





## SHORT TAKES

**Delhi govt report on custodial death of man sketchy: HC**AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

The Delhi High Court Wednesday termed as “sketchy” a status report filed by the AAP government on the death of a man in judicial custody for alleged theft of a vehicle, saying it does not say what transpired between his arrest and his hospitalisation. Justice Prathiba M. Singh said the report was “wanting of material particulars”, “absolutely sketchy” and did not even state if there was any policy in place for providing compensation in cases of custodial deaths. The court said the report only states when he was arrested and when he was admitted in hospital, but nothing about what happened in between and nothing about any enquiry carried out in relation to his death. The court asked the Delhi government whether any policy was there for providing compensation in cases of custodial deaths and said it would take up the issue of compensation on the next date of hearing on April 13. The court had on March 8 called for a status report from the Delhi government. It was hearing a plea moved by the wife of the deceased who was arrested by the police on November 11, 2020 in connection with the alleged theft of a vehicle. When the deceased was produced before the Magistrate, the Magistrate recorded that his physical condition was not good and that he was unable to even stand, the high court had noted in its March 8 order. “However, the deceased was remanded to judicial custody. Shockingly, on November 12, 2020, he passed away while he was still in judicial custody,” the high court had said. The wife has alleged that her husband was tortured by the police and has sought compensation from the authorities as he has left behind two minor daughters aged 6 years and five months.

**Man arrested for spitting on roti**

**New Delhi:** A 25-year-old man has been arrested after a video surfaced on social media purportedly showing him spitting on the ‘roti’ (flatbread) just before putting them in the oven, officials said on Wednesday. In the video, a person, wearing a yellow T-shirt, can be seen spitting on the roti just before placing them inside a tandoor. The accused has been identified as Khalik, a resident of Kishanganj district in Bihar, they said. A senior police officer said that the video of the incident went viral on social media on Monday. After the video went viral, police scanned it and identified the accused. A case was registered under relevant sections of the IPC and the accused was arrested on Monday, the officer said. A challan has been issued to the owner of the hotel for allegedly running it without the license. The hotel is closed since then, police said. Earlier, two men have been arrested after a video surfaced on social media purportedly showing one of them kneading the dough at a local hotel in west Delhi and the other spitting on the ‘roti’ (flatbread) just before putting them in the oven.

**‘Full bottle’ on table at clubs, hotels soon**

**New Delhi, March 24:** Delhiites will soon have an option to place order for a full bottle of liquor on their tables in hotels and clubs as a group of ministers headed by deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia has recommended several steps that are part of excise reforms. Currently, people having drinks at these establishments are served liquor as pegs in the national capital. In its report, the GoM, however, said it will be the sole responsibility of bars to ensure that no customer takes the served bottles out of their premises.

There are over 1,000 hotels, clubs and restaurants in the city, which have an excise license to serve liquor to their customers. “The GoM is of the view

that service of full bottle on table may be allowed by the licensees to ensure service of quality liquor to the customers. This, however, shall be the subject to the sole responsibility of the licensee to ensure that no customer takes the served bottles out of the license premises,” it stated. The GoM said these establishments may be allowed to have additional dispensing counters against payment of five per cent of the applicable license fee per additional counter.

It also said that the liquor service in open spaces like terrace, balcony, lower area of restaurant, clubs and hotels may be allowed. “Timings of bars in restaurants and clubs may be increased to be at par with neighbouring cities like Noida,” it said.

**EXCISE REFORMS**

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“Hotel, clubs and restaurants will have to place purchase order only from retail vendors instead of wholesalers,” the GoM said. All establishments will be permitted two counters without any additional charge, it added. During a press conference on Monday, Sisodia,

who also holds the excise portfolio, said the Delhi Cabinet has accepted the recommendations made by the GoM.

In the report, the GoM said the conditions related to playing of Music/DJ under conduct of business, as mentioned in rule 53 (4) of Excise Rules is archaic and not reflecting present day needs. The GoM also recommended that draught beer will be allowed to be taken away in bottles or growlers’ as applicable in other states like Punjab and Karnataka.

It said the move will help fuel the micro-brewery industry and added that draught beer can also be allowed to be served at events like wedding functions and parties which have sought license to serve liquor to their guests. — PTI

**■ Sad day for democracy, says Delhi CM after RS passed GNCTD Bill Will continue fight to restore power back to people: Kejri**

AAP MPs Sanjay Singh, Sushil Gupta (left) and Narain Dass Gupta speak to media after the Upper House passed the GNCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill 2021, during the Budget Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

**Delhi Cabinet okays nameless scheme**AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

After the Centre stopped the doorstep delivery of ration scheme MMGGRY (Mukhya Mantri Ghar Ghar Ration Yojana) of the Delhi government, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal-led government on Wednesday decided to implement the scheme without a name. The Delhi cabinet approved to implement the doorstep delivery of ration scheme by dropping the name. The proposal for

the same will now be sent to the central government. Earlier the scheme was scheduled to be launched on March 25 under the name Mukhya Mantri Ghar Ghar Ration Yojana. However, the Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs stopped the implementation of the scheme citing that the subsidised foodgrains being allocated by the department for distribution under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) cannot be used for running any state-specific or other

scheme under a different name other than NFSA. “The use of new nomenclature or scheme name for distribution of NFSA foodgrains by the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi is not permissible,” the Consumer Affairs Minister said. The Delhi government is planning to provide packaged wheat flour, packaged rice and packaged sugar under the Targeted Public Distribution System. — PTI

nassed uproar by opposition members who termed the bill “unconstitutional” and demanded that it be sent to a Select Committee for scrutiny. The upper house also witnessed two brief adjournments. The members of the BJD, SP and the YSR-Congress also walked out of the House. “The said Bill will promote harmonious relations

between the legislature and the executive, and further define the responsibilities of the elected government and the L-G, in line with the constitutional scheme of governance of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, as interpreted by the Supreme Court,” the statement of objects said. — PTI

**Protests, gatherings prohibited in Delhi due to surge in Covid cases**

**New Delhi, March 24:** The AAP government told the Delhi High Court on Wednesday that the Disaster Management Authority (DMA) has prohibited public gatherings, including for festival celebrations and protests, in view of the surge in Covid-19 cases.

The submission was made before Justice Prathiba M. Singh during the hearing of the pleas by AAP MLAs Raghav Chadha and Atishi Chandra seeking permission to protest outside the residences of home minister Amit Shah and Lt Governor Anil Bajjal.

Delhi government additional standing counsel Gautam Narayan told the court that the Delhi DMA or DDMA has issued an order on March 23 prohibiting all public gatherings in the national capital in view of the surge in COVID-19 cases.

Delhi reported 1,101 Covid-19 cases on Tuesday, the highest in over three months, while four people succumbed to the disease.

During the brief hearing on Wednesday, the court asked the lawyers for the two MLAs whether they were still pressing their pleas challenging the denial of permission to protest as ‘circumstances have changed’.

The lawyers for the two MLAs said there have been some subsequent develop-

**1,254 Covid cases in city; 6 deaths**

**New Delhi, March 24:** Delhi reported 1,254 coronavirus cases on Wednesday, highest in over three months, while six more people succumbed to the disease, the health department said. This is the highest number of cases since December 18 when 1,418 people tested positive for the virus, according to official data. The city had recorded 1,101 cases on Tuesday. It was the first time since December 24 that the number of cases crossed the 1,000 mark. — PTI

ments and therefore, they wanted to file some fresh affidavits.

When the court asked the Delhi government what was the current situation regarding public gatherings in the city, Narayan said the DDMA’s March 23 order prohibits the same due to the rise in coronavirus cases.

The AAP government had in January told the court that Raghav and Atishi cannot protest outside the homes of Shah and Bajjal as political gatherings were prohibited by the DDMA till January 31.

On December 18, last year the police told the court that permissions

were denied to the two AAP MLAs on the basis of orders passed by DDMA prohibiting large gatherings in the city in view of the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic.

It had also said that in accordance with a Supreme Court order, it has issued a standing order prohibiting protests and dharnas in residential areas in the national capital.

Both AAP MLAs wanted to stage ‘dharnas’ outside the residences of Shah and Bajjal on December 13, 2020 to protest against the alleged misappropriation of funds by the North Delhi Municipal Corporation, but they were denied permission.

Both were detained by police on December 13, 2020 along with some other AAP leaders, for attempting to protest at the two sites without the necessary permission.

They have sought quashing of the December 12, 2020, decision of Delhi Police rejecting their request to hold a protest outside the residences of Shah and Bajjal. Another reason cited by Delhi Police in January for denying permission to the two AAP leaders was the prohibitory orders issued under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) for the entire central Delhi where the two residences are located. — PTI

**HC suspends 2-yr jail term of Somnath Bharti in assault case**

Trial court’s verdict was based upon a fabricated story: AAP MLA

**New Delhi, March 24:** In a relief for Aam Aadmi Party MLA Somnath Bharti, the Delhi High Court on Wednesday stayed his conviction in a case of assault on AIIMS security staff and suspended the two-year jail term.

Justice Suresh Kait also sought the response of the Delhi government on Bharti’s plea challenging his conviction and the sentence awarded to him by a trial court. The high court listed the matter for further hearing on May 20.

Bharti was taken into custody and sent to prison on Tuesday after the pronouncement of the verdict by the trial court here. Bharti, in his plea filed before the high court on Wednesday, has sought setting aside of the trial court verdict and suspension of sentence during the pendency of the revision petition. He has also sought a stay on his conviction in the case.

According to the prosecution, on September 9, 2016, Bharti, along with nearly 300 others, brought down the fence of a boundary



Somnath Bharti

wall at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here with a JCB operator.

A magistrate had in January sentenced him to two years in prison. The order was challenged before the special judge which also upheld his punishment on Tuesday.

In the petition before the high court, Bharti claimed that the special judge has erroneously convicted and sentenced him and that it was a case of no evidence. He said the verdict of the trial court was based upon a totally false and fabricated story of the prosecution.

The case of the prosecution is full of improve-

ments, embellishments, contradictions and is unworthy of reliance and will fall like a pack of cards just by the stroke of the sheer hand of providence by this court, the plea said, adding that Bharti’s conviction has resulted in a travesty of justice.

It added that the magistrate court as well as the sessions court failed to appreciate that he is a sitting and third time MLA having a good reputation in society and that he devotes all his time for the service of the society.

The petitioner is an officer of this court and this prosecution is politically motivated to falsely implicate him, it said.

The special judge had partly dismissed Bharti’s appeal and convicted him for the offences under sections 147 (rioting) read with 149 (unlawful assembly) of the Indian Penal Code and under section 3 (mischievous causing damage to public property) of the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act. — PTI



Folk artists from Tripura perform Hojagiri dance during a week-long handloom expo at the Press Club in New Delhi on Wednesday. — G.N. JHA

**HC to Delhi govt: Release outstanding amount to 3 MCDs before March 31**

**New Delhi, March 24:** The Delhi High Court Wednesday directed the Delhi government to release the outstanding amount to the three municipal corporations as per its own revised estimate before March 31, to enable them to pay salaries and pensions of employees.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli said there was no justification of the Delhi government not paying Basic Tax Assignment (BTA) to the corporations — East, North and South as per its own revised estimate for the financial year 2020-21.

We, therefore, allow the application (of EDMC) and

direct the Delhi government to release the remaining amount of BTA to the corporations as per its own revised estimate in this financial year itself, the bench said.

It listed the matter for reporting compliance of its order on April 5, when a batch of petitions relating to non-payment of salaries of MCD employees was already fixed for hearing.

The court was informed that as per the revised estimate of Delhi government, the amount payable by the state to EDMC, SDMC and NrDMC towards BTA is ₹864.8 crore, ₹405.2 crore and ₹764.8 crore respectively in the financial year

2020-21. Advocate Manu Chaturvedi, representing EDMC, told the court that during the year, the corporation has received ₹501 crore and an amount of ₹363 crore is due to be received from Delhi government.

With only a few days left before the amount is likely to be lapsed with the end of the present financial year, if not transferred by the Delhi government to EDMC, he submitted.

The remaining amount to be paid to SDMC and NrDMC by Delhi government is not known.

Delhi government counsel Satyakam said it has

been a difficult year in terms of generation of revenue for the government also.

The bench said the Delhi government cannot seek to postpone payment of BTA as per revised estimate to the next financial year, since corporations have to make payments now to pay salaries and discharge other financial obligations.

It noted that one of the major sources of revenue for the corporations is made by the Delhi government inter alia BTA and the corporations have to meet their expenditures towards salaries and other expenses on a day-to-day basis. — PTI

**N-E Delhi riots: Court directs police to ensure Khalid’s safety**

**New Delhi, March 24:** A court here on Wednesday directed the police to ensure safety and security of former JNU student leader Umar Khalid while bringing him for the proceedings in a case related to north-east Delhi riots.

Chief metropolitan magistrate Dinesh Kumar directed the Tihar Jail Superintendent, DCP (Deputy Commissioner of Police) and DAP (Delhi Armed Police) to ensure



Umar Khalid

safety and security of Khalid while bringing him to the court and taking him back to the prison.

“It is directed that while producing accused Umar

Khalid in the court on any day in future, sufficient steps shall be taken by the Jail Supdt and the DCP, DAP, III Battalion to ensure the safety and security of the applicant/accused Umar Khalid while bringing him to the court from the prison, during his production in the court and while taking him back to the prison from the court,” the court said in its order. — PTI

**Akbar moves HC against Ramani in defamation case**

**New Delhi, March 24:** Former Union minister M.J. Akbar has moved the Delhi High Court challenging a trial court order acquitting journalist Priya Ramani in the criminal defamation case filed against her over the allegations of sexual harassment.

