

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI MONDAY 8 MARCH 2021



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Iran up for talks if US lifts sanctions, says Prez Hassan Rouhani



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No home games this IPL: Mumbai Indians face RCB in April 9 Chennai opener

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Women's Day: Women who dared to breach traditional boundaries



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WINDOWS



US President Joe Biden speaks at the White House. The Senate on Saturday passed Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief bill after voting overnight on amendments.

■ Report on Page 6 — AP

DJB seeks Central aid, says Haryana behind water crisis

New Delhi: Delhi Jal Board (DJB) V-C Raghav Chadha on Sunday said the national capital was reeling under water shortage as "Haryana has reduced the supply of raw water to the city". He requested Union Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat to intervene and direct the Haryana government to release Delhi's share of raw water. Haryana has reduced the supply of raw water to Delhi, as a result we are facing a shortage in water production. — PTI

SUV owner's death: ATS file murder case

Mumbai: Maharashtra ATS has registered a murder case into the mysterious death of Mansukh Hiren, whose SUV laden with gelatin sticks was found abandoned near the house of industrialist Mukesh Ambani in Mumbai. Full report on Page 3

Priyanka Chopra opens NY eatery

London: Actor-producer Priyanka Chopra Jonas has announced that she is opening an Indian cuisine restaurant in New York. Chopra Jonas took to Instagram late Saturday evening and shared a picture of the restaurant named 'Sona', which will be opening doors for food enthusiasts later this month. — PTI

COUNTERPOINT



What can we do now, sir? They have happily agreed to give whatever number of seats you want!

WEATHER

Max: 32°C
Min: 17°C
RH: 44%
Rain: NIL

Forecast: Mostly sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Bahula Dasami till 3.47 pm
Star: Purvashada till 8.42 pm
Varjyam: Sesa Varjyam till 8.04 am; 4.42 am to 6.18 am (Tuesday)
Durmuhurtam: 12.50 pm to 1.37 pm; 3.11 pm to 3.59 pm
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am
SUNSET TODAY 5.55 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.21 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 2.11 AM
MOONSET TODAY 3.09 PM

■ PM tears into TMC's 'Olympics of Corruption'; plays BJP's industry card

Modi mocks Mamata, claims she is headed for a 'big fall' in Nandigram

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MARCH 7

Mocking West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's recent "scooty ride" from her Kalighat residence in south Kolkata to Nabanna, the state secretariat in Howrah, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday asserted that the Trinamul Congress supremo's two-wheeler is destined to fall along with her as she is defeated in Nandigram, the hot seat of the West Bengal Assembly election where she has chosen to contest from after fleeing her winning seat of two terms, Bhowanipore, fearing a loss on her home turf.

"Didi, a few days ago you were managing to handle the scooty. All then were praying for your well-being so that you would not get injured. It was good that you did not fall down, otherwise, you would have made the state, where the scooty was built your enemy. Had the scooty been made in the South, you would have treated it as your enemy. If it was built in the North, you would have turned it into your enemy," Mr Modi told Ms Banerjee while addressing a massive BJP rally with Bollywood actor Mithun Chakraborty on the dais at Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata.

Emboldened by Mithun's induction into the saffron party at the mega poll campaign event, Mr Modi taunted Ms Banerjee, saying: "It is good that you are fine. But your scooty is headed towards Nandigram instead of moving to Bhowanipore. We are well-wishers of all always. We do not want anyone to be injured. But what can we do if her scooty itself has decided to fall in Nandigram?" His jibe directed at Ms Banerjee with full confidence assumes significance as the BJP has fielded her former Cabinet colleague and ex-TMC heavyweight



Prime Minister Narendra Modi is felicitated by Bollywood star and new BJP member Mithun Chakraborty at his rally in Kolkata's historic Brigade Parade Ground on Sunday.

— PRITAM CHAKRABORTY

Suwendu Adhikari against her at Nandigram at his wish since it is his home turf. Impressed by the huge turnout at the rally, Mr Modi quipped: "It looks like of May 2 (the date of the poll results)."

Tearing into the dynasty politics in the TMC supremo's family to target her MP nephew Abhishek Banerjee, the PM wondered: "The people of Bengal elected to see you in the role of Didi (elder sister) in the last 10 years. But why did you, as Bua (aunt), keep yourself restricted to only one Bhatija (nephew)? Why did you select yourself to be Bua for the love of only one Bhatija? Why did you get busy in fulfilling the aspirations of your own Bhatija instead of the expectations of lakhs

■ Turn to Page 4



West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee during a protest rally against the hike in fuel and LPG prices in Siliguri on Sunday.

— PTI

FILM STAR MITHUN ENTERS BJP, SAYS HE'S LIKE A 'TRUE COBRA'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, MARCH 7

Emerging as a Bengali bhadralok in white dhoti-punjabi, to suit the BJP's dream of a bhumiputra CM candidate, Bollywood actor Mithun Chakraborty joined the BJP at its mega-rally on Sunday.

In filmi style, he claimed he was a "true cobra", able to kill anyone with just "one bite", before sharing the dais with Narendra Modi, who hailed his "journey as an example to all". Mithun said his joining the TMC earlier was a "bad decision".

■ Full report on Page 4

Didi 'dares' PM to face her; says he's 'extortionist'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, MARCH 7

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee has sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi to reveal his worth in terms of "price" while branding him the "biggest extortionist", in her vitriolic retaliation to his blistering attack on her on Sunday.

The angry Trinamul Congress supremo also accused the PM and his deputy, Union home minister Amit Shah, of being the "only syndicate" in the country before daring Mr Modi to face her in a "one-to-one" on the eve of the Assembly election in the state.

Spewing venom at the PM at Siliguri, in North Bengal, after leading a protest rally there against the steep hike in fuel prices, Ms Banerjee said: "You first have to explain why there has been fuel and LPG price hikes daily. LPG cylinders need to be provided free of cost. People of the state want to know that before they cast their vote. The Bengal government provides rice free of cost while one has to buy LPG cylinders at Rs 900 to cook food. Narendra Modi, what is your price? Five states are going to the polls in the coming days. You will face defeat everywhere."

In an oblique reference to Mr Modi, she claimed: "Whenever he visits Bengal, he levels allegations of extortion. You are the biggest extortionist. If a poor man indulges in extortion, it is merely Rs 10. What is the amount when you and your cronies do it? What is the amount of extortion in the

■ Turn to Page 4

Shah optimistic of AIADMK-BJP forming TN govt

DMK agrees to give Cong 25 seats

ARULOLI M. and R. MOHAN
NAGERCOIL/CHENNAI, MARCH 7

Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday expressed optimism about the formation of a coalition government in the state, in which the BJP would be a partner, after the Assembly elections.

Addressing Sakthikendra members of the BJP party at a private hotel in Nagercoil, Kanyakumari district, Mr Shah said he recognised the hurdles the BJP was facing in Tamil Nadu to form a government. However, he hoped the coming Assembly elections will be a game changer that would pave the way for the formation of a BJP-AIADMK government in the state.

Advising the Sakthikendra members to make the people aware of the BJP-led Central government's welfare schemes for Tamil Nadu, more so for the coastal community, Mr Shah said Tamil Nadu was one of the states that benefited the most through the fisheries department, created by the Centre in 2019. During the first term of the Narendra Modi-led NDA government at the Centre, Tamil Nadu was allotted ₹545 crores for fisheries development schemes. Appreciating chief minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and deputy chief minister O. Panneerselvam for their good work during the Covid-19 pandemic, Shah came down heavily on the DMK and the Congress for trying to bring in their "dynasty rule" in the state. "Stalin has no concern for the people of Tamil Nadu," he said, adding that the DMK chief's prime objective was to make his son, Udayanithi Stalin, the chief minister. In Tamil Nadu, the bat-



Amit Shah

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tle lines are almost fully drawn. The two top alliances led by Dravidian majors are ready with only minor agreements to be sewn. On Sunday, the Congress shook hands with the DMK on a deal that gives the national party 25 Assembly seats — as opposed to the 41 (winning eight) in the 2016 elections — and also keeps the Kanyakumari Lok Sabha seat, which the late H. Vasanthakumar had won for it in the 2019 Parliament elections.

The DMK needs to wrap up a deal with the CPI(M) to make the DMK-led alliance complete. Similarly, the AIADMK-led alliance has to wrap up a deal with the DMKD and G.K. Vasan's TMC to complete its lineup for the poll. Both Dravidian majors have largely stuck to their plan of fighting 170 to 180 seats out of 234 and giving their allies a

■ Turn to Page 4

Pope, in Iraq's Mosul, prays for ISIS' victims



Pope Francis, surrounded by shells of destroyed churches, attends a prayer for the victims of war at Hosh al-Bieaa Church Square in Mosul (Iraq) on Sunday. The long 2014-2017 war to drive the Islamic State out left ransacked homes and charred buildings around the north of Iraq. ■ Report on Page 6 — AP

Nepal's SC quashes unification of Oli, Prachanda Left units in 2018

Kathmandu, March 7: Nepal's Supreme Court on Sunday quashed the unification of the erstwhile Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) led by Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda.

The CPN-UML and CPN (Maoist Centre) merged in May 2018 to form a uni-



P.K. Prachanda and K.P. Sharma Oli

fied Nepal Communist Party following victory of their alliance in the 2017 general elections.

On Sunday, an apex court bench of justices

Kumar Regmi and Bam Kumar Shrestha issued the verdict giving authenticity of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) to Rishiram Kattel, who had registered the party at the Election Commission (EC) in his name prior to the formation of Nepal Communist Party (NCP) led by Oli and Prachanda. The Kathmandu Post newspaper reported. — PTI

Assam vigil as Ulfa chief is calling up party leaders

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MARCH 7

The security forces' "unified command" has found in its assessment that no militant group in Assam has strength to create any trouble in the coming Assembly elections but is keeping a close watch on the activities of Ulfa (I) commander-in-chief Paresh Baruah, who has been calling up many political leaders of different parties to know their assessment of the emerging political scenario.

Security sources said the unified command has decided to intensify vigil along inter-state borders to check the entry of militants, saying there were reports of the presence of a few armed Ulfa (I) cadres in Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts and in Mon district. They said Ulfa (I) chief Paresh Baruah was found to be calling up certain political leaders and discussing the possible outcome of the elections in the state. The security sources claimed that Ulfa (I) doesn't have the capability to create any disturbance in the elections.

■ Full report on Page 4

SHORT TAKES

Delhi 3rd in list of states/UTs with most contaminated sitesAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

The national capital stands third on the list of states and Union territories with most contaminated sites, according to the Central Pollution Control Board data. There are 112 sites in India contaminated by toxic and hazardous substances. Besides, there are 168 sites that may be contaminated but require investigation and confirmation, as per the CPCB. Odisha tops the list with 23 contaminated sites, followed by Uttar Pradesh (21) and Delhi (11). Bhalswa and Ghazipur landfill sites, industrial areas at Jhilmil, Wazirpur, New Friends Colony, Dilshad Garden and Lawrence Road are among the 11 contaminated sites in Delhi. Also, there are 12 probably contaminated sites in the national capital. According to the Union Environment Ministry, 'Contaminated Sites' are delineated areas in which the constituents and characteristics of the toxic and hazardous substances, caused by humans, exist at levels and in conditions which pose existing or imminent threats to human health and the environment. Contaminated sites may include production areas, landfills, dumps, waste storage and treatment sites, mine tailings sites, spill sites, chemical waste handler and storage sites located in various land uses.

Renovation of 12 Metro stations endsAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) has completed renovation work of 12 out of 21 stations of the Red Line. To take stock of these massive renovation activities, Dr Mangu Singh, Managing Director of DMRC inspected the various Metro stations with the Director Mr A K Garg and other senior officials of DMRC on the intervening night of 6th/7th March 2021, read a release by the DMRC. Renovation work was started by DMRC in July 2019 for 21 of its stations between Dilshad Garden and Rithala section of the red line which is amongst the oldest Metro network opened. The renovation included replacement of exterior, relaying dilapidated granite flooring at concourse and ground levels, chemical polishing of platforms, internal and external painting of stations, toilet block and parking renovation and replacement of analogue CCTV cameras with Digital version for enhanced clarity. Major stations where the renovation work is almost complete include Dilshad Garden, Jhilmil, Mansarovar Park, Shahdara, Welcome and Shastrī Park. The work at the remaining Metro stations will also be completed by May 2021, read the release. The Red Line was the first Delhi Metro line which became operational in 2002 with the opening of the 8.4 KM long Shahdara to Tis Hazari section comprising 6 stations.

DJB blames Haryana for water scarcity

New Delhi: Delhi Jal Board (DJB) vice chairman Raghav Chadha on Sunday said the national capital was reeling under water shortage as "Haryana has reduced the supply of raw water to the city". He requested Union Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat to intervene and direct the Haryana government to release Delhi's share of raw water. Haryana has reduced the supply of raw water to Delhi, as a result we are facing a shortage in water production. Currently, Haryana through Carrier Lined Channel (CLC) canal is supplying only 549.16 cusecs (against 683 cusecs) and Delhi Sub-Branch canal is supplying 306.63 cusecs (against 330 cusecs), Chadha tweeted. The treatment capacity at Wazirabad and Chandrawal water treatment plants has dipped by 30 per cent. The same has reduced by 15 per cent at Okhla WTP, he said. Further, Haryana Govt's lackadaisical attitude has led to unchecked dumping of sewage into Yamuna. Samples picked up by our Quality Lab show high contamination/Ammonia, Chadha claimed in another tweet. — PTI

■ Free vaccines for all likely in 3rd phase of vaccination at Delhi govt hospitals

Budget may allocate fund for free Covid vaccination

New Delhi, March 7: The Delhi Budget 2021-22, to be presented in the Assembly session starting on Monday, is expected to have a special allocation for free Covid-19 vaccination at Delhi government hospitals, sources said. The Budget is also likely to have proposals to open "Sainik Schools" in Delhi and promote yoga at a wide scale in the city, they said.

Vaccination is currently underway in Delhi at 192 hospitals, including 56 run by the Delhi government, for people aged 60 years and above and those in the age group of 45-59 years having comorbidities.

