh and arrested three flyers in connection with the case.

According to airport sources, based on intelligence, three passengers, Naina Mohamed (41) of Chennai, Jahir Hussain (49) and Ajith Ahmed (26) both of Trichy who arrived from Dubai by Emirates flight EK-544 were intercepted at the exit on suspicion of carrying gold.

On personal search nine bundles of gold paste weighing 3.65 kg were recovered from rectum. On extraction, 3.27 kg gold valued at ₹1.53 crore was recovered. Five semi-finished gold chains weighing 150 grams val-

On personal search nine bundles of gold paste weighing 3.65 kg were recovered from rectum. On extraction, 3.27 kg gold valued at ₹1.53 crore was recovered

ued at ₹7 lakh was also recovered from their pant pockets.

Total 3.42 kg gold valued at ₹1.60 crore was recovered and seized under

Customs Act. All three were arrested by the customs.

Further, on the search of their check in bags, 19 iPhones 12, 51 cigarettes cartons, 15 airpods, 19 Apple watches, 18 used laptops totally valued at ₹28 lakh were recovered and seized under the Customs Act.

In total, valuables worth ₹1.88 crore were seized from the three. Further investigation is in progress.

Advocates stage protest demanding arrest of former DGP, Chengalpet SP

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 3:

Advocates in the Chengalpet district court on Wednesday staged a protest on premises, demanding the arrests of Former DGP Rajeshdas who sexually harassed a woman SP and Chengalpet SP Kannan and team for preventing the victim from complaining by stopping her car near Parunar toll plaza. The protestors also demanded dismissal of the officers from their posts.

The Crime branch of the CB-CID in TN has registered an FIR against former Special Director-General of Police, Rajesh Das, in connection to sexual harassment allegations levelled against him by a woman IPS officer in the state.

According to sources, the woman officer has alleged that Rajesh Das behaved inappropriately with her in his vehicle. It is alleged that many officers tried to dissuade the women from filing a complaint, however, she went ahead with it.

Rajesh Das has been booked by the CB-CID for outraging the modesty of a woman under the Indian Penal Code and also under the Tamil Nadu Prevention of Women Harassment Act. The FIR also mentions Chengalpet SP D. Kannan who stopped the IPS officer on her way to Chennai, allegedly on the orders of Rajesh Das.

Issue circulars to comply with directions of court, HC tells chief secretary and DGP

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 3

The Madras high court has directed the chief secretary of Tamil Nadu to send a circular to all IAS officers, including those who are holding posts in corporation, CMDA, housing, panchayat, municipality etc., to the effect that in case of any direction issued by the Madras high court to dispose of the representation/appeal, it should be complied with in letter and spirit within the time stipulated by this court and shall not create a situation for contempt to be filed to comply with the orders.

Justice S. Vaidyanathan also directed the Director General of Police to send a similar circular to all his subordinates on or before April 15, 2021. Both chief secretary and DGP are further directed to forward the circulars to the registrar (judicial) of this court within two weeks from the issuance of such circular without fail.

Disposing of a petition filed by V. Kumaran, the judge directed the commissioner of police, Chennai, to consider the appeal preferred by the petitioner dated December 28, 2019

PIL to permit fishermen to catch fish using purse seine nets

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 3

A PIL has been filed in the Madras high court to direct the state government to permit the fishermen of the coastal villages in Tamil Nadu to catch fish using purse seine nets within the 5 km radius for the month commencing from February to March.

The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy, before whom the PIL filed by Fisherman Care represented by its president L.T.A.

against his dismissal from service in the police department, if not already disposed of, and pass appropriate orders thereon, in accordance with law, after affording an opportunity of hearing to the petitioner within 2 months.

The judge said the petitioner shall furnish his phone number, email ID, if any etc., along with a copy of the appeal and this order, to the Commissioner of Police immediately. The Commissioner of Police was directed

Peter Rayan came up for hearing adjourned it by five weeks, to enable the state government to file its response.

According to the petitioner, though the object of banning the purse seine net has only relevance to deep sea fishing where the juveniles and coral reefs were present and whereas, within 5 km from the shore only the fully grown up fish will come and there was no prohibition in catching them. The only source of livelihood for the fishermen is fishing. For generations together, the fishermen in the coastal vil-

ages of Tamil Nadu have been relying on fishing to sustain their families. A large number of fishermen depend on the fishing business and they were all traditional fishermen who rely only on country made boats and not mechanised boats. The fishermen have been using purse seine nets for the past 15 years and have invested ₹20 lakh for purchasing the same and other implements, together with fibre boats, he added.

He said the purse seine nets were used to fish a unique fish called Mathi (sardine), whose lifespan

was only for a period of 6 months. This type of fish was available within 5 km radius from the shore where the traditional fishermen of Tamil Nadu were engaged in the fishing using purse seine nets. Every year in the month of April, the fisheries department announces a ban on fishing, citing the breeding time for the fish. From the month of April to August every year, the sea in the Indian Ocean becomes rough and the country made boats cannot be used during the rough sea weather. Hence, he has filed the present petition, he added.

He said the purse seine nets were used to fish a unique fish called Mathi (sardine), whose lifespan served for one reason or the other, the same shall be kept in the file without opening it for the proof of delivery, so that the petitioner, at a later point of time will not take a plea that he was not aware of the order, the judge added.

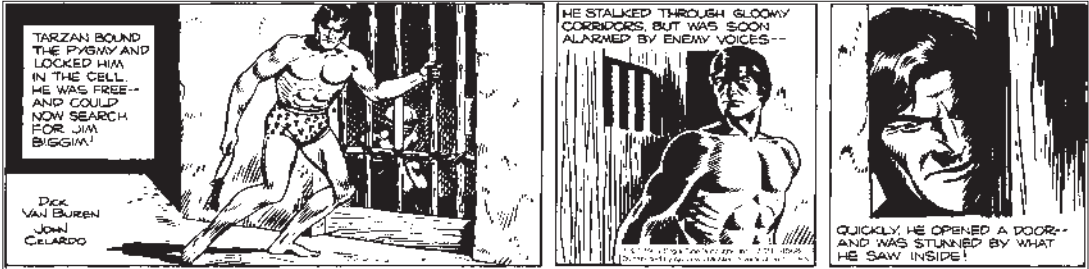
The judge said that later, it was noticed that several orders of this court, issuing directions to dispose of the representation/appeal, have not been complied, within the time prescribed by this court and the authorities were sleeping over the mat-

ters, as result of which, many contempt petitions were pending. It was also reported that in several cases involving heinous offences, charge sheets have not been laid even after registration of FIRs long back, as a result of which, the accused were allowed to wander freely in the society, after getting either anticipatory bail or default bail and indulge in further crimes, the judge added and gave the above directives to the Chief Secretary and DGP.



Antiquities like potsherds, stone and iron tools reportedly belonging to the Neolithic Age have been found at a Vellore excavation site by a team of second year PG students of department of ancient history and archaeology of Madras university at Chenthrumalai in Valasai village near Gudiyatham.

— K. Senthil Nathan



SHORT TAKES

FOREST FIRE RAGES AT SIMILIPAL SANCTUARY

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 3

A major forest fire raging in Similipal sanctuary spread across 2,750 square km for the past one week and has endangered the lives of animals. Several trees in the sanctuary have been turned into ashes.

As per reports, the fire has already spread to Betanoti, Rasgobindpur and Morada forest range of the sanctuary.

Union environment minister Prakash Javadekar has directed officials to take immediate action to bring the Similipal fire under control. "I have ordered officers to take immediate action and report it to me," Javadekar tweeted on Tuesday.

Initially, Akshita M. Bhanj Deo, the princess of Mayurbhanj, had posted a message on social media about the devastating fire in the Similipal sanctuary, Asia's second largest biosphere.

Earlier on March 2, Union petroleum and natural gas minister Dharmendra Pradhan drew the attention of the Union environment minister on the Similipal fire by tagging him on the social media. Pradhan also tagged Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on the social media post.

I-T RAIDS ANURAG KASHYAP, TAAPSEE PANNU PROPERTIES

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 3

The Income Tax Department on Wednesday raided premises linked to filmmaker Anurag Kashyap, who launched the now dissolved production house Phantom Films, Reliance Entertainment group CEO Shishashish Sarkar and Taapsee Pannu. The I-T searches are in connection with Kashyap's Phantom Films, which was dissolved in 2018.

Searches took place at 30 locations in Mumbai and Pune, including premises linked to a talent agency as well as Phantom Films, which was co-promoted by Anurag Kashyap, producers Vikas Bahl and Madhu Mantena. In the meantime the income tax officials were questioning both Kashyap as well as Pannu in Pune.

Speaking about these raids, Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar in a briefing stated that the Income Tax department probes someone based on whatever information they get and the issue goes to court later.

Anurag Kashyap and Taapsee Pannu are outspoken critics of the government and have lent their voice to various causes, including the ongoing farmer protests against central laws.

According to an I-T official the searches were carried out as there have been instances of tax evasion. The movies produced by the production house have been super hit, but the profits and account statements of the company are showing disproportionately low income. The action drew severe criticism from the opposition parties and activists.

ARMY OFFICER, JAWAN DIE BY SUICIDE

DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, MARCH 3

An Army officer and a young soldier on Wednesday ended their lives by shooting themselves with their service weapons at two different places in Jammu and Kashmir.

The police and Army sources said that the officer Colonel Sudeep Bhagat Singh reportedly shot himself dead inside the unit he was posted at in Khanmoh area on the outskirts of capital Srinagar.

On hearing the gunshots, some soldiers rushed to the spot and found the officer lying on ground in pool of blood. He was taken to the hospital where doctors pronounced him dead, the sources said. Earlier during the day, the bullet-riddled body of an Army jawan was found at a camp in Gurdan area of frontier Rajouri district in Jammu region. The police said that preliminary investigation into the incident point out to the 24-year-old soldier's shooting himself dead with his service weapon.

Rajouri Government Medical College (GMC) Hospital Superintendent Dr Javid Iqbal Choudhary said that the soldier had died on way to the hospital and that it appeared to be a case of suicide.

SASIKALA ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT FROM POLITICS

FROM PAGE 1

The political grapevine has it that she was asked to move out of the political scene by the BJP, which was skeptical of its alliance, led by the AIADMK, losing votes if she continued to loom over the electoral scene in some form or the other by remaining outside the AIADMK.

Though there were allegations that the crowds that welcomed her when she returned to Chennai after undergoing her jail term in Bengaluru were hired by Dhinakaran and all that receptions that she was accorded were stage-managed, there was a lingering doubt that she may have the support of AIADMK cadre.

The image created by the grandiose welcome on February 8 perhaps frightened the mandarins of the BJP that they wanted her to be out of politics or be with them. During the 23-hour journey from Bengaluru to Chennai, Sasikala herself vowed to come back to politics.

