

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
ANANTAPUR | SATURDAY | 6 MARCH 2021



WEATHER

Max: 34.0°C
Min: 19°C
RH: 41%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Misty morning. Max/Min
temp. 34/19 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Bahula Ashtami
till 6.13 pm
Star: Jyesta till 9.39 pm
Varjyam: Nil
Durmuhurtam: 6.34 am to
8.08 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
HIJRI CALENDAR
Rajab 17,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.08 am
Zohar: 12.05 pm
Asar: 4.11 pm
Maghrib: 5.47 pm
Isha: 7.02 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.48 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.13 PM
MOONSET 11.24 AM
MOONRISE 12.08 PM

COUNTER POINT



We have a tie-up with one party, a secret pact with another, and an understanding with the rest!

SHORT TAKES

OTT regulations are toothless: SC

New Delhi: The Supreme Court Friday said the Centre's guidelines on regulating social media lacks teeth and do not have any provision for taking action for prosecution or punishment against digital platforms. The court also granted interim protection from arrest to Amazon Prime Video's India head Aparna Purohit in FIRs lodged over web series Tandav. It asked her to co-operate with the investigation.

Gold tumbles below ₹44,000

New Delhi: Gold prices on Friday tumbled by ₹522 to ₹43,887 per 10 grams in the national capital, due to muted trend in the international markets, according to HDFC Securities. The metal had closed at ₹44,409 per 10 grams in the previous trade. Silver crashed by ₹1,822 to ₹64,805 per kg as compared with the close of ₹66,627 per kg.

■ Report on Page 7

Abdullah contests ED attachment

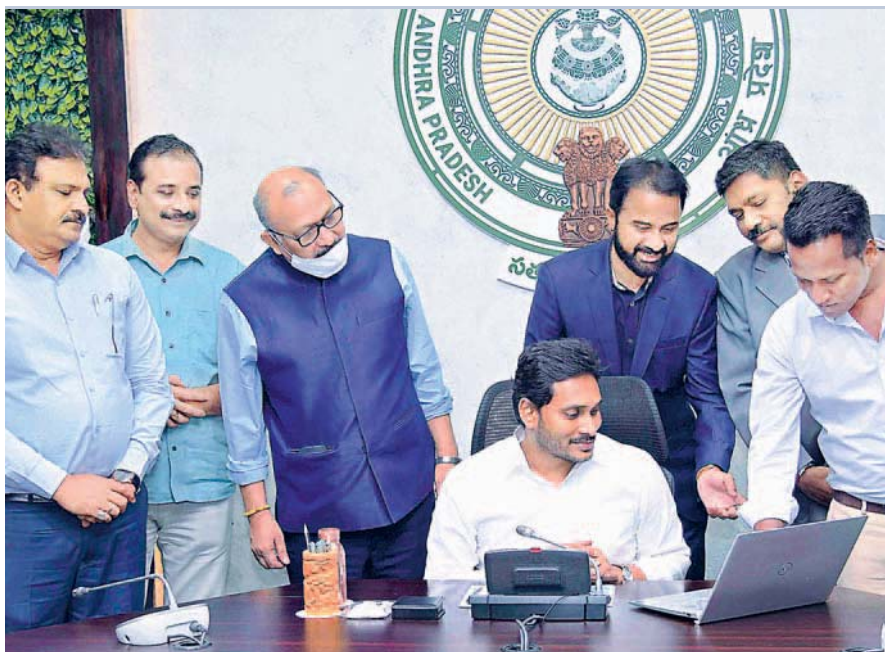
Srinagar: National Conference president and former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah has challenged an Enforcement Directorate order attaching his residential and commercial properties worth ₹12 crore. Party MP Hasnain Masoodi said the petition challenging the ED order was filed before the Jammu and Kashmir HC here on Wednesday.

Swiss to vote on burqa ban

Geneva: At a time when seemingly everyone in Europe is wearing masks to battle Covid-19, the Swiss go to the polls Sunday to vote on a long-laid proposal to ban face-coverings, both the niqabs and burqas worn by a few Muslim women and the ski masks and bandannas used by protesters. The issue strikes at the intersection of religious freedom, security, and women's rights.

NATION | 4

Accused implicates Vijayan in smuggling



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy launches the AP Fact Check website and a Twitter account at his camp office in Tadepalligum on Friday. Chief Secretary Adityanatha Das and other officials are also seen. — BY ARRANGEMENT

Jagan launches website for checking fake news

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 5

In a novel initiative, Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy launched the official fact-check portal of A P government, <https://factcheck.ap.gov.in/> here on Friday. Fact Check AP aims to curb the spread of misinformation. Jagan launched the website and twitter account at an event held in the Chief Minister Camp office at Tadepalli.

He said malicious propaganda was being spread in

the media and social media and the AP Fact Check platform would spread awareness among the public about false news with evidence.

The Chief Minister said the spread of fake and malicious propaganda is mainly done via social media.

He advised officials to identify culprits and take action. "No one has the right to deliberately damage the reputation of an individual or the system with malicious intentions," the CM said while

emphasizing the need to check malicious campaigns against governmental programmes. "The people have the right to know what is the truth," the CM stressed.

Chief Secretary Adityanatha Das, government adviser (communications) G.V.D. Krishnamohan, information commissioner Tumma Vijaykumar Reddy, DIG (technical services) G. Palaraju, AP digital corporation VC and MD Chinna Vasudevarreddy and other officials were present.

WORLD | 5

Beijing tightens control on Hong Kong

SPORTS | 8

Neeraj smashes national javelin record

AP to give free sanitary napkins at govt schools

CM orders officials to focus on health and hygiene of girls

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 5

The Andhra Pradesh government will distribute sanitary napkins free of cost to girls studying in government educational institutions. The scheme would be launched on March 8, marking International Women's Day.

Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy held a review meeting on girls' health and education at the CM Camp Office at Tadepalli on Friday. He announced that the government will distribute 10 sanitary napkins to girl students per month and 120 napkins per annum. An amount of ₹41.4 crore would be set apart for the scheme per year.

The CM advised officials to distribute quality, branded sanitary napkins to the girl students from Classes VII to XII in gov-

CM JAGAN MOHAN Reddy advised officials to distribute quality, branded sanitary napkins to the girl students from Classes VII to XII in government educational institutions for free.

ernment educational institutions for free. He said officials must lay more focus on the health and hygiene of the girls and added that the state government would launch the scheme on March 8.

Officials said tendering process would be completed by April 15 and MoUs will be signed between reputed companies and the MEPMA and SERP by April end. The sanitary napkins will be distributed to girls in govern-

ment schools, junior colleges and Gurukul schools from July 1.

Branded sanitary napkins will also be made available at Cheyutha grocery shops at affordable prices.

The CM asked officials to ensure best coaching is provided to girls for competitive exams. "Prepare an action plan with the help of reputed coaching centres and provide girls with laptops for best coaching. Complete the process of receiving options from students for laptops under the Ammavodi scheme," he said and added that the coaching should be interactive, using technology and laptops with the help of professional support.

He said the action plan should ensure that the programme will be of help to the maximum number of students.

Chief secretary Adityanath Das, special chief secretaries Satish Chandra (higher education and skill development) and Gopalakrishna Dwivedi (panchayati raj and rural development) were present at the meeting along with principal secretaries Budithi Rajasekhara (school education), Y. Srilakshmi (municipal and urban development), A.R. Anuradha (women and child welfare), Anil Kumar Singh (medical and health), K. Sunita (social welfare).

Also present were health and family welfare commissioner Katamaneni Bhaskar, finance secretary Kartikeya Mishra, women and child welfare director Kritika Shukla, school education commissioner V. Chinaveerabhadru and APSCE chairman K. Hemachandra Reddy.

MAMATA'S DARE: TO CONTEST ONLY AT NANDIGRAM

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, MARCH 5

With the slogan of *Kheleenge, Larenge, Jitenge* (Will Play, Fight and Win) on her lips, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday fielded 291 Trinamul Congress candidates, while leaving the rest three for her secret ally — Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (Bimal Gurung faction) in their stronghold in the hills of North Bengal.

In a show of confidence, Banerjee would contest only from one seat — Nandigram. "I will contest from Nandigram. I always keep my words. I won as MLA from Bhowanipore twice. If needed, I will fight from there again but later. Bhowanipore in any case remains in my grip."

Pant's heroics



Rishabh Pant celebrates after scoring a century in fourth Test against England at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Motera on Friday. Pant's aggressive innings helped India to a comfortable position. ■ Full report on Page 8 — AFP

Centre to stop funding DRDAs

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MARCH 5

The District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs) are to henceforth come under state's Panchayat Raj Department. The state government has already issued internal orders to this effect. This is consequent on the Central government's announcement that it will stop funding DRDAs in the country from the forthcoming

financial year.

There are about 226 employees working in 13 DRDAs across Andhra Pradesh. Kadapa District Rural Development Agency currently has about 16 staff, two of whom will retire in a few months.

The survival of YSR Kranthi Patham implemented by DRDAs under the State Poverty Alleviation Programme (SERP) has come under question.

The scheme was first started in 2000 by then chief minister Chandrababu Naidu. It was renamed Indira Kranti Patham in 2006 when Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy came to power.

The scheme enabled economic advancement of rural women by developing and strengthening women's self-help groups.

■ Page 2: DRDAs played key role in rural development

Property registrations fail to recover

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 5

Registration of properties has declined across the state barring in some districts like Visakhapatnam and Kurnool, and have dealt a major blow to the exchequer.

The state received cumulative collection of revenue through registration of properties worth nearly ₹4,753 crore from April 1, 2020 to March 2 of this year as against ₹4,895 crore generated for the yearago period, showing a shortfall

of 2.89 per cent in revenue collection. However, some districts registered a good growth in revenue collections: Srikakulam 5.37 per cent, Vizianagaram 1.86 per cent, Visakhapatnam 2.02 per cent, Prakasam 6.77 per cent, Anantapur 5.53 per cent and Kurnool 8.01 per cent.

Districts showing negative growth in revenue collections include: East Godavari 1.96 per cent, West Godavari 9.12 per cent, Krishna 10.75 per cent, Guntur 8.43 per cent,

DISTRICTS SHOWING negative growth in revenue collections include: East Godavari 1.96%, West Godavari 9.12%, Krishna 10.75%, Guntur 8.43%, Nellore 8.93%, Chittoor 7.80%

Nellore 8.93 per cent, Chittoor 7.80 per cent and Kadapa 2.40 per cent.

One of the main reasons attributed for the positive growth in Srikakulam, Vizianagaram and Visakhapatnam is stated to be the move to set up

administrative capital in Visakhapatnam. Registration authorities maintain that open lands located in Anandapuram, Bheemili and Madhurawada and other regions were developed and layouts established. This resulted in people going on a buying spree assuming that the land value of the plots would increase in the days ahead. As Visakhapatnam is closely linked to Srikakulam and Vizianagaram, the same trend prevailed and there was a rise in registration of proper-

ties fetch-hing handsome revenue. The upswing in Kurnool is reportedly due to the proposed High Court. Local officials maintain that the upward revision of market value last August, where a minimum of ₹2 lakh was fixed as market value for an acre of farmland in areas falling under the jurisdiction of Kalluru sub-registrar office and in villages falling under the purview of KUDA.

■ Page 3: Decentralisation affected registrations

BORDER | ROW

Indian foreign minister asked China to quickly resolve all issues

India to China: Step back in other areas

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

India on Friday once again asked China "to ensure that disengagement in the remaining areas (of the Ladakh sector) is completed at the earliest" between the troops of both nations after the completion of disengagement around the Pangong-Tso lake which "alone will lead to the restoration of peace and tranquility and provide conditions for progress in our bilateral relationship". It also said the details of

establishment of a hotline between foreign ministers of the two countries "will be worked out subsequently through diplomatic channels".

In a statement, the MEA said, "It is therefore our expectation that the Chinese side will work with us, both through the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) and Senior Commanders' meetings, to ensure that disengagement in the remaining areas is com-

pleted at the earliest. This would allow both sides to consider de-escalation of forces in Eastern Ladakh as that alone will lead to the restoration of peace and tranquility and provide

conditions for progress in our bilateral relationship."

The MEA also said, "Last week, External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar had a telephone conversation with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. A detailed press release was issued outlining the main points of conversation between EAM and his Chinese counterpart. EAM had emphasized that with the completion of disengagement in the Pangong Lake area, the two sides should now move

quickly to resolve the remaining issues along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh. The Senior Commanders in their last meeting (held on February 20) had also noted that the disengagement in the Pangong Lake area was a significant step forward and it provided a good basis for the resolution of other remaining issues along the LAC in the Western Sector. The two sides had a detailed exchange of views at the last meeting of Senior Commanders on the remaining issues."

Bandh for VSP ends peacefully

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 5

The state-wide bandh called by the Steel Plant Parirakshana Samithi on Friday was peaceful and total in Andhra Pradesh. RTC and private buses were off the road till 1 pm. Educational institutions, banks and shops voluntarily downed their shutters.

Normal life came to a grinding halt for a few hours. Top leaders kept themselves away from poll campaign for the day. Many political parties, associations, women outfits and student bodies took part in the protest and raised slogans against the NDA government for its plans to privatise AP's biggest factory. The BJP and the Jana Sena abstained from the bandh.

In Visakhapatnam, ministers K. Kannababu and Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao, Lok Sabha member M.V.V. Satyanarayana, Chodavaram MLA Karanam Dharmasri and other senior leaders took part in a human chain at the Maddilapalem junction in the morning along.

The ministers said the YSRC was opposed to the privatization. Kannababu said CM Jagan Mohan Reddy suggested alternative measures to the

NORMAL LIFE came to a grinding halt for a few hours. Top leaders kept themselves away from poll campaign for the day. Many political parties, associations, women outfits and student bodies took part in the protest and raised slogans against the NDA government for its plans to privatise AP's biggest plant.

Centre by which RINL can make a turnaround and recover from the losses. Minister Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao said the YSRC has been in the forefront of the agitation.

Vijayawada reports said all schools, colleges and higher educational institutions had declared a holiday in view of the bandh call in Krishna and Guntur districts. The Pandit Nehru Bus Station in Vijayawada and the NTR bus station in Guntur wore a deserted look due to the cancellation of bus services. A majority of shops, commercial markets and other establishments remained closed and roads were empty due to the absence of traffic.

■ Page 3: Bandh remained partial in Kadapa, Anantapur

SHORT TAKES

FIVE NOMINATIONS
BY YSRC NOMINEES
FOUND TO BE VALID

Vijayawada: The nominations filed by five YSRC candidates are valid after scrutiny. In a statement issued on Friday, the chief electoral officer's office stated that the nominations filed by the five YSRC candidates for biennial election to the AP Legislative Council by MLAs were found to be valid. The nominations that are found to be valid were filed by Balli Kalyanachakravarthy, Mohammed Karimunnisa, C. Ramachandraiah, Srinivas Duvvada Shaik Mohammed Iqbal.

The Election Commission changed the polling time with respect to polling stations located under Rampachodvaram and Yetapaka divisions in East Godavari from 8 am to 2 pm.