As many as 286 new cases and two deaths were reported in the city on Sunday, while the positivity rate stood at 0.31 per cent amid a sudden surge in incidences. "The government is expected to allocate funds for free vaccines to all people in the third phase of vaccination at its hospitals in Delhi," said a government source.

PATRIOTISM FLAVOUR

● Vaccination is currently underway in Delhi at 192 hospitals, including 56 run by the Delhi government, for people aged 60 years and above and those in the age group of 45-59 years having comorbidities.

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The Delhi government is working on a plan for taking yoga to the masses in Delhi. The government intends to popularise yoga through extensive campaign in residential areas of the city, the sources said.

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Besides this, the govern-

ment is likely to share its plan to celebrate 75th Independence Day in 2022 through various programmes, including installing of high mast tricolour like one at Connaught Place, across the city, they added.

The Budget session will commence with Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal's address to the House at 11 am on Monday. It will be followed by presentation of Economy Survey of Delhi (2020-21) by Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia.

The Outcome Budget of the Delhi government for 2020-21 will also be tabled in the House by Sisodia, who is also the finance minister of the government.

BJP MLA and Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri alleged that the AAP government has curtailed the Question Hour in the Budget session to evade questions from opposition legislators.

— PTI

Another farmer commits suicide near Tikri border

49-yr-old from Haryana allegedly hanged self from a tree

Chandigarh, March 7: A 49-year-old farmer from Haryana's Hisar district on Sunday allegedly hanged himself from a tree, about seven kilometres from the Tikri border protest site, police said.

The farmer, who supported the agitation against Centre's new farm laws, has purportedly left a suicide note, they said.

"The victim, Rajbir, hailed from a village in Hisar district. He was found hanging from a tree," Bahadurgarh City police station SHO, Vijay Kumar said over phone.

His body was found hanging by some farmers who informed the police.

In the suicide note purportedly left behind by Rajbir, it is mentioned that the three farm laws were responsible for him to take the extreme step. He also said that the Centre should fulfil his last wish by repealing the legislations, police said. Last month, a farmer from Jind in Haryana who was also supporting the agitation against the Centre's farm laws had allegedly hanged

■ **LAST MONTH,** a farmer from Jind in Haryana who was also supporting the agitation against the Centre's farm laws had allegedly hanged himself from a tree, merely two kilometres from the Tikri border protest site.

■ **Earlier,** another farmer from Haryana had allegedly consumed a poisonous substance at the Tikri border. He had died during treatment at a Delhi hospital later.

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Earlier, another farmer from Haryana had allegedly consumed a poisonous substance at the Tikri border. He had died during treatment at a Delhi hospital later.

In December last, a lawyer from Punjab had allegedly killed himself by consuming poison a few kilometres away from the protest site at the Tikri border.

Earlier, Sikh preacher

Sant Ram Singh had also allegedly ended his life near the Singhu border protest site, claiming that he was "unable to bear the pain of the farmers".

Thousands of farmers have been protesting since November last year at Delhi borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, demanding a rollback of the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

The protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that these laws would pave the way for the dismantling of the minimum support price (MSP) system, leaving them at the "mercy" of big corporations. However, the Centre has maintained that the new laws will bring better opportunities to farmers and introduce new technologies in agriculture.

— PTI

Pillion rider killed after water tanker hits 2-wheeler

New Delhi, March 7: A 30-year-old man, who was riding pillion on a scooter, was killed after the two-wheeler was hit by a water tanker near the Delhi Jal Board office in south Delhi, police said on Sunday.

The deceased, Vinod Kumar, lived with his family in Haryana's Faridabad and was employed with a private firm in the area, they said.

Kumar was returning from Gole Market on the scooter with his brother-in-law Pramod on March 4. When they reached near the Delhi Jal Board office on the BRT, their scooter was hit from behind by a water tanker, a senior police officer said.

The victim was rushed to the Safdarjung Hospital where the doctors declared him brought dead, he said.

On the basis of a complaint filed by Pramod, an FIR was registered under sections 279 (rash driving or riding on a public way), 337 (causing hurt by act endangering life or personal safety of other) and 304 A (causing death by negligence) of the Indian Penal Code at the Defence Colony police station and an investigation has been taken up. Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Atul Kumar Thakur said.

The owner of the water tanker, identified as Sant Raj, has been served a notice under the Motor Vehicles Act and he will produce the accused driver before police on Monday, he said.

— PTI



Kisan Congress members carry 101 urns with soils collected from various part of the country to mark 101 days of farmers' agitation against new farm laws in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

Women to play key roles at farmers' protest sites at Delhi borders today

New Delhi, March 7: From managing the stage, food and security to sharing tales of their struggles, and significance of taking part in the farmers' agitation, thousands of women farmers, students and activists will take over key roles at the Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur protest sites at Delhi's borders on International Women's Day on Monday.

Noting that women contribute significantly to the country's farming sector, the organisers have laid out elaborate plans to let women farmers take centre stage and all the space under the sky to acknowledge the big but unrecognised part of the farming community.

Thousands of women

farmers especially from Punjab and Haryana will congregate at Delhi's borders on Monday and the day will be entirely dedicated to women farmers, activists and students, farmer leaders said.

Marked annually on March 8, International Women's Day (IWD) is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity.

To celebrate women's day, the stage will be managed by women, and the speakers too will be women. And there will be a small march at Singhu border, the details for which will be shared later.

— PTI

Fire dept mulls tech overhaul, Wi-Fi & GPS-enabled systems in fire tenders

New Delhi, March 7: From GPS-enabled computer systems for automatically redirecting calls to area fire stations to equipping fire-fighting vehicles with tablets and Wi-Fi for receiving instructions from control rooms in real-time, the Delhi Fire Service (DFS) is planning a technology overhaul to reduce response time and increase efficiency.

The National Informatics Centre (NIC) and the National e-Governance Division (NeGD) have been asked to study the working of the fire department and accordingly give suggestions to modernise its functioning, officials said

on Sunday.

Last month, a proposal in this regard was discussed at a meeting. For the NIC-NeGD study, a survey has been carried out and a report is awaited, they said.

"We are in the process of modernising our way of functioning. But it's in the initial stage currently. We have given an expression of interest and asked the NIC and the NeGD to conduct a study on the working of the fire department," a senior DFS official said.

Following their study, the NIC and the NeGD will suggest the DFS ways to modernise its functioning using technology in an

effective manner to increase efficiency for quicker response, he said.

Citing an example, the fire service official said the department has been using basic technology when it comes to dispatching fire tenders to the spot of incident.

Dispatching, among many protocols, includes determining the shortest route to the place of incident, he said.

"We are planning to introduce GPS-enabled systems in the DFS' control room so that any distress call can be directly received by the system, which will also guide the nearest fire station to that particular fire call. Fire

tenders, accordingly, will be dispatched from the fire station concerned," the official said.

Currently, the central control room receives calls on helplines and a department staffer logs in the details of a distress call, including location, in a register.

However, when the new computer systems are in place, details of a caller like the person's location will automatically get saved in the system, he said.

In case the call gets disconnected, the caller can be contacted again as all details will be recorded digitally, the official said.

— PTI

Chemical-ridden intimate hygiene washes prone to infection: Experts

New Delhi, March 7: Urging women not to ignore their intimate hygiene, health experts have warned against the use of chemical-ridden vaginal washes that increase the risk of infection.

Speaking on the eve of International Women's Day, the experts, on Sunday, advised the usage of hygiene products that have natural ingredients enriched with bacteria and fungus prevention properties.

"Women should use particularly those intimate washes which enhance their skin health and serve as a helpful add-on therapy for those with vaginal infections," R.P. Prashar from Delhi-based Ayurveda Hospital said in a statement.

Sanchit Sharma, the executive director of AIMIL Pharma engaged in manufacturing ayurvedic

■ **IN INDIA,** at least eight out of ten women are vulnerable to vaginal infection, while at least 80 per cent ignore the importance of internal hygiene due to which they face various bacterial and fungal infection issues, according to a data

drugs, said that keeping in mind the health hygiene need of women, researchers have developed 'Ayurveda Vagitone Intimate Hygiene Wash' that is rich in green tea, 'haridra', and 'amla', among others, known for their time-tested ayurvedic and anti-bacterial properties.

"Mostly, it has been found that chemical-based products have adverse health impact on women. Hence, when it comes to internal organs of women, it is important to be careful," he said. He asserted that

adding chemicals like silicon and artificial colours in such products should be strictly prohibited.

Mr Prashar said there is widespread ignorance among women when it comes to their intimate hygiene.

In India, at least eight out of ten women are vulnerable to vaginal infection, while at least 80 per cent ignore the importance of internal hygiene due to which they face various bacterial and fungal infection issues, according to data.

The Union government has also been stressing on safe hygiene practices. The ministry of medium, small and micro enterprises' (MSME) Flavour and Fragrance Development Corporation (FFDC) has prepared a natural face serum and fragrance and recently transferred the technology to AIMIL.

— PTI

Driverless taxi pods in consideration for connectivity to Noida Airport

Noida (UP), March 7: Driverless personal rapid transport (PRT) or pod taxis could be considered for last mile connectivity of passengers commuting to and from the upcoming Noida International Airport, BJP leader and Jewar legislator Dharendra Singh said.

The hi-tech pod taxis, which are used in several western countries, are cost-effective, pro-environment, and convenient, Mr Singh said a day after meeting the representatives of Ultra PRT, a company that specialises in taxi pods.

Mr Singh, in whose constituency the Greenfield airport is coming up, has been apprised of the idea of having taxi pods for connectivity between Jewar and Greater Noida, said Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath. The chief minister's thrust is on having futur-

istic mode of transport and taxi pods can be more viable on this route than Metro train because they are environment friendly, cost-effective, and provide last-mile connectivity, he told a news agency.

The accident rate in pod taxis is zero. There is no carbon emission as they are battery-operated. With prefabricated construction, the facility could be set up on the route in a period of two months. One taxi can have five to six passengers. This makes it more viable than even buses which run with empty seats, he added.

Ultra PRT's CEO (India and Middle East) Nitin Kumar said the construction cost of the system for pod taxis would cost five times less than it does in creating a Metro or train route.

These self-driven pod taxis run on battery or hydrogen and are environ-

■ **THE ACCIDENT** rate in pod taxis is zero. There is no carbon emission as they are battery-operated. With prefabricated construction, the facility could be set up on the route in a period of two months. These self-driven pod taxis run on battery or hydrogen and are environment friendly.

ment friendly. They occupy less space and hence are naturally suitable for Indian cities and have viability in the future also, Mr Kumar said.

Mr Singh said besides the airport, a film city is coming up in Jewar along the Yamuna Expressway. A heritage city till Vrindavan is being developed while several multinational companies are also planning facilities in the region, which makes the option of having pod

taxis practical for commuters, he added.

According to Ultra PRT's estimates, construction of one kilometre route for pod taxis could cost around ₹40 crore to 45 crore against ₹135-150 crore for light rail transit (Metro train), ₹250-350 crore for mass rapid transport, and ₹40-45 crore for bus rapid transport (for bus).

Development work for the first phase of the Noida International Airport in Jewar is underway. The Greenfield airport is being developed in four phases and billed to be the biggest when completed with five or six runways spread in an area of 5,000 hectare, according to project officials.

Swiss-developer Zurich International Airport AG is developing the airport at an estimated cost of ₹29,560 crore, the officials said.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

Maha: 5 killed as truck goes berserk

Beed: Five persons were killed and eight others were injured on Sunday night after a truck collided with an autorickshaw on Beed-Parli highway in Maharashtra and went on hit a two-wheeler and a four-wheeler before landing into a roadside pond, the police said. All the deceased, including two children, were travelling in the autorickshaw to Beed from Wadvani tehsil when the truck rrammed into it around 8 pm, a police official said. Five of the eight injured were from the autorickshaw while two others were travelling in the four-wheeler. Another person was riding the two-wheeler, the official said. Some of the injured persons were admitted in Beed civil hospital and remaining others were sent to Aurangabad, he said. The driver of the truck fled after the accident, the official said. — PTI

3 Lankan boats caught in Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram: Three Sri Lankan fishing boats, carrying unauthorised communication equipment and narcotics, were seized by the Indian Coast Guard off Minicoy, following which a joint and detailed probe has been launched by concerned agencies. The three boats—Akash Duwa, Chathu Rani 03 and Chathu Rani 08, with totally 19 men on board, were intercepted by the coast guard ship 'Varaha' in the Indian territorial waters about seven nautical miles off Minicoy on March 5, for moving in a suspicious manner. The coastguard personnel boarded the boats and preliminary inquiry revealed that the occupants had used unauthorised communication equipment and were carrying narcotics, a defence release said. — PTI

CONCLAVE TO PROMOTE NATIONS AS GLOBAL BRANDS

AGE CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH 7

How do you sell a nation as a brand? A stute marketing has been the backbone of several success stories in this regard and more of it is needed when the coronavirus Covid-19 has impacted nations across the globe significantly with most economic activity coming to a standstill and millions of lives loss to the pandemic. "Nations as brands have to come together and work to rebuild pride and boost citizen confidence," says P.N. Mahadevan, vice-president Global - Business Development, International Advertising Association. He has started work already for the IAA's World Summit of 2021 to be held in New Delhi on November 17 & 18. IAA believes the summit will be an ideal platform for bringing nations and brands together to showcase to the world that IAA, with a presence in 56 countries through 4,000 individual and corporate members, is the most influential global marcom network, which works with governments in shaping the rules for the benefit of the industry. "We are at a tipping point, economy wise. This is when baton branding can help attract a creative workforce, improve image and reputation, enhance cultural and influence. What we are aiming to do is to bring the best thinkers to one great platform to share their thoughts and help everyone get off to improving the economic vitality of nations," Mahadevan explains.

Odisha collector says no casualty of wildlife has been reported

Locals offer helping hands to douse forest fire

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 7

Villagers living adjacent to Similipal National Park in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district have extended their helping hands to the state forest department staffers and fire services personnel to douse the wildfire that devoured huge stretches of forests and caused serious damage to the wildlife.

