

SHORT TAKES

DoT brings down 140 illegal mobile signal boosters

New Delhi: The wireless technology monitoring group of the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has brought down 140 illegal mobile signal boosters during a week-long raid in the national capital. The raids were conducted between February 18 and 24 in several parts of Delhi, including Connaught Place, Hauz Khas and Nehru Place. "We have conducted awareness campaigns with which people are made aware, not to use illegal mobile signal boosters," DoT Wireless Monitoring Organisation Engineer Incharge Devendra Kumar Rai told PTI. He added that inspection drives and public awareness campaigns were initiated in 2018 under the supervision of R K Saxena, WMO director and head of department, and in 2020, around 400 illegal mobile signal boosters were removed. "Under the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, and the Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1943, use of such wide-band signal boosters is illegal as these causes radio frequency interference into the licensed wireless networks of various telecom service providers and so the wireless users operating under their licensed network," Rai said. According to industry estimates, there were around 3,000 illegal mobile signal boosters installed in Delhi that were leading to call drops and other network issues. Telecom operators have frequently raised the issue before DoT to bring down illegal mobile signal boosters as they adversely impact the quality of service.

— PTI

KVIC gets order of 45K masks from DTC

New Delhi: The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) said on Wednesday that it received orders of 45,000 khadi masks for staff members of the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC). While 30,000 masks have been delivered to the DTC, remaining 15,000 will be supplied within this week, the KVIC said in a statement. The masks, made using a specific combination of blue-coloured "double-twisted" khadi fabric, will have a DTC logo placed on it, it added. "The bulk purchase of Khadi face masks by Delhi Government manifests Khadi's growing popularity and also the acceptance of Khadi in various government departments," KVIC chairperson Vinai Kumar Saxena said. Such big orders create additional jobs for khadi artisans and helped them overcome financial distress during the coronavirus pandemic, Saxena said. The KVIC has sold more than 25 lakh face masks in just over eight months since its launch in April last year, including 12.30 lakh masks from the Indian Red Cross Society alone, he added. Earlier, masks were also bought by the administration in Arunachal Pradesh (1.60 lakh), and Jammu and Kashmir (7.50 lakh). It has also received repeat orders from the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the Prime Minister's Office and various central government ministries and public sector units, apart from the common people.

— PTI

2 crushed under wheels of bus

New Delhi: Two men died after their scooter was allegedly hit by a bus in northeast Delhi, police said on Wednesday. The two, both aged 40, were returning home in Loni in Ghaziabad after completing their work in Delhi on Tuesday, according to police. The scooter was hit by a Haryana Roadways bus from behind at Sonia Vihar around 4.30 pm. Vijay and Tinku fell from the vehicle and got crushed under the wheels of the bus, an officer said. The driver has been arrested and the bus seized. A case has been registered under sections 279 (rash driving or riding on a public way) and 304A (causing death by negligence) of the Indian Penal Code, police said.

— PTI

Kejriwal: Civic bypoll win a hint to next year's outcome

'People of Delhi once again voted in the name of work'

New Delhi, Mar. 3: Buoyed by the AAP's victory in four out of five wards in municipal bypolls, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday said it showed the faith of the people in his government's work, including for improvement in schools, hospitals, power and water supply.

Kejriwal also took a dig at the BJP for losing on the five seats including the one it was holding, saying it was an indication of the outcome of the civic body polls next year.

"The zero obtained by BJP showed people rejected corruption and theft at MCD ruled by it and the politics of violence they practiced by vandalism at Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia's residence and DJB office," he said.

"The results are an indication of what kind of outcome are expected next year in civic body polls. We are waiting for it and would make the city neat and clean," Kejriwal said in an address at the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) office on DDU Marg where he celebrated the victory with party workers.

He claimed that the people of Delhi have rejected and defeated the BJP due to its "incompetence" in the MCD and want a change.

"In 2015 elections, we got 67 out of 70 seats, and in 2020, we got 62 out of 70 seats. After six years, the people of Delhi have again shown their faith in us and they want us to continue the way we are working," he asserted.

The BJP has been ruling the municipal corporations since 2007 and has come under a sharp attack from the AAP in the run up to civic body polls in 2022.

"The full form of the MCD is the Most Corrupt Department, and people do not want this corruption. They want the MCD to function as effectively as the Delhi government," Kejriwal said.

The AAP won four of the five wards where bypolls



AAP workers celebrating the party's victory in Delhi MCD by-election in New Delhi on Wednesday. (below) Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal addresses party workers after the victory.

— G.N Jha

were held on February 28. It lost Chauhan Bangar ward to the Congress while wrestling Shalimar Bagh North from the BJP.

It retained Trilokpuri, Kalyanpuri and Rohini-C wards it had won in 2017 municipal polls.

"If someone asks about the achievements of AAP, people from across the country will tell you how we have improved schools, hospitals, electricity, water, and roads. The people of Delhi have again shown their faith in us and they want us to continue the way we are working," Kejriwal said.

The chief minister also tweeted, "The people of Delhi once again voted in the name of work. Congratulations to all. The public has been perturbed by the 15-year BJP's misrule in the MCD. People are now desperate to form the Aam Aadmi Party government in the MCD as well."

Referring to the recent BJP campaign of putting up hoardings and banners across the city to demand Rs 13,000 crore for municipal corporations, Kejriwal said people did not like it.

"The Delhi government has given all the funds as mentioned in the Constitution. The public has realised that the BJP needs more money to do more corruption," he said.

— PTI



Largest victory margin in Chauhan Bangar ward, lowest in Shalimar Bagh-North

New Delhi, Mar. 3: The Chauhan Bangar ward of Delhi witnessed the largest victory margin of over 10,000 votes, while Shalimar Bagh (North) recorded the lowest in the bypolls to the five municipal wards results of which were declared Wednesday.

The Congress' Chaudhary Zubair Ahmad won the Chauhan Bangar by a massive margin of 10,642 votes, while the AAP's Sunita Mishra won the Shalimar Bagh (North) by a difference of 2,705 votes. The AAP won four of the five civic wards, with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal asserting that people are desperate to bring the party to power in

the three municipal corporations in the national capital. The AAP, however, suffered a shock defeat in the minority-dominated Chauhan Bangar ward, where Ahmad defeated Mohammad Ishraq Khan by a whopping margin of 10,642 votes.

While Ahmad got 16,203 votes, his AAP rival only polled 5,561 votes, according to data shared by the State Election Commission in Delhi.

The wards that went to bypolls on Sunday were — Rohini-C and Shalimar Bagh (North) in north Delhi; Trilokpuri, Kalyanpuri and Chauhan Bangar in east Delhi.

— PTI

58-year-old arrested for robbing, killing realtor

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAR. 3

A 58-year-old man was arrested for allegedly killing a property dealer during a robbery bid in west Delhi's Punjabi Bagh area, police said on Wednesday.

The accused has been identified as Anil Kumar, a resident of Nihal Vihar, who already has nine cases registered against him, they said.

Police said that on February 16, a person named Radhey Shyam (52), was found lying in a pool of blood near the Madipur bus stand on the Rohtak Road in Punjabi Bagh. He was rushed to a hospital where he was declared brought dead.

During investigation, it was found that on the day of the incident the victim left for his home at Nihal Vihar after 12 am from Sadar Bazaar area. His mobile phone was also missing, police said.

On February 26, the phone was found to be

DURING INTERROGATION, the accused told the police that he was a drug-addict and he had sold his two ancestral homes in Delhi's Nihal Vihar for drugs. He was now dependent on the money from snatching and robbery.

activated in the Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh, following which a police team rushed to the area where they found the accused was hiding in Bansura village, a senior police officer said.

The police also found that 9-10 people from Delhi had visited the place in the recent past to attend a function. The team finally learnt about the persons who had sold the phone to a person there.

Later, the team came back to Delhi, the officer said.

"On Tuesday, a tip-off was received regarding the accused, following which the police laid a trap near Cement Siding, Punjabi Bagh, and appre-

hended one person," Deputy Commissioner of Police (west) Urvija Goel said.