HC DIRECTS WARD
VOLUNTEERS TO
SURRENDER PHONES

Vijayawada: The Andhra Pradesh High Court directed the ward volunteers to surrender their mobile phones to the officers designated by the municipal commissioners.

A division bench comprising justices Joymalya Bagchi and U. Durgaprasada Rao heard a house motion petition filed by the State Election Commission on Friday. The court directed the ward volunteers to use their mobile phones given by the government for official use, under the supervision of the officials concerned for office purpose only.

The court permitted the SEC to initiate disciplinary action on ward volunteers if they were found flouting the poll code.

SEC TO KEEP CLOSE
VIGIL ON INFLUENCE
OF MONEY, LIQUOR

Vijayawada: The State Election Commission (SEC) to keep a close watch on the influence of money in the state's urban local body polls. The SEC has set up a call centre with the number 0866-2468877 at its office in Vijayawada, advising anyone who finds any issue with regard to implementation of poll code or other violations in the urban local body polls, to alert it to take necessary action.

HC TELL SEC TO FILE
COUNTER-AFFIDAVIT
BY MARCH 8

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 5

The Andhra Pradesh High Court directed the State Election Commission to file its counter-affidavit by March 8. On Friday, the court held a batch of petitions seeking re-notification for conduct of polls to MPTCs and ZPTCs in the state and accepting electoral rolls prepared as per census 2021 to allow new voters.

Though the court asked the SEC to file its counter-affidavit by March 5 in its earlier hearing in the case, the SEC failed to file it. The court observed that the SEC was deliberately delaying filing of a counter-affidavit in the case. Later, it asked the SEC to file its counter-affidavit by March 8 and said that if it failed to do so by that time, it would go ahead with the hearing in the case and issue its verdict.

SRILAKSHMI ASKS
TS HIGH COURT TO
QUASH CBI CASES

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

Y. Srilakshmi, principal secretary in the AP government, has filed an additional affidavit before the Telangana High Court seeking to quash the CBI cases registered against her in relation to granting of mining licence to Obulapuram Mining Company (OMC) and others in Anantapur district when she was secretary, industries and commerce, in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh government. This adds to her earlier application for quashing of CBI cases which has been pending before the court since 2015.

In the additional application, Srilakshmi said the allegations against her were with regard to the exercise before granting of licence to OMC. The CBI hadn't raised any contentions in its report about granting of licence to the OMC. This shows the allegations of quid pro quo against her were not maintainable.



An old man performs Karasamu (feats with a stick) to attract the voters during a campaign for YSRC candidate in the upcoming GVMC elections at Tathichetlapalem under 43rd Ward in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

— DC

YSRC wins 2 municipalities,
one corporation in Chittoor

Ruling party candidates win several wards unanimously

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 5

The YSRC cadres are in a cheerful mood, with the ruling party candidates winning several wards unanimously in the municipal corporations of Tirupati and Chittoor. The party showed a clear majority in three municipalities including Punganur, Palamaner and Madanapalle in Chittoor district.

According to reports, the YSRC candidates won all the 31 wards unanimously in Punganur municipality, which is the home turf of Panchayat Raj minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy. Out of the 97 nominations received for 31 wards, 45 were withdrawn and 21 were rejected in the scrutiny. This resulted in the ruling party candidates winning all the 31 wards without any contest.

NEC DIRECTOR
REVIEWS BY POLL
ARRANGEMENTS

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 5

Director for National Election Commission (media communications and SVEEP) Santosh Ajmera directed the officials concerned to take measures for increasing the polling percentage in the ensuing Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection.

Reviewing with joint-collectors of both Chittoor and Nellore districts on the election arrangements and data of voters in Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency, at Sri Padmavathi guesthouse in Tirupati on Friday, Santosh asked the officials to create awareness among the voters to utilise their votes in the upcoming byelection.

The NEC director instructed the officials to organise various programmes such as rallies, social media campaigns, cultural events and mobile autos for creating awareness among the public to make sure that they will utilise their votes. He suggested the officials to involve students in explaining to the public the importance of voting, voter helpline app, postal ballot, C-vigil app and other technical details.

Chittoor joint-collector (welfare) Rajasekhar explained to the director about the polling percentages in the last LS election. He said that 66 per cent of polling was recorded in the last Lok Sabha elections in Tirupati Assembly constituency, followed by 89 per cent in Srikalahasti, 85 per cent in Satyavedu constituencies. Further, Nellore district joint-collector Dr N. Prabhakar Reddy informed that 82 per cent of polling was recorded in the last Lok Sabha elections in segments that come under Nellore district limits.

● The NEC director suggested officials to involve students in explaining to the public the importance of voting.

● The YSRC showed a clear majority in three municipalities including Punganur, Palamaner and Madanapalle in Chittoor district.

● According to reports, the YSRC candidates won all the 31 wards unanimously in Punganur municipality, which is the home turf of Panchayat Raj minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy.

The neighbouring Palamaner municipality clearly tilted towards the YSRC, whose candidates were elected unopposed in as many as 18 of the 26 wards. Only 8 wards are going to election, scheduled to be held on March 10.

The Madanapalle town also appears to have been leaning towards the ruling party, whose candidates elected unopposed in 15 wards, as against the 35 wards in this municipality.

On the other hand, the ruling party has to face the elections in two

municipalities under the Nagari assembly segment, represented by the APIIC chairperson and MLA R.K. Roja. Majority of the wards in Nagari and Puttur municipalities are going to polls, where only seven out of 29 and one out of 27 wards in these two municipalities respectively were declared unanimous.

In Nagari, six YSRC candidates and one TD candidate were declared unopposed and in Puttur only one ruling party candidate was elected unanimously. Both the municipi-

palities have to witness a multi-cornered contest with the YSRC, TD, Independents and YSRC rebels being in the fray in many wards.

When it comes to corporation elections, as many as 37 out of the 50 divisions in Chittoor Municipal Corporation were declared unanimous by the time the withdrawal process came to an end. The ruling party candidates won the 37 wards.

In the Tirupati Municipal Corporation, the ruling party won 21 of the 50 divisions and the remaining 29 were going to the polls on March 10.

In 2014 municipal elections, the present ruling party YSRC had swept the Chittoor Corporation, Madanapalle, Palamaner, Punganur and Nagari municipalities, while the TD won Puttur with a meagre majority.

DRDAs played key role
in rural development

From Page 1

After Chandrababu Naidu came back to power again after division of Andhra Pradesh, he named it as Velugu Project. The present government has changed the title to YSR Kranthi Patham.

Two and a half decades ago DRDAs played a leading role in rural development. Most new IAS officers used to be appointed as DRDA project directors.

These agencies thus always had a new lease of life. Welfare schemes, such as pensions and financial assistance to deserving poor, are imple-

mented through DRDA.

Funds sanctioned by the central government under various schemes to deserving poor got channelled through DRDA. The union government also paid 75 per cent of DRDA staff's salaries, with the remaining being the contribution of the state government.

Over time, however, powers of DRDAs started getting eroded with the government bringing about many changes in implementation of welfare schemes.

The central government has now made it clear that it will not be funding DRDAs from April 1, 2021.

With this, the state government has started the exercise to bring DRDAs under state government's Panchayatiraj Department.

Kadapa DRDA project director Ambati Murali Manohar told Deccan Chronicle that they have not yet got any specific orders or guidelines to merge DRDAs with Panchayati Raj Department.

He, however, said central government will not more be contributing to salaries of the DRDA staff. Details in this regard are now being examined by the state government, he stated.

OWAISI SAYS YSRC, TD HAVE UNHOLY TIES WITH BJP

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MARCH 5

The All India Majlis Ittehadul Mussalman (AIMIM) president and Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi has slammed the YSRC and TDP for failing to achieve the Special Category Status (SCS) for AP even as they had won a huge mandate in

successive polls.

"These parties are having an unholy relationship with the BJP at the cost of people's interests," he said on Friday.

Owaisi was addressing a meeting here ahead of the municipal polls. MIM is contesting 9 wards in Adoni and 6 wards in Kurnool where sizeable chunks of Muslim popula-

tion reside.

Dismissing the criticism over his outreach to Andhra Pradesh, Owaisi said "the MIM is the face and voice of Muslims". Wherever Muslim population existed, he would go and stand in support of them, he said.

He said privatisation of the Vizag Steel was not in the interests of the people.

NAIDU | VS COPS

Naidu's charges appear out of frustration: APPOA

Police body up in arms against Naidu

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 5

AP Police Officers' Association (APPOA) has condemned what it called "baseless allegations" made by Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu against state director general of police (DGP) Gautam Sawang. It warned TD that it will take legal action against the party if it continues to defame AP police. APPOA president J. Srinivas Rao felt Naidu's charges appear to be out of latter's frustration over losing gram panchayat elections.

The association presi-

dent, along with general secretary Md. Mastan Khan and senior vice presidents K. Srinivas Rao and

tection and safety of women in the state is in line with Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's aspirations. The event was attended by Epic Fusion Healthcare Solutions CEO Sridhar Reddy, additional director general of police (Law and Order) Ravisankar Ayyanar, IG Nagendra Kumar, OSD (Security) Ramakrishna (retired) and women staff.

M. Somasekhara Reddy, issued a statement on Friday maintaining that threatening police person-

None can stop TD winning
Vizag civic polls, says Naidu

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 5

Opposition leader and national president of TD Nara Chandrababu Naidu launched his election campaign in Visakhapatnam, addressing several road shows on the outskirts of the city on Friday.

Addressing one in Pendurthi, Naidu said the TD would sweep the Visakhapatnam corporation elections, and the party candidate Peela Srinivasa Rao would become the new mayor of the city.

"None can stop TD from sweeping the elections in Vizag," Naidu said with a tone of confidence.

Reminding his efforts to develop the port city, Naidu said he always wanted to make Visakhapatnam the financial capital of united Andhra Pradesh. The party also prepared a master plan in this regard, he said and added that only TD could develop Visakhapatnam city. He appreciated the Vizagites calling them simple, honest and enterprising.

About his commitment to Vizag, Naidu said when Hudhud super cyclone



TD chief N. Chandra Babu Naidu, along with party's state president Kinjarapu Atchannaidu, takes part in the campaign for the upcoming GVMC elections at Pendurthi Junction in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

— DC

ravaged the city, he came within hours and spent 10 days till normalcy was restored.

Blaming the ruling party, he said land grabbing and other criminal activities increased alarmingly under the new regime.

Jungle law is prevailing, and there is no security to the people, he added.

"False cases are being filed against opposition

leaders, and the government filed cases against me for visiting Ramateertam temple," Naidu bemoaned.

The TD chief will stay in Visakhapatnam and resume campaigning on Saturday.

Earlier, Visakhapatnam north MLA Ganta Srinivasa Rao was among the top leaders who received him and had a one-to-one meeting.

Testing time for Bobbili
scion Ranga Rao

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 5

The scion of Bobbili R.V.S.K. Ranga Rao, popularly known as Baby Nayana, will have to take the fight to the YSRC top leaders - minister Botsa Satyanarayana and Vizianagaram MP Bellana Chandrasekhar Rao - to retain the municipality with the Telugu Desam.

Baby Nayana proved his mettle and successfully handled the gram panchayat elections by winning 45 out of 110 panchayats while top leaders, including former chief minister Chandrababu Naidu and his top associates, were drubbed down in their home panchayats.

In the last municipal elections held in 2014, the YSRC won 15 wards, TD won 13 and independents won two. Baby Nayana's elder brother Sujay Krishna Ranga Rao was still with the YSRC but could not form the council.

Telugu Desam, with the help of two independents

and two who walked out of the YSRC, formed the council, making Achyutavalle the chairperson.

Two years later, Sujay Krishna Ranga Rao joined the TD and became minister for mines in the Chandrababu Naidu Cabinet. But he lost to YSRC candidate China Appala Naidu in the 2019 elections. Since then, he has been keeping aloof from active politics.

Baby Nayana took over the leadership of TD in Bobbili and proved his leadership in the recently concluded gram panchayat elections.

Political observers of the region said Botsa Satyanarayana and Lok Sabha member Bellana Chandrasekhar are making all the efforts to wrest the municipality from the TD as they did in panchayat elections. However, with the active support of former Vizianagaram MLA Meesala Gita, who has been made in-charge of Bobbili for TD, Baby Nayana will give a tough fight to the ruling party, local leaders said.

YSRC GOVT FAILED TO GENERATE
EMPLOYMENT, SAYS ANITHA

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 5

Telugu Desam has promised to organise job melas in all municipalities and corporations of the state after its victory, as the YSRC government has failed to generate any employment in the state.

Stating this here on Friday, Telugu Desam politburo member Vangalapati Anitha asserted that these job melas will be held within a couple of months from now, as the TD is confident of winning all the corporations and municipalities that it is contesting from.

She pointed out that during the tenure of then chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, 39,450 new companies had been opened and 5.13 lakh jobs pro-

vided, as per the statement made by the current industries and commerce minister M. Gautham Reddy himself at the 34th session of the council. More than ₹5 lakh crore investments had come into the state at the time.

Anitha alleged that since Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has come to power, no new employment has been provided for youth in the state. Moreover, over ₹2 lakh crore expected investments have been lost during the last 20 months due to incapability of the current government.

The TD politburo member claimed that AP stood first among all Indian states in ease of doing business for two consecutive years in 2016 and 2017 during the TD regime.

MUSLIM BODY DEMANDS YSRC
TO FULFILL ELECTION PROMISES

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 5

Muslim religious leaders have formed AP State Mashaik Board (APSMB) to fight for issues concerning minorities. It sought the YSRC government to fulfill promises made to them during elections.

The Board met in Hazrat Syed Shah Bukhari Asthana at Kondapalli on Friday. President Sk Shah Shafi Basha and general secretaries Sk Sha Zakauddin Hussein and Altaf Raza said that religious leaders and Islamic scholars from 13 districts participated in the meeting.

APSMB is seeking ten

per cent reservation from the present four per cent to all Muslims, after taking into consideration the recommendations of Sachar Committee report. They lamented that Wakf assets are now largely in the hands of encroachers. The government should initiate measures to get back those lands.

They sought honorariums for Imams, Muezzins and Dargah Mujaawars working in non-income mosques and dargahs.

They also wanted the Shaaadi Mubarak scheme, an Islamic bank and full implementation of the minority sub-plan by making suitable budget allocations.

SHORT TAKES

Man kills mom over family row

Tirupati: In a shocking incident, a son has allegedly beaten his mother to death due to an altercation over a domestic matter. The incident took place at Bestavaripeta Khajipuram in Prakasam district on Friday.

As per the police, the accused son P. Harish Kumar Reddy had recently developed differences with his mother after she informed him that she is going to give her daughter some hefty gifts for her marriage. This had been the bone of contention in the family and Harish Kumar used to pick quarrel with his mother P. Aruna, who was in her 60s, over this matter. Accordingly, on Friday, the enraged son allegedly hit his mother's head with a grindstone following which she collapsed and died. On being informed CI Sudhakar and SI Balakrishna rushed to the spot and collected details. A case has been registered and further investigation is being done.