Several portions of the SNP which also houses the famed Similipal Tiger Reserve have been destroyed due to a wildfire that reportedly began on March 2. Similipal Tiger Reserve is a compact block



Forest officials and villagers try to douse forest fire.

of an elevated plateau located in the central portion of the Mayurbhanj district. "The concerned divisional forest officers (DFO), police inspectors, range officers, and locals have joined

hands in extinguishing a ground fire in Rairangpur forest division," the state forest department tweeted. The forest department personnel have left no stone unturned to douse the wild-

fire as efforts in this regard are underway during night time also. Mayurbhanj collector Vineet Bhardwaj informed that wildfire was under control. "Field staffers and fire squads have contained the ground fire using advanced satellite-based fire response systems and modern field equipment. No loss of wildlife has been reported," the Collector said.

The stretch of forest, including Similipal Reserve Forest, was in 1973 declared as "Tiger Reserve" with effect from December 4, 1973, under the 'Project Tiger' scheme of the Government of India.

Ready to take up any responsibility, says 'Metro man'

Thiruvananthapuram, March 7: "Metro man" E. Sreedharan on Sunday said he was ready to take up any responsibility given to him by the BJP, which he had recently joined.

Speaking at a rally attended by Union home minister Amit Shah, at nearby Shangumugham, Sreedharan said he wanted to utilise his energy for the state of Kerala.

"For the last 67 years I was a government servant.

Many people have asked me why I ventured into politics after these many years. For 67 years, I worked as part of many projects for this country."

"I am still energetic and want to utilise my energy for the state of Kerala. Whatever responsibility is given to me I will take it up with all courage and energy," he said at the rally marking the culmination of the Vijay Yatra taken out by BJP state president K. Surendran from Kasaragod to Thiruvananthapuram, ahead of the April 6 Assembly polls.

Days ago, Mr Sreedharan had said his main aim was to help the BJP to come to power and he was open to chief ministership, to which the party is yet to respond.

In the 2016 elections, the saffron party had won only one seat in the 140-member Assembly.

Mr Shah also wrapped a shawl around Sreedharan welcoming him into the BJP.

Speaking at the rally, Mr Shah was all praise for the 88-year old former technocrat, who was part of various development projects in the country.

"I would like to say a few words about Sreedharanji. An engineer and a teacher, who was part of various developmental-



E. Sreedharan

DAYS AGO, Sreedharan had said his main aim was to help the BJP to come to power and he was open to chief ministership, to which the party is yet to respond. In the 2016 elections, the saffron party had won only one seat in the 140-member

projects. He is known as Metro man because he constructed the first Metro in the country. But we cannot ignore his engineering marvel—the Konkan Railway—which connected southern India to the rest of the country in a rapid manner," Mr Shah said.

"I am already 56. Many times, I have felt that it's time to stop. But even at his age, Sreedharan ji is energetic and ready to work for this country. I would like to salute him. The infrastructure developer, Metro man has decided to join BJP for the nation building," Mr Shah added.

The "Metro man", who is all set to contest the Assembly polls on a BJP ticket, had recently resigned from the post of DMRC's principal advisor.

Mr Sreedharan, now a member of the BJP state Election Committee, said he has requested the party leadership to field him from a constituency not far from his residence in Ponnani in Malappuram district.

Thrash govt officials if they don't listen: Giriraj

CM Nitish, Opp. leaders target minister for his remark

NAYEAR AZAD PATNA, MARCH 7

Union Minister and BJP leader Giriraj Singh, who is known for his contentious remarks, has landed into controversy again by asking people of his constituency to beat up government officials with the bamboo stick.

While addressing a gathering in his Lok Sabha constituency Begusarai Mr Singh said "don't hesitate to reach out to government officials with your concerns and if they don't listen to your grievances beat them up with bamboo sticks. MP, MLA, DM, SDO, DDC are there for you so go to them and if your rights are violated then you will find Giriraj Singh standing there for you".

His comment has triggered sharp reactions from across the political spectrum in Bihar. Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar when asked about the issue said that "you should ask him. Is it appropriate to use words like *pitai* (beating)"?

Mr Kumar's JD(U) is part of the ruling NDA



Union law and IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad with Union minister Giriraj Singh and BJP MP Sushil Kumar Modi during a BJP state working committee meeting in Patna on Sunday.

— PTI

government in Bihar. The sarcastic statement by the chief minister against a senior BJP leader has aroused political tempera-

ture in the state. Apart from Nitish, Opposition parties have also strongly condemned Mr Singh's remark. In his tweet, Bihar Opposition leader Tejashwi Yadav said, "Union minister Giriraj says that there is anarchy in Bihar. Officers do not listen to anyone. The chief minister is weak, so pick up bamboo sticks and beat officers.

Nitish government has been rewarding ministers who promote violence but files FIRs against journalists who expose the truth".

After winning Lok Sabha polls from Nawada in 2014, Giriraj served as a minister of state with independent charge in the first Modi Cabinet. He was elevated to the Cabinet rank after he contested and defeated CPI's youth leader Kanhaiya Kumar from Begusarai seat by a margin of over four lakh votes in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

MHA wanted 20% funds of Centre's scheme, likely to get go ahead soon Spending on China border infra to be doubled

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

In a major initiative to boost infrastructure along the Indo-China border, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) will soon clear a home ministry proposal to increase spending on border projects from 10 per cent to 20 per cent in Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim.

The majority of these funds are provided by the

home ministry as part of the Centrally sponsored scheme to further improve infrastructure and facilities in border areas close to the China border.

So far states sharing borders with China could spend almost 10 per cent of the Border Area Development Programme (BADP) for border infrastructure. Now there is a plan to double this amount as it is felt that work along the Indo-China border needs to be expedited for which a detailed proposal

SPO FAR, states sharing borders with China could spend almost 10% of the Border Area Development Programme for infrastructure. This year nearly ₹800 crore has been allocated for the scheme.

will soon be placed before the CCS.

This year nearly ₹800 crore has been allocated by the home ministry for the BADP schemes, though there is a provision to provide additional


funds of the same amount. In addition, there are other schemes and projects both by Ministries of Home and Defence that focus on development work in border areas with China. India shares a long 3,488 km border with China.

"The idea to double the spending under BADP is to give States greater fiscal autonomy and freedom to decide on which border projects are important. The States don't have to wait for financial sanction


from the Home Ministry but immediately start working on the project," a home ministry official remarked.

Sources said security forces have asked different State Government to develop strategically important villages and towns in border areas.

States like Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Sikkim and Uttarakhand have already started expediting developing these strategic villages and other assets.



Happy International Women's Day



Saluting the Pride 'SHE' holds!

Delhi Police has created the following for Safety of Women:

- Women Help Desk**
24x7 at All Police Stations
- All Women Patrols**
For assistance dial 112
- Sashakti**
Self-defence for women
- Himmat Plus App**
Contact us in emergency
- Women Helpline 1091**
For your safety
- Helpline Against Obscene Calls**
1096

March, 2021

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For Immediate Police Help Call 112 **To Share Information Call 1090**

SHORT TAKES

DENIED TICKET,
ASSAM MINISTER
JOINS CONGRESS

Guwahati, March 7: Unhappy with the denial of party ticket for the Assembly election in Assam, BJP minister Sum Ronghang on Sunday joined the opposition Congress which is likely to field him from the Diphu constituency held by him.

The hill areas development and mines and minerals minister joined the Congress in presence of AICC general secretary Jitendra Singh and the party's state unit chief Ripun Bora.

"I did not like the way I was denied the ticket. I performed my duties with full dedication. I did not get the ticket due to the conspiracy of certain individuals," Mr Ronghang told reporters without elaborating.

The minister alleged that the BJP functions in a "non-transparent manner". "I felt that I will not be able to serve my people by staying in the BJP. That is why I have left the party and joined the Congress," Mr Ronghang said.

— PTI

ACTIVIST TO TAKE
BACK COMPLAINT
AGAINST BJP MLA

Bengaluru, March 7: In a twist to the alleged sex-for-job scandal in Karnataka, social activist Dinesh Kallahalli on Sunday said he would withdraw his police complaint against BJP MLA Ramesh Jarkiholi, which had led to his resignation as Minister.

Dinesh Kallahalli said he will withdraw the complaint as he was hurt by allegations of a ₹5 crore deal, levelled by JDS leader H.D. Kumaraswamy. However, the activist's lawyer said there were some technical problems due to which the decision was taken.

Meanwhile, Balachandra Jarkiholi, brother of Ramesh Jarkiholi, alleged that there was a big conspiracy in the state in which four teams have been working to "malign" Jarkiholi and target the BJP ahead of Assembly elections in five states. He sought a CBI probe into the episode.

— PTI

ARMY CONVERTS
BUS STAND INTO
'STREST LIBRARY'

Anantnag: In a novel initiative, the Army has converted a dilapidated bus stand in a village in South Kashmir into a 'street library' to help students of neighbouring areas to prepare for competitive exams and higher studies. The library which was set up in the last week of February by the 18 Rashtriya Rifles of the Army has become an instant hit among the students of Ranipura, Chittisippura and Devipora villages, officials said. Seeing students of higher classes getting engrossed in books, the younger lot from primary classes surrounded Lt. Col. Rohit Jha, commanding officer of the 18 RR, which comes under the Victor Force that looks after South and central Kashmir, and demanded that some story books be kept for them too.

— PTI

Didi 'dares'
PM to face
her; says he's
'extortionist'

■ **Continued from Page 1** sale of the Railways, SAIL, Coal India and Air India? What syndicate you talked about? India knows only one syndicate is working — Narendra Modi and Amit Shah. There is no other syndicate."

Throwing a challenge to the PM, Ms Banerjee added: "When you address an empty Brigade, I, being a street-fighter forever, stay on the road which shows me the way. I want to continue as a commoner. Face me in a one-to-one if you have the guts."

A day before the International Women's Day celebrations, the TMC chief further targeted Mr Modi over his criticism of her government over the violence against women in the state, pointing out the incidents of rape in BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh. She also ridiculed him for being publicity-hungry over the display of his photo on everything—from the Covid-19 vaccine certificates to space programmes.

Crowds paint Kolkata saffron

Chants of Jai Shri Ram, Bharat Mata Ki Jai pervade Brigade Parade Ground

Kolkata, March 7: Chants of Jai Shri Ram and Bharat Mata Ki Jai pervaded the sprawling Brigade Parade Ground and the adjoining tree-lined avenues in Kolkata as lakhs of BJP supporters converged for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first rally in West Bengal after the announcement of the state polls.

The exuberant crowd, with many wearing saffron scarves, milled around the sprawling ground that has been witness to political rallies from before Independence, and cheered speakers like Mukul Roy and Suwendu Adhikari as they launched a tirade at the ruling Trinamul Congress.

As yesteryear Bollywood star Mithun Chakraborty, who joined the BJP at the meeting and gave a call for building a sonar banga (golden Bengal), shouts of Guru, Guru rent the air. The crowd lustily cheered the veteran actor-turned-politician, who had starred in the commercially successful 1989 film Guru.

The largest cheer went up for Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he took to the podium and gave a call for asol poriborton (true change) in Bengali.

Many in the crowd held up pictures of Modi and carried cartoon figures caricaturing the TMC supremo and her khela hobe (let there be game) campaign, while BJP flags fluttered across the landscape.

The rally venue reverberated with sounds of drum beats and strangled ek tara as BJP supporters from the tribal Jangalmahal belt and Nadia district upped the crescendo as Modi arrived on stage.

A cutout carried by a group showed Mamata Banerjee departing from the scene with Pisi Jao (auntie go) written in bold letters.

Pisi Jao is a poll campaign song launched recently by the BJP, inspired by the well known Bella Ciao lyrics. Meaning Goodbye beautiful, Bella Ciao is an Italian protest song that originated in the late 19th century



BJP supporters during a rally to attend Prime Minister Narendra Modi's election meeting ahead of West Bengal Assembly Polls outside Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata on Sunday.

— PTI

against the oppressive working conditions in the paddy fields of North Italy.

Earlier in the day, thousands of BJP supporters and workers from districts arrived at Brigade Parade Ground in the central hub of the city in buses and other vehicles. Several reserved buses from Purbo and Paschim Medinipur had supporters sitting on the roof.

Carrying BJP flags and lotus symbols they painted the city and the rally venue in saffron hues.

Jiten Paswan, a hawk peddling party symbols and pictures of political personalities, looked a happy soul.

"I could sell several large Modi photographs and scarves with Jai Shri Ram embossed on them. My stock of 100 is exhausted," Paswan said.

He said exactly one week back, he had sold around 60 hammer and sickle symbols on cardboard during another rally organised jointly by the Left Front, Congress and Indian Secular Front.

"While the crowd was mostly Bengali speaking in the earlier meeting, today it is a heady mix of Bengali and Hindi speaking people," he said.

— PTI

Mithun in BJP, says he's
a cobra with deadly biteDC CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, MARCH 7

Emerging as a Bengali *bhadralok* in white *dhoti-punjabhi*, to suit the BJP's dream of a *bhumiputra* CM candidate, Bollywood actor Mithun Chakraborty joined the BJP at its mega-rally on Sunday.

In filmi style, he claimed he was a "true cobra", able to kill anyone with just "one bite", before sharing the dais with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who hailed his "journey as an example to all". Mithun said his joining the Trinamul earlier was a "bad decision".

Sharing of his "dream coming true to be on the stage with the PM", he described himself as a "pure and proud Bengali" before the crowd. Mithun said, "For me anyone lives in Bengal is a Bengali. If anyone tries to take your rights away, people like me



Actor Mithun Chakraborty and BJP leader Subhendu Adhikari during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's public meeting at Brigade Parade Ground.

— PTI

will stand in between. I know you are waiting to listen to my movie dialogue which says: Hit you here, and you will end up in your grave."

Urging people to support the BJP, he added, "Here is a new dialogue for you before I start my cam-

paign. Remember this. My name is Mithun Chakraborty. I Do what I say and the dialogue goes: Neither I am a Keelback, nor I am a Krait. I am a true Cobra! One Bite and you are gone. That is what it will be from now. Keep faith in me, trust my words. I never shunned you in tough times, I am going to be there always with you."