During interrogation, he told the police that he was a drug-addict and he had sold his two ancestral homes in Delhi's Nihal Vihar for drugs. He was now dependent on the money from snatching and robbery, the DCP said.

On that night, while the accused was returning to Nihal Vihar from Sadar Bazar on his bike, he noticed the victim in an inebriated condition and offered him a lift, police said.

Later, when they reached near the Madipur Bus Stand, he asked the victim to hand over all his belongings at knife point, but the victim refused and a scuffle ensued between them, they said.

Kumar slit the wrist of the deceased and fled the spot with all his belongings, the police said, adding he left for Sitapur to attend a function of his friend.

2 held for trying to extort ₹2cr from businessman

New Delhi, Mar. 3: A 27-year-old man working at a chemist shop here was arrested along with a colleague for allegedly trying to extort Rs two crore from a businessman and threatening him, posing as a gangster lodged in Tihar prison.

Accused Deepak Sahrawat and his accomplice, 19-year-old Satish Kumar, are employees of a chemist shop in Delhi's Janakpuri, police said on Wednesday.

They hatched the conspiracy to make quick money and called the businessman on his phone from the vicinity of Tihar prison while posing as gangster 'Shakti' using SIM cards bought from Allahabad, the police said.

The duo even bought new mobile phones to make the threat calls, they said. They knew the businessman and saw

him as a easy target, the police added.

The accused had called the businessman twice on January 23 and gave him two days' time to arrange the money, they said, adding that the complainant, however, approached the police on March 1 after getting another threat call.

A case was registered and the location of the suspects traced near Hari Nagar and Janakpuri, Shibesh Singh, Additional Commissioner of Police (Crime), said.

Satish Kumar was arrested from Uttam Nagar and Sahrawat was apprehended from his house in the Gole market area, he said.

Two mobile phones with SIM cards used for making the extortion calls were recovered, he added.

— PTI

2 nabbed for burglary in Karawal Nagar

New Delhi, Mar. 3: Two men escaping after allegedly committing a burglary in south Delhi were nabbed by a police team when they stopped for urinating in public, an official said on Wednesday.

The incident took place early Tuesday morning.

After committing a burglary in Karawal Nagar, Deepak and Ravikant were returning to their hideout with gold and silver jewellery. The two men stopped for urinating at the BRT road where they were caught by the police team, the official said.

The accused, who were in a car, were spotted by the picket staff when they were urinating in public, police said.

Two country-made pistols and some gold and silver ornaments were recovered from their possession.

— PTI

Sign of revival, says Cong; BJP alleges 'match fixing' by rivals

New Delhi, Mar. 3: The municipal corporation (MCD) bypoll results announced on Wednesday were termed a sign of revival of the party by the Congress, while the BJP alleged "max fixing" between its rivals.

Congress candidate Chaudhary Zubair Khan won the Chauhan Bangar ward by a whopping margin of over 10,000 votes defeating AAP candidate and ex-MLA Mohammad Ishraq Khan.

The leaders of AAP, which swept the bypolls winning four of the five wards, exuded hope that they would win the 2022 municipal corporation elections, after a "clean sweep" in the "semi final". The BJP's tally in the bypolls was zero.

Delhi Congress president Anil Kumar said in a press conference that following the MCD bye-election results for the five wards, the Congress is

"strongly" pitted against its rivals for the "final battle" of the MCD elections in 2022.

Kumar said in a tweet that Congress's victory in Chauhan Bangar showed that the confidence of people in the party was rising and it was a message of "revival" of the party.

"Delhiites want the Congress back in power. The bye-election results signalled their emphatic response against corruption and misrule of the BJP at municipal corporations and the Arvind Kejriwal government which has been driving Delhi towards ruin," he claimed.

The BJP drew a blank in the bypolls and even lost the Shalimar Bagh North ward, held by it, to the AAP.

"The MCD bypolls results are an outcome of match fixing by the Congress and the AAP," Delhi BJP president

Adesh Gupta alleged in a statement.

He claimed the bypolls results "clearly" show that the Congress and AAP had "teamed up" to defeat the BJP.

"The decrease in vote share of the Congress in Shalimar Bagh and its increase in Chauhan Bangar ward is proof enough that the Congress and the AAP conspired against the BJP," Gupta alleged.

The Delhi BJP president said that the party will deliberate over the reasons behind its defeat and weed out the shortcomings.

"We will contest 2022 MCD polls with renewed energy and strategy. No victory or defeat is final for any political party, and I am sure we will win the 2022 elections," he said.

The party will hold a meeting to discuss what went wrong and try to rectify it, he said.

— PTI

Nilam Katara to be given security on her visits to Delhi from Dehradun, HC told

New Delhi, Mar. 3: The Delhi Police on Wednesday informed the Delhi High Court that it would provide round-the-clock security to Nilam Katara, mother of murdered business executive Nitish Katara, whenever she visits the capital from Dehradun as she fears for her life.

Justice Yogesh Khanna was informed by the police that the officials would also protect the accommodation where she would be staying during her visit to Delhi for medical treatment or court cases. The police said Nilam Katara shall intimate them through e-mail at least 72 hours prior to her visit.

While recording the submissions made in a status report on behalf of Delhi Police, the high court disposed of her plea seeking direction to the Centre to grant her protection in Uttarakhand, where she

has recently shifted.

Advocate Pradeep Dey, representing Nilam Katara, said instead of providing protected accommodation to her only in east Delhi, the police be asked to provide her security in New Delhi and Central Delhi area also.

To this, additional standing counsel Rajesh Mahajan, representing Delhi Police, said they have no objection to it and she will be provided with the e-mail id on which she shall intimate about her visit here.

The Centre had earlier informed the high court that it has requested Uttarakhand government to provide adequate security to Nilam Katara as she was shifting to Dehradun.

Nilam Katara, in her plea, had said she needed protected accommodation whenever she visits the national capital for pursuing pending legal matters



Nilam Katara

in courts here or for medical reasons.

The high court was earlier informed that she has been provided security here since 2002 and she will be shifting to Dehradun at the end of the month due to financial and other issues.

Her counsel had submitted that she feared for her life and the high court has the power to direct the central authority to provide her security at both the places, Delhi and Dehradun.

On October 3, 2016, the Supreme Court had

awarded a 25-year jail term without any benefit of remission to Vikas Yadav and his cousin Vishal for their role in the sensational kidnapping and killing of her son Nitish Katara.

Another co-convict Sukhdev Pehalwan was also handed down a 20-year jail term in the case.

Prior to this, the Delhi High Court, while upholding the life imprisonment awarded to Vikas and Vishal Yadav by the trial court, had specified a 30-year sentence, without any remission, to both of them. It had awarded a 25-year jail term to third convict Pehalwan.

All three were convicted and sentenced for kidnapping Nitish Katara from a marriage party on the intervening night of February 16-17, 2002 and then killing him for his alleged affair with Bharti Yadav, the sister of Vikas.

— PTI

HC seeks reply on contempt plea for not extending RTE beyond 14

New Delhi, Mar. 3: The Delhi High Court Wednesday sought response of Ministry of Education on a plea seeking contempt action against the authorities for not taking decision on extension of free education under the Right To Education (RTE) Act to children of EWS even after attaining 14 years of age in the same school.

Justice Najmi Waziri questioned the Central government as to why decision has not been taken to extend RTE Act beyond 8th class and upto 12th class, despite court's directions passed in 2019.

The court listed the matter for further hearing on March 17. Advocates Ashok Agarwal and

Kumar Utkarsh, representing the NGO, said due to inaction on the part of the Central government, private schools across the country are throwing thousand of Economically Weaker Section (EWS) students out of school every year after they pass class 8th.

In December 2019, the high court had asked the Centre to take a decision on the extension of free education to disadvantaged children even after attaining the age of 14 years or beyond. The plea sought initiation of contempt proceedings against the authorities for their alleged intentional disobedience of December 9, 2019 judgement of the high court.