THREE MINOR GIRLS MISSING FROM TP GUDUR

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 5

The TP Gudur police registered a complaint and launched an investigation into the missing of three girls from Potlapudi Girijana Colony in Nellore.

According to the police, Uppala Venkatamma from the village had lodged a complaint on Thursday with the police that her daughter Uppala Chenchu Ravamma, 15, has been missing along with Uppala Seenamma, 8, and Kowrigiri Tulasi, 12, all hailing from Potlapudi village.

They left their houses without informing their parents. The police registered a case with Cr No. 88/2021.

They are suspecting the role of one Gandhalla Venkata Subbalah, hailing from the same village, behind the missing of three girls.

138 RED SANDERS LOGS RECOVERED FROM FOREST

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 5

The Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force (RSASTF) on Friday seized 138 logs, which were dumped in the forest area near SL Puram of KVB Puram mandal in Chittoor district.

According to the DSP K.C. Venkataiah, a team led by RI Krupanand have started a combing operation in the forest area two days ago. During the operation, the team found a dump of 138 red sanders logs in the forest area. In connection with this, the RSASTF officers took one Chembaiiah from ST colony of SL Puram and his helper Chengaiah into custody.

Upon investigating, the sleuths learnt that the two smugglers had deputed one Prasanth and Venkatesh, from the same locality, and also woodcutter and coolies from Tamil Nadu for looting red sanders logs from the nearby forest areas.

● The sleuths learnt that the two smugglers had deputed one Prasanth and Venkatesh, and also woodcutter and coolies from Tamil Nadu

Finance minister justifies state govt's borrowings

Buggana refutes TD's allegations on AP govt's debt

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 5

Finance minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy has refuted Telugu Desam's allegations that AP has incurred debts by countering that budget deficit has been a result of earlier TD government's non-priority expenditure.

He maintained that economy of many countries has collapsed due to Coronavirus pandemic. He pointed out that even revenue had gone down drastically even as costs

of managing Covid-19 have gone up.

Speaking to media here, Rajendranath clarified that the state government borrowed money more than permissible limits only after the Centre gave its clearance in the aftermath of lockdown. He defended the government's expenditure asserting that YSRC government gave priority to welfare even while pumping in money to revive the state's economy.

Countering TD's allegations, the finance minister said, "Revenue



Buggana Rajendranath Reddy

receipts have increased for the financial year 2020-21 compared to 2019-20." He further

pointed out that state faced revenue deficit after bifurcation. Naidu, who came to power after the state's division, ended up pushing the state into severe additional debt thereafter.

Rajendranath Reddy said the state government has not cut down on any welfare schemes despite the state's revenue declining due to Covid-19. Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy was quite clear that the state government should stand by its people in such tough times.

Spiritual duty



Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu, along with his family, offers prayers in the Srivari temple at Tirumala on Friday.

Decentralisation affects registrations in state

FROM PAGE 1

In Anantapur too, real estate gained momentum. Open lands are being converted as layouts and there is anticipation of speedy construction of houses and their registration.

However, on the flip side, Krishna district registered a negative growth of 10.75 per cent and Guntur district, which hosts Amara-vati, also registered a negative growth of 8.43 per cent.

Registration sources

maintain that the move to relocate administrative and judicial capitals is impacting the negative growth.

However, there is no matching rise in revenue collections in Visakhapatnam and its two neighbouring districts to offset negative growth.

One of the prime reasons for the phenomenon is that big players are venturing into safer zones like Hyderabad, Chennai, Bengaluru, Pune and other metros while some are unwilling

to risk an investment following the sudden boom in land value.

A senior official from the registration department said, "We are expecting registration of properties to rise as all deferred agreements for registration of properties during lockdown due to Covid-19 are getting materialised. The real estate industry is also slowly picking up overcoming initial hiccups due to RERA, 2016. Revision of market value of properties is expected to come in handy."

Balayya holds road shows in Hindupur

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MARCH 5

In view of the defeat of the Telugu Desam in a majority of gram panchayats in Hindupur area, MLA and film star Balakrishna is making serious efforts to regain the TD's hold over Hindupur municipality.

Balakrishna is conducting road shows and campaigns in the municipality in recent days with a view to neutralising the influence of the YSRC over the voters as was reflected in the gram panchayat polls.

The TD had won the

chairperson seat in the last polls while the Congress proved its existence in the previous polls. For Telugu Desam, B.S. Vidayasagar had become the municipal chairman during the NTR term. The municipal poll process later went through legal complications following the merger of Kotnur and Kollakunta gram panchayats with the municipality.

In recent gram panchayat polls, Hindupur, which was under the grip of the TD for over three and a half decades, deserted the party. The

YSRC bagged more than 80 per cent of the gram panchayats under the Hindupur Assembly segment.

Hindupur has been a stronghold for Telugu Desam since 1985. Party founder N.T. Rama Rao won thrice from this assembly segment — and functioned twice as CM and once as leader of Opposition during this period. People continued to support TD till the last general polls. This period saw NTR's sons Nandamuri Hari Krishna and Nandamuri Balakrishna and other TD candidates winning

the assembly polls from Hindupur.

Congress and other parties were unable to establish a hold in Hindupur till the last general polls.

The scenario changed dramatically during the recent gram panchayat polls. Even MLA Nandamuri Balakrishna stayed there for campaign for a couple of days and yet the YSRC won a majority of GPs.

Alerted over the gram panchayat drubbing, Balakrishna began fresh efforts to attract voters to the TD through roadshows and campaigns in the municipal wards of



Lawyers display placards as they stage protest against the privatisation move on Visakhapatnam Steel Plant by the Central Government, outside the District Court premises in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

— DC

Bandh remained partial in Kadapa, Anantapur

From Page 1

Kakinada reports said the bandh was peaceful in East and West Godavari districts. RTC cargo handling operations were stopped for four hours in the morning as the workers participated in the bandh. Advocates in Kakinada, Prathipadu and elsewhere boycotted courts. The agitators went to Kakinada Sea Port and forced a stoppage of work there and took out a procession.

Reports from Kadapa said there was a partial response to the bandh. RTC buses were off the road following directions from the government but offices functioned as usual. Leaders of the Left, along with TD, YSR Congress, Congress and students and youth organisations staged protests.

The bandh was partial in Anantapur district. APSRTC suspended its

RTC SUFFERS ₹10 CR LOSS

● APSRTC incurred a revenue loss of ₹10 crore as it suspended operations until 1 pm following the state-wide bandh call given by political parties and trade unions opposing the privatization of Visakha Steel Plant on Friday.

● APSRTC sources said that out of a total of 10,800 services, it suspended 8,619 services up to 1 pm, resulting in a revenue loss of ₹10 crore. However, it resumed the operations from the afternoon.

services till evening. Educational institutions, banks and other offices were closed. Karnataka buses were also stopped at various border points.

AP STUDENT WINS 2 GOLD MEDALS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH. 5

A student of VR Siddhartha Engineering College, Vijayawada, has won two gold medals in the Hawk Eye sports rifle shooting championship held at Bengaluru and got qualified for South Zone shooting competitions. The B.Tech first-year civil engineering student, Jangam Dev Ashish Raju, said that he got two gold medals in open sight rifle shooting tournament held in Bengaluru in which shooters from seven states had participated.

He said that last year he won a gold medal for the Krishna district.

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2	M 12X200	40
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	Total	394

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DIVINE | BLESSINGS

Number of devotees who had darshan of the Lord dipped to 14.41 lakh

TTD's February hundi crosses pre-Covid levels

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 5

Despite low pilgrim foot-falls, hundi (Parakamani) collection at Srivari temple in Tirumala has been registering a steady increase. The hundi income received in February this year is relatively higher compared to the corresponding period in the last two years.

As per official figures, TTD netted an income of ₹93.96 crore through offerings made by devotees in the hundi last month. The share of e-Hundi (online money offerings) in this was ₹3.51 crore. The majority share of the total offerings was from Srivari Hundi at Tirumala temple, which was ₹90.45 crore.

On an average, around 50,000 devotees have been having darshan of Lord

● TTD received ₹93.96 crore as hundi offerings during February 2021.

● An official says the hill shrine is presenting an almost normal picture like in pre-Covid days.

Venkateswara every day in the last couple of months. In the pre-Covid times, this figure was at least 75,000 pilgrims a day. As many as 19.93 lakh and 21.68 lakh devotees had darshan of Lord Balaji in February 2019 and February 2020 respectively. The corresponding hundi collections were ₹83.44 crore and ₹89.07 crore of offerings.

In February this year, however, the number of devotees who had darshan of the Lord dipped to 14.41 lakh. But the income

received through Srivari hundi increased to ₹90.45 crore. The hundi registered 8 percent and 1.5 percent increase in income when compared to figures of February 2019 and 2020 respectively, despite the pilgrim count declining by 27 percent and 33.5 percent respectively.

"TTD's revenue has stabilised now, as the daily hundi collection has reached the pre-Covid-19 levels. In fact, it has increased a few folds than the pre-Covid times. Now, the daily hundi collection is anywhere between ₹3 crore to 3.5 crore", a TTD official said. A senior official remarked that the current year has been very exciting, as donations and Srivari Hundi offerings have been recording a significant growth compared

to previous years. He expressed his happiness that the hill shrine is now presenting an almost normal picture like in pre-Covid days.

With regard to Anna Prasadam to devotees, around 21.07 lakh devotees have been provided Anna prasadam in February this year, while 43.94 lakh and 48.40 lakh devotees enjoyed the prasadam in February 2019 and 2020 respectively.

Similarly, around 82.38 lakh and 83.91 lakh laddus had been sold to devotees during that period, as against 76.61 lakh laddus in February 2019 and 2020 respectively.

ARJITHA SEVAS, DARSHAN FOR SENIOR CITIZENS IN A PHASED MANNER: TTD

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 5

TTD will resume all darshans in a phased manner, including arjitha sevas and darshan for senior citizens, physically disabled etc., which were stalled since March last year, owing to Covid-19 pandemic.

Arjitha sevas which were stopped since Covid-19 lockdown in March last year, will be revived from April 14 for devotees, who have booked in advance. Covid-19 test certification before three days (72 hours) is a must for the devotees who are taking part in Arjitha Sevas.

TTD is said to be rigor-

● From March 24 to 28, the annual Srivari float festival (Teppotsavams) will be observed in Tirumala

ously working to bring out Astadasa Puranas to the public fore and veteran pundits are working on this project, as part of the Sanatana Dharma Prachara.

TTD is also likely to resume the Ashtakshari Nama audio in the footpath route once the renovation works are completed.

From March 24 to 28, the annual Srivari float festival (Teppotsavams) will be observed in Tirumala in Swami Pushkarini.

IN BRIEF

RAPE SURVIVOR SET ABLAZE IN RAJASTHAN

Jaipur, Mar 5: A 33-year-old rape survivor was set afire in Rajasthan's Hanumangarh district, police said on Friday.

The woman has been admitted to a hospital in Bikaner with serious burn injuries, Golupura Station House Officer (SHO) Omprakash said, adding that Pradeep Vishnoi, who was accused by the woman of raping her in 2018, has been detained for questioning. The incident occurred in the early hours of Thursday.

The victim, who has a daughter, was living with her maternal grandmother following a dispute with her husband, the police said.

A man entered their house premises in the early hours of Thursday, sprinkled kerosene on the floor, knocked on the door and called the woman by her name. As she opened the door, the man dropped a burning stick on the floor, resulting in serious injuries to her, the SHO said.

He said the victim's maternal grandmother has accused Vishnoi of committing the crime and the latter has been detained for questioning.

BRIDE DIES OF HEART ATTACK DURING BIDAAI

AKSHAYA AKUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 5

Marriage celebrations turned into mourning in Odisha's Sonepur district on Friday morning as a newlywed bride collapsed and died after suffering a massive heart attack during the 'bidaai' ceremony.

The bride Gupteswari Sahoo (Rosy), daughter of Murali Sahoo and Menaka of Julunda village, was declared dead by the doctors at the Durguripalli Community Health Centre before admission.

Rosy tied the knot with Bisikesan Pradhan of Tentulu village in a simple ceremony at the bride's parental house on Thursday evening.

On Friday morning when the family members were preparing for the 'bidaai' (bride leaving father's house for in-law's place) ceremony, Rosy who was crying inconsolably, suddenly fainted and collapsed on the ground.

Family members and relatives of the newlywed couple present at the spot tried to wake up Gupteswari by sprinkling water on her face. However, she did not gain consciousness. Subsequently, the bride was rushed to the Durguripalli CHC in a vehicle but the doctors declared her brought dead. The doctors later confirmed that Rosy had died due to cardiac failure.

OVER 16,000 NEW COVID CASES REGISTERED

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

India has registered a cumulative figure of more than 1.9 crore Covid-19 vaccination doses so far and on Friday alone 10.34 lakh vaccine doses were administered.

Out of this, 8.25 lakh beneficiaries were given the first dose while 2.09 lakh health-care and frontline workers received the second dose of the vaccines.

Six states, Maharashtra, Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi, have reported high daily new cases in the last 24 hours, with 84.44% of the new cases coming from these. India on Friday had 16,838 fresh cases and 113 new deaths.



Tamil Nadu Congress Committee president K.S. Alagiri (L), party's election campaign management observer M. Veerappa Moily and AICC in-charge of Tamil Nadu Dinesh Gundu Rao, during the executive committee meeting, at Sathyamurthy Bhavan in Chennai on Friday.

- PTI

DMK-CPI deal done, other allies wait

Coalition partners to be announced at a grand meeting

G BABU JAYAKUMAR & D SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, MARCH 5

The CPI signed a pact to contest in six constituencies for the April 6 State Assembly elections even as the DMK's tough bargaining continued on Friday with the other allies who are keeping their fingers crossed while remaining out of the negotiating table.

Hopes were expressed that all the allies will come around by Saturday as the coalition partners would be announced at a grand public meeting that the DMK is holding near Tiruchy on March 7, when functionaries at all levels would congregate to devise the strategy for the elections, but indications are there that the Congress was not happy with the low number of seats offered to them.

Even the MDMK and the CPM would be considering the proposals of the DMK only after holding meetings with their functionaries and cadre

on Saturday. The series of meeting at the TNCC headquarters remained inconclusive with a tug of war between two groups.

One group in the Congress did not mind the party making a compromise and settling down for a smaller number of seats, while the other group took a belligerent stand, saying that self-respect and honour were more important than winning a few Assembly seats in the elections.

The disenchanted cadre wanted their party to go it alone rather than accept the crumbs thrown at them by the DMK, though they were conscious of the results if the party went alone.

However, TNCC president K S Alagiri and also MDMK general secretary Vaiko put up a brave front saying that the coalition was intact and that the hitches would be ironed out, though many Congress members felt short-changed by the offer of

BJP ANNOUNCES TO CONTEST 92 OUT OF 126 SEATS IN ASSAM

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, MAR. 6

The Bharatiya Janata Party on Friday announced that it will contest the ensuing assembly polls in alliance with Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), and United People's Party (Liberal).

The BJP will contest a total of 92 seats out of 126 seats. AGP will contest from 26 constituencies, UPPL will contest from eight constituencies, and one seat has gone to Rabha Joutho

the DMK.