Mithun is going to start campaigning for the BJP in the state from March 12.

In a kurta, cap and sunglasses, the national award winner accepted the BJP flag and waved to the crowd.

The 70-year-old actor and former Trinamool Rajya Sabha member has a huge fan-following in Bengal. Lately, he has been seen in popular dance reality shows; in Bollywood, his popularity peaked during his days as a dancer actor in blockbusters like "Disco Dancer".

Dravidian parties finalise alliances

R. MOHAN
CHENNAI, MARCH 7

The battle lines are almost fully drawn.

The two top alliances led by Dravidian majors are ready, with only minor agreements to be sewn. On Sunday, the Congress shook hands with the DMK on a deal that gives the national party 25 Assembly seats as opposed to 41 (winning eight) in the 2016 elections — and also keeps the Kanyakumari Lok Sabha seat which the late H. Vasanthakumar had won for it in the 2019 Parliament elections.

The DMK needs to wrap

up the issue with the CPM to make the DMK+ alliance complete. Similarly, the AIADMK+ alliance has to wrap up a deal with MDMK and G.K. Vasan's TMC to complete its line-up for the poll. Both Dravidian majors have largely stuck to their plan of fighting 170 to 180 seats of 234 and giving their allies a lesser number to fight from but the numbers will keep the alliances going into a crucial election on April 6.

Dinesh Gundu Rao, Congress leader in charge of Tamil Nadu, said on Sunday morning at the DMK headquarters in Chennai that more than an

alliance this was a secular partnership that will oppose the BJP and its "dictatorial ways" and "One Nation, One Leader", idea. "BJP by entering into an alliance with AIADMK, its intention is to finish off AIADMK. They want to kill all Opposition parties in the country," he declared. The alliance against the saffron party was not confined to ideology alone, but extended to "saving democracy" from its clutches, he pointed out.

The Congress was a shade late in clinching the Tamil Nadu deal but since it had few options it had to depend on word from

Delhi to DMK president M.K. Stalin to open up final negotiations for what is a long standing alliance in the State. The local Congress chief K.S. Alagiri found the progress of the alliance talks so painful at one stage as to burst into tears at a media conference. After the agreement was signed on Sunday he said he was "fully satisfied".

Rao said the only aim was to ensure the victory of the secular front led by DMK. "Once we sign an agreement, we have to be satisfied because this has been done after a lot of deliberations. Our only aim is now to see that the

secular front wins. The time for being satisfied or dissatisfied is over. Now we are in the battlefield. We have to take on our opponents," Rao said.

Rao also hinted that the alliance will also be in place for Puducherry soon though the political picture in the UT is not yet clear with the NR Congress of N. Rangasamy dominating the scene but is looking for allies to strengthen its hands.

The second major Tamil Nadu alliance fell in place a day after the ruling AIADMK had sealed a seat deal by allotting 20 seats to the BJP besides the Kanyakumari LS seat.

India to launch sat to keep eye
on borders in near real-time

Will also aid in military ops, enable quick disaster monitoring

Bengaluru, March 7: India plans to launch on March 28 an earth observation satellite that will provide it near real-time images of its borders and also enable quick monitoring of natural disasters.

GISAT-1 is slated to be lofted into space by GSVL-F10 rocket from Sriharikota spaceport in Andhra Pradesh's Nellore district, about 100 kms north of Chennai. "We are looking to launch this Geo imaging satellite on March 28, subject to weather conditions", an official of the Bengaluru-headquartered Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) told PTI on Sunday.

The rocket will place the spacecraft in a geosynchronous orbit. It will be subsequently positioned in geostationary orbit, about 36,000 km above earth's equator, using its onboard propulsion system.

The launch of GISAT-1 onboard GSVL-F10 rocket



was originally planned for March 5 last year but postponed a day before the blast-off due to technical reasons.

Experts said positioning the state-of-the-art agile earth observation satellite in geostationary orbit has key advantages.

"It's going to be a game-changer in some sense for India", a department of space official said.

"With onboard high resolution cameras, the satel-

'Ultras in Assam
not in position
to create trouble'MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MARCH 7

The unified command of security forces in its assessment has found that no militant group in Assam has the strength of creating any trouble in the ensuing Assembly polls but keeping a close watch on activities of Ulfa (I) commander-in-chief Paresh Baruah who has been calling up many political leaders of different political parties to know their assessment on the emerging political scenario of the state.

Informing that the unified command has decided to intensify vigil along the inter-state border with Assam to check the sneaking in of militants, security sources said that Unified Command had some input on the presence of few armed cadres of Ulfa(I) in Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts of Arunachal Pradesh Mon district of Nagaland.

Pointing out that Ulfa (I) chief Paresh Baruah was found to have been calling up some of the political leaders of the state frequently and discussing the possible outcome of the state elections, security sources however

claimed that the outfit doesn't have the capability to create any disturbance in the elections.

Asserting that all possible steps have been taken to ensure peaceful elections in the state, security sources said that unified command of security forces have already started re-allocation of security forces to ensure that security-related guidelines of the Elections Commission of India is implemented effectively in three-phase polling in the state.

Security sources said that stress has been given to improve the coordination among the various security forces deployed for the election duty in the state.

About the Bodoland Territorial Council in Western Assam, security sources admitted that all the militant organizations have laid down arms and came over the ground in January 2020 but they are not sure about former National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) leader M. Batha — who came back to Assam in January of 2020, around 25 years after he went underground but for quite some time, he has gone missing.

Budget Session's
2nd part likely
to be cut shortAGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

Amid the high-octane poll campaign in five states/UT, the second half of Parliament's Budget Session will begin Monday, when the government's priority will be the passage of demands for grants for 2021-22 along with the Finance Bill, that carries various tax proposals. The government has listed various bills for passage in the session, which ends on April 8.

However, it is learnt the session may be curtailed as most politicians will be busy campaigning for the Assembly polls. Sources said most parties support curtailing the session due to the Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry polls. MPs from the poll-going states will anyway skip the session. An official decision is, however, yet to be taken.

Some of the bills listed by the government include the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (Amendment) Bill, National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development Bill, Electricity (Amendment) Bill, Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official

■ **WHILE MOST** political parties will be busy campaigning, MPs from West Bengal, Kerala, Assam and Tamil Nadu, where election will take place are expected to skip the Budget Session

Digital Currency Bill.

While most political parties will be busy campaigning, MPs from West Bengal, Kerala, Assam and Tamil Nadu, where election will take place are expected to skip the session. These states, particularly West Bengal, are witnessing high voltage campaigning.

The first part of the Budget Session started on January 29 with the President's address to joint sitting of both houses of Parliament. The address was boycotted by over 20 Opposition parties, including the Congress, in support of the demand of the protesting farmers for the repeal of the three farm laws. The Union Budget was tabled on February 1.

Thereafter, House proceedings were washed out for four consecutive days over the opposition's demand for separate discussion on farm issues. To compensate the session's lost time, the House sat till midnight for several days.

■ **GISAT-1 IS** slated to be lofted into space by GSVL-F10 rocket from Sriharikota spaceport in Andhra Pradesh's Nellore district on March 28

■ **WITH ONBOARD** high resolution cameras, the satellite will allow the country to monitor the Indian land mass and the oceans, particularly its borders continuously, said an official

lite will allow the country to monitor the Indian land mass and the oceans, particularly its borders continuously."

Listing the objectives of the mission, Isro has earlier said the satellite would provide near real-time imaging of the large area region of interest at frequent intervals.

It would help in quick monitoring of natural disasters, episodic and any short-term events.

The third objective is to obtain spectral signatures of agriculture, forestry, mineralogy, disaster warning, cloud properties, snow and glacier and oceanography.

GISAT-1 will facilitate near real-time observation of the Indian sub-continent, under cloud-free condition, at frequent intervals, Isro said.

The planned launch of GISAT-1, weighing about 2,268 kg, comes close on the heels of the successful February 28 PSLV-C51 mission that orbited Brazil's earth observation satellite Amazonia-1 and 18 co-passengers, including five built by students.

Isro chairman K. Sivan told PTI last week that the technical issues that led to postponement of GISAT-1 mission have been resolved and the further delay in the launch was due to Covid-19-induced lockdown which affected normal work.

— PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

8 MARCH 2021

As BJP raises anti-Didi pitch, Bengal is the battle to watch

The BJP of Narendra Modi, Amit Shah and Yogi Adityanath is making a bid to emerge as the hegemonic power across all the territories of India. The looming Assembly elections in Assam and West Bengal in the east/north-east, and Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the south, will be a test of that resolve, which depends not only on highlighting the political weaknesses of opponents and their governance deficits (West Bengal), the normal way to do things.

More crucially, the effort mounted by the saffron party relies on a polarising community-based campaign that seeks to exploit the religious divide and — no less pertinently — on the use of state agencies, such as CBI, Income Tax, Customs, and the NIA, controlled by the Union government. Gone is the era when Mr Modi's campaign depended on recounting the virtues of the so-called "Gujarat model" of development from his days as chief minister. This was a fraudulent rhetoric that was milked in the 2014 Lok Sabha election. Regrettably, the media failed to analyse it when it mattered.

Since then, leading planks of government policy such as demonetisation, faulty GST implementation, response to the coronavirus pandemic that set off the biggest mass migration of the working class in history in pathetic circumstances, the worst unemployment in nearly half a century, the farmers' agitation, and the impression of political caving in before the Chinese army in eastern Ladakh, have caused much anguish among wide swathes of the populace. And yet, the broad impression is that the Prime Minister and his chief lieutenants are sitting pretty and continue to command the affections of the country on account of the weaponised Hindutva factor.

One way or the other, the upcoming state polls, whose results will be known on May 2 (with polling to commence in about three weeks), are likely to either confirm the enormous value of overtly religiosity-centric electoral politics in the BJP's scheme of things — or the repudiation of this principle.

If the pull of religiosity is confirmed, Mr Modi's — and Mr Shah's — the BJP is likely to get even more gung-ho than it is in its preparation for the next Lok Sabha election in 2024.

Interestingly, the BJP's political opponents appear not to fully grasp the meaning of the upcoming state polls. They continue to parse till infinity the inner meaning of secularism in India in order to retain power or influence, and in this process attempt to exclude or restrict the influence of other so-called "secular" parties. Kerala and West Bengal are good examples of this.

In Assam, the BJP took power from the Congress. It is the only state where it will be challenged by the Congress-led front. In Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the BJP appears to have made some impression among the middle classes, the upwardly mobile groups, and sections of the upper castes and the propertied classes. Even so, the best it may hope to do is to improve its vote-share and win just a few seats (along with ally AIADMK in TN) and register improvements in Kerala in the company of some caste outfits.

It is in West Bengal that the saffron party hopes to eject two-time CM Mamta Banerjee's Trinamul Congress from power, much as Ms Banerjee had torpedoed Left Front rule in 2011. This really is the poll to watch along with Assam where the BJP could face a battle of rough parity with the Congress and its allies.

Team India worthy winners

Team India are in the final of the Word Test championship and that is just the icing on the cake. A comprehensive 3-1 rout of England was completed on a clutch of astounding performances from young members of the team like Rishabh Pant, Washington Sundar, Axar Patel and Mohammed Siraj. As Serena Williams said famously, "Champions are defined not by wins but by how they can recover when they fail." Team India did it twice in the space of two series, first recovering from the lows of 36 all out in the first Test in Australia and then from heavy defeat at the hands of England in the first Test in Chennai.

Remarkable resilience is only one part of the story. Cricketers who were on the fringes of the national team not only stepped into the Test arena with confidence but also shone like seasoned stalwarts. The quality of pitches prepared after losing the first Test may have left a lot to be desired but before the series ended in Ahmedabad, Team India had proved that the playing surface can be made incidental to the plot by professional performances. The players also defied the deleterious effects of seven long months spent in a bio-bubble. There is no doubt Team India will start favourites in the WTC final at Lord's this summer.

The prowess of the younger Indian players was stressed even more as the senior batsmen — Virat Kohli (172), Cheteshwar Pujara (133) and Ajinkya Rahane (112) — had very modest series like most of the England batsmen save Joe Root who made a double hundred in Chennai. The match winners with the bat for India were Rohit Sharma, whose phenomenal home record at an average of 79.52 runs per innings is nearly Bradmanesque, Pant who is fast becoming the world's best wicket-keeper batsman whose willow does all the talking and Washington Sundar. India's spin twins Ravichandran Ashwin (32 wickets at 14.71) and Patel (27 wickets at 10.59) proved irresistible as they spun a web around the visiting batsmen.

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Subhani



Competitive politics & competitive economy



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

Elections to the state legislatures of Assam, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Kerala have acquired national relevance for more than one reason. The most important one, of course, is that the outcome would determine whether or not the Indian political system would once again be characterised by what political scientist Rajni Kothari once famously termed as "one party dominance".

True, the BJP has already acquired a dominant national presence of the kind that the Indira Congress enjoyed well into the 1980s. But Kothari coined that term to capture the kind of sway across the country that the Indian National Congress enjoyed during the 1950s, when regional parties had not yet made their presence felt even at the provincial level.

Even though the BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has acquired what political scientist Antonio Gramsci defined as "hegemony", using instruments of the State to browbeat the Opposition, the fact is that regional formations like the Trinamul Congress and the Telangana Rashtra Samiti have been able to hold their own against the Hindutva juggernaut. If Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress, the DMK in Tamil Nadu and the Congress in Assam manage to defeat the BJP, these state legislature elections will mark a turning point in national politics. The outcome in Kerala is unlikely to favour the BJP, despite the rapid transit of "Metro Man" E. Sreedharan into provincial politics.

While psephologists and political analysts will analyse the political impli-

cations of the election outcome, investors and economists would want to know what the economic consequences of the outcome are likely to be. Many imagine that a nationwide sweep in favour of the BJP, reinforcing Hindutva dominance from West Bengal to Tamil Nadu, will be good for business and the economy. Single party dominance, they imagine, would further strengthen Prime Minister Modi's hands and that he would then be able to push through the agenda of building an "Atma Nirbhar Bharat", restoring momentum to a sagging economy.

