

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

KARIMNAGAR | TUESDAY | 2 MARCH 2021

WEATHER



Max: 36.8°C
Min: 22.2°C
RH: 48%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Hazy sky.
Maximum/Minimum
temp. 36/20°C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Bahula Chaviti till
2.59 am (Wednesday)
Star: Chitta till 3.28 am
Varjyam: 12.50 pm to 2.18 pm
Durmuhurtam: 8.57 am to
9.44 am; 11.14 pm to 12.03 am
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
HJRI CALENDAR
Rajab 17, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.33 am
Zohar: 12.38 pm
Asar: 4.44 pm
Maghrib: 6.28 pm
Isha: 7.36 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.22 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.34 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 8.30 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 8.06 AM

COUNTER POINT



Don't insist on the number of seats... our MLAs will anyway defect to the winning party after polls!

SHORT TAKES

LPG price hiked again by ₹25

New Delhi: Cooking gas LPG price was on Monday hiked by ₹25 per cylinder across all categories, including subsidised fuel and those availed by Ujjwala scheme beneficiaries — the fourth increase in rates in a month's time. LPG prices have gone up by ₹125 per 14.2-kg cylinder since the beginning of February, price data from state-owned oil marketing companies showed. Also, jet fuel prices were hiked by a steep 6.5 per cent.

Car firms out of Covid slowdown

Pune: Major car makers in the country on Monday reported robust double-digit sales in February, bringing cheers to automakers depressed from the Covid pandemic woes which had hit hard the auto industry. The top 10 car makers who produce 97 per cent of the domestic sales clocked 24 per cent rise in domestic volumes in February. ■ Report on Page 7

Warrant issued against Kangana

Mumbai: A local court on Monday issued a bailable warrant against actor Kangana Ranaut after she failed to appear before it in connection with a defamation complaint filed against her by lyricist Javed Akhtar. Her advocate, however, said she would file a petition in the Bombay HC challenging the process.

MAN VS WILD

River, source of drinking water, is Mugger sanctuary

Croc kills 50-yr-old in Manjeera

T.S.S. SIDDHARTH | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 1

A 50-year-old man died of crocodile attack close to the banks of River Manjeera on Sunday when he was trying to get one of his buffaloes back from the water to the shore.

According to a forest department official, G Ramulu from Esoipeta village in Pulkal mandal of

ONE OF HIS animals strayed into the water. As he went after the animal, he happened to have passed by a crocodile's nest. The crocodile felt threatened and attacked the man.

Sangareddy district was grazing his cattle near the river. One of his animals strayed into the water. As

he went after the animal to get it back to the land, he happened to have passed by a crocodile's nest with eggs in it. The crocodile felt threatened and attacked the man.

The crocodile dragged Ramulu into the water and he could not save himself. The villagers refused to have a post-mortem done on the body.

Manjeera river and its

dam are popular weekend destinations for many from the city. The river and the reservoir are a declared Mugger Crocodile sanctuary.

Last year, after a crocodile was spotted near Pasalwadi, officials had cautioned people to remain safe. As per the 2017 census of crocodiles in the sanctuary, this is home to 171 muggers.

NATION | 4

SC asks rape accused if he'll wed minor girl

WORLD | 5

Sarkozy sentenced to jail for corruption

SPORTS | 8

Sindhu, Saina set up Swiss slugfest

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi being administered the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine by sister P. Niveda at AIIMS in New Delhi on Monday. During his brief stay at the hospital, the PM chatted with the nurses and other staff and even cracked jokes with them. Niveda said the PM, after getting the vaccine shot, remarked: "Laga bhi diya, pata bhi nahin chala" (Already done? I didn't even feel it). She was from poll-bound Puducherry. The other nurse, Rosamma Anil from Kerala, said it was the happiest day of her life "because our PM Modi ji came to our AIIMS hospital for taking vaccine."

Modi takes Covaxin shot, launches 2nd phase drive

DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

The second phase vaccination drive to cover the general population above 60 years and those above 45 with co-morbidities began Monday with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and some of his Cabinet ministers taking the first dose of the anti-Covid jab. The 70-year-old PM took the first dose of the indigenously made Covaxin at New Delhi's AIIMS to launch the second phase drive.

"Took my first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine at AIIMS. Remarkable how our doctors and scientists have worked in quick time to strengthen the global fight against Covid-19. I appeal to all those who are eligible to take the vaccine. Together, let us make India Covid-19 free!" the PM tweeted after taking the vaccine shot.

The decision to take the Covaxin shot by the PM was intended to quell the apprehensions and suspicion over the India-made

100-yr-old takes Covid jab in city

BALU PULIPAKA | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 1

A 100-year-old man became the oldest person to receive Covid-19 vaccination in Telangana on Monday. The centenarian, Jaidev Chowdhry, was among the first to get vaccinated at a private hospital in the city.

A former entrepreneur, Chowdhry said he was looking forward to get vaccinated as he wanted to "enjoy an active social life of quality."

"There has been a lot of hesitation among people over taking the vaccine because of misinformation," he said.

vaccine as several Opposition leaders have questioned its safety and efficacy. The government has given emergency use



Jaidev Chowdhry

Visibly happy after receiving the first dose, Chowdhry said people should get vaccinated not just for themselves but also to keep their families and loved ones safe.

authorisation to Bharat Biotech, which has developed Covaxin in collaboration with the ICMR-NIN.

Cracks show up in BJP, AIADMK alliance in TN

G BABU JAYAKUMAR &
D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 1

The DMDK, founded by actor Vijayakanth, is seemingly angry with the AIADMK, its coalition party, and has sent out signals of a possible break-up by calling for applications from its cadre to contest all seats across Tamil Nadu.

Though the announcement of the schedule for the Assembly elections has led to hectic activity with leading parties try-

ing to wrap up alliances and start campaigns, allies of the AIADMK are playing truant, demanding seats more than what is being offered to them by the coalition leader.

After the PMK, the ally with the biggest votebank in northern TN, accepted the 23 seats that the AIADMK offered, talks with the BJP and the DMDK are said to have gone south, particularly the parleys with the BJP's top honcho and home minister, Amit Shah, in Chennai on Sunday night.

The talks, in which both chief minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and deputy chief minister O. Panneerselvam took part, went on till late night as Mr Shah's scheduled arrival to Chennai from the districts by road was delayed a bit.

Since the BJP did not make any announcements on the finalisation of the alliance, which Mr Shah had said he would do on Monday, doubts were being raised about whether the talks yielded substantial results.

PG 2: AIMIM WILL CONTEST ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS IN TN

KCR surveys hint at easy win for TRS in elections

Tells party not to be complacent in upcoming MLC, N'Sagar polls

L. VENKAT RAM REDDY | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 1

Internal surveys commissioned by the TRS chief and Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao have boosted the morale of the party leaders and cadre.

Sources in TRS said Mr Chandrashekar Rao had commissioned six surveys by various private agencies between February 1 and February 28 on a weekly basis, covering Hyderabad, Rangareddy, Mahabubnagar, Warangal, Nalgonda and Khammam districts on the MLC polls on March 14 and the Nagarjunasagar assembly bypoll later.

All these surveys indicated a clear edge for TRS in all these elections, the sources claimed. The surveys noticed a 'positive wave' for the TRS among the voters. What's important now is, how the TRS leaders and cadre convert this into votes in the next two weeks. The survey reports cautioned party leaders and cadre against any complacency at this stage as the last two weeks before polling have the scope to change the political complexion.

It was since a long time that Chandrashekar Rao has plunged into action to

deal with elections directly. After Mr Chandrashekar Rao became CM in June 2014, barring 2018 December assembly polls, all the remaining elections were monitored by his son and TRS working president K.T. Rama Rao.

All the elections held between 2014 and 2020 were monitored by Mr Rama Rao. However, the party received setbacks in the recent Dubbak and GHMC bypolls in which BJP, on the other hand, has put up a stunning performance.

The ongoing MLC election schedule came at a time when it has become very important for the TRS to check the rise of the BJP in Telangana. Hence, KCR himself is guiding the leadership in shaping the party's MLC election strategy. The CM would be campaigning, which shows the importance he has attached to this election.

KCR has been holding teleconferences with ministers and party poll in-charges from Pragathi Bhavan every day for six to eight hours every day. He is sharing the details of his internal survey reports and guiding them on how to overcome the deficiencies pointed out in the survey reports.

KTR, Ramchander slug it out on jobs

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 1

The war of words between TRS working president and IT minister K.T. Rama Rao and BJP MLC candidate for Hyderabad-Rangareddy Mahabubnagar Graduates Constituency N. Ramchandrarao has escalated into a Twitter squabble on Monday. Both the leaders took a dig at each other with their posts on the social media site.

After writing an open letter to Rama Rao, asking him to prove the TRS government's claim of filling 1.32 lakh posts in government departments during the past seven years, the BJP leader dared Mr Rama Rao for a debate at Osmania University Arts College on Monday.

When the minister did not turn up, Ramchander Rao tweeted, "I Am Here at Arts College. Where are you, Mr. @KTRTRS?" (sic).

Taking the battle to the rival's territory, Rama Rao

Taking the battle to the rival's territory, TRS working president Rama Rao tweeted, "I am busy gathering information on the 12 crore jobs (2 crore per year) & Rs 15 lakhs in all Jandhan accounts promised by Hon'ble PM Shri Modi Ji."

tweeted, "I am busy gathering information on the 12 crore jobs (2 crore per year) & Rs 15 lakhs in all Jandhan accounts promised by Hon'ble PM Shri Modi Ji. NDA (No Data Available) is the answer so far. Please share if you have any answers."

To this, Ramchandrarao replied, "You could have collected this information earlier or later. I hope you are manufacturing data for public consumption. We shall soon meet." (sic).

■ Page 2 KTR asks Netizens how GDP is growing

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OTHER STORIES

SSC EXAM FEE
PAYMENT DATE
EXTENDEDDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 1

The Director of Government Examinations, Telangana, on Monday extended the deadline for SSC examination fee payment, on request of principals and headmasters.

According to an official circular, the last date for remittance of examination fee to headmasters with a late fee of ₹50 has been extended to March 6. The Telangana SSC examinations 2021 are scheduled to be held from May 17-26.

TRS TAKING ALL
MEASURES TO
WIN 2 MLC SEATSDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 1

Ruling TRS is making all preparations to win both the graduate MLC seats from Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal and Hyderabad-Ranga Reddy-Mahabunagar constituencies.

Party high command has made ministers, MLAs and public representatives of respective districts responsible for ensuring the victory of the party candidates. Ministers are campaigning vigorously along with the candidates. Key party leaders are being made in-charge for every 100 voters in the two constituencies to ensure the victory of TRS nominees.

In-charge ministers and MLAs have been given the overall responsibility for mobilising voters constituency-wise in the respective districts.

KTR QUESTIONS
BJP ABOUT MODI'S
POLL PROMISE

From Page 1

As the minister did not turn up, Ramachander Rao tweeted, "I Am Here at Arts College. Where are you, Mr. @KTRTRS?" (sic).

KTR took potshots at Ramachander Rao by retweeting, "I am busy gathering information on the 12 crore jobs (2 crore per year) & ₹15 lakhs in all Jandhan accounts promised by Hon'ble PM Shri Modi Ji. NDA (No Data Available) is the answer so far. Please share if you have any answers."

To this, Ramachander Rao replied, "You could have collected this information earlier or later. I hope you are manufacturing data for public consumption. We shall soon meet." (sic).

Of late, the Chief Minister is taking the BJP to task on Twitter with his sarcastic posts at the Modi-led NDA government at the Centre in the backdrop of the upcoming MLC polls on March 14 in which the TRS and the BJP are engaged in a pitched battle.