The plea is scheduled to come up for hearing on Thursday before Justice Mukta Gupta. Akbar has challenged the trial court’s February 17 order acquitting Ramani in the case on the ground that a woman has the right to put grievances before any platform

of her choice even after decades.

The court had said it was shameful that crimes against women are taking place in a country where mega epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata were written about respecting them. — PTI

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For Manufacture Testing and Delivery of surge arresters with porcelain housing:- 64 Nos. of 60 KV, 36 Nos. of 120 KV, & 88 Nos. of 198 KV 10KA station type heavy duty, class-III zinc oxide (gasless type), Last Date & Time for Downloading of tender- 06.04.2021 upto 05:00 PM, Last Date & Time for submission of tender- 07.04.2021 upto 03:00 PM, Date & Time for Opening of tender - 09.04.2021 at 10:00 AM	
Detailed NIT / specification may be downloaded from Punjab Govt. e-tendering website <a href="https://eproc.punjab.gov.in/nicgep/app">https://eproc.punjab.gov.in/nicgep/app</a> . Corrigendum, if any, will not be published in newspapers. As such the website may be visited regularly for updates.	
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1. Last Date & Time for Downloading of tender 26.04.2021 17:00 Hrs 2. Last Date & Time for receipt of tender 26.04.2021 17:00 Hrs 3. Date & Time for Opening of tender 28.04.2021 time at 10:00 Hrs. Detailed NIT/specification may be downloaded from PSTCL e-tendering website <a href="https://eproc.punjab.gov.in/nicgep/app">https://eproc.punjab.gov.in/nicgep/app</a> . Corrigendum, if any, will not be published in newspapers. As such the website may be visited regularly for updates.	
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## SHORT TAKES

## DMK opposes use of old EVMs, moves HC

**Chennai:** The DMK moved the Madras high court with a plea to restrain the Election Commission from using EVMs that were beyond the expiry period of 15 years, in the April 6 Tamil Nadu Assembly polls. The other prayers of the DMK, represented by its Organisation Secretary R S Bharathi, were to provide CCTV live coverage/web-stream during voting in all the polling booths and voting centers, to install jammers at the strong rooms, where EVMs are stored and at the counting centres. The Opposition party also wanted the court to direct the Returning Officers to count at least 50% of VVPATS, simultaneously. After listening to the preliminary arguments by DMK senior counsel P. Wilson, the first bench of Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy ordered notice to the EC, returnable by March 29. — *PTI*

## SC reserves verdict on sale of poll bonds

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court on Wednesday reserved its order on a plea by NGO Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) seeking stay of the opening any further window for sale of the fresh electoral bonds from April 1, 2021, ahead of the ongoing Assembly elections in five state assemblies of West Bengal, Kerala, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. Reserving the order, a bench headed by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde and also comprising Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice V. Ramsubramanian, however, expressed concerns over the possible misuse of bonds and asked the Centre to examine it. "If a political party gets ₹100 crore worth bonds what is the control over the use of these bonds for illegal activities or purposes outside political agenda" the court asked in a poser to the government.

## Mamata's assets plummet by 45%

**Kolkata:** West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's asset value has decreased by 45.08 per cent now compared to what it was during the 2016 assembly elections. Banerjee, who is contesting this year's assembly election from Nandigram, has in her affidavit which was submitted along with her nomination to the Election Commission declared her total worth to be ₹16,72,352. The Trinamul Congress supremo's asset during the 2016 election when she contested from Bhawanipore constituency in the city was ₹30,45,013, the "Analysis of criminal, financial education, gender and other details of candidates" for West Bengal phase II polling stated. — *PTI*

## SHORTAGE OF 405 PILOTS IN IAF: GOVT IN LS

**New Delhi:** The Indian Air Force has a shortage of 405 pilots against the authorised strength, the government told Lok Sabha on Wednesday. Minister of state for defence Shripad Naik said the number of pilots in the Indian Air Force at present is 3,834 as against the sanctioned strength of 4,239. "There is a shortage of 405 pilots (as on March 1) in the IAF," he said, replying to a question. He said 260 aircraft are being used for training of pilots in the force. The trainer aircraft in the IAF included Pilatus PC-7 Mk-II, Kiran MkI/IA and Hawk Mk-132 advanced jet trainer. To a separate question on whether India can counter China effectively with hypersonic vehicles, the minister declined to answer saying the information sought is highly sensitive and classified. "The information sought is highly sensitive and classified and cannot be divulged on the floor of the House," he said in his written reply. Replying to another question, Naik said 1,98,881 dwelling units were planned for construction through Married Accommodation Project route and 57,745 units were already built under phase one of the project. He said 69,904 units were planned to be built under phase two of the project out of which construction of 58,062 units was completed. — *PTI*

## KERALA

Amit Shah gives boost to BJP campaign

## BJP promises love jihad law, rituals at Sabarimala temple

GILVESTER ASSARY  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
MARCH 24

The BJP lined up several promises, including a legislation to protect traditions of the Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala and law against "love jihad", while assuring employment for at least one person from each family and free laptops to high school students, in its manifesto for the Assembly polls unveiled here on Wednesday.

The manifesto, which was released by Union minister Prakash Javadekar on Wednesday, said that social welfare pension would be raised to ₹3,500 and temple administration will be freed from political control and entrusted to devotees.

The LDF government had promised to raise the social welfare pension to ₹2,600 from the current ₹1,600, while the opposition UDF has assured to increase it to ₹3,000, if voted to power.

As part of the saffron party's assurances on places of worship, the manifesto promises to take urgent steps to re-acquire encroached lands of temples and a legisla-



Artists perform during Union home minister Amit Shah's election campaign for the upcoming state Assembly elections at Thripunithura in Kochi on Wednesday. — *PTI*

tion for an independent, non-political and devotee controlled temple administration in the state.

The BJP, which is making an all-out effort to improve its electoral prospects in Kerala, got a boost on Wednesday with the participation of Union home minister Amit Shah in roadshows and election meetings in various parts of the state.

The BJP, which had just one member in the 140-member Assembly, is

hopeful of doing better this time though various opinion polls have predicted just one to three seats for the party. "We will perform in a much better way in Kerala in the coming elections. The people of Kerala are fed up with the corruption of LDF and UDF," Mr Shah told media-persons on the sidelines of his roadshow in Thripunithura in Ernakulam district.

In the last elections, the BJP-led NDA had secured

nearly 15 per cent of the votes. It managed to retain the same percentage of votes even in the local bodies poll held in December.

In a bid to improve its vote share and convert the votes into seats, the BJP had made an attempt to reach out to the Christian community.

The saffron party has even given tickets to Christians this time hoping to make some dent in the Christian belt of Central Travancore.

## After hiccups, Cong upbeat in Assam

Internal report says that party is making gains, attracting crowds

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

The Congress is upbeat about the upcoming Assembly elections in Assam after initial hiccups it feels that it is giving the ruling BJP a run for its money. Insiders claim that reports coming in from the state indicate that the difference between the ruling BJP and the Congress led alliance is narrowing sharply.

The BJP has stuck to its former ally Asom Gana Parishad, while also teaming up with the United People's Party Liberal. The Congress has joined hands with the Bodoland People's Front, the Anchalik Gana Morcha, the AIUDE, CPI(M), CPI and CPI-ML.

Interestingly the



Chhattisgarh chief minister and Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel participates in a roadshow in support of party candidate Rajkumar Nilanetra Neog in Dibrugarh district on Wednesday. — *PTI*

Congress has taken the bill by its horns and has declared that it will not implement CAA in the state. When the CAA amendments were passed in parliament in December 2019 Assam saw large scale protests and disruptions.

Both young and old leaders of the party are fighting as one.

The assessment done by the party indicates that Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi are attracting a lot of crowds and are making

## BJP candidate says 'beef national dish', FIR filed

Mushahary made statement to appease minority voters

MANOJ ANAND  
GUWAHATI, MARCH 24

The Election Commission (EC) has filed an FIR against BJP candidate in Assam for his remarks on beef during an election meeting. The FIR has been lodged at the Gauripur police station in Western Assam's Dhubri district.

The BJP candidate Banendra Kumar Mushahary, who is contesting from Gauripur constituency, claimed that beef is the "national dish of India". In an obvious bid to appease the minority voters he made this remark at an election meeting in a Muslim-dominated area of the district. "How can anyone ban beef? It is the National Dish of India," he said at the meeting.

Contrary to frequent campaigns of the saffron party to ban beef across the country, he went on saying, "The beef is an international dish and 'educated Muslims in the rural areas of Assam should understand that no one can ban the sale of beef in Assam or anywhere in India'."

Mr Mushahary, a veteran politician, joined the BJP in December 2020. He was first elected to the



Banendra Kumar Mushahary

Assam Legislative Assembly in 1996 as an independent candidate from Gauripur constituency in Dhubri district.

In 2011, he was elected as an AGP candidate from Gauripur. Later, he joined the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) and was elected as an MLA for the third time. Meanwhile, BJP workers in the districts have expressed deep anguish over Mr Mushahary's remarks and demanding an unconditional apology for his remark.

Meanwhile members of Purbanchal Hindu Aikya Mancha has also filed an FIR at Dispur police station and demanded actions against the BJP candidate for violating Model Code of Conduct which was enforced on February 26 in poll-bound Assam.

## Modi: Cong's mahajut is maha jhooth

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI, MARCH 24

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday accused the Congress party of making false promises to the people of Assam. Coming down heavily on the Congress-led grand alliance — mahajut (grand alliance), Prime Minister while addressing a public meeting at Bihpuria in Assam said that it's not Congress' mahajut but it's Congress party's "maha jhooth" (biggest lie). "A Maha jhooth that guarantees illegal immigrants in Satras, Namghar, National Parks, a mahajhooth which guarantees poaching and corruption. It is a mahajhooth that can defame Assam's pride and even tea in the whole world," said Mr Modi. Speaking about the promises made by the Congress to improve the condition of tea workers, Mr Modi said that the Congress party did nothing for those working in the tea gardens when the party was in power.

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<b>A)</b>	<b>(1)</b> 73/DGM(JAL)/AO/SM(JAL)-I/2020-21 M/o Sewerage (One year Desilting and Cleaning of Deep Sewer Line by Super Sucker Machine in Sector-130, 132, and 135) Noida, Cost Rs. 16.16 Lacs
<b>(2)</b>	74/DGM(JAL)/AO/SM(JAL)-I/2020-21 M/o Sewerage (One year Desilting and Cleaning of Deep Sewer Line by Super Sucker Machine in Village Mohiyapur, Gulawali, Yakootpur, Nagli Wazidpur, Nagla Nagli Sakhpur) Noida, Cost Rs. 21.78 Lacs
<b>(3)</b>	75/DGM(JAL)/AO/SM(JAL)-I/2020-21 M/o W/s (P/F Level Transmeter at OHT/UGR in Sector-105, Judge Colony Sector-105, Sector-106, and Sector-110) Noida, Cost Rs. 06.12 Lacs
The above tenders can be uploaded by date <b>01.04.2021 upto 05.00 PM</b> . Pre-qualification shall be opened /downloaded on date <b>02.04.2021 at 11.00 AM</b> .	
Office Sector-5	SENIOR MANAGER (JAL)-I NOIDA
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## Nitish must apologise for ruckus in House: Tejashwi

NAYEAR AZAD  
PATNA, MARCH 24

Leader of the opposition Tejashwi Yadav on Wednesday raised the political pitch in Bihar by threatening to boycott the remaining tenure of the assembly session if the state government fails to apologise for the police action against RJD MLAs.

Terming Nitish Kumar government as "Niraj" (shameless) Tejashwi Yadav said that "it seems he has lost all shame. MLAs were beaten up inside the assembly. We will boycott the assembly for the remaining tenure if he (Nitish Kumar) doesn't apologise for the ruckus".

On Tuesday after the special armed police bill was introduced by the state government led by



Tejashwi Yadav

Nitish Kumar, RJD MLAs staged a violent protest inside the Bihar assembly.

Some of the opposition MLAs even tried to stop speaker Vijay Kumar Sinha from stepping out of his chamber. This prompted the police and marshals to forcibly evict the agitating MLAs and in this many were badly injured including women members.

On Wednesday opposition MLAs held a paral-

lel Assembly session chaired by RJD legislator Bhudeo Chaudhary in the lawns of the Bihar Assembly.

The violent protest by the opposition parties was later condemned by the NDA leaders in Bihar.

Speaking to reporters on the issue chief minister Nitish Kumar said that "instead of seeking an apology from others they (RJD) should explain what they did inside the house. They even tried to restrict the assembly speaker from leaving his chamber. I have never seen this kind of incident anywhere I don't know who has been advising them to create disturbances inside the house like this. Every member of the house should follow procedures".

## Modi biggest liar in world: Didi

RAJIB CHOWDHURI  
KOLKATA, MARCH 24

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday called Prime Minister Narendra Modi the "biggest liar" in the world and accused him of running three syndicates with union home minister Amit Shah and corporates like the Adanis after his vitriolic attack on her for labelling the BJP as Bohiragoto (Outsiders) in the Trinamul Election.

