

SHORT TAKES

Woman cop attacked, molested in moving bus

New Delhi: A 25-year-old woman constable of the Delhi Police was allegedly molested and attacked by a man in a moving bus in Dwarka area, officials said on Friday. The incident took place on Wednesday afternoon when the constable, posted with the PCR unit, was on her way to work, they said. The accused boarded the cluster bus with the constable and stood behind her. Later, he touched her inappropriately. When the constable objected and shouted at the accused, he hit her with a helmet, a senior police officer said. The constable was injured while the accused deboarded the bus and fled, the police said, adding that the constable was taken to Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital and is stated to be stable now. They said no one came forward to help the constable. Even the bus driver and marshal did not help her. The driver said the incident took place outside the bus. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka) Santosh Kumar Meena said, "A case has been registered and further investigation is underway to nab the accused person." The police said they are scanning the footage of CCTV cameras installed in the area where the incident took place to identify the accused. — PTI

MoU signed for steel plant in Odisha

Bhubaneswar: The Odisha government on Thursday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with ArcelorMittal-Nippon Steel India (AM/NS) for an integrated steel plant in Kendrapada district. The proposed 12-million tones for annum (MTPA) integrated steel plant will be set up with an investment of ₹50,000 crore, an official of the chief minister's office (CMO) said. Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik and steel tycoon Lakshmi N. Mittal were present during the signing of the MoU at Lokaseva Bhavan here in Bhubaneswar. Earlier, Mr Mittal met Mr Patnaik at Naveen Niwas and discussed his company's projects in the state. — PTI

Teen stabbed to death by roommate

New Delhi: An 18-year-old man was stabbed to death with a scissor allegedly by his roommate following a scuffle between them over a land dispute in Delhi's Shahadra area, police said on Friday. The victim, Aftab Alam, was stabbed on late Thursday night in Gandhinagar area of Shahadra, they said. The police said both the victim and the accused, identified as Rashid Alam, hail from the same village in Araria district of Bihar. After stabbing Aftab, the accused jumped from the fourth floor of the building, following which he sustained fractures on his legs. The two men were taken to a nearby hospital, where Aftab was declared brought dead and Rashid was treated for his injuries, a senior police officer said. A case of murder was registered and the accused has been arrested. — PTI

‘Respond within 10 days to plea on reopening Markaz’

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

The Delhi High Court on Friday granted time to the Centre, AAP government and the police to respond to a plea seeking reopening of the Nizamuddin Markaz which has been locked since March 31 last year after several people who attended the Tablighi Jamaat congregation there contracted Covid-19. Justice Mukta Gupta said the status report be filed by the authorities within 10 days and listed the matter for further hearing on March 24. The high court had on February 24 issued notices and sought replies of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Delhi Government and Delhi Police on the petition filed by the Delhi Waqf Board. The Delhi government standing counsel (criminal) Rahul Mehra, representing the state and Delhi Police,

Farmers' protest is India's 'internal issue', says UK

New envoy says things that happen in India have ripples in Britain

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

Just days ahead of an expected discussion in the British Parliament on Monday over the ongoing farmers' protests in India, the new British High Commissioner (HC) to India Alex Ellis on Friday termed these protests against the recently-enacted three Indian farm laws as an "internal issue of India", even as New Delhi on Friday evening said Indian diplomats in the UK are apprising the British Government as well as Members of Parliament (MPs) and members of the civil society there about the concerned three farm Bills and also about the Indian Government's efforts to resolve the issue in talks with farmers. "This is an internal

▶ **ISSUES RELATED** to India are quite regularly debated in our parliament. ... So this is something that is done by our parliament, not the government, said new British High Commissioner to India Alex Ellis

issue of India. ... We look at it. That is for India to resolve," the British High Commissioner told reporters on Friday, in reference to the ongoing protests by farmers predominantly from some of the northern Indian states. "Things that happen in India have ripples in the UK," Mr Ellis said, in an obvious reference to the large Indian-origin community and Diaspora in the UK. He also referred to a remark made by British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab in India in December last year that



Alex Ellis

"your (Indian) politics are our (British) politics".

Mr Ellis said that the forthcoming discussion on the Indian farmer protests in the British Parliament was due to the "process of petitions". He added, "If you get a sufficient number of signatures, you can debate an issue in Parliament. And issues related to India are quite regularly debated in our Parliament. ... So this is something that is done by our Parliament, not the Government. The (British) Government has to participate. It has to

answer but it is really the (British) Parliamentarians raising issues of concern to them and their constituents."

The new British High Commissioner further said, "As the Indian Diaspora grows and it is really very successful in many countries of the world, you are going to see more of this. As India becomes ever so significant in the world, there will be more (such) debates..."

Meanwhile, MEA Spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said that the Indian High Commission in London and Indian consulates in Birmingham and Edinburgh are apprising the UK's Government, MPs and civil society about the concerned three farm Bills and also about the Indian Government's efforts to resolve the issue in talks with farmers.

Captain went missing during patrolling on Pak border

SC notice to Centre on plea by woman for search of her son

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

The Supreme Court on Friday issued a notice to the Centre on a plea by a mother seeking direction to the Centre to take "immediate steps" for the search and release of her son, Captain Sanjit Bhattacharjee, who was reported missing on April 19, 1997, and is suspected to be languishing in Pakistan jail.

On April 19, 1997, Captain Sanjit Bhattacharjee led a patrolling team at the India-Pakistan border in the Rann of Kutch. However, the following day, only 15 platoon members returned while Captain Bhattacharjee and Lance Naik Ram Bahadur Thapa were reported missing.

Issuing notice to the Centre, Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde heading a bench also comprising

▶ On April 19, 1997, Captain Sanjit Bhattacharjee led a patrolling team at the India-Pakistan border in the Rann of Kutch. However, the following day, only 15 platoon members returned while Captain Bhattacharjee and Lance Naik Ram Bahadur Thapa were reported missing.

▶ In her plea, the captain's mother Ms Kamla Bhattacharjee has stated that over the past 23 years she has neither been given any opportunity to state her case before the appropriate authority nor was her son allowed to communicate with his family members.

Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian told lawyer Saurabh Mishra appearing for Kamla Bhattacharjee — mother of Capt. Sanjit Bhattacharjee — to make a list of all such similarly placed Army men who went missing and could not be traced.

In her plea, Ms Bhattacharjee has stated that over the past 23 years she has neither been given any opportunity to state her case before the appropriate authority nor was her son allowed to communicate with his family members.

Apex court laments copy and paste of HC orders

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

The Supreme Court on Friday lamented the tendency of "copy and paste" in the high court orders which appears to be voluminous but do not address the core issue that is before them in appeal against the tribunal order.

"Cutting and pasting from tribunal judgment may add to the volume of pages but does not address the core issue of the appeal," said Justice D.Y. Chandrachud heading a bench also comprising Justice M.R. Shah.

Giving expression to his

frustration with copy and paste high court orders, Justice Chandrachud said that he "hated" seeing such orders and attributed the tendency as a problem of the computer age.

"One of the gravest problems of the computer age is cut and paste order. I hate seeing high court orders only doing cut and paste. If you are upholding something, you have to give reasons," Justice Chandrachud said.

The strong disapproval of the copy and paste orders of the high court by Justice Chandrachud—who heads the e-commit-

tee of the top court—came in the course of the hearing of an appeal by UPSC against an aspirant seeking entry into the Indian Administrative Service (IAS).

Setting aside the Odisha high court order and observing that it has failed to apply its mind independently, the top court remanded the matter back to the high court to consider it afresh.

The court also noted that matters of selection of IAS officers are governed under the UPSC guidelines, which are framed in pursuance under Article 320 of the Constitution.

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

A couple was found dead in Tilak Nagar area at their rented apartments under mysterious circumstances. Police said that no suicide note has been recovered from the house.