Soon after signing the pact with the DMK, CPI State secretary R Mutharasan told the media that ideology was more important for his party than the number of seats and hence they agreed to contest in six constituencies.

Mancha but they would be fielding their candidate on BJP's party symbol.

Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal will contest the assembly election from Majauli seat, the BJP said while releasing a list of candidates for two phases of the three-phase election.

Assam health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, a key BJP strategist for the north-east, will contest from Jalukbari, a seat that he currently holds.

As of now, the DMK has allotted two seats to the Manithaneya Makkal Katchi, three to the IUML, six to the VCK and another six to the CPI.

The Kongu Makkal Katchi, the CPM and the Congress are yet to finalise the alliance.

Swapna's 'revelations' put Kerala CM in dock

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAR. 5

The statement filed by Customs Preventive Commissionerate in Kerala High Court disclosing that gold smuggling accused Swapna Suresh has given a confidential statement alleging chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan's involvement in dollar smuggling, has triggered a political storm in the poll bound state.

Sumit Kumar, Commissioner of Customs, informed the court that in the statements recorded under section 164 CrPC and 108 of the Customs Act, Swapna revealed about the involvement of chief minister, speaker of Kerala and three ministers. She alleged that

● THE PRIME accused in gold smuggling case revealed Mr Vijayan's close connections with the previous Consul General of UAE and the 'illegal' monetary transactions.

smuggling of foreign currency was done at the instance of Mr Vijayan and Assembly Speaker P Sreeramakrishnan with the help of the UAE Consulate.

Swapna also revealed Mr Vijayan's close connections with the previous Consul General of UAE and the 'illegal' monetary transactions, Kumar added.

The statement was filed in response to a petition filed by the DG Prisons Kerala, against certain remarks in the order of the Additional CJM (Economic

Offences) Court's on providing security to Swapna who is lodged in Women's Prison, Thiruvananthapuram. The observation in the order will affect the credibility and bonafide of the jail department, argued the state.

The Customs officer said Swapna's statement exposed highly illegal, improper and immoral activities by those occupying high offices. The customs was prepared to produce the copies of the statements before the court in a sealed cover.

The statement said Swapna's apprehensions regarding her safety in jail were totally justified.

"They being high profile politicians and holding high positions in the government are capable of hitting back by all means," it added.

'Owner' of car in Ambani case found dead in Thane

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 5

Amid the demand of the opposition BJP to hand over the investigation into the case of explosives planted near Mukesh Ambani's house Antilia on February 25 to National Investigation Agency (NIA), the Maha Vikas Aghadi government on Friday handed over the enquiry to the state Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS).

Meanwhile, Mansukh Hiren, whose car was found outside Mukesh Ambani's residence in Mumbai, was found dead at Retibunder creek in Thane district. He was missing since Thursday and his kin had registered a missing complaint.

An official of Thane police informed "The body of one Mansukh Hiren whose car was found outside Mukesh Ambani's residence (with gelatin inside it), died by suicide by jumping into Kalwa creek. Accidental Death Report (ADR) registered."

News of his death came within hours after BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis demanded that Hiren be provided police protection. Later, the state home minister informed in the legislative Assembly that Hiren was not the actual owner of the car. "Car's owner was Sam Muten who had given it to Mansukh

Hiren for maintenance of its interior. Hiren had kept the car in his custody when Sam didn't pay for it," he said.

Mr Fadnavis demanded NIA investigation into the case of explosives planted near Reliance Industries chairman's house. However, state home minister Anil Deshmukh rejected the demand saying the state police are competent to investigate it and subsequently in evening, he informed the state Assembly that Maharashtra ATS has been entrusted the responsibility to investigate the case.

Speaking with the reporters on Friday, Mr Deshmukh said that the government has decided to hand over the investigation to the ATS in connection with the case of explosives planted in scorio near Mukesh Ambani's house Antilia on February 25.

Earlier in the afternoon, Mr. Fadnavis expressed his suspicion over API Sachin Vaze's role in the Antilia bomb scare case and therefore, he demanded the probe into it by the NIA. He also raised a question over the several co-incidences pertaining to the presence of Mr Vaze at several places in connection with this case.

He said, "Mr Vaze was the first police officer to reach the spot even before local police. Mr. Vaze also spotted the threat letter."

Mirwaiz Umar not allowed to offer prayers in Srinagar

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, MARCH 5

Angry crowds on Friday held protests at and outside Srinagar's Jama Masjid after the police prevented chief Muslim cleric and separatist leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq from relocating to the historic place of worship to offer prayers and deliver a sermon.

The authorities had on Wednesday announced that the Mirwaiz is no longer in house detention following which the cleric-cum-politician said he would be addressing the Friday congregation at the Grand Mosque, for the first time in 19 months during which he remained under house arrest.

His party activists and supporters had decorated the passage to the mosque and nearby streets by erecting arches and placing emerald fabric crossroads.

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

Jammu and Kashmir was stripped of its special constitutional status and split up into two union territories on August 5, 2019. Most of them have been set free since.

The police used 'mild force' including firing pellet shotgun to disperse a slogan chanting crowd in the outer compound of the Grand Mosque. Though the police said no one was injured, the local sources said that a woman was hit in the action.

The witnesses said that a police officer caught a press photographer by his collar and a policeman hit another with the gun butt on the back, triggering a protest by media persons covering the incidents.

Kashmir Press Club condemned the "assault" on Shafat Farooq and Saqib Majeed, while discharging their professional duties.

It urged the police authorities to "sensitize" their ranks or "it would be assumed that such intimidation, harassment and assaults are meant to stop journalists from doing their duties".

The Mirwaiz later told this correspondent over the phone that police officials visited him late Thursday evening to say he continued

FLIGHT TEST OF SFDR TECHNOLOGY SUCCESSFUL

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BALASORE, MARCH 5

India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on Friday successfully carried out a flight demonstration based on Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) technology from Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur off the coast of Odisha.

The SFDR was fired at around 10.30 am.

"All the subsystems, including the booster motor and nozzle-less motor, performed as expected. During the test, many new technologies were proven, including Solid Fuel based Ducted Ramjet technology," an official release of DRDO said.

Successful demonstration of Solid Fuel based Ducted Ramjet technology has provided DRDO with a technological advantage which will enable it to develop long range air-to-air missiles. At present, such technology is available only with a handful of countries in the world.

During the test, air launch scenario was simulated using a booster motor. Subsequently, the nozzle-less booster accelerated it to the required Mach number for Ramjet operation.

The performance of the missile was monitored using the data captured by Electro Optical, Radar and Telemetry instruments deployed by ITR and confirmed successful demonstration of the mission objectives. Defence minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the scientists of DRDO, Indian Air Force and the Industry on the successful flight test of SFDR.

to be under house detention and won't be allowed to go to the Grand Mosque on Friday.

He said that it was quite in contrast to junior Union Home Minister's recent statement in Parliament that no politician is under house arrest in Kashmir now and also gave lie to the J&K police announcement that "I'm a free man now and can go anywhere."

He said, "Whether under house arrest or free, I would continue to call for resolving the Kashmir dispute as per the wishes and aspirations of its people. The entire world from USA to Russian to China is asking for addressing this issue amicably but India is turning a blind eye on the reality of Kashmir".

The police privately justified the move of imposing curbs on the Mirwaiz and preventing him from relocating to the Grand Mosque. They said that it was done "as a precautionary measure to prevent breach of peace". Earlier during the day, police reinforcements laid siege around the Mirwaiz's residence in Nigeen area and also places vehicles crossing the approach road to prevent him from coming out of his home.

ED summons Mehbooba Mufti for questioning

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, MARCH 5

Former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister and president of People's Democratic Party (PDP), Mehbooba Mufti, has been summoned by Enforcement Directorate (ED) to its headquarters in Delhi for questioning in connection with an alleged money laundering case.

While reacting to it, Ms. Mufti tweeted, "Government of India's tactics to intimidate and browbeat political opponents to make them toe their line has become tediously predictable. They don't want us to raise questions about its punitive actions and policies. Such short sighted scheming won't work".

The ED has asked the former chief minister to present herself before its officials on March 15.

The case in connection

with which she would be questioned was filed by the ED under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) some time ago, reports said.

Earlier this year, J&K police's Criminal Investigation Kashmir (CIK) wing had arrested PDP youth leader Waheed Ur Rehman Parra in connection with an alleged politicians-militants nexus and terror funding case.

This was soon after a special court of National Investigation Agency (NIA) at Jammu had granted him bail in the case which is being probed by it and also ED separately.

The NIA had arrested Mr. Parra on November 25 last year for his alleged "close links" with Kashmiri lawyer Irfan Shafi Mir, who was arrested by the police along with Hizb-ul-Mujahideen commander Syed Naveed Mushtaq alias Naveed Babu, another militant Asif Ahmed Rather

and tainted J&K police officer Davinder Singh in January 2020.

The NIA and J&K police have claimed that Mir had during his interrogation claimed Mr. Parra sought his support during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections for his party candidate Ms. Mufti.

Meanwhile National Conference president and three time chief minister Farooq has challenged the ED's order attaching his six properties worth ₹11.86 crore including his residential houses in twin capitals of Srinagar and Jammu in connection with a probe into alleged scam in Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA) in the high court.

Mr. Abdullah has in his plea said that the properties were either ancestral or acquired before the alleged offence took place and were therefore not involved in any illegal or criminal activity.

SUPREME | ORDER

Amazon Prime India head Aparna Purohit not to be arrested

OTT rules have no teeth, bring law: SC

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

A day after emphasizing on the need to screen the programmes telecast on OTT (Over-The-Top) platforms, the Supreme Court on Friday made light of the recent regulations brought by the government to deal with the OTT and social media platforms, saying that they have "no teeth" but only guidelines and no mechanism to ensure no "objectionable contents" are screened online.

Having chided the government for bringing toothless

regulation to deal with social media and OTT platforms, the top court however, in a breather, granted protection from arrest to OTT platform Amazon Prime India head Aparna Purohit. "We direct that the petitioner (Aparna Purohit) shall not be arrested in FIR No. 14/2021 subject to her co-operation with the investigation. She shall appear before the Investigating Officer as and when required," the court ordered.

Purohit had approached the top court for anticipatory bail in connection with

the FIRs registered against her over the controversial 9-part web series Tandav that was released on the internet in January.

Earlier her plea for anticipatory bail was rejected by Allahabad High Court.

A bench comprising Justice Ashok Bhushan and Justice R Subhash Reddy, which had sought the regulations framed on February 25, for its perusal, said, "We went through the Technology intermediary guidelines. But there is no teeth. No power of prosecution. These are just guidelines. No mechanism to

control it. Without legislation you cannot control it."

Taking a dim view of the effectiveness of the regulations brought to regulate social media and OTT platforms, the court asked the government to consider bringing some law that regulate the platforms.

Noting that one of the issues that have cropped up before the court was that of "control and regulation of platform on which web-series are released", the court in its order today said that the perusal of Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines

and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, that were brought by the government on February 25 2021, indicate that "the Rules are more and more in the form of guidelines and have no effective mechanism for either screening or taking appropriate action for those who violates the guidelines."

Put on defensive, Solicitor General said that the government will "consider and take appropriate steps for regulation or legislation as may be found fit" and the same shall be placed before the Court.



SHORT TAKES

TURKEY BLAMES WEATHER FOR CHOPPER CRASH

Istanbul: Turkey's defence minister on Friday blamed bad weather for a military helicopter crash that killed 10 soldiers and a senior commander in the country's restive south-east.

Lieutenant General Osman Erbas, who headed the army's 8th Corps based in the eastern Elazig province, was among those killed in Thursday's accident. The crash was the deadliest since 13 soldiers died in the southeastern Sirtak province near Turkey's border with Syria and Iraq in 2017.

"Based on initial information and witnesses' statements, we determined that the accident occurred due to suddenly changing adverse weather conditions," the Anadolu state news agency quoted Defence Minister Hulusi Akara as saying. Akara and Interior Minister Suleyman Soyulu took teams of senior military figures to the crash site in the southeastern Bitlis province on Thursday.

Defence officials said a formal investigation into the incident had been launched.

The European Union and the United States immediately offered their condolences to the NATO ally. A Turkish diplomatic source said NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also expressed his support in a telephone call with Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.

ISRAEL BOOSTS PLANS FOR IRAN ATTACK

Tel Aviv: Israel's defense minister said his country is upgrading contingency plans to strike Iranian targets if Tehran shows signs of nuclear escalation, the latest sign of rising tensions between the two archenemies.

Benny Gantz told the American cable network *Fox News* that Israel is still working on its plans, but that "we have them in our hands of course." His comments came as President Joe Biden considers re-joining a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers to limit Iran's nuclear program, with some changes to toughen curbs on Tehran's activities. Former President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the atomic accord in 2018 and imposed a so-called campaign of maximum pressure, including sanctions, on Tehran.

Since then, Iran has stepped up uranium enrichment. The U.N. atomic watchdog agency said earlier this week that Iran nearly tripled its stockpile of enriched uranium since November in violation of its deal with world powers. Iran and the Biden administration are deadlocked over how to revive the deal, with Tehran demanding an immediate lifting of sanctions and the U.S. calling on Iran to first return to full compliance with the restrictions of the nuclear agreement.

CHINA HIKES DEFENCE BUDGET TO \$209 BILLION

Beijing: China on Friday hiked its defence budget for the first time to more than \$200 billion, over three times higher than that of India, maintaining a single-digit growth for the sixth consecutive year with a 6.8 per cent increase in 2021.

The hike in defence spending was announced by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on the opening day of the National People's Congress, China's Parliament, amidst a military standoff with India in eastern Ladakh and growing political and military tensions with the United States. This year's planned defence spending will be about 1.35 trillion yuan (about \$209 billion), state-run *Xinhua* news agency reported, adding that the annual defence budget maintains a single-digit growth for a sixth consecutive year.

China's defence budget is about one quarter of the US figure, which is \$740.5 billion for the 2021 fiscal year, it said. Friday's increase is over three times higher than India's defence budget of about \$65.7 billion (including pensions). Last year, China allocated 1.268 trillion yuan (about \$196.44 billion), according to the state-run *Global Times*.

In his 35-page work report outlining China's achievements in 2020 and tasks for 2021, premier Li described last year as a "major success" for the armed forces without mentioning China moving over 60,000 well-armed troops who were mobilised for annual exercises.

Pope's historic Iraq trip



An Iraqi girl in a traditional dress offers Pope Francis a bouquet of flowers at Baghdad airport upon his arrival on Friday. Pope Francis is honouring the victims of one of Iraq's most brutal massacres of Christians by Islamic militants by saying their deaths are a reminder that violence is incompatible with religious teaching. — AFP

China claims veto over HK lawmakers

Beijing, March. 5: China moved on Friday to grant itself veto powers over selecting Hong Kong's lawmakers, part of a campaign to eliminate dissent and ensure a "patriotic" government in the city following huge democracy rallies in 2019.

Legislation to allow China's communist rulers to vet all election candidates in Hong Kong was tabled at the opening of the nation's rubber-stamp parliament in Beijing.