On Saturday, K.T. Rama Rao took potshots at the Centre on rising prices of gas, diesel and petrol. In his tweet, he posed a question to the Twitterati — "Quick general knowledge question. What is the full form of GDP that has been constantly on the rise because of the extraordinary performance of the Union Govt?"

Netizens angry over the steep increase in LPG and fuel prices in the recent past understood the sarcasm in the question and were quick to answer it with a reply — "Gas, Diesel, Petrol."

Etala takes jab, kicks
off vaccination drive

Everyone should take Covid vaccine, says health minister

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 1

Health Minister Etala Rajendar on Monday called on all people eligible to receive Covid-19 vaccine, to do so without fail.

Rajendar kicked off the latest phase of the vaccination programme in the state at Huzurabad Government Hospital's Covid Vaccination Centre in the morning.

"There is no reason for fear and everyone should take the vaccine. Do not get anxious for your turn, register online and get vaccinated. Everyone will get their turn and we will vaccinate all," Rajendar said.

He was speaking immediately after receiving the first of the two doses of the Covid-19 vaccine at the Huzurabad Government Hospital. He was accompanied by district collector K. Shashanka, and Director of Medical Education Dr K. Ramesh Reddy.

From today, the vaccine



Health minister Etala Rajendar takes the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine at Area Hospital in Huzurabad of Karimnagar district on Monday.

—DC

is being given to all people older than 60 years, and to those with comorbidities and aged between 45 and 59 years. While the vaccine is being given free in government hospitals and

health centres, private hospitals have been allowed to charge ₹250 for each administered dose of the vaccine.

Rajendar said vaccinating these two groups of

people will be expanded and more hospitals and health centres added to the list where people can go and get vaccinated in the days and weeks to come.

4,558 GET FIRST
DOSE OF COVID
VACCINEDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 1

A total of 4,558 people from the two priority groups — older than 60 years, and between 45 and 59 with comorbidities — received their first shot of the Covid-19 vaccine in Telangana on Monday.

The day saw the state rolling out a new phase of vaccination for people from these two priority groups. All the priority groups will be vaccinated across the state in the designated government or private Covid vaccination centers via online registration or on-the-spot registration.

According to the director of health services Dr G. Srinivasa Rao, the Covid-19 shots were administered at 48 government healthcare facilities and 45 private hospitals across the state. Simultaneously, the drive for healthcare workers (HCWs) and frontline workers (FLWs) continued, with 249 HCWs getting their first dose and 70 their second dose. For the FLWs, Monday saw 51 getting their first shot while another 16 got their second dose.

So far, 4,48,115 people have received either the first or second dose of the vaccine in the state, Dr Srinivasa Rao said.

● **THE DIRECTOR** of health services Dr G. Srinivasa Rao said the Covid-19 shots were administered at 48 government healthcare facilities and 45 private hospitals across the state.

VUJJINI
VAMSHIDHARA | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 1

Telangana Chief Justice Hima Kohli on Monday found a serious lapse in the police investigation into the brutal murder of advocate-couple Gattu Vamana Rao and Nagamani and directed the Advocate General to rectify the anomaly that could dilute the case and help the accused go scot-free.

The Chief Justice's direction raised hopes in the legal fraternity that justice would be rendered in the daylight murder, which has political implications. The kin of a ruling party leader, who allegedly masterminded the gruesome murder, was arrested along with his accomplices.

The court made its keenness to monitor the investigation known by asking the police to submit status reports to it from time to time.

Protests and more protets



Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao pays a courtesy call on the Chief Justice of High Court Hima Kohli at her residence in Hyderabad on Monday. Justice Kohli took over as Chief Justice on January 7 at a ceremony held at Raj Bhavan which was attended by CM.

— BY ARRANGEMENT

KTR is duping graduates
through his tweets: DasojuDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 1

AICC national spokesperson Sravan Dasoju on Monday accused IT minister K.T. Rama Rao of diverting people's attention over the prestigious Information Technology and Investment Region (ITIR) project ahead of graduate MLC elections in Telangana.

Addressing media at Gandhi Bhawan on Monday, Sravan released a letter purportedly written by KTR that read: "It is imperative... to restore ITIR scheme or provide a better scheme in its place to ensure that cities like Hyderabad continue to build on the tremendous momentum in the IT sector growth that has been witnessed over the last six years."

Such a scheme (will) also provide a major

boost to IT industry as it looks up to the government for relief from economic downturn."

The AICC spokesperson said graduates are intelligent enough to identify the chameleon-like characteristics of the minister, who is producing fabricated figures.

He alleged that KTR is resorting to Goebbels propaganda on employment just to get the votes of graduates in the forthcoming MLC elections.

Sravan pointed out that many times, including in assembly, Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhara Rao himself had said that ITIR, NIMZ and pharma are dream projects that would change the landscape of Telangana while ensuring millions of employment opportunities for the state's youth.

But neither KCR nor KTR sincerely tried to retain those prestigious

projects for the state.

Not a single TRP MP raised a question or stalled the parliament to protect the interests of our youth after the project got shelved in 2018. Instead, only in 2021, KTR has written a letter asking the union IT minister to sanction an alternative scheme for the state, he explained.

The AICC spokesperson said Congress party will continue to fight until the last of 1.91 lakh government vacancies, as per Biswal Commission report, are filled up by the government and all 1.20 lakh contract employees in Telangana regularised. He slammed the government for lacking a proper employment policy and not issuing DSC, Group I and Group II notifications, which would have helped BC, SC and ST communities in getting employed.

French connection



Emmanuel Leanain, French ambassador and Dr Marjorie Vanbaelinghem, consul-general of France met I.T. minister K.T. Rama Rao in Hyderabad on Monday. IT secretary Jayesh Ranjan was also present. Emmanuel later tweeted, "Excellent meeting with KTR. Telangana is already home to many companies in aeronautics, pharmaceuticals, IT and energy. We discussed how France can further contribute to Telangana's growth and innovation goals."

— BY ARRANGEMENT

BALLOT | BATTLE

Owaisi plans to expand party's base in the country

MIM to contest polls in TN

ATHER MOIN | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 1

The All India Majlis Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (AIMIM) has decided to contest the Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, its second attempt in the state.

Party president Asaduddin Owaisi, who announced the decision at a press conference here on Monday, said that they had entered the political fray from three constituencies in Tamil Nadu five years back.

On plans to contest in West Bengal, Owaisi hinted that AIMIM will change its electoral strategy after its potential partner, Furfura Shareef led by cleric Abbas Siddiqui and its Indian Secular Front, formally joined the Left-



Asaduddin Owaisi

Congress alliance.

Owaisi said he will react to Siddiqui's move at an appropriate time and also reveal his plans for West Bengal. On the current political developments in West Bengal, he said everyone should have a positive outlook. "We will contest and

● **ON PLANS** to contest in West Bengal, Owaisi hinted that AIMIM will change its electoral strategy after its potential partner, Furfura Shareef led by cleric Abbas Siddiqui and its Indian Secular Front, formally joined the Left-Congress alliance.

● **OWAISI REMINDED** that they entered Gujarat and the party won seven seats in Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation and "we are hopeful that our candidates will win from Bharuch, Modasa and Godhra."

make our presence felt", he said.

Owaisi reminded that they entered Gujarat and the

erstwhile Mahabubnagar district along with party national vice-president D.K. Aruna on Monday. Addressing the media, the minister alleged that the TRS weakened the Legislature in Telangana after coming to power.

He stated that the people of Telangana want a change and BJP will

replace the TRS in the next Assembly elections. This was already worrying Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhara Rao, who is feeling increasingly insecure. He predicted that the MLC elections were always in favour of BJP as it enjoyed the trust and blessings of intellectuals.

party won seven seats in Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation and "we are hopeful that our candidates will win from Bharuch, Modasa and Godhra. We worked hard. Our work is going on and we are looking ahead."

Continuing on the theme of expanding the AIMIM footprint in the country, Owaisi said party leaders would meet to decide on entering Rajasthan.

Owaisi said "we are working for elections in Uttar Pradesh. I will visit the State on March 14 and discuss plans with Shivpal Singh Yadav of Samajwadi Party. We have announced the candidature of Ilyas Baghban from Gulbarga. I will also visit West Bengal."

OTHER STORIES

TRAINING FOR
POLLING OFFICERS
TO BE IN 2 PHASESDC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MARCH. 1

Training of 312 assistant polling officers for polling, to conduct elections of the Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal graduate constituency will be imparted training in two phases training will be held on March 2 and March 9 in SR and BGNR Degree College. About 127 polling stations will be set up at 40 locations for 87,172 voters in Khammam district. The polling will be held from 8 am to 4 pm on March 14 and there are 71 candidates remaining in the fray. Collector R.V. Karnan told the polling officials to implement the model code of conduct in full spirit and violations to MCC should not take place.

The candidates or political parties should take prior permission to the meetings as part of the campaign. He said that the SR and BGNR Degree College will be used as polling material distribution centre and the material will be transported from there to Nalgonda election reception centre.

Vax begins for people
with comorbidities

Vaccine will be given free of cost at government hospitals

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, MARCH. 1

Covid-19 vaccination for risk persons and elderly people began on Monday. The state government has accorded permission for the Government General Hospital and Pragathi, Medicovert private hospitals to take up vaccination programme. Elderly people of 60 and above age and 45 years to 59 years with chronic diseases are allowed to get the vaccine.

Submitting an Aadhar card or any identity proof, Covid-19 vaccine will be given free of cost at GGH. In private hospitals, people should pay ₹250 per Covid-19 vaccination.

Meanwhile, district collector C. Narayana Reddy's mother got



Nizamabad district collector C. Narayana Reddy's mother takes first dose of Covid-19 vaccine in government general hospital on Monday.

—BY ARRANGEMENT

Covid-19 vaccine at GGH. The collector said that the same company Covid-19 vaccine will be given in two doses.

There is no need to worry about the Covid-19 vaccine and people

should get it without hesitation, he said. If any problem arises after jabe of Covid-19 vaccine, a team of doctors are ready to tackle the situation, he said. "We are planning to

● SUBMITTING AN Aadhar card or any identity proof, Covid-19 vaccine will be given free of cost at GGH. In private hospitals, people should pay ₹250 per to get Covid-19 vaccination.

give vaccines for 200 people in each centre daily", he said. DMHO Sudarshanam, hospital superintendent Prathima Raj, Government medical college principal Indira, programme officer Rajender were present.

After a long time, the highest number of Covid-19 positive cases was reported in Nizamabad district on Monday. Of 828 tests, 15 cases reported to be positive. Earlier, positive cases were below ten.

Elect CPI candidates
as MLC: JayasarathiDC CORRESPONDENT
KOTHAGUDEM, MARCH. 1

CPI candidate from Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal graduate constituency B. Jayasarathi Reddy said it is time graduates voted for left parties to focus on issues of unemployed youth in Telangana. He said he has covered all three districts so far and is continuing to meet graduate voters. "There is considerable unemployment among graduates, whom the state government is neglecting. Self-employment schemes are

being executed by the TRS government in an unfair manner. Persons, who have set up units, are suffering as their loan amounts are not being released, he pointed out.

Jayasarithi, who was campaigning in Paloncha and Dammamet on Monday, said the TRS government in state and BJP government at centre made several promises to youth before elections but ignored them later.

He said the unemployment allowance scheme mooted by the TRS government is also being delayed.

0.6 TMC WATER RELEASED FROM BABLI

Nizamabad: About 0.6 tmc of water was released from the Babli project in Dharmabad in Maharashtra on Monday. In the presence of the Sriramagar project, Babli Project Authority and Central Water

Commission officials the water released from Babli to river Godavari. As per the directives of Supreme Court, the water was released from the Babli project and gates were closed on the same day.