The deceased has been identified as Pawan Paliwal (29), a permanent resident of Meerut while his wife has been identified as Priyanka Bist (23), who hailed from Nainital, Uttarakhand.

Police said that the girl was working with a private company in Gurugram while the man was a gym trainer and he was also doing modeling.

According to a senior police official, a police control room (PCR) call

▶ **THE DECEASED** has been identified as Pawan Paliwal (29), a permanent resident of Meerut while his wife has been identified as Priyanka Bist (23), who hailed from Nainital, Uttarakhand. The woman was working with a private company in Gurugram while the man was a gym trainer.

regarding a foul smell from old Mahabir Nagar, Tilak Nagar was received following which a police team was dispatched for the spot.

"The caller also told police that a girl was residing in this house and two days prior one boy also came into this house. On reaching the spot, the ground floor of the house was found

It is a proved allegation once it comes in media'

Delhi riots: HC pulls up cops for leakage of chargesheet

New Delhi, Mar. 5: The Delhi High Court Friday pulled up the Delhi Police for leakage of supplementary chargesheet filed in case related to communal violence in northeast Delhi last year to the media even before cognisance was taken by the concerned court, saying an offence is made out of the incident.

Justice Mukta Gupta asked the Delhi Police Commissioner to file an affidavit fixing responsibility on the person instrumental in leaking the information to the media.

It is a proved allegation (of leakage) once it comes in media. It no more remains an allegation now. You have to ascertain who has done it, the court told the counsel for the police.

Advocate Amit Mahajan, representing the Delhi Police, maintained that the contents of the supplementary charge sheet were not leaked to media by police.

He said the responsibility cannot be fixed on police as they have not leaked it.

To this, the high court said it was a property in the hands of a police officer and if your officer has leaked it it's abuse of power, if for sanction this was entrusted to someone else it's criminal breach of trust and if the media has taken it away then it's a theft. So in any case, an offence is made out.

The court was hearing a plea by JMI student Asif Iqbal Tanha alleging misconduct by police officials in leaking his disclosure

statement, recorded by the probe agency during the investigation, to the media.

Advocate Siddharth Aggarwal, representing Tanha, contended that recently the police has filed a supplementary charge sheet in the criminal case before the trial court and portions of the documents were with the media the very next day without providing copies to the accused.

He said the trial court was yet to take cognisance of the supplementary charge sheet and then the trial court had to pass an order in which media was pulled up for reporting exact contents of the charge sheet even before cognisance.

He sought time to file an additional affidavit in this regard.

The high court said that the earlier order was clear that there would not be any media briefing till charges are framed.

You file an additional affidavit, we will see what action has to be taken. We will see if they can do indirectly what they can't do directly, the judge said, adding that "don't do the inquiry as done by you earlier, you will have to answer the contentions of petitioner's counsel".

The high court listed the matter for further hearing on March 25.

In pursuance to the court's earlier order, Special Commissioner of Police (Vigilance) Sundari Nanda was also present in the hearing.

— PTI

Regulate online path labs or face action: HC

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

The Delhi High Court on Friday said it expects that the AAP government will put things in order and comply with a judicial order asking authorities to take action and regulate online pathological labs, otherwise contempt action would be initiated.

The high court, which was hearing a plea alleging non-compliance of its order in this regard, also sought to know from the AAP government whether its pathological laboratories and hospitals are NABL accredited.

The plea alleged non-compliance of the high court's August 6, 2020 order to take action against illegal online health service aggregators operating in Delhi and to regulate online pathological labs.

There is something fundamentally wrong in the process. Are your own labs and hospitals NABL (National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories) accredited? It is a very fundamental question, Justice Najmi Waziri said.

Show proof of compensation to dead sanitation worker's family: NHRC

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

The NHRC on Thursday issued summons to the secretary of the Delhi Urban Development Department, saying it has "not received" requisite reports and proof of payment of compensation of Rs 10 lakh in case of death of a sanitation worker during cleaning of a sewer line in 2018.

The rights panel, in a statement said, has asked the secretary to appear before it in person in May

with the requisite reports. "The National Human Rights Commission, having not received the requisite reports and the proof of payment of Rs 10 lakh in a case of a death in sewer cleaning, today issued summons to the secretary, Department of Urban Development, Govt. of NCT of Delhi to appear before it in person on 3.5.2021 with the requisite reports.

The incident had happened in Vaishali Extension, Dabri, Delhi on September 14, 2018.

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
TENDER NOTICE	
Invitation of Tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement System)	
NIT No.	17/20-21/AWE
Name of Work with its location	a) Supply & maintenance of indoor well developed ornamental potted plants, ht. 2' to 5' on hire basis in HQ Office Baroda House & DRM Office New Delhi in the Sio SSE/Hort./BH & NDLS under ADEN/Hort./NDLS
Approx. Cost of work	a) Rs. 2548000.00
Completion period of work	a) 12 Months
Date/Time for submission of tender and opening of tender	Opening date of tender on 30.03.2021 at 15:00 hrs.
Website particular notice board location complete details of tender can be seen and address of the office from where the tender form can be purchased etc.	Above tender available on IREPS site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in
No. 128-W/269/OET/19-20/AWE/NIT/17 Dated : 04.03.2021 501/21	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	

pstcl PUNJAB STATE TRANSMISSION CORPORATION LIMITED	
(Regd Office: PSEB Head Office, The Mall, Patiala - 147001) Corporate Identity No. U40109PB2010SGC033814 www.pstcl.org O/o: SE / TS (Design), Telefax: 0175-2207774, Email: se-trd@pstcl.org	
Notice Inviting E-Tender	
Enquiry No.	STQ-5129
Description	Supply of 132kV PTs & 132kV CTs of various ratios.
Qty.	23 Nos 132kV PTs 46 Nos. 132kV CTs
Last Date & Time for Downloading of tender	05.04.21 upto 11.30AM
Last Date & Time for receipt of tender	06.04.21 upto 11.30AM
Date & Time for Opening of tender	08.04.21 at 11.30 AM
Detailed NIT/specification may be downloaded from PSTCL e-tendering website https://eproc.punjab.gov.in . Corrigendum, if any, will not be published in newspapers. As such the website may be visited regularly for updates.	
Dy. CE/TS (Design), PSTCL, Patiala.	
RO No PR-Advt. No. : 76/12/43/2021/2255	

pstcl PUNJAB STATE TRANSMISSION CORPORATION LIMITED	
(Regd Office: PSEB Head Office, The Mall, Patiala - 147001) Corporate Identity No. U40109PB2010SGC033814 www.pstcl.org O/o: SE / TS (Design), Telefax: 0175-2207774, Email: se-trd@pstcl.org	
Notice Inviting E-Tender	
Enquiry No.	STQ-5130
Description	Turnkey package for supply and commissioning of 125MV AR 400kV Bus Reactor at 400kV substation Dhuri alongwith construction of Allied bay.
Last Date & Time for Downloading of tender	05.04.21 upto 11.00AM
Last Date & Time for receipt of tender	06.04.21 upto 11.00AM
Date & Time for Opening of tender	08.04.21 at 11.00 AM
Detailed NIT/specification may be downloaded from PSTCL e-tendering website https://eproc.punjab.gov.in . Corrigendum, if any, will not be published in newspapers. As such the website may be visited regularly for updates.	
Dy. CE/TS (Design), PSTCL, Patiala.	
RO No PR-Advt. No. : 76/12/44/2021/2256	

SHORT TAKES

40 awarded science, research fellowship

New Delhi: Forty scholars from six countries have been awarded fellowship to conduct research in science and technology in Indian institutes and universities, according to an official statement on Friday. These scholars have been selected for India Science and Research Fellowship (ISRF) 2021 based on research proposal, experience, academic merit and publication record, the department of science and technology said. "As a part of India's initiatives to engage with neighbouring countries to develop S&T partnerships, the Department of Science and Technology (DST) has launched ISRF Programme for Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand researchers to work in Indian universities and research institutions," the statement said. — *PTI*

