

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

KARIMNAGAR | THURSDAY | 4 MARCH 2021

WEATHER



Max: 36°C
Min: 20°C