TEACHER SUSPENDED FOR SHOWING PORN

Adilabad: DEO Ravinder Reddy on Monday issued orders suspending an English teacher M.A. Khadir working in government school of Ghotkur, Tamsi mandal. On charges of

showing porn to girl students. Villagers informed the matter to the local police and DEO. The issue came to light when the VI class girl students told the matter to their parents.

KAVITHA INAUGURATES SHIVALAYAM

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, MARCH. 1

Telangana Jagruthi president, MLC Kalvakuntla Kavitha inaugurated reconstructed Shivalayam at Jannepally village in Navipet mandal of Nizamabad on Monday. Mynampally social

services organisation led by Malkajigiri MLA Mynampally Hanumnath Rao reconstructed the temple, which is believed to be constructed by Lord Rama in Dwapara yugam. Kavitha received a rousing welcome from Hyderabad to Jannepally as TRS leaders and activists welcomed her.

YOUTH DEMANDS FIR ON JVR OCM SCAM

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOTHAGUDEM, MARCH. 1

The issue of not filing FIR on the coal scam taken place in JVR OC mine in Sattupalli is exposed once again on Monday. Unemployed persons led by Y. Anand staged protest at SCCL head office demanding to file FIR on the concerned officials that resorted to the scam in coal deals.

Anand said that the SCCL showed ₹27 lakh as fraud in its annual report and the company management is not taking any action on the officials who are involved in the scam.

"As per procedure, the SCCL management should file a case on the scam and ask the police to make an FIR", he said, adding that the misadministration of the company caused crores of rupees loss.

Cops fast track advocate
couple's murder caseDC CORRESPONDENT
PEDDAPALLI, MARCH. 1

Ramagundam Police Commissionerate has fast tracked investigation into the murder of High Court advocate couple Vaman Rao and Nagamani in Peddapalli district. They are busy locating the weapons used by prime accused Kunta Srinu and Shivandula Chiranjeevi, who divulged that they had thrown them in Sundilla barrage while on their way to Maharashtra.

To reconstruct the scene, police have taken the duo and another accused Akkapaka Kumar to Sundilla barrage. They are taking the help of boats and divers from Viskhapatnam to locate the weapons between 58 and 59 fillers from where the attackers threw their weapons into standing water. Currently, Sundilla barrage has about 10

feet of water.

Police believe the weapons could be stuck in sand, as it is already 10 days since the brutal killing and disposal of weapons. They have decided to use powerful magnets to extract weapons from the water.

Police officials are continuing to interrogate Kunta Srinu, Chiranjeevi, Kumar and Bittu Srinu. However, sources say authorities do not yet have any evidence of politics behind broad daylight murder of the advocate couple. In a statement here, Ramagundam police said they have provided security to Vaman Rao's father Gattu Kishan Rao and brother Gattu Indrasekhar following the latter's request. Security has been stepped up even in Gunjapadugu and surrounding villages to prevent any untoward incidents.

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SHORT TAKES

C'GARH ALLOCATES ₹30 CR FOR 'RAM GAMAN' CIRCUIT

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MARCH 1

An allocation of ₹30 crore has been made in the annual budget of Chhattisgarh for 2021-22 towards the development of places in Chhattisgarh visited by Lord Ram during his 14-year-exile.

This was announced by Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel while presenting annual budget for 2021-22 in the Assembly on Monday. Chhattisgarh government in August last had unveiled a ₹137.45 crore ambitious project envisaging development of "Ram Van Gaman Tourism Circuit" linking 75 sites in Chhattisgarh, said to be visited by Lord Ram during his 14-year-exile.

Baghel has earlier written a letter to the Union tourism minister Prallhad Patel urging him to sanction the project under the Centre's scheme, Ramayan circuit of swadesh darshan. The letter cited various researches in the field which suggested that Lord Ram spent 10 years out of his 14-year-exile period at various places in Chhattisgarh. Folk songs of Chhattisgarh also establish this, the letter said.

Research work in the field suggests that Lord Ram spent some time in 51 places out of the 75 sites he had visited in Chhattisgarh during his exile, according to the letter. The state government plans to develop nine out of these 75 sites in the first phase at a cost of ₹30 crore.

NIA ARRESTS 4 FROM J&K FOR NARCO TERRORISM

DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, MARCH 1

National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Monday arrested four persons from Jammu and Kashmir allegedly involved in smuggling of heroin and other narcotic drugs worth million of rupees from across the Line of Control (LoC).

The money obtained through the sale of the contraband locally and in other parts of the country would be transferred to a major militant outfit to help it in carrying out "terrorist activities" in the Valley, the agency claimed.

A statement issued by the NIA here said that the case of "narco-terrorism" was registered by it in June last after the J&K police seized 21 kilograms of heroin and cash amount of ₹1,35,89,850 from the members of a drug syndicate operating in the Union Territory.

The accused who were formally arrested by the agency in Srinagar have been identified as Altaf Ahmed Shah, Showkat Ahmad Parray, Mudasar Ahmad Dar, and Amin Allaie alias Hilal Mir—all residents of Kashmir Valley.

The NIA said that the case was initially registered under an FIR filed at a police station in Handwara area of frontier Kulwara district on June 11, 2020.

WARRANT ISSUED AGAINST KANGANA RANAUT

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 1

A magistrate court in Mumbai on Monday issued a bailable warrant against Bollywood actor Kangana Ranaut, as she failed to appear before it despite issuance of summons in connection with a defamation complaint filed against her by lyricist Javed Akhtar.

Metropolitan Magistrate R.R. Khan had issued summons to Ranaut on February 1, with a direction to appear before the court on March 1.

On Monday, when the matter was called out for hearing, Ranaut was not present in the court following which the court issued a bailable warrant against her. With issuance of the warrant the court deferred hearing on this matter till March 22.

After hearing Akhtar and his lawyer Niranjan Mundargi the Magistrate court had ordered the Juhu police to file a report in December 2020.

The police had sought further time to submit the report and the court had ordered Juhu police to file the report by January 18, 2021, however, they had sought further time.

Finally, the police submitted the report in February and in the report police stated that the offences alleged against Kangana are made out for further investigation.

BJP trying to woo Christian voters ahead of Assembly polls in Kerala

Saffron party had secured close to 15 per cent votes in the last Assembly polls in 2016

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 1

The BJP in Kerala is hoping to improve its electoral fortunes with the help of Christian votes in the coming Assembly elections.

The party which had secured close to 15 per cent votes in the last Assembly polls in 2016, believes that the support of Christians is crucial to convert the votes into seats. Two prominent leaders of the BJP called on Cardinal Mar George Alanchery who is the Major Archbishop of Syro Malabar Church in Kochi on Monday.

BJP state president K. Surendran who arrived in Kochi as part of his statewide Vijay Yatra, met the cardinal at the Kerala Catholic Bishops Conference headquarters in Kochi. Though the BJP leader maintained that it was only a courtesy call, sources said the issues related to Assembly elections also figured in the discussions.

Soon after Surendran left, Karnataka deputy chief minister C.N. Ashwath Narayan who is also in charge of Assembly elections in Kerala, drove straight to the Catholic Bishops Conference headquarters and held discussions with Cardinal Alanchery and other leaders of the Syro Malabar Church. The BJP has deputed Narayan who is known to have close ties with Christian denominations running educational institutions in Bengaluru and other parts of Karnataka.

Though Narayan also said that it was a courtesy visit, he admitted that political issues also came up for discussions during the meeting which went on for more than 30 minutes. He told media persons that the BJP was hopeful of getting a sizeable Christian vote in the coming elections. The party is focussing on Christian dominated constituencies in central Travancore, he said and added that a good number of Christian candidates will figure in BJP's candidate list this time.

More central leaders of the BJP are expected to meet Church leaders in Kerala in the run up to the polls.

The BJP which had only one member in the outgoing 140 member Kerala Assembly has been working assiduously to woo the Christians. Senior Kerala BJP leader and Mizoram Governor P.S. Sreedharan Pillai had taken the initiative to resolve the dispute between Jacobite and Orthodox factions in the state. The two churches are engaged in a decades old battle regarding the ownership of various Churches and associated properties.

Christians form about 19 per cent of the state's 3.5 crore population. The Christian vote is decisive in Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, Idukki, Ernakulam, parts of Kannur, Malappuram and Wayanad. Latin Catholic population plays a key role in the outcome of polls in coastal districts.

Though the BJP had



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi eats ice apple from a roadside stall during his election campaign for the forthcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly polls, in Kanyakumari district on Monday. He tweeted about "three alternatives" that the Centre has given to people as he went on to suggest that consumers have been left with no choice. "Prices of LPG cylinders hiked yet again. For people, these are Modi government's alternatives — Wrap up businesses, throw away cooking stoves and eat up jumlas (false promises)," his tweet said.

● **SENIOR KERALA BJP leader P.S. Sreedharan Pillai** had taken the initiative to resolve the dispute between Jacobite and Orthodox factions in the state. The two churches are engaged in a decades old battle regarding ownership of various Churches.

made an attempt to woo the Muslims as well by appointing A.P. Abdullakutty as national vice president of the party, the possibility of the community favouring the saffron party is remote. Abdullakutty who was a former firebrand leader of CPM was elected to parliament twice. After quitting CPM he joined Congress and became an MLA. Now he is one of the main faces of BJP. Former union minister Alphons Kannanthanam who was also once CPM MLA, had joined the BJP and made a central minister during the previous Modi ministry. Now he is a Rajya Sabha member.

DMK firms up ties, seat deals

G BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, MARCH 1

DMK President M.K. Stalin announced his grand plan for unveiling a 10-year vision document for the state in its public meeting to be held on Sunday even as his party started finalising seat sharing with its allies, one after the other.

Though the talks with the Congress ran into rough weather over the numbers, the DMK leaders assigned to hold talks with the alliance partners managed to bring around the MMK and IUML by offering them two and three seats respectively. Delegations from the VCK and MDMK held talks on Monday and have agreed to return to the table after holding discussions with their leaders. But insiders say there was no



M.K. Stalin

big hitch on finalising the agreement though again the bone of contention is the numbers and the question of which symbol they will be contesting under.

Since the DMK would like its smaller allies to contest in its popular 'Rising Sun' symbol, most of the parties seem to have a different view on that. The IUML has already made it clear it would face the elections in its 'ladder' symbol, the MMK is yet to decide on what symbol to go for. The two Communist par-

state leaders the coming election would be Sudhakaran's eighth and Isaac's fifth electoral battle.

With the CPM aiming for a repeat, the party does not want to take any chances by keeping its popular leaders out of electoral contests in the name of norms. Party sources said if the norms are enforced strictly then at least 28 sitting MLAs of the CPM including 7 ministers will have to stay out of contest. As per norms finance minister Thomas Isaac, PWD minister G. Sudhakaran, fisheries minister J. Mercykutty Amma, local bodies minister A.C. Moideen, general education minister C. Raveendranath, higher education minister K.T. Jaleel, industries minister

E.P. Jayarajan and Law minister A.K. Balan should not be in the fray. Besides, Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan will also have to sit out.

The party feels that it would be suicidal to keep the ministers, especially those who have performed well, out of electoral fray in such a crucial election. However, the final decision on fielding the ministers will be taken at the state committee meeting to be held later this week.

Meanwhile, the seat sharing talks of ruling LDF remained inconclusive on Monday. The CPM top leadership had a one on one meeting with the leaders of the alliance partners at the party headquarters AKG Centre in Thiruvananthapuram.

SHOCKING | ORDER Bombay HC set aside trial court order granting anticipatory bail to accused

'Will you marry her,' SC asks rape accused

PARMOD KUMAR | DC WITH AGENCY INPUTS NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

The Supreme Court on Monday asked a government servant accused of repeatedly raping a minor girl if he would marry her.

Heading a three judge bench Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde asked the lawyer appearing for the accused whether his client would marry the victim girl.