At a Trinamul Congress campaign rally in Bishnupur of Bankura she alleged, "I earlier used to respect the PM's chair. It is not that I do not do it



Mamata Banerjee

now. But I have not seen a biggest liar like PM Modi anywhere. He only lies. Who are the Bohiragoto (Outsiders) goons? Tortured by the BJP, the IPS officers are quitting jobs in Uttar Pradesh. So many tribal girls were set ablaze. Their parents were

attacked when they had gone to lodge complaints. But they are claiming themselves to be friends of the tribals after coming to Midnapore and Bankura, bringing food from a five star hotel and taking a house on rent. But I do not lie like this PM and always keep my words through my work for the people."

Countering Mr Modi's poll promises in the state, the TMC chief pointed out that whatever Mr Modi promised in the past elections or any other time, have turned out to false. On the PM's cry of syndicate raj in the state she claimed, "Mr Modi runs three syndicates. One is

about himself, another is of Amit Shah and the third is of Adani. The Adanis will loot all the farmland and produces including potatoe and onion. Only Mr Modi, Mr Shah and the Adanis will eat them while the people of Bengal and the entire country will cry around." She then defined her 'Outsiders' slogan. "Bohiragoto goons are being brought to Bengal. We do not call those who live in Bengal Bohiragoto be it Rajasthani, Punjabi, Gujarati, Marwari, Tamil or someone from Delhi. Bohiragoto goons are those who, all dressed up, are sent here from UP."

**हिमाचल प्रदेश सरकार ने पूरा किया अपना वादा – घर द्वार पर वी सुविधाएं ज्यादा से ज्यादा।**

**ऑनलाइन पेमेन्ट का ज़माना है। प्रदेश को आगे बढ़ाना है।**

विद्युत बिल और विद्युत आपूर्ति सम्बंधी सभी सुविधाएं अब घर द्वार पर।

**ऑनलाइन सुविधाएं:**

- विद्युत बिल देखने की सुविधा।
- विद्युत बिल भुगतान करने की सुविधा।
- विद्युत बिल कैलकुलेट (Calculate) करने की सुविधा।
- पैशन सम्बंधी जानकारी की सुविधाएं।
- कर्मचारियों सम्बंधी सुविधाएं।
- नये कनेक्शन सम्बंधी सुविधाएं।
- विद्युत आपूर्ति व विद्युत बिल सम्बंधी शिकायतों की सुविधा।
- विद्युत बोर्ड लिमिटेड सम्बंधी सभी जानकारी की सुविधा।

मुख्य रूप से उपभोक्ता, हिमाचल प्रदेश स्टेट इलेक्ट्रिसिटी बोर्ड लिमिटेड की वेबसाइट <https://www.hpsebl.in> पर जाकर **View / Pay Energy Bills without Login** की ऑफ़न पर जाकर अपना 12 नम्बरों का कन्स्यूमर आईडी, भरकर अपना बिजली बिल देख सकते हैं और भुगतान कर सकते हैं।

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• हिमाचल प्रदेश स्टेट इलेक्ट्रिसिटी बोर्ड लिमिटेड की वेबसाइट <a href="http://www.hpsebl.in">www.hpsebl.in</a>	• सुविधा जनक है।
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• ऑनलाइन एनर्जीएफटी, आरटीजीएस।	• पर्यावरण के अनुकूल है।
• लोकमित्र केंद्र	• बेहतर धन प्रबंधक है।
	• आपको व्यवस्थित रखता है।
	• आधुनिक तकनीकी का उचित प्रयोग।

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...पटुता रात है अजरी को उन जन तक...  
...विद्युत सम्पर्क...



## SHORT TAKES

## 3 get death for 2018 rape, murder in UP

**Lucknow:** A court in Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr district on Wednesday sentenced three men to death in connection with the gang-rape and murder of a minor in January 2018, the state government said in a statement here. Additional district judge (POCSO-2), Bulandshahr, Rajesh Parashar found the three guilty and sentenced them to death.

The accused — Zulfiqar Abbasi, Dilshad Abbasi and Ibrael alias Malani (all residents of Sikandarabad area in Bulandshahr) — had on January 2, 2018 abducted the girl while she was returning from tuition classes. The girl was abducted in a car, gangraped, and then killed using her dupatta. The body was thrown in a canal under Dadri police station area of Gautam Buddh Nagar district. A case was registered against the three under Sections of the IPC and the POCSO Act. — *PTI*

## India committed to stable Afghan: MEA

**New Delhi:** External affairs minister S. Jaishankar "reassured afghan foreign minister Haneef Atmar of India's long-term commitment towards a peaceful, sovereign, stable and inclusive Afghanistan where the rights of all sections of the society are protected within a democratic constitutional framework". Mr Jaishankar mentioned it during his extensive talks with Atmar on Monday, the MEA said. The Afghan foreign minister also met National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval during the visit which assumes significance in view of the ongoing Afghan peace process between Kabul and the Taliban. India is strongly backing Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. The "EAM highlighted that enduring peace in Afghanistan is important for the peace, security and prosperity of the region.

## Shivraj calls meet as Covid cases rise

**Bhopal:** Madhya Pradesh recorded year's highest single-day spike in Coronavirus positive cases on Monday prodding Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan to convene an emergency high level meeting late in the evening to review the situation and roll out fresh measures to contain the epidemic. The state has reported 1,712 positive cases in the last 24 hours, taking the tally of cases to 2,78,577. On December 9, positive cases in the state had dropped to 495. However, cases increased on March 17 when the state recorded 832. "We are very much concerned over the resurgence of cases. I have convened a high level official meeting to review the situation again," Chouhan said.

## 3 COW VIGILANTES HURT IN FIGHT WITH SMUGGLERS

**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO**  
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 24

Three cow vigilantes were seriously injured as they were allegedly attacked by cattle smugglers on National Highway 16 in Bhadrak district on Wednesday. The injured were admitted to the Bhadrak District Headquarters Hospital in critical conditions.

According to reports, a team of cow vigilantes under the banner of Go Surakhya Samiti was trying to intercept three trucks in which over 300 cattle were being transported illegally. However, the smugglers launched attacks on the vigilantes with sharp edged weapons, sticks and stones, leaving three of them injured. "We were informed by some local people that some cow smugglers were carrying cattle in container trucks. The workers of Go Surakhya Samiti chased the trucks and informed the police about the same. On the way at Rantal near Bhadrak town, the smugglers started throwing stones in order to stop us. They also attacked us with sharp edged weapons and sticks and injured three of us badly," said Rabindra Das, a member of Go Surakhya Samiti.

While Bhadrak police seized two trucks from the spot with the help of the vigilantes, the smugglers managed to flee with another truck. "Around 10-12 smugglers attacked me when we were trying to stop them. They thrashed me seriously," said another Go Surakhya Samiti member, Hemant Baisakh.

## Decomposed body of student found in UP; 3 arrested

**Shahjahanpur (UP), March 24:** (PTI) Three people were arrested on Wednesday in connection with the death of a 20-year-old college student, whose decomposed body was found in a forest area near Marena village here days after he went missing, police said.

During questioning, one of them told police that they killed Hariom because he had molested his girlfriend.

Deceased Hariom was studying at a law college run by the Mumukshu Ashram of former Union minister Swami Chinmayanand. He went missing on March 19.

Superintendent of Police (SP) S Anand said the body was found late Tuesday night.

"Hariom was a student of Swami Shukdevanand Law College and resided in a rented accommodation in Mohanganj locality. He went missing on March 19 after sitting for his examinations. His father Ashok Singh had lodged a missing report at the Sadar Bazar Police Station," Assistant Superintendent of Police (City) Sanjay Kumar said. "Police on Wednesday arrested three accused persons. They study at the same college," Anand said.

According to the SP, the main accused told police that he was in a relationship with a female student studying in LLB

## 62-YEAR-OLD WOMAN RAPED, BRUTALLY ATTACKED IN MP

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY**  
BHOPAL, MAR 24

A 62-year-old woman was abducted at knife point by a youth in Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh and then raped repeatedly by him on Tuesday night.

She was later allegedly brutally attacked by him before being abandoned at the crime spot.

The incident took place near Bhagabanpur village on the outskirts of Gwalior city.

## Bill on Delhi L-G clears RS

■ **Continued from Page 1** have full belief in the Constitution. We did not bring this bill to create problems for the Delhi government... I request every member to support the bill unequivocally," said Mr Reddy ahead of voting on consideration of the motion to pass the bill, as demanded by the Opposition, before the bill was passed by a voice vote. Some other Opposition parties, including the Congress, also staged a walkout.

Earlier, the Upper House saw an uproar and sloganeering as it took up the bill, which was opposed by some non-NDA parties like the BJD and the YSRCP, who on various occasions had supported

■ **DECEASED HARIOM** was studying at a law college run by the Mumukshu Ashram of former Union minister Swami Chinmayanand. He went missing on March 19.

third semester and she was allegedly molested by Hariom in the past.

On March 18, when the woman reached the college to collect her admit card, Hariom allegedly offered to help her but then grabbed her with "bad intention", the SP said, quoting the main accused.

When the accused came to know about it, he vowed to take revenge, Anand said.

They devised a plan the same day, and on March 19, they took Hariom to a forest and attacked him with a sickle, the SP said.

The body of the deceased bore several injury marks. Additional SP Kumar earlier said, and added that it has been sent for a post-mortem examination.

Meanwhile, a BA second-year female student of the same college died at a Lucknow hospital on Tuesday, a month after she was found severely burnt and lying naked along a national highway here.

She was cremated amid tight security arrangements at the Ganga Ghat on Wednesday. — *PTI*

## ■ Mumbai ex-top cop told to move to HC SC: Param Bir's charges against minister serious

**SHAHAB ANSARI**  
MUMBAI, MARCH 24

Former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh will move the Bombay high court against state home minister Anil Deshmukh after the SC termed his allegations against the minister "very serious" and told him to approach the HC first.

A division bench of justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Justice Subhash Reddy of the Apex Court on Wednesday asked former Mumbai Police chief Param Bir Singh to approach the Bombay high court with his plea seeking CBI investigation in the alleged corrupt malpractices of Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh.

Even though the court noted that "no doubt the matter is quite serious affecting administration at large. It appears a lot of material has come in the public domain due to persons falling apart". However, it asked two questions to the petitioner. The bench asked why a petition has been filed before the Supreme Court

## CONG SEEKS JUDICIAL PROBE INTO ALLEGATIONS AGAINST DESHMUKH

**BHAGWAN PARAB**  
MUMBAI, MARCH 24

Despite the talks of grumbling in the Maharashtra Congress over the corruption allegations of former top cop Param Bir Singh against home minister Anil Deshmukh, the party has made it clear that there is no threat to the state government. It has also accused the BJP of misusing Central agencies to destabilise the gov-

ernment. The allegations against Mr Deshmukh have reportedly caused discomfort within the Congress with some leaders raising concerns that the party's image is getting unnecessarily maligned on the issue. However, Mr Patole dismissed the reports. He also demanded a probe by a committee headed by a judge on the allegations against Mr Deshmukh.

under Article 32 rather than a petition under Article 226 before the high court. The court also asked him as to why Home Minister Anil Deshmukh, the person against whom they have made serious allegations hasn't even been impleaded as a party.

Replying to this senior counsel Mukul Rohatgi on behalf of Singh submitted that he will implead the party. Regarding the maintainability of Article 32 plea, he stated that it can be maintained where Art 226 can be maintained.

Advocate Rohatgi cited Prakash Singh's case and submitted that the court had said that effecting senior police transfers without completing 2 years is a serious issue and can be done only if he is facing a probe.

The bench stated that the issue isn't about the state, it is that the police reforms haven't taken place despite judgment in Prakash Singh's case. Whenever some particular episode erupts people suddenly remember Prakash Singh's judgment.

## Nuns harassed, forced off train in UP

*Incident echoes in Kerala; Shah promises action, Vijayan writes to Centre*

**Kanjirappally/Thiruvalla (Kerala), March 24:** The alleged harassment of nuns belonging to a Kerala-based congregation in Uttar Pradesh recently had its echo in the poll-bound southern state on Wednesday, with chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan taking it up with the Centre and home minister Amit Shah promising strong action.

While Mr Vijayan flagged concerns of freedom of individual rights in the incident, Mr Shah pointed out that Uttar Pradesh was a BJP-ruled state and promised to bring before the law, those behind the incident.

Two nuns and two novices were forcefully asked to deboard an

express train in Uttar Pradesh's Jhansi by members of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) after local Bajrang Dal activists allegedly complained that the two women were allegedly conducting religious conversion. They were detained for questioning by railway police on March 19, and only after establishing there was no conversion involved, they were allowed to proceed.

Mr Shah, in the state to campaign ahead of the April 6 Assembly polls, said, "I want to assure the people of Kerala that the culprits behind this incident will be brought to justice at the earliest."

The issue was raised before Mr Shah by BJP's

Kanjirappally Assembly candidate and party's Christian face K.J. Alphonse, also his former ministerial colleague in the union cabinet.

In a memorandum addressed to Mr Shah, Mr Alphonse said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has in various meetings with the Christian community, "has assured equality for all, as enshrined in the Constitution."

"Such incidents perpetrated by fringe elements and groups create a sense of insecurity in our minority community," he said.

The incident, coming in the backdrop of the saffron party reaching out to Christians in the state, is being seen by Kerala BJP leaders as a setback for

## India-Pak Indus water meet ends on a 'cordial note'

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

In yet another sign of improved bilateral ties, a two-day annual meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission, comprising Indus commissioners of India and Pakistan, was concluded "in a cordial manner" wherein "discussions continued on designs of two Indian projects, namely, Pakal Dul (1000 MW) and Lower Kalnai (48 MW)".