Farooq Abdullah challenges ED order

Srinagar: National Conference President Farooq Abdullah has approached the Jammu and Kashmir High Court against an ED order attaching his properties worth nearly ₹12 crore in a case of alleged money laundering. The former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister challenged the December 2020 order before the high court on Wednesday. It is scheduled to come up for hearing later Friday. The ED has alleged that Abdullah "misused" his position as president of the Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA) from 2001-2011 and made appointments in the sports body so Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) sponsored funds could be laundered. Abdullah said the list of properties attached by the ED in Kashmir and in Jammu were unrelated to the alleged criminal activity mentioned in the Final Report/FIR and termed it a "continuing violation of his fundamental rights". — *PTI*

UP Woman raped by paddy trader

Bhadohi: A 30-year-old married woman was allegedly raped by a paddy trader when she had gone to receive the payment of the produce sold by her husband in a village in Aurai area here, police said on Friday. The accused is missing and efforts are underway to catch hold of him, the police added. The woman has alleged that when she had gone to Aurai police station for filing a written complaint of rape, the policemen present there tore up her complaint and chased her away. She later met the Bhadohi SP and pleaded for justice after which a case of rape was filed. — *PTI*

MAHARASHTRA ECONOMY TO CONTRACT BY 8%

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, MARCH 5

Maharashtra's economy, which is battered by Covid induced lockdown, is expected to contract by eight per cent in 2020-21, according to the state's economic survey presented in the state Assembly on Friday. The 'Manufacturing' and 'Construction' sectors were hit hardest and are expected to grow at (-)11.8% and (-)14.6% respectively, due to which 'Industry' sector's growth is expected to be (-)11.1%. The growth of agriculture and allied activities is expected to be 11.7 per cent. The Economic Survey of Maharashtra 2020-21 was tabled by deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar, who is also holding the finance portfolio, on Friday in the Legislative Assembly. The report said, "Agriculture and allied activities sector was the only sector that contributed positively to GSAV in 2020-21 and was least impacted during Covid pandemic due to timely and proactive measures taken by the government." The crops sector expected to grow by 16.2%, livestock by 4.4% and forestry and logging by 5.7%, it added. The pandemic has badly hit trade, repairs, hotel and restaurants and transport sectors, as a result the service sector is expected to grow at (-)9.0 per cent. The pandemic has impacted the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), which is expected to drop to ₹2,661,629 crore, ₹1,56,926 crore down from ₹2,818,555 crore in 2019-20.

ED summons Mehbooba in money laundering case

'Govt's tactics to intimidate, browbeat political opponents'

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, MARCH 5

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

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

The ED has asked the former chief minister to present herself before its officials on March 15. The case in connection with which she would be questioned was filed by the ED under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) some time ago, reports said. Earlier this year, J&K police's Criminal Investigation Kashmir (CIK) wing had arrested PDP youth leader Waheed Ur Rehman Parra in connection with



Mehbooba Mufti

▶ **THE ED** has asked the former CM to present herself before its officials on March 15. The case in connection with which she would be questioned was filed by the ED under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act some time ago

an alleged politicians-militants nexus and terror funding case. This was soon after a special court of NIA at Jammu had granted him bail in the case, which is being probed by it and also ED separately. The NIA had arrested Mr Parra on November 25 last year for his alleged "close links" with Kashmiri lawyer Irfan Shafi Mir, who was arrested by the police along with Hizb-ul-Mujahideen commander Syed Naveed Mushtaq alias Naveed Babu, another militant Asif Ahmed Rather and tainted J&K police officer Davinder Singh in January 2020. The NIA and J&K police have claimed that Mir had during his interrogation claimed Mr Parra sought his support during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections for his party candidate Ms Mufti.

Meanwhile National Conference president and three-time chief minister

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

Mr Abdullah has in his plea said that the properties were either ancestral or acquired before the alleged offence took place and were therefore not involved in any illegal or criminal activity. He has also raised the validity of the ED in the case saying that on the date of the registration of the ECIR (Enforcement Commission Information Report) and the initiation of the investigation, the state of J&K was governed by the Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir, 1956, and had special status under Article 370 of the Constitution of India.

Over 1.90cr Covid vaccine doses administered so far

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

India has registered a cumulative figure of more than 1.9 crore Covid vaccination doses so far and on Friday alone 10.34 lakh vaccine doses were administered. Out of this, 8.25 lakh beneficiaries were given the first dose while 2.09 lakh healthcare and frontline workers received the second dose of the vaccines even as fresh cases are on a rise.

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

Maharashtra continues to report the highest daily new cases at 8,998. It is followed by Kerala with 2,616 while Punjab reported 1,071 new cases. India's

total active caseload stands at 1.76 lakh on Friday and the country's present active caseload consists of 1.58% of the total positive cases. However, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have shown a reduction in the active cases in the last 24 hours.

On the other hand, Maharashtra, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi and Gujarat display a rise in the active cases during the same time period. At present, 20 States/UTs have less than 1000 active cases while Arunachal Pradesh reported only two active cases.

The cumulative positivity rate of the country shows a continuous decline and stands at 5.08% as on date. No new Covid fatality was reported from 18 States/UTs in the last 24 hours.

India again asks China to pull back from all areas

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

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

In a statement, the MEA said, "It is therefore our expectation that the Chinese side will work with us, both through the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) and Senior Commanders' meetings, to ensure that disengagement in the remaining areas is completed at the earliest. This would allow both sides to consider de-escalation of forces in Eastern Ladakh as that alone will lead to the restoration of peace and tranquility and provide conditions for progress in our bilateral relationship."

Centre's OTT guidelines have no teeth, says SC

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

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

Having chided the government for bringing toothless regulation to deal with social media and OTT platforms, the top court, however, in a breather, granted protection from arrest to OTT platform Amazon Prime India head Aparna Purohit.

Mumbai, March 5: The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) on Friday filed a charge-sheet before a special court here in a case related to drugs angle in the death of filmstar Sushant Singh Rajput last year, naming 33 accused, including actor Rhea Chakraborty and her brother Showik.

The over 11,700-page charge-sheet, detailing drugs seizures, collection of various evidences and investigation done so far, was filed before the special court set up under the Narcotic Drugs and

Clashes erupt in Srinagar over house arrest of separatist Mirwaiz disallowed to offer prayers

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, MARCH 5

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

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

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

The Mirwaiz, who heads



Agitators pelt stones after clashes erupted between police and protestors during a demonstration against house arrest of chief clerk and chairman of Hurriyat Conference Mirwaiz Umar Farooq at Nowhatta Chowk in Srinagar on Friday.

a faction of Kashmiri separatist parties' amalgam All Parties Hurriyat Conference, was among the hundreds of politicians, activists, civil society and trade Union leaders, and lawyers placed under house arrest or jailed ahead of or soon after J&K was stripped of its special

constitutional status. Most of them have been set free since. The police used 'mild force,' including firing pellet shotgun, to disperse a slogan chanting crowd. Though the police said no one was injured, local sources said that a woman was hit in the action.

The witnesses said that a

Modi holds virtual meet with Swedish PM Stefan

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Swedish counterpart Stefan Löfven held wide-ranging discussions lasting just under an hour during a virtual summit between the two nations on Friday, during which the two leaders discussed all aspects of bilateral ties including defence, space, security and strategic cooperation, trade ties, and cooperation in science and technology including green technologies apart from healthcare and the fight against the Covid pandemic. Sweden also announced its decision to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA). In response to a media query on whether there had been any discussion between the two leaders on the issue of young

Swedish environment activist Greta Thunberg who had recently supported the farmer protests in India, the ministry of external affairs (MEA's) secretary (West) Vikas Swarup said that there had been "no discussion" on the matter as it was "not a bilateral issue". The two PMs also "underlined that the long-standing close relations between India and Sweden are based on shared values of democracy, rule of law, pluralism, equality, freedom of speech, and respect for human rights".