Statistical evidence, however, does not seem to bear this hypothesis out. In India's seven-decade experience with democracy, the interesting fact is that the era of single party dominance has been correlated with a lower rate of economic growth than what former Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh famously called the "era of coalitions", with its multi-party governments.

Between 1947 and 1977, the era of the Congress Party's dominance, the average annual rate of growth of the economy was around 3.5 per cent. Though the 1980s also saw single party government in New Delhi, it was the decade in which state governments run by regional political parties proliferated. The Indira Congress of the 1980s was no longer as powerful across the country as the Congress under Jawaharlal Nehru was during the 1950s.

Despite the weakening of Congress dominance and the rise of minority and coalition governments in the last two decades of the last century, the rate of economic growth picked up and the average annual

rate of growth of national income was 5.5 per cent during 1980 to 2000. Granted that correlation does not imply causation, but the evidence of the first two decades of the 21st century is convincing. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh led a minority government that had the support of a fractious coalition and yet he delivered historically high rates of economic growth. Between 2003 and 2011 the Indian economy grew at an annual average of close to 8.0 per cent. It slipped a bit below that during the last three years of the Manmohan Singh government, but the average was still around 7.5 per cent.

The last data point seals the argument. After having established a single party government in New Delhi for the first time in three decades and asserting BJP dominance at the national level, Prime Minister Modi has not been able to improve the performance of the economy. After six years in national office, Mr Modi has not been able to push the investment rate above 30 per cent and the average annual rate of economic growth, keeping the Covid-19 year 2020-21 out, is nowhere near the rate of growth attained during the Manmohan Singh years. Even if Covid-19 had not struck the economy, the annual average rate of economic growth during 2014-21 would have been closer to 6.0 per cent rather than the 8.0 per cent recorded during 2003-11.

Economist Surjit Bhalla, now an executive director on the board of the International Monetary

In India's seven-decade experience with democracy, the interesting fact is that the era of single party dominance has been correlated with a lower rate of economic growth than what former PM V.P. Singh famously called the 'era of coalitions'

Fund representing India, made an interesting politico-economic forecast in April 2014, writing in the *Financial Times* of London. If the elections of 2014 threw up a single party majority government, he argued, the economy would be able to return to an average annual rate of economic growth of 8.0 per cent, that India had recorded till 2011.

Well, the fact is that the elections did produce a decisive mandate in favour of Prime Minister Modi but he has not been able to pull the rate of economic growth back to the Manmohan Singh average of 8.0 per cent. This has not been for want of trying. So the assumption that a strong, stable single party government would deliver economic performance superior to a weak, unstable, multi-party coalition was yet again disproved.

What this means is that encouraging political competition and ensuring that political parties in government are under the constant pressure of a critical and assertive Opposition is in fact good for governance and the economy. One party dominance delivers sub-optimal performance at least in part because the absence of the pressure of competition ends up in not ensuring performance.

To cut a longer story short, an outright victory for the BJP in the coming state Assembly elections may not be the best thing that could happen to the economy. Rather, the emergence of a viable and assertive Opposition that exerts competitive pressure on the dominant party, at the centre and in the states, may yield better economic results. Many of the policy mistakes of the Modi government during its second term in office are clearly a consequence of the arrogance of power. A new lease of life for non-BJP parties may be good for the polity and the economy.

The writer is an economist, a former newspaper editor, a best-selling author and former adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh

LETTERS

WELL DONE, TMC

The Election Commission's missive to the health ministry to remove the Prime Minister's photograph from the certificates issued to vaccine recipients in the poll-bound states of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam and Kerala and the Union Territory of Puducherry must cheer BJP's adversaries. Certificates bearing the PM's image could give the saffron party an undue edge in the poll-bound States. The Trinamul Congress had taken up the issue on March 2, demanding the removal of the photo.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

CLEVER INDICTMENT

PAVAN VARMA'S tongue-in-cheek "Freedom, conspiracy and other anti-national sins" (March 7) was a cleverly veiled but unmistakable indictment of all that is frightfully wrong around us today. If the powers that be have managed to uncover the irony behind Mr Varma's brilliantly crafted article, they may even drag him over the coals on the very counts that he has enumerated as qualifying for the offence of sedition or "anti-nationalism". One only hopes that good sense would ultimately prevail and the nation and its people will be spared of the current intolerance.

Bhaskar Roy
New Delhi

ILLEGAL QUOTA

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "To draw votes, Khattar's quota sacrifices growth" (March 6). Haryana deputy chief minister Dushyant Chautala has endorsed the quota. However, it is actually violative of the fundamental rights granted under Article 19(1)(g). It also discriminates against talent. Hope it is rolled back soon, or else, it will strike the death knell for industry in hubs, such as Faridabad and Gurugram.

Yugal Kishore Sharma
Faridabad

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Deepak Singhal (Mar. 7). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Shikha Mukerjee



Mamata's long game: Women's status in Bengal is transformed

It would be easy to list the fights Mamata Banerjee has won; it would be easy to trace her years of grind in the Congress' ranks and then her meteoric rise up the ladder from her 1984 success in defeating Somnath Chatterjee, later Lok Sabha Speaker in the UPA-1 years, and becoming one of the Lok Sabha's youngest parliamentarians up until now, when she is fighting off a challenge from the BJP, this is determined to snatch West Bengal away from her.

As the challenger, the BJP is insistent that Ms Banerjee failed to serve West Bengal's people, regardless of how her rule has been evaluated by some of the Centre's own ministries.

Perception, not data, is how Ms Banerjee is usually rated. In many ways she presents a soft target to patriarchy who arrive at judgments that are contradicted by facts. The reason: she is now India's only woman chief minister and woman of substance. It is axiomatic that patriarchy would consciously and unconsciously react to the idea of power and formidable popularity of this one woman, whose presence prevents the Indian State from being overrun by men.

If Narendra Modi and his 56-inch chest is the epitome of male power, the barely 60-inch frame of Ms Banerjee is the epitome of woman power. It's unlikely that even the least exposed voters in far-flung corners of any part of India would not recognise the names of Mr Modi and Mamata Banerjee. This puts her at par with Indira Gandhi, a name and face that almost everyone in any part of India instantly recognises.

By the time Ms Banerjee became chief minister in 2011, development theory and strategy for guiding decision and policymaking had evolved about why women were systematically left behind and struggled to fulfil their potential. There was also a large and constantly growing body of work that was taking apart the structures, institutions and systems that supported the control exercised by patriarchy. There was a growing body of expert opinion, social choice theory, for which Amartya Sen won the Nobel in Economics, that indicated merely prescribing education as the best way to bring about change and development was not enough to aid the poor or help the girl child escape the systematic incarceration by patriarchy.

In a textbook development strategy to keep the girl child in education and give her the means to negotiate her choices and decisions about her own future, that is a limited autonomy, the Mamata government began the "Kanyashree" programme in 2013. Contrary to the dismissive assessment of the programme as a scholarship, it is really an incentive for families and the girl child to remain in education and complete the process of acquiring a secondary school certificate that would enable her to access undergraduate college education. In other words, "Kanyashree" has created access by arming the girl child-young woman with resources to give her an entry into tertiary level education by giving her a measure of financial autonomy in making decisions and choices.

The idea of a programme for the secondary level girl child was Mamata Banerjee's. Instead of taking the usual route of asking her bureaucrats to design the programme, she got Unicef to develop the design. It makes "Kanyashree" a textbook strategy for empowerment of the girl child and a long game that will effectively transform how gender and women negotiate for their

rights, power and status in the near future, but not the immediate one. The ₹25,000 deposited in her name in a bank is seed capital she can leverage to create her own future.

In a slew of programmes that empower women to make their decisions count, the West Bengal government has initiated a quiet revolution. The Rupashree Prakalpa — a ₹25,000 one-time grant "for economically stressed families at the time of their adult daughters' marriage" — is far more than a dowry. It ensures the daughter is an adult and not a child when she is married off; it ensures the young woman has a voice in decision-making about her marriage, because she has the means, and it ensures she doesn't become Rasika Agarwal, a woman who died as her parents persuaded her to return to her in-laws though she was brutalised by her husband.

With the elder woman named as head of the household under Swasthya Sathi, a universal access to health services scheme of the Mamata Banerjee government, and the elder woman named as head of the household on ration cards, the change is even deeper. Women's access to medical care is neglected

in India; as head of the household, the woman in West Bengal can access the care, worth ₹5 lakhs a year, without asking her family. The same is true of her entitlement to food; as the head of the household, her access to food in terms of quantity and quality is embedded in the ration card.

Between Kanyashree and Swasthya Sathi, the widows' pension available to any woman who is over 18, Ms Banerjee has done what advocates of women's development lobby for when women take control after acquiring power in government. As a role model for how women in power can transform the future, in their own lives, for their families, for the state and the country, Mamata Banerjee is taking up where Jayalalithaa was stopped by her untimely death. The programmes are not original, as the Jayalalithaa government set up the prototype. But by building on example, Mamata Banerjee will go down as a transformer.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

Today is International Women's Day

SHORT TAKES

JUSTICE IN DOCK
AS SARKOZY
CRIES 'SCANDAL'

Paris: The French justice system has scored a series of major victories in high-profile corruption cases against right-wing politicians, but the successes have sparked claims of bias and verbal attacks on prosecutors and judges.

After the stunning conviction of ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy this week, a debate has raged about whether the sword of justice is getting stronger, or whether its blows are being manipulated.

Sarkozy, who became the first modern president sentenced to jail, has consistently sought to portray the multiple investigations into his affairs since leaving office in 2012 as a witch hunt.

He has called it a "scandal that will remain in the annals of history," has questioned whether France still lives under the rule of law.

SAUDI-LED
JETS POUND
YEMEN CAPITAL

Riyadh, March 7: A Saudi-led military coalition mounted air strikes on Yemen's Huthi-controlled capital Sanaa on Sunday after it intercepted a string of drones launched by the Iran-backed rebels, state media reported.

The developments mark a new escalation in Yemen's six-year conflict between the coalition-backed Yemeni government and the rebels, despite a renewed US push to end the conflict.

The strikes triggered huge explosions in Sanaa and sent plumes of smoke rising in the sky, according to reports. The rebels reported seven air strikes on the city.

"The military operation targets Huthi military capabilities in Sanaa and a number of other provinces," the coalition was quoted as saying by the official Saudi Press Agency.

The raids come after the coalition said it intercepted a total of 12 drones launched by the rebels on Sunday, in a sharp escalation in cross-border attacks on the kingdom.

ANOTHER AIDE
ACCUSES CUOMO
OF MISCONDUCT

New York: Another woman who worked for Gov. Andrew Cuomo is describing conduct she felt was inappropriate for the workplace.

Ana Liss, 35, told *The Wall Street Journal* in a story published on Saturday that when she worked as a policy aide to the governor between 2013 and 2015, Cuomo called her "sweetheart," once kissed her hand and asked personal questions, including whether she had a boyfriend.

She said he sometimes greeted her with a hug and a kiss on both cheeks. Liss told the *Journal* she initially thought of Cuomo's behavior as harmless, but it grew to bother her. She felt it was patronising.

"It's not appropriate, really, in any setting," she said. "I wish that he took me seriously." A spokesman for Cuomo didn't immediately return a request for comment, but told the *Journal* that some of the behavior Liss was describing was the kind of innocent glad-handing that politicians often do at public events.

SWITZERLAND
VOTES ON
'BURQA BAN'

Berlin: Swiss voters delivered their verdict Sunday on a proposal to ban face coverings, both the niqabs and burqas worn by a few Muslim women in the country and the ski masks and bandannas used by protesters. A projection after polls closed pointed to a very close result.

The measure would outlaw covering one's face in public places like restaurants, sports stadiums, public transport or simply walking in the street. There would be exceptions at religious sites and for security or health reasons, such as the face masks people are wearing now to protect against Covid-19, as well as for traditional Carnival celebrations.

Authorities would have two years to draw up detailed legislation. The Swiss government opposes the measure and says that people covering their faces is a "marginal" issue.

It argues the measure could harm tourism — most Muslim women who wear such veils in Switzerland are visitors from well-heeled Persian Gulf states, who are often drawn to Swiss lakeside cities.

Iran up for talks if
US lifts sanctions

Prez Rouhani criticises the European signatories of the historic nuclear deal

Tehran, March 7: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Sunday his country was prepared to take steps to live up to measures in the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers as soon as the United States lifts economic sanctions on Iran.

In a meeting with Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney, Rouhani said: "Iran is ready to immediately take compensatory measures based on the nuclear deal and fulfill its commitments just after the US illegal sanctions are lifted and it abandons its policy of threats and pressure."

Rouhani criticised the European signatories of the historic nuclear deal for what he said was their inaction on their commit-

ments to the agreement. He said Iran is the only country that kept its side of the bargain.

Trump in 2018 unilaterally withdrew the US from the Iranian nuclear accord, in which Tehran had agreed to limit its uranium enrichment in exchange for the lifting of

economic sanctions.

When the US then reimposed some sanctions and added others, Iran gradually and publicly abandoned the deal's limits on its nuclear development.

The Republic of Ireland has the role of facilitator in the implementation of the nuclear deal.

Coveney said the withdrawal of former President Donald Trump was a mistake and noted that the new US administration is determined to return to the deal. In December, Iran's parliament approved a bill that calls for the suspension of part of UN inspections of its nuclear facilities if European signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal do not provide relief from oil and banking sanctions. — AP

Biden's Covid bill cleared

Washington, March 7: The US Senate on Saturday voted to approve a \$1.9 trillion relief package in what President Joe Biden called a "giant step" towards reviving the pandemic-stricken American economy, capping frenzied negotiations and a marathon overnight voting session.

Passed by 50 votes to 49 in a strict party line vote, the sweeping legislation now heads back to the Democratic-majority House of Representatives,

where it is expected to be adopted, barring a last-minute setback.

"I promised the American people help was on the way," said Biden in an address from the White House, after the plan was approved along strict party lines.