In a statement, New Delhi said the "Indian side held that these projects are fully compliant with the provisions of the treaty and provided technical data in support of its position" while the "Pakistan side requested India for sharing of information on design of other Indian hydropower projects being planned to be developed". New Delhi said the "Indian side assured that the information will be supplied as and when required to be supplied under the provisions of the Treaty".

The Permanent Indus Commission is a bipartisan body entrusted with

the everyday implementation of the Indus Waters Treaty, which mandates it to meet at least once every year; alternately in India and Pakistan. It comprises Indus commissioners from both sides and discusses technical matters related to the implementation of the treaty. It has met well over 100 times since 1960.

The meeting took place here after a gap of over two years.

It may be recalled that under the treaty, which was signed by the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistan's then President Ayub Khan in 1960, water of six rivers — Beas, Ravi, Sutlej, Indus, Chenab and Jhelum — were to be shared between the two countries. Pakistan has been complaining of not receiving enough water and gone for international arbitration in a couple of cases. The Indus system of rivers comprises three eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas and Sutlej and their tributaries) and three western rivers (Indus, Jhelum and Chenab and their tributaries).

## Muslims will get rid of burqa soon: UP minister

**Ballia (UP), March 24:** Uttar Pradesh minister Anand Swarup Shukla on Wednesday said Muslim women will be "freed" from the practice of wearing 'burqa', which he described as an evil custom and compared it to the banned triple talaq.

This comes a day after the minister wrote to the Ballia district magistrate, complaining that he is facing difficulties in discharge of his duties due to loudspeakers at mosques and said their volume should be fixed according to the court orders.

"Muslim women will be freed from 'burqa' like triple talaq. There will come a time when they will get rid of it. There are many Muslim countries where 'burqa' is banned," Mr Shukla told reporters, without elaborating on his claim.

The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act 2019 makes the practice of instant divorce through "triple talaq" among Muslims a punishable offence.

Under the provisions of the Act, a Muslim man who pronounces "triple talaq" upon his wife can be sentenced to a jail term that may extend to three years.

Mr Shukla, the Uttar Pradesh minister of state for parliamentary affairs, said the "burqa" is "inhuman and evil custom" and added that those with progressive thinking are shunning it and not pressing for its use.

On his letter to the DM in which he raised objection to the volume of loudspeakers at the mosque near his house, the minister said that those having problems should dial '112' and inform police about it, adding if proper steps are not taken, he will decide further course of action. — *PTI*

## SSC officers can now use their rank after retirement

**PAWAN BALI**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

The defence ministry has decided to allow the retired Short Service Commission officers of the Indian Army to use military ranks after their release from the force.

The Short Service Commission (SSC) officers, after completion of their mandated terms and conditions of the service, were not authorised to use the military ranks. This had been causing dissatisfaction and discontentment among the SSC officers who serve under the same service conditions and face similar hardships as permanent commission officers with a similar service profile.

"This decision of the government will not only remove dissatisfaction and discontentment among the retired SSC officers but will serve as a big boost to the young aspirants," said the defence ministry in a statement. It said that this decision will act as a morale booster for the

## GOVT: AWARE OF CHINESE INFRA BUILUP IN BORDER REGIONS

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

The "government is aware that China is developing infrastructure in the border regions opposite India in Tibet and Xinjiang Autonomous Regions", the MEA informed Parliament. The MEA added that the "government gives careful and special attention to improvement of infra-

structure for the development of border areas, in order to facilitate the economic development of these areas as also to meet India's strategic and security requirements".

It said the "government continues to keep constant watch on all developments having a bearing on India's security and takes all the necessary measures to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity."

existing SSC officers.

The demand for use of military ranks by SSC officers after release from service has been pending since 1983. The SSC officers form the backbone of the support cadre of the Army. They serve for a period of 10-14 years to make up for the deficiency of young officers in units. There have been several attempts at making the SSC attractive. Permission to allow the

use of military ranks by these officers has been one of their major demands. Unlike in the past when SSC officers used to serve for a period of five years, now they serve for a tenure of 10 years, further extendable by four years. The SSC officers provide a support cadre to the officers' cadre of the Army and have been created primarily to provide young officers to the units.

## NIA invokes UAPA

■ **Continued from Page 1**

over the Hiren murder case papers despite the Central government transferring the case to the NIA.

Additional solicitor-general Anil Singh, on behalf of the NIA, contended that the Central government had directed the NIA to take up this murder case because it was linked to the bomb scare near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's "Antilla" residence.

After hearing the arguments, the magistrate, Ms Ingale, observed: "It appears the investigation of this ATS Crime no 12/2021 is transferred to the NIA by the Central government as per order dated 20/03/2021 as per Section 8 of the NIA Act." She also said that the fact was communicated to the director-general of police, Mumbai, and a copy of this letter was also received by the ATS office. All these facts are admitted by the investigating officer of the ATS. With these observations, the magistrate directed the ATS not to proceed with the investigation and to forthwith transmit all relevant documents and the case records to the NIA.

## PM slams Mamata

■ **Continued from Page 1**

you to talk of bohiragoto in that very Bengal from where Gurudev stitched all Indians in one bond and said from this soil what we repeat daily? How can you? While labels of 'tourist' are made, fun is made and insults are hurled. The people from the soil of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore do not see anyone as bohiragoto here. This is the call of the soil. In Bengal, the CM of the state government of the BJP that you are going to build will be a son of this soil. After all, the land is Bengal."

He continued: "Didi, *Apni Khela Korben. Amra Seva Korbo. Khela Noy Seva Hobe* (Didi, you will play while we will serve the masses. Service, not a game, will take place.) Didi

is nervous because her game has been exposed. The TMC is resorting to lies and fake allegations on Nandigram. Didi, Nandigram gave you so much dignity and honour. But you are defaming Nandigram before the country by making false claims! The people of Nandigram will not tolerate it. They will seek your explanation."

Mocking Ms Banerjee's tour, Mr Modi alleged: "Visiting Midnapore time and again nowadays, Didi is giving excuses. She could not explain to those families which were first affected by Cyclone Amphan and then looted by talabaj (extortionists) of the TMC. The relief sent by the Central government here got stuck in the Bhaipo window."



## THE ASIAN AGE

25 MARCH 2021

### Shot eligibility expansion route out of return wave

The decision of the Union government to open up the vaccination programme against pandemic Covid-19 further and include all those who are aged 45 years and above is a welcome move as it comes in the nick of time. India is on the verge of a second wave of the pandemic with more than 47,000 people contracting the virus on Tuesday alone. The daily caseload has been hovering above 40,000 for the last couple of weeks. Several states have already gone back to or are contemplating re-introducing lockdown in varying intensities to check the spread of the virus.

The government decision comes amid demands made by several state governments to include more categories of the population under it. The Delhi government has demanded that everyone above 18 years be given the jab while Punjab wanted the norms for the second phase where only those above 60 years were eligible for the vaccine be done away with. Its chief minister is particularly worried as 81 per cent samples that underwent genome sequencing from the state showed B117 virus, the UK strain of Covid-19.

**The US has vaccinated 37.83 of every hundred people while China's number stands at 5.21 against India's 3.54**

The percentage of people who have got the vaccine is far too low compared with that in the US and Britain: the US has vaccinated 37.83 of every hundred people while China's number stands at 5.21 against India's 3.54. At this rate, India will take months on end to get a sizeable share of the population inoculated. This would mean some region or the other being under lockdown or debilitating restrictions. But the nation cannot afford to keep its economic activity in chains for long.

It has been one year since Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared a national lockdown to tame the virus and flatten the curve. One year on, India has suffered immensely at the hand of the microorganism. Crores of people found it difficult to make ends meet but the governments at the Centre and in most states offered very little in the form of immediate relief. Lakhs of people were made to flee their temporary abodes in the towns and trek thousands of miles on their way back home, creating one of the most heartrending and shameful episodes of Independent India. One year down the line, India is still the country with the third largest number of Covid cases and deaths after the United States and Brazil.

There cannot be a repeat of the same this year. The government must further strengthen the inoculation programme and at the same time strictly impose Covid-appropriate protocol across the country. Any laxity on these counts will cost the nation heavily.

### Lanka: A lost opportunity

In abstaining from the vote on the United Nations Human Right Council resolution against Sri Lanka, India may have been attempting to find a pragmatic balance. But, in not claiming the moral high ground on the issue of human rights violations against Sri Lankan Tamils, the country lost an opportunity to be the conscience keeping leader of the region. There may have been inhibiting reasons in voting for the resolution like respect for the territorial integrity of the island nation, but none was so compelling as to impose an ambivalent position on how Sri Lanka tamed LTTE's secessionist movement towards the end of the civil war when it brazenly carried out executions, including that of the minor son of LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran.

What the Sri Lankan Army did in the guise of winning a war was morally reprehensible. Considering the head of the defence forces in the war against the rebels that ended in May 2009 is now the president of Sri Lanka, it is unlikely that the probe, financed with the UN's US \$2.8 million, will get very far. It is clear that India chose the path of lesser resistance in joining the abstainers rather than the 22 nations who voted for the resolution and 11, including Pakistan and China, voting against. India's two fundamental considerations of "supporting the Tamils for equality, justice, dignity and peace and ensuring the unity, stability and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka", are in the realm of the pedantic.

There is no doubt the nearness of April 6 elections in Tamil Nadu influenced the decision to abstain. The perception of New Delhi varies vastly from that of Tamil Nadu, obviously influenced by the romanticism of a Tamil Eelam, or homeland. The fact remains that New Delhi voted thus only with an eye on the Tamil Nadu voter rather than the empathetic first principles in favour of a people residing in northern Sri Lanka who are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity. No Indian on Tamil can influence the court of post-war events in Sri Lanka. But to remain a silent spectator to human rights abuses reflects moral bankruptcy.

#### THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



## Halt Covid complacency: Be vigilant, keep all safe



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

Around this time last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a nationwide lockdown to stop the spread of the coronavirus. Indians were given four hours' notice before the order took effect. "From 12 midnight tonight, the entire country will go under a complete lockdown," Mr Modi said. "To save India and every Indian, there will be a total ban on venturing out of your homes." The initial clampdown was for 21 days.

A year on, where are we? That question is the big story in our lives.

Many of us have lost loved ones, jobs, watched our savings evaporate, been sick ourselves. Most of us have no choice but to tap our inner strengths as we cope with everyday challenges in the time of a pandemic.

It is not a totally bleak picture. Vaccines are available now and we are likely to see a huge scale-up in the government's immunisation drive in the coming weeks.

But alongside, worryingly, we are also seeing a big surge in Covid-19 cases in many parts of the country and a disconcerting general disregard for safety protocols. India's new Covid-19 cases had peaked at nearly 100,000 a day in September and had been declining steadily until late last month.

Two recent surveys give us a sense of just how bad the economic situation is.

The first one relates to the situation in New Delhi, the nation's capital.

According to a recent survey by the Delhi government, the unemployment rate in Delhi was 11.1 per cent before the onset of the pandemic and it shot up to 28.5 per cent during October-November 2020, an increase of 17.4 per cent. The male unemployment rate was 8.7 per cent before the pandemic;

it increased to 23.2 per cent, an increase of 14.5 per cent. The female unemployment rate was 25.6 per cent before the pandemic and went up to 54.7 per cent, an increase of 29.1 per cent, in the same period. The average monthly income of employed persons in the city before the pandemic was ₹16,511. It dipped to ₹15,383, a reduction of 6.8 per cent in the average monthly income during October-November last year.

In the past year, on the whole, the worst-affected sectors have been construction, food and beverages, service activities, education, wholesale and retail trade, services to buildings and landscape activities, information service activities, land transport, security and investigation activities, human health activities and wearing apparel manufacturing.

The survey was conducted last year, and arguably things have improved since then.

But here is the catch, signs of economic activity do not necessarily mean that workers are getting their due wages. From my personal conversations with scores of people in the informal service sector, I know that many are still getting a fraction of their former wages and many who are without work.

In January this year, I met Naresh Kumar, 55, in one of the "pagoda" style temporary refuges in winter in the Bangla Sahib shelter run by an NGO. Mr Kumar told me

**Let's face it — we are in the middle of two crises — the coronavirus pandemic and the one impacting the economy. Both intersect. We have the vaccine. But as scientists keep reminding us, it doesn't herald a full stop to the pandemic just yet.**

**A spike in coronavirus cases in India would dent the green shoots of the economic recovery as fresh curbs will kick in to prevent a new wave from gaining momentum. We must do everything we can to ensure that does not happen.**

He used to earn his living as a waiter, mostly at weddings. For the last one and half months, he had been at the shelter. He had no work for the past year. He was picked up by a rescue van and brought to the shelter. He had no identity documents. Naresh Kumar feared going back to sleeping in the streets once the temporary shelter closed down. I wonder where he is today....

Even in tony South Delhi enclaves, it is not uncommon to find people in the beauty, wellness and hospitality industry complaining of getting less than their salary. They can't quit their jobs because there are few new opportunities in the market.

Though the unemployment rate is gradually decreasing in the city, the implementation of a job guarantee scheme is very much needed to revive the national capital's economy scarred by the coronavirus pandemic.

The survey tells us that people at the bottom of the income hierarchy were among the worst affected. Those with no or minimal education lost jobs in far greater numbers than those with a simple diploma.