The MEA's secretary (West) also said both PMs regarded defence as an "important area of cooperation", adding that New Delhi was aware of the Swedish interest regarding any possibility of Swedish fighter aircraft Gripen being manufactured in India.

DRDO successfully test-fires advanced ramjet tech missile India moves closer to making long range air-to-air missiles

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

To develop indigenous long-range air-to-air missiles to be deployed on fighter aircraft, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on Friday successfully carried out a flight demonstration based on Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) technology from Integrated Test Range Chandipur off the coast of Odisha.

SFDR engine is likely to use in future Astra Mark 3 beyond visual range air-to-air missile, to developed by India that would have a strike range of 350 kilometres. India is currently working on Astra Mark 2 missile, which will have a range of 160 kilometres.

The Indian Air Force and Indian navy have already given orders for Astra Mark-1 missiles, which have a range of 110 kilometres and will be used in MiG-29, Tejas, Su-30 and MiG-29K aircraft.

DRDO said that all the subsystems, including the booster motor and nozzle-less motor, performed as expected. "During the test, many new technologies were proven, including Solid Fuel based Ducted



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

Ramjet technology," said DRDO.

"Successful demonstration of solid fuel-based ducted ramjet technology has provided DRDO with a technological advantage which will enable it to develop long-range air-to-air missiles," said DRDO.

At present, such technology is available only in a handful of countries in the world. "During the test, the air-launch scenario was

simulated using a booster motor. Subsequently, the nozzle-less booster accelerated it to the required Mach number for Ramjet operation," said DRDO.

The performance of the missile was monitored using the data captured by electro-optical, radar and telemetry instruments deployed by ITR and confirmed successful demonstration of the mission objectives, it said. The

launch was monitored by senior scientists of various DRDO labs, including Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL), Research Centre Imarat (RCI) and High Energy Materials Research Laboratory (HEMRL).

Defence minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the scientists of DRDO, Indian Air Force and the Industry on the successful flight test of SFDR.

India denies its role in Adani's port deal in Lanka

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

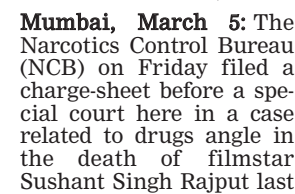
India on Friday said it had told Sri Lanka that a specific reference in a recent Sri Lankan government statement mentioning that a proposal reportedly presented by the Adani group for the development of the Colombo port's West Container Terminal (WCT) had been approved by the Indian high commission (IHC) in Colombo was "factually incorrect". New Delhi added that the Sri Lanka "has engaged directly with investors on this project".

This was stated by India after media reports from Colombo quoted a recent Sri Lankan Cabinet Memorandum as saying, "The proposal presented by Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) has been approved by the IHC." According to news agency reports too from Colombo, the Sri Lankan Cabinet Memorandum had said that the Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) proposal approved by a negotiating committee had been forwarded to both the Indian High Commission and the Japanese Embassy in Colombo and that the proposal presented by Adani Ports and special economic zone limited (APSEZ Consortium) has been approved by the Indian High Commission.

MEA spokesperson Anurag Srivastava on Friday said, "Our High Commission in Colombo has already conveyed to the Government of Sri Lanka that the media release in so far as approval of the High Commission was concerned is factually incorrect. We understand that the Government of Sri Lanka has engaged directly with investors on this project."

oral and documentary evidences, the probe agency said. During the investigation, substantial quantity of narcotics drugs (charas, ganja, LSD, ecstasy) and psychotropic substances (alprazolam and clonazepam), covered under the provisions of sections 20(b), 22, 23 of the NDPS Act, were seized, it said.

Substantial Indian and foreign currencies were also seized during the investigation and action was taken under relevant provisions, the probe agency said. — *PTI*



Sushant Singh

Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

The voluminous document has named 33 persons as accused in the case, including Rhea Chakraborty (who was said to be in a relationship with Rajput), her brother

Showik, and contains statements of over 200 witnesses.

Out of the total accused, eight are still in judicial custody, while the rest, including the brother-sister duo, have been granted bail, the NCB said.

▶ **THE OVER** 11,700-page charge-sheet, detailing drugs seizures, collection of various evidences and investigation done so far, was filed before the special court set up under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act

SHORT TAKES

Rape survivor set ablaze in Rajasthan

Jaipur: A 33-year-old rape survivor was set afire in Rajasthan's Hanumangarh district, police said on Friday. The woman has been admitted to a hospital in Bikaner with serious burn injuries, Golupura station house officer Omprakash said, adding that Pradeep Vishnoi, who was accused by the woman of raping her in 2018, has been detained for questioning. The incident occurred in the early hours of Thursday. The victim, who has a daughter, was living with her maternal grandmother following a dispute with her husband, the police said. A man entered their house premises in the early hours of Thursday, sprinkled kerosene on the floor, knocked on the door and called the woman by her name. As she opened the door, the man dropped a burning stick on the floor, resulting in serious injuries to her, the SHO said. — PTI

EC rejects charges of bias by official

New Delhi: The Election Commission has rejected a demand by Trinamul Congress for removal of Sudeep Jain, deputy election commissioner in charge of West Bengal elections, saying the commission has full faith in the integrity and fairness of the officer. "The commission would like to categorically state that all our deputy election commissioners and other officials posted in the ECI headquarters and/or working in the field are discharging their duties strictly as per Constitution of India and the various extant rules regarding the conduct of elections. There could be an odd exception here or there in which case EC takes corrective action immediately. In the immediate case, the commission has full faith in the integrity and fairness of Shri Sudeep Jain, DEC..." the EC said.

'Over `1,500cr spent on cows in Raj'

Jaipur: Rajasthan urban development minister Shanti Dhariwal on Friday said the state government has spent ₹1,511.31 crore for the protection of cows in the past over three years. The funds collected from stamp duty and VAT payable on liquor sale has been spent on the protection of cows, he said. Replying to a supplementary question of BJP legislator Dharam Narayan Joshi during the question hour in the state Assembly, Mr Dhariwal said as per the rules, funds are sanctioned whenever a demand is raised. Mr Dhariwal in his written reply to the legislator's question told the House that the state government received ₹1,242.56 crore from 2015-16 to 2020-21 through surcharge on stamp duty. — PTI

Owner of SUV is found dead

■ **Continued from Page 1**
Hiren be provided police protection.
Later, the state home minister informed in the Legislative Assembly that Hiren was not the actual owner of the car. "Car's owner was Sam Muten who had given it to Mansukh Hiren for maintenance of its interior. Hiren had kept the car in his custody when Sam didn't pay for it," he said.
Mr Fadnavis, who is also the leader of the Opposition in the Maharashtra Assembly, demanded NIA investigation into the case of explosives planted near Reliance Industries chairman's house. However, state home minister Anil Deshmukh rejected the demand saying the state police are competent to investigate it and subsequently in evening, he informed the state Assembly that Maharashtra ATS has been entrusted the responsibility to investigate the case.
Speaking with the reporters on Friday, Mr Deshmukh said that the government has decided to hand over the investigation to the ATS in connection with the case of explosives planted in scorio near Mukesh Ambani's house Antilia on February 25.
Earlier in the afternoon, Mr Fadnavis expressed his suspicion over API Sachin Vaze's role in the Antilia bomb scare case and therefore, he demanded the probe into it by the NIA. He also raised a question over the several co-incidences pertaining to the presence of Mr Vaze at several places in connection with this case.

DMK seals deal with CPI, other allies wait

Coalition partners to be announced at grand meeting tomorrow

G BABU JAYAKUMAR and D SEKAR
CHENNAI, MARCH 5

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

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

Even the MDMK and the CPM would be considering the proposals of the DMK only after holding meetings with their functionaries and cadre on Saturday. The series of meeting at the TNCC headquarters remained inconclusive with a tug of war between two groups



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

— PTI

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

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

ident K.S. Alagiri and also MDMK general secretary Vaiko put up a brave front saying that the coalition was intact and that the hitches would be ironed out, though many Congress members felt shortchanged by the offer of the DMK.