She was using the AIADMK flag on her car — when she was released from jail she drove in Jayalalithaa's old vehicle to reach her farmhouse in Bengaluru outskirts — and maintained that she was the general secretary of the party.

Even on Jayalalithaa's birth anniversary on February 24, she addressed the media and gave an indication that she was interested in politics and leading the AIADMK.

AIADMK leaders were delighted on hearing about her retirement plans, though Dhinakaran said that he would be continuing with his fight in the April 6 elections under the AMMK banner. He had made it clear a couple of days earlier that he was on his own and not expecting to join the AIADMK.

‘Khela Hobe’ vs ‘Jai Shri Ram’ even at sweet shops TMC: PM free to visit WB anytime

Kolkata, March 3: The bitter fight for elections in Bengal has reached the sweet shops with popular retailers in the state churning out new delicacies, capturing the mood of the season — ‘Khela Hobe’ vs ‘Jai Shri Ram’.

Balaram Mallick Radharaman Mallick, one of the iconic sweet shops of Kolkata, has launched sandesh with the two slogans written on them. While ‘Khela Hobe’ is written on the sandesh in white and green, the ‘Jai Shri Ram’ sandesh is in white and orange.

‘Khela Hobe’, meaning ‘Game On’, is a slogan first given by Trinamul Congress as scores of its leaders switched to the BJP, pitching Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee against all the opposition faces.

The slogan has since become popular with a pop version of it being played at TMC rallies and hoardings coming up across West Bengal. The opposition parties have also launched their own versions of the slogan, making it a flavour of the poll season.

Besides, ‘Jai Shri Ram’ — the popular BJP slogan has turned into the party's battle-cry ahead of the closely — watched elections, which will begin on March 27.

“The soft-rolled Nalen Gur sandesh with either ‘Khela Hobe’ or ‘Jai Shri Ram’ embossed on them are already being bought by the respective political parties,” Sudip Mallick, said the owner of the sweet retail chain.

Modi sandesh and Didi Sandesh, with images of the two leaders etched on them, and other ‘mishitis’ (sweets) bearing symbols of the BJP and TMC are also on the



Security personnel conduct a flag march, ahead of the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections in Kanyakumari district on Wednesday. — PTI

Mirwaiz Umar Farooq freed after 19 months

Cleric to address weekly congregation at Grand Mosque

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, MARCH 3

The Jammu and Kashmir police said on Wednesday that separatist leader and the Valley's chief Muslim cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq is no longer under house detention.

When contacted over the phone around 4 pm, the Mirwaiz said that a contingent of the police continued to be deployed outside his residence in Srinagar's Nigean area but it appeared the siege around the premises was being lifted.

The Mirwaiz who heads a faction of Kashmiri separatist parties' amalgam All Parties Hurriyat Conference was among hundreds of politicians, human rights activists, civil society and trade union leaders and lawyers placed under house arrest or jailed by the authorities ahead of or soon after J&K was stripped of its special status and split up into two

● **THE MIRWAIZ** refused to speak on his prolonged detention, the prevailing political situation in J&K or the recent developments in the South Asian region, the subjects he would frequently talk louder on before his house detention.

Union Territories on August 5, 2019. Most of them have been set free since.

The Mirwaiz refused to speak on his prolonged detention, the prevailing political situation in J&K or the recent developments in the South Asian region, the subjects he would frequently talk louder on before his house detention. He said that he would be addressing the weekly congregation at Srinagar's Grand Mosque on Friday. If permitted it would be his first such public appearance in many months. Traditionally, incumbent Mirwaiz or chief priest

delivers customary pre-namaz speech at the historic place of worship on Fridays which is often followed by a speech by him on current affairs.

Last week, Syeed Ahmed Naqashbandi, the grand imam at Jama Masjid had alleged that the Mirwaiz was being prevented from discharging his religious duties for political reasons. He had urged the authorities to release him from house detention immediately. Mutahida Majlis-e-Ulema (MMU) Jammu & Kashmir, an alliance of religious leaders and organisations, too had expressed its serious concern over the Mirwaiz's continued detention.

At a meeting held at Mirwaiz Manzil, the Mirwaiz clan's seat located in central Srinagar, earlier during the day on Wednesday, the MMU had said that due to “continued detention of Mirwaiz Umar the pulpits of J&K's largest religious

COVAXIN: TRIAL RESULTS SHOW 81% ‘INTERIM’ EFFICACY

FROM PAGE 1

The interim efficacy trend of 81%, analyzed as per the protocol approved by the DCGI, puts it at par with other global front-runner vaccines, ICMR said in a statement.

The results may help setting aside concerns of safety and efficacy by several groups that have questioned the use of COVAXIN in India's Covid-19 immunization programme as the vaccine is still under study and has been approved only for restricted emergency use under trial mode. The other vaccine being used in India — Covishield — had shown an efficacy rate of 70 per cent after two full doses. However, one of the regimens with a half dose and a full dose showed 90 per cent efficacy against the virus.

The Phase 3 trial of COVAXIN was conducted in a total of 25,800 individ-

uals across 21 sites between 18-98 years of age, including 2,433 over the age of 60 and 4,500 with comorbidities.

“The bench-to-bedside journey of the completely indigenous Covid-19 vaccine in less than eight months' time showcases the immense strength of Atmanirbhar Bharat to fight the odds and stand tall in the global public health community. It is also a testament to India's emergence as a global vaccine superpower,” said Dr Balram Bhargava, director general, ICMR.

The COVAXIN is the first Covid-19 vaccine that has been developed completely in India. ICMR has claimed that pre-clinical studies in small animals and hamsters showed promising results in terms of safety and immunogenicity. Further studies conducted in rhesus macaques also established remarkable safety

Hectic parleys on in 3 major Fronts in Kerala

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 3

The CPM, Congress and BJP-led Fronts in Kerala are engaged in hectic deliberations to finalise their candidates for coming Assembly polls.

The district leadership of the CPM has almost finalised the list of prospective candidates in all 14 districts. Barring some leaders, the names of most sitting MLAs including senior ministers have been recommended by the district leadership for the coming polls.

The issue of exemption for four and five time legislators will be taken up at the CPM state committee meeting on March 5.

The No 2 party in the LDF, CPI which contested 27 seats in 2016 Assembly polls is likely to get 25 seats this time. Some of the seats of the CPI are likely to be given to the new allies. Similarly, the number of CPM seats will also come down to accommodate the alliance partners.

The CPI leadership has asked the district councils to prepare a panel of candidates in each district.

The panel will be discussed at the state executive meeting. Subsequently

the final list will be announced.

The Congress-led UDF is also in the process of finalising the candidates. Congress election committee meeting held in Thiruvananthapuram decided not to field sitting MPs in the coming polls. The members of the committee submitted separate recommendations about candidates to the top leaders.

KPCC president Mullapally Ramachandran has decided to opt out the elections this time as he wants to concentrate on the campaigning of the UDF. However, the final decision in his case will be taken by the high command.

Many veteran leaders including P.J. Kurien, P.C. Thomas, V.M. Sudheeran have requested the leadership to give tickets to young leaders.

The BJP is conducting its seat sharing and candidate level discussions on the sidelines of the Vijaya Yatra of party state president K. Surendran. The BJP and its allies in the NDA are likely to finalise the candidates by next week. The bulk of seats will be contested by BJP. All top leaders of the party are likely to be in the fray this time.

Delhi civic bypolls: AAP wins 4 wards

New Delhi, March 3: The AAP on Wednesday won four of the five civic wards in Delhi in a bypoll, with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal asserting that people were desperate to bring the party to power in the three municipal corporations in the national capital.

The AAP, however, suffered a shock defeat in the minority-dominated Chauhan Bangar ward, where Chaudhary Zubair Ahmad of the Congress defeated the party's candidate Mohammad Ishraq Khan by a whopping margin of 10,642 votes.

The BJP failed to open its account in the bypolls, being seen as the semi-final ahead of the civic polls due in 2022, and even lost the Shalimar Bagh seat held by it to the AAP.

“We honour the mandate given by people. Losing Shalimar Bagh North is a matter of introspection. The shortcomings will be removed and I am sure BJP will win the elections for three municipal corporations in 2022,” said

Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta.

The AAP candidates won from Kalyanpuri, Rohin-C, Trilokpuri and Shalimar Bagh North wards.

According to the state election commission, the AAP polled the highest 46.10 per cent votes in the bypolls, followed by 27.29 per cent by the BJP and 21.84 per cent by the Congress.

“The people of Delhi have once again voted in the name of work. Congratulations to all. The people are fed up with misrule of the BJP at MCD for 15 years. People are desperate to bring the AAP to rule the MCD,” Kejriwal tweeted after the AAP's victory.

AAP candidate Dhirender Kumar won the Kalyanpuri ward by 7,043 votes.

The party candidate Vijay Kumar from Trilokpuri defeated BJP's Om Prakash by a margin of 4,986 votes. AAP's Sunita Mishra defeated Surbhi Jaju of the BJP in Shalimar Bagh ward by 2,705 votes. The seat was earlier held by the BJP. — PTI

UDDHAV: SHAH’S DENIAL OF CM POST PROMISE ‘SHAMELESS’

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 3

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday directly attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah.

Thackeray had so far refrained from speaking negatively about Modi and Shah and had left that task to his deputies in Shiv Sena.

However, while speaking in the state Assembly on the Governor's speech, the

Chief Minister raised questions about the PM fund and alleged that anyone questioning it is labelled as a “traitor”. He also accused Shah of lying about the assurance given to him about the chief minister's post and said that the BJP leader is “shameless”.

Reacting to Thackeray's speech, the leader of opposition in Maharashtra Assembly Fadnis said that the CM still doesn't understand the difference between the speech in Chowk and speech in Assembly.

Karnataka Minister resigns following allegations of sexual harassment

Bengaluru, Mar 3: Karnataka Water Resources Minister Ramesh Jarkiholi on Wednesday resigned from the state cabinet, following allegations of sexual harassment against him.

His resignation came after protests and criticism by opposition parties and several sections of society, causing a huge embarrassment to the government and the ruling BJP.

In his resignation letter to Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa just ahead of the cabinet meeting this afternoon, Jarkiholi claimed he was innocent.

“The allegations against me are far from the truth. It has to be investigated at the earliest.

Though I'm confident



Jarkiholi getting intimate with an unidentified woman was widely aired by Kannada news channels.

According to sources, Jarkiholi tendered his resignation on the directions from the party high command.

BJP National General Secretary in-charge of Karnataka Arun Singh and party national General Secretary (organisation) B L Santosh reportedly held discussions on the charges and CD this morning and communicated the party's decision to the state leadership, keeping in mind the assembly polls in five states and also bypolls and panchayat elections in Karnataka.

Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa then called

party MLA from Arabhavi, Balachandra Jarkiholi, who is Ramesh's brother and informed him of the decision. Reacting to the charges, Ramesh

on Tuesday night had said he was shocked and the videos were “100 per cent fake.”

He had also sought a probe, while asserting that he would quit as Minister and also from politics if proven wrong.

Balachandra Jarkiholi had said after meeting the CM in the morning that there was no need for Ramesh to resign if he has not done anything wrong and a thorough probe has to be done, either by CBI or CID, to find out the truth behind the allegation and the CD, also those behind it. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

OZ AG DENIES RAPE CHARGE, WON'T RESIGN

Canberra, March 3: Australia's attorney-general denied having sexual contact with a 16-year-old who had accused him of raping her 33 years ago and said Wednesday he would not resign as the nation's top law officer.

Christian Porter instead said he would take leave to care for his mental health after the allegations recently became public. "I'm going to take a couple of short weeks leave just for my own sanity," Porter told reporters. "I think that I will be able to return from that and do my job." The accuser took her own life last year, and her allegations against Porter became public last week.

BOY, 11, NABBED FOR BRINGING GUN TO SCHOOL

Naples (US), March 3: A Florida elementary school student was arrested Tuesday after bringing an unloaded gun to school and threatening two classmates, authorities said. A deputy stopped the 11-year-old boy as he got off the morning bus at Osceola Elementary School in Naples, according to a Collier County Sheriff's Office news release.

The fourth-grade student faces a felony charge of carrying a concealed weapon on school grounds. Deputies learned earlier Tuesday morning that the boy had threatened other students a day earlier, officials said. When they searched his backpack, they reported finding a handgun, the statement said. Officials didn't release the boy's name.

MEXICO PASSES BILL FAVOURING FOSSIL FUEL

Mexico City, March 3: Mexico's Senate passed an electrical energy bill that favours government-owned generating plants that largely run on fossil fuels Tuesday, putting renewable and private plants at the back of the line for purchasing power.

The bill has drawn complaints from private business groups and US investors, some of whom backed cleaner gas and renewable power plants in Mexico. Some analysts warn the measure could violate the US-Mexico-Canada free trade pact. The Senate must still vote on some objections, but President Andrés Manuel López Obrador appeared to have the votes to push the bill through. It passed earlier in the lower house of Congress.

15 KILLED AFTER SUV CRASHES INTO SEMITRUCK

El Centro (US), March 2: An SUV believed to be carrying 27 people crashed into a semitruck Tuesday on a Southern California highway, killing 15 people and leaving others injured, hospital officials said.

Judy Cruz, director of El Centro Regional Medical Center's emergency department, said 14 people died at the scene, which is about 11 miles (18 kilometres) north of the US-Mexico border, and another died after arriving at the hospital. Officials believe there were 27 people in an SUV that struck a tractor-trailer full of gravel. Multiple patients were sent to hospitals for their injuries, including four flown to Desert Regional Medical Center in Palm Springs, spokesman Todd Burke said. Three were in intensive care.

10 rockets hit US airbase in Iraq

Baghdad, March 3: At least 10 rockets targeted a military base in western Iraq that hosts US-led coalition troops on Wednesday, the coalition and the Iraqi military said. It was not immediately known if there were any casualties.

The rockets struck Ain al-Asad airbase in Anbar province at 7:20 a.m., coalition spokesman Col. Wayne Marotto said. No one claimed responsibility for the attack.

The Iraqi military released a statement saying the attack did not cause significant losses and that security forces had found the launch pad used for the rockets a burned out truck. It was found in the al-Baghdadi area of Anbar, about 5 miles (8 kilometres) from the base, an Iraqi military official said on condition of anonymity to discuss the attack with the media.

Video of the site shows a burning medium-sized truck in a desert area.

It was the first attack since the US struck Iran-aligned militia targets along the Iraq-Syria border

last week, killing killed one militiaman and stoking fears of a possible repeat of a series of tit-for-tat attacks that escalated last year, culminating in the US drone strike that killed Iranian Gen. Qassim Soleimani outside the Baghdad airport.

Wednesday's attack targeted the same base where Iran struck with a barrage of missiles in January last year in retaliation for the killing of Soleimani.

Dozens of US service members were injured, suffering concussions in that strike. British Ambassador to Iraq Stephen Hickey condemned the attack, saying it undermined the ongoing fight against the Islamic State group. Coalition forces are in Iraq to fight Daesh at the invitation of the Iraqi government, he tweeted, using the Arabic acronym for IS. These terrorist attacks undermine the fight against Daesh and destabilize Iraq. Denmark said coalition forces at Ain al-Asad were helping to bring stability and security to the country. — AP

Myanmar security men gun down at least 6 protesters

Authorities extend crackdown on protests against last month's coup

Yangon, March 3: Myanmar security forces shot and killed at least six people on Wednesday, according to accounts on social media and local news reports, as authorities extend their lethal crackdown on protests against last month's coup.

Multiple reports from several cities and towns, difficult to independently confirm, said police used live ammunition as well as tear gas and rubber bullets to violently disperse protesters. In Myingyan in central Myanmar, multiple social media posts reported the shooting death of a 14-year-old boy.

A second death was reported later. At least four other deaths were reported elsewhere. Demonstrators have regularly flooded the streets of cities across the country since the military seized power on Feb. 1 and ousted the elected government of leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Their numbers

have remained high even as security forces have repeatedly fired tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds to disperse the crowds, and arrested protesters en masse.

On Sunday, the UN Human Rights Office said it believed at least 18 people were killed that day. The escalation of violence has led to increased diplomatic efforts to resolve Myanmar's political crisis. The UN Security Council is expected to hold a closed meeting on the situation on Friday, council diplomats said, speaking on condition of anonymity ahead of an official announcement. The United Kingdom requested the meeting, they said.

But any kind of coordinated action at the United Nations would be difficult since two permanent members of the UN Security Council, China and Russia, would almost certainly veto it. Some countries

● **DEMONSTRATORS HAVE regularly flooded the streets of cities across the country since the military seized power on Feb. 1 and ousted the elected government of leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Their numbers have remained high even as security forces have repeatedly fired tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds to disperse the crowds, and arrested protesters en masse.**

have imposed or are considering imposing their own sanctions. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, of which Myanmar is a neighbour, held a teleconference meeting of foreign ministers on Tuesday to seek a consensus on hel-

pful measures. The regional group of 10 nations has a tradition of non-interference in each other's internal affairs. A statement — issued by the group's chair, rather than as a joint declaration — called for an end to violence and for talks to try to reach a peaceful settlement.

Snubbing Asean's appeal, Myanmar's security forces on Wednesday continued to attack peaceful protesters. Details of the crackdowns and casualties are difficult to independently confirm, especially those occurring outside the bigger cities.

But the accounts of most incidents have been consistent in social media and from local news outlets, and usually have videos and photos supporting them. It is also likely that many incidents from remote areas go unreported or generally unnoticed. In the central city of Monywa, which has turned out

huge crowds to protest the military takeover, three people were shot on Wednesday, including one in the head, reported the Democratic Voice of Burma, an independent television and online news service.

There were also fatalities in the city on Sunday. In Myingyan in the same central region, multiple social media posts reported the death of the 14-year-old boy. Photos showed what was said to be his body, with his head and chest soaked with blood, being carried from where he fell by fellow protesters.

In Magwe, a student was reported seriously injured with a gunshot wound. In the town of Hpakant, four people were reported to have been shot with live ammunition. Myanmar's ethnic Kachin minority has historically had tense relations with the central government and fields a guerrilla force of its own. — AP



A technical investigator wearing protective equipment is at work after an explosion occurred near a Covid-19 test centre, shattering windows but causing no injuries, in Bovenkarspel, the Netherlands, on Wednesday. — AFP

Blast at Dutch virus test centre

The Hague, March 3: A blast smashed five windows at a coronavirus testing centre in a small Dutch town early Wednesday and explosive experts were called in to investigate, police said. Nobody was hurt.

Police in the province of North Holland tweeted that "an explosive went off" near the testing center in Bovenkarspel just before 7 a.m. Police cordoned off the area, which is 60 kilometres (40 miles) north of Amsterdam, and were investigating the cause of the blast. Police spokesman Menno Hartenberg said it was unclear whether the testing centre was deliberately targeted or when the facility would be able to reopen.

He said it was clear that the explosive didn't "get there by accident. But we have no idea at the moment who exactly left it there and what the intention was." Police said a metal cylinder that had exploded was found outside the building. The northern regions of North Holland province have been identi-

Texas biggest state to lift mask mandate

Houston, March 3: Texas will lift its mask mandate and increase the capacity of all businesses to 100 per cent from March 10, Governor Greg Abbott has announced, making it the largest US state to end one of the most effective ways to slow the spread of the deadly coronavirus.

"It is now time to open Texas 100%, Abbot said on Tuesday. The announcement by the Republican leader in Texas, where the virus has killed more than 42,000 people, has rattled doctors and city leaders who said they are now bracing for another deadly resurgence.

Texas is the largest US state to end its mask man-

date. Abbott has faced criticism from his party over the measure, which was imposed last July. The administration of US President Joe Biden, a Democrat, has made it clear coronavirus restrictions are still necessary to contain the spread of the disease that has claimed the lives of over 516,400 people in the country. Abbott made the announcement during a business event where he issued an executive order rescinding most of his earlier executive orders like the mask mandate. He said businesses of any type will be allowed to open fully from March 10. — PTI

fied as a virus hotspot in recent weeks, with infection numbers higher than

the national average. In January, rioters torched a coronavirus test facil-

ity in the fishing village of Urk on the first night of a 9 p.m.-to-4:30 a.m. nationwide curfew imposed as part of the government's latest coronavirus lockdown. Attacks on health workers and facilities around the world have increased amid the Covid-19 pandemic. A new report by the Geneva-based Insecurity Insight and the University of California, Berkeley's Human Rights Center identified more than 1,100 threats or acts of violence against health care workers and facilities last year.

Some Dutch lockdown restrictions were relaxed Wednesday with hairdressers, masseurs and other "contact professions" allowed to reopen if they adhere to strict social distancing and hygiene measures. Nonessential shops also were allowed to reopen in the Netherlands for the first time since mid-December, though only to very limited numbers of customers who make an appointment in advance. — AP

Tanden withdraws Biden budget chief nomination

Washington, March 3: In the first major setback to US President Joe Biden, Indian-American policy expert Neera Tanden has withdrawn her nomination as his top White House budget official after she faced strong opposition from both Democratic and Republican senators for her past controversial posts on social media.