This is not just in Delhi or India's big cities. Across the country, not only have the number of the poor increased, leading to a sharp spike in the global increase in poverty, a new Pew Research Centre analysis talks about the retreat of India's middle class in 2020. The middle class in India is estimated to have shrunk by 32 million last year as a direct fallout of the economic downturn, compared with the number it may have reached without the pandemic, it says.

Understandably, people

are tired and craving for normalcy and economic recovery.

But let's face it — we are in the middle of two crises — the coronavirus pandemic and the one impacting the economy. Both intersect. We have the vaccine. But as scientists keep reminding us, the vaccine doesn't herald a full stop to the pandemic just yet.

Nicholas Christakis, a physician, epidemiologist, and sociologist at Yale University, says the coronavirus pandemic will continue to affect our lives through 2021 and beyond. He talks about it in detail his new book *Apollo's Arrow: The Profound and Enduring Impact of Coronavirus on the Way We Live*.

When the virus is surrounded by people who are vaccinated, it has nowhere to go and thus outbreaks are suppressed, he says. Until such a state of herd immunity is reached, mask wearing, hand washing with soap and social distancing will have to necessarily remain.

A lot has changed since 2020. For many, hugging a loved one is a fantasy with restrictions on mobility still in place. New protocols for health safety have drastically changed our everyday lives in the past year. No one knows just how long it will take us to bounce back psychologically, socially and economically in the long term. There are still many uncertainties about the virus and variants are popping up.

But we know that a spike in coronavirus cases in India would dent the green shoots of the economic recovery as fresh curbs will kick in to prevent a new wave from gaining momentum. We must do everything we can to ensure that does not happen.

We must beat the virus, but that can happen only if everyone sees it as a shared interest and shared fate. If we become complacent, and drop our guard, infections can rise. That affects us all.

*The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com*

#### LETTERS

#### CAVALIER ABOUT COVID

Massive rallies are being seen in the current election campaigning and no leader is wearing a mask. Social distancing protocols have been abandoned in favour of audience density. Back in the studio, the same leaders wax eloquent on civic responsibility. It was Donald Trump who went ahead with open rallies at the height of the pandemic in the US, and he paid for his cavalier defiance with ignominious defeat. Unfortunately, in India, every party is a law-breaker and NOTA the only feeble means to even approach such an outcome.

R. Narayanan  
Navi Mumbai

#### VACCINE FOOTPRINT

THE GOVERNMENT'S nod to inoculate all citizens above 45, irrespective of co-morbidities, from April 1 is a welcome step. Expanding the vaccination circle will make nearly a quarter of India's population eligible for the shots. The move coming in the wake of a galloping second wave could see more people queue up at the vaccination centres. Meanwhile, people must continue to exercise Covid-appropriate behaviour and not throw caution to the winds.

N.J. Ravi Chander  
Bengaluru

#### OLYMPIC DISASTER

IT'S A MATTER OF immense pride for a nation to host the quadrennial Olympics. However, even though it was moved to 2021 from 2020 on account of the Covid-19 pandemic, this edition of the Tokyo Games is going to be the most expensive of them all, costing in the neighbourhood of US \$26 billion. This is a great burden on the Japanese exchequer. The Japanese yen has depreciated considerably. Japan is also going to incur losses in the vicinity of US \$850 million in sale of tickets. The sole ray of hope was broadcasting rights, but here, too, the International Olympic Committee enjoys the lion's share. The Games are going to spell a financial disaster for the eastern country.

Rahul Chouhan  
Ujjain

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

Dilip Cherian  
Dilli Ka Babu



### Will J&K-AGMUT cadre merger solve Valley's problem of sparse governance?

The merger of the Jammu and Kashmir cadre into the UT cadre, among other things, is meant to address the old problem of the acute shortage of IAS officers in the Union territory. The erstwhile J&K cadre had a stipulated strength of 137 IAS officers but currently has merely 58, of which nine are on Central deputation. The result is that practically every IAS officer in the UT is handling several portfolios, which is not exactly great news for good governance.

The problem has lingered for several years, with the result that officers of the Kashmir Administrative Service have long been handling posts reserved for IAS officers, without being promoted to the IAS. For instance, the post of district magistrate (DM) can only be filled by an IAS officer, but in

Kashmir, nine out of 20 district magistrates are from the state administrative service.

Apparently, no state administrative service officer has been inducted into the IAS since 2012, which has only accentuated the problem. While in other parts of the country there is a 37 per cent reserved quota for state service officers, in Kashmir it has become 50 per cent!

The cadre merger, the Centre hopes, will allow officers in the AGMUT cadre to be posted in J&K and Ladakh, and vice-versa. Until that happens it is the state service babus who will continue to hold most of the administrative positions in the Union territory.

#### A HIGH-PROFILE EXIT

P.K. Sinha, senior advisor to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, quietly put in his papers but cannot stop

**P.K. Sinha, senior advisor to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, quietly put in his papers but cannot stop tongues from wagging. It is being said that Mr Sinha could be the next lieutenant governor of either Delhi or Puducherry.**

tongues from wagging. It is being said that the former Cabinet secretary is being primed for another role by Mr Modi. Among the theories doing the rounds, it is being speculated that Mr Sinha could be the next lieutenant governor of either Delhi or Puducherry.

This may not be without precedent. Recall 2019 when Nripendra Misra, the then principal secretary

to the PMO, similarly resigned "for personal reasons" but was soon named chairman of the prestigious Ram temple construction committee.

#### BABU'S MIXED LEGACY

Economic affairs secretary Tarun Bajaj has been given an additional charge of revenue secretary after the retirement of A.B.P. Pandey last month. However, Mr Pandey's exit hasn't been as quiet as he may have expected. As soon as he retired, media reports appeared around the lack of progress in filling more than 400 vacancies of income tax commissioners and others, some of which have been hanging fire since 2019. It was somehow hinted that Mr Pandey did not do enough during his stint as revenue secretary to fill these vacancies. Further,

sources say, Mr Pandey drew the ire of Odisha-based IT chief commissioner D.P. Kar, who reportedly wrote to the Prime Minister demanding an inquiry against Pandey.

Yet, others point out that the same Mr Pandey was among the few babus who successfully led three crucial institutions of the Modi sarkar — department of revenue, goods and services tax network and the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI). As revenue secretary, Mr Pandey led significant tax reforms undertaken by the government. The detractors waited for the man to retire before raising issues that troubled them during his tenure.

Share a babu experience! Follow [@dilipthecherian](https://twitter.com/dilipthecherian) on Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.



## SHORT TAKES

DUBAI'S DY  
RULER PASSES  
AWAY AT 75

**Dubai:** Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum, deputy ruler of Dubai and the finance minister of the United Arab Emirates, has died, his brother said on Wednesday. He was 75.

Sheikh Hamdan served as deputy leader of Dubai under his brother, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the hereditary ruler of the city-state who also serves as prime minister and vice president of the UAE. Emirati officials announced his death without specifying the cause. Sheikh Hamdan had been in poor health for several months.

VIRGINIA GOV. TO  
SIGN LAW ENDING  
DEATH PENALTY

**Jarratt (US):** Governor Ralph Northam is set to sign historic legislation that will put an end to the death penalty in Virginia, a state with a long and prolific history of carrying out executions.

Northam scheduled a tour on Wednesday of the death chamber at the Greensville Correction Center, then planned to sign the landmark legislation abolishing the death penalty.

The legislation marks a dramatic shift in a state that has executed more people than any other. Virginia has put to death nearly 1,400 people since its days as a colony. In modern times, Virginia is second only to Texas in the number of executions it has carried out, with 113 since the US Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976.

GILANI'S POLL  
RESULT PLEA  
DISMISSED

**Islamabad:** A Pakistani court on Wednesday dismissed former prime minister Yusuf Raza Gilani's petition challenging the results of the Senate chairman election which he lost in a keenly-fought contest.

Gilani filed the petition on Monday in the Islamabad High Court (IHC) which was accepted for hearing by Chief Justice Athar Minallah. During the hearing on Wednesday, Chief Justice Minallah noted that the proceedings of the upper house of parliament were "immune from the interference" of the high court.

The "language used by the framers of the Constitution is unambiguous and effective in order to prevent a court from encroaching upon the independence of the Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament)," Chief Justice Minallah wrote.

UK MIN PLEDGES  
OVERHAUL OF  
REFUGEE SYSTEM

**London:** British Home Secretary Priti Patel on Wednesday announced a major overhaul of the country's asylum system, which includes tougher measures to break what she described as the business model of people smugglers and remove illegal migrants more easily.

In a speech in the House of Commons, the senior Indian-origin Cabinet minister laid out a "New Plan for Immigration" because she said the current system is becoming overwhelmed, as 1,09,000 claims are sitting in the asylum queue and 42,000 failed asylum seekers have not left the country, despite having their claim refused.

The plans have been dubbed the "biggest overhaul of the UK's asylum system in decades" as Patel said parts of the immigration system have been "open to abuse... for too long".

4 KILLED, 14  
HURT IN PAK  
BOMB BLAST

**Quetta:** At least four people were killed and 14 others injured after a powerful roadside bomb exploded outside the offices of Pakistani security forces in the restive Balochistan province, bordering Afghanistan, police said.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack outside the Levies headquarters in Chaman town. Chaman Assistant Commissioner Zakullah Durrani said at least four people were killed and around 14 others injured in the explosion. Explosives were planted in a motorcycle and the apparent target was a police mobile stationed outside the Levies headquarters, which also serves as a temporary prison, he said.

## Myanmar releases hundreds

It is first gesture by the military to try to placate the protest movement

**Yangon, March 24:** Hundreds of people imprisoned for protesting last month's coup were released Wednesday in the first apparent gesture by the military to try to placate the protest movement.

Witnesses outside Insein Prison in Yangon saw busloads of mostly young people, looking happy with some flashing the three-finger gesture of defiance adopted by the protest movement. State-run TV said a total of 628 were freed.

The prisoners appear to be the hundreds of students detained in early March while demonstrating against the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. One lawyer, speaking on condition of anonymity because she doesn't want attention from the authorities, said all those released were arrested on March 3. She said only 55 people detained in connection with the protests remained in the prison, and it is likely they will all face charges under Section 505(A) of the Penal Code, which carries a penalty of up to three years in prison. Myanmar's Assistance Association for Political Prisoners says it has confirmed the killings of 275 people in connection with the post-coup crackdown, with additional deaths still unverified.



AP journalist Thein Zaw waves outside Insein prison after his release Wednesday, in Yangon, Myanmar. — AP/PTI

It also says that as of Tuesday, it had verified arrest or charges against 2,812 people, of whom 2,418 remain in custody or with outstanding charges. Demonstrators on Wednesday tried a new tactic that they dubbed a silence strike, calling on people to stay home and businesses to close for the day.

The extent of the strike was difficult to gauge, but social media users posted photos from cities and towns showing streets empty of activity save for the occasional stray dog. The online meme posted to publicise the action called silence "the loudest scream" and explained its purpose was to honour the

movement's fallen heroes, to recharge protesters' energy and to contradict the junta's claims that "everything is back to normal."

The new tactic was employed after an extended onslaught of violence from security forces. Local media reported that a seven-year-old girl in Mandalay, was among the latest vic-

tims on Tuesday.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners included her in its list of fatalities. "Khin Myo Chit was shot in the abdomen by a soldier while she sat in her father's lap inside her home in Aung Pin Le ward," the online news service *Myanmar Now* reported. — AP

## No winner in Israel exit poll

**Jerusalem, March 24:** Israeli parliamentary elections have resulted in a virtual deadlock for a fourth time in the past two years, exit polls indicated, leaving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with an uncertain future and the country facing the prospect of continued political gridlock. The exit polls on Tuesday on Israel's three main TV stations indicated that both Netanyahu and his religious and nationalist allies, along with a group of anti-Netanyahu parties, fell short of the parliamentary majority required to form a new government. That raised the possibility of an unpre-

cedented fifth consecutive election later this year.

The election was seen as a referendum on Netanyahu's polarising leadership, and the initial results showed the country remains as deeply divided as ever, with an array of small sectarian parties dominating the parliament.

The results also signalled a continuing shift of the Israeli electorate toward the right wing, which supports West Bank settlements and opposes concessions in peace talks with the Palestinians. That trend was highlighted by the strong showing of an ultranationalist anti-Arab religious party. After three

previous inconclusive elections, Netanyahu had been hoping for a decisive victory that would allow him to form a government with his traditional ultra-Orthodox and hard-line nationalist allies and seek immunity from corruption charges.

In an address to supporters early Wednesday, a subdued Netanyahu boasted of a "great achievement" but stopped short of declaring victory. Instead, he appeared to reach out to his opponents and called for formation of a "stable government" that would avoid another election.

"We must not under any circumstances drag the

state of Israel to new elections, to a fifth election," he said. "We must form a stable government now."

Around 64 per cent of the vote had been counted by early Wednesday, leaving the outcome undetermined. A small Islamist party was hovering just below the threshold to enter parliament, and whether it made the cut could affect the distribution of pro- and anti-Netanyahu blocs in the Knesset.

Updated exit polls on two channels forecast an evenly divided parliament. The third station gave Netanyahu's opponents a one-seat advantage. — AP

## Surgeon General: Senate okays Murthy

**Washington, March 24:** Indian-American physician Vivek Murthy has been confirmed by the Senate as President Joe Biden's surgeon general, a role in which his top priority would be responding to the Coronavirus pandemic that has severely hit the country. Dr. Murthy, 43, would occupy the position of America's Surgeon General for the second time. In 2011, president Barack Obama tapped him to serve on the advisory group on prevention, health promotion, and integrative and public health.