As of now, the DMK has allotted two seats to the Manithaneya Makkal Katchi, three to the IUML, six to the VCK and another six to the CPI. The Kongu Makkal Katchi, the CPM and the Congress are yet to finalise the alliance.

Meanwhile, DMK chief M.K. Stalin gave a call to his cadre to put up a united fight against communal forces and invited his functionaries to the Tiruchy public meeting, which he has termed as 'a clarion call for a new dawn.'

Stalin said that the state had gone to ruin in the last 10 years of AIADMK rule and stressed on the need to revive it. He would also unveil a plan for the development of the State in the next 10 years, he said in a letter to cadre.

Will campaign if invited, says Azad

New Delhi, March 5: Days after leading the Congress' "Shanti Sammelan" in Jammu attended by senior party leaders, Congress veteran Ghulam Nabi Azad on Friday said the party's victory in forthcoming Assembly elections in four states and one Union Territory is his top priority at the moment.
"Victory of Congress party in forthcoming assembly elections is my priority at the moment," he told ANI. Senior Congress leader Azad who recently retired from Rajya Sabha and has been advocating reforms in Congress including immediate internal elections.
He also said he is available wherever he is invited by candidates or the

party for campaigning.
Mr Azad is one of the key members of "G-23" (or the group of 23 dissenting leaders, who had questioned the party's functioning in a letter to interim president Sonia Gandhi) calling for sweeping reforms in the party.
Last week Ghulam Nabi Azad along with other senior leaders openly expressed displeasure with the current state of affairs within Congress.
Recently at another public event, Azad drew parallels between himself and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, stating that the latter has not forgotten his roots and proudly calls himself a "chaiwala" as well as he does not hide his true self. — ANI

Advance deployment of troops in poll-bound states

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

The Union home ministry has already started advance deployment of CRPF and other Central paramilitary forces in poll-bound states of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Kerala and Puducherry even though the first phase of polling begins only on March 27.
Officials said the advance deployment was being done to help security forces familiarise themselves with the local area and "give a sense of security to residents there", especially in states like Bengal and Assam which are expected to witness violence.
An estimate of 1 to 1.2 lakh Central forces are being deployed for the

Assembly elections, bulk of which will be used in West Bengal.

"The main reason why we have already sent advance teams of CRPF to these States is to familiarise them with the local areas and at the same time give some confidence to the political leadership and residents there that they can campaign without any kind of fear," a senior security officer said.

The home ministry is also in constant touch with the Election Commission and all decisions regarding deployment of security forces are done only after wider consultations between the two. Sources said that this was the first time that security forces were being deployed almost a month

before the polls. In a normal situation, central forces are t to the poll-bound States or areas a week to the days before any elections.

However, considering the "sensitive inputs" received regarding the possibility of violence, particularly in Bengal and Assam, both the Election Commission of India and the Union home ministry were in no mood to take any chances. Hence, for the time such advance deployment of central para-military forces has been done.

All Central observers, who have been appointed by the Election Commission and are former senior IAS and IPS officers, have also started their work in their respective states.

Gold, dollar smuggling kingpin names Vijayan, UAE consulate officials

Swapna's 'revelations' put Kerala CM in dock

AGE CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 5

A statement filed by Customs, probing the gold smuggling case, before the high court Friday claimed prime accused Swapna Suresh has made "shocking revelations" against chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan, Assembly Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan and some ministers on dollar "smuggling" involving UAE consulate officials, kicking up a political storm in poll-bound Kerala

Sumit Kumar, commissioner of Customs, informed the court that in the statements recorded under Section 164 CrPC and 108 of the Customs Act, Swapna revealed the involvement of the chief minister, Speaker and three ministers. She alleged that the smuggling of foreign currency was done at the instance of Mr Vijayan and Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan with the help of the UAE Consulate.
Swapna also revealed Mr Vijayan's close connections with the previous

Consul General and the "illegal" monetary transactions, Mr Kumar added.
Seizing the opportunity, the Opposition Congress and BJP raised it as a big political issue in the ongoing election campaign.
The ruling CPI(M), however, hit out at the BJP-led Central government questioning its intentions in the backdrop of the elections.
The statement was filed in response to a petition filed by the DG Prisons Kerala, against certain remarks in the order of the Additional CJM

(Economic Offences) Court's on providing security to Swapna who is lodged in Women's Prison, Thiruvananthapuram. The observation in the order will affect the credibility and bonafide of the jail department, argued the state.
The Customs officer said Swapna's statement exposed highly illegal, improper and immoral activities by those occupying high offices in the state. The customs was prepared to produce the copies of the statements before the court in a sealed

cover, the customs commissioner said.
The statement said Swapna's apprehensions regarding her safety in jail were totally justified.
While Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala termed as "shocking" Suresh's "revelations" against Vijayan and the Speaker, BJP state chief K. Surendran said "jail is ensured for Vijayan..."
Slamming the CM, Mr Chennithala said he does not have the right to remain in the chief minister's post in view of the revelations.

BJP will contest 92 seats, AGP 26 in Assam

■ **Continued from Page 1**
Minister Narendra Modi, Union home minister Amit Shah and party president J.P. Nadda among others.
Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal, Cabinet minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, state president Ranjit Dass, general secretary Dilip Saikia, Cabinet minister Atul Bora and working president Keshav Mahanta were present in the meeting as well.
Of the 126 seats in Assam's Legislative Assembly, 47 will go to the polls on March 27 in the first phase, voting on 39 will be held on April 1 in the second phase and 40 seats will go to the polls in the third and final phase on April 6.
The names for the 70 seats announced on Friday will contest in the first and second phases.

AIADMK announces list..

■ **Continued from Page 1**
DMDK, the party founded by actor Vijayakanth, has almost suspended negotiations.
The BJP was unable to arrive at a settlement as the AIADMK would not give the seats that it would like and the coalition leader taking six seats for itself came as a surprise.
All the six seats are the bastions of the party's top leaders: Bodinayakanur for Mr Manneerselvam, Edappadi for Mr Palaniswami, Royapuram for fisheries minister D. Jayakumar, Villupuram for minister C. Ve S h a n m u g h a m , Srivaikundram for M.L.A. S.P. Shanmuganathan and Nilakottai (reserved) for M.L.A. S. Thenmozhi.
The early announcement of the constituencies was, perhaps, aimed at sending across a message to the alliance partners not to ask for them during negotiations. The AIADMK's biggest headache has been the BJP demanding the seats that the ruling party has nurtured over the years

TMC leaders break down in tears after being dropped

Kolkata, March 5: Several Trinamul Congress leaders voiced their anguish against the party after they were denied nomination for the West Bengal assembly elections with protests being held at a few places.
Four-time Satgachia MLA Sonali Guha, once a close associate of Mamata Banerjee, burst into tears after learning that she was denied a ticket this time. "May God give Mamata-didi good sense and counsel, I have been with her from the beginning," said Guha, the former deputy speaker of the state assembly.

Former MLA Arabul Islam, a strongman from Bhangar in South 24 Parganas district, broke down in tears as he said that those who have loved the party with their heart have been ignored. "I will do whatever the local people want me to do," he said about his future plans, as some of his supporters burnt tyres and put up roadblocks in the area in protest.

Supporters of Rafiqur Rahaman, the sitting TMC MLA of Amdanga in North 24 Parganas, blocked the highway in the area after his name did not appear in the list. — PTI

Susanta Ghosh, a former state minister who had become infamous for the Benachara skeleton case from Salboni and Deblina Hembram , a central committee member of the party and a former state

minister from Ranibandh (SC) seat, besides former party MP Pulin Behari Baskey from Keshiari. The Congress and ISF said that they will come out with the names of their contestants later. — PTI

Shivraj says edu bodies shouldn't make terrorists

Cong sees it attack on madrasas

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPLA, MARCH 5



Shivraj Singh Chouhan

In a veiled 'attack on madrasas', Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday said educational institutions should produce good citizens, not terrorists.