— PTI

Apex court notice to NIA on Navlakha's plea for default bail

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MAR. 3

The Supreme Court on Wednesday sought response from National Investigation Agency (NIA) on plea for default bail by Gautam Navlakha — one of the accused in the January 2018 Bhima Koregaon violence case.

Gautam Navlakha has moved the top court against Bombay High Court order which had upheld the NIA special court order rejecting his plea for default bail as the NIA had failed to file charge-sheet within mandatory 90 days after his arrest as per Section 167(2) of the Code of Criminal

Procedure (CrPC).

The notice returnable in two weeks was issued by a bench comprising Justice Uday Umesh Lalit and Justice K.M.Joseph.

Navlakha has contended that 34 days (August 29 to October 1, 2018) when he was put under house arrest too should be counted for calculating upper limit of 90 days period for filing charge-sheet and since the investigating agency failed to file charge-sheet within the prescribed time period he is entitled to default bail.

NIA has contended that since the period of house arrest of Navlakha was held as illegal, the same can't be counted for calculating the 90 days pre-

scribed limit to file charge-sheet under Section 167(2) of the CrPC.

Navlakha has moved the top court against the February 8, 2021, Bombay High Court order dismissing his bail plea. The high court had said that it saw "no reason to interfere with a special court's order which had earlier rejected his bail plea."

The police have charged Navlakha and other activists for allegedly making inflammatory speeches and issued provocative statements at the Elgar Parishad meet in Pune on December 31, 2017 that led to violence at Bhima Koregaon the next day.



SHORT TAKES

Clerk caught taking ₹20,000 bribe in MP

Gwalior: The Lokayukta police of Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday caught a clerk from the revenue department while accepting a bribe of ₹20,000 from a farmer here for transferring a land title, an official said. The Lokayukta police had received a complaint that Shrikrishna Bohre, a clerk from the revenue department, had demanded ₹30,000 for transferring land title from the complainant, who owns a land in Bhind district, police inspector Kavindra Singh Chouhan said. The accused had later settled for ₹20,000 and had called the complainant to a hospital to hand over the bribe amount, the official said. Bohre was caught red-handed while accepting the bribe at in the morning hours, he said. A case has been registered and further action will be taken in this regard, the official added. — PTI

Man kills girl after failed rape attempt

Bulandshahr: A 22-year-old man was arrested on Wednesday for allegedly killing a minor girl after a failed rape attempt, police said, adding that the victim's body was exhumed from his house. The accused, identified as Harendra, was arrested from Shimla. The body of the 12-year-old girl was exhumed from a pit in his house on Tuesday, days after it was buried. The girl had gone missing from her home in the Anoopshahr area of the district on February 25 after which an FIR was lodged on February 28 on the complaint received from her father, a labourer, police said. "In his complaint, the girl's father had raised suspicion over the accused. The body was buried in a pit in the courtyard of the accused's house and has been exhumed. He killed her and buried the body," Bulandshahr SSP said. — PTI

Average 2 rapes in Guj daily: House told

Gandhinagar: The crime figures of Gujarat shared in the Legislative Assembly on Wednesday revealed that average two murders, four incidents of rape and six kidnappings occurred everyday in the state in the last two years. As many as 1,944 murders, 1,853 incidents of attempt to murder, 3,095 rapes, 4,829 incidents of abduction and over 14,000 cases of suicide were reported in different parts of the state in the last two years ending December 31, 2020, the data shared by the state home department said. This information was shared in response to the questions raised by different Congress MLAs during the Question Hour on Wednesday. — PTI

INDIA TO MARK 'CHABAHAR DAY' TODAY: MINISTRY

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

India will celebrate "Chabahar Day" on Thursday in celebration of the Iranian port being developed with Indian assistance that gives New Delhi sea-land connectivity to Afghanistan and Central Asia bypassing the land route through Pakistan.

Six other countries — Armenia, Russia, Iran, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan — will also participate in the celebrations. But it is the participation of Armenia which is being seen as significant, given that country's hostilities with Azerbaijan last year over the region of Nagorno Karabakh. Azerbaijan had been closely supported by Pakistan's close friend Turkey in that conflict. In a statement, New Delhi said, "India will commemorate 'Chabahar Day' on March 4 on the margins of the Maritime India Summit-2021 which is being held from March 2-4. Ministers from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Armenia, Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, Russia and the Republic of Uzbekistan will participate in the event." It may be recalled that in a major boost to Indian strategic interests last December, India had announced that "besides Uzbekistan, other Central Asian countries have also shown interest in using the Chabahar port".

I-T raids Anuraag Kashyap, Taapsee Pannu properties

Searches in connection with filmmaker's Phantom Films, dissolved in 2018

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, MARCH 3

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

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

Speaking about these raids, I&B minister Prakash Javadekar in a briefing stated that the I-T department probes someone based on whatever information they get and the issue goes to court later. Anuraag and Taapsee are outspoken critics of the government and have lent their voice to various causes, including the ongoing farmer protests against Central laws. According to an I-T official the searches were carried out as there have been instances of tax evasion. The movies produced by the production house have been super hit, but the profits and account statements of the company are showing disproportionate

Despite LoC pact, no let up in terror mobilisation

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

Nearly a week after Pakistan reached a ceasefire agreement with India there has been no let up in mobilisation of terror operatives in PoK as more militants are being shifted from terror camps to launch pads close to the LoC and the International Border. Intelligence agencies too have cautioned that Pakistan was "not serious" about the ceasefire agreement hence security forces need to be fully alert during the coming summer months.

Sources in the security establishment said that though they were fully committed to honour the ceasefire agreement with Pakistan but they will continue to remain extremely alert along the entire Indo-Pak border. "Despite the ceasefire agreement there is no question of trusting Pakistan. We have concrete information that terror operatives across the border in PoK continue to mobilise their cadre by brining them to the launch pads so that they can infiltrate into India during the coming summer season. The possibility that Pakistan Army and border forces may use the ceasefire regroup and consolidate their assets and resources also cannot be ruled out," a senior security official based in Srinagar told this newspaper. In the last three years there have been a total of 10,752 cases of ceasefire violations in which 72 security personnel and 70 civilians were killed.

'China mobilised cyber forces to threaten India'

New Delhi, March 3: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said that China had mobilised its conventional and cyber forces to threaten India and warned that the government's "cowardice" would have tragic consequences in the future.

He cited a news report that claimed that night satellite images show Chinese build-up in the Depsang region near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh. "China mobilised its conventional and cyber forces to threaten India. Government of India (GOI) buckled. Mark my words, our land in Depsang is gone and DBO (Daulet Beg Oldie) is vulnerable. Government of India's cowardice will lead to tragic consequences in the future," he said on Twitter.

A border standoff between the Indian and Chinese armies has been on in Eastern Ladakh since May last year after a violent clash in the Pangong Tso Lake area, and both sides had gradually



► **ANURAG KASHYAP** and Taapsee Pannu are outspoken critics of the government and have lent their voice to various causes, including the ongoing farmers' protests against the Centre's three laws



BJP'S A team at work to harass, intimidate & silence those who don't fall in line. India has never seen such malafide use of IT dept, ED, NIA, police etc.

— **Prashant Bhushan,**
Senior lawyer

ly low income.

The action drew severe criticism from the Opposition parties and activists.

Senior lawyer and activist Prashant Bhushan tweeted, "Filmmaker Anuraag Kashyap, Actor Taapsee Pannu Face Income Tax Raids. BJP'S A team at work to harass, intimidate & silence those who don't fall in line. India has never seen such malafide use of IT dept, ED, NIA, police etc."

Maharashtra minister Ashok Chavan said, "Such raids have become very

common nowadays as the BJP uses the Central agencies to target people speaking up against their governments."

He added, "This happened to them as they are celebrities who voice their opinions regarding what is happening around the country."

Deputy leader of the Shiv Sena Priyanka Chaturvedi tweeted, "Hope the Income Tax department of our country, is saved from bonded slavery status soon. Same wishes for ED and CBI too."