I'm deeply grateful to be confirmed by the Senate to serve once again as your Surgeon General. We've endured great hardship as a nation over the past year, and I look forward to working with you to help our nation heal and create a better future for our children, Murthy said on Tuesday soon after the Senate confirmed his nomination by 57-43 votes.

In 2013, Obama nominated Dr. Murthy to be the surgeon general. He was

China bashes  
US over racism

**Beijing, March 24:** China lashed out on Wednesday at the US over racism, financial inequality and the federal government's response to the Coronavirus in an annual report that seeks to counter US accusations of human rights abuses by China's ruling Communist Party.

The report issued by China's Cabinet said the US in 2020 "saw its own epidemic situation go out of control, accompanied by political disorder, inter-ethnic conflicts, and

social division." The document released by the State Council Information Office also highlighted the January 6 insurrectionist attack on the Capitol as well as gun violence and health disparities.

China issues the report each year in response to US criticism of its record on issues such as abuses against minority groups in the western regions of Xinjiang and Tibet and a crackdown on opposition voices in Hong Kong. — AP

the youngest ever to hold the office at the age of 37. However, he had to abruptly leave the position during the Trump administration. As US Surgeon General, Dr. Murthy will

advise President Biden on the Coronavirus pandemic and will be the federal government's leading voice on public health.

Seven senators from the opposition Republican

Party voted in support of Dr. Murthy. He was an adviser to the Biden campaign and transition.

Senator Joe Manchin said that during his previous tenure as Surgeon General, Dr. Murthy worked to create a culture of public health promotion grounded in nutrition, physical activity and emotional well-being to help prevent conditions like obesity and diabetes.

Dr. Murthy also released a report outlining plans to reduce opioid prescriptions and expand access to treatment for those suffering from a substance use disorder, he said. He understands the issues facing this nation including the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the drug epidemic and protecting rural healthcare.

Covid-19 has taken the lives of several members of Murthy's extended family. During his confirmation hearing in February, he said that seven of his family members in India and America have died due to Covid-19. — PTI

INDIA, U.S. TO  
TALK HOMELAND  
SECURITY

**Washington, March 24:** The Biden administration has announced the re-establishment of the Homeland Security Dialogue with India that was discontinued by the previous Trump dispensation.

This comes a day after Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas spoke with India's Ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu on Monday and expressed his desire to further strengthen the partnership between India and his department.

"Mayorkas and Sandhu agreed to re-establish the US-India Homeland Security Dialogue and to discuss important issues such as cybersecurity, emerging technology and addressing violent extremism," according to a read-out of the meeting. — AP

COSMIC | MOUTHFUL Vines grew faster than those on Earth despite less light

## Tasters savour wine that orbited earth

**Bordeaux (France), March 24:** It tastes like rose petals. It smells like a campfire. It glistens with a burnt-orange hue. What is it? A 5,000-euro bottle of Chateau Petrus Pomerol wine that spent a year in space. Researchers in Bordeaux are analysing a dozen bottles of the precious liquid along with 320 snippets of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon grapevines that returned to Earth in January after a sojourn aboard the International Space Station.

They're releasing preliminary results on Wednesday, as part of a

longer-term effort to make plants on earth more resilient to climate change and disease by exposing them to new stresses, and to better understand the aging process, fermentation and bubbles in wine.

At a one-of-a-kind tasting this month, 12 connoisseurs sampled one of the space-travelled wines, blindly tasting it alongside a bottle from the same vintage that had stayed in a cellar. I have tears in my eyes, said Nicolas Gaume, CEO and co-founder of the company that arranged the experiment, Space Cargo Unlimited, as the bottles were carefully

● PRIVATE INVESTORS helped fund the project, though the overall cost wasn't disclosed.

uncorked at the Institute for Wine and Vine Research in Bordeaux.

When you expose wine, when you expose cells, plants to an environment without gravity...we create tremendous stress on any living species, he said.

Jane Anson, a wine expert and writer with The Decanter, said the wine that remained on earth tasted a little younger than the one that had been to space.

Chemical and biological analysis of the wine's aging process could allow scientists to find a way to artificially age fine vintages, said Dr. Michael Lebert, a biologist at Germany's Friedrich-Alexander-University.

The vine snippets — known as canes in the grape-growing world — not only all survived the journey but also grew faster than vines on Earth, despite limited light and water.

It's too early for the researchers to determine why. But when they do, Lebert said that could help scientists develop sturdier

vines on earth and pave the way for grape-growing and wine-making in space.

Plus, he said, Grapes...are very healthy for the astronauts. Private investors helped fund the project, though the overall cost wasn't disclosed.

For the average earthling, the main question is: What does cosmic wine taste like?

For me, the difference between the space and earth wine...it wasn't easy to define, said Franck Dubourdieu, a Bordeaux-based agronomist and oenologist, an expert in the study of wine and wine-making. — AP

Cargo ship  
turns sideways,  
blocks Suez

**Dubai, March 24:** A cargo container ship that's among the largest in the world has turned sideways and blocked all traffic in Egypt's Suez Canal, officials said Wednesday, threatening to disrupt a global shipping system already strained by the coronavirus pandemic.

The MV Evergreen, a Panama-flagged container ship that carries trade between Asia and Europe, became grounded Tuesday in the narrow, man-made waterway dividing continental Africa from the Sinai Peninsula. It wasn't immediately clear what caused it to turn sideways in the canal.

GAC, a global shipping and logistics company, described the ship as suffering "a blackout while transiting in a northerly direction," without elaborating. Evergreen Marine Corp., a major Taiwan-based shipping company that operates the ship, said in a statement provided to *The Associated Press* that the ship had been overcome by strong winds as it entered the

Suez Canal from the Red Sea but none of its containers had sunk.

A Egyptian official, who spoke to the *AP* on condition of anonymity as he wasn't authorized to brief journalists similarly blamed a strong wind in the area for the incident. Egyptian forecasters said high winds and a sandstorm plagued the area Tuesday, with winds gusting as much as 50 kph (31 mph). "All crew are safe and accounted for," said Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement, which manages the ship.

"There have been no reports of injuries or pollution." The Evergreen's bow was touching the canal's eastern wall, while its stern looked lodged against its western wall, according to satellite data from MarineTraffic.com. Several tug boats surrounded the ship, likely attempting to push it the right way, the data showed.

An image in Instagram by a user on another waiting cargo ship appeared to show it wedged across the canal. — AP



In this photo released by the Suez Canal Authority, a cargo ship Evergreen sits grounded Wednesday, after it turned sideways in Egypt's Suez Canal. — AP/PTI

Merkel cancels  
Easter shutdown

**Berlin, March 24:** Chancellor Angela Merkel on Wednesday dropped plans for a five-day shutdown in Germany over Easter, which had prompted confusion and criticism. She called the idea a mistake and apologised to Germans.

Merkel announced the decision after calling a hastily arranged video-conference on Wednesday with Germany's 16 state governors, who are responsible for imposing and lifting restrictions.

The same group had come up with the unexpected plan for deeper restrictions over Easter, which was announced early Tuesday.

The plan was to make Thursday next week —

the day before Good Friday — a "rest day," with all shops closed, and only allow supermarkets to open on Easter Saturday. Since the Friday and Monday are already holidays, that would have created a five-day shutdown of public life — on top of existing lockdown restrictions, which were extended through April 18.

The lockdown plan had raised many questions about logistical details, which remained unresolved, and also was criticised because there had been no public discussion of it before it emerged in the small hours of Tuesday following lengthy haggling. — AP

Shooting suspect  
prone to rage

**Colorado (US), March 24:** Law enforcement officials and former associates of a 21-year-old accused of killing 10 people at a Colorado supermarket described the suspect as someone prone to sudden rage who was suspended from high school for a sudden attack on a classmate that left the student bloodied.

Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa, who is from the Denver suburb of Arvada, was booked into jail Tuesday on murder charges a day after the attack at a King Soopers grocery in Boulder. He was due to make a first court appearance Thursday. Alissa had bought an assault weapon on March 16, six days before the attack, according to an arrest affidavit.

Investigators have not established a motive, said Boulder County District Attorney Michael Dougherty. It was not immediately known where the suspect purchased the weapon. Among the dead was Boulder police Officer Eric Talley, 51, who was the first to arrive after responding to a call about shots fired and someone carrying a gun, said police Chief Maris Herold.

A law enforcement official briefed on the shooting said the suspect's family told investigators they

DEMOCRATS  
VOW VOTE ON  
GUN BILLS

**Washington, March 24:** Democrats said they are pushing toward a vote on expanded gun control measures as the nation reels from its second mass shooting in a week. President Joe Biden said "we have to act," but prospects for any major changes were dim, for now, in the closely divided Congress.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer vowed Tuesday morning to bring to the Senate floor legislation passed by the House that would require background checks for most gun sales and transfers. He said the Senate "must confront a devastating truth" after a lack of congressional action on the issue for almost three decades. — AP

believed Alissa was suffering some type of mental illness, including delusions. Relatives described times when Alissa told them people were following or chasing him, which they said may have contributed to the violence, the official said. — AP



quick  
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,180.31	-1.74
Nifty 50	14,549.40	-1.79
S&P 500*	3,919.66	0.23
Dollar (₹)	72.56	-0.17
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.61	0.16
Euro (₹)	85.90	0.28
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,350▼149	0.33
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.43	5.99
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.152	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.642	0.004

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Covid health  
policies can be  
renewed till Sept.

The insurance regulator permitted all insurers to offer and renew short-term Covid-specific health policies up to September 30, 2021. Accordingly, Corona Kavach policies (standard indemnity-based health policy) and Corona Rakshak policies (standard benefit-based policies) are permitted to be offered and renewed by all insurers upto September 30 said the Irdai. All other terms remain as specified before.

Differential  
licensing in  
telecom mullied



The Centre is carrying out a consultation process on differential licensing through which different layers related to telecom services will be dealt separately. Currently, infrastructure, network, and service layers are not segregated and are part of the Unified Licence. "The government is in the process of consultation on the matter of enabling unbundling of different layers," minister of state Sanjay Dhotre told the Lok Sabha.

Tesla to accept  
Bitcoin as  
payment for cars

Having stunned the market with its audacious bet on Bitcoin earlier this year, Tesla Inc will now start accepting the world's largest electronic currency as payment for its electric cars. CEO Elon Musk tweeted that "you can now buy a Tesla with Bitcoin" and that paying by Bitcoin will also be available to customers outside the US later this year. He said any Bitcoin paid to the company will be retained as Bitcoin.

RBI ex-deputy  
guv Khan to leave  
Bandhan board

Bandhan Bank said former RBI deputy governor Harun Rashid Khan is not seeking re-appointment as independent director on its board after completion of his term later this week. Khan was brought on-board Bandhan Bank from March 26, 2018 for a period of three years. His first term would come to end at the close of business hours on March 26, 2021, Bandhan Bank said in a regulatory filing.

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■ Selling pressure drags Sensex by 871 pts

Market panics  
over 2nd wave

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, MARCH 24

Weak global cues and surging Covid cases in India and Europe led to across-the-board selling in the stock market on Wednesday, as investors worried about the impact of fresh lockdowns. The Sensex closed at 49,180, down 871 points, or 1.74 per cent, near a two-month low.

The Nifty-50 Index fell 265.35 points, or 1.79 per cent, to 14,549.40.

The broader market indices fell even more, with the Nifty Mid-cap 50 Index down 2.45 per cent and the Nifty Mid-cap 100 Index down 1.99 per cent.

The second wave of coronavirus infections was causing grave concern in the market, as it would impact the economic recovery process. Mumbai alone crossed 5,000 daily infections, the highest so far, as total fresh cases in Maharashtra stood at 28,699 and the all-India daily cases stood at 47,262.

The Maharashtra government announced a complete lockdown in Beed and Nanded districts from March 25 to April 4.

The foreign portfolio investors turned net sellers of equities worth Rs 1,951.90 crore.

With equity derivatives expiry scheduled on Thursday, market volatility is expected to rise, said analysts.

NSE's India VIX Index surged 8.66 per cent to 22.46, indicating higher market volatility ahead.



"All sectors barring pharma witnessed selling as second and third wave infections in India and Europe, respectively, are bound to hamper economic recovery. Reports of a potential tax hike in the US also impacted the market sentiment," said Vinod Nair, head-research, Geojit Financial Services.

Crude oil prices fell 4 per cent to below \$58 per barrel on global growth concerns, as Europe is experiencing a third wave of Covid infections.

"Sensex and Nifty-50 lost 871 and 265 points on the back of weakness in the commodity prices, lack of FPI flows and tight liquidity conditions due to successive IPOs and QIPs. Defensive sectors like Pharma & IT were relatively stable whereas high beta sectors like metals, banking and mid-cap stocks fell sharply," said Hemang Jani, head-equity strategy, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

Investor wealth on tumbled by more than Rs 3.27

lakh crore as markets witnessed massive selling pressure. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies plunged by Rs 3,27,967.71 crore to reach Rs 2,02,48,094.19 crore at the close of trade.

Binod Modi, head-strategy at Reliance Securities, said, "Domestic equities fell sharply on weak global cues and continued apprehensions among investors from surge in coronavirus cases in the country."

Further, a sharp rebound in dollar index aggravated concerns despite dip in US bond yields and crude prices, he added.

Among the 30 scrip Sensex pack, barring Asian Paints and Power Grid Corporation, all other constituents closed in the red.