Inaugurating the 2-day national teachers' conclave here, Mr Chouhan indicated that his government was going to reform the education system in the state by introducing a uniform education policy for all educational institutions to deny the authorities of some of them to enforce curriculum of their choice in their institutions.
"Some educational institutions have independently chosen curriculum for their students. The practice will end. We will reform the education system in the state by introducing a uniform education policy for all educational institutions," he announced.

"Educational institutions should produce good citizens, not terrorists," he added.
Mr Chouhan said a task force will be set up to frame a new education policy in the state by bringing sweeping reforms in the current education policy and assured that the new education policy would prove to be a milestone in the sector.

Mr Chouhan's remark-shave come for severe criticism from Congress. The party demanded the CM to name which educational institutions in the state produced terrorists and also name the terrorists created by the institutions in MP.

"Mr Chouhan was obviously referring to madrasas when he called upon the educational institutions not to produce terrorists. In that case, he should be held accountable for the education system in the state since he was chief minister for 15 years in his last three consecutive stints.

"The CM should name the educational institutions which produced terrorists and name the terrorists produced by educational institutions in the state, also," Congress spokesman Bhupendra Gupta said.

BJP state secretary Rajneesh Agrawal has however defended the chief minister saying that the latter was right when he said the educational institutions should produce good citizens, not terrorists.

large number of seats like the DMK.

However, it is said that the BJP, playing Big Brother, was putting pressure on the AIADMK not to let any of the parties walk out on the alliance as it considers all the votes precious and imperative for the victory of its candidates, too.

It was due to such a view that every vote counted that the BJP wanted the AIADMK to let T.T.V. Dhinakaran and V.K. Sasikala into the alliance. But the AIADMK managed to thwart that move effectively. Now, the pressure is on to accommodate the DMDK, which refused to come for talks.

Already, actor Sarathkumar-led All India Samathuva Makkal Katchi had broken ties with the AIADMK and joined hands with actor Kamal Haasan-led Makkal Needhi Maiaam, which might end up leading a third front in the state if more parties disillusioned with their coalition leaders' attitude gravitate towards it.

THE ASIAN AGE

6 MARCH 2021

To draw votes, Khattar’s quota sacrifices growth

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

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

The Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act 2020 requires companies and other private entities — including trusts and societies — that have more than 10 employees to reserve three-fourths of all jobs where salaries will be below Rs 50,000/- per month for residents of the state or domiciles of Haryana. This is far from being a welfare move

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

as it does not even pretend to efface iniquity. But even if it did so, it will be open to questioning. The basic reason is that such a step impinges on the right of individuals or a group of individuals to choose their business and profession in an open society.

If the government forces companies to take steps that may impact employee productivity, then it forces companies to be less than competitive. That goes against the grain of capitalist development. The idea of positive discrimination in a sociologically iniquitous context is for the state to promote through education and

employment policies by enlarging opportunity following on appropriate investments, and not to be thrust down the gullet of private players. Indeed, obliging the non-government sector to enter the realm of states is a step in the wrong direction as it undermines the legitimacy of the state.

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

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

Spectrum auction a failure?

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

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

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

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

THE ASIAN AGE

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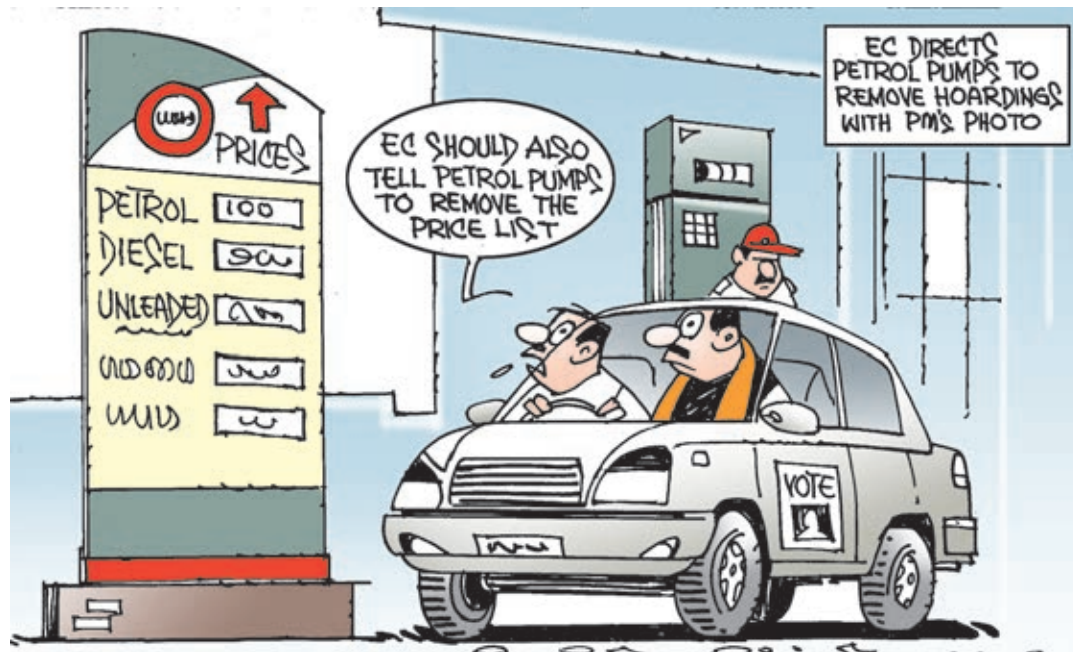
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Subhani



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

Shobhaa De



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

being targeted or harassed, okay? That is just an assumption. Didn’t you read what the good minister had to say about the raids? He assured everybody that these were routine raids on movie people who had been on the radar of the agencies for months. Tax evasion is a serious concern! They must be investigated and punished in case they have failed in their duty to pay up — that’s called cheating the exchequer. Naughty! Prakash Javadekar, the information and broadcasting minister, thundered: “This is too much! Probe agencies undertake investigations based on credible information and the matter later goes to the courts as well.” Egg-xactly! Anurag Kashyap and Taapsee Pannu should rest assured that they are not being victimised for their political views, theek hai? 20 crore *ka* tax evasion is no joke! As for the much bigger economic offenders who may have evaded 200 crores in taxes and have not been subjected to raids — do keep up the good work of being loyal spokespeople. The cutlery tray in India never falls short of *chamchas*, that’s for sure. Besides, raids on movie people receive the sort of publicity for our agencies that most marketing gurus would compute at millions of rupees worth of prime-time coverage. Why not maximise the publicity value of the great work done by these wonderful people by thoroughly probing the tax returns of the Anurag-Taapsee type of people? Which type? Don’t act dumb, *yaar*. Meaning, high-profile, well-known showbiz names. Of course, there are many others on the list — but *aaram se!* No hurry. This is just the trailer, *bhai*. Picture *abhi baaki hai*.

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

LETTERS

FRIVOLOUS PLEA

The Tamil Nadu BJP unit has asked the Election Commission to restrain Congress leader Rahul Gandhi from campaigning in the state reportedly for comparing the situation in today’s India to colonial rule. The Tamil Nadu Assembly election is just a month away. Instead of going to the Election Commission, BJP leaders should go to the electorate and convince the voters on their agenda if they can. The leaders who are asking for an FIR against Rahul Gandhi need not be reminded what the Supreme Court has said about sedition while hearing a case just the other day.