Jaya aide Sasikala quits politics

Says would be praying continuously for return of Jaya's golden rule in TN

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR and D. SEKAR
CHENNAI, MARCH 3

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

Even her nephew and founder of AMMK, T.T.V. Dhinakaran was vexed. He told the media that the announcement came as a bolt from the blue. Great expectations in some



quarters of Sasikala storming the AIADMK citadel and establishing her supremacy have evaporated.

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

identified her as the "general secretary"

During a seat-sharing talk in Chennai a few days ago, the BJP gave great importance to her by putting pressure on AIADMK leaders to accommodate Mr Dhinakaran and Ms Sasikala in their alliance, which was vehemently resisted. The reason given by the BJP leaders was that the AIADMK votes would be split if AMMK was to stand alone.

In Wednesday night's statement, Ms Sasikala repeatedly urged the followers of MGR and

4-member panel formed to probe incident In Maha, girls stripped, forced to dance by cops

Mumbai, March 3: The Maharashtra government has formed a four-member high-level committee to conduct a probe into an incident where girls were allegedly stripped and forced to dance by policemen at a hostel in Jalgaon, state home minister Anil Deshmukh said on Wednesday.

The minister made the announcement in the state Assembly after the issue was raised by Opposition members.

BJP leader Sudhir Mungantiwar targeted the Maharashtra government, suggesting it was not serious over the issue.

According to media reports, some girls from a hostel in Jalgaon complained that people from outside and policemen were allowed to enter the facility on the pretext of a probe and some girls were forced to strip and dance.

A video clip of the same has also surfaced.

"It is a very unfortunate incident. A four-member high-level committee of officials has been formed

A four-member high-level committee of officials has been formed to conduct a probe into it... They have been asked to submit a report in two days. Action will be taken as per rules after the report is submitted.

— **Anil Deshmukh,**
Maha home minister



to conduct a probe into it... They have been asked to submit a report in two days. Action will be taken as per rules after the report is submitted," Mr Deshmukh said.

Before the minister made the announcement, Mr Mungantiwar said the incident is very serious.

He alleged the government was only taking note of such an incident and called for stricter action.

Replying to him, Mr Deshmukh said, "All information about the incident is being taken. The entire video recording and other documents are being recorded."

Strict action will be taken as per rules after gathering all the information, he said.

Objecting to it, Mr Mungantiwar said the police already has all the information about the incident.

"If the police machinery is not going to take information after spending ₹15,000 crore, why this government (is needed then)?" the BJP leader said.

BJP leader Devendra Fadnis said there is a video clip (of the incident) and it would have been a different case had it been just a news report.

The video clip of a girl being forced to dance after stripping her is a serious matter, he said. — PTI

SEARCH FOR MISSING FEMALE



General public is here by informed that two female **Names:** (1). Meena, **W/o:** Raj @ Gabbar, **R/o** A 618, Phase -I, Metro Vihar, Holambi Kalan, Delhi, **Age:** 34 years, **Height:** 5'4", **Complexion:** Fair, **Face:** Round, **Built:** Healthy, **Wearing:** Blue Colour Suit-Salwar, (2) Tannu, **D/o:** Raj @ Gabbar, **Age:** 18 years 6 Months, **Height:** 5'3", **Complexion:** Wheatish, **Face:** Long, **Built:** Thin, **Wearing:** Red Kurta and Blue Plajo, have been missing since 14.01.2021 at 11:00 AM from their house.

In this regard a vide DD No. 32A, dated 25.01.2021 has been lodged at P.S. Narela Industrial Area, Delhi. Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out information about this female but no clue has come to light so far. Any person having any information or clue about this female kindly inform to the following.

E-Mail: cbc@cbl.gov.in **SHO**
Website: http://cbl.nic.in **P.S. Narela Industrial Area, Delhi**
Fax: 011-24368639 **Ph. 011-27787592, 27787593**
Ph: 011-24368638, 24368641 **DP/803/ON/2021**

NORTHERN RAILWAY

1st Corrigendum Notice

The advertised tender notice no. No. 128-W/280/e Tender Notice/NIT-39/2020-21 dated 09.02.2021 in which one item namely "TRR(S) with 60Kg/52Kg Rails, 7.678Km in the section of SSE/P-Way/NDLS under ADEN/NDLS, TRR(S) 3.982 Km and TRR(S) 3.696 Km in the section of SSE/P-Way/NDLS under ADEN/NDLS" for Contract value of Rs. 72.85,138.71/- and EMD of Rs. 0.00/- is deleted from IREPS on administrative ground. No. 128-W/280/e Tender Notice/NIT-39/2020-21/W-3 Dated: 03.03.2021 482/2021

Serving Customers With A Smile

NORTHERN RAILWAY

OPEN E-TENDER NOTICE

The Sr. Divisional Engineer-I/II, Northern Railway, Delhi Division invites E-Tender for the following work:-

Name of Work	TRR(S) with 60Kg/52Kg Rails, 7.678 Km in the section of SSE/P-Way/NDLS under ADEN/NDLS (TRR(S) 3.982 Km and TRR(S) 3.696 Km in the section of SSE/P-Way/NDLS under ADEN/NDLS)
Approximate Cost of work	₹72.85,138.71 (Rupees Seventy Two Lakh Eighty Five Thousand One Hundred Thirty Eight and paise Seventy One only)
Earnest Money to be deposited	₹0.00
Cost of tender document	₹0.00
Date & Time of submission of tender bid and opening of tender	26.03.2021 @ 15:00 hrs.
Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	www.ireps.gov.in

The tenderer/s must be registered on the Indian Railway E-Procurement system (IREPS) site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for participating in the e-tender system.
• For all terms and conditions please refer tender document.
• No manual offers are acceptable.
• Cost of tender document and Earnest money will be acceptable through net banking or payment gateway only.

Tender No. 128-W/280/e tender Notice/NIT/41/2020-21/W-3
Dated: 03.03.2021 480/21

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTHERN RAILWAY

E-TENDER NOTICE

AMM/ETD/GZB acting for and on behalf of President of India invites E-Tender against tender no. 44215042. The details are under:-

1	Description of Item	Supply, commissioning and testing of wheel set trolley towing equipment to RDSO TC No. ELSR/TC/0090 Rev D or latest along with accessories.
2	Quantity	07 Nos.
3	Tender due on	24.03.2021, 11:00 Hrs.
4	Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	www.ireps.gov.in

Note:- 1) The tenderer/s must be registered on the Indian Railway E-Procurement System (IREPS) site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for participating in E-tender system.
2) For all terms and conditions please refer tender document.
3) No manual offers are acceptable.

No.: 16/44215042/ETD/GZB Dated: 02.03.2021 477/2021
Serving Customers with a Smile

SEARCH FOR MISSING MALE

General Public is hereby informed that one male (depicted in the photo) namely **Vijay Singh S/o Jagdev R/o H.No.562, Pana Udhayan, Narela, Delhi Aged-39** Years has been reported missing since 30.01.2021 at 7:30 AM from his residence vide DD No.43 Dated 01.02.2021 registered at Police Station Narela, Delhi. His physical description is as under:-



Complexion: Fair, **Height:** 5'6", **Face:** Round, **Built:** Medium, **Clothing:** Brown coloured Sweater, Blue coloured jeans and Black coloured shoes in feet.