Dismissing the petition by the accused as withdrawn, the top court in its order said "However, there shall be stay of arrest of the petitioners for a period of eight weeks. Thereafter, the Trial Court will decide the question of the liberty

of the petitioners."

"We are not forcing you to marry. Let us know if you will. Otherwise you will say we are forcing you to marry her," the CJI said, making clear the position of the bench.

As the lawyer upon taking instructions from the accused rapist informed the court that the accused can't marry the victim as he is already married.

"I wanted to marry her. But she refused. Now I cannot, as I am already married. Trial is going on, charges are yet to be framed", accused told the court.

"You should have thought before seducing and raping the young girl. You knew you are a gov-

● **DISMISSING THE** petition by accused as withdrawn, SC in its order said 'However, there shall be stay of arrest of petitioners for a period of eight weeks. Thereafter, Trial Court will decide question of the liberty of the petitioners.'

● **OTHER JUDGES** on the bench included Justice A.S.Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian.

ernment servant." CJI told the lawyer appearing for the accused.

Other judges on the bench included Justice A.S.Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian. The top court was hear-

PUNJAB CM SAYS PRASHANT KISHOR HAS JOINED HIM

Chandigarh, March 1: Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Monday said poll strategist Prashant Kishor has joined him as his principal advisor.

Happy to share that @PrashantKishor has joined me as my Principal Advisor. Look forward to working together for the betterment of the people of Punjab!, said Amarinder Singh in a tweet.

The development assumes significance as the Punjab Assembly elections are due early next year.

Currently, Kishor's company, Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC), is assisting Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress (TMC) in the West Bengal elections.

Kishor had handled the Congress poll campaign in the 2017 Punjab Assembly elections. The Congress in 2017 had stormed to power by bagging 77 seats in the 117-member Assembly.

Kishor was the brain behind Punjab Congress programmes like Coffee with Captain and Punjab Da Captain to drum up support for the party.

Last year, the Punjab CM had said Kishor told him that he would be "quite happy" in handling the election campaign of the Congress in Punjab for the 2022 Assembly polls.

His claims had come amid media reports that Kishor had said no to handling the party's campaign in the state.

Amarinder Singh had then even said Congress president Sonia Gandhi had left it to him on roping in Kishor for the party's poll campaign in the state.

The CM had then said that he had even asked his party MLAs whether they want Kishor for the next Assembly elections. "Out of 80 MLAs, 55 said yes, they want him," Singh had then said. — PTI



A medic administers the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine to Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar at Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences in Patna on Monday. — PTI

BIHAR TO GIVE COVID VACCINES FREE TO ALL

NAYEAR AZAD | DC PATNA, MARCH 1

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar received the first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine on his 70th birthday on Monday and urged people to get vaccinated as per the central government guidelines. He also announced his government's decision to provide the vaccination free of cost including at private hospitals in the state.

"Our government has decided to provide vaccination free of cost for the people of the state. This facility will also be made available at private hospitals. I, therefore, urge all those who are eligible to get vaccinated", he said.

The announcement comes on the day country started the second phase of its nationwide vaccination drive. The decision to provide free vaccination was taken on Sunday during a meeting chaired by the Chief Minister.

Free vaccination for Covid-19 was one of the key promises made by the NDA during the Bihar Assembly elections.

Kumar who took the vaccine at the state-run super speciality hospital Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (IGIMS) in the presence of health minister Mangal Pandey said that "I am in good health after taking my first dose. Doctors have fixed March 31 for the second dose of vaccination for me".

He further said that arrangements for vaccination for members of the state legislature have also been made at the hospital.

Later, while responding to the state government's announcement, Bihar BJP in a statement said, "The state is ready for vaccination of elderly and people above 45 years of age. The cost of vaccination in private hospitals of ₹250 will also be borne by the NDA government. The largest vaccination drive in the world is progressing in the country as well as in the state".

Ahead of the second phase of the vaccination drive, Bihar health minister had released data on Twitter claiming that "the total number of healthy patients in the state reached 2,60,594 and recovery rate is 99.26 per cent. There are 398 active corona patients in the state".

● **FREE VACCINATION** for Covid-19 was one of the key promises made by the NDA during the Bihar Assembly elections.

Bombay HC set aside trial court order granting anticipatory bail to accused

ing a plea filed by the accused against the Bombay High Court's February 5 order cancelling the anticipatory bail granted to him by the trial court in January last year.

Describing it as "atrocious", the Bombay High Court had set aside the trial court order granting anticipatory bail to the accused who has moved the top court against the High court order.

The accused had repeatedly raped the victim when she was 16 year and studying in 9th standard. However, when things came to light, the accused mother dissuaded the victim's mother from reporting the matter to police.

She assured that when the victim will turn 18 she will be married to the accused. But that did not happen and a complaint was filed after a gap of two years.

He has also been accused of offences punishable under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

In his plea filed in the top court, he has referred to the Maharashtra Civil Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules 1979 and said it pointed out that if a government servant is detained in police custody under criminal charges for a period of 48 hours, then he shall be deemed to have been placed under suspension by an order of appointing authority.

SHORT TAKES

KHASHOGGI FIANCE
WANTS SAUDI'S
MBS PUNISHED

Istanbul: The Turkish fiancée of slain Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi said on Monday that Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman should be "punished without delay" over the murder. The United States on Friday declassified a report that publicly accused the crown prince of approving Khashoggi murder in the kingdom's Istanbul consulate in 2018.

But the United States stopped short of applying sanctions against the 35-year-old de facto leader, known by his initials MBS.

"It is essential that the Crown Prince, who ordered the brutal murder of a blameless and innocent person, should be punished without delay," Khashoggi's fiancée Hatice Cengiz said in a statement posted on her official Twitter account in English and Arabic.

NEW WTO CHIEF
ACCEPTS SWISS
PAPER'S APOLOGY

Geneva: The first woman and first African to lead the World Trade Organisation on Monday welcomed an apology from a Swiss newspaper that had dismissed the seasoned international professional as a grandmother.

"It is important & timely that they've apologised," Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said in a tweet.

The development economist took over as the new WTO chief on Monday after a long, high-powered career serving as minister of finance and foreign affairs in her native Nigeria and 25 years at the World Bank.

CUOMO AGREES
BEHAVIOUR SEEN
AS 'FLIRTATION'

Albany: New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo acknowledged for the first time Sunday that some of his behaviour with women had been "misinterpreted as unwanted flirtation," and said he would cooperate with a sexual harassment investigation led by the state's attorney general.

In a statement released amid mounting criticism from within his own party, the Democrat maintained he had never inappropriately touched or propositioned anyone. But he said he had teased people and made jokes about their personal lives in an attempt to be "playful." "I now understand that my interactions may have been insensitive or too personal and that some of my comments, given my position, made others feel in ways I never intended. I acknowledge some of the things I have said have been misinterpreted as an unwanted flirtation. To the extent anyone felt that way, I am truly sorry about that," he said.

AUSSIE CABINET
MIN. ACCUSED
OF RAPE

Sydney: Australia's Prime Minister rejected calls on Monday to suspend a cabinet minister accused of rape, saying the unnamed official "vigorously denied" allegations that have now been referred to police.

Scott Morrison — already under mounting public pressure to tackle what has been called a toxic sexist culture in Canberra politics — insisted the minister was innocent until proven guilty.

"Allegations of criminal conduct should be dealt with by competent and authorised agencies," Morrison said, adding it was a "matter for the police." Morrison recently received a letter detailing allegations that a man currently serving in the cabinet raped a 16-year-old girl in Sydney in 1988.

The woman took her own life last year. The man not been named publicly due to Australia's defamation laws.

Morrison said he had raised the issue with the minister "who absolutely rejects these allegations."

"It is the police, in a country where you're governed by the rule of law, that determine the veracity of any allegations of this nature," Morrison said in a testy exchange with journalists on Monday. "The police have had this matter referred to them. The individual involved here has vigorously rejected these allegations. And so, it's a matter for the police." Police said they had "received a complaint relating to an historic sexual assault," but "will not be making further comment."

Covid vaccine IP rights divides WTO

India, South Africa lead calls to waive rights, notion rejected by pharmaceutical giants

Geneva, March. 1: The World Trade Organisation faces calls led by India and South Africa to waive intellectual property rights for Covid-19 vaccines — a notion fiercely rejected by pharmaceutical giants and their host countries.

The WTO will thrash out the divisive issue at its general council meeting on Monday and Tuesday as its new head Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala takes up her post. Some countries see the waiver as a short-cut to ending the novel coronavirus that has hobbled the global economy.

The IP plan was filed by India and South Africa on October 2 and garnered support from a host of developing countries which — correctly — anticipated being left behind in the vaccination race.

The text proposes a temporary exemption from certain obligations under the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), so that any country can produce vaccines without worrying about patents.

The waiver would also cover "industrial designs, copyright and protection of undisclosed information," and would last "until widespread vaccination is in place globally, and the majority of the world's population has developed immunity".

More than 80 countries support the proposal, including Argentina, Bangladesh, the DR Congo, Egypt, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan and Venezuela. Backed by NGOs including the medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF), they think it would facilitate timely access to affordable medical products for all countries in need.

"All Covid-19 health tools



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson bumps elbows with with Head Girl Hirah Hussain during his visit to St Mary's C.E. Primary School in Stoke-on-Trent, central England on Monday, to see how their preparations are going ahead of students returning on March 8, after England's third lockdown. — AFP

ALL COVID-19 health tools and technologies should be true global public goods, free from the barriers that patents and other intellectual property impose

SIDNEY WONG, MSF's co-director for access to medicines

and technologies should be true global public goods, free from the barriers that patents and other intellectual property impose," said Sidney Wong, MSF's co-director for access to medicines.

The idea also has the backing of World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. "If not now, then when?"

Tedros said of the scheme on Friday, condemning the "serious resistance" against it. The International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations is strongly against the proposal.

"Taking away patents now or imposing a waiver wouldn't give you a single dose more," IFPMA chief Thomas Cueni told reporters last week.

"It wouldn't empower you to get the vaccine because you still wouldn't know how to roll them out on a large scale." The United States, the European Union and Switzerland — home to major pharmaceutical firms — oppose the idea, along with other wealthy nations including Australia, Britain, Japan, Norway and Singapore. — AFP

FRANCE, GERMANY STRUGGLE TO
SELL ASTRAZENECA VACCINE SAFETY

Paris, March. 1: Already facing a daunting Covid vaccination challenge, French and German authorities are fighting to convince more people that a jab from the pharma giant AstraZeneca is just as effective as others.

Stocks of the vaccines from the British-Swedish firm are going unused in both countries, depriving officials of a crucial tool to help end a pandemic that has sparked a social and economic calamity on a scale not seen since World War II.

Only 273,000 AstraZeneca doses have been administered in

France out of 1.7 million received as of end-February, according to health ministry figures.

The poor take-up comes even as the target group for the jabs, health workers over 50 and people with other serious health risks, can get the vaccine directly from their doctor instead of waiting for appointments at vaccination centres.

Experts say it is also cheaper to produce than the two other vaccines approved for Europe, from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, and does not require ultracold storage, making it easier to deploy. — AFP

French ex-prez
Sarkozy guilty of
graft, to be jailed

Paris, March. 1: Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy was found guilty of corruption on Monday and handed a three-year prison sentence, in a ruling that deals a major blow to any lingering political ambitions.

The sentence includes two years suspended and the remaining one year would be converted into a non-custodial sentence, meaning it is unlikely Sarkozy will end up behind bars over this case.

He is almost certain to appeal and remains free, with no arrest warrant issued, but he faces several other corruption investigations over campaign financing and alleged influence peddling.