M.C. Joshi
Lucknow

DISGRACEFUL CONDUCT

CONGRESS LEGISLATOR B.K. Sangamesh has not crowned himself with glory by going shirtless during a protest in the Assembly. The disgraceful act earned him the wrath of the Speaker and a week’s suspension from the Assembly. It is incongruous that the Siddaramaiah-led Congress marred the entire day’s proceedings with protests demanding revocation of Sangamesh’s suspension instead of reprimanding him.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

PURPOSEFUL LIVING

KARAN SINGH’S “Art of Ageing...” (March 3) provided food for thought. More and more people are taking an interest in the spiritual heritage of India so that even though we are old and weak, our mind may remain joyous because of a profound philosophy of total human development given to us through the Upanishads and other books. As Swami Ranganathananda says, we must always remember the truth that there is a divine spark in all of us which will make this life full of joy. Despite having all facilities, if we have no will for being joyous, our life will become barren, especially in old age.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



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

— From *Bachchoo’s Bickerings*

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

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

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

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

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

I confess that I pass and fail the Tebbit test regularly. In the recent series of Test matches between India and England, I was all for Joe Root’s team in the first Test, when “we” were winning, and then switched allegiance in the second and third, with patriotic support for Virat Kohli’s team and achievement. No, gentle reader, in democratic Britain, this admission can’t lead to Clueless sending MI5 to knock at my door at dawn.

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

betrayed their country by making money through its defeats.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHORT TAKES

TURKEY BLAMES WEATHER FOR CHOPPER CRASH

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

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

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

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

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

ISRAEL BOOSTS PLANS FOR IRAN ATTACK

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

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

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

CHINA HIKES DEFENCE BUDGET TO \$209 BILLION

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

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

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

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

Pope's historic Iraq trip



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

China claims veto over HK lawmakers

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

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

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

CAPITOL POLICE CHIEF APPEALS FOR NATIONAL GUARD TO STAY

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

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

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

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

FILM | FEST

SUPARNA SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

Berlinale, or the Berlin International Film Festival, is considered the most political of Europe's Big 3 (Cannes, Venice and Berlin), and on Friday it again burnished its reputation by handing over the festival's top award, the Golden Bear, to Romanian writer-director Radu Jude's film, *Bad Luck Banging or Loony*



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

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

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

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

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

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

"This will effectively wipe out any remaining opposition." The measure had been widely expected with Beijing officials stating in the lead-up that only "staunch patriots" — those loyal to the Communist Party — should be involved in governing Hong Kong.

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

This does not include Vice President Harris,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

Prez Biden pats Indo-Americans

Appoints over 55, says they are taking over US

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

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

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

Indian-American scientist Swati Mohan leads the guidance, navigation, and control operations of Nasa's Mars 2020 mission. Biden, who was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States on January 20, has created history by appointing at least 55 Indian-Americans to key positions in his administration.

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— PTI

Spain's king seeks to steady crown

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

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

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

with understandable outrage in Spain.

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

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

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

— AFP

US RECORDS FEWER COVID CASES IN FIVE MONTHS

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

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

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

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

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

One shot dead in Myanmar

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Huge quake sparks Pacific-wide tsunami alert

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

ring of fire, where the Earth's tectonic plates collide. New Zealand's NEMA said the remoteness of the quakes did not minimise

their potential impact.

"The earthquake may not have been felt in some of these areas, but evacuation should be immediate as a damaging tsunami is possible," it said.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said Vanuatu and New Caledonia were likely to experience the largest waves, measuring up to three metres. "Based on all available data, hazardous tsunami waves are forecast for some coasts," it said.

It said initial smaller waves were already reported in Tonga, and small waves were also possible as far afield as Japan, Russia, Mexico and the South American coast. — AFP

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

quick BITES

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

* As of 8:30 PM IST

IT sector sales up 5.2% in Q3: RBI data

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

Blackstone in talks for minority stake in Sify



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

SBI Payments offers contactless transactions

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

Laurus dips 4% after promoters sell 1.3% holding

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

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

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 5

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—PTI

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

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

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

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

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



Narendra Modi

benefits will be doubled and job creation will also increase.

The Prime Minister said the government is working to reduce compliance burden, further improve ease of doing business and cut down logistics costs for the industry.

"An average of 5 per cent of production is given as incentive. This means that PLI schemes will lead to production worth \$520 billion in India in the next five years," he said.

Modi said that over the past six-seven years, several successful efforts have been made to encourage 'Make in India' at different levels.

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

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

"Our effort is to reduce over 6,000 compliance burden (for industry)," he said.

The government, he said, believes that its interference in everything creates more problems than solutions and "therefore, self-regulation, self-attesting, self-certification are being emphasised".

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

—PTI

MTAR Tech subscribed 200 times

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 5

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

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

10 face value.

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

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

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

164.99 times subscription. Retail individual bidders applied for 28.4 times the shares on offer, said sources working close to the merchant bankers.

The public issue received over 29.17 lakh applications.

MTAR Technologies raised Rs 178.92 crore from 15 anchor investors a day prior to its issue opening on Wednesday at the upper price band of Rs 575 per share.

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

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

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

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

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

Appeal against Cairn award likely

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

—PTI

journalists at IWPC.

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

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

—PTI

Indonesia plans battery production in public sector

ARYS ADITYA & CLAIRE JIAO MARCH 5

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

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

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

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

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

—Bloomberg

NIPPON STEEL TO SHUT 20% CAPACITY BY 2025

MASUMI SUGA MARCH 5

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

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



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

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

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

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

—Bloomberg

OMRON EYES SMALLER SOUTHERN MARKETS

FC BUREAU HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

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

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

Skoda gives glimpse of Kushaq interiore

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, MARCH 5

Skoda, the Czech car manufacturer, which is all set for the world premiere of its new SUV Kushaq on March 18 and will go on sales in India thereafter, has released the first set of the Kushaq's interior.

The Skoda Kushaq will take on popular SUVs such as Hyundai Creta, Kia Seltos, MG Hector and Tata Harrier.

The new SUV, likely to be priced in the Rs 10 lakh to Rs 17 lakh bracket, is the first of four models specially adapted for India by Skoda Auto from the Skoda and Volkswagen brands as part of the India 2.0 product campaign of its turnaround strategy. The second model will be



Volkswagen Taigun.

The technical development is being carried out at Skoda Auto's Technology Centre in Pune.

The Kushaq will come with a layered dashboard that gets a thin chrome bar to separate the top from the bottom. This chrome bar spans the length of the dash and connects the large, chrome-lined vents at each end.

MEDICAL | MARIJUANA

New revenue source opens for households

Thai families allowed to grow cannabis

PRIM CHUWIRUCH MARCH 5

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

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

"Marijuana and hemp

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

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



tive compounds, the minister said.

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

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

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

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Sindhu marches into semifinals

Basel: Olympic silver medallist P. V. Sindhu advanced to the semifinals of the Swiss Open Super 300 tournament with a straight-game win over Thai Busanan Ongbamrungphan. World champion Sindhu took a minute less than an hour to see off a fighting Busanan, seeded fifth, 21-16, 23-21 to set up a clash with fourth seed Denmark's Mia Blichfeldt. Meanwhile, B. Sai Praneeth lost 14-21, 17-21 to Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia in 45 minutes to bow out of the tournament. Ajay Jayaram's campaign ended after a demoralising 9-21, 6-21 loss to eighth seeded Thai Kunlavut Vitidsarn in another last eight men's singles match. Earlier, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponnappa fought hard before going down 17-21, 21-16, 8-21 to fifth seeds Tan Kian Meng and Lai Pei Jing in quarterfinals of mixed doubles. — PTI

Goa hold Mumbai in 1st leg of semis

Margao: FC Goa missed the chance to enter the second leg of the Indian Super League semifinals with an advantage as they squandered a lead twice in their 2-2 draw against Mumbai City FC here on Friday. Goa broke the deadlock through Igor Angulo's penalty (20') before his goal was cancelled out by Hugo Boumous (38'). The Gaurs then took the lead again through Saviour Gama (59') but Mourtada Fall (62') soon netted a vital equaliser to help the Islanders escape with a vital point. Mumbai dominated the proceedings after the break but it was Goa who scored against the run of play around the hour mark, after a stunning solo goal from Gama. — PTI