It came a day after dozens of democracy campaigners in the financial hub — including former lawmakers — were jailed under a security law that was passed during last year's parliamentary session.

● **THE INTRODUCTION of the vetting legislation — expected to be approved next week — was quickly interpreted as one of the final nails in the coffin of Hong Kong's democracy movement.**

The new legislation includes a "qualification vetting system" that will promote "orderly political participation", parliamentary spokesman Wang Chen told reporters.

China had committed to giving Hong Kong a degree of autonomy when it reverted from British colonial rule in 1997.

But it began moving quickly to dismantle the financial hub's democrat-

ic pillars in response to huge and sometimes violent democracy rallies that paralysed the city throughout 2019.

The introduction of the vetting legislation — expected to be approved next week — was quickly interpreted as one of the final nails in the coffin of Hong Kong's democracy movement. "If the measures are passed, as I'm sure they will be, then the voice of the opposition will be effectively silenced," said Willie Lam, China analyst at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

"This will effectively wipe out any remaining opposition." The measure had been widely expected with Beijing officials stat-

ing in the lead-up that only "staunch patriots" — those loyal to the Communist Party — should be involved in governing Hong Kong.

But the proposed rules drew swift condemnation from the European Union, which warned that it may expand existing sanctions on exports to China if the situation worsens.

"The EU calls on the authorities in Beijing to carefully consider the political and economic implications of any decision to reform the electoral system of Hong Kong that would undermine fundamental freedoms, political pluralism and democratic principles," an EU spokesperson said. — AFP

CAPITOL POLICE CHIEF APPEALS FOR NATIONAL GUARD TO STAY

Washington, March 5: Worried about continuing threats, the acting chief of the US Capitol Police has appealed to congressional leaders to use their influence to keep National Guard troops at the Capitol, two months after the law enforcement breakdowns of the deadly January 6 insurrection.

Yogananda Pittman told the leaders on Thursday that the board that oversees her department has so far declined to extend an emergency declaration required by the Pentagon to keep Guardsmen who have assisted Capitol officers since the riot.

Pittman said she needed the leaders' assistance with the three-member Capitol Police Board, which reports to them. She said the board has sent her a list of actions it wants her to implement, though she said it was unclear whether the points were orders or just recommendations.

The letter underscored the confusion over how best to secure the Capitol after a dismal lack of protection in January and biting criticism for law enforcement's handling of the invasion. — AP

One shot dead in Myanmar

Yangon, March 5: A protester was shot dead in Myanmar on Friday, in the latest round of blood-letting at anti-coup demonstrations as the UN Security Council prepared to meet on the escalating crisis.

Despite an increasingly brutal crackdown by the military authorities that has seen more than 50 people killed, protesters took to the streets again in towns around the country to denounce the February 1 coup.

The violence has brought condemnation from around the world, with the UN rights chief

demanding the junta "stop murdering and jailing protesters", and the Security Council is set to discuss the crisis later Friday.

But despite the mounting international pressure, the generals have shown no signs of heeding calls for restraint.

In Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest city, hundreds of engineers took to the streets crying "Free our leader" in reference to ousted State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, detained by the military since the first night of the coup. A 26-year-old man helping at barriers set up

in the city to slow security forces died after being shot in the neck, medical officials said.

The killing follows the deadliest day of the crackdown so far on Wednesday, when the UN said at least 38 people were killed as graphic images showed security forces firing into crowds and bloodied bodies dragged away.

There were also protests Friday in the central town of Bago and the San Chaung district of the commercial capital Yangon — a hotspot for rallies — where groups of demonstrators sang a song of defiance. — AFP

Huge quake sparks Pacific-wide tsunami alert

Wellington, March 5: Tens of thousands of coastal residents in New Zealand, New Caledonia and Vanuatu fled for higher ground on Friday as a cluster of powerful earthquakes sparked a Pacific-wide tsunami alert.

Warning sirens sounded across Noumea as authorities ordered evacuations amid fears that waves of up three metres (10 feet) were headed towards the French territory.

"People must leave beach areas and stop all water activities, and should not pick their children up at schools to avoid creating traffic jams," emergency services spokesman Alexandre Rosignol told public radio.

In New Zealand, communities along stretches of the North Island were warned to flee as tsunami alert sirens wailed after an 8.1-magnitude quake, which followed earlier tremors in the same region measuring 7.4 and 7.3. "Do not stay at home," the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) said.

"People near the coast... must move immediately to the nearest high ground, out of all tsunami evacuation zones, or as far inland as possible." The largest of the quakes struck around 1,000 kilometres (640 miles) off the New Zealand coast at 8:28 am (1928 Thursday GMT), the US Geological Survey said.



A man looks out onto a beach following a tsunami warning in Orewa, north of Auckland, on Friday. — AFP

It was preceded by two seismic jolts that were also enormously powerful, in an unusually strong cluster even for the Pacific

Prez Biden pats Indo-Americans

Appoints over 55, says they are taking over US

Washington, March 5: Indian-Americans are "taking over the country", US President Joe Biden said on Thursday, referring to the large number of "incredible" professionals from the community holding key positions in his administration.

In less than 50 days of his presidency, Biden has appointed at least 55 Indian-Americans to key leadership positions in his administration ranging from his speech writer to the Nasa, to almost every wing of the government.

"Indian of descent Americans are taking over the country: you Dr Swati Mohan; my Vice President (Kamala Harris); my speech writer, Vinay (Reddy). I tell you what. But thank you. You guys are incredible," President Biden said during a virtual interaction with scientists at Nasa who were involved in the historic landing of Perseverance rover on Mars on February 18.

Indian-American scientist Swati Mohan leads the guidance, navigation, and control operations of Nasa's Mars 2020 mission.

Biden, who was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States on January 20, has created history by appointing at least 55 Indian-Americans to key positions in his administration.

This does not include Vice President Harris,

which is an elected position, and Neera Tanden, who a day earlier withdrew her nomination from the position of Director of White House Office of Management and Budget.

Nearly half of them are women and a sizable number of them are working in the White House. So far, the Obama-Biden administration (2009-2017) has the distinction of appointing the largest number of Indian-Americans in any administration, the previous Donald Trump administration was not lagging far behind as it appointed the first ever Indian-American with a cabinet rank and inside the National Security Council.

The Biden administration has for the first time appointed such a large number of Indian-Americans in the first 50 days of his administration. This past week, Dr. Vivek Murthy testified before a Senate Committee for US Surgeon General and Vanita Gupta is all set to appear for her confirmation hearing for Associate Attorney General Department of Justice.

"It is impressive to see how many Indian-Americans were ready to go into public service. There have been so many additions since we launched our Government Leaders list last month on Presidents' Day. I am so proud to see our community is going from

strength to strength!," eminent Indian-American philanthropist and Indiaspora founder M. Ranganaswami said.

While the community is disappointed that Tanden had to withdraw her nomination because of stiff opposition from the Republicans, Indian-American women have reached a new height in the Biden administration. Biden sought to speak with Swati Mohan, Guidance and Controls Operations Lead, Mars 2020. She is not a political appointee though.

Indian-American women appointed by Biden include Uzra Zeya, Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, State Department; Mala Adiga: Policy Director to Dr Jill Biden; Aisha Shah: Partnership Manager, White House Office of Digital Strategy; Sameera Fazili, Deputy Director, US National Economic Council (NEC); Sumona Guha: Senior Director for South Asia at the National Security Council, White House; and Sabrina Singh: Deputy Press Secretary, Vice President White House.

Shanthi Kalathil has been appointed as Coordinator for Democracy and Human Rights, National Security Council, White House; Garima Verma has been named as Digital Director of the Office of the First Lady and others. — PTI

Spain's king seeks to steady crown

Madrid, March 5: Families are frequently a source of embarrassment, but the recent troubles caused by Spanish King Felipe VI's relatives belong to an entirely different realm.

From expedited Covid vaccinations to tax offences and shady financial dealings by family members, Felipe has found himself in a royal mess sabotaging his efforts to clean up the image of Spain's scandal-tainted monarchy.

It has in some ways left him tilting at windmills. Earlier controversies led to him cutting off his own father's allowance, among other steps, but now more may be on the way as he seeks to balance family concerns

with understandable outrage in Spain.

Last week his father, former king Juan Carlos, announced he had settled debt of nearly 4.4 million euros (\$5.3 million) with the Spanish tax office due on the value of previously undeclared private jet flights paid by a foundation based in Liechtenstein.

It was the second such tax settlement in less than three months for Juan Carlos, who went into self-exile in the United Arab Emirates in August as questions mounted over the origins of his fortune.

The former king is the target of three separate probes into his financial dealings. — AFP

US RECORDS FEWER COVID CASES IN FIVE MONTHS

Washington, March 5: The United States recorded fewer than 40,000 new daily cases of Covid-19 for the first time in five months on Thursday, a piece of promising news as countries across the globe struggle to hold off another infection surge before inoculations become widespread.

With frustration over restrictions having long weighed on populations worldwide, leaders were seeking to balance demands for easing rules while not unleashing another explosion in cases.

In the United States, the world's hardest-hit country, the number of daily cases peaked at nearly 3,00,000 in early January following the Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's holidays.

With cases declining and vaccines rolling out, several US states have begun jettisoning mask-wearing rules — much to the chagrin of President Joe Biden, who called the move "Neanderthal thinking." While his administration says its promise to vaccinate 100 million people in its first 100 days is ahead of schedule, Europe is facing heavy criticism over delays in its inoculation campaign.

The EU drug watchdog said Thursday it had started a "rolling review" of the Sputnik V shot, meaning Russian Coronavirus vaccines could soon be doled out across Europe. — AFP

FILM | FEST

Germany's Maren Eggert wins first 'Gender Neutral' award for her role in 'I'm Your Man'

'Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn' takes the Golden Bear

SUPARNA SHARMA | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

Berlinale, or the Berlin International Film Festival, is considered the most political of Europe's Big 3 (Cannes, Venice and Berlin), and on Friday it again burnished its



reputation by handing over the festival's top award, the Golden Bear, to Romanian writer-director Radu Jude's film, *Bad Luck Banging or Loony*

Porn. The film, which opens with a naughty, kinky pornographic scene, is a dark, funny, disturbing autopsy of a nation that is living in haughty denial of its past while embracing prejudice and bigotry with smug sanctimony.

Celebrating the film's "rare and essential quality of a lasting art work," the six-member jury said in a statement that *Loony Porn* "captures on screen the very content and essence, the mind and body, the values and the raw flesh of



A movie still from *I'm Your Man*.

our present moment in time. Of this very moment of human existence." The Silver Bear for Best

Director went to Dénes Nagy for the Hungarian World War II drama, *Natural Light*. Calling it

"appalling and beautifully shot", the jury said the film was "a portrait of war in which the observant gaze of the director reminds us again of the need to choose between passivity and taking individual responsibility."

German actor Maren Eggert won the first ever gender-neutral Silver Bear Best Performance award (replacing best actor and actress prizes) for her leading role in Maria Schrader's *I'm Your Man*. In the film Eggert plays Alma, a scientist at the

famous Pergamon Museum in Berlin. To get a research fund, she accepts an offer to participate in a bizarre experiment. For three weeks Alma has to live with a rather handsome humanoid robot, Tom (Dan Stevens), who is programmed as her perfect life partner.

If she has a shot at a successful, happy relationship, she is told that it is with Tom, a sum total of Alma-specific algorithms. He can romance, do the dishes, and will always be available for exhilarating

sex. Shot in beautiful Berlin, *I'm Your Man* is about the pursuit of happiness and explores how far humans will go to find love.

Every year the Golden and Silver Bears are handed out at a glitzy ceremony at the 1,600-seater Berlinale Palast theatre. But for this year's 71st edition of the festival, which was truncated and online-only, the trophies will be presented in person, in June, when organisers hope to invite stars for red carpet events and screen films for the public.

DECCAN Chronicle

6 MARCH 2021

To draw votes, Khattar's quota sacrifices growth

The move by the Haryana government to force the private sector to reserve 75 per cent jobs in their establishment for the people of the state is a regressive move. It also appears to be unconstitutional since our Constitution does not discriminate on the ground of place of birth. The decision of the Manohar Lal Khattar government announced last Tuesday is, in fact, shot through with political cynicism.

The ongoing farmers' agitation, which has had a special impact in some northern regions, including Haryana, has left the Khattar government reeling and the so-called "sons-of-the-soil" policy seems a desperate bid to recover some lost ground. Needless to say, it militates against the very thought of "Ek Bharat, Shresth Bharat" which Prime Minister Narendra Modi injects into his speeches on a frequent basis.

The Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act 2020 requires companies and other private entities — including trusts and societies — that have more than 10 employees to reserve three-fourths of all jobs where salaries will be below Rs 50,000/- per month for residents of the state or domiciles of Haryana. This is far from being a welfare move as it does not even pretend to efface inequity. But even if it did so, it will be open to questioning. The basic reason is that such a step impinges on the right of individuals or a group of individuals to choose their business and profession in an open society.

Needless to say, it militates against the very thought of 'Ek Bharat, Shresth Bharat' which Prime Minister Narendra Modi injects into his speeches on a frequent basis

If the government forces companies to take steps that may impact employee productivity, then it forces companies to be less than competitive. That goes against the grain of capitalist development. The idea of positive discrimination in a sociologically iniquitous context is for the state to promote through education and employment policies by enlarging opportunity following on appropriate investments, and not to be thrust down the gullet of private players. Obliging the non-government sector to enter the realm of states is a step in the wrong direction as it undermines the legitimacy of the state.

If all states were to follow suit, the mobility of labour and the freedom of Indians to compete anywhere in the country in search of work will be comprehensively stymied as one state will become like another country to other states, requiring work permits and visas. The people of Haryana, too, will be barred from working in other states. The dangerous principle on which such moves rest will also make a mockery of all-India services since India will cease to be common territory for the purpose of employment. If the idea is extended to the field of education, and other sectors, then we may conceivably be looking at the vivisection of India.

Andhra Pradesh has mandated 75 per cent reservation for locals and Karnataka seems to be contemplating quotas for locals in blue collar jobs. The AP Bill has been challenged in the High Court. It is time for the constitutionality of the matter to be settled by the Supreme Court. Caste and class are bad enough to divide society and the country. Motivated moves to catch votes by insecure political parties are something we can do without.

Spectrum auction a failure?

The department of telecommunications (DoT) has recently completed yet another auction of radio spectrum or airwaves that raked in ₹77,800 crore. The government dubbed the auction successful claiming that it had raised more money than it had expected on account of uncertainties created by the Covid pandemic and the general financial situation of the telecom sector. However, as always there are varied opinions about spectrum pricing.

Citing the phenomenally higher base price of ₹3,92,000 crore that the government set for the auction, some experts claim that the spectrum auction is a failure as it managed to fetch merely one-fifth of its reserve price. Out of 2,308.8 megahertz airwaves that were on offer, just a little more than one-third — 855.6 MHz — was purchased. The bidders have once again shunned more efficient 700 MHz, which could have helped them to address network issues, because of its prohibitive reserve price.