The sentence for seeking to illegally influence a judge is the latest twist in the tumultuous political career of the 66-year-old who remains a favourite for many on the right for his combative style and tough talk on crime and immigration.

The conviction is likely to undermine any attempted comeback to



Nicolas Sarkozy

frontline politics, an ambition he has denied, but which has been promoted by many supporters ahead of 2022 presidential elections.

Wearing a dark suit and tie, Sarkozy showed no emotion as the sentence was read out and he left court without commenting to waiting journalists before heading to his private office in central Paris.

"What a senseless witchhunt, my love Nicolas Sarkozy," his wife, former supermodel and singer Carla Bruni, posted on Instagram, next to a picture of the couple embracing. "The fight goes on, the truth will come out. #injustice." — AFP

Trump hints at Prez re-run in 2024

Washington, March. 1: In his first public speech since leaving the White House, former US president Donald Trump has raised the climate issue while criticising his successor Joe Biden for rejoining the "very unfair" Paris Agreement, saying what good does it do when America is "clean" but China, Russia and India are not.

Speaking at the Conservative Political Action Committee in Orlando, Florida on Sunday, the 74-year-old leader, who left the White House on January 20, came down heavily on the Biden administration for putting the "United States back into the very unfair and very costly Paris Climate Accord without negotiating a better deal".

"First of all, China does not kick in for 10 years, Russia goes by an old standard which was not a clean standard... but we get hit right from the beginning when it costs us hundreds of thousands and millions of jobs, it was a disaster... but they go back in."

"We have the cleanest air and cleanest water... and what good does it do when we're clean, but China is not and Russia is not and India is not, so they are pouring fumes... you know the world is a small piece



Former U.S. President Donald Trump addresses the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) held in the Hyatt Regency in Orlando, Florida. — AFP

of the universe and we're trying to protect everything," Trump said amidst applause from his supporters.

On February 19, the US officially returned to the historic Paris climate accord, 107 days after it left at the behest of former president Trump. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres had termed that decision as a "major disappointment for global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote global security."

In the past also, Trump has criticised China, India and Russia for pollution. In October last year, he accused China, India and Russia of not taking care of their "filthy air" as he

justified America's withdrawal from the landmark Paris climate agreement. "Look at China, how filthy it is. Look at Russia. Look at India. The air is filthy," Trump had said during the final presidential debate with his Democratic challenger Joe Biden in Nashville, Tennessee. Days earlier while speaking to his cheering supporters at an election rally in North Carolina.

Donald Trump told conservatives Sunday he was considering running for president again in 2024, as he reasserted dominance over the Republican Party and warned of a "struggle" for America's very survival. Echoing the

● **IN OCTOBER** last year, Trump had accused China, India and Russia of not taking care of their "filthy air" as he justified America's withdrawal from the landmark Paris climate agreement.

grievance politics of his 2016 campaign and the harsh rhetoric of his one-term presidency, the 74-year-old fired up an enthusiastic crowd at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Orlando.

In a keynote speech — his first since leaving the White House on January 20 — he repeated his false claims that he won the election instead of President Joe Biden, and hammered establishment Republicans who voted against him in the latest impeachment drama.

But while he teased his future plans, he left the crowd guessing about whether he will challenge Biden in a rematch.

"With your help we will take back the House, we will win the Senate, and then a Republican president will make a triumphant return to the White House — and I wonder who that will be?" Trump said to a raucous cheer. — PTI

PROTESTS GO ON
IN MYANMAR,
DESPITE DEADLY
CRACKDOWN

Yangon, Mar. 1: Police in Myanmar's biggest city on Monday fired tear gas at defiant crowds who returned to the streets to protest the military's seizure of power a month ago, despite reports that security forces had killed at least 18 people around the country a day earlier.

The protesters in Yangon were chased as they tried to gather at their usual meeting spot at the Hledan Center intersection. Demonstrators scattered and sought to rinse their faces with water in vain attempts to ease the irritating effects of the gas.

In the capital, Naypyitaw, the country's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi made a court appearance Monday via videoconference, the *Independent Myanmar Now* online news agency reported. It said she received a charge under Section 505(b) of the Penal Code for allegedly inciting unrest. Further details of the court appearance were not immediately available. — AP

300 RALLY IN
BANGLA TO
DENOUNCE
PRISON DEATH

Dhaka, March. 1: About 300 student activists rallied in Bangladesh's capital on Monday to denounce the death in prison of a writer and commentator who was arrested last year on charges of violating a sweeping digital security law that critics say chokes freedom of expression.

The protesters marched through the Dhaka University campus and Dhaka's streets toward the country's Home Ministry to also demand the annulment of the digital security law and the release of seven student activists arrested during recent protests denouncing the death of 53-year-old Mushtaq Ahmed.

They broke a barricade by removing barbed wire fences on the way to the ministry, but were intercepted by a few hundred police officers outside the ministry in downtown Dhaka.

"The state must take responsibility. He has been killed, it was not a natural death. How come he was held for nine months in jail without any justice?" said one protester, Mahfuza Akhter.

"We want justice," she said. There were no immediate reports of any violence. Ahmed's death Thursday night sparked protests on streets and on social media, and prompted global human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, to urge Bangladesh's government to conduct a thorough investigation.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, or CPJ, demanded that the government cancel the security act. — AP

BERLINALE | 2021

Winners to be announced on the last day, the Golden, Silver Bear trophies will be given in June

Virtual screenings, gender-neutral awards and Tina

SUPARNA SHARMA | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH. 1

Berlinale, the world's biggest film festival which usually attracts close to 5,00,000 film fans to the German capital, opened quietly on thousands of laptops across the world on Monday morning and for five worthies at the plush Berlinale Palast theatre.

Sitting at a safe distance from each other in the 1,600-seater theatre were five former Golden Bear winners (the festival's top prize which goes to the best film) who will pick this year's winner from 15 films in the festival's

Competition section. The sixth jury member, Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof, could not make it. Rasoulof, who won the Golden Bear last year for

There Is No Evil, a film on capital punishment in Iran, has been found guilty of making films that are a "propaganda" tool "against the system" and is under a travel ban. He will be watching films on his laptop.

Usually held for 10 days in February every year, the 71st edition of the International Film Festival of Berlin is a hybrid affair that's been

cut short and split into two. From March 1-5, Berlinale will run virtually for film critics and industry across the world. The winners will be announced on the last day, but the Golden and Silver Bear trophies will be presented in person, in June, when organisers hope to invite stars for red carpet events and screen films for the public.

Another departure from the past is that this year the festival has gone "gender neutral" in terms of awards. Berlinale is the first international film festival that has replaced best actress and best actor prizes with awards for best lead and supporting performance. The jury is, quite literally, out on

whether this will be a unique way to showcase women's talent or whether it will end up robbing actresses of yet another chance to be celebrated on the world stage.

Berlinale's artistic director Carlo Chatrrian, speaking about this year's Competition section, has said that these are "deeply personal films that reflect the disruption brought on by the events of 2020".

The films competing for the top prize this year are from Germany, France, Romania, Hungary, Mexico, South Korea and Japan. They were either shot or were in post-production during the pandemic.

Films outside the Competition section that

are set to have their world premiere at Berlinale include director Azazel Jacobs' French Exit starring Michelle Pfeiffer, and the real-life thriller *The Mauritanian*, which stars Jodie Foster and Benedict Cumberbatch. Foster won the Golden Globe for best supporting actress for her performance in *The Mauritanian* on Monday.

Another film that has already created a lot of buzz is *Tina*, a documentary about the queen of rock'n'roll by Oscar winners Dan Lindsay and T.J. Martin (Undeafed). It features never-before-seen concert footage and interviews with the notoriously private 81-year-old superstar.



A still from the documentary *Tina*

DECCAN Chronicle

2 MARCH 2021

G-23's Jammu conclave exposes Cong. faultlines

The Jammu conclave on Saturday of the 23 Congress dissidents (G-23) who wrote to interim party president Sonia Gandhi in August demanding a “full-time and effective leadership”, as well as proper internal party elections, now appears to have fully emerged as a caucus reminiscent of the ginger group that the late V.P. Singh had formed with disgruntled Congressmen to take on then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The difference is that the anti-Rajiv dissidents challenged a PM, using the same ammunition as the rest of the Opposition, and in time became the principal Opposition. In the Lok Sabha polls that followed, Mr Singh ended up as PM through political stagecraft. This time the circumstances are very different. The Congress is in Opposition and is facing a very determined ruling party under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But, in Jammu, the G-23 have played their real hand.

This can be seen to be in two parts. First, Ghulam Nabi Azad, the former J&K chief minister who days ago retired from the Rajya Sabha, where he was the designated Leader of the Opposition, was projected as Congress president by one of the most important dissidents, Kapil Sibal. Two, in his own remarks, Mr Azad did not fail to make a favourable mention of Prime Minister Modi, a reference to the PM, teary-eyed, marking out the retiring Congress leader for praise in the Upper House recently.

He was critical of the BJP government at the Centre only to the extent of questioning the Modi government's move to constitutionally reduce J&K from a state to a Union territory. He did not question the ending of J&K's autonomy, setting himself apart from the position taken by the Gandhis in Parliament.

It's not clear if all the G-23 leaders will be in the Azad camp for Congress president when the party elections take place. Some of them apparently also see themselves as contenders. But what became evident was that the thrust of the Jammu conclave was against the Congress leadership, though names were not mentioned. The Jammu meet leaders noted that the Congress had become weak and they had come together to strengthen it. Their other objective was to campaign against the BJP. But not much was said about the BJP at the forum.

The G-23 had launched themselves through a letter to the interim chief (which arrived in newspaper offices before it landed with Mrs Gandhi) not long before the Bihar Assembly election. They held their first formal meet in Jammu weeks before Congress will be up against formidable challengers in the Assembly elections in West Bengal, Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, where the Congress government was practically toppled through the BJP's manoeuvring recently.

After the Congress' below par showing in Bihar, the caucus leaders sharply questioned the leadership. They would doubtless have the opportunity to do so again if their party fares poorly in the upcoming state polls and may even pray for the opportunity. However, it hardly behoves an official Congress spokesman in New Delhi, Abhishek Singhvi, to be critical of G-23's Jammu show. The party election has been pushed from January-February this year to June — no doubt with the Assembly polls in view. But this was an executive decision, rather than one formally made consensually, including with the dissidents.

Biden lets Saudis off the hook?

America's strategic interests seem to have prevailed even as US President Joe Biden reprimanded Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman by releasing an intelligence report saying the assassination of critic Jamal Khashoggi was carried out with the prince's tacit approval. Mr Biden stepped back after suspending some arms sales, drawing criticism from his own party that he didn't go the whole hog and sanction MBS, who goes scot-free for the sinister actions of his Rapid Intervention Force lackeys which pursues and silences dissidents at home and abroad.

In calling out the Crown Prince, who is the real power behind his ailing father King Salman, who still occupies the throne, Mr Biden merely sent out the political signal that he is different from Donald Trump and that Saudi Arabia can't expect the same kind of cosy ties it enjoyed with the White House through Mr Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, especially if it breaches human rights as brazenly as, say, Russia did with Alexei Navalny.

The Saudi-US pact goes back eight decades to the Franklin D. Roosevelt era when Americans gained access to cheap Saudi oil in exchange for protection under a bizarre security covenant between the world's oldest democracy and the epitome of an Islamic monarchy. The tensions that came with the release of the intelligence report may only help push the kingdom further towards Russia and China, the latter already Saudi's biggest trade partner.