Boxers Satish, Ashish in semis

New Delhi: Olympic-bound Indian boxers Satish Kumar (+91kg) and Ashish Kumar (75kg) entered the semifinals of the 35th Boxam International Tournament in Castellon, Spain with impressive victories. Also advancing to the last-four round was Sumit Sangwan (81kg) after a 4-1 triumph over Mohor El Ziad of Belgium. Satish, the first super heavyweight from the country to qualify for the Olympics, defeated Denmark's Givskov Nielsen 5-0 in his last-eight bout late on Thursday. Asian silver-winner Ashish, on the other hand, got the better of Italy's Remo Salvati in a split 4-1 verdict to make the medal rounds. Earlier, Mohammed Hussamuddin (57kg) and the duo of Manish Kaushik (63kg) and Vikas Krishan (69kg) advanced to the medal rounds. — PTI

Rijiju tells coach Boe to mind duty

New Delhi: Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju on Friday reacted sharply to foreign badminton coach Mathias Boe's comments on the Income Tax raid at properties of his actor partner Taapsee Pannu, saying the Dane must stick to his professional duties instead of commenting on matters which are not his domain. Boe on Thursday requested Rijiju to help Pannu after the Income Tax department raided properties linked to her over alleged tax evasion. The former Danish shuttler, who is currently with the Indian badminton players in Switzerland for the Swiss Open, took to Twitter to seek Rijiju's help for Pannu and her family. "Law of the land is supreme and we must abide by that. The subject matter is beyond yours and my domain. We must stick to our professional duties in the best interest of Indian Sports," Rijiju tweeted. — PTI

Live on TV

CRICKET

India vs England: Fourth Test, Day 3 from 9.30 am on Star Sports 1

BADMINTON

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

FOOTBALL

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

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PANTHER ATTACK

Pant's splendid ton puts England under the pump

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When he finally got out, Root's frustrated expression was a dead giveaway that the match was now out of hand for England, having conceded as many as 141 runs in a single session. Pant had hit 13 fours and two sixes during an innings which, in all likelihood, will earn him the 'Man of the Match' award.

Ben Stokes (22-6-73-2) troubled the Indians with reared up deliveries, one of those got skipper Virat Kohli (0), but there was no trouble for Pant, who would gleefully pull the



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

England all-rounder.

The audacity with which he came down the track against Anderson (20-11-40-3), depositing him over extra cover for a boundary, could have taken anyone's breath away.

It was one fascinating day of Test cricket where flamboyant players like Rohit Sharma (49 off 144 balls) and Pant traded

their natural attacking instincts for a more conservative approach.

Earlier, Cheteshwar Pujara (17 off 66 balls) and Kohli's (0 off 8 balls) dismissals brought England back in the game. Ajinkya Rahane (27) hit a flurry of boundaries to get the scoreboard moving but Anderson had him caught at second slip. — PTI

NUMBERS GAME

VIRAT KOHLI'S SECOND DUCK OF THE SERIES:

● England's right-arm fast-medium bowler, Ben Stokes dismissed Virat Kohli for duck in India's first innings on the second day of the fourth and final Test match at Ahmedabad on Friday (March 5).

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

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

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

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

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

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

SCORECARD

England 1st innings: 205

India 1st innings (overnight 24/1): R. Sharma lbw b Stokes 49, C. Pujara lbw b Leach 17, V. Kohli c Foakes b Stokes 0, A. Rahane c Stokes b Anderson 27, R. Pant c Root b Anderson 101, R. Ashwin c Pope b Leach 13, W. Sundar (batting) 60, A. Patel (batting) 11. Extras (B-8, LB-5, NB-3) 16. **Total (for 7 wickets in 94 overs) 294.**

FoW: 1-0, 2-40, 3-41, 4-80, 5-121, 6-146, 7-259.

Bowling: Anderson 20-11-40-3, Stokes 22-6-73-2, Leach 23-5-66-2, Bess 15-1-56-0, Root 14-1-46-0.

Aussies pack off Kiwis to force T20 series decider

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

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

The Australians scored 156 for six in their 20 overs after winning the toss and electing to bat.

In reply, New Zealand were all out for 106 after 18.5 overs.

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

Finch chiselled out his 14th T20 half-century off 55 balls before cutting loose with four sixes in the final over, in which Kyle Jamieson conceded 26 runs.

But he struggled for partners as the Black Caps pinned back Australia's batters with accurate bowling and a steady flow of wickets.

Despite his man-of-the-match batting performance, Finch singled out his bowling attack for praise, saying they were outstanding on a wicket that did not play as expected.

"I thought we adapted really well, it was a really polished performance with the ball," he said.

Kyle Richardson ended with the best figures of



Australia captain Aaron Finch plays a shot against New Zealand during their fourth Twenty20 match in Wellington on Friday. — AFP

three for 19, but spinners Ashton Agar, Adam Zampa and Glenn Maxwell all contributed with two wickets each.

Leg-spinner Ish Sodhi was the pick of the New Zealand bowlers, claiming three for 32.

The Black Caps made a slow start, with openers Martin Gupthill and Tim Seifert managing just one boundary apiece in the opening three overs on a spin-friendly wicket.

Gupthill departed cheaply for seven but it was only the beginning of New Zealand's woes as they lost a further six wickets for 30 runs.

Meanwhile, New

Zealand fast bowler Tim Southee has been reprimanded for showing dissent at an umpire's decision. Southee was found to have breached "Article 2.8 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel", a Level 1 breach. In addition to this, one demerit point has been added to the disciplinary record of Southee, for whom it was the first offence in a 24-month period. — AFP

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

National athletics coach found dead

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

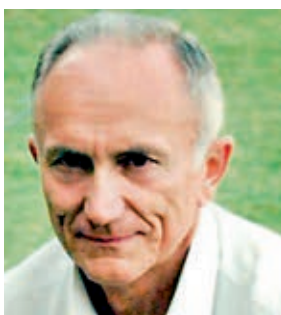
The dead body of the 72-year-old Snesarev, who returned to India after a gap of two years to be at the helm till the end of September, has been sent to a government hospital for post mortem.

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

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

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

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



Nikolai Snesarev

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

— ADILLE SUMARIWALLA
Athletics Federation of India president

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

NEERAJ SETS NEW NATL JAVELIN THROW RECORD

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

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

Chopra opened the competition with an effort of 83.03m before having two foul throws. After a fourth throw of 83.36m, Chopra sent the javelin to 88.07m amid loud cheers from a sizeable audience at the NIS Patiala. His final throw was 82.24m. "I was prepared and today it was windy. I used my favourite javelin which helped me. Pandemic did affect training and preparation but we managed to hold on," said Chopra. — PTI



Chelsea's Cesar Azpilicueta (left) challenges for the ball with Liverpool's Diogo Jota (center) during their English Premier League match at Anfield stadium in Liverpool on Thursday. Chelsea won 1-0. — AP

Mount stars as Liverpool crash

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

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

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

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

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

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

BILBAO TOPPLE LEVANTE, MEET BARCA IN FINAL

Madrid, March 5: Athletic Bilbao could win two Copa del Reys in two weeks after beating Levante 3-2 on aggregate on Thursday to book their place in this season's final against Barcelona.

Bilbao's 2-1 win after extra-time means they will face Barca on April 17 at La Cartuja, shortly after playing Basque rivals Real Sociedad in the postponed final of last season's tournament at the same venue on April 3.

Levante had already beaten Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid this season and they made the perfect start to the second leg when Roger Marti found the corner on the turn in the 17th minute.

But Garcia equalised for Bilbao from the penalty spot after being pulled down by Duarte before Berenguer scored the winner in extra-time. — AFP