The top losers included Mahindra & Mahindra (3.97 per cent), SBI (3.38 per cent), Axis Bank (3.33 per cent), ICICI Bank (3.22) per cent), IndusInd (3.07 per cent) and ITC (2.75 per cent).

SEBI TO ATTACH  
BANK, DEMAT  
ACCOUNTS OF  
RANA KAPOOR

New Delhi, March 24: Markets regulator Sebi on Wednesday ordered attachment of bank accounts as well as share and mutual fund holdings of Rana Kapoor, former MD and CEO of Yes Bank, to recover dues of over Rs 1 crore.

The decision has been taken after Kapoor failed to pay the fine imposed on him.

Sebi, in September 2020, had levied a fine of Rs 1 crore on Kapoor for not making disclosures regarding a transaction of Morgan Credit, which was an unlisted promoter entity of Yes Bank.

By not disclosing about the transaction to Yes Bank's board of directors, Kapoor created an opaque layer between him and stakeholders and violated the provision of the LODR (Listing Obligations and Disclosures Requirements) Regulation, Sebi had said in the order.

Further, the Securities and Exchange Board of India issued a demand notice to Kapoor in February this year, although he did not pay any dues.

The pending dues, totalling Rs 1.04 crore, include an initial fine of Rs 1 crore and an interest of Rs 4.56 lakh and a recovery cost of Rs 1,000, the attachment notice showed on Wednesday.

In the notice, Sebi has asked banks, depositories and mutual funds not to allow any debit from the accounts of Kapoor. But credits have been permitted. —PTI

New bankruptcy filings  
may resume from April

SHRUTI SRIVASTAVA &  
BIJOU GEORGE  
MARCH 24

India's government is considering resuming fresh bankruptcy filings after the current suspension expires on March 25, people with knowledge of the matter said.

The lifting of the halt would come even as a resurgence in virus cases threatens the nascent economic recovery. It could spark a wave of new insolvencies, pent up from last year when businesses were hurt by India's first economic contraction in decades.

The government last year halted the process of initiating most fresh insolvency proceedings



to insulate cash-strapped borrowers hit by the pandemic for six months starting March 25, and that was extended twice during the year.

The suspension is unlikely to be prolonged further because a return to normality is needed, the people said, asking not to be identified citing rules. Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman is

considering a proposal to this effect.

A spokesman for the corporate affairs ministry didn't answer calls made to his mobile during business hours.

The move closely follows a Supreme Court ruling on Tuesday that allows lenders to resume classifying bad debt. The two steps together give investors a clearer sense of the impact of the pandemic on the asset quality of local banks.

The move also reopens avenues for lenders to collect on soured debt from delinquent borrowers, allowing them more tools to manage one of the world's worst bad loan piles.

—Bloomberg

Healthcare allocation of states rise

SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, MARCH 24

Battling the pandemic, both central and state governments have increased their budget outlays for healthcare expenditure in FY22 compared with budget estimates of FY21. This is good news for the healthcare industry, which is expected to see positive revenue growth from the first quarter of FY22.

Healthcare allocation is to go up by 9.2 per cent in the FY22 budget estimates of 19 state governments that have announced their budgets, while the allocation of the central government in the budget esti-

mate of FY22 has gone up over BE FY21 due to the spending on Covid-19 vaccination of Rs 35,000 crore.

Among the 19 states, 10 have made double-digit increase in allocations for health. These 10 states account for 50 per cent of the spending on health. However, Maharashtra brought down the allocation by 7 per cent and West Bengal by 5 per cent, finds a report by Care Ratings.

In the current fiscal, 13 states have registered double-digit growth in healthcare spending compared to their revised budget estimates of FY21 and RE of FY20. These states account for 70 per cent of

the total spending on health. Uttar Pradesh is the only state where health care spending in FY21 remain at the same level as in FY20.

Meanwhile, the hospital and healthcare industry is expected to grow by about 10-12 per cent in FY22. The industry revenues, which had de-grown the first three quarters of FY21, are estimated to return to normal levels by end of Q1FY22 backed by expected improvement in occupancy rates, footfalls and ongoing vaccination program. Increase in momentum of non-Covid treatments and elective surgeries will support the industry growth in FY22.

Sushil Modi says GST on petrol  
impossible for next 8-10 years

New Delhi, March 24: Bringing petrol and diesel under the GST regime is not possible for the next 8-10 years as no state is ready to face the annual revenue loss of over Rs 2 lakh crore on this account, BJP member Sushil Kumar Modi said in Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

Speaking in support of the Finance Bill, the former finance minister of Bihar dared the opposition to raise the matter at the GST Council, saying no finance minister from non-NDA ruled states has opposed any decision of the GST Council.

The Centre and states collectively collect over Rs 5 lakh crore tax on petroleum products, Modi said.

The statement assumes significance in view of the outcry over the rise in petrol price for the past over one year that touched Rs 100 per litre in some states and the demand by the Congress and some other parties that petrol and diesel be brought under the GST regime.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had on Tuesday said in Lok Sabha that she would be "glad" to

PETROL SEES FIRST PRICE CUT THIS YEAR

FC BUREAU  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

For the first time this year, state-owned oil marketing companies on Wednesday cut fuel prices by 18 paise on petrol, and 17 paise on diesel, following a steep decline in global crude oil prices. It is widely speculated that the companies may go for further price cut. Petrol and diesel prices remained unchanged at record highs for 24 straight days. Following Wednesday's cut, the price of a litre of petrol in Delhi now costs Rs 90.99, down from 91.17. Petrol prices have also declined in other major cities comprising Bengaluru (Rs 94.04),

Chennai (Rs 92.95), Jaipur (Rs 97.56), Hyderabad (Rs 94.61), Kolkata (Rs 91.18), Mumbai (Rs 97.40).

The diesel price in Delhi has now dipped to Rs 81.30, down 17 paise from Tuesday. It has also come down in other major cities like Bengaluru (Rs 86.21), Chennai (Rs 86.29), Hyderabad (Rs 88.67), Jaipur (Rs 89.84), Kolkata (Rs 84.18), Mumbai (Rs 88.42), Bengaluru (Rs 86.21).

Taxes on petrol and diesel are an essential revenue source for the Centre and state governments. Taxes and levies constitute account for 60 per cent of the retail cost for petrol and 54 per cent for diesel.

discuss the issue at the next GST Council meeting.

Modi said, "I have been associated with the GST for a long time. I want to know from the House, that if petrol and diesel are put under the GST regime, who will compensate for

the loss of revenue of over Rs 2 lakh crore to states."

"I want to tell this House that it is not possible to put petrol and diesel under the GST in the next eight to 10 years, as no state is ready to lose Rs 2 lakh crore revenue," he added. —PTI

US mental health app  
draws big investors

GILLIAN TAN &  
HEATHER PERLBERG  
MARCH 24

Blackstone Group Inc is leading a \$100-million funding round in on-demand and mental-health company Ginger, accelerating a push into fast-growing technology startups.

The funding will be done by the investment firm's growth equity arm, Blackstone and Ginger said. The stake values the San Francisco-based service at about \$1 billion, vaulting it to unicorn status.

Demand for resources provided by Ginger, which connects users to behavioural health experts via a mobile app, is surging in the Covid-19 pandemic. The company's revenue has tripled in the past year.

"There's a widespread prevalence of mental health issues in this country," said Ram Jagannath, who heads health-care investing for Blackstone Growth Equity. "Like other sectors of health care, the pandemic exacerbated the underlying trends and accelerated people's adoption of digital platforms." Blackstone recently



announced the close of its first growth equity fund at \$4.5 billion. Its New York-based growth vehicle has made several investments, including backing online dating company Bumble Inc, vegan food products maker Oatly, enterprise software provider ISN Software Corp and Epidemic Sound, a royalty-free music company.

Ginger CEO Russ Glass plans to use Blackstone's investment to acquire companies and platforms focused on mental health, or data that could complement what Ginger is already doing.

"There's going to be a massive mental health need for the foreseeable future," Glass said in an interview. "The more we can focus on innovation, everyone who has a need

will get access."

Statistics bear that out. During the week of March 8th, demand for therapy and psychiatry services jumped 365 per cent compared to pre-pandemic averages measured from August 2019 to January 2020, the company said.

In the first half of the year, Ginger plans to extend its reach to underserved populations through new government relationships and collaborations with non-profits, Glass said.

Ginger has already made inroads with large brand-name companies, including Delta Air Lines, Sanofi and Domino's Pizza, which provide Ginger's mental health resources to their employees.

Ginger has also announced a partnership with digital pharmacy Capsule to provide medication delivery to members.

"I see this as an investment, not a cost," said Clint Wallace, the head of human resources for North America at Sanofi. "We can't solve all of people's problems but we can help them give their best."

—Bloomberg

ICICI BANK  
CUSTOMERS  
CAN PAY SCHOOL  
FEES IN EMIs



New Delhi, March 24: ICICI Bank customers can break their high value transactions of over Rs 50,000 into suitable EMIs directly on its internet banking platform to make their purchases more affordable, the lender said on Wednesday.

The facility, offered on savings account, is the first in the industry, the bank added.

It will be applicable on transactions up to Rs 5 lakh and will bear no additional cost on the customers.

Christened 'EMI @Internet Banking', the facility will enable customers to convert their high-value transactions up to Rs 5 lakh into easy monthly instalments, ICICI Bank said in a release.

Customers can purchase gadgets or pay for their insurance premium or school fees in easy EMIs from their savings account using the internet banking platform, it said.

The bank has tied up with online payment gateways BillDesk and Razorpay to enable this facility.

To begin with, over 1,000 merchants in categories like online shopping portals, insurance, travel, education- school fees and electronic chains have been brought on-board.

The bank endeavours to partner with more payment gateway companies, merchants and add categories under this facility in the near future. Customers can select tenures of 3, 6, 9 or 12 months for the EMIs.

Sudipta Roy, head-unsecured assets, hoped the facility will empower millions of the bank's pre-approved customers to purchase or shop for their needs.

—PTI

NO COUPON Investors will receive their capital along with additional payout

First wildlife bond to track rhino populations

ANTONY SGUAZZIN  
MARCH 24

A bond designed to raise funds to grow the population of endangered black rhinoceros in South Africa will be sold by the World Bank this year.

The five-year, 670 million rand (\$45 million) security will be the world's first wildlife conservation bond and the aim is to sell it in the middle of the year. Returns for investors will be determined by the rate of growth of the populations of the animals in two South African reserves, according to the Rhino Impact Investment Project, an initiative started by the Zoological Society of London.

If successful, the pro-

gramme could be expanded to protect black rhino populations in Kenya as well as other wildlife species such as lions, tigers, gorillas and orangutans, Rhino Impact said in a document detailing the proposal. It provides an opportunity for people interested in conservation to get a return on their support and possibly reinvest money in new projects rather than the more traditional route where projects are funded by philanthropists or governments.

"The innovative wildlife conservation bond financing mechanism plans to use a World Bank, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development IBRD AAA-



rated bond," it said. Credit Suisse Group AG is advising on the project.

The World Bank will also sell a \$100 million conservation bond at the same time, without specifying what it will be used for.

Under the terms of the rhino bond, investors will forgo an annual coupon and will instead receive

their original capital and an additional payout depending on how much the rhino population has grown over five years. The principal of the bond and the possible payout at maturity will be paid by the Global Environment Facility, which has received donations from more than 40 countries and was formed ahead of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992.

Of the 29,000 rhinos made up of five species globally, about 80 per cent are in South Africa and almost all them are white rhino. Black rhino numbers have dropped to about 5,500 from 65,000 in 1970. The animals are found in four African countries and can weigh

as much as 1.4 tonnes – much smaller than the white rhino.

Rhinos are under threat from poaching, mostly because of demand in Vietnam and China for the powder from their horns that's believed to cure cancer and improve virility.

"When working on innovative structures like this one, we start small and hope to learn from the first one and then get successfully larger in an ambition to ultimately scale what works," Marisa Drew, chief sustainability officer at Credit Suisse, said.

The two sites selected in South Africa are the Addo Elephant National Park and the Great Fish River Nature Reserve.