Ever since the 2010 3G spectrum auction that fetched a fantastic amount for the government because of the shortage of airwaves and bullish outlook of telecom companies, the government has been fixated only on the ways to milk the telecom sector. Precisely this attitude has got several telecom companies shut down and made others sit on mountains of debt.

Though there has been a rapid adoption of 4G networks in India, around 45 per cent of Indian mobile customers continue to use 2G networks. It is high time that the government rationalises the reserve price of airwaves for the auction or finds out another mechanism unfettered by the controversies created by the 2G spectrum sale during the UPA regime. The government should have a relook at the national telecom policy guided by the interests of the country's development, and the financial health of the telecom sector and its lenders.

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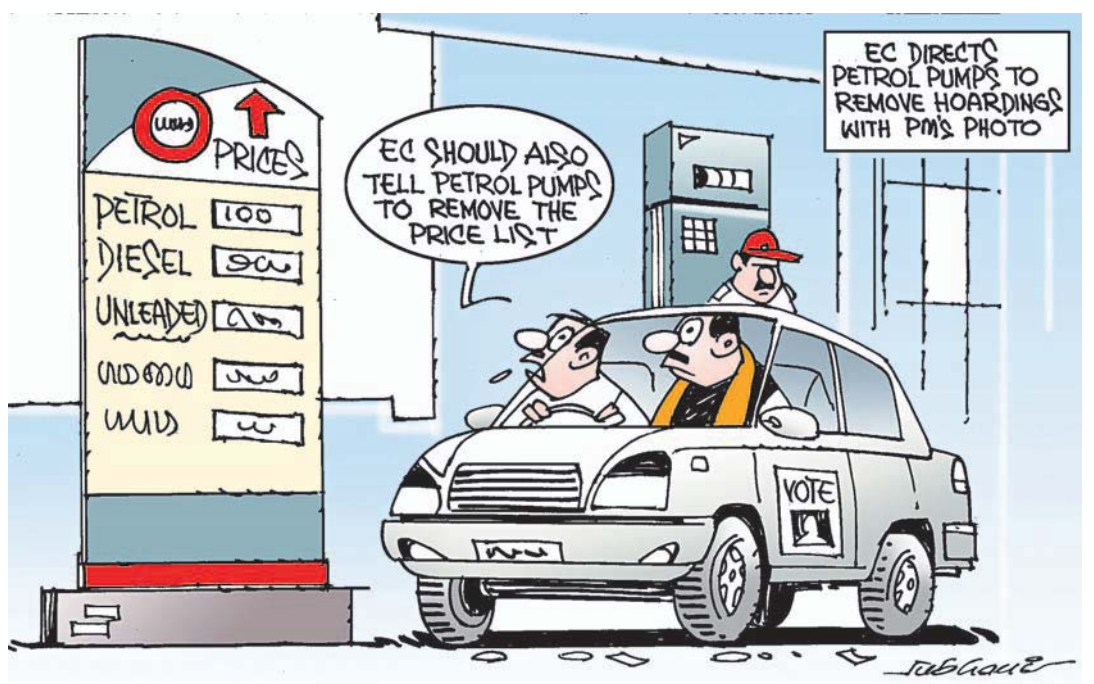
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Subhani



I've vaxxed... Have you? 'Jab' as a status symbol



Shobhaa De

Everyone, but everyone, has been "vaxxing" eloquent since March 1. The "Jab" has become the biggest status symbol of the season. If you have taken the shot before anybody else in your circle — your *bhav* goes up instantly! The moment you roll up your sleeve and flash a victory smile for the camera, you feel that you have arrived! You start working the cellphone and messaging all the groups you are on, to brag that you've done it! Scored! Sure enough, half a dozen others will text back in a flash — "Oh... we got ours earlier!"

Our beloved leader — *arrey baba*, why are you acting thick and asking, "Which one?" ... There is only one beloved leader in our vast country, get it? Anyway, we were most impressed to note Prime Minister Narendra Modi had opted for the "Made in India" vaccine (Covaxin, indigenously developed by Bharat Biotech). It established his "Atma Nirbhar" convictions and sent out a powerful message to the watching world. Good move. Well played! Besides, by opting for the Dr Krishna Ella-led Covaxin, the PM boosted the image and confidence of the makers and became the ninth world leader to get the jab, which was administered at New Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences by nurse P. Niveda from Pudu-cherry. Adar Poona-wala, the dynamic CEO of the Serum Institute of India (the makers of Covishield, the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine)

was quick to congratulate the Prime Minister, in a generously worded tweet which was widely appreciated by the pharma industry. Soon after, Adar's fetching and gorgeous wife Natasha (who could give many movie stars a run for their money), posted a yummy picture of herself getting "vaxxed". She was, as always, impeccably dressed for the important occasion, in pristine white.

A close friend came back from a public hospital after the deed was done. She was in a euphoric state, as she recounted the super-efficient procedure at Mumbai's Sion Hospital, which was handling the huge number of vaccination seekers very briskly. I asked her for the historic "vaxxie" (selfie while taking the vaccine), and she sheepishly confessed that she didn't click one! I was surprised, given her vast following on Instagram — no pic of a bared arm! *Hai!* Wasted photo-op! Look at how aggressively some veteran cricketers and other semi-famous folks have been publicising their jabs! The only thing missing in the pics is a winner's cup. Or a medal. People are so focused on beating everyone else to the shot, we have happily forgotten minor irritations like petrol prices zooming to a hundred bucks a litre. Or key Assembly elections that are taking place in five states/UTs, with all eyes on West Bengal, where, for the moment, Mamata Didi seems to be having an edge — despite her crazy stunts and tantrums. The sight of her being carried down the street astride a

two-wheeler was almost as hilarious as the sight of Rahul Gandhi jumping into the sea for a quick swim with Kerala fisherfolk! Both performed stunts for the cameras — but Rahul looked cuter — sorry Didi! The things that politicians do! Now if only someone could persuade Priyanka Gandhi Vadra to take the plunge into shark-infested waters, voters would instantly perk up and take more interest in the outcome of the state elections.

We are waiting for the Sonia jab. Unless, of course, she has already taken it, *chhup chaap se!* Given the severe style of her saree blouses, with fitted, elbow-touching sleeves, we are curious to know how exactly the jab will be administered, when and where. This whole jab thingie has developed an independent life of its own, with people obsessing over their own vaccination schedule and even more so about which stranger will get it next and be in the news for beating rivals to it. Such a silly race of one upmanship, na? But soooooo entertaining!

Meanwhile, Bollywood is all a-flutter dealing with the income tax raids on handpicked filmwallahs. Don't be silly! They are not being targeted for speaking up on the farmers' protests and other national issues even if 90 per cent of Indians have a problem with the same issues! Bollywood is not being targeted or har-

Anyway, we were most impressed to note Prime Minister Narendra Modi had opted for the 'Made in India' vaccine'. It established his 'Atma Nirbhar' convictions and sent out a powerful message to the watching world

assed, okay? That is just an assumption. Didn't you read what the good minister had to say about the raids? He assured everybody that these were routine raids on movie people who had been on the radar of the agencies for months. Tax evasion is a serious concern! They must be investigated and punished in case they have failed in their duty to pay up — that's called cheating the exchequer. Naughty! Prakash Javadekar, the information and broadcasting minister, thundered: "This is too much! Probe agencies undertake investigations based on credible information and the matter later goes to the courts as well."

Egg-xactly! Anurag Kashyap and Taapsee Pannu should rest assured that they are not being victimised for their political views, theek hai? 20 crore *ka* tax evasion is no joke! As for the much bigger economic offenders who may have evaded 200 crores in taxes and have not been subjected to raids — do keep up the good work of being loyal spokespeople. The cutlery tray in India never falls short of *chamchas*, that's for sure. Besides, raids on movie people receive the sort of publicity for our agencies that most marketing gurus would compute at millions of rupees worth of prime-time coverage. Why not maximise the publicity value of the great work done by these wonderful people by thoroughly probing the tax returns of the Anurag-Taapsee type of people? Which type? Don't act dumb, *yaar*. Meaning, high-profile, well-known showbiz names. Of course, there are many others on the list — but *aaram se!* No hurry. This is just the trailer, *bhai*. Picture *abhi baaki hai*.

Readers can send feedback to www.shobhaade.blogspot.com

LETTERS

MIXED ECONOMY

The privatisation of industries can bring efficiency but can it stop over-exploitation, unemployment, redtapism, crony capitalism? The motive of any private organisation is restricted towards earning profits but the government's aim is social welfare. Hence, a hence mixed economic system is suitable to our country where an public sector industry can be role models for private industries, as VSP is..

**Ratnaraj Jain
Rajamahendravaram**

BJP'S SMART MOVE

The BJP rarely names its chief ministerial face before state elections (*Metroman Sreedharan made BJP CM face for Kerala polls, March 5*). The party did a flip-flop on E. Sreedharan but by inducting him, the BJP has put pressure on ruling CPI(M) and the Congress. The man behind Konkan Railways and Delhi Metro has an impeccable record as an able administrator.

**Sajid Farooq
Kurnool**

JUNK SEDITION LAW

The apex court deserves applause for brushing off the sedition petition against Jammu and Kashmir former chief minister Farooq Abdullah (*Dissent not sedition: SC sends gout clear signal, March 5*). The SC has laid down the norm and it is time to strike out the colonial era law. The government must that its image does not get sullied by the police or vigilante groups.

**Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam**

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Heavy casualties in East Pak

DACCA, (EAST PAKISTAN) MARCH. 6

An East Pakistan political leader said here that reports of thousands of casualties were pouring in from different parts of East Pakistan in the current political crisis.

Meanwhile, President Yahya Khan in a move aimed at ending political chaos in Pakistan announced today the National assembly will on March 25 to draft a new Constitution.

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"If reality is a reflection. Don't smash the mirror in a rage. If reality is just a fiction, Don't rip up the offending page. If reality is a nightmare. Ride the white horse into the dawn. If reality is a game of chess. Face the fact — Oh sacrificial pawn!"

— From *Bachchoo's Bickerings*

Of 'patriotism' & 'nationalism': It may be time to do a rethink

Some decades ago, Norman Tebbit, a former pilot turned politician (just like our own Rajiv Gandhi?) and a minister in Margaret Thatcher's government, devised what became known as the "Tebbit test". It wasn't put to any practical or political use but was at the time accepted as a measure of British patriotism applied to its ethnic population.

The test was an observation of who was cheering which team when the MCC, or now England, were playing a game of cricket against the West Indies, Pakistan, India or Bangladesh. If you were of Pakistani ancestry living in Bradford or Huddersfield, even if you, and perhaps even your parents, had been born and brought up in Britain,

would you cheer for the Pakistani XI or for the British team?

The Tebbit test was never passed into law — unlike the strictures that today's home secretary, Pritti "Clueless" Patel, has introduced about measuring earning capacity and only admitting those in the upper brackets, banning those whose potential earnings would classify them as "hoi polloi" (I am sure Clueless doesn't use the Latin term!). Tebbit's test was simply a conduit for antagonism.

I confess that I pass and fail the Tebbit test regularly. In the recent series of Test matches between India and England, I was all for Joe Root's team in the first Test, when "we" were winning, and then switched allegiance in the second and third, with patriotic support for Virat Kohli's team and achievement. No, gentle reader, in democratic Britain, this admission can't lead to Clueless sending M15 to knock at my door at dawn.

The Tebbit test is basically moronic. Cricket isn't war, it's just a game and those blue-blooded British who place a bet on India winning the latest Test have used their judgment of bowling and batting, rather than

betrayed their country by making money through its defeats.

And yet the idea of patriotism, in the wake of the assault by American "patriots" on their own legislature, and in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, can perhaps do with some examination, or at least discussion. The arguments for so doing are, forgive me, not rocket science — though I've found dealing with rockets quite easy to master when I light them placed in empty wine bottles and turn them away from gathered family and friends each Diwali.

Were the neo-Nazis who attacked the Capitol in Washington really "patriots"? Other columnists have been examining the word, perhaps for the same reasons that I feel impelled to. I publicly admit, gentle reader, to being a regular subscriber to a right-wing British magazine called *The Spectator*. Its columnists and editorials are always vitriolic against something they call "the left" — a label they affix to anything that the writers disagree with. Some of their columnists, with one token exception, are apologists for disastrous Brexit; many of them for Donald Trump when he was in power and some plainly eccentric. One of

their columnists, who in recent issues has been an ardent opponent of the UK government's "lockdown", is called Lionel Shriver. I believe that she is a novelist of sorts and won a prize for a book called something like — I'm sorry, memory fails — "We must ask Johnny why he killed his classmates". Her arguments against lockdown said she was in possession of research which showed that lockdowns didn't work. I would have written a letter to the magazine pointing out that they didn't work because idiots didn't obey the lockdown and gathered together at every opportunity and spread the wretched disease. They wouldn't have printed it.

I've picked on this particular columnist and this particular foolishness because last week Ms Shriver quotes Webster's dictionary to contend that patriotism and nationalism used to be interchangeable until, surprise, surprise, the villainous, shadowy left "hived off" the definition of patriotism to distinguish it from nationalism. "Patriots" can advocate open borders. While 'nationalists' are selfish bigots who throw children in cages. Putting a neo-Nazi stink on the word 'nationalists' also puts a stink on the desire

for more effective border control." Ms Shriver, an American immigrant herself, wants to use dodgy semantics to slam the door behind her. *Hypocrite lecturer, ma semblable, ma souer!*

Perhaps Ms Shriver has never read George Orwell and ought to. Here's his definition of 'nationalist': "The nationalist does not go on the principle of simply ganging up with the strongest side. Nationalism is power hunger tempered by self-deception. Every nationalist is capable of the most flagrant dishonesty, but he is also unshakably certain of being in the right."

Ms Shriver should also note that the patriots who attacked the Capitol were neo-Nazis, some of them wearing printed T-shirts saying 6MNE — "Six million not enough"! They were there in support of Mr Trump who was, like her, an ardent advocate of "effective border control".

In any democratic country today, patriotism ought to mean love for and loyalty to a country that defines itself, as did the exemplary founders of Independent India, as one with cast-iron guarantees of freedom of speech and social and political equality for all.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50405.32	-0.87
Nifty 50	14938.10	-0.95
S&P 500*	3,766.64	-0.05
Dollar (₹)	73.02	-0.24
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.00	0.44
Euro (₹)	87.00	0.71
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	43,887.522	1.18
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.79	3.07
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.232	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.608	0.058

* As of 8:30 PM IST

IT sector sales up 5.2% in Q3: RBI data

The IT sector remained in positive terrain throughout the pandemic period and the sector's sales rose by 5.2 per cent YoY in the December 2020-21 quarter, according to RBI data, drawn from quarterly results of 2,692 listed non-government non-financial (NGNF) companies. Sales of 1,685 manufacturing firms expanded by 7.4 per cent YoY in the December quarter after contracting in the preceding six quarters.

Blackstone in talks for minority stake in Sify



Blackstone Group Inc is in exclusive talks to acquire a minority stake in India's Sify Technologies Ltd, Bloomberg reported citing sources. The communications infrastructure firm has sought a valuation of around \$1 billion to \$1.2 billion for the transaction. Sify, led by chairman Raju Vegesna and CEO Kamal Nath, owns data centres and India's largest multiprotocol label switching, or MPLS, network.