Tanden, 50, had been facing a tough time for the confirmation of her nomination as Director of the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) over her past Twitter outbursts against several lawmakers, including those from her own Democratic Party.

Tanden, president of the left-leaning think tank Center for American Progress, would have led a key economic post that oversees the production of the President's proposed budget for his agenda if she had been confirmed. The OMB is in charge of the budget-drafting process in the White House, as well as having a large role in the issuance of new regulations. Biden on Tuesday accepted her withdrawal and indicated that Tanden might be brought in the administration in some other capacity.

Commerce secy gets Senate nod

Washington, March 3: The Senate voted overwhelmingly Tuesday to confirm Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo to serve as President Joe Biden's commerce secretary and help guide the economy's recovery during and after the coronavirus pandemic. The vote was 84-15. Raimondo, 49, was the first woman elected governor of Rhode Island and is serving her second term. She is a Rhodes Scholar and a graduate of Yale Law School who became a venture capitalist before

turning to politics.

Raimondo will be responsible for promoting the nation's economic growth domestically and overseas. Republican opposition to her confirmation focused on concerns that she would not be forceful enough in confronting the Chinese government's efforts to gain an economic and technological edge through espionage.

Senator Ted Cruz, R-Texas, in particular said he was concerned that she declined during her confirmation hearing. — AP

House ready to pass poll, ethics bill

Washington, March 3: House Democrats are poised to pass a sweeping elections and ethics bill, offering it up as a powerful counterweight to voting rights restrictions advancing in Republican-controlled statehouses across the country. — AP

Jan. 6 slips: Security officials to testify

Washington, March 3: Federal national security officials are set to testify in the second Senate hearing about what went wrong on January 6, facing questions about missed intelligence and botched efforts to quickly gather National Guard troops that day as a violent mob laid siege to the US Capitol. Senators are eager to grill the officials from the Pentagon, the National Guard, and the Justice and Homeland Security

departments about their preparations as supporters of then-President Donald Trump talked online, in some cases openly, about gathering in Washington and interrupting the electoral count.

At a hearing last week, officials who were in charge of security at the Capitol blamed each other as well as federal law enforcement for their own lack of preparation as hundreds of rioters descended on the building. — AP

FILM | FEST

French screenwriter and director Celine is earning critical acclaim from 'Water Lilies' of '07

Sciamma's work: A gentle, warm ode to the power of imagination

SUPARNA SHARMA | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

Imagination is no child's play. Building a happy, alternate universe requires feeling lonely while grappling with questions that no one is providing answers to. In our imagined worlds, everything and everyone is as they should be, and not how they are.

This creation of our imagination is a correction to fill the gaps that life and those we love have left unattended, and to live the life we think we deserve.

French screenwriter and director Celine Sciamma, who has been consistently

climbing up the ladder of critical acclaim with her films since the 2007 *Water Lilies*, really made her presence felt on the world stage when her stunning fourth feature, *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2019.

On Wednesday, Sciamma's fifth feature, *Petite Maman*, a story about three generations of women, had its world premiere at the International Film Festival of Berlin, online.

The film opens with Marion's (Gabrielle Sanz) mother (Nina Meurisse) has passed away at an old age home. Nelly (Josephine Sanz), Marion's daughter, is eight but caring and curi-



ous beyond her age. They share a warm, loving relationship, but Nelly is also acutely aware of her mother's silence and sadness. Nelly is helping her parents clean out her mother's childhood home and in

between chores, often at night, she asks Marion questions about her childhood, the wood hut she had built, the operation she had to undergo. But Marion doesn't want to tackle her past. "You always ask so many

questions at bedtime."

"I only see you at bedtime."

Next morning, Marion is gone, leaving Nelly with an unexplained, disturbing absence.

In between helping her father, Nelly ventures out into the woods carrying fragments of memories her mother and grandmother shared with her. There she discovers a friend and together they create a world complete with a hut in the forest and warm meals. They write a play, act out their roles, play board games and help each other find some answers.

Petite Maman (Petite Mom) is an intimate, gentle, gorgeous ode to the power

of imagination.

Though less dazzling in its scale and ambition than Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, *Petite Maman* is more assured, mature filmmaking.

Shot in a house and a forest lit by yellow and red autumnal leaves, *Petite Maman* has few dialogue and yet it beautifully conveys feelings and emotions through the simplest of daily routines and interactions.

Shot during the Corona pandemic, *Petite Maman* seems to say that checking into an imagined world is not always checking out of life. It's also, sometimes, the place we need to go to, to find answers and love.

PUBLIC NOTICE

My client LIC Housing Finance Ltd. Having office at Tri Star Tower, Avinashi Road, Coimbatore-20, have proposed to lend housing loan to Muthunagai, W/o. S. Ramarajan at Door No. 31-W, New Balaji Nagar, Bommanampalayam, Coimbatore. Muthunagai, offered the Eastern Portion of the house site No. 45 measuring 957.375 Sq ft of vacant land SF No. 47/1 Part, 47/2 Part, 47/2 Part, 47/2 Part Vadavalli Village, Joint II SRO, Coimbatore. She alleged that the original parent document Sale Deed Doc. No. 3573/1993 dated: 22-10-1993 has been misplaced / lost & untraceable. Anybody in possession of the documents or having objection in LIC Housing Finance Ltd extending loan to her, may inform me within 15 days from today. Any objection after that period would not bind my client in any manner.

S. SIVADAS, MBA, M.L., Advocate No. 204, Law Chambers, District Court Campus, Coimbatore-641018, Ph: 9842234869.

PUBLIC NOTICE

My client M/s. LIC Housing Finance Ltd having office at 654, Tri-Star Tower, Avinashi Road, Coimbatore -641037, propose to extend loan to Mrs. Gayathiri Devi, W/o. Kannan, residing at Site No. 7, First Street, Mahalakshmi Nagar, Muthalannampalayam, Tiruppur-641606 to purchase the property to an extent of 1250 sqft of land in the Northern Portion of Site No. 18 out of 5000 sqft of land comprised as site No. 15 and 18 in the layout of residential sites named as Ponnuthu Nagar situated at Perur Taluk, Veerakeralam Village in SF No. 78/2 from Mr. Praveenkumar, S/o. Kandasamy. It is alleged that the Original Parent Sale deed dated 23.06.1997 registered as Document No. 1985/1997 at Thondamuthur Sub Registration District stands in the name of Mrs. Annu Alogappan, W/o. Raja is lost and not traceable. Anybody in possession of document or having any right, lien, and charge over the property or any objection in M/s. LIC Housing Finance Ltd extending financial assistance to the said Mrs. Gayathiri Devi, W/o. Kannan, may inform me within 15 days from today. Any objection thereafter will not be entertained and the same shall not bind my client in any manner whatsoever it may be.

P. BHARATH, BA, BL, Advocate, 156/18, Parsn Trade Plaza, Dr. Nanjappa Road, Coimbatore-641018. Ph: 9443934365

DECCAN Chronicle

4 MARCH 2021

Cyber warfare and state surveillance new normal

Cyberattacks have become the new normality. Warfare using Internet-enabled technology to attack another nation's digital infrastructure with viruses or carry out denial-of-service attacks is also becoming common enough. Strenuous denials as in the suspected cyberattack on the Maharashtra electricity grid that brought about a blackout in Mumbai in October 2020 when suburban train services and stock market trading were halted are barely believable because the likelihood of state-sponsored actions in a cyber battle was very high at a time of India-China tensions along the LAC. The employment of non-state actors to carry out such attacks to aid plausible deniability cannot be discounted either since cyber hits for hire are dime a dozen in an increasingly connected world.

There are no innocents in this battle of wits fought through computer networks. India is also suspected to have sponsored phishing activity in the time of the coronavirus to aim at Chinese entities while China is said to have been behind a string of hacking attempts aimed at India's banking sector. America responded recently to Russian cyber threats to its electricity grids by littering the Russian system with code in a cyber warning. The history of Russia intervention and hactivist actions goes back some way, extending to interfering with a Presidential election. The recent Russian intervention through the SolarWinds hack that hit nine government agencies and 100 corporations including Microsoft had set the cyber world abuzz about State versus State cyber action.

Cyber security is the watchword but cyber protection is an expensive exercise as dependence on foreign hardware and software in India is extremely high and vulnerabilities exist in all systems that are networked for operational efficiencies. Even as the Indian Army has been priding

itself on electronic warfare capability it enjoys on the borders, LAC and LoC, military experts have been calling for replacement of Chinese-made hardware in utilities like power and railways. Vaccine research and manufacturing has also become the target of attacks lately suggesting how susceptible the world is to cyber theft. The government has a great responsibility towards funding cyber security measures in all sectors that are strategically important while individuals are left to their own devices to protect their privacy.

Another facet of new normality has equally sinister implications. In this modern technological environment, the State has been empowered to use cyber tools in surveillance as technology in this field has improved by giga leaps and bounds. Myanmar is an extreme example now in its extensive use of military grade surveillance in targeting critics of the February 1 coup. The capacity to mine phones and computers and employing software and spyware to eavesdrop on conversations and the use of drones and iPhone cracking devices are part of a vast digital arsenal that the State has built up towards electronic warfare in repressive surveillance of its people. An Orwellian dystopia is very much upon us already as States get more powerful in sustaining surveillance upon its critics, rebels and dissidents and just about anyone disagreeing with its ideology. As Bob Dylan said, the times they are a-changin'.

India is out of recession, but...

After stonewalling demands to lower taxes on fuel, the Union finance ministry suggested that it was in talks with all stakeholders to lessen the tax burden on fuel consumers. While it is good news for the general public, especially the middle class, which has been hit hard by an unprecedented near-three-digit fuel price, the statement, however, comes with a qualification — any reduction should not affect the government's finances.

Though the economy has begun to see an uptick in activity, the government may not get such elbowroom any time soon. The Reserve Bank of India, too, has been cautious in its assessment of the economy. Despite highlighting various positives seen in the economy, the RBI concluded, stating that "the jury leans towards such recoveries [seen in India] being shallow and short-lived". The central bank has also pointed out that the private investment — a key driver in a country's growth story — was missing in action. The credit off-take by large corporations continued to be in negative territory.

Another driver for economic growth is foreign direct investment (FDI). However, the RBI report quoting UNCTAD data states that FDI flows globally has recorded a precipitous decline, plunging by 42 per cent to an estimated US \$859 billion in 2020 from US \$1.5 trillion a year ago. Though emerging economies like India have been modestly hit, the RBI admits that downside risks to the outlook of FDI flows remain in 2021 due to persistent uncertainty clouding the course of the virus. This worry, perhaps, could be one of the driving factors for easing curbs on investments from China. While India could be better placed than the Western countries, it would be wrong to say that its economy has come out of the woods.

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Subhani



India must learn from Chanakya, not a Shah!