Any person having any information/Clue about this missing male, may inform SHO, Narela, Delhi at E-mail : cic@cbl.gov.in or website : <http://cbl.nic.in>

Tele No. : 011-24368638 or 24368641 **Sd/-**
FAX No. : 011-24368639 **SHO, Narela, Delhi**
DP/808/ON/2021 **Tel.: 011-27280435, 27282350**

OFFICE OF THE DIVISIONAL MANAGER, CTU, & DIRECTOR TRANSPORT, U.T. CHANDIGARH	
E_TENDER NOTICE	
E tenders (Online Tenders) are invited for "Marketing Rights for Display of Advertisement (Outside and Inside) on CTU Long Route & Sub Urban Buses for a period of 4 years" on the terms and conditions and technical specifications as set out in the tender documents which can be downloaded from the website http://etenders.chd.nic.in or http://chdctu.gov.in . The important dates with regard to uploading the tenders are as under:	
Bid Reference	: CT/CTU/2020/1761 dated 03.03.2021
Date of Commencement of downloading of Bid Documents	: 04.03.2021 at 11:00 AM
Last Date and Time for EMD and Bid Processing Fee in physical form and uploading of bid (Technical and Financial in e-procurement platform http://etenders.chd.nic.in)	: 15.03.2021 up to 2.00 pm
Date and time of opening of Technical Bids	: The bids will be opened online by the Authorised Officers on 16.03.2021 at 3.00 pm
Date and time of opening of Financial Bid	: Will be intimated to technically responsive bidders
Place of opening of bids and address for communication	: Chandigarh Transport Undertaking O/o Director Transport, UT, Chandigarh, Plot No 701, Industrial Area, Phase-1, Chandigarh-160002
In case of any query / clarification	: The bidders can approach office of Director Transport, UT, Chandigarh on any working day between 9:00 am to 5:00 pm (till the date of Pre-Bid Meeting in case of any clarification / query regarding e-tender (Ph No - 2679002) or mail at directorctuchd@gmail.com
No tender except EMD and Bid Processing Fee shall be accepted in physical form. The Director, Chandigarh Transport Undertaking shall have every right to cancel / withdraw / amend the advertisement or extend the due date at any time before the proposal due date or accept or reject any tender without assigning any reason.	
Divisional Manager CTU & Director Transport, U.T., Chandigarh.	

SHORT TAKES

TMC candidates' list likely tomorrow

Kolkata: Trinamul Congress is likely to release its full list of candidates for the coming assembly poll on Friday and its election manifesto early next week, party sources said. TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee will release the candidate list like in the previous elections, the sources said. "Though we had prepared the draft list even before the poll dates were announced on February 27, we had initially decided to release the list in phases. But now most likely the entire list of 294 candidates will be declared on March 5 by the party supremo," a senior TMC leader said. The party is likely to release its manifesto on March 9, he said. According to TMC sources, the party has decided to omit from the candidates list the names of several sitting MLAs who are 80 years old or are more. — PTI

2 IISc students die on campus

Bengaluru: Two students of the Indian Institute of Science died on campus in separate incidents, the institute said on Wednesday. In the first incident, a PhD student from Bihar died of suicide by hanging. "The reason behind the suicide is not known as no note was found. Police are investigating," an IISc faculty told PTI. In the other incident, a student of MTech collapsed and was found unresponsive while playing football. — PTI

BJP panel will meet today

■ **Continued from Page 1** West Bengal core group leaders is also scheduled and could take place Wednesday night. The BJP top brass also held deliberations on the seat-sharing formula with the AGP, its ally in Assam. Assam CM Sarbananda Sonowal, state Cabinet minister minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and state party chief Ranjeet Kumar Dass attended the meeting, which was held at Mr Shah's residence. These leaders later also met at BJP president J.P. Nadda's residence. For the BJP, the stakes are high in West Bengal and Assam. In West Bengal, it mounted an aggressive all-out campaign, deploying a number of leaders from various states and considered adept in poll campaigning, to end the 10-year-old reign of chief minister Mamata Banerjee. In Assam, where the party came to power for the first time in 2016, the BJP has been pulling out all the stops to retain power, with the Congress joining hands with regional parties to capture its old bastion. In Tamil Nadu, the party has allied with the AIADMK, which is now in power, and in Kerala, the party leadership is hoping to improve its voteshare.

'Covaxin 81% effective'

■ **Continued from Page 1** programme as the vaccine is still under study and has been approved only for restricted emergency use under trial mode. The other vaccine being used in India – Covishield – had shown an efficacy rate of 70 per cent after two full doses. However, one of the regimens with a half dose and a full dose showed 90 per cent efficacy against the virus. The Phase 3 trial of COVAXIN was conducted in a total of 25,800 individuals across 21 sites between 18-98 years of age, including 2,433 over the age of 60 and 4,500 with comorbidities.

"The bench-to-bedside journey of the completely indigenous Covid-19 vaccine in less than eight months' time showcases the immense strength of Atmanirbhar Bharat to fight the odds and stand tall in the global public health community. It is also a testament to India's emergence as a global vaccine superpower," said Dr Balram Bhargava, director general, ICMR. The COVAXIN is the first Covid-19 vaccine that has been developed completely in India. ICMR has claimed that pre-clinical studies in small animals and hamsters showed promising results in terms of safety and immunogenicity. Meanwhile, Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Karnataka continued to report a surge in daily new cases. Together, they account for 85.95 per cent of the new Covid-19 cases reported in the past 24 hours.

Officials say Mirwaiz freed from detention

Hurriyat leader refrains from political comments

YUSUF JAMEEL SRINAGAR, MARCH 3

The Jammu and Kashmir police said on Wednesday said that separatist leader and the Valley's chief Muslim cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq is no longer under house detention. When contacted over the phone around 4 pm, the Mirwaiz said that a contingent of the police continued to be deployed outside his residence in Srinagar's Nigeen area but it appeared the siege around the premises was being lifted.

The Mirwaiz who heads a faction of Kashmiri separatist parties' amalgam All Parties Hurriyat Conference was among hundreds of politicians, human rights activists, civil society and trade union leaders and lawyers placed under house arrest or jailed by the authorities ahead of or soon after J&K was stripped of its special status and split up into two Union Territories on August 5, 2019.

The Mirwaiz refused to



Mirwaiz Umar

speak on his prolonged detention, the prevailing political situation in J&K or the recent developments in the South Asian region, the subjects he would frequently talk louder on before his house detention. He said that he would be addressing the weekly congregation at Srinagar's Grand Mosque on Friday. If permitted it will be his first such public appearance in many months. Traditionally, incumbent Mirwaiz or chief priest delivers customary pre-namaz speech at the historic place on Fridays which is often followed by a speech by him on current affairs.

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

At a meeting held at Mirwaiz Manzil, the Mirwaiz clan's seat located in central Srinagar, earlier during the day on Wednesday, the MMU had said that due to "continued detention of Mirwaiz Umar the pulpits of J&K's largest religious and spiritual centre — Jama Masjid Srinagar — has fallen silent for the last 82 Fridays, which otherwise reverberated with the call for Dawah, the Islam's message for wisdom and preaching Quran and spreading the message of Prophet Muhammad.

Kamal vows to turn jallikattu 'more humane'

AGE CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH 3

Actor Kamal Haasan promised to turn jallikattu into a 'more humane international spectator sport' if his Makkal Neethi Maaim (MNM) comes to power in the state after Assembly elections.

Releasing a manifesto that elucidated on development of youth, women and sports, Haasan told young people that jobs would come in search of them.

Promising 50 lakh new job opportunities during his term in office, Haasan said the jobs would be within 100 km of the individual's pin code.

Other sops to youth include revision of unemployment allowance based on cost of living index, incentives to those who gave employment to five or more youth and e-bikes on zero interest to first time employees.

Women would get more jobs in the uniformed services as 50 per cent of the forces would be women.

Uddhav blasts Shah over denial of CM post promise BJP has no right to chant 'Bharat mata ki jai': CM

SONU SHRIVASTAVA MUMBAI, MARCH 3



What is your (BJP) mother institution's (RSS) contribution during the independence struggle? Therefore, you (the BJP) don't have the right to say 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai'.

— Uddhav Thackeray

Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday directly attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah. Mr Thackeray had so far refrained from speaking negatively about Mr Modi and Mr Shah and had left that task to his deputies in Shiv Sena. However, while speaking in the state Assembly on the governor's speech, the chief minister raised questions about the PM fund and alleged that anyone questioning it is labelled as a "traitor". He also accused Mr Shah of lying about the assurance given to him about the chief minister's post and said that the BJP leader is "shameless".

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

Referring to Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Mr Thackeray said, "What is your (BJP) mother's institution's (RSS) contribution during the independence struggle? Therefore, you (the BJP) don't have the right to say 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai'."

Slamming the BJP leadership for not keeping the promises made to him during a closed door room meeting at Matoshri in 2019, Mr Thackeray said, "How you (Amit Shah) shamelessly denied what was discussed in Balasaheb's (Thackeray) room. Shameless is an unparliamentary word. But there isn't more apt

for this."