SBI Payments offers contactless transactions

SBI Payments and the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) have joined hands to launch RuPay SoftPoS that will enable merchants to make contactless transactions of up to Rs 5,000 through their smart phones. The solution has the capability to transform NFC (near field communication) enabled smartphones into merchant Point-of-Sale (PoS) terminals for retailers, a joint release said.

Laurus dips 4% after promoters sell 1.3% holding

Shares of Laurus Labs Ltd fell over 4 per cent after two promoters offloaded the company's shares. On the BSE, the scrip ended at Rs 351.3, down 4.63 per cent. In a regulatory filing on Thursday, Laurus Labs said Dr Satyanarayana Chava, founder promoter, CEO & ED, sold 52 lakh equity shares worth Rs 191.67 crore and Mrs Nagarani Chava, one of the promoters, sold shares worth Rs 66.04 crore.



■ Metal cheaper by ₹1,200/gm from Aug. high Customers wait for gold to bottom out

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 5

With the gold price having fallen Rs 12,000 per 10 gm from their record-high levels in August, the bullion channel is stocking up physical gold for customers who are waiting for some stability in prices to make purchases.

India had seen gold jewellery demand falling to a multi-year low of 315 tonnes in 2020. The first three quarters of the calendar year was a wash-out in terms of gold demand.

However, the pent-up demand is likely to trigger buying with the supportive movement in prices. Gold prices have dropped to Rs 44,280 per 10 gm in the Multi Commodity Exchange from the highs of Rs 56,590 in August—losing more than Rs 12,000 per 10 gm.

The correction has led to some improvement in demand, but not yet at the customer level. The gold channels have been stocking up the yellow metal expecting the demand to rise once the wedding season starts and vaccination picks up. 'This has been evident from the gold import figures.

Gold imports had risen 72 per cent in volume terms and 154 per cent in value terms in January. As per the latest trade figures, gold imports are up 124 per cent in value terms in February as well. "Gold imports in 2020 had fallen substantially as the channel was blocked



due to the lockdown. In the past few months there has been some re-stocking happening within the channel for replenishment purposes," said Ashish Petha, chairman of the All-India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council. Further, the channel had stayed away from replenishment of stocks at higher price levels.

According to Petha, investment demand is still robust while jewellery demand is yet to pick up. Investment demand had in fact started picking up in the fourth quarter of 2020 when the consumption was up by 8 per cent compared to Q4 2019.

According to Amit Bhandari, founder of Tezbid.com, for investors the recent downturn in prices offers a good entry point, preferably with a long holding period.

"Inflation is expected to be higher going forward and gold offers a good hedge against rising prices—the speculation

on bitcoin is a good example of the kind of froth/asset bubbles building up in financial markets. Some allocation to gold is prudent," said Bhandari.

However, jewellery buyers are still waiting for the right time. "Jewellery customers are still in a wait-and-watch mode and are looking for stability in prices. Once prices stabilise, demand will pick up. Further, festivals like Gudi Padwa and Akshaya Tritiya are coming up and the wedding season too will start soon. This year, we might see more number of weddings happening. Hence the demand is expected to recover to 2019 levels," said Petha.

"The buoyancy in the market is tangible. People are waiting and watching with the intent to buy. The duty cut and gold price fall are favourable factors for buying," said Somasundaram PR., managing director, World Gold Council India.

IndiGrid to acquire NER II from Sterlite Power for ₹4,625 crore

New Delhi, March 5: Investment trust IndiGrid on Friday inked an agreement to acquire 100 per cent equity stake in NER II Transmission from Sterlite Power for about Rs 4,625 crore.

The completion of acquisition would depend upon receipt of unitholders' consent, regulatory and other relevant approvals, it said.

"India Grid Trust (IndiGrid) signed share purchase agreement on March 5, 2021 for acquisition of 100 per cent shareholding and economic interest, in one or more tranches, in NER II Transmission Ltd from Sterlite Grid 4 Ltd," a company statement said.

Sterlite Grid is a wholly owned subsidiary of Sterlite Power Transmission Ltd, one of the sponsors of IndiGrid.

The acquisition would boost IndiGrid's asset under management by 34 per cent to over Rs 20,000 crore (\$2.8 billion).

NER-II is part of Inter-State Transmission Scheme network, and was awarded on a build, own, operate, maintain (BOOM) basis with a contractual period of 35 years. The project has 11 elements including two substations of 1,260 MVA capacity and four transmission lines over 830 circuit kilometers. The asset runs across Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura. —PTI

PLI could raise production by \$520 bn in 5 years: PM

New Delhi, March 5: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme, which is aimed at boosting domestic manufacturing and exports, is expected to increase the country's production by \$520 billion in the next five years.

Addressing a webinar on the PLI scheme, organised by the Department of Industry and International Trade and Niti Aayog, through video conference, Modi said the government is continuously carrying out reforms to boost domestic manufacturing.

In this year's budget, about Rs 2 lakh crore was earmarked for the PLI scheme for the next five years and "there is an expectation that the scheme would result in increasing the production by about \$520 billion in the next five years", he said.

He added that there is also an expectation that the current workforce in the sectors which will avail of the PLI scheme



Narendra Modi

benefits will be doubled and job creation will also increase.

The Prime Minister said the government is working at every level to promote the industry through measures like ease of doing business, reducing the compliance burden, creating multi-modal infrastructure to reduce logistics costs, and constructing district-level export hubs.

"Our effort is to reduce over 6,000 compliance burden (for industry)," he said. The government, he said, believes that its interference in everything creates more problems than solutions and "therefore, self-regulation, self-attesting, self-certification are being emphasised".

"We have to attract cutting-edge technology and maximum investment in the sectors related to our core competency," he added. —PTI

MTAR Tech subscribed 200 times

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 5

Hyderabad-based MTAR Technologies' Rs 596-crore initial public offering received huge response from all categories of investors, especially high net worth investors (650 times) on the last day of bidding and the issue got subscribed over 200 times.

MTAR Tech's public issue was priced at Rs 574 to Rs 575 per share of Rs

10 face value.

As per stock exchange data, updated around 5 pm, the IPO was subscribed 200.79 times.

High network individuals or non-institutional investors bid for shares in large numbers on the final day of bidding, leading to the shares reserved for HNIs getting subscribed 650.79 times.

The qualified institutional investors' portion also got big a response at

He stressed on the need to take a big leap, as well as increase the speed and scale to boost manufacturing as it would increase employment generation in the country.

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About 580,000 frequent fliers' data breached: SIA

GURDIP SINGH SINGAPORE, MARCH 5

Around 580,000 privilege fliers, KrisFlyer and PPS members, have been affected by a data breach, Singapore Airlines (SIA) has said.

The data breach involves the passenger service system servers of SITA, an air

transport infotech company, according to a Channel News Asia report.

"While SIA is not a customer of the SITA PSS, this breach of the SITA PSS server has affected some KrisFlyer and PPS members," the national carrier said on Thursday.

SIA added that this data breach specifically does

not involve KrisFlyer and PPS member passwords, credit card information and other customer data such as itineraries, reservations, ticketing, passport numbers and email addresses.

Such information is not shared with other Star Alliance member airlines for this data transfer, the

airline said.

"The information involved is limited to the membership number and tier status and, in some cases, membership name, as this is the full extent of the frequent flyer data that Singapore Airlines shares with other Star Alliance member airlines," said SIA. —PTI

NIPPON STEEL TO SHUT 20% CAPACITY BY 2025

MASUMI SUGA MARCH 5

Japan's oldest and largest steelmaker is cutting capacity as it contends with shrinking domestic demand and pivots operations to help meet the nation's ambitious target of net-zero emissions by 2050.

Nippon Steel Corporation will shut one of its largest domestic blast furnaces near Tokyo as well as production lines to trim its steelmaking capacity, according to a statement on Friday. That along with previously announced measures will cut its capacity by 20 per cent by March 2025. The company



also aims to lower carbon dioxide emissions from its operations 30 per cent by 2030 from 2013 levels, it added.

President Eiji Hashimoto is pushing through structural reforms to fend off challenges from faster growing foreign rivals--

particularly top producer China. Competition is now spreading to the development of fossil fuel-free steel manufacturing after governments in Europe, China and Japan pledged net-zero emissions in the coming decades.

Innovations for decarbonisation, including the development of hydrogen reduction steel production, will require research and development costs of about 500 billion yen (\$4.6 billion) and as much as 5 trillion yen in investment in facilities, the company said, which could double the cost of steel over the next 30 years. —Bloomberg

OMRON EYES SMALLER SOUTHERN MARKETS

FC BUREAU HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

Omron Healthcare India, a global major in digital blood pressure monitoring products, on Friday, said it plans to expand its sales network to smaller cities in south India, such as Warangal, Gulbarga and Raichur; among others.

Speaking to reporters here, Masanori Matsubara, MD, Omron Healthcare India, said the firm is planning to consolidate its market share in the home-care segment. South India contributes nearly 30 per cent of Omron's sales which it plans to increase to 40 per cent in FY22.

Fuel tax cut a joint call of Centre & states: FM

New Delhi, March 5: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday acknowledged that consumers have a case for petrol and diesel prices to be brought down but said a reduction in taxes should be a joint call of the central and state governments.

As much as 60 per cent of the retail price of petrol—which has shot above the Rs 100-mark in some places in Rajasthan, MP and Maharashtra—is made up of central and state taxes. Taxes make up about 56 per cent of the record high diesel rates.

Sitharaman, who had increased central excise duty on petrol and diesel by a record margin last year to mop up gains arising from two-decade low international oil prices, remained non-committal on taking the first step to cut central taxes to give relief to consumers.

For consumers, "there is enough case to say that prices should be down, it's a burden," she said while interacting with

Appeal against Cairn award likely

New Delhi, March 5: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday indicated the government's intent to appeal against an arbitration panel asking India to return \$1.4 billion to UK's Cairn Energy Plc, saying it is her "duty" to appeal in cases where the nation's sovereign authority to tax is questioned. —PTI

journalists at IWPC.

While the burden on the consumers is "understood", the pricing is a vexatious issue, she said.

"That's where I use the word 'dharamsankat'," she said. "It is a question which I would like states and the Centre to talk about because it's not just the Centre which has duties on petroleum products, it also has the states charging." —PTI

Indonesia plans battery production in public sector

ARYS ADITYA & CLAIRE JIAO MARCH 5

Indonesia laid down its plans to have a complete battery production line onshore, with a state-owned holding firm to be set up by June.

The country has drafted an "end-to-end development" plan that would see four state firms supplying nickel ore, processing nickel sulfate and cobalt sulfate, and then producing cathodes and batteries, Agus Tjahajana, who heads the task force on electric-vehicle development, said in a Thursday seminar.

Resource-rich Indonesia, home to a quarter of the world's nickel reserves, has set its sights on moving up the supply chain to become a global hub for battery-making. The surge in demand for batteries, used to power everything from mobile phones to electric vehicles, has become a tailwind for Southeast Asia's largest economy as it seeks a way out of a recession.

"Indonesia will hold everything from upstream to downstream involving nickel and electric batteries in the battery holding company," Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises spokesperson Arya Sinulingga said. "We have to proceed quickly."

Miner PT Aneka Tambang will focus on nickel ore, while PT Indonesia Asahan Aluminium, known as Inalum, and energy holding company PT Pertamina will oversee the production of battery and cell components. Pertamina and power producer PT Perusahaan Listrik Negara will look after electricity supply and infrastructure. Each of the state firms will hold a 25 per cent stake in the Indonesian Battery Industry holding firm, which will be set up by June. The potential projects include a 195 GW/hour factory with capacity to produce 150,000 tonnes of nickel ore a year, he said. —Bloomberg

MEDICAL | MARIJUANA

New revenue source opens for households

Thai families allowed to grow cannabis

PRIM CHUWIRUCH MARCH 5

Thai households can now grow six pots of cannabis each to supplement their income, the nation's health minister said, as the first country in the region to legalise medical marijuana further eased rules to promote the crop's commercial use.

Families may form communities to grow marijuana and supply the crop to public hospitals and state facilities, or use them to make food and cosmetic products as a fresh revenue source, Thailand's deputy premier and health minister Anutin Charnvirakul said in a statement on Friday.

"Marijuana and hemp

are both economic crops and it provides a new option for locals to generate revenue," Anutin said at a marijuana education expo at Buriram, 400 kilometres northeast of Bangkok. "We are trying to ease restrictions to allow the public easier access to the plant, but please cooperate and use it correctly."

While Thailand became the first country in Southeast Asia to legalise medical marijuana in 2018, its use for recreational purpose is still banned. Any flowers and seeds yielded from the crop grown at homes must be sent to state medical facilities as they remain in the country's criminal code due to their high levels of psychoac-



tive compounds, the minister said.

The rest of the marijuana, including leaves, branches and fibre as well as hemp plants have been decriminalised and allowed to be used in food and cosmetic products

since December last year. Anutin became a minister in 2019 after an election in which the centre-piece of his political party's campaign was marijuana legalisation.

Though some restrictions remain, allowing households to grow marijuana is another step to unshackle the industry and is similar to Sri Lanka which allows limited growth of the plant by state-licensed growers and only for medical purposes. The Philippines is considering allowing use of the plant for epilepsy treatment, but marijuana in most other nations in Southeast Asia remains forbidden and in some, punishable with death sentences. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Sindhu in semis as Indians sink

Basel: Olympic silver medallist P. V. Sindhu advanced to the semifinals of the Swiss Open Super 300 tournament with a straight-game win over Thai Busanan Ongbamrungphan. World champion Sindhu took a minute less than an hour to see off a fighting Busanan, seeded fifth, 21-16, 23-21 to set up a clash with fourth seed Denmark's Mia Blichfeldt. However, it was a bad day in office for other Indians in fray as none of them could reach the last four. Olympic hopeful B Sai Praneeth, who reached the final in the last edition, lost 14-21, 17-21 to Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia in 45 minutes.

Ajay Jayaram's campaign ended after a 9-21, 6-21 loss to eighth seeded Thai Kunlavut Vitidsarn in another last eight men's singles match. Earlier, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponnappa fought hard before going down 17-21, 21-16, 8-21 to fifth seeds Tan Kian Meng and Lai Pei Jing of Malaysia in quarterfinals of mixed doubles. — PTI

Hyd sides for throw, handball

Hyderabad: Following are the Hyderabad district throwball sub-junior and handball women's teams for the inter-district tournaments to be held from Saturday:

THROWBALL

Boys: Balaji (captain), Manideep, Harshith Varma, Vishnu, Karthik, Shaik Abbas, Omkar, Siddarth, Rahul, Tarun Teja, Mayank, Prashanth, Harshith, Akshith, Satwik Reddy, Pranay. **Coach:** Siddeshwar Reddy. **Manager:** Kiran Chary.

Girls: Harika (captain), Sai Shruthi, Jahnvi, Annaya, Amuktha, Sneha Reddy, Shailu, Shobha Rani, Vidya, Snigdha, Mahima Rani, Lakshmi. **Coach:** Suchetana. **Manager:** G Raju.