The prince's actions, which included detention of hundreds of princes and businessmen at a luxury hotel in 2017 aimed at consolidating his power base, may not have endeared him to a more liberal America with its faith in personal freedoms. Mr Biden's moves since moving into the White House has been to reset America's ties with many countries with the focus on first stamping out Mr Trump's erratic and personalised style of handling foreign relations. Can Mr Biden propel America quickly enough into cherishing democratic values and human rights once again? That remains the key question.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

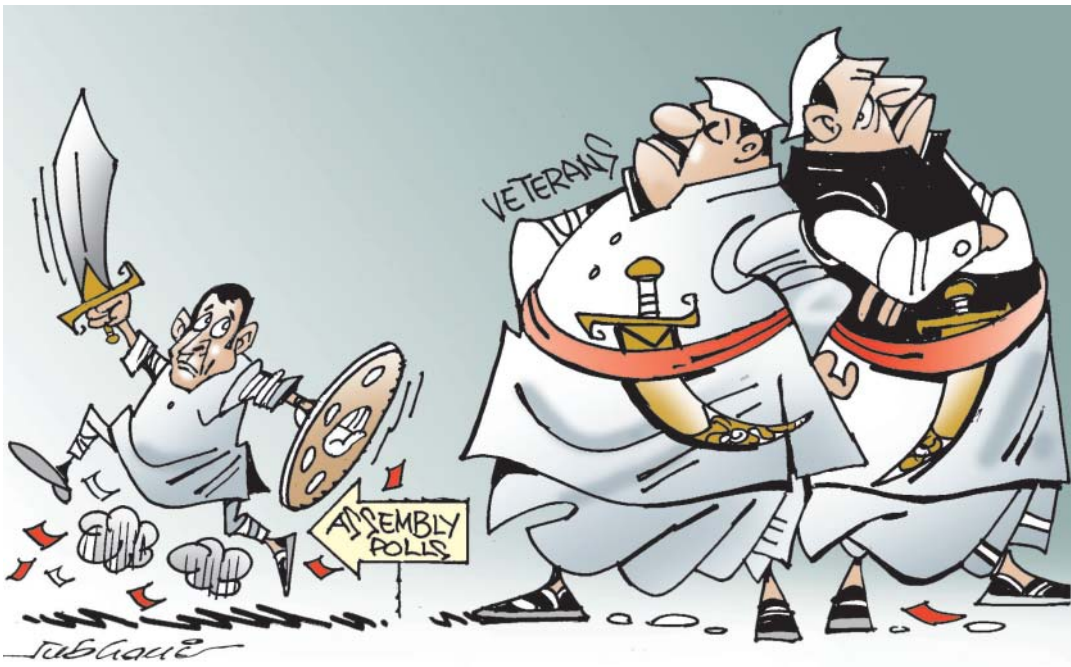
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Subhani



New online, digital code fails to empower users

Shashidhar Nanjundaiah

The new Information and Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 under Section 79 of the IT Act has created a flutter. The news media has paid extraordinary attention, space and time to it as it unfolded, and with good reason. Few people dispute the need for some kind of regulation of the digital media. But the debate is over whether it does what is needed. How empowering a tool are the new rules for the public, who are the ultimate users?

From the press statements of minister for information and broadcasting Prakash Javadekar and minister for information technology Ravi Shankar Prasad, it seems that the new rules seek to rein in the online media and the social media platforms by intervening in their content, and that the overarching objective is to get the digital platforms to be enveloped into “the law of the land”. (I draw a technical distinction between “online platform” from “digital platform” — the first is an unbundled series of news stories released across time, while the latter is a package, similar to a printed newspaper.)

Because the interpretations of sensitive laws of the land by government agencies — in regard to the freedom of expression versus sedition, for example — in recent years have been disputed, a certain amount of scepticism with regard to Rules 2021 should be expected. Experts have questioned whether the new rules even pass the test of constitutionality — in terms of rationale, purpose, proportionality, necessity, and possible impingement on people's basic rights.

First, to tease out what is new in the rule. In its artic-

ulation, the rule seeks to empower the user's voice, especially in case content is objectionable to them. The new rule changes the privacy protection norms that the social platforms seek to exercise by drawing a line between acceptable messaging and spreading objectionable messages. The mandating of age-appropriateness in the rule for the over-the-top (OTT) content certainly ensures that parents have the right to monitor which content is available to their child and which content could be abhorrent. International OTT channels do declare the customary caution about the nature of the content. The rule attaches online news to the conventional definition of news, making online-only news platforms adhere to the same Press Council of India and the Cable Act norms as the conventional media do. The rules mandate a self-regulatory mechanism, like the National Broadcasters' Standards Association (NBSA). A three-tier redressal mechanism entails inter-ministerial oversight. Social media companies, or “intermediaries”, would need to disclose the originator of a “mischievous” message.

I would like to take a media literacy point of view here. In a social media world, the user is also a producer of messages. Media literacy has increasingly gained popularity in school and college curricula in several countries after the alarming rise and opiate-like popularity of fake news. Recently, the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism at the Arizona State University introduced a degree programme in media literacy that takes a train-the-trainer approach and teaches journalism students to further educate society. It empowers the user through an under-

standing of messages, modes and meanings. Among other functions, media literacy unlocks the user's understanding of how to decode media messages — including what is omitted and unstated.

Fake news is a significant reason that media literacy has emerged strongly in the education curricula around the world. Facts and fiction are distinguishable quite simply — if you mix facts with fiction, the concoction can still be called fiction, but the other way around should not be acceptable. One would have expected the Rules 2021 to draw that distinction in an effort to stem fake news. In the long run, its mandate to identify — and punish, presumably — objectionable content may act as a threat and thereby a deterrent to fake news mongers. Handing itself the authority to know who the originator of an objectionable message is does empower the government to act against such individuals. But it misses the point on educating the user. The tiered approach of redressal would only empower users to the extent that social media platforms already allow — through complaints about content that one may find objectionable. There is no real way in which to prevent fake news or intimidation or national security threats because there is no scope for prior restraint in the current technology adoption.

The word “media” in the term “social media” is totally misleading — it is merely media in a technology sense of the term. Yet it is an empowering tool like none other in recent history. People tend to use the social media as a public square, mixing facts and fiction, public and pri-

If the government's intent is to provide more rights to its people, it must help soothe the nerves of people who are now confused about what to say on the social media.

vate. Other users exposed to the public discourse have been consuming and re-producing it, essentially dismissing the need for credible information, or for doing any kind of fact check. The new rule does not take care of this problem. How does a user distinguish between the credible and non-credible platforms?

So, the proposed rule on the social media “intermediaries” seems both perfunctory and off the mark. Is it because the real intent is to rein them into a more government-controlled content environment in the name of the “law of the land”, which are being adhered to anyway? In an ideal world, strengthening the hands of the user and empowering the government should be the same thing. But is it possible for a government to use the former as a front for the latter? The decryption-on-demand mandate is a powerful indicator that this could be the result, providing access to the government to whether what people are saying — and perhaps thinking — can be punished if found to be politically inconvenient.

The exemplary and now routine arrests of seemingly ordinary individuals who are seen to be endangering the nation's sovereignty have spooked a large number of citizens. If the government's intent is to provide more rights to its people, it must help soothe the nerves of people who are now confused about what to say on the social media. If the government seeks to make genuine efforts through the Rules 2021, it must decontrol, not control, the information flow, but in parallel also launch a national drive to make the user more aware of the importance of real information, drawing a distinction between certified, credible platforms and opinionated individuals pretending to be the disseminators of information.

The writer has led reputed institutes of media and communications, and is the founder of “Being Responsible”, which promotes media literacy. The views expressed here are personal.

LETTERS

QUARTERLY BULLETIN

It is a Herculean task for the government to provide jobs for all unemployed youth (Uttam asks CM for data on jobs, March 1). However, the government may release quarterly bulletins indicating vacancies and jobs provided. This can clear all the apprehensions.

G.V.N. Murthy
Hyderabad

BANDI VS DALITS

It is shocking to note that the BJP state president called Dalits “sandal makers and crooks”! If this is his opinion about Dalits, his party high command should fire him (TRS Dalit MLAs flay BJP, DC, March 1). Anything short of his resignation or dismissal will reveal the true face of his party.

B.Banerjee
Hyderabad

FARMERS PROTEST

A narrative is being built up by a section of influential people that paints you anti-farmer if you support reforms in agriculture. Regardless of the government's offer to freeze the farm laws for 18 months or proposal to discuss contentious issues and the SC appointing an expert committee, a section of farmers are portraying themselves as victims.

Shashi Karan
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

PM's narrow escape

BHUBANESHWAR, MARCH. 1 The Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi had a miraculous escape when her Dakota with engine trouble made a forced landing well in time, at Jayakapur airstrip in Koraput district this afternoon.

The pilot of the Indian Air Force plane noticed smoke emitting from the port engine as the aircraft was nearing Jayakapur and later detected oil splashes. He then reduced the power of the engine and made an emergency landing. Fearing a fire in the port engine, the pilot Wg. Cdr. V. Krishnamurthy, manoeuvred a smooth emergency landing at the Jayakapur airstrip, about ten miles from Rayagada.

The sighting of the Dakota over Jayakapur was the signal for a large number of people to rush to the air-field thinking that Mrs. Gandhi was landing there to address them as had originally been planned.

Aakar Patel



As democracy endangered, India's global reputation hit

The Washington Post's editorial board has written that India's claim of being a democracy should be put in question. This headline came after it summed up what was happening in India accurately across the spectrum of governance, from the farm laws being passed without voting in Parliament to young women being jailed because they edited an open-source document.

India's ministry of external affairs did not put out a brave response to this, as it did earlier when a pop star that almost nobody in India had heard of wrote six words (“Why aren't we talking about this?”) over a CNN headline on February 2. India's brave soldiers like Akshay Kumar and Sachin Tendulkar did not respond to the Washington Post either, as they had done to Rihanna. Presumably the Prime Minister did not instruct his minions to react because he does not care about what the Washington Post writes, whereas the pop star has millions of followers.

The Economist, which is the world's most respected magazine, has carried a headline in its latest issue which reads: “The Indian government's pursuit of its critics is not just unfair, but hypocritical”.

Like the Post, this magazine is well-informed about what is going on in India. It says that the Narendra Modi government's actions have made it globally look “mean and silly”.

The government had not responded to this either, though presumably it will have to do something. One reason is that The Economist has referred to the Indian government's promotion of Guruji Golwalkar through an official tribute earlier in February. The magazine told its readers that “Mr Golwalkar believed that Nazi Germany's management of its Jewish problem ‘represented a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by’.”

Let us examine what the Washington Post has claimed, that we are not a democracy. The West doesn't see democracy beginning and ending at the polling station. It has to be accompanied by civil liberties, fundamental rights and access to justice. All of these ingredients together form what the government structure, which they consider democracy.

In our case, we believe elections are democracy. But there is a problem here. India achieved freedom at the group level in 1947. Independence meant that control of the State was transferred

from a set of people led by foreigners to Indians entirely. This gave Indian citizens the space to determine how to govern themselves and write their own laws to enjoy individual freedoms and civil liberties.

Freedom at the group level meant essentially the right to vote. This was available, but restricted, in the British period too. Freedom at the group level liberated India from a system that already included voting rights, legislatures and lawmaking ability for Indians. It was on limited subjects, however.

After 1947 India should have focused on individual freedoms so that the exercise could be deepened. Here India stumbled. The State (meaning, the apparatus of government) did not relinquish its rights to citizens. It contested the space and asserted itself over citizens on essential freedoms.

The rights — to freedom of speech and expression; practice any profession or occupation; peaceful assembly; to form associations; freely practice and propagate religion; not to be deprived of life and liberty — do not exist in India today. These rights are fundamental, which enjoy a high degree of protection from encroachment by the State. But

they are not available to Indians today despite what the Constituent Assembly wanted. The State has taken them away and many never existed in the first place.

There are so many laws that regulate and criminalise free speech that it is difficult to know where to start. Sedition, criminal defamation and criminal contempt are a start. They don't exist in the nations where our laws are derived from (India's Constitution isn't based on Manu Smriti, but the constitutions of other nations).