Mohan Guruswamy

Mohamed Reza Pahlavi, the second and last Shah of Iran from the Pahlavi dynasty, was the son of an Iranian gunnery sergeant who managed to seize control of that country in 1925 and crown himself king. Like Rajput kings who gave themselves extravagant genealogies of being descended from the sun or the moon, Mohammed Reza gave himself a 2,500-year-old lineage descending from Cyrus the Great. To him the surest and simplest way to greatness was to use Iran's new petro-dollar millions to buy the latest weapons that money can buy.

Iran then was a low-income country, but the Shah's vision was soaring. The Americans encouraged him. The US Air Force and the Navy loved him for he helped to defray the cost of development of new weapons. Flushed with his weapons, he grandiosely announced that after the two superpowers, Iran was the greatest military power and, encouraged by the United States, he appointed himself as the keeper of peace and order in the near region. Reza Pahlavi's megalomania blinded him to the reality of Iran and a man called Ayatollah Ruhollah Nasrollah Khomeini, a Shia theologian who was banished to a Paris suburb. We know what happened next.

This should be a lesson in history for all those strategists who think that weapons confer status. India's diplomatic and military establishment seems gripped by grandiose visions of an India sitting on global high tables like the UN Security Council. India's new middle classes blithely talk about India becoming a superpower, and against this rising tide

few are willing to question why? Recent studies reveal that as much as 70 per cent of Indian households make do without the minimum standards evolved by international bodies like the UNDP to be considered above the poverty standard. India's own poverty line is indeed a starvation line that prescribes a minimum caloric norm. Even by that self-serving standard, a quarter of India is excruciatingly poor. And not only is India poor, it is also economically backward, with a relatively small manufacturing base supporting a disproportionately large service sector, giving it the economic profile of a post-industrial society like the US or Europe. We mostly miss the irony of looking post-industrial without having industrialised!

India's pursuit of iron-clad national security and global status ambitions makes it annually import as much as \$20 billion, or Rs 120,000 crores, of weapons, putting us in a league of our own. Our military leaders want even more and to this extent they now have a vested interest in weapons acquisitions. Most of our other engineering imports are to facilitate domestic production, either as plant and machinery or as components. Thus, they contribute to overall value addition. Military hardware imports are a one-way street and the only ones who benefit by it are the exporting economies.

In the next decade alone, India will import over \$200 billion of weapons. Consider this. This is the kind of money that can give us a brand-new high-speed rail quadrilateral or 10 new world-class cities of 10 million people each. If we factor in the military's wishlist, then we are really looking at infinity. And much of what is being

planned for acquisition is not even required. Take, for instance, the French Dassault Rafale fighter-bomber. Each of these aircraft will cost at least ₹1,600 crores and the IAF wants 126 of them. It just got 36 of them for now. Not being satisfied with this, the IAF is thinking ahead and is said to be contemplating large numbers of an even more costly fighter — the American F-35. This will be in addition to the 272 SU30MKI fighter-bombers the IAF is in the process of inducting. Those who are knowledgeable will argue that the SU30MKI confers far greater lethality than the Rafale and costs about Rs 650 crores. Hence, why even buy Rafales? This is the exact question then defence minister Manohar Parrikar had posed. Besides, the SU30MKIs are already being assembled by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd at Nashik and its AI-31FP turbofan engines at Korapur.

Then let's consider what is the aircraft the IAF needs to urgently replace. It's the now outdated MiG-21 series. The MiG-21 is described as a frontal aviation aircraft designed mainly to intercept enemy aircraft and on occasion to drop small bombs and conduct ground attacks. It has a very limited range and endurance. The logical replacement for the MiG-21 is another light single-engine interceptor such as the Tejas LCA or even the more expensive Saab Gripen, but not an expensive heavy twin-engine fighter-bomber.

Empirical evidence suggests that the survival ability of a twin-engine fighter is not better than a single engine fighter in a conflict.

The Indian strategy must threaten to disrupt China's economic interests and inflict huge costs on any Himalayan adventure, not just in the Himalayas but also in other theatres of our choosing

It gives it a bigger load carrying capacity and more range. But single engine fighters like the Gripen also have good range now. As the Pakistan Air Force showed in the post-Balakot engagement, good radar and better missiles even on an old platform like the F-16 can be more than a match for heavy fighters without them.

More than numbers, India needs a strategy to keep the Chinese deterred. This strategy must threaten to disrupt China's economic interests and inflict huge costs on any Himalayan adventure, not just in the Himalayas but also in other theatres of our choosing. China's People's Liberation Army might have the advantage of interior lines in Tibet and Xinjiang, but the IAF and the Indian Army maintain bases and formations close to the border on the plains, giving them several tactical advantages. Just adding more troops and calling them strike formations makes little sense, as high-altitude battlefields require acclimatisation and the conflicts in all probability will be long over before they can be deployed in battle. India can never match China in the numbers game alone. To deter China, it has to show the willingness and ability to impose disproportionate costs. We must consider scenarios like this. China operates almost 20 airfields in Xinjiang, Tibet and Yunnan, from which the PLAAF can target IAF airbases in the Ganga and Brahmaputra basins. Each of these airbases is alongside a major population centre. China's home areas are deep in its hinterland. Do we have a plan to counter target them?

It's very easy to become a Shah with poor people's money. Clearly, India doesn't need to be inspired by a Shah. However, it does need to be inspired by Chanakya or even Sun Tzu.

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.

LETTERS

RAPE CASE

This is with reference to your editorial *Rape case: Bizarre suggestion* (March 3). Only recently, Bombay high court judge, Justice Pushpa V. Gandawala has given a verdict that groping without skin to skin contact is not sexual assault. The supreme court collegium withdrew her recommended permanent appointment as punishment for the bizarre verdict. Now, a bombshell has come from an unexpected quarter with the highest court of the land offering a choice to the rapist to marry the minor girl, which was refused as he was already married. Further, the rapist was not to be arrested for four weeks. I concur with your indignation that such a suggestion should not have come up in first place giving scope for unsavoury comments. The minor rape victim should get justice and the rapist punished as per law.

Parthasarathy Mandadi,
Tirupati

■ **THE QUESTION** posed to a rape accused in the Supreme Court whether he was willing to marry his victim is both ridiculous and shocking. Such questions to a rape accused in the court will encourage men with criminal mindset to indulge in such offences with the hope and expectation of getting relief from the top court. Crime is a crime which should never go unpunished unless there are some very special and compelling circumstances to show some concession or lenience to the accused. In the case under probe in the Supreme Court it is quite clear that the accused had the mindset full of temerity with blind boldness to escape from the blame by citing his age and employment etc. Such sort of persons will be a constant threat to the dignity of women if let free without exemplary punishment.

Kongunaattan, Coimbatore

STEYN'S COMMENT ON IPL

SOUTH AFRICAN pace great Dale Steyn needs to be complimented for his candid comment on how money has gained prominence in IPL over the game of cricket itself. It pains that even in times of grim tidings, reportedly a staggering ₹145 crores have been spent on the tournament's auction this year (Money is given more importance in IPL, says Steyn, March 3). There is no denying the fact that unfortunately, the very sanctity of the game is pledged for money in IPL ever since its launch in 2008, which led to the tournament being embroiled in betting and spot-fixing scandals in its 2013 edition, and the offenders are still to be brought before the law. Also, the nauseating sideights to the cash-rich tournament are really toe-curling.

R. Sivakumar, Chennai

Sunanda K. Datta-Ray
Reflections



If Biden can't punish MBS, US image will take ethics hit

By taking an expedient stand on Jamal Khashoggi's brutal killing, US President Joe Biden may have thrown away the chance of drawing an ethical line between his administration and its predecessor. It looks almost as bad as allegations that India had sent naval commandos to capture beleaguered Princess Latifa of Dubai off the Goa coast and handed her over to the UAE in March 2018 to please one of the world's richest heads of state.

Pragmatism isn't always reconcilable with ethics, which also explained India's long boycott of Israel. Moreover, as Morarji Desai found in 1977, he couldn't easily distance India from the Soviet Union. Of course, the Democratic President, from whom Americans and the world expect so much, and who spent his first hours in the White House cancelling many of Donald Trump's executive orders, might yet redeem himself. He has already taken the US back into the Paris climate agreement and is exploring ways of reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. Mr Biden has also ordered a review of US arms sales to the Saudis and is reportedly considering a ban on all non-defensive purchases.

But surely the world's only super-

power claims a higher moral role than just organising the distribution of weapons and pocketing the profits. That was emphasised in 1990 as the USSR's collapse prompted Richard Nixon to crow triumphantly from retirement that the time had come for America to reset its geopolitical compass. "We have a historic opportunity to change the world", he wrote.

Mr Biden's ambitions needn't be that grandiose, but he does have an opportunity to correct some of the distortions and aberrations of the past four years, give even 74 million Trump supporters a sense of true pride in their country's achievements, and inspire foreigners with confidence in Washington's sense of fair play. Sadly, some of Mr Trump's partnerships recalled the old story of an American President infamously claiming that a particularly unsavoury South American dictator "might be a son of a bitch, but he is our son of a bitch". Americans were taken aback in 2018 when Mr Trump appeared to support Vladimir Putin over US intelligence claims on Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. His applause for Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro and courtship of North Korea's Kim

Jong Un also looked like aligning the US with regimes that are the antithesis of values the US claims to promote.

At home, the deadly Charlottesville protest in 2017, the rise in violent right-wing extremism, and the viral spread of malevolent conspiracy theories that he encouraged were accompanied by mounting police brutality against blacks. The rise of groups like the Proud Boys, a violent street gang that gained new notoriety after Mr Trump acknowledged them during a pre-election debate with Mr Biden, was a particularly dangerous feature of those years.

It's the close military and strategic relationship with Saudi Arabia that disturbs many Americans. When Mr Trump and Saudi King Salman signed a \$350 billion arms deal in 2017, Tulsi Gabbard, Democratic congresswoman from Hawaii, warned: "Saudi Arabia is a country with a devastating record of human rights violations at home and abroad and has a long history of providing support to terrorist organisations that threaten the American people". The sale was the reported handiwork of Mr Trump's all-powerful son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner, said to be close to the kingdom's real ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, 35. Mr

Kushner, who cultivated relationships with Saudi royals, personally contacted Lockheed Martin during the deal-making process.

Widely known as MBS, the crown prince has been accused by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence of ordering Khashoggi's murder and the dismemberment of his body. "We assess Saudi Arabia's crown prince... approved an operation in Istanbul, Turkey, to capture or kill Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi", says the ODNI's four-page report. Resident in the US, Khashoggi, who wrote for the Washington Post, was lured into the Saudi consulate in Istanbul and never seen again. When the Central Intelligence Agency levelled the same charge only a month later, Mr Trump blocked the report's declassification and continued Washington's strong ties with Riyadh. He refused to hold the prince publicly responsible for the crime even as the US government demanded that the perpetrators be punished.