Asking why the Union government has not conferred Bharat Ratna on Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the Hindutva ideologue, Thackeray said in the Assembly that the BJP should not teach Hindutva to its former ally, the Shiv Sena.

"Letters were sent (to the Centre) twice, seeking Bharat Ratna for Savarkar. Who confers Bharat Ratna? It is the right of the prime minister and a committee," Thackeray said.

The BJP has been targeting the Shiv Sena chief for "giving up" his Hindutva ideology for sharing power with the NCP and Congress. Among other things, it has questioned the 'delay' in renaming Aurangabad in central Maharashtra, named for the Mughal emperor, as Sambhajinagar. "You don't give Bharat Ratna to Savarkar and you preach us about renaming?" the chief minister said, adding that Aurangabad will definitely be renamed.

'Doors being opened for talented youth many sectors'

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

Greater opportunities have been opened for talented youth in several sectors such as space, atomic energy and agriculture as limiting knowledge and research is a big injustice to the country's potential, the Prime Minister said on Wednesday.

Addressing a webinar on the implementation of the Union Budget provisions in the education sector, Mr Narendra Modi said the new National Education Policy has encouraged the use of local language and now it is the responsibility of all academics and experts of every language to prepare the best content available in the country and the world in Indian languages.

This is definitely possible in this era of technology, he asserted.

Mr Modi said education, skill, research and innovation were the second biggest focus of budget after health.

"The Budget has broadened our efforts to link education with employability and entrepreneurial capability," he said.

As a result of these efforts, India today is among the top three countries in terms of scientific publications, Mr Modi said. He said India has joined the top 50 countries in the Global Innovation Index and is continuously improving.

To build a self-reliant India, it is important that youngsters have confidence in themselves, he said, asserting that it comes only when they have complete faith in their education and knowledge.

Stressing the importance of local languages in the education system, Modi said experts know that language plays an important role in understanding a subject.

'West Bengal: 37% of sitting MLAs face criminal cases'

Cong, ISF break ice over seats

Kolkata, March 3: Thirty-seven per cent of the sitting MLAs in West Bengal — 104 out of the 282 — have criminal cases against them, according to a study jointly conducted by the West Bengal Election Watch and the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

In a report released on Wednesday, the civil society organisations said that 90 (32 per cent) of the sitting legislators in the state assembly have declared having serious criminal cases against them.

"Serious criminal cases" are non-bailable offences that entail punishment for more than five years, a spokesperson of the West Bengal Election Watch (WBEW) said.

The WBEW along with the ADR has analysed the criminal background, financial, education, gender and other details of sitting MLAs based on their self-sworn affidavits and found that 61 of the 205 Trinamool Congress MLAs and 15 of the 39 legislators of the Congress have serious criminal cases against them.

Kolkata, March 2: The Congress and the ISF on Tuesday managed to break the ice between them over seat-sharing for the upcoming Assembly elections in West Bengal but talks are still underway for some constituencies, sources said.

Newly-floated Indian Secular Front (ISF) had initially demanded 15 seats from the Congress, but the party had agreed to give only five to it.

However, during the fresh talks, the grand old party agreed to give eight seats in all but the Abbas Siddiqui-led party is

demanding two-three more constituencies, they said. "The talks were held in a positive manner and we agreed to put up a united fight against communal BJP and undemocratic TMC to ensure their defeat. All the participants understood the need for the talks to succeed to prevent splitting of votes," a Congress leader said.

The final list is scheduled to be announced on March 7 and 8 and a large number of young CPI (M) leaders will find place in it, a leader of the party said. — PTI

Major fire in Odisha's tiger reserve

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 3

A major forest fire has been raging in Similipal sanctuary spread across 2,750 square kilometer for the past one week endangering the lives of animals. Moreover, many trees in the sanctuary have been turned into ashes due to the forest fire.

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

Union environment minister Prakash Javadekar has directed officials to take immediate action to bring the fire under control and report him on the measures. "I have ordered officers to take immediate action and report it to



A major fire rages in Odisha's Similipal sanctuary

me," Mr Javadekar tweeted Tuesday.

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

Earlier on March 2, petroleum minister

background, financial, education, gender and other details of 282 MLAs out of the 294 sitting MLAs".

Ten seats are vacant in the current assembly, while analysis of the affidavits of two MLAs could not be done as they were "unclear", the report said.

There are 97 'crorepati' MLAs. Of them, 78 belong to the ruling TMC and 13 are from the Congress, it said. — PTI

Dharmendra Pradhan drew Mr Javadekar's attention on the Similipal fire by tagging him on the social media. Mr Pradhan also tagged chief minister Naveen Patnaik and sought his attention.

Odisha PCC chief Niranjan Patnaik also raised concern over the forest fire in Similipal.

Anti-govt views...

■ **Continued from Page 1** the nation, and therefore he deserves to be removed from Parliament." It claimed that his statement is "anti-national" and "seditious", and therefore sought that the government be directed to declare him as being "not deserving" to be a member of Parliament. Dr Abdullah is the sitting Lok Sabha member. The PIL said if Dr Abdullah was allowed to continue as an MP, it will amount to approval of all anti-national activities by anyone in India. Rajat Sharma is a secretary and trustee of "Vishwa Guru India: Vision of Sardar Patel".

Alliances in TN in turmoil

■ **Continued from Page 1** of leaders in the TNCC was not in favour of continuing with the alliance if the DMK refused to give in to their demand.

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

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

The DMK's offer to give more seats if parties like the VCK and MDMK could contest on the "rising sun" election symbol, too, has angered the allies as they want to maintain their individual identity and also aspire for recognition as state parties.

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

Most of the seats that the BJP is eyeing at are also being sought by either the PMK or certain AIADMK functionaries, who had expended their resources in developing the constituencies. The earlier hitch in the AIADMK-BJP ties has been ironed out with the BJP not insisting on the AIADMK accommodating the AMMK of T.T.V. Dhinakaran.

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

Apart from that, the

AIADMK was unable to finalise the agreement with the DMK as the party was also demanding a Rajya Sabha seat in future, besides Assembly seats. With the AIADMK saying a firm no, it was also learnt that the DMKD was not averse to switching over to the DMK-led front.

If the DMK agrees to its demand for the Rajya Sabha seat and if the Congress breaks away from the present alliance, the DMKD might land in that alliance, sources say, adding that the possibilities, however, were very remote.

But if the Congress snaps ties with the DMK and goes on its own, some other small parties, now peeved with the way in which they were treated by the DMK negotiating team, might also leave the alliance, sources say.

However, none of the present allies of the DMK would cross over to the AIADMK camp as the BJP was there and that could possibly lead to the formation of yet another front.

Karnataka mantri quits

■ **Continued from Page 1** Jarkiholi, alleging he had sexually harassed a "job aspirant" and threatened her and family with dire consequences.

Dubbing it as "sex for job" scandal, purported video clips showing Mr Jarkiholi getting intimate with an unidentified woman were widely aired by Kannada news channels.

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

BJP national general secretary in-charge of Karnataka Arun Singh and party national general secretary (organisation) B.L. Santosh reportedly held discussions on the charges and CD this morning and communicated the party's decision to the state leadership, keeping in mind the

Assembly polls in five states and also bypolls and panchayat elections in Karnataka.

Mr Yediyurappa then called party MLA from Arabhavi, Balachandra Jarkiholi, who is Ramesh's brother and informed him of the decision.

Reacting to the charges, Ramesh on Tuesday night had said he was shocked and the videos were "100 per cent fake." He had also sought a probe, while asserting that he would quit as minister and also from politics if proven wrong.

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

also those behind it.

Terming it an attempt to defame the family as they have made it big in politics, Balachandra also threatened to file a Rs 100 crore defamation suit against those who released the "fake CD".

According to sources, Mr Yediyurappa reportedly assured Mr Jarkiholi that he would be inducted to the Cabinet again if he was cleared of the charges levelled against him. There were also reports that he was promised that Balachandra Jarkiholi would be inducted in his place.