The Supreme Court in the 1950s ruled while the Constituent Assembly guaranteed freedom to practice “any” profession or “carry out any occupation”, it could not allow butchery of cows because that offended Hindus; and while the Constitution was supreme, Hindu sentiment was more supreme.

Protest (peaceful assembly) has been criminalised, right to propagation has been criminalised and so has the right to occupation. The freedom of speech is criminalised with sedition, criminal defamation and criminal contempt laws.

The State sought to regulate these freedoms by so-called “reasonable restrictions”, which overturned the

rights themselves. This was always the case in India. However, this government has pushed the rights of the State over the rights of Indian citizens to the point where it will crush individuals who stand up to the State. This is what the Washington Post and Economist are writing about. The reason the Indian government is silent on these accusations is that they are true.

We can tell a pop singer to shut up because she is a young woman. It's slightly more difficult to tell the Washington Post and Economist to get lost, so silence is the next best option. What is left unsaid is that this is not something that will pass over. The Indian government's continued actions and its refusal to reverse what it is doing to its citizens has come at a cost to India's global reputation. We are too close to the story as it unfolds before us in real time today to be able to calculate what this cost is. But it is substantial, and entirely avoidable. It's a different matter that the Indian government today does not care what it does to Indians as long as it can continue on its path.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,849.84	1.53
Nifty 50	14,761.50	1.60
S&P 500*	3,898.07	2.28
Dollar (₹)	73.55	-0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.40	0.02
Euro (₹)	88.40	0.78
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	45,520	241 0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	65.02	0.93
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.209	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.426	-0.030

* As of 8:30 PM IST

SBI reduces home loan rates to 6.70%

State Bank of India said it has reduced interest rates on home loans by up to 10 basis points (bps) and is offering loans starting from 6.70 per cent rate. The new rates are based on loan amount and Cibil score of the borrower, and are available till March 31, 2021. The bank said the home loan interest rates will start from 6.70 per cent for loans up to Rs 75 lakh and 6.75 per cent for loans in the range of Rs 75 lakh-Rs 5 crore.

WTO to hold ministerial meet in late 2021



World Trade Organization members agreed to hold the next major ministerial meeting in Geneva, Switzerland in late 2021, delegates said. The biennial conference was originally set to be held in Kazakhstan last year but was delayed due to the pandemic. The WTO's director-general Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala who began work on Monday hopes the meeting will provide a venue for a deal on fisheries subsidies and WTO reforms.

Govt expects ₹3.39 L cr from maritime summit

The government is aiming to attract investment worth Rs 3.39 lakh crore during Maritime India Summit 2021 in various projects. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to inaugurate Maritime India Summit 2021 (MIS 2021) on Tuesday, which will be held virtually and is likely to be participated by many nations, including Russia, Uzbekistan, Qatar, Denmark, Iran, Afghanistan, and Armenia.

Credit demand may double to 9-10% in FY22

On the back of government and regulatory measures, which helped the economy to recover faster than expected, bank credit is seen growing 400-500 bps to 9-10 per cent in FY22, a Crisil report said. While bank credit growth had contracted 0.8 per cent in the first half of this fiscal, it recovered sharply in the third quarter by growing 3 per cent QoQ. In Q4, too, it should clock 3 per cent growth, Crisil said.



Sales jump 12% at Maruti, 29% at Hyundai Cars regain speed, clock 24% growth in February

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, MARCH 1

Major carmakers on Monday reported robust double-digit sales in February, bringing cheers to the automakers depressed from the prolonged Covid pandemic that had hit them hard.

The top 10 carmakers who produce 97 per cent of the total domestic sales clocked a 24 per cent growth in domestic volumes in February at 298,694 units against 241,533 units sold in February 2020.

Maruti Suzuki, India's biggest car maker by sales, said it sales in February jumped 11.8 per cent to 1,52,983 units from 1,36,849 units it sold a year ago.

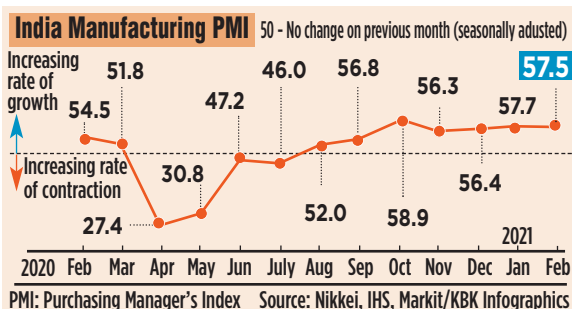
Sales at its rival Hyundai, the second largest carmaker, also rose 29 per cent to 51,600 units, up from 40,010 units.

Tata Motors reported an 119 per cent jump in sales to 27,225 units, up from 12,430 units.

Korean brand Kia Motors logged a 7 per cent rise in volumes to 16,702 units against 15,644 units.

Mahindra and Mahindra, the SUV specialist, also reported 41 per cent jump in sales last month to 15,391 units, up from 10,938 units a year ago.

Japanese carmaker Toyota registered a 36 per cent sales growth last month. It sold 14,075 units compared to 10,352 units in February 2020. Toyota attributed this sales growth to new launches like Innova Crysta and



Mfg PMI stays in expansion zone

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

Strong demand and increased output helped India's factory activity to stay in expansion for the seventh straight month in February. Although the Nikkei Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index, or PMI, compiled by IHS Markit, eased slightly to 57.5 in February from 57.7 in January, it remained well above the 50-level separating growth from contraction.

"Better demand conditions and successful marketing campaigns reportedly underpinned a further increase in new orders during February. Although easing from January, the pace of growth remained sharp in the context of historical data," IHS Markit said. Pollyanna De Lima, economics associate director at IHS Markit, said, "Indian goods producers reported a healthy inflow of new orders in February, a situation that underpinned a further upturn in output and quantity of purchases. This was evident from a quicker rise in outstanding business and another decline in inventories of finished goods."

Fortuner facelift and Fortuner Legender in January.

French car brand Renault posted 26 per cent growth in February volumes to 11,043 units against 8,784. The company has started dispatches of their latest model Kiger to its showrooms. Honda Cars sold 28.3 per

cent more cars at 9,324 units last month, up from 7,269 units it sold last year. Sales at MG Motor registered its best-ever monthly retail at 4,329 units last month, marking a growth of 215 per cent compared to February 2020. China's SAIC-owned British carmaker registered this

Chinese hackers target Indian vaccine makers

KRISHNA N. DAS
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

A Chinese state-backed hacking group has in recent weeks targeted the IT systems of two Indian vaccine makers whose coronavirus shots are being used in the country's immunisation campaign, cyber intelligence firm Cyfirma told Reuters.

Rivals China and India have both sold or gifted Covid-19 shots to many countries. India produces over 60 per cent of all vaccines sold in the world.

Goldman Sachs-backed Cyfirma, based in Singapore and Tokyo, said Chinese hacking group APT10, also known as Stone Panda, had identified gaps and vulnerabilities in the IT infrastructure and supply chain software of Bharat Biotech and the Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's largest vaccine maker.

"The real motivation here is actually exfiltrating intellectual property and getting competitive advantage over Indian pharmaceutical compa-

MINISTRY SAYS NO MALWARE IMPACT ON POWER SYSTEM

New Delhi, March 1: The Ministry of Power on Monday said there is no impact on operations of Power System Operation Corporation (Posoco) due to any malware attack and that prompt actions are taken on advisories issued against such threats.

The ministry was responding to a study by a private US company which suggested that a China-linked group targeted India's power grid system via malware.

nies," said Cyfirma chief executive Kumar Ritesh, formerly a top cyber official with British foreign intelligence agency Mi6. He said APT10 was actively targeting SII, which is making the AstraZeneca vaccine for many countries and will soon start bulk-manufacturing Novavax shots.

"In the case of Serum

GST COLLECTIONS SEE 7% YoY RISE AT ₹1.13 L CRORE

FC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MARCH 1

For the fifth month in a row, the goods and services tax (GST) mop-up crossed the Rs 1-lakh crore mark in February. GST collections in the month stood at Rs 1.13 lakh crore, which is 7 per cent higher year-on-year but lower than the all-time high of nearly Rs 1.20 lakh crore recorded for January, government data showed on Monday.

"Out of the total GST for the February month, the Central GST was Rs 21,092 crore, State GST was Rs 27,273 crore, Integrated GST was Rs 55,253 crore (including Rs 24,382 crore collected on import of goods) and compensation cess was Rs 9,525 crore (including Rs 660 crore collected on import of goods)," the finance ministry statement said.

It said the government settled Rs 22,398 crore to CGST and Rs 17,534 crore to SGST from IGST.

growth on account of robust demand for Hector facelift, Hector Plus, and Gloster.

Riding on the success of the Magnite SUV, Nissan Motor saw 313 per cent growth in February volumes to 4,244 units as against 1,028 units sold in the same month last year.

IDBI BANK TO SET OFF ₹45,580-CR LOSSES AGAINST SECURITIES PREMIUM ACCOUNT

New Delhi, Mar. 1: LIC-controlled IDBI Bank will set off its accumulated losses worth Rs 45,586 crore against the balance in the securities premium account, according to the bank's draft scheme.

Its accumulated losses (or debit balance of profit and loss account) at the end of March 31, 2020, stood at Rs 45,586 crore. They were at Rs 44,739 crore as on December 31, 2020.

The accumulated losses as on March 31, 2021, shall be ascertained after the audited financial statements are approved by the bank's board, said the lender.

The bank's authorised share capital is Rs 25,000 crore.

The issued, subscribed and paid-up share capital is worth Rs 10,752.40 crore and the security premium is of Rs 50,732.27 crore.

IDBI Bank said the balance standing to the credit of securities premium account of the bank as per audited financial statements for FY20 and as on April 1, 2020, it is Rs 49,669 crore.

This balance as on December 31, 2020, stood at Rs 50,718 crore as per the unaudited financial statements.

Last month, its board had approved a proposal for setting off the bank's accumulated losses by April 1, 2021, in full or partially, by using the balance in the securities premium account. —PTI

BPCL to sell NRL stake to OIL, EIL for ₹9.9K cr

New Delhi, March 1: Privatisation-bound Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) on Monday said it will exit Numaligarh refinery in Assam by selling its entire stake to a consortium of Oil India Ltd and Engineers India Ltd for Rs 9,876 crore.

The sale of Numaligarh Refinery Ltd clears the way for privatisation of India's second-largest fuel retailer.

In keeping with the Assam Peace Accord, the government had decided to keep Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL) in the public sector. As part of this, BPCL was to sell its entire 61.65 per cent stake to state-owned firms.

A consortium of Oil India Ltd, Engineers India Ltd and the Government of Assam expressed interest in buying the stake and the BPCL board on Monday approved the sale.

"The board of directors of BPCL at the meeting held on March 1, 2021, has approved the proposal for sale of entire equity shares of 445.35 crore held by BPCL in NRL to a consortium of OIL and EIL and to Government of Assam,"

₹77K crore bids for spectrum on Day 1

New Delhi, March 1: India's first auction of spectrum in five years attracted Rs 77,146 crore of bids on the opening day on Monday, with Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel, and Vodafone Idea participating in the bidding process—a response that the government said was better than expected.

There were, however, no takers for spectrum in 700 MHz and 2500 MHz bands on the first day, and the auctions will conclude on Tuesday.

About 2,308.80 MHz of spectrum, that carry telecom signals, in seven bands worth nearly Rs 4 lakh crore at the reserve or start price, was offered for bidding in the auction that began on Monday.

Communications minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said Rs 77,146 crore worth of spectrum was bid on the first day but there were no takers for the airwaves in the premium 700 MHz as also 2500 MHz bands. The response from players and the bids received surpassed government's internal estimates that had anticipated bids worth Rs 45,000 crore.