To do the crown prince justice, he accepted Saudi Arabia's overall responsibility for the murder of a dissident journalist who was his most vocal critic. But he denied any personal link although the ODNI says

"the crown prince viewed Khashoggi as a threat to the kingdom and broadly supported using violent measures if necessary to silence him". Antony Blinken, US secretary of state, says the US will not admit foreigners who threaten dissidents. To flesh out that oblique warning, Washington has banned 76 Saudi nationals implicated in Khashoggi's killing.

Nevertheless, if action isn't taken against the prime suspect, the drama might resemble Frederick Forsyth's thriller *The Cobra* in which the US President sanctions the creation of an elaborate and expensive state-within-a-state machinery with the sole objective of destroying the cocaine industry. But when the resultant civil conflict threatens political careers, the US government abandons the cause. In the words of the man who was appointed to take on the cocaine underworld: "It has become corrupt and venal, weak and yet arrogant, dedicated to the obese and the stupid."

Nobody can say that of Mr Biden's administration. But he has yet to live up to the convictions that earned him a historic victory.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,444.65	2.28
Nifty 50	15,245.60	2.19
S&P 500*	3,858.55	-0.30
Dollar (₹)	72.71	0.90
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.95	-0.21
Euro (₹)	88.05	0.03
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,768▼208	0.46
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.40	2.71
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.238	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.496	0.081

* As of 8:30 PM IST

India ahead in terms of women in senior mgmt

India is ahead of global average in women working in senior management positions and ranks third globally, says a Grant Thornton report that surveyed 10,000 businesses across 29 countries. The percentage of women in senior management in India stood at 39 per cent against the global average of 31 per cent. Over 98 per cent of businesses in India have at least one woman in senior management Vs 90 per cent globally.

Services expand at fastest rate in a year in Feb.



India's services activity expanded at the fastest rate in a year in February, while employment fell further and companies noted the sharpest rise in expenses from rising prices. The seasonally adjusted India Services Business Activity Index rose from 52.8 in January to 55.3 in February—the sharpest rate of expansion in output in a year. Service sector employment fell during February as the pandemic restricted labour supply.

Podcast series on Indian entrepreneurs

Singapore-based Melting Pot Podcast has kicked off a series featuring 10 leading Indian entrepreneurs. In 10 episodes, the podcast will feature entrepreneurs who started their ventures at a young age and became an inspiration for people from all over the world. Melting Pot Collection is an inspiring series, presenting stories of culturally diverse and passionate individuals, says Payal Nayar, founder & host of the podcast.

Oye! Rickshaw launches battery swapping platform

Electric mobility start-up Oye! Rickshaw announced the launch of its battery swapping platform targeting to deploy 10,000 lithium-ion batteries by the end of this year. The firm, which started a battery swapping pilot project in December, said it has crossed 1 lakh swap kilometres in under three months. Founder Mohit Sharma said, "By introducing swapping, we are significantly reducing downtime of e-rickshaws."



■ Spectrum auction helps market regain momentum

Bulls in 'pawri' mode

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 3

The stock market moved up for the third consecutive session, gaining over 2 per cent on Wednesday and making investors richer by over Rs 10 lakh crore since the steep, over 3.5 per cent fall last Friday.

This week's spectrum auction, which fetched the government Rs 77,814 crore, seems to have buoyed market sentiments. Index heavyweight Reliance Industries and rival telecom company Bharti Airtel gained 4.52 per cent and 0.92 per cent, respectively, after they put in majority of the bids in the spectrum sale.

Despite mixed global cues, with the overnight US market closing in the red, the Sensex opened higher and kept the momentum to close with a gain of 1147 points, or 2.28 per cent, at 51,444 points. The Nifty-50 gained 326

points, or 2.19 per cent, to close at 15,245.

The return of foreign investors after last Friday's heavy selling seems to have stabilised the domestic market. Foreign portfolio investors were net buyers of equities worth Rs 2,088.70 crore on Wednesday after Rs 2,223.16 crore buying on Tuesday. Domestic institutions also turned net buyers on Wednesday by Rs 392.91 crore.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies crossed the Rs 210-lakh crore mark for the first time. The BSE Mid-cap and Small-cap indices gained 1.45 per cent and 1.34 per cent, respectively.

"A stellar rally across BFSI & Metals powered indices higher today by 2.3 per cent with the market breadth improving dramatically in afternoon trade. Investors cherry-picked AMCs, HFCs and the day also witnessed keen interest in sugar

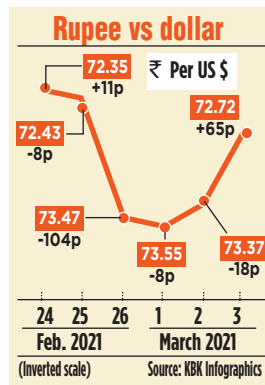
₹ gains 65p, but rising trend may not last

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, MARCH 3

The rupee on Wednesday closed 65 paise stronger, as investor appetite for emerging market assets improved after the US treasury yields continued to cool off and weakened the dollar globally. However experts said that further appreciation of the rupee will be limited due to the hardening of the US 10-year yields.

Sriram Iyer, senior research analyst, currency and commodities, Reliance Capital, said, "The rupee has been appreciating for the last two-three sessions due to corporate dollar and portfolio inflows in our equity markets, but this appreciation could be limited due to expectation of further hardening of the US treasury yields as the market is factoring good economic outlook supported by the US government stimulus plan and steps taken by the US Federal Reserve to support the economy."

"The 10 year US yields, which is at 1.4 per cent right now, could harden



to 1.8 per cent which will support the US dollar, and if that happens, the rupee would weaken. In the short-term 72.50 will remain a key resistance point," added Iyer.

The US Fed will be worried if the US yields harden further as it wants to pump money at lower rates, added Iyer.

At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened at 73.26 and after hitting an intra-day high of 72.71 and a low of 73.26, finally settled at 72.72 against the dollar.

stocks which recorded handsome gains" said S. Ranganathan, head of Research, LKP Securities. Among the sectoral indices BSE Bankex

gained 2.75 per cent, Metal (3.23 per cent), IT (2.01 per cent) and Realty (1.47 per cent) as all sectoral indices barring the Auto Index closed in the green.

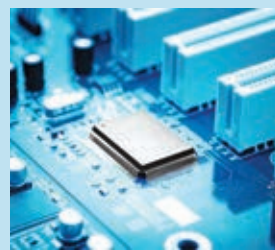
'Chip shortages could extend into next year'

DEBBY WU
MARCH 3

Taiwanese panel supplier Innolux Corporation says the current chip shortages could last beyond this year, becoming the latest manufacturer to warn that competition for semiconductors may persist for some time.

"Supply at foundries is very tight. Capacity in the chip packaging and testing space is also tight," James Yang, president of the Foxconn affiliate, told analysts at an earnings conference on Wednesday. "The chip supply bottleneck could still remain unresolved in the first half of 2022."

Some chip packaging



equipment now takes 11 months to ship, Yang said. Chipmakers aren't expanding capacity for 8-inch wafers needed for power management chips and display driver integrated circuits, he added. Automakers and 5G smartphones both need power management chips so the overall supply is getting even tighter, the

executive said. Chip shortages are expected to wipe out \$61 billion of sales for automakers alone and delay the production of a million vehicles in the March quarter, but the fallout now threatens to hit the much larger electronics industry. Possibly a broad spectrum of chip-heavy products from cars to phones and gaming consoles could see shortages or price hikes.

About 3 to 5 per cent of total panel supply could suffer shipment delays, though the impact on Innolux so far has been slight, Yang said. Panel demand will outpace supply this year, he added.

—Bloomberg

Extreme weather puts ₹6.2 L cr debt at risk

ARCHANA CHAUDHARY
MARCH 3

An increase in extreme weather events like floods, droughts and cyclones risk souring debt worth more than Rs 6.19 lakh crore (\$84 billion) at India's biggest financial institutions, according to leading non-profit environmental disclosure platform CDP.

State Bank of India, HDFC Bank, IndusInd Bank and Axis Bank are among the institutions that reported climate risks to CDP in 2020, it said in its annual report released on Wednesday.

The banks flagged exposure to environmentally sensitive businesses, including cement, coal, oil and power. They also listed

the effects of cyclones and floods on loan repayments in farming and related sectors. Lenders accounted for 87 per cent of the total risk, valued at about \$97 billion, across 67 Indian companies that responded to CDP.

"Climate is the biggest risk to businesses in the long run. Financial institutions are beginning to understand it," said Damandeep Singh, Delhi-based director of CDP India. "As investors look at funding companies based on environmental, social and governance disclosures, we've seen many more companies report climate change risk."

CDP, which gathered the data on behalf of 515 investors with \$106 trillion in assets, said it got respon-

ses from 220 small and large Indian companies.

SBI, which is facing concerns from investors over its proposal to fund the Carmichael coal mine in Australia, valued its total climate risk at Rs 3.83 lakh crore. The bank said it may "indirectly face reputational risks, should it be involved in lending to environmentally sensitive projects which may have significant public opposition."

The second-highest risk was flagged by HDFC Bank, which estimated it had Rs 1.79 lakh crore of assets in danger—a 24 per cent increase from 2019.

IndusInd, Axis and Yes reported lowered risk at Rs 46,600 crore, Rs 7,500 crore and Rs 2,000 crore, respectively.

—Bloomberg

Insurance brokers brought under ombudsman in expanded mandate

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

In a bid to facilitate speedy redressal of customer grievances, the government has amended insurance ombudsman norms. Under the new rules, the Council for Insurance Ombudsmen will take over the duties of the executive council of insurers and insurance brokers will be brought within the ambit of the ombudsman.

The government move

comes after the Department of Financial Services of finance ministry receiving scores of complaints from policyholders about the deficiency and delay in insurance services by the insurers. Besides, a parliamentary panel had also raised this issue last year, demanding that there should be a dispute resolution and complaint redressal mechanism in form of insurance ombudsmen for the insured.

Notifying the new norms, finance ministry said on Wednesday that the amended rules have enlarged the scope of complaints to ombudsmen include deficiencies in service by insurers, agents, brokers and other intermediaries. "Further, insurance brokers have been brought within the ambit of the ombudsman mechanism, by empowering the ombudsmen to pass awards against insurance brokers as well," it said.

Lexus drives in LC 500h at ₹2.15 crore

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, MARCH 3

Lexus, the Japanese car giant Toyota's luxury arm, on Wednesday launched a limited-edition model of its sports coupe, the LC 500h in the country at Rs 2.15 crore at pan-India showroom.