"Today, I can say we've taken one more giant step forward in delivering on that promise," he said. "It obviously wasn't easy. It wasn't always pretty. But it was so desperately needed." Even without the pro-

gressive priority of a minimum wage increase to \$15 an hour, the stimulus bill marks a victory for Biden's Democrats as they put their stamp on the recovery from a pandemic that has killed more than 5,00,000 people in the United States and hobbled its economy.

Top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer vowed that the bill "will deliver more help to more people than anything the federal government has done in decades." — AP

Vaccine rollout 'India's gift' to world: US

Houston, March 7: The rollout of Covid-19 vaccine is "India's gift" to the world in combating Coronavirus and will be remembered as a time when the country stepped up in a major way as a global player in innovation, a top American scientist has said.

India is called the pharmacy of the world during the Covid-19 pandemic with its vast experience and deep knowledge in medicine. The country is one of the world's biggest drug-makers and an increasing number of countries have already approached it for procuring Coronavirus vaccines. Dr. Peter Hotez, Dean of the National School of

• **INDIA'S DRUGS** regulator gave emergency use authorisation to Covishield, produced by Pune-based Serum Institute of India after securing licence from British pharma company AstraZeneca, and Covaxin, indigenously developed jointly by Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech and Indian Council of Medical Research scientists.

Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine (BCM) in Houston during a webinar this week said that the two mRNA vaccines may not impact the world's low and

middle income countries, but India's vaccines, made in collaboration with universities across the world such as BCM and Oxford University, have "rescued the world" and its contributions must not to be underestimated.

During the webinar, "Covid-19: Vaccination and Potential Return to Normalcy — If and When", Dr Hotez, an internationally-recognised physician-scientist in neglected tropical diseases and vaccine development, said that the Covid-19 vaccine rollout is "India's gift" to the world in combating the virus.

India's drugs regulator gave emergency use aut-

horisation to Covishield, produced by Pune-based Serum Institute of India after securing licence from British pharma company AstraZeneca, and Covaxin, indigenously developed jointly by Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech and Indian Council of Medical Research scientists.

The webinar was organised by Indo American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston (IAC-GCH). "This is something very special and I see it myself because I'm on weekly teleconferences with our colleagues in India, you make a recommendation, and within days it's done and not only done, but it's done well

and with incredible rigor and thought and creativity," Dr Hotez said, stressing that he felt compelled to make this statement because "India's huge efforts in combating global pandemic is a story that's not really getting out in the world."

Dr Hotez, considered as the authority on vaccinations, is working on an affordable coronavirus vaccine in collaboration with Indian pharmaceutical companies. There is increasing evidence that vaccines not only "interrupt symptomatic illness and keep you out of the hospital" but halts asymptomatic transmission as well. — PTI

China warns Biden to reverse
'dangerous practice' on Taiwan

Beijing, March 7: China's foreign minister warned the Biden administration on Sunday to roll back former President Donald Trump's "dangerous practice" of showing support for Taiwan, the island democracy Beijing claims as its own territory.

The Chinese claim to Taiwan, which split with the mainland in 1949, is an "insurmountable red line," Wang Yi said at a news conference during the annual meeting of China's ceremonial legislature.

The United States has no official relations with Taiwan's democratically



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi speaks during a remote video press conference held on the sidelines of the annual meeting of Chinas National Peoples Congress (NPC) in Beijing, on Sunday.

elect government but extensive informal ties. Trump, who left office in January, irked Beijing by

sending Cabinet officials to visit Taiwan in a show of support. "The Chinese govern-

ment has no room for compromise or concessions on the Taiwan issue," Wang said. "We urge the new US administration to fully understand the high sensitivity of the Taiwan issue" and "completely change the previous administration's dangerous practices of crossing the line" and playing with fire," he said.

Wang gave no indication how Beijing might react if US policy isn't changed, but the ruling Communist Party has threatened to invade if Taiwan declares formal independence or delays talks on uniting with the mainland. — AP



Nuns wave flags of Iraq, Kurdistan, and the Holy See as they wait for the arrival of Pope Francis at the Franso Hariri Stadium in Arbil, on Sunday, in the capital of the northern Iraqi Kurdish autonomous region.

Pope prays for Iraq's victims of war

Mosul, Iraq, March 7: Pope Francis prayed on Sunday for "victims of war" outside a centuries-old church in Iraq's Mosul, where the Islamic State group ravaged one of the world's oldest Christian communities until the jihadists' defeat three years ago.

With the crumbling stone walls of the Al-Tahera (Immaculate Conception) Church behind him, Pope Francis made a plea for Christians in Iraq and the Middle East to stay in their homelands.

The 84-year-old pontiff said the "tragic" exodus of

• **THE IS** onslaught forced hundreds of thousands of Christians in northern Iraq's Nineveh province to flee. Iraq's Christian population has shrunk to fewer than 4,00,000 from around 1.5 million before the US-led invasion of 2003.

Christians from war-scarred Iraq and the wider region "does incalculable harm not just to the individuals and communities concerned, but also to the society they leave behind".

The IS onslaught forced hundreds of thousands of

Christians in northern Iraq's Nineveh province to flee. Iraq's Christian population has shrunk to fewer than 4,00,000 from around 1.5 million before the US-led invasion of 2003.

The faithful had gathered on Sunday in the courtyard of the Al-Tahera Church, whose roof collapsed during fighting against IS in 2017.

It is one of the oldest of at least 14 churches in Nineveh province that were destroyed by IS.

Boutros Chito, a Catholic priest in Mosul, said the pope's visit could change the way people think about his city, the ancient

centre of which still lies in ruins.

"Pope Francis will announce to the whole world that we are the people of peace, a civilisation of love," Chito said.

The heaviest deployment of security forces yet has been mobilised to protect Francis on what is perhaps the riskiest day of his historic trip to Iraq, where state forces are still hunting IS sleeper cells.

Pope Francis's trip to Iraq as a "pilgrim of peace" aims to reassure the country's dwindling Christian community and to expand his dialogue with other religions. — AP

Myanmar protests
after overnight
raids in Yangon

Yangon, March 7: Thousands of Myanmar anti-coup demonstrators defied a continued military crackdown on Sunday, following overnight raids in Yangon in which an official from Aung San Suu Kyi's party was beaten to death and several others were detained.

Myanmar has been rocked by unrest since a February 1 coup ousted civilian leader Suu Kyi from power and triggered a mass uprising opposed to the new military junta. Wednesday was the deadliest day so far, with the United Nations saying at least 38 people were killed as security forces fired into crowds, shooting some protesters in the head.

The UN rights office also said it has verified at least 54 deaths since the coup — though the actual number could be far higher — and more than 1,700 people have been detained.

National League for Democracy party official Soe Win confirmed some officials were arrested in overnight police operations but the exact number is not known.

At least one community leader connected to the ousted NLD government, 58-year-old Khin Maung Latt, was killed during a raid at Pabedan township in Yangon, Tun Kyi, from the Former Political Prisoners Society, said.

"He was beaten and

taken in a raid since last night and it seems he underwent a harsh interrogation," he said.

"The dead body is being taken from Mingaladon military hospital and on the way to Yay Way cemetery," NLD MP Sithu Maung posted on Facebook that security forces last night were also searching for the party's information officer Maung Maung but had been unable to find him.

"Maung Maung's brother was beaten by police and soldiers and his body was held in an upside-down position while he was tortured because there was no one to arrest," the MP said.

State-run media on Sunday warned ousted lawmakers involved in a group called the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw — which is claiming to be the legitimate elected government — that they are committing "high treason" and could be sentenced to death or 22 years jail.

The junta has declared group members personae non-grata and says those who communicate with them could face seven years prison.

Rallies fanned out across the country with more than seven separate demonstrations in Yangon and at least five in other cities and regional towns, according to Facebook live feeds. — AP

TOP | AUCTION

"just setting up my twttr," Jack Dorsey tweeted on 21 March 2006

World's first ever tweet draws \$2 mn bid

San Francisco, March 7: Twitter boss Jack Dorsey is selling his first tweet at auction, with bidding Saturday reaching \$2 million in a sign of the appetite for virtual objects authenticated through blockchain technology.

"just setting up my twttr," Dorsey tweeted on March 21, 2006. On Friday he posted a link to "Valuables @Cent," an online marketplace for tweets where, the site says, investors or collectors can "buy and sell tweets auto-



Jack Dorsey

ators." The top bid on Saturday for Dorsey's tweet — \$2

• **THE TOP** bid on Saturday for Dorsey's tweet — \$2 million — came from Justin Sun, the founder of TRON, a platform for blockchain, the technology underlying cryptocurrencies.

million — came from Justin Sun, the founder of TRON, a platform for blockchain, the technology underlying cryptocurrencies. He also heads the BitTorrent streaming platform.

"The creator of a tweet decides if they would like to mint it on the blockchain, creating a 1-of-1 autographed version," Valuables explains. Buying a tweet means purchasing "a digital certificate of the tweet, unique because it has been signed and verified by the creator," according to Valuables.

In Dorsey's case, the tweet itself remains visible to all, so long as he and Twitter leave it online.

The approach is much like the online sales of dramatic digital

"moments" from National Basketball Association games; the short video sequences remain visible for free on the internet but a blockchain-backed "Non-Fungible Token" (NFT) is generated to guarantee the identity, authenticity and traceability of the video, confirming its value.

Thus, a 10-second clip showing a spectacular sequence by basketball superstar LeBron James fetched \$208,000 on the NBA Top Shot site late last month. Top Shot has generated

more than \$200 million in transactions this year, according to Dapper Labs, which partnered with the NBA to create Top Shot.

In 2019, Sun paid \$4.6 million in a winning bid to lunch with iconic billionaire Warren Buffett. Sun reportedly tried but failed to convince the elderly investor of the value of bitcoins.

NFTs have soared in popularity, to the point that prestigious auction house Christie's last month sold an entirely digital artwork. — AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50405.32	-0.87
Nifty 50	14938.10	-0.95
S&P 500*	3,841.94	1.95
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 Friday/Saturday

FDI in software, hardware jumps 4-fold to \$24.4 bn

Foreign direct investments in the computer software and hardware sector jumped nearly four-times to \$24.4 billion during April-December, according to the DPIIT against \$6.4 billion in the year-ago period and \$7.7 billion in FY20. The other sectors which recorded significant growth in foreign inflows during the nine-month period include construction (infrastructure) activities (\$7.2 billion), and pharmaceuticals (\$1.24 billion).

DoT to issue demand notes to telcos this week



The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) will issue demand notes to telcos next week on an upfront payment for spectrum acquired in the just-concluded auctions, which raked in over Rs 77,800 crore, for 855.6 MHz of spectrum, for the government. Reliance Jio spent the most in the auction, picking up 488.35 MHz spectrum in bands such as 800 MHz, 1800 MHz and 2300 MHz for Rs 57,122.65 crore.

Ranganathan is head of CII-SR, Ella deputy

C. K. Ranganathan, chairman of Chennai-based CavinKare Ltd has been elected chairman of the CII, Southern Region, for 2021-22. Bharat Biotech International co-founder Sushitra K. Ella was elected as deputy chairperson. Ranganathan has been associated with the CII in various capacities. Ella was the past chairperson of CII Andhra Pradesh and also the national council member and the past national chairwoman of CII IWN.

FPIs pull out ₹5,156 cr in first week of March

Reversing the two-month buying streak, foreign portfolio investors pulled out Rs 5,156 crore from Indian markets in the first week of March amid profit booking and rising bond yields in the US. According to depositories data, overseas investors pulled out a net Rs 881 crore from equities and Rs 4,275 crore from the debt segment between March 1-5, taking the total net withdrawals to Rs 5,156 crore.

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Covid drives up domestic, export demand Home textile firms raising capacities

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 7

Buoyed by increased demand in both export and domestic markets, home textile companies are expanding their capacities.

The home textile segment is witnessing a strong demand revival. Increased consumption due to hygiene consciousness has improved the demand in both international and domestic markets, said Sidharth Rajagopal, executive director of Texprocil. There is also a surge in demand in the developed markets, including the US.

The Rs 55,000-crore Indian home textile sector, comprising products such as terry towels, bed sheets and spreads, pillow cases, curtains, and rugs and carpets, derives as much as 60-70 per cent of its revenue from exports. The US and the European Union account for over 80 per cent of these exports and large retailers and departmental stores are the major customers.

"Home textiles have taken a centre-stage in our lifestyle as work-from-home makes people spend more time inside their houses. There has been a pent-up demand in the June quarter, but in the September and December quarters the momentum is continuing," said Kailash Lalpuria, executive director and CEO of Indo Count.

Most of the major home textile companies reported a cumulative revenue



growth of 22 per cent in the December quarter. Supported by this positive outlook on demand, many of them are expanding their manufacturing capacities, according to Motilal Oswal Institutional Equities.

Welspun India is expanding its capacity for home textile business through debottlenecking facilities at Vapi and Anjar in order to increase capacity of towels, bed linen, rugs and carpets. Its flooring business grew over three-fold in the December quarter. Capacity of its hard flooring plant is being doubled in January. It is being further doubled by Q2 FY22 to cater to growing demand. Soft Flooring has also started gaining traction, with strong inquiries from US, Canada, and other markets.

Himatsingka Seide had recently announced its new licensing agreement with The Walt Disney Company for the European

region. The licence will give it the right to design, develop, manufacture, and distribute a broad range of home textile products inspired by Disney's vast archives and characters from all its franchises including Disney, Marvel, Pixar and Lucas.

Trident has announced its Vision 2025, which includes expansion of existing businesses, diversification into new businesses through organic and inorganic growth.

"The industry is debottlenecking and increasing capacity as well as moving into other product categories within home textiles. We are also drawing plans on increasing capex and capacities. We expect the home textile export market to grow at a CAGR of 15 per cent in the coming years," said Lalpuria.

VText, another major player, is operating at almost full capacity for woven fabric, gray fabric and processed fabric.

Old cars to get 5% rebate in scrappage policy: Gadkari

New Delhi, March 7:

There is good news for consumers who are going to junk their old vehicles and buy a new one under the Vehicle Scrapping Policy as automakers will give about 5 per cent rebate on the new purchase, Union minister Nitin Gadkari has said.