"The winning bids that have come till 6 PM today is Rs 77,146 crore. We thought since there are only three players, and spectrum replacement is happening...our estimation was that the bids will touch about Rs 45,000 crore, but it is a matter of assurance that it has gone as high as Rs 77,146 crore," Prasad said.

The bidder-wise details were not available immediately. A total of 2,308.80 MHz spectrum is being



put to auction, out of which there have been bids for 849.20 MHz so far, an official release said.

Bids were received in 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1800 MHz, 2100 MHz and 2300 MHz bands, as players gave the prized 700 MHz band a miss on the first day of auctions.

"Total value of spectrum put to auction was about Rs 4 lakh crore. In this, 700 MHz band was a costly band, and that cost itself is Rs 1.97 lakh crore," the minister said adding that the government will take a call on 700 MHz band, used for 5G, in case it remains unsold in the ongoing auctions.

Excluding 700 MHz and 2500 Mhz bands, the bidding accounted for 60 per cent of the spectrum that was put to auction.

The 700 MHz band went unsold during the 2016 auctions, too. During 2016, when there were seven bidders, the spectrum sold was 41 per cent by quantity and 12 per cent by value of the total spectrum put to auction. The corresponding figures in the 2021 spectrum auction so far are 37 per cent and 19 per cent respectively, with three participants. —PTI

FINOLEX LENDS HELPING HAND TO WOMEN IN MAHA, TELANGANA

Hyderabad, March 1: Finolex Industries (FIL) through its CSR partner Mukul Madhav Foundation (MMF) has been working for women's upliftment in Maharashtra and Telangana.

MMF and FIL in 2019 had identified 312 widow farmers and taught them the best farming practices, soil testing and selling techniques post-harvesting. For this initiative, MMF collaborated with Krishi Vidyan Kendra, which distributed 30 kg of soya seeds and 15 kg of tuvar seeds for their first harvest.

Further, 100 women farmers in rural Maharashtra were taught mechanised farming and crop productivity enhancement techniques. These farmers are now training 1,000 fellow women farmers in turn.

FIL and MMF have been working closely in Palghar, Maharashtra since 2017 where they have completed the construction of over 500 toilets for the tribal villagers. In 2019 MMF extended its work to build safe, hygienic and equipped menstruation homes for women. Banishing menstruating women is an unhealthy practice amongst certain tribes in Gadchiroli—a tribal, nasal-affected and underdeveloped village.

Vulnerable HIV positive mothers and sex workers are being provided with dry groceries on a monthly basis. The affected have been provided with sewing machines to create a livelihood for themselves. Internationally renowned garment house, Kashka, is providing them training and buying back the finished goods.

Box office collections drop 85% in 2020

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 1

Total box office collections of Indian film industry were down 85 per cent in 2020 compared to the previous year.

The box office collections in 2020 stood at Rs 861 crore against Rs 5,613 crore in 2019—a drop of 85 per cent. In fact, in 2019, the collections had grown 30 per cent, from Rs 4,422 crore in 2018, as per a report by Care Ratings. The fall in collections can be attributed to the significant fall in movie releases during the year to 75. Out of these, just 7



films were released between November 15 and December 25, which clocked total revenues of Rs 36 crore. The remaining 68 films were released between January 1 and March 13 and generated box office revenues of Rs 825 crore. In the previous year, 246 movies had clocked collections of Rs

5,613 crore. An analysis of financials of 44 companies in the film production, distribution and entertainment industry showed total expenditure also declined by nearly three-fourths, which helped minimise losses for players. The industry's loss at the net level stood at Rs 403 crore in Q1 FY21, which reduced to Rs 288 crore in Q2 and to Rs 71 crore in Q3 FY21.

Minimal electricity and water charges and reduction in employee costs through measures like layoffs, retrenchments and reduction in salaries led to lower operational cost.

SHORT TAKES

Varun, Malvika win in Uganda

New Delhi: Indian shuttlers Varun Kapur and Malvika Bansod registered hard-fought wins to clinch the men's and women's singles titles respectively at the 2021 Uganda International in Kampala. Varun had to sweat it out to get the better of seventh seeded Sankar Muthusamy 21-18, 16-21, 21-17 in the men's singles final, while second seed Malvika notched up a come-from-behind 17-21, 25-23, 21-10 victory over compatriot Anupama Upadhyaya in the women singles summit clash.

The junior world no. 2 Varun, who has been a consistent performer on the junior circuit and clinched his sixth title earlier this year, won the first game convincingly before losing the second.

However, the 17-year-old looked in complete control in the decider and wrapped up the match comfortably in his favour. — PTI

Sayali clinches sub-junior TT title

Indore: Sayali Wani of Maharashtra outwitted Haryana's Suhana Saini 4-3 to emerge champion at the 82nd Cadet & Sub-Junior National Table Tennis Championships here on Monday.

Top-seeded Suhana led 3-2 but goofed it up in the crucial sixth game, allowing her Nasik rival to inch ahead. Sayali courageously saved a match point at 9-10. And when she made it 10-all, she grabbed the first chance to go 11-10 up before finishing the game and match in style.

In the Cadet Girls' final, M. Hansini notched up a 4-2 victory over Tamil Nadu's Ananya Muralidharan.

What stood out on the day was Hansini's better reading of the situation.

On the other hand, Ananya relied too much on her back-hand blocks and drives. Rarely did she employ her forehand while Hansini was adept at doing both. Her top-spin fore-hand winners often fetched rewards, saving her whenever in trouble. — PTI

FULL THROTTLE

Kohli & Co. back in nets ahead of final Test

Ahmedabad, March 1: Big guns Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and Ajinkya Rahane went full throttle at the nets as the Indian cricket on Monday trained in earnest for the upcoming fourth and final Test against England.

The fourth Test starts here on Thursday. Captain Kohli, his deputy Rahane and senior opener Rohit were seen batting at the nets in a video posted by the BCCI on Twitter.

The three senior players drove, pulled and flicked against the fast bowlers and spinners at the Narendra Modi Stadium here.

Head coach Ravi Shastri was seen interacting with Rohit and Kohli before the two star batsmen sat together for a discussion.

Left-arm spinner Axar Patel, who bagged 11 wickets in India's thumping win in the pink ball third Test at the same venue, was seen rolling his arms over at the nets against some of the world's best batsmen.

They were also seen fielding with Rahane, standing next to Rohit in the second slip position, taking a one-handed diving catch to his right.

The Kohli-led Indian team lost the first Test in Chennai by 227 runs, but bounced back with a 317-run hammering of the visitors in the second Test.

In the previous match, India shot out England for 112 and 81 to wrap up the Test inside two days on a challenging Motera track.

The Indian team had a full-fledged practice session here on Sunday as well.

— PTI



India's Axar Patel at a training session in Ahmedabad on Monday, ahead of the fourth and final Test against England starting on Thursday. — BCCI

AUSTRALIA'S HOGG BATS FOR ASHWIN'S RETURN TO ODIs

Sydney, March 1: Former Australia all-rounder Brad Hogg has called for Ravichandran Ashwin's inclusion in India's ODI squad, saying the senior off-spinner is a wicket-taker who also adds depth to batting.

Replying to a tweet by a fan, Hogg said Ashwin would be a great addition to Indian side in the 50-over format.

"I think it is a great option, gives the batting line up extra depth allowing the top order to be more aggressive at the top," Hogg said in reply to a tweet by a fan asking if Ashwin can make a comeback to One-Day International cricket.

"And he is a wicket taking option with the ball, as well as economical. Get him back in. #INDvENG #Cricket," Hogg tweeted.

— PTI

Ashwin, who has featured in 111 ODIs and 46 T20Is, besides 77 Tests, has been out of India's limited overs side for a few years now. He last appeared in an ODI game in June 2017.

The 34-year-old played a major role in India's historic Test series victory in Australia earlier this year.

In the third Test against England last week, he became the fourth Indian to take 400 Test wickets.

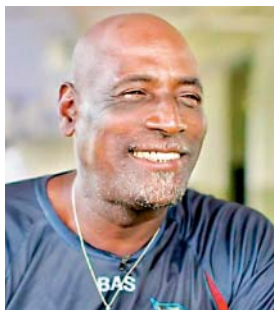
The fourth and final Test between India and England begins on Thursday in Ahmedabad. The hosts lead the series 2-1. After the Test series, the two teams are scheduled to play five T20Is and three ODIs.

— PTI

Stop groaning over pitches: Viv

New Delhi, March 1: West Indian batting legend Viv Richards is not amused with past and present English cricketers "moaning and groaning" about the spin-friendly pitches in India and said the visitors did not prepare well for the challenge.

The newly-laid Motera track in Ahmedabad became a subject of debate after India crushed England inside two days in the third Test to go 2-1 up in the four-match series. The severe criticism came from former England captains like Michael Vaughan and a



People seem to forget that if you're going to India, you should expect that. You are going to spin land. You should basically prepare yourself to know what you're going to encounter.

— VIV RICHARDS
West Indies batting legend

section of the British media.

All the chatter has not gone down well with Richards, whose incredible range of strokes and fearless approach to the

played in India, the second and third Test match against England. And I am a little confused about the question really because there seems to be a lot of moaning and groaning about the wicket that they were playing on," Richards said in a video posted on his Facebook page.

"I just felt that the ones who are moaning, in my opinion, should realise that there are times that you're going to get a seaming track, a ball that is basically jumping off a good length and everyone thinks that's a problem for batters," he said. — PTI

Sindhu & Saina eye Swiss treat

Basel (Switzerland), March 1: Reigning world champion P.V. Sindhu will be eager to return to the podium as former winner Saina Nehwal looks to regain her touch in the season-opening Swiss Open tournament beginning here on Tuesday.

Indian men's singles players, too, have tasted success in this tournament with Sameer Verma, H.S. Prannoy and Kidambi Srikanth emerging victorious in 2018, 2016 and 2015 respectively and B. Sai Praneeth finishing runners-up in the last edition.

All four will be looking to relive the moments and extend India's good run at the \$140,000 event which will also resume the extended Olympic qualifying period.

It was here at St. Jakobshalle venue that Olympic silver medallist Sindhu had claimed the world championship gold in 2019, her last title before the Covid-19 pandemic disruption.

The 25-year-old from Hyderabad, seeded second, will look to go the distance again as she opens her campaign against Turkey's Neslihan Yigit.

Sindhu didn't have a good outing in the three events in Thailand recently but the road to the quarterfinal here looks smooth for the Indian where she is likely to confront fifth seed Thai Busanan Ongbamrunphan, an opponent she had beaten at the Toyota Thailand Open in January.

Two-time former winner Saina, too, is in the same half but the senior pro will have to overcome players

● **It was here at St. Jakobshalle venue that Olympic silver medallist Sindhu had claimed the world championship gold in 2019, her last title before the Covid-19 pandemic disruption.**

like Korea's sixth seed Sung Ji Hyun and fourth seeded Danish Mia Blichfeldt — whom she is likely to meet — to set up a semifinal face-off with Sindhu.

All eyes will also be on world number 10 men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty after their semifinal finish at Toyota Thailand Open.

The Indian pair, seeded second, would look to stretch its good run, especially after a month-long training session under new doubles coach Mathias Boe of Denmark.

The Indian duo will face Scotland's Christopher Grimley and Matthew Grimley in the opening round.

Expectations will be high from Satwik and Ashwini Ponnappa as well after their last-four finish at the previous event. But it will be an uphill climb for the duo as it faces second seeds Indonesians Hafiz Faizal and Gloria Emanuelle Widjaja first up.

In the men's singles, it will be an all-Indian show when Sameer takes on former world number one Kidambi Srikanth in the opening round.

— PTI

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