—Bloomberg



## SHORT TAKES

## Ind shuttler forced out of Orleans tour

**Paris:** An unnamed Indian woman shuttler was on Tuesday forced to withdraw from the Orleans Masters after a team entourage member tested positive for Covid-19 and she was identified as a close contact. In a statement, the Badminton World Federation (BWF) said that a total of three players have been withdrawn from the event which began with the qualifiers here. "An Indonesian women's doubles pair has been withdrawn after one player tested positive to the mandatory PCR test conducted on Monday," the BWF stated. "An Indian women's singles player has been withdrawn after a team entourage member tested positive to the mandatory PCR test. The singles player was identified as a close contact of the entourage member and as a result the player has been withdrawn from the tournament," it added. — *PTI*

## SAI asks PCI to submit report

**Bengaluru:** Sports Authority of India on Wednesday sought a report from the Paralympic Committee of India after it emerged that facilities here at the National Para Athletics championship are not wheelchair-friendly and Covid-19 protocols are also "not being adhered to". A qualification event for the Tokyo Paralympics, the tournament to be held from March 24 to 27 was shifted here from Chennai at a short notice on March 20, leading to discrepancies in the conduct of the event. SAI has asked the national federation to immediately sort out the issues. "It has been brought to the notice of Sports Authority of India that the facility in Bengaluru at which the Para Athletics National Championships is not wheelchair-friendly and that Standard Operating Procedures for prevention of Covid-19 are not being adhered to," SAI said in a statement. — *PTI*

## Blatter banned by FIFA again

**Zurich:** Sepp Blatter was banned for a second time by FIFA on Wednesday for financial wrongdoing, seven months before the 85-year-old former president's first ban expires. Blatter has recently been in poor health and was put in an induced coma for one week after undergoing heart surgery in December. FIFA said its ethics committee banned both Blatter and former secretary general Jerome Valcke for six years and eight months for financial wrongdoing linked to awarding themselves contractual bonuses worth millions of dollars. Both men, who also face criminal proceedings in Switzerland, will start serving the new bans when their current ones expire. Blatter and Valcke were previously banned for six years and 10 years, respectively, in separate cases. Blatter's first ban expires in October and Valcke's initial ban will be served in October 2025. — *AP*

## Venus bows out of Miami Open

**Miami:** Venus Williams crashed out of the Miami Open on Tuesday, losing her first round game in straight sets to Zarina Diyas of Kazakhstan. Diyas advanced to a second round meeting with Swiss 11th seed Belinda Bencic after completing a 6-2, 7-6 (12/10) victory in 1hr 28min on the Hard Rock Stadium's Grandstand court. The round of 128 defeat is the 40-year-old Williams' earliest exit in Miami since she made her debut in the tournament in 1997. After Diyas raced through the first set, Williams fought back in the second, breaking her Kazakh opponent's serve in the 12th game to force a tie break. Williams saved three match points to extend the tie break but handed Diyas a fourth match point with a double fault which she converted to complete victory. — *AFP*

## SHOULDER SLIPS

## Shreyas out of England ODIs, likely to miss IPL 1st half

**Pune, March 24:** India batsman Shreyas Iyer was on Wednesday ruled out of the ongoing ODI series against England and left in serious doubt for the first half of the IPL starting next month after dislocating his left shoulder in the opening game here.

The incident happened in the eighth over of the England innings when Shreyas dived on a drive hit by Jonny Bairstow off pacer Shardul Thakur.

He looked in tremendous pain as he left the field clutching his shoulder. "It is unlikely he will play first part of IPL," a BCCI source said.

On Tuesday, the BCCI had stated, "Shreyas Iyer subluxated (partially dislocated) his left shoulder in the 8th over while fielding. He has been taken for further scans," the source added.

He captains Delhi Capitals in the IPL, which begins on April 9.

Shreyas had led Delhi Capitals to the final in the previous edition of the league. It could take as much as six weeks to recover from shoulder dislocation and much longer in case a surgery is required.

In his absence, the DC captaincy could be handed to either Rishabh Pant, Australian Steve Smith or R. Ashwin.

## EOIN, SAM INJURED TOO

Meanwhile, England skipper Eoin Morgan and Sam Billings are doubtful for the second ODI against India here on Friday after sustaining injuries in the series-opener, dealing a



India's Shreyas Iyer (left) walks off the field after injuring himself while fielding during the first One-Day International against England at Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune on Tuesday. — *AP*

fresh blow to the side's floundering campaign.

The visitors suffered the setbacks in their 66-run defeat after the skipper split the webbing between his right thumb and index finger that required four stitches. In another incident, Billings injured his collarbone following an awkward dive to stop a boundary.

"We're going to wait 48 for hours and see how it

is...give as much time as needed to hopefully be available for Friday," Morgan said.

England skipper Morgan said his batting would not be 100 per cent given the injury and fielding too is a concern with a split webbing.

Billings, who had dislocated his left shoulder to miss their triumphant campaign in the 2019 World Cup, too batted in

the stiff run chase, and scored 18.

"I haven't spoken with Sam about his batting so I don't know in his instance... In mine, it's never going to be at 100 per cent but it's not that I can't hold a bat," Morgan said.

Down 0-1, the world champions face a must-win situation in the second of the three ODIs here on Friday. — *PTI*

## NUMBERS GAME

## PRASIDH KRISHNA - 1st INDIAN TO TAKE FOUR WICKETS IN DEBUT MATCH

● Prasidh Krishna became the first Indian and 55th bowler overall to take four wickets on debut in one day internationals.

● The right-arm medium-fast bowler achieved this feat by taking four for 54 in the first one day international match against England at Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium, Pune on Tuesday (March 23).

● Off-break bowler Noel David who took three wickets for 21 runs against West Indies at Port of Spain on April 27, 1997 held the previous record of best bowling on debut for Indian in one day internationals.

## BEST BOWLING ON DEBUT FOR INDIA IN ONE DAYERS

● 4-54 — Prasidh Krishna against England in Ahmedabad on March 23, 2021.

● 3-21 — Noel David against West Indies in Port of Spain on April 27, 1997.

● 3-24 — Varun Aaron against England in Mumbai on October 23, 2011.

● 3-30 — Subroto Banerjee vs West Indies in Perth on December 6, 1991.

— *S. PERVEZ KAISER*



Chinky Yadav poses with her gold medal in the Women's 25m Pistol event at the Shooting World Cup in New Delhi on Wednesday.

## Chinky, Aishwary dazzle with gold

**New Delhi, March 24:**

Chinky Yadav upstaged the experienced Rahi Sarnobat and the fancied Manu Bhaker to win gold as India swept the women's 25m pistol event of the ISSF shooting World Cup here on Wednesday, highlighting the country's depth of talent in the sport.

The 23-year-old Yadav prevailed over Sarnobat, 30, 4-3 in a shoot-off after their scores were tied at 32, taking India's gold tally to nine in the event.

Bhaker, aged only 19, shot 28 to settle for the bronze medal before being eliminated, leaving her two other compatriots to fight for the top prize at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range.

Yadav led the pack after first 20 targets with a score of 14.

She was followed by Bhaker at second with 13.

Then, the shooter from Bhopal led with a score of 21 and pulled away from the rest, even as the seasoned Sarnobat clawed her way back into the finals after struggling in bottom half. In the finals, Yadav

shot all the five targets twice — in the first competition stage's second series and the sixth series of the elimination stage — after beginning with two.

Meanwhile, young Indian shooter Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar claimed the gold medal in the men's 50m rifle 3 positions event, consolidating the host nation's top standing in the ISSF World Cup here on Wednesday.

The 20-year-old from Bhopal shot 462.5 to win the top prize ahead of Hungary's star rifleman Istvan Peni (461.6) and Denmark's Steffen Olsen (450.9) at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range. This was India's eighth gold medal at the ongoing marquee event.

The other Indians in the final, veteran Sanjeev Rajput and Niraj Kumar, finished sixth and eighth respectively. After an impressive start following which he led for a while, Tomar slipped in the standings but fought back strongly with a 10.4, 10.5 and 10.3 in the standing elimination stage. — *PTI*

## Super Kings pay tribute to armed forces in new jersey

**Chennai, March 24:** Three-time IPL champions Chennai Super Kings on Wednesday unveiled a new-look jersey that features camouflage as a tribute to the country's armed forces.

Unveiled ahead of the 2021 IPL season, the jersey also has three stars atop the franchise's logo to denote the three titles won in 2010, 2011 and 2018, besides the camouflage as a tribute to India's armed forces.

It has been on our mind for some time now to find ways to raise awareness about the significant and

selfless role of the armed forces. The camouflage is an appreciation of their service...they are the true heroes, CSK CEO K. S. Viswanathan said in a release.

The IPL team also released a short video of talismanic skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni, launching the new jersey on its Twitter feed.

CSK hold the armed forces close to the heart and showed their appreciation by presenting a cheque of ₹2 crore at the start of the 2019 IPL season, the release said.

That's not all, the cele-

brated Mahendra Singh Dhoni is an honorary Lieutenant Colonel in the Territorial Army and also trained with the Parachute Regiment in 2019.

The jersey has been redesigned for the first time since the inaugural edition in 2008, the release said.

The camouflage on the shoulders is bordered with gold bands that signify the high standards set by the team both in terms of consistency and fair play. CSK have won the IPL fair play award six times in 11 seasons. — *PTI*



Chennai Super Kings captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni holds up the team's redesigned T-shirt for the new IPL season. The camouflage on the shoulders is a tribute to India's armed forces. — *Twitter*

## Krunal remembers late Dad after India victory

**Pune, March 24:** India all-rounder Krunal Pandya had his late father Himanshu's travel bag in the dressing room as he tried to keep him close ahead of his outstanding ODI debut in which he smashed the fastest 50 by a debutant.

Celebrating his 30th birthday on Wednesday, Krunal and his younger brother and star all-rounder Hardik Pandya spoke about the close relationship they shared with the Senior Pandya, who died of a heart attack in January.

"So basically the thing is, he passed away on 16th morning and I was playing Syed Mushtaq Ali on that day. He had a habit of

keeping his clothes ready in the night, his shoes, his pant, his shirt, hat as well.

"So what I did was just before the game, I got his bag from Baroda here, and I thought, I know he is not with us, but those clothes, which he was supposed to wear in that game, I thought I'll bring that and keep in the dressing room," Krunal said.

Apart from his 58-run knock, Krunal also picked up a wicket in the game, against England, which India won by 66 runs to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series. He broke down while speaking to the host broadcaster after the match and was comforted by his brother.

"Obviously, I worked so

hard to be here...not just in cricket, but in terms of everything, taking care of my diet to fitness, to everything and again this is all dedicated to the old man...his blessings are there with us and obviously it was very emotional for you and me, both of us, and again getting a cap from you," Krunal added.

"...my focus has always been about how I can be the best version of myself, how I can improve, not just as a cricketer, but how can I improve as a human being as well.

"...again somewhere down the line, I just feel his (late father's) blessings are there, just feel more secure...this is for him," said Krunal. — *PTI*



India's Hardik Pandya (left) greets teammate Krunal Pandya before the start of the first One-Day international (ODI) match against England at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune on Tuesday. — *AFP*

## ONE OF OUR SWEETEST VICTORIES AGAINST ENGLAND, SAYS KOHLI

**Pune, March 24:** India skipper Virat Kohli said Tuesday's 66-run win over England was "one of the sweetest" after his bowlers hit back following a batting onslaught in the first one-day international.

Chasing 318 for victory, the tourists were bowled out for 251 in 42.1 overs despite Jonny Bairstow's 94 and his opening stand of 135 with Jason Roy to trail the three-match series 1-0.

Shikhar Dhawan hit 98 while KL Rahul, 62 not out, and Krunal Pandya, unbeaten 58 off 31 balls, steered the hosts to 317-5 after being put into bat first.

"This is one of our sweetest victories in the recent past," skipper Virat Kohli said in the post-match presentation.

"It is right up there purely because from 135-1 getting nine wickets is simply outstanding. I am a really, really proud man

right now," he added.

"We need to execute better than we did today. India did really well and deserved to win," said England captain Eoin Morgan.

"Being able to take the attack to the opposition is something that we pride ourselves on. We want to continue to push the envelope in that regard. It's better for us to lose like this than losing by 20 runs," the England captain further added. — *PTI*

## PT USHA, GURBACHAN NAMED SELECTION COMMITTEE HEADS

**New Delhi, March 24:** Sprint legend P. T. Usha has been given charge of the junior selection committee, while hurdling great Gurbachan Singh Randhawa will head the senior panel in the latest appointments announced by the Athletics Federation of India.

The 56-year-old Usha won multiple medals in the Asian Games in 100m, 200m, 400m and 4x400m besides finishing fourth in 400m hurdles in 1984 Olympics.

Other members of the junior committee are Soma Biswas, Anand Menzes, Satbir Singh, Sandeep Sarkaria, Sunita Rani, Rama Chandran, Joseph Abraham, Harwant Kaur, M. D. Valsama and Kamal Ali Khan.

The senior selection committee, to be chaired by Randhawa, will have former chief coach Bahadur Singh, Bahadur Singh Saggi, Krishna Poonia, Jyotirmoyee Sikdar, Uday Prabhu, Praveen Jolly and Gopal Saini as other members. Randhawa had won a gold in decathlon in 1962 Asian Games and finished fifth in 110m hurdles in the 1964 Olympics.

"The role of each and every member of selection committee is very important and hence, we have included former athletes who have plenty of experience for this important role," AFI President Adille Sumariwalla said. — *PTI*

## Ingram stands tall to sink LA Lakers

**Los Angeles, March 24:** Brandon Ingram scored 36 points as the New Orleans Pelicans took full advantage of LeBron James' injury absence to pummel the Los Angeles Lakers 128-111 on Tuesday.

Ingram sent his former team sliding to defeat in a one-sided game at New Orleans' Smoothie King Center.

The Lakers were rocked on Saturday by an injury to James which has left the four-time NBA champion facing several weeks on the sidelines. With Anthony Davis and Marc Gasol already out injured, the depleted Lakers have now lost three consecutive games to fall to fourth place in the Western Conference standings at 28-16.

The Pelicans meanwhile remain in the hunt for a

playoff berth after a win that sees them improve to 19-24. The Pels' superior firepower comfortably overwhelmed the Lakers, with Zion Williamson complementing Ingram's display with a 27-point effort.

## SUNS SCORCH HEAT

Elsewhere, Devin Booker scored 23 points and Deandre Ayton added a double-double as the Phoenix Suns extended their winning streak to three games with a 110-100 road win over the Miami Heat.

The Suns are now in second spot in the Western Conference after improving to 29-13, two games back from leaders Utah.

Denver Nuggets meanwhile are closing in on the fourth-placed Lakers after a 110-99 win over the Orlando Magic. — *AFP*