However, clarifying that there were no conditions put before the resignation was tendered, Balachandra Jarkiholi said the CM sent the resignation to the governor, a probe would take place and Ramesh would come out innocent. — PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

4 MARCH 2021

Cyber warfare and state surveillance new normal

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

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

The key to containing urban surges is the vaccine even if there is no guarantee on efficacy against the Brazilian strain, which is said to be re infecting those who have had the virus

Cyber security is the watchword but cyber protection is an expensive exercise as dependence on foreign hardware and software in India is extremely high and vulnerabilities exist in all systems that are networked for operational efficiencies. Even as the Indian Army has been priding itself on electronic warfare capability it enjoys on the borders, LAC and LoC, military experts have been calling for replacement of Chinese-made hardware in utilities like power and railways. Vaccine research and manufacturing has also become the target of attacks lately suggesting how susceptible the world is to cyber theft. The government has a great responsibility towards funding cyber security measures in all sectors that are strategically important while individuals are left to their own devices to protect their privacy.

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

India is out of recession, but...

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

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

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

THE ASIAN AGE

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Sunanda K. Datta-Ray
Reflections



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

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

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

But surely the world's only super-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

Subhani



India must learn from Chanakya, not a Shah!



Mohan Guruswamy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

FARMERS' CHALLENGE

Dissident farmers have decided to take on the government in more ways than one. The protesting unions will send out teams to the four election-bound states and one Union territory. Punjab farmer Balbir Singh Rajewal, who heads his own faction of the Bharatiya Kisan Union, said they will not canvass support for any political party but will appeal to the people not to vote for the BJP. In West Bengal, the Kisan Samyukt Morcha is already part a similar "No Vote to BJP" campaign. It will be interesting to see how the BJP deals with this challenge.

Mohd A. Khan
Hyderabad

MYTHBUSTER

THE MYTH OF the ₹1.76 lakh crores worth presumptive loss in the 2G auctions spread by former comptroller and auditor general of India Vinod Rai must be laid to rest now that the 5G auctions are around the corner with the government receiving bids worth Rs 80K crores. The claims of the CAG led to the defeat of the UPA government, leapfrogging the BJP to power. Even though the courts exonerated the accused of charges of corruption, the stigma remains and is brought up regularly by the BJP to discredit the UPA constituents.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

BOOST FOR AAP

THE AAM AADMI PARTY has won four out of five wards and the Congress one in the Delhi municipal bypolls. The AAP had won four seats in the last polls while one seat was held by the BJP. The results show that people are happy with AAP's performance. In 2015, it won 67/70 seats in the Assembly elections, in 2020, it won 62/70 seats and now its score is 4/5 in the civic by-polls. The BJP's zero, on the other hand, shows that people are upset with it.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

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

SHORT TAKES

OZ AG DENIES
RAPE CHARGE,
WON'T RESIGN

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

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

BOY, 11, NABBED
FOR BRINGING
GUN TO SCHOOL

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

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

MEXICO PASSES
BILL FAVOURING
FOSSIL FUEL

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

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

15 KILLED AFTER
SUV CRASHES
INTO SEMITRUCK

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

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

PIO SOLD MEDS
IN UK BLACK
MARKET, JAILED

London, March 3: An Indian-origin pharmacist in Britain has been sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment for selling hundreds of thousands of doses of addictive prescription drugs in the black market. Balket Singh Khaira, who worked at his mother's Khaira Pharmacy on the high street in West Bromwich, was sentenced on Tuesday. The court was informed that the 36-year-old sold the restricted medicines to be sold only with prescriptions at huge profit during 2016 and 2017, with the value of the pills on the black market estimated at over £1 million. "It is a serious criminal offence to sell controlled, unlicensed or prescription-only medicines," said Grant Powell, Enforcement Officer with the UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Authority.

10 rockets hit US
airbase in Iraq

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Myanmar security men gun
down at least 6 protesters

Authorities extend crackdown on protests against last month's coup

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Blast at Dutch virus test centre

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

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

He said it was clear that the explosive didn't "get there by accident. But we have no idea at the moment who exactly left it there and what the intention was." Police said a metal cylinder that had exploded was found outside the building. The northern regions of North Holland province have been identified as a virus hotspot in recent weeks, with infection numbers higher than

Texas biggest state
to lift mask mandate

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

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

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

date. Abbott has faced criticism from his party over the measure, which was imposed last July. The administration of US President Joe Biden, a Democrat, has made it clear Coronavirus restrictions are still necessary to contain the spread of the disease that has claimed the lives of over 516,400 people in the country.

Abbott made the announcement during a business event where he issued an executive order rescinding most of his earlier executive orders like the mask mandate. He said businesses of any type will be allowed to open fully from March 10.

— PTI

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

the national average.

In January, rioters torched a Coronavirus test facil-

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

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

Tanden withdraws Biden
budget chief nomination

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

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

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

Commerce secy
gets Senate nod

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

turning to politics.

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

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

HOUSE READY
TO PASS POLL,
ETHICS BILL

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

House Resolution 1, which touches on virtually every aspect of the electoral process, would restrict partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts, strike down hurdles to voting and bring transparency to a murky campaign finance system that allows wealthy donors to anonymously bankroll political causes.

"Our purpose was to remove... obstacles of participation for Democrats or Republicans. That's what the law requires, that was the right thing to do," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Tuesday on the House floor. — AP

FILM | FEST

French screenwriter-director Celine's film, *Petite Maman*, had its world preview on Wednesday

Sciamma's film is a gentle, warm ode to human imagination

SUPARNA SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3



Imagination is no child's play.

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

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

French screenwriter and director Celine Sciamma, who has been consistently

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

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

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

curious beyond her age. They share a warm, loving relationship, but Nelly is also acutely aware of her mother's silence and sadness. Nelly is helping her parents clean out her mother's childhood home and in between chores, often at night, she asks Marion questions about her childhood, the wood hut she had built, the operation she had to undergo. But Marion doesn't want to tackle her past.

"You always ask so many questions at bedtime."

"I only see you at bedtime."

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

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

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

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



mature filmmaking.

Shot in a house and a forest lit by yellow and red autumnal leaves, *Petite Maman* has few dialogue and yet it beautifully con-

veys feelings and emotions through the simplest of daily routines and interactions.

Shot during the Corona pandemic, *Petite Maman*

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

quick BITES

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

* As of 8:30 PM IST

India ahead in terms of women in senior mgmt

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

Services expand at fastest rate in a year in Feb.



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

Podcast series on Indian entrepreneurs

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

Oye! Rickshaw launches battery swapping platform

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

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■ Spectrum auction helps market regain momentum

Bulls in 'pawri' mode



RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 3

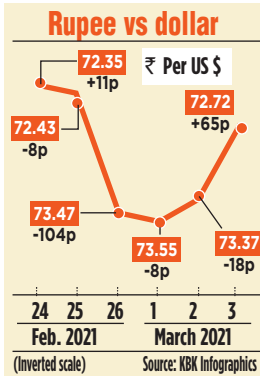
The stock market moved up for the third consecutive session, gaining over 2 per cent on Wednesday and making investors richer by over Rs 10 lakh crore since the steep, over 3.5 per cent fall last Friday. This week's spectrum auction, which fetched the government Rs 77,814 crore, seems to have buoyed market sentiments. Index heavyweight Reliance Industries and rival telecom company Bharti Airtel gained 4.52 per cent and 0.92 per cent, respectively, after they put in majority of the bids in the spectrum sale. Despite mixed global cues, with the overnight US market closing in the red, the Sensex opened higher and kept the momentum to close with a gain of 1147 points, or 2.28 per cent, at 51,444 points. The Nifty-50 gained 326

points, or 2.19 per cent, to close at 15,245. The return of foreign investors after last Friday's heavy selling seems to have stabilised the domestic market. Foreign portfolio investors were net buyers of equities worth Rs 2,088.70 crore on Wednesday after Rs 2,223.16 crore buying on Tuesday. Domestic institutions also turned net buyers on Wednesday by Rs 392.91 crore. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies crossed the Rs 210-lakh crore mark for the first time. The BSE Mid-cap and Small-cap indices gained 1.45 per cent and 1.34 per cent, respectively. "A stellar rally across BFSI & Metals powered indices higher today by 2.3 per cent with the market breadth improving dramatically in afternoon. Investors cherry-picked AMCs, HFCs and the day also witnessed keen interest in sugar