The voluntary vehicle scrapping policy announced in the Union Budget for 2021-22 provides for fitness test after 20 years for personal vehicles while commercial vehicles would require it after the completion of 15 years.

"Automobile manufacturers will provide about 5 per cent rebate on new car purchases" to the consumers in lieu of scrapping of the old, road transport, highways and MSMEs minister Gadkari told PTI.

The minister said the policy would lead to a 30 per cent boost to the Indian automobile industry turnover to Rs 10 lakh crore in the years to come from the present about Rs 4.5 lakh crore.

Gadkari said: "Automobile industry turnover which is Rs 4.5 lakh crore at present is likely to swell to Rs 10 lakh crore in years to come with India becoming an automobile hub."

Of this, the export component will go up to Rs 3 lakh crore from Rs 1.45 lakh crore now, he added.

—PTI

LIC capital base to go up from ₹100 cr to ₹25,000 cr

New Delhi, March 7: The government has proposed to significantly increase the authorised capital of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) to Rs 25,000 crore to facilitate its listing slated for the next fiscal.

Currently, the paid-up capital of the life insurance company with over 29 crore policies is Rs 100 crore. LIC, which started with an initial capital of Rs 5 crore in 1956, has an asset base of close to Rs 32 lakh crore at Rs 31,96,214.81 crore.

The authorised share capital of LIC shall be Rs 25,000 crore divided into 2,500 crore shares of Rs 10 each, as per the amendments proposed in the Life Insurance Corporation Act, 1956.

The amendments proposed as part of the Finance Bill 2021 will lead to the setting up of a board with independent directors in line with list-



ing obligations.

According to one of the 27 proposed amendments, the central government will hold at least 75 per cent in LIC for the first five years post the IPO, and subsequently hold at least 51 per cent at all times after five years of the listing.

Up to 10 per cent of the LIC IPO issue size would be reserved for policyholders, minister of state for finance Anurag Thakur had said last month.

The government will remain the majority shareholder and will continue to retain manage-

ment control, safeguarding the interest of policyholders, he had said.

In her budget speech, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the initial public offering (IPO) of LIC would be launched in the next financial year, beginning April 1.

Currently, the government owns 100 per cent stake in LIC. Once listed, it is likely to become the country's biggest company by market capitalisation, with an estimated valuation of Rs 8-10 lakh crore.

The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (Dipam), which manages the government's equity in state-owned companies, has already selected actuarial firm Milliman Advisors for ascertaining the embedded value of LIC for meeting the government's disinvestment target.

—PTI

RINL expects ₹1,000 cr from land sale

ABHISHEK SONKAR NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

State-owned RINL expects to garner Rs 1,000 crore from the sale of its 22.19-acre land located in the heart of Visakhapatnam.

Last week, state-run construction company NBCC had announced signing an MoU with Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd (RINL) for redevelopment and monetisation of its 22.19 acres of land in the city of Visakhapatnam.

The company expects to

get around Rs 1,000 crore as the market price of land is around Rs 1 lakh per square yard. The amount raised would be used to pay back a portion of the company's debt, a company source told PTI.

According to RINL's website, the company had a net debt of Rs 19,592 crore in financial year 2018-19.

The company, without any captive iron ore mine, produces over 19,000 tonne of hot metal per day from its three fully operational

blast furnaces at the plant. The source said RINL's land at Maddilapalem is a prime location, situated about 4 km from the beach and 2 km from NH-16 that connects Howrah in to Chennai.

The value of the project would be ascertained after the preparation and finalisation of a detailed project report. NBCC would make the DPR. The source said the redevelopment and monetisation would be undertaken on a self-sustainable model.—PTI

BIZ CONFIDENCE HIGHEST IN A DECADE: FICCI

FC BUREAU CHENNAI, MARCH 7

Corporate India's business confidence was at a decadal high in the December quarter, according to industry body Ficci.

Ficci's Overall Business Confidence Index reached 74.2 in the current round (Q3) on account of improvement in present conditions as well as expectations, the chamber said on Sunday.

The index had stood at 70.9 in the previous survey and at 59 a year ago, noted the survey, based on responses from about 190 companies, with their turnover ranging from Rs 1 crore to Rs 1.37 lakh crore.

The survey revealed recovery of demand conditions, improved capacity utilisation and a promising outlook on various operational parameters.

However, rising raw material costs is emerging as a bothersome factor for members of India Inc. The rise in fuel and other commodity prices is beginning to exert pressure on the input costs of companies.

Ikea rushes to make up lost time on expansion

CHRIS KAY MARCH 7

Furniture giant Ikea is accelerating its India expansion after a nationwide pandemic lockdown last year delayed the construction and opening of new stores in one of its fastest-growing markets.

"If you have a lockdown you can't continue to construct," Peter Betzel, Ikea's chief executive officer for India said in an interview. "But now we are back in full speed."

The company opened its second India store on the outskirts of Mumbai in December and another in Bengaluru is now on course to be completed in 12 months, Betzel said, adding that he was hopeful of meeting the target of rolling out shops in 30 cities within seven years.

Ikea, which opened its first store in Hyderabad in 2018, also has just two years left to raise the ratio of goods and materials sourced from India – currently at 22 per cent – to at least 30 per cent to meet local regulations. Betzel



Peter Betzel

said that was "absolutely" achievable.

"It's increasing as we speak," he said. "But this is not done overnight."

The Swedish furniture giant, known for its minimalist aesthetics, is now making up for lost time as the Indian economy begins to rebound from the pandemic-induced recession and Covid-19 infections slow down in the world's second-worst hit nation.

Ikea's ambitious plans for India, however, face potentially stiff competition after Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani, whose conglomerate bought a local furniture e-tailer, Urban Ladder, recently as part of its large

er plans to dominate India's \$1 trillion consumer retail market.

Betzel, an Ikea veteran who headed the company's Spanish and German operations before moving to India in 2018, said there is ample space for multiple players to plug "a big need in India – we are one part of that."

Ikea recently announced the acquisition of land in Noida, a satellite city adjacent to New Delhi, for a \$753 million multipurpose mall that should be ready in about three-and-a-half years, he said. Development on a second store close to the national capital will begin this year and two smaller centres in Mumbai will open in 2021, in sync with its global expansion spree as it adds stores at a record pace despite worldwide virus restrictions.

India's lockdown helped bolster Ikea's online business, which now accounts for 40 per cent of total sales compared to about 10-15 per cent a year ago, according to Betzel.

—Bloomberg

AIRASIA PLANS FLYING-TAXI SERVICE NEXT YR

YANTOULTRA NGUI MARCH 7

Malaysian budget airline AirAsia Group Bhd said it is seeking to launch a flying-taxi business as soon as next year.

"We are working on that right now," Tony Fernandes, the company's CEO and co-founder, said. "I think we are about a year-and-a-half away from launching."

AirAsia expects to start its own e-hailing services in April, Fernandes said. The flying taxis it hopes to begin providing next year will come with as many as four seats and will be powered by a quadcopter.

Separately on Saturday, the company announced that it's partnering with a state agency called the Malaysian Global Innovation and Creativity Centre to develop an urban drone delivery service.

Fernandes is optimistic that air travel will soon rebound with the rollout of vaccination programmes. The group offers low-cost flights linking 22 countries, mostly in the Asia-Pacific.

—Bloomberg

WOMEN'S DAY | MUSINGS

Freedom to do things that bring one happiness is critical

Financial freedom essential for women

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MARCH 7

Women empowerment is also about achieving financial independence, driving money matters for yourself and family.

Against the theme of International Women's Day on Monday, women can take this opportunity to start taking stock of their or their family's financial situation.

So, what is financial freedom?

Financial freedom is nothing but to create enough wealth so that it can fend for yourself. It is about being able to make choices/achieving goals without being constrained by money. A person or household is financially free if they can make the choices that bring them

happiness without having to worry about money. Your goal can be to send your kids abroad for higher education, upgrading the house or car, retiring in a certain location or getting kids married or a family vacation. Here is a broad road map to help you secure your and your family's future:

■ The first step is to identify and finalise your financial goals, decide the timeframe for achieving the goals and arriving at an estimated cost to achieve each goal. Then comes budgeting, saving, investing and growing the money.

Says Pankaaj Maalde, a certified financial planner, "You should know what is your income and how much is the outflow due to expenses. Your



household expenses should not be more than 30-35 per cent of your income. The idea is to set a minimum savings target of 25-30 per cent of one's monthly income to meet your future goals."

■ Buy life and health insurance: A serious injury or a disease can wipe away all your investments and savings and

derail you from the path to financial freedom. Not only your health may get affected but also your ability to work. Therefore, you need to protect your life and health through insurance. Buy a term life insurance with a sum assured that is at least 10 to 12 times your annual income. You should also insure yourself and family for medical emergencies by buying a health cover that covers you and each family member for at least Rs 5 lakh or insure all the members through a family floater scheme of minimum Rs 15 lakh. If you can afford, also buy a critical illness policy.

■ Investment strategy: According to Surya Bhatia, a certified financial planner, "Your investment strategy should

depend on your age, risk profile and the timeframe in meeting your goals.

"Those with short term goals, say one to two years, could invest their money in liquid mutual funds and fixed deposits. Those with medium-term goals say 3 to 5 years could consider debt funds. Those with long-term goals, say 10 years or more, could look at investing in equity mutual funds through the SIP route and also invest in PPF," added Bhatia.

■ Reviewing your portfolio is equally important: As you work towards your goal, review the progress made on a monthly, quarterly, or within a particular timeframe. If you're not making satisfactory progress on a goal, you can change the process to achieving it.

More women rising as fund managers

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 7

More women fund managers are managing mutual fund assets today in the domestic mutual fund industry compared to the past years.

"When we first came out with a report on women fund managers in 2017, there were only 18 women fund managers," said Morningstar, a US-based mutual fund research company.

Currently, there are 30 women fund managers (28 last year) and they manage approximately Rs 4.11 lakh crore of assets, which is about 13.5 per cent of the Indian mutual fund industry.

Domestic mutual fund industry assets are managed by 376 fund managers across all fund hous-

es. With a meagre 8 per cent representation, women still remain drastically under-represented among the ranks of mutual fund managers.

The 30 women fund managers were spread across 19 fund houses, with two fund houses having three or more women fund managers.

Six fund houses had two women fund managers while 11 fund houses had at least one woman fund manager.

When it comes to tenure, 10 female fund managers have managed funds consistently for over five years. 12 fund managers have been managing funds between two and five years, and eight fund managers have a relatively lower experience of managing/co-managing funds below two years.

SHORT TAKES

Vinesh bags gold, reclaims top spot

Rome: Living up to the expectations, star Indian wrestler Vinesh Phogat won her second gold medal in as many weeks with a dominant win in the Matteo Pellicone Ranking Series event and reclaimed the top rank in the her category here. The 26-year-old world bronze medallist and the only Indian woman wrestler to have qualified for the Tokyo Games, Vinesh blanked Canada's Diana Mary Helen Weicker 4-0 in the 53kg title clash. Vinesh scored all her points in the first period and held on to her lead in the second to ensure a top-of-the-podium finish. Vinesh had won a gold medal in Kiev last week and this performance would give her the belief that her preparations for the biggest sporting event are on the right track. The Indian had entered the event as world number three but is back to world number one by jumping 14 points. — PTI

Covid hits Indian boxers in Spain

New Delhi: The Indian men's boxing team's final campaign at the 35th Boxam International Tournament in Castellon, Spain was derailed by a positive Covid-19 case in the side, resulting in three withdrawals from the summit clashes. Olympic-bound Ashish Kumar (75kg) tested positive for the virus and as a result of being his roommates, Mohammed Hussamuddin (57kg) and Sumit Sangwan (81kg) were forced to withdraw from the finals on Saturday night. All three of them ended with silver medals which could have been gold but for the unforeseen circumstances. Hussamuddin and Sumit have tested negative and are travelling back with the team which will land in Mumbai on Monday. Among the women, Simranjit Kaur (60kg), who is also bound for the Olympics, was forced out of her final after her semifinal opponent — Kiria Tapia of Puerto Rico — tested positive for the virus. — PTI

Srinu, Sudha win Delhi Marathon

New Delhi: Srinu Bugatha clocked a personal best to comfortably win the sixth edition of the Ageas Federal Life Insurance New Delhi Marathon while Sudha Singh bagged the top honours in the women's category, here on Sunday. Bugatha clocked a personal best of 2 hours 14 minutes and 59 seconds which was shy of the 2 hours 11 minutes and 30 seconds that he was targeting to earn himself a run in the Tokyo Olympics. Sudha, who was aiming for her own hat-trick of Olympic appearances, won the women's title in 2:43:41. That was, however, off the national record of 2:30:00 which would have earned her a ticket to Tokyo. Uttarakhand's Nitendra Singh Rawat (2:18:54) and Army Sports Institute's Rashpal Singh (2:18:57) clinched the silver and bronze medal in the men's elite category, while Maharashtra's Jyoti Gawate (2:58:23) and Ladakh's Jigmet Dolma (3:04:52) emulated them among the women.

Guptill leads NZ to T20 series win

Wellington: A century opening stand by Martin Guptill and Devon Conway saw New Zealand clinch their Twenty20 series against Australia in Wellington on Sunday after the tourists faltered in the face of an experimental spin attack. Set a target of 143 for victory in the fifth and final match, New Zealand claimed victory by seven wickets and took the series 3-2 with an emphatic 27 balls to spare. — AFP

Live on TV

CRICKET

Vijay Hazare Trophy: Quarterfinal from 9 am on Star Sports 2 HD, 3

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: First Semifinal, 2nd leg — Mumbai vs Goa from 7:20 pm on Star Sports 2, HD

English Premier League: Chelsea vs Everton from 11:30 pm; West Ham vs Leeds United from 1:30 am (times) on Star Sports Select 1

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BREEZY MARIN DRIVE
Carolina cruises past Sindhu to win Swiss Open title

Basel, March 7: World Champion P.V. Sindhu finished a distant second best in the Swiss Open final after being completely routed by Olympic gold medallist Carolina Marin of Spain in a lop-sided women's singles title clash here on Sunday.