HANDBALL

Rishika (captain), M. S. Gayatri, Aishwarya, Hemalatha, Nanditha, Likhitha, Haritha, Divya Rani, Tanisha, Priya Darshini, Ashwini, Siddi Patil, Uma Rajender, Haindavi, Madhavi, Srihitha Reddy. **Coach-cum-manager:** Siva Kumar.

PANTHER ATTACK

Pant's splendid ton puts England under the pump

Ahmedabad, March 5: Rishabh Pant changed his game-plan and in turn India's fortunes with a magnificent century, helping the side snatch control from England's grip to finish the second day at a robust 294 for 7 in the final Test here on Friday.

England dominated the first two sessions and India looked in all sorts of trouble before Pant (101 off 118 balls) suddenly decided to catch the opposition by the scruff of their necks, effortlessly changing gears in company of Washington Sundar (60, 117 balls, 8x4).

The duo added 113 runs in 26 overs but more importantly, landed an exquisite 'left-hook' on England's hopes of turning party-poopers, having already conceded a first innings lead of 89 runs.

At stumps, Washington was still at the crease with Axar Patel (11).

For someone, who has always been panned for his lack of game awareness, it was Pant 2.0 at play where he defended when it was necessary but unlocked his brutal attacking instincts when required.

The first 50 came off 82 balls and the next off 33 balls with Washington being the ideal foil, holding one end well en route to his half century.

Just like playing a single spinner in the third Test was a blunder, England paid the price for playing a bowler short as their main four got tired during the final session.

Pant deposited Dom Bess into the 'cow corner' of the stands against the turn, to complete his third Test hundred, first at home, having missed at least five in recent years.

When he finally got out, Root's frustrated expression was a dead giveaway that the match was now out of hand for England.

— PTI



India's Rishabh Pant celebrates his century against England during the second day of the fourth Test at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Friday.

NUMBERS GAME

KOHLI'S SECOND DUCK

● England's right-arm fast-medium bowler, Ben Stokes dismissed Virat Kohli for duck in India's first innings on the second day of the fourth and final Test match at Ahmedabad on Friday.

● It was second duck in the series for Indian skipper Virat Kohli. The first one was in the first innings of the second Test match at Chennai. It was second time when Virat Kohli received two ducks in a series. The first occasion when Indian skipper received two ducks in a series was also against England in the five Test series in England in 2014.

● Virat Kohli also equalled Mahendra Singh Dhoni's record of most ducks as Indian skipper by getting eighth duck in 98 innings of 50 Tests. Mahendra Singh Dhoni received same number of ducks in 96 innings of 60 Tests as skipper.

● The 113-run stand between Rishabh Pant/Washington Sundar was the ninth seventh wicket century stand for India against England. Syed Kirmani and Ravi Shastri's 235-run stand is the best for seventh wicket for India against England in Tests.

● Rishabh Pant made his maiden century at home in eighth innings of sixth Test match by making 101 off 118 with 13 fours and two sixes. It was his third century in 33 innings of 20 Test matches.

● Rishabh Pant also became the third Indian wicket-keeper to score three or more hundreds in Tests. Mahendra Singh Dhoni holds the record of scoring the highest number of hundreds as wicket-keeper. He scored six hundreds in 144 innings of 90 Tests. Wriddhiman Saha made three hundreds in 50 innings of 37 Tests.

— S. PERVEZ KAISER

SCORECARD

England 1st Innings: 205
India 1st Innings (Overnight 24/1): R. Sharma lbw b Stokes 49, C. Pujara lbw b Leach 17, V. Kohli c Foakes b Stokes 0, A. Rahane c Stokes b Anderson 27, R. Pant c Root b Anderson 101, R. Ashwin c Pope b Leach 13, W. Sundar (batting) 60, A. Patel (batting) 11. Extras (B-8, LB-5, NB-3) 16. Total (for 7 wickets in 94 overs) 294.
FoW: 1-0, 2-40, 3-41, 4-80, 5-121, 6-146, 7-259.
Bowling: Anderson 20-11-40-3, Stokes 22-6-73-2, Leach 23-5-66-2, Bess 15-1-56-0, Root 14-1-46-0.

AUSSIES PACK OFF KIWIS TO FORCE DECIDER

Wellington, March 5: Australia crushed New Zealand by 50 runs in a low-scoring fourth Twenty20 international in Wellington Friday to level the series at 2-2.

The result sets up a winner-takes-all blockbuster in the final match on Sunday, with Australia in red-hot form after struggling early in the series.

Australia scored 156 for 6 in 20 overs after winning the toss. In reply, New Zealand were all out for 106.

Captain Aaron Finch anchored the tourists' innings with a gritty 79, making him Australia's most prolific T20 international run scorer on 2,310, ahead of David Warner's 2,265.

Brief scores: Australia 156/6 in 20 overs (Finch 79; I. Sodhi 3/32) **bt New Zealand 106** in 18.5 overs (K. Jamieson 30; K. Richardson 3/19).

ONE-DAY LEAGUE

■ Hyderabad Cricket Academy 277 in 70.5 overs bt SK Blues 152 in 32 overs (Mohd Afzal Ali 38, Siddharth Rao 35, Zaheer Abbas 4/33, G Gunavith 4/59). **Points:** Academy 5, Blues 0.
■ Secunderabad Gymkhana 525/7 in 90 overs bt Mayura 61 in 30.5 overs (Vignesh 3/7). **Points:** Gymkhana 5, Mayura 0.
■ Warangal District 281 in 69.4 overs bt Vijayapuri Willowmen 197 in 75.5 overs (Aashlesh Vaman 54, N. Pavan Reddy 4/20). **Points:** Warangal 5, Willowmen 0.



Preetesh Rawani



Venkatesh



Syed Azizuddin

238 in 70.1 overs (V. Gowtham 55, K. R. Dhanush 53, D. Manish 37, Abdul Khaliq Khan 3/37, **Syed Azizuddin 5/66 — 17.1-2-66-5**). **Points:** CCOB 5, Ours 0.

■ Elegant 258 in 51.1 overs lost to Adilabad District 264/4 in 42.1 overs (**Maresh 125 n.o — 126b, 21x4, 3x6, Srivastava 87**). **Points:** Adilabad District 5, Elegant 0.

■ Team Speed 236 in 67.3 overs vs Nizamabad District 193/7 in 46.4 overs (Y. Murali Krishna 55 n.o, Rohit Kumar 31, D. Manish Goud 5/55). **Points:** Speed 2, Nizamabad 2.

■ PKMCC 242/9 in 90 overs lost to Venus Cybertech 246/7 in 59.2 overs (Rishit Reddy 57, M. S. Karthikeya 45, Chaitanya Charan 35, K. Naveen 52, B. Sujana Kumar 3/41, T. Sourabh 3/56). **Points:** Venus Cybertech 5, PKMCC 0.

■ Crown 220 in 65.2 overs lost to HBCC 222/5 in 44 overs (Vara Prasad 73, Yash Dubey 40 n.o). **Points:** HBCC 5, Crown 0.

■ Shalimar 317 in 62.5 overs bt Hucc 302 in 83.4 overs (Prudhvi Nalk 30, Sree Madhav 56, Pranav Chandra 50). **Points:** Shalimar 5, Hucc 0.

■ Brothers XI 167 in 60.3 overs (Likhit 30, Ajay 51, Ershad Pasha 3/32, Shyam Reddy 4/30) lost to Vijay CC 168/4 in 25 overs (B. Shiva 74 n.o, Badal 62). **Points:** Vijay CC 5, Brothers XI 0.

■ Adams XI 362 in 54.4 overs bt Bharat 277 in 61.4 overs (B. Bhargav 77, Aditya Varma 40, Suraj Rao 31 n.o, M. Balaji 3/3, Khaled Khan 4/72). **Points:** Adams 5, Bharat 0.

■ Roshanara 608/9 in 50 overs (Deepak Tak 80, **Preetesh Rawani 366 — 40x4, 24x6, Karthik 6/115**) bt Starlets CC 258 in 46 overs (Venkat 49, Praneeth 54, Shashank 41, Lokesh 3/54, **Om Prakash 5/24**).
■ Ranga Reddy 247/9 in 50 overs (Nimal Reddy 94, Neeraj 33, Arjit 3/37, Aryan Reddy 4/27) lost to Gunrock 252/6 in 36.2 overs (Shubham Sahu 30, **Nagaraju 107**, Utkarsh 3/61).
■ Team Kun 160 in 47.3 overs (Navaneeth Reddy 30, Sai Charan 3/28, Raj Suryansh 3/34) lost to LNCC 161/5 in 23.2 overs (Gopi 38, Pranav 58 n.o, Palash 3/43).
■ Consult CC 199 in 34 overs (Abhinav 37, Vamsi 3/7) lost to Safilguda 120/1 in 23.2 overs (Lokesh 71 n.o, Ayush 39).
■ Satya CC 104 in 39.5 overs (Nanda 39, Pavan Sai 3/10) lost to Golconda 105/3 in 19.4 overs (Chattrapathi 40).

Preetesh cracks triple ton in one-day league

Kotes, Venkatesh, Azizuddin, Mahesh, Karthik, Om, Nagaraju shine

DC CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

Preetesh Rawani cracked a triple century in the Hyderabad Cricket Association's one-day league while S. Kotes took six wickets in the two-day grade to emerge top performers on Friday.

Preetesh slammed 366 which contained 40 fours and 24 sixes to propel Roshanara to 608 for 9 in 50 overs against Starlets, for whom Karthik took 6 for 115. Starlets were all out for 258 in 46 overs, thanks to Om Prakash's 5 for 24.

In another one-day match, Nagaraju's 107 powered Gunrock to a four-wicket win over Ranga Reddy.

In the two-day games, Kotes bowled Cheerful Chums to a big win over Rakesh XI with fine figures of 6 for 20 in nine overs.

Shanti XI's Venkatesh Sheshadharan (5/26), CCOB's Syed Azizuddin (5/66) and Adilabad District's Mahesh (125 n.o) were the other performers in the two-day section.

Brief scores:

TWO-DAY LEAGUE

■ Cheerful Chums 260 in 73 overs bt Rakesh XI 70 in 30.3 overs (**Kotes 6/20 — 9-1-20-6**). **Points:** Cheerful Chums 5, Rakesh XI 0.

■ Shanti XI 357 in 89 overs bt Hyderabad Panthers 80 in 39.1 overs (**Venkatesh Sheshadharan 5/26**, Venkat Chandra 3/27). **Points:** Shanti 5, Panthers 0.

■ CCOB 339 in 66.4 overs bt Ours

National athletics coach found dead

Patiala, March 5: India's middle and long distance coach Nikolai Snesarev of Belarus was on Friday found dead in his hostel room at the National Institute of Sports here, the Athletics Federation of India said.

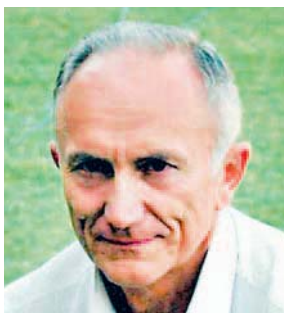
The dead body of the 72-year-old Snesarev, who returned to India after a gap of two years to be at the helm till the end of September, has been sent to a government hospital for post mortem.

"He had come to NIS for the Indian Grand Prix 3 (from his Bengaluru base) held today. But when he did not turn up for the meet, the coaches checked for him in the evening and his room was found locked from inside," AFI President Sumariwalla said.

"When the door was broken, he was found lying on his bed. The Sports Authority of India doctor at the NIS declared him dead and the ED (team) of the SAI has referred the body to the government hospital for post mortem.

"We don't know the cause of death. We will know it later after post mortem."

Snesarev was coaching 3000m steeplechaser Avinash Sable, who has qualified for the Olympics, and other middle and long-distance runners in their bid to qualify for the Tokyo



Nikolai Snesarev

He had come to NIS for the Indian Grand Prix 3 (from his Bengaluru base) held today. But when he did not turn up for the meet, the coaches checked for him in the evening and his room was found locked from inside. When the door was broken, he was found lying on his bed.

— ADILLE SUMARIWALLA
Athletics Federation of India president

Games. He had quit as Indian athletics' long and middle distance coach in February 2019 after Sable opted to leave him and train under Army coach Amrith Kumar. His contract then was till the end of the Olympics, postponed by a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

— PTI

Neeraj sets natl javelin record

Patiala, March 5: Olympic-bound star javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra smashed his own national record with a throw of 88.07m, which is also the best of the year so far, in a sensational return to action during the third Indian Grand Prix meet here on Friday.

Competing for the first time in more than a year after the Covid-19 pandemic wiped out the whole of 2020 calendar, Chopra hurled the spear to a distance of 88.07m in his fifth attempt to obliterate his earlier national record of 88.06m, sealed during the gold-winning effort at the 2018 Asian Games.

The 24-year-old Chopra opened the competition

with an effort of 83.03m before having two foul throws. After a fourth throw of 83.36m, Chopra sent the javelin to 88.07m amid loud cheers from a sizeable audience at the NIS Patiala. His final throw was 82.24m.

"I was prepared and today it was windy. I used my favourite javelin which helped me. Pandemic did affect training and preparation but we managed to hold on," Chopra said, adding, "On the world level I would need to perform even better as current standard is quite high."

Chopra qualified for the upcoming Tokyo Olympics in January last year in an event in South Africa.

— PTI

LIVERPOOL CRASH TO YET ANOTHER HOME DEFEAT

London, March 5: Mason Mount fired Chelsea into fourth place in the Premier League as the midfielder's superb strike clinched a 1-0 win against troubled Liverpool, while Everton boosted their top four bid with a 1-0 victory at West Brom on Thursday.

Mount's first half goal was enough to see off lacklustre Liverpool and extended Chelsea's impressive renaissance under new boss Thomas Tuchel.

Chelsea are unbeaten in 10 games in all competitions since Tuchel replaced the sacked Frank Lampard in January.

The Blues sit one point clear of fifth placed Everton, who have a game in hand on the west Londoners.

While Chelsea are on the up, injury-hit Liverpool crashed to a fifth successive home defeat for the first time in their illustrious history, leaving the spluttering champions without a win at Anfield since before Christmas.

Reds are languishing in seventh place, four points behind Chelsea after losing five of their last six league matches.

— AFP

Live on TV

BADMINTON

Swiss Open: Semifinals from 3.30 pm on Star Sports 2 HD, 3

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Second Semifinal, 1st leg — North East United vs Mohun Bagan from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, HD

Italian League: Juventus vs Lazio from 11.15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

UFC

Fight Night: Jan Blachowicz vs Israel Adesanya and other bouts from 8.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2

Laxmi, Chandan are champs

Hyderabad: Laxmi Siri Dandu and Chandan Shivraj won the girls and boys titles respectively in the Under-16 AITA Championship series played at Sania Mirza Tennis Academy in Murtuzaguda.

In Friday's finals, sixth seeded Laxmi defeated M. Manognya 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 while Chandan Shivraj, also a sixth seed, saw off G. Chaitra Reddy in straight sets at 6-2, 6-2.

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