₹ gains 65p, but rising trend may not last

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, MARCH 3

The rupee on Wednesday closed 65 paise stronger, as investor appetite for emerging market assets improved after the US treasury yields continued to cool off and weakened the dollar globally. However experts said that further appreciation of the rupee will be limited due to the hardening of the US 10-year yields. Sriram Iyer, senior research analyst, currency and commodities, Reliance Capital, said, "The rupee has been appreciating for the last two-three sessions due to corporate dollar and portfolio inflows in our equity markets, but this appreciation could be limited due to expectation of further hardening of the US treasury yields as the market is factoring good economic outlook supported by the US government stimulus plan and steps taken by the US Federal Reserve to support the economy." "The 10 year US yields, which is at 1.4 per cent right now, could harden



to 1.8 per cent which will support the US dollar, and if that happens, the rupee would weaken. In the short-term 72.50 will remain a key support for the USD-INR pair while on the upside 73.25 will remain a key resistance point," added Iyer. The US Fed will be worried if the US yields hardened further as it wants to pump money at lower rates, added Iyer. At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened at 73.26 and after hitting an intra-day high of 72.71 and a low of 73.26, finally settled at 72.72 against the dollar.

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

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

Insurance brokers brought under ombudsman in expanded mandate

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

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

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

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

Lexus drives in LC 500h at ₹2.15 crore

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, MARCH 3

Lexus, the Japanese car giant Toyota's luxury arm, on Wednesday launched a limited-edition model of its sports coupe, the LC 500h in the country at Rs 2.15 crore at pan-India showroom. The company claims that the model is inspired by the graceful flight of birds and airplanes to elevate the sense of driving with refined aerodynamics. The grand-touring coupe's special edition features borrow from an earlier partnership between air race pilot Yoshihide



Muroya and Lexus engineers that helped him win the 2017 Red Bull Air Race World Championships. A team consisting of the same engineers worked on the design of the Lexus LC 500h. "We are very excited to announce the addition of the exclusive limited edition of the LC 500h. With

its bold, aviation-inspired design language, we are confident that it will be well received by our discerning guests," PB Venugopal, president at Lexus India said. The limited edition model has been built by the same set of engineers who have built the LFA supercar.

Amazon, Google vie for digital payments platform to rival NPCI

SARITHA RAI
MARCH 3

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

users to link their phone numbers to their bank accounts. "The regulator probably doesn't want concentration risk as the UPI backbone has become critical to the economy," said Nandan Nilekani, the man behind Aadhaar. "With more licensees and these systems presumably being able to operate seamlessly with each other, the aim seems to be to reinvigorate innovation and push digital payments even deeper into the country," said Nilekani, a co-founder and chairman of Infosys. Though commissions on digital payments are thin, the volume is potentially huge. Card and mobile payments represented only 21 per cent of \$781 billion in retail purchases at brick-and-mortar stores in 2019, according to an estimate by S&P Global Market Intelligence. The new licensees could make money by charging businesses transaction fees. They can also break new territory by setting up and operating ATMs, point-of-sale systems, remittance services and new innovative payment solutions.

—Bloomberg

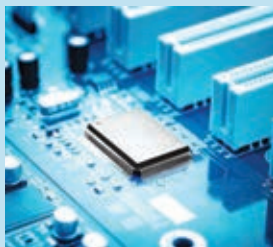
‘Chip shortages could extend into next year’

DEBBY WU
MARCH 3

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

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

Some chip packaging



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

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

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

—Bloomberg

Extreme weather puts ₹6.2 L cr debt at risk

ARCHANA CHAUDHARY
MARCH 3

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

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

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

the effects of cyclones and floods on loan repayments in farming and related sectors. Lenders accounted for 87 per cent of the total risk, valued at about \$97 billion, across 67 Indian companies that responded to CDP. "Climate is the biggest risk to businesses in the long run. Financial institutions are beginning to understand it," said Damandeep Singh, Delhi-based director of CDP India. "As investors look at funding companies based on environmental, social and governance disclosures, we've seen many more companies report climate change risk."

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

ses from 220 small and large Indian companies.

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

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

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

—Bloomberg

TRACKING | VITALS

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

Startup offers remote patient monitoring

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

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

The startup has already tied up with 70 hospitals across the country in three months for remote patient monitoring. "We are looking to part-

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

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

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



through the pandemic and beyond.

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

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

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

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

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

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

—PTI

SHORT TAKES

Sania-Andreja sail into semis

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

Paddler Sharath off to flying start

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

Hockey side hold Germany on tour

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

Suns scorch Lakers 114-104

Los Angeles: LeBron James exploded for 38 points but it was not enough to prevent the Los Angeles Lakers from sliding to a 114-104 defeat against the Phoenix Suns on Tuesday. A tussle clash between the Western Conference rivals saw Phoenix star Devin Booker ejected for two technical fouls during the second half before the Suns rallied to close out the win. LeBron James led the scorers and chipped in six assists and five rebounds, but a Lakers offense still missing the injured Anthony Davis failed to fire consistently. The Suns' victory saw them leapfrog the Lakers into second place in the Western Conference with 23 wins and 11 defeats. The NBA champions Lakers are third at 24-12. Dario Saric led Phoenix's scoring with 21 points — including 10 in the fourth quarter — while Mikal Bridges added 19. — *AFP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

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

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THE LAST GAMBIT

Resurgent India plot final move to trap England

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

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

While a draw always seems a safe option in a game like this but Kohli and coach Ravi Shastri, with their attacking instincts, wouldn't like to play a defensive game which at times can be counter-productive.

India laid a venomous trap on the refurbished Motera and with the pink ball, demolished England inside two days, messing more with their minds than getting any real help from the track.

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

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

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

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

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

— *PTI*

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

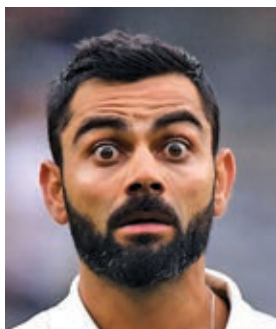
Virat shuts spin-track noise

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

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

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

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



Virat Kohli

Kohli said at the pre-match press conference.

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

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

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

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

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

NUMBERS GAME

TESTS AT NARENDRA MODI STADIUM:

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

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

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

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

— *S. PERVEZ QAISER*

Kohli bats for rotation policy in bubble times

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

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

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

“The kind of systems

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

— **VIRAT KOHLI**
India cricket captain

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

Bio-bubbles became imperative for resumption of sporting action

after COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc in 2020.

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

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

Srikanth shines in Swiss opener

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

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

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

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

PRANNOY CRASHES

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

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

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

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

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

— *PTI*

STAR MARY CRUISES INTO SPANISH TOURNEY SEMIS

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

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

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

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

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

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

— *PTI*

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

Jesus brace helps City hunt Wolves

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

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

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

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

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

— *AFP*

RONALDO DIGS DEEP TO BLANK SPEZIA IN ITALY

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

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

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

“The gap is just the points that separate us,” Juventus coach Pirlo said.

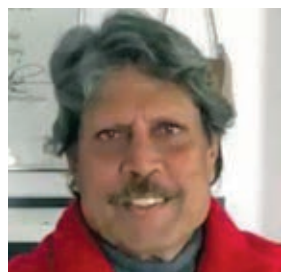
— *AFP*

Kapil, Pele receive first dose of Covid-19 vaccine

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

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

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



Kapil Dev

include everyone above 60 and those over 45 with comorbidities.

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

Elsewhere, football great Pele also received his first

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

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

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

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

— *Agencies*

Agar snares six as Oz down NZ

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

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

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

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

with two games to go.

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

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

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

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