The 25-year-old Indian, who had won the coveted World Championship gold medal here in 2019, couldn't match the speed and accuracy of Marin during her 12-21, 5-21 defeat in the final that lasted only 35 minutes.

It was Sindhu's third successive loss to Marin, who had won both the Super 1000 events in Thailand in January before finishing runners-up at the HSBC BWF World Tour Finals.

Playing her first final in 18 months, Sindhu entered the match with a 5-8 head-to-head record against Marin, having lost her last two matches against the former world no. 1.

The world No. 7 Indian, who didn't drop a game in the last four matches this week, however, failed to summon her 'A' game under pressure as Marin came up trumps to claim her third title of the year. Marin, the current world No. 3, had also defeated Sindhu in the final of the Rio Olympics in 2016.



Carolina Marin poses with the Swiss Open trophy after beating P.V. Sindhu in the final. — Twitter

Sindhu seemed completely clueless against a rampaging Marin, who outclassed the Indian with her pace, power and precision during the summit

clash. In the opening game, Marin opened up a 2-0 lead early on, which was quickly erased by Sindhu as she looked to step up the pace.

The Indian moved ahead 6-4 — the only time she had a lead in the match — but Marin again clawed back with Sindhu finding the net more often than

● **It was Sindhu's third successive loss to Marin, who had won both the Super 1000 events in Thailand in January before finishing runners-up at the HSBC BWF World Tour Finals.**

not.

Sindhu missed a shot at the backline and committed a couple of unforced errors as Marin lead 9-6.

The Spaniard erred twice before winning a video referral. She then entered the mid-game interval with a healthy 11-8 advantage.

It was a one way traffic after the break as Marin continued the momentum, grabbing four straight points to move to 15-8.

Marin didn't take the foot off the pedal and continued to dominate the proceedings, zooming to a 5-0 lead in the second game. A net error gave Sindhu the serve but the Indian just couldn't get going as she again faltered at the net and then mis-cued a forehand return. Marin soon moved to 8-2.

Sindhu will next compete at the All England Championships, a Super 1000 event to be held from March 17 to 21. — PTI

WOMEN'S | CRICKET

Toothless India fall flat on return

Lucknow, March 7: Lizelle Lee and Laura Wolvaardt shared the highest opening wicket stand against an under-prepared India to give South Africa an emphatic eight-wicket win in the first ODI of the five match series here on Sunday.

Asked to bat, India never got the momentum it needed and could only manage 177 for nine despite sedate fifty from skipper Mithali Raj (50 off 85) and a quick-fire 40 off 41 balls from her deputy Harmanpreet Kaur (83 not out off 122) and Wolvaardt (90 off 110) helped South Africa chased down the target in 40.1 overs with a record 169-run stand.

India would quickly like to forget their first outing in 12 months and come back much stronger in the next game against a side

which has come into the series with substantial game time.

The South African opening duo did not look any sort of trouble against the India pacers as well as their highly rated spinners. Lee smashed 11 fours and a six while Wolvaardt collected 12 boundaries.

Veteran India pacer Jhulan Goswami (2/38), playing her first game since November 2019, was the most impressive in an otherwise disappointing bowling effort. Debutant pacer Monica Patel got only four overs in which she conceded 20 runs. — PTI

Brief Scores: India 177/9 in 50 overs (Mithali Raj 50, Harmanpreet Kaur 40, Deepti Sharma 27, Shabnim Islam 3/28, N Mlaba 2/41) lost to South Africa 178/2 in 40.1 overs (Lizelle Lee 83 not out, Laura Wolvaardt 80; Jhulan Goswami 2/38).

HARMANPREET SAYS INDIA LACKED MATCH PRACTICE

Lucknow, March 7: Indian women's ODI vice-captain Harmanpreet Kaur on Saturday said the team was lacking match practice and will need time to get back into rhythm after being away from international cricket for a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We didn't get any international cricket for a year. Apart from three IPL games we didn't get much time to work as a unit. As a team you need to spend time and get ready for any series," Kaur said at the post-match press conference.

"Nowadays everybody is looking for a big total, every game we want to score more than 250 but for that you need some time and matches. In the past few years we had built a rhythm but we will need time to create that rhythm and next game we will try to do that as a unit," added Kaur, who was playing her 100th ODI. — PTI

Shastri takes dig at ICC for 'shifting goalposts'

Ahmedabad, March 7: Known for not mincing words, India head coach Ravi Shastri on Sunday criticised the ICC for changing the qualification criteria for the World Test Championship final, saying the world governing body needs to stop "shifting goalposts".

India beat England 3-1 in the just concluded four-Test series to set up World Test Championship title date with New Zealand but the Indian coach wasn't happy that midway through the tournament, global body changed the criteria from maximum points earned to maximum percentage points earned.

"If you ask me about first cycle, please don't shift the goalposts," Shastri took a direct dig at the ICC when asked about what changes he would like when WTC is held during next cycle of events.

"I am sitting at home because of Covid-19 in the month of October with more points than any other team, 360 apparently (having won three series and lost one). A week later without knowing some rule comes that we are going to go (move) into the percentage system and we go (slip) from number one to three (in points table)," the coach said.

He continues, "Fine that's because of countries not wanting to travel, countries that are in the red zone. All acceptable and fine. I want to



India head coach Ravi Shastri (left) and captain Virat Kohli in this file photo. — AFP

understand the logic because now it's like "What's the way forward for me?" Sitting 60 to 70 points ahead, I am told, now you have to go to Australia and what you have to do? You have to beat Australia," he had a lot of sting in his voice.

"If you don't beat Australia, you come back home and you have to then beat England 4-0 and get close to 500 points and you still don't qualify? So we have had to dig deep and go down every hole and we have earned our stripes to be in the biggest of the them all — the World Test Championship final," he said.

SHASTRI SEES GLIMPSE OF HIM IN SUNDAR

Shastri was both Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev's 'go to man' with his all-round abilities

during the '80s and head coach firmly believes that young Washington Sundar could play a similar role in the current Test team. The left-handed specialist batsman, who also bowls mean off-breaks, scored three half centuries in his four Tests along with six wickets which includes prized scalps of Steve Smith and Joe Root.

Do you see glimpses of you in him?

"I think Washy has far more natural ability than I had," said the veteran of 80 Tests who had close to 4000 runs and 150 plus wickets.

"He has the ability and he belongs at this level and he can go a long way. If he could focus on his bowling (in Tests), India could have a very good number six for overseas conditions." — PTI

Can the fearless newbies go on to become world-beaters?



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

India's forceful entry into the World Test Championship (WTC) final couldn't have come at a more opportune moment. March 6, 2021 saw the Virat Kohli led team beat a hapless England on a good Test match pitch at Motera, Ahmedabad by a thumping margin of 25 runs to win by an innings. The same day 50 years ago saw the Indians start a Test which resulted in their most important Test victory in far away Port of Spain, Trinidad.

It was a gooseflesh moment in 1971 when the country woke up to the

image of debutant Sunil Gavaskar (in the center) flanked by Sir Garfield Sobers who was shaking the hand of the effervescent Abid Ali while they walked back to the pavilion. That victory (the first ever against the West Indies) was the start of a thread which inspired many young Indians to take to the game with a belief that we could win in foreign climes and under challenging circumstances as was displayed in the recent past by Kohli, Rahane and team India.

One can find many similarities between the teams

that are separated by five decades. Ajit Wadekar was given a crew of grey haired cricketers who mingled with young tyros that came in with a fearless mindset. An attitude that respected legendary names who had blazed the field but left it at that. To the young lads of 1971 like Gavaskar, Gundappa Viswanath and Eknath Solkar, Sobers and Rohan Kanhai may have been their heroes off the field but opponents on the ground who stood between them and victory.

When Rishabh Pant reverse-swept James Anderson over the slip cordon on the second day of the Ahmedabad Test, he was making a statement. Some called it an audacious shot considering Anderson's pedigree and that the ball was new and shiny. The fact that he was

closer to getting his hundred, having done all the hard work of getting India past England's meagre total didn't matter to him. Neither did Anderson's vintage of 159 Tests (going into the Test) nor his 613 wickets (before Pant's) make any difference to the dashing left-hander.

All reputations were dealt with the way they are meant to by Pant who batted the way he would for Delhi Capitals in the Indian Premier League. The reverse-sweep statement he made was to ensure that Anderson, the most experienced English warrior, wasn't allowed a foot in the door. Similar to another southpaw who, 50 years ago, told Sir Garfield Sobers: "You play your game, we will play ours," when the West Indian skipper objected to Solkar's demand to inspect a

changed ball.

The resemblance between the current lot of cricketers and those who debuted in the 1969-71 period comes across strikingly when we look back through the current England Test series and the one that concluded in Australia a month ago. The batch of Pant, Mohammed Siraj, Washington Sundar and Shardul Thakur are equally fearless as were Gavaskar, Viswanath and Solkar.

Believing in themselves and their abilities is what made the erstwhile cricketers world beaters and it does look the present lot are headed in the same direction.

Just as Gavaskar, Viswanath and Solkar proved their mettle abroad with scintillating, match winning knocks and world class catches, India's new-

No home games, no fans this IPL

New Delhi, March 7: The IPL 2021 will run from April 9 to May 30 across six venues with no team getting to play at home, its Governing Council announced on Sunday.

Despite Covid-19 surge, Mumbai has been named as one of the host cities and the tournament will be held behind closed doors at least in the initial phase of the tournament. The other venues are Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi and Kolkata.

The Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad will host the final on May 30 as well as the play-offs. Defending champions Mumbai Indians will face

Royal Challengers Bangalore in the tournament opener in Chennai on April 9.

Each team is set to play at four venues during the league stage. Out of the 56 league matches, Chennai, Mumbai, Kolkata and Bengaluru will host 10 matches each while Ahmedabad and Delhi will host eight matches each.

There will be a total of 11 double headers where six teams will play three afternoon matches and two teams will play two afternoon matches. The afternoon games are slated for a 3:30pm start while the evening games will have a 7:30pm start. — PTI

IPL SCHEDULE

M	Date	Time	Teams	Venue
1	9-April	7.30 pm	MI vs RCB	Chennai
2	10-April	7.30 pm	CSK vs DC	Mumbai
3	11-April	7.30 pm	SRH vs KKR	Chennai
4	12-April	7.30 pm	RR vs PK	Mumbai
5	13-April	7.30pm	KKR vs MI	Chennai
6	14-April	7.30 pm	SRH vs RCB	Chennai
7	15-April	7.30 pm	RR vs DC	Mumbai
8	16-April	7.30 pm	PK vs CSK	Mumbai
9	17-April	7.30 pm	MI vs SRH	Chennai
10	18-April	3.30 pm	RCB vs KKR	Chennai
11	18-April	7.30 pm	DC vs PK	Mumbai
12	19-April	7.30 pm	CSK vs RR	Mumbai
13	20-April	7.30 pm	DC vs MI	Chennai
14	21-April	3.30 pm	PK vs SRH	Chennai
15	21-April	7.30 pm	KKR vs CSK	Mumbai
16	22-April	7.30 pm	RCB vs RR	Mumbai
17	23-April	7.30 pm	PK vs MI	Chennai
18	24-April	7.30 pm	RR vs KKR	Mumbai
19	25-April	3.30 pm	CSK vs RCB	Mumbai
20	25-April	7.30 pm	SRH vs DC	Chennai
21	26-April	7.30 pm	PK vs KKR	Ahmedabad
22	27-April	7.30 pm	DC vs RCB	Ahmedabad
23	28-April	7.30 pm	CSK vs SRH	Delhi
24	29-April	3.30 pm	MI vs RR	Delhi
25	29-April	7.30 pm	DC vs KKR	Ahmedabad
26	30-April	3.30 pm	PK vs RCB	Ahmedabad
27	1-May	7.30 pm	MI vs CSK	Delhi
28	2-May	3.30 pm	RR vs SRH	Delhi
29	2-May	7.30 pm	PK vs DC	Ahmedabad
30	3-May	7.30 pm	KKR vs RCB	Ahmedabad
31	4-May	7.30 pm	SRH vs MI	Delhi
32	5-May	7.30 pm	RR vs CSK	Delhi
33	6-May	7.30 pm	RCB vs PK	Ahmedabad
34	7-May	7.30 pm	SRH vs CSK	Delhi
35	8-May	3.30 pm	KKR vs DC	Ahmedabad
36	8-May	7.30 pm	RR vs MI	Delhi
37	9-May	3.30 pm	CSK vs PK	Bangalore
38	9-May	7.30 pm	RCB vs SRH	Kolkata
39	10-May	7.30 pm	MI vs KKR	Bangalore
40	11-May	7.30 pm	DC vs RR	Kolkata
41	12-May	7.30 pm	CSK vs KKR	Bangalore
42	13-May	3.30 pm	MI vs PK	Bangalore
43	13-May	7.30 pm	SRH vs RR	Kolkata
44	14-May	7.30 pm	RCB vs DC	Kolkata
45	15-May	7.30 pm	KKR vs PK	Bangalore
46	16-May	3.30 pm	RR vs RCB	Kolkata
47	16-May	7.30 pm	CSK vs MI	Bangalore
48	17-May	7.30 pm	DC vs SRH	Kolkata
49	18-May	7.30 pm	KKR vs RR	Bangalore
50	19-May	7.30 pm	SRH vs PK	Bangalore
51	20-May	7.30 pm	RCB vs MI	Kolkata
52	21-May	3.30 pm	KKR vs SRH	Bangalore
53	21-May	7.30 pm	DC vs CSK	Kolkata
54	22-May	7.30 pm	PK vs RR	Bangalore
55	23-May	3.30 pm	MI vs DC	Kolkata
56	23-May	7.30 pm	RCB vs CSK	Kolkata
PLAYOFFS				
57	25-May	7.30 pm	Qualifier 1	Ahmedabad
58	26-May	7.30 pm	Eliminator	Ahmedabad
59	28-May	7.30 pm	Qualifier 2	Ahmedabad
60	30-May	7.30 pm	Final	Ahmedabad