The company claims that the model is inspired by the graceful flight of birds and airplanes to elevate the sense of driving with refined aerodynamics.

The grand-touring coupe's special edition features borrow from an earlier partnership between air race pilot Yoshihide



Muroya and Lexus engineers that helped him win the 2017 Red Bull Air Race World Championships. A team consisting of the same engineers worked on the design of the Lexus LC 500h.

"We are very excited to announce the addition of the exclusive limited edition of the LC 500h. With

its bold, aviation-inspired design language, we are confident that it will be well received by our discerning guests," PB Venugopal, president at Lexus India said.

The limited edition model has been built by the same set of engineers who have built the LFA supercar.

SARITHA RAI
MARCH 3

Technology giants Facebook, Amazon.com and Google and credit-card providers Visa and Mastercard are among those vying for unprecedented access to India's burgeoning digital retail payments market.

The companies are part of four consortia preparing to apply for licences to operate retail payments and settlement systems in the country, people familiar with the matter said. More companies could band together before a March 31 application deadline.

In a market where cash is still king, digital payments are quickly gaining ground as India's 1.3 billion people are starting to embrace online shopping and services such as online gaming and streaming. With Credit Suisse Group AG predicting \$1 trillion in online payments in India in 2023, the companies chosen to enable such transactions stand to reap lucrative commissions.

"India's mobile digital payments is seeing huge growth in a post-pandemic world," said Vijay



Shekhar Sharma, founder and CEO of New Delhi-based Paytm. "It's a good time to open up more diverse payments solutions and keep the momentum going."

One of the consortia consists of Amazon, Visa, ICICI Bank and Axis Bank as well as fintech startups Pine Labs and BillDesk. Another group is led by Reliance Industries and its partners Facebook and Google, which together agreed to invest more than \$10 billion in Reliance's digital services unit last year.

Sharma's Paytm heads a group that includes ride-hailing startup Ola and at least five other companies. The fourth consortium consists of Tata

Group, Mastercard, Bharti Airtel and retail banks Kotak Mahindra Bank and HDFC Bank.

The contest is fierce as regulator Reserve Bank of India is expected to give just one or two licenses, as implied in its notification inviting bids. The process to decide the winners could take at least six months and it could be a further year or more before the systems and solutions come into use.

The winners will take on National Payments Corporation of India, the sole pioneering umbrella organisation backed by more than 50 retail banks. Its Unified Payments Interface, or UPI, protocol debuted in 2016 and set the digital payments arena afire by allowing

users to link their phone numbers to their bank accounts. "The regulator probably doesn't want concentration risk as the UPI backbone has become critical to the economy," said Nandan Nilekani, the man behind Aadhaar. "With more licensees and these systems presumably being able to operate seamlessly with each other, the aim seems to be to reinvigorate innovation and push digital payments even deeper into the country," said Nilekani, a co-founder and chairman of Infosys.

"Though commissions on digital payments are thin, the volume is potentially huge. Card and mobile payments represented only 21 per cent of \$781 billion in retail purchases at brick-and-mortar stores in 2019, according to an estimate by S&P Global Market Intelligence.

The new licensees could make money by charging businesses transaction fees. They can also break new territory by setting up and operating ATMs, point-of-sale systems, remittance services and new innovative payment solutions.

—Bloomberg

TRACKING VITALS

Dozee raises an alert if there is deterioration in a patient's health

Startup offers remote patient monitoring

New Delhi, March 3: Healthcare startup Dozee on Wednesday said it has launched a contactless remote patient monitoring solution for hospitals and aims to partner over 500 hospitals in the next 12 months.

The Dozee Pro solution features an AI-powered triaging system that enables remote monitoring of patients outside of the ICU.

The startup has already tied up with 70 hospitals across the country in three months for remote patient monitoring.

"We are looking to part-

ner over 500 hospitals and monitor over 2 lakh patients in the next 12 months. We are keen to work with both government and private hospitals," Dozee CEO & co-founder Mudit Dandwate said in a virtual event.

Dozee has so far deployed 4,000 devices in hospitals to monitor patients continuously and to help them enhance patient care and clinical outcomes.

"Remote patient monitoring is rapidly becoming a way for hospitals and healthcare providers to deliver an enhanced level of quality patient care



through the pandemic and beyond.

"From Covid-19 patient care, to post-surgical follow-up, to ongoing care management for patients with chronic illness, Dozee has been helping doctors and hospitals with

clinical-grade technology to provide quality of care safely and at scale," Dandwate noted.

Dozee provides doctors with continuous data on a patient's vitals and raises an alert when there is deterioration in health, empowering them to make informed care decisions no matter where they are.

The country has 20 lakh hospital beds and only one lakh ICU beds. Coupled with the shortage of trained nursing staff, it is impossible to keep an active watch on the health of all the patients continuously, especially outside

the ICU.

Currently, hospital staff has to manually visit patients every couple of hours to measure the patient vitals. Without continuous monitoring, any deterioration in a patient's health can go unnoticed and lead to complications.

According to industry estimates, the global remote patient monitoring market is expected to touch \$2.14 billion in 2027 from \$786.4 million in 2019, registering a Compound annual growth rate of 14.1 per cent through the forecast period.

—PTI

SHORT TAKES

Sania-Andreja sail into semis

Doha: Indian tennis star Sania Mirza and her Slovenian partner Andreja Klepac sailed into the women's doubles semifinals of the Qatar Open with a straight sets win over their rivals here on Wednesday. Sania and Andreja made short work of fourth seeds Anna Blinkova and Gabriela Dabrowski 6-2, 6-0 to reach the last four round. The Indo-Slovenian pair will next play top seeds Czech Republic's Barbora Krejickova and Katerina Siniakova. Krejickova and Siniakova defeated Dutch duo of Kiki Bertens and Lesley Pattinama Kerkhove 4-6, 6-4, 13-11 in another quarterfinal duel. Elsewhere in Rotterdam Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik mauled champion Alexander Zverev in straight sets 7-5, 6-3 in the Round of 32 at the ABN Amro World Tennis Tournament on Wednesday. — *Agencies*

Paddler Sharath off to flying start

Doha: Ace Indian paddler Achanta Sharath Kamal advanced to the second round of the World Table Tennis Contender series with a hard fought 3-2 win over Czech Republic's Pavel Sirucek here on Wednesday. Sharath toiled hard before defeating Sirucek 17-15, 9-11, 11-6, 8-11, 11-9 in the first round. However, Sathiyam Gnanasekaran, who alongside Sharath secured a direct entry into the main draw, made a first round exit after going down to world no.30 Aruna Quadri 7-11, 4-11, 8-11. World No.32 Sharath struggled initially when he was seen trailing by five points in the first game before recovering well with a strong counter attacking display to take an early 1-0 lead in the match. Despite losing the next game, the nine-time national champion kept firing attacking shots to bag the third game comfortably. — *PTI*

Hockey side hold Germany on tour

Krefeld, Germany: The Indian men's hockey team played out a 1-1 draw against Germany in the second game of its four-match tour of Europe here. Jarmanpreet opened the scoring for India in the fourth minute, while Martin Haner scored the equaliser for Germany. High on confidence after a dominating 6-1 win in the opening match, world No.4 India started on an attacking note against the hosts and earned themselves a penalty corner in the 4th minute, which was converted by defender Jarmanpreet with a classic slap shot. Within the following two minutes, the hosts also bounced back and got their chance to score an equaliser with a PC but could not capitalise. The visitors continued to be dominant in the second quarter, displaying better ball possession and creating opportunities with an intent to capitalise on the early lead. — *PTI*

TN Police rally to beat Customs

Chennai: Tamil Nadu Police rallied from two sets down to edge out Chennai Customs 23-25, 24-26, 25-23, 25-18, 15-11 in the Dr.Rela Institute and Medical Centre A division volleyball league at Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium on Wednesday.

Live on TV

CRICKET

India vs England: Fourth Test, Day 1 from 9.30 am on Star Sports 1

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Fulham vs Tottenham from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1; West Brom vs Everton from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 2

Italian League: Parma vs Inter Milan from 1.15 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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THE LAST GAMBIT

Resurgent India plot final move to trap England

Ahmedabad, March 3: A ruthless India will not take their foot off the pedal while taking England for another "spin ride" in the high-stakes Test series finale starting Thursday, aiming to not just complete another dominant home performance but also realise their World Test Championship dreams.

Virat Kohli's men need at least a draw to maintain the current 2-1 scoreline to qualify for the Lord's final against New Zealand while England at best can heal Tim Paine's January scars by letting Australia a lucky passage to the summit clash with a win.

While a draw always seems a safe option in a game like this but Kohli and coach Ravi Shastri, with their attacking instincts, wouldn't like to play a defensive game which at times can be counter-productive. India laid a venomous trap on the refurbished Motera and with the pink ball, demolished England inside two days, messing more with their minds than getting any tangible help from the track.

Axar Patel bowled ramrod straight and England had their heads "spinning" from the start. The play has worked well for the hosts.

Both Ajinkya Rahane and Zak Crawley felt that the track for the fourth Test looks "similar" to what they got in the previous two matches but the red ball which skids less off the surface compared to the pink one promises to make it a better contest between the two teams.

This is a Test match where England have little to gain save salvaging a bit of pride in a drawn series while India have everything to lose.

For England, poor team selection has also contributed to their shoddy batting where Joe Root (333 runs) managed to maintain a fair gap (187 runs) between him and the second highest scorer Ben Stokes (146).

Jack Leach (16 wickets) has done his bit but he does have his own set of limitations and with his pace he is unlikely to always trouble the batsman. — *PTI*

STEYN SORRY FOR HIS POST CRITICISING IPL

New Delhi, March 3: South Africa pace great Dale Steyn on Wednesday apologised for his criticism of the Indian Premier League, saying he never intended to "degrade or insult" the world's biggest franchise-based T20 tournament.

The 37-year-old veteran fast bowler said his statement that cricket is sometimes forgotten amid all the money talk in the IPL was taken out of context in social media.

"IPL has been nothing short of amazing in my career, as well as other players too. My words were never intended to be degrading, insulting, or comparing of any leagues. Social media and words out of context can often do that. My apologies if this has upset anyone," Steyn tweeted.

Steyn's apology came after he claimed on the sidelines of the Pakistan Super League 6, where he is representing Quetta Gladiators, that money is given more importance than the game in the IPL.

Steyn had said that this was one of the reasons why he had not featured regularly in the event.

"I think when you go to the IPL, there are such big squads and so many big names and so much emphasis on maybe the amount of money players earn and everything like that, so sometimes, somewhere down the line, cricket gets forgotten," he had stated. — *PTI*



India's Shubman Gill (left) prepares to catch the ball during a training session ahead of the fourth Test against England at Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Wednesday. — *AP*

Virat shuts spin-track noise

Ahmedabad, March 3: Stop the noise, tighten up that defence and get on with the game — a combative Indian skipper Virat Kohli said on Wednesday ahead of the fourth and final Test against England as he navigated persistent queries on the spin-friendly tracks in the country.

India annihilated England inside two days in the Pink-ball Test at Motera, days after the visitors crumbled on another spin-assisting pitch in Chennai in the second Test.

England managed 112 and 81 in the Ahmedabad Test after scoring 134 and 164 in Chennai as Ravichandran Ashwin and Axar Patel tormented them in turns.

"There is always too much noise and too much conversation about spin tracks," India skipper



Virat Kohli

Kohli said at the pre-match press conference.

"I am sure if our media is in a space to contradict those views or present views which say that it is unfair to criticise only spin tracks, then it will be a balanced conversation," he added. Kohli, at the end of the third Test, had blamed the batsmen's technique for their failure on the Motera track.

"But the unfortunate bit is everyone plays along with that narrative (spinning tracks) and keeps making it news till the time it is relevant. And then a Test match happens, if you win on day 4 or 5, no one says anything but if it finishes in two days, everyone pounces on the same issue," he said.

When asked what he thought were the skills required to survive on such challenging spin tracks, Kohli emphasised on having a solid defence, which, he believes, is not the strongest anymore thanks to shorter formats.

Meanwhile, Joe Root has urged his England team to be "braver" and to free themselves from fear in the fourth and final Test.

"We've got all the ingredients, all the pieces and all the skills to exploit and succeed in these conditions," he said. — *PTI*

NUMBERS GAME

TESTS AT NARENDRA MODI STADIUM:

● The only day/night match played here ended in just two days.

● England have won three and India two in last five Tests between the two sides.

● Axar Patel took 18 wickets in their first two Tests. The number for Axar Patel to shoot at in the final Test is 31, by Nariender Hirwani, so he needs the little matter of 14 wickets to beat that. Charles "Terror" Turner of Australia had 29 wickets after three Tests.

● Ravichandran Ashwin who scored 957 runs in 30 innings of 18 Tests, needs 43 runs to become 14th Indian batsman to make over 1000 runs against England. Ravichandran Ashwin who scored 957 runs in 30 innings of 18 Tests, needs 43 runs to become 14th Indian batsman to make over 1000 runs against England.

— *S. PERVEZ QAISER*

Kohli bats for rotation policy in bubble times

Ahmedabad, March 3: India skipper Virat Kohli feels rotation policy is the way forward in the age of bio-bubbles as mental fatigue caused by restrictive quarantines will make it extremely difficult for players to stay hungry.

England have been following a rotation policy in their ongoing tour of India, something that has drawn criticism from legends such as Kevin Pietersen.

Kohli, though, is convinced that as long as players are staying in bio-secure environments, taking intermittent breaks is not a bad idea.

"The kind of systems

I feel any format of the game is right place for rotation. No human being can possibly go on for that many number of games throughout of the year. Everyone needs to find windows of having some time off.

— **VIRAT KOHLI**
India cricket captain

you have to follow in the bubble, it can get very monotonous and it is very difficult to keep yourself excited about small things," Kohli said.

Bio-bubbles became imperative for resumption of sporting action

after COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc in 2020.

"I feel any format of the game is right place for rotation. No human being can possibly go on for that many number of games throughout of the year. Everyone needs to find windows of having some time off.

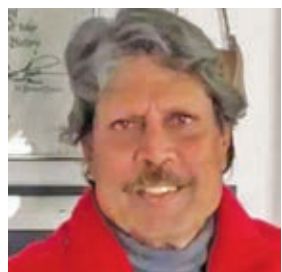
"These are the things that need to be considered for as long as you play in the bubble, outside of that it depends on where you stand physically more than mentally. But till the bubble exists, we need to keep the mental factor in the picture as well, because mental fatigue would be a huge, huge factor," he said. — *PTI*

Kapil, Pele receive first dose of Covid-19 vaccine

New Delhi, March 3: Indian cricket legend Kapil Dev on Wednesday received his first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine at a renowned city hospital here.

The 62-year-old World Cup-winning captain got vaccinated at the capital's Fortis hospital. Kapil Dev, thus, became the second former India cricketer to receive the vaccine after India head coach Ravi Shastri, who got vaccinated on Tuesday at Ahmedabad.

Both the cricket legends received the vaccine after India's inoculation drive entered its second phase on Monday in which the coverage was expanded to



Kapil Dev

include everyone above 60 and those over 45 with comorbidities.

India's greatest-ever fast bowler Kapil Dev had undergone an angioplasty in October last year after suffering a heart attack.

Elsewhere, football great Pele also received his first

dose of a Covid-19 vaccine on Tuesday, calling it an "unforgettable day."

The 80-year-old Brazilian football legend posted the news on his social media channels along with a picture of himself receiving the shot in his right arm.

Pele did not disclose where the dose was given, but he has been staying at his home in Guarujá, outside Sao Paulo, since the pandemic hit Brazil one year ago.

"Today is an unforgettable day I received the vaccine! The pandemic is not over yet. We must keep discipline to preserve lives until many people have taken the vaccine," Pele said. — *Agencies*

Agar snares six as Oz down NZ

Wellington, March 3: Spinner Ashton Agar produced the best bowling performance in Australia's Twenty20 international history in a 64-run win over New Zealand in Wellington on Wednesday.

Agar's match-turning six for 30, including three in one over, derailed a New Zealand fightback as Australia avoided a series loss in the third Twenty20 international.

Under-fire skipper Aaron Finch hit 69, his best T20 international score for more than two years, and Glenn Maxwell smashed 70 from 31 balls.

The result leaves the five-match series at 2-1 in New Zealand's favour

with two games to go.

Finch said the Australians, who have rested stars such as David Warner, Steve Smith and Mitchell Starc for the New Zealand tour, were still targeting a series win.

Australia finished their 20 overs at 208 for four after losing the toss and being asked to bat.

In reply, New Zealand were bundled out for 144 in 17.1 overs thanks to Agar's heroics with the ball. — *AFP*

Brief scores: Australia 208/4 in 20 overs (Maxwell 70, Finch 69; Sodhi 2/32) bt New Zealand 144 in 17.1 overs (Guptill 43; A. Agar 6/30, Meredith 2/24).

Srikanth shines in Swiss opener

Basel, March 3: Top Indian shuttler Kidambi Srikanth staved off a spirited challenge from compatriot Sameer Verma to make a winning start to his campaign at the Swiss Open Super 300 tournament here on Wednesday.

The fourth seeded Indian, who had claimed the title in 2015, took little over an hour to see off 2018 winner Sameer 18-21, 21-18, 21-11 in a hard-fought men's singles opening round match.

World No. 13 Srikanth, an Olympic hopeful, will be up against France's Thomas Rouxel in the Round of 16. Rouxel beat Canada's Xiaodong Sheng 21-18 21-14 in another first round match.

Sourabh Verma also won his first round match against Switzerland's Christian Kirchmayr 21-19 21-18. He faces eight seed Kunlavut Vitidsarn of Thailand in the Round of 16.

PRANNOY CRASHES

However, H. S. Prannoy made an early exit after losing to France's Mark Caljouw 19-21, 21-9, 17-21 in a men's singles first round match.

Last night, Indian mixed doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponnappa notched up an upset 21-18, 21-10 win over the world No. 8 and second-seeded Indonesian pair of Hafiz Faizal and Gloria Emanuelle Widjaja in the opening round.

The world no 19 duo, who have been training under new foreign coach Mathias Boe for the last one month, will face another Indonesian pair — Rinov Rivaldy and Pitih Haningtyas Mentari — next.

The second seeded Indian pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty also won their first round men's doubles match against Christopher Grimley and Matthew Grimley of Scotland 21-18 19-21 21-16.

Another Indian shuttler, Pranaav Jerry Chopra didn't have a good outing as he along with his mixed doubles partner N. Sikki Reddy lost 18-21 15-21 to the third-seeded English pair of Marcus Ellis and Lauren Smith in 39 minutes. — *PTI*

STAR MARY CRUISES INTO SPANISH TOURNEY SEMIS

New Delhi, March 3: Six-time world champion M. C. Mary Kom (51kg) was assured of a medal in her first competitive outing since qualifying for the Olympics last year when she entered the semifinal of the Boxam International Tournament in Castellon, Spain, on Wednesday.

The 37-year-old, who had not competed since her Tokyo qualification last year in Jordan, defeated Italian Giordana Sorrentino with a split verdict in the quarterfinal stage of the event.

Next up for her is American Virginia Fuchs as she builds up for her second Olympic appearance in Tokyo later this year.

It was a watchful start by the experienced Indian as she took her time to get a measure of her aggressive opponent.

Both the boxers preferred to counter-attack in the opening round, adopting a cautious approach for most part.

The proceedings picked up pace in the second round but in the final three minutes, it was Mary Kom who launched into attacks, dropping her guard completely and using her right hooks to good effect. — *PTI*



Gabriel Jesus (left) of Manchester City controls the ball as Conor Coady of Wolverhampton Wanderers looks on during their English Premier League match at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester on Tuesday. City won 4-1. — *AFP*

Jesus brace helps City hunt Wolves

Manchester (United Kingdom), March 3: Manchester City equalled their club record of 28 games unbeaten on Tuesday, hammering Wolverhampton 4-1 to open up a gaping 15-point lead at the top of the Premier League.

Pep Guardiola shuffled his pack at the Etihad against the team who did the league double against them last season as he maintained his club's assault on an unprecedented quadruple.

The champions-elect were made to sweat after Conor Coady cancelled out an early own goal from Leander Dendoncker but two late goals from Gabriel Jesus and a Riyad Mahrez strike sealed the three points.

City's 28-match unbeaten run in all competitions equals their run from April to December 2017 and they are red-hot favourites to wrap up a third Premier League title in four years.

Manchester City's victory was their 21st in a row and their 15th straight Premier League win. — *AFP*

RONALDO DIGS DEEP TO BLANK SPEZIA IN ITALY

Milan, March 3: Juventus gave their hopes of a 10th straight Italian league title a timely boost as they beat struggling Spezia 3-0 on Tuesday to move within seven points of league leaders Inter Milan.

Juventus were frustrated for long periods, but second-half goals from Alvaro Morata, Federico Chiesa and Cristiano Ronaldo clinched an important win. Juve sit three points behind second-placed AC Milan with Inter Milan four points further clear ahead of their match at Parma on Thursday.

The Turin giants have won the last nine Italian league titles, but have it all to do to deny either of the two Milan clubs from ending that remarkable run.

"The gap is just the points that separate us," Juventus coach Pirlo said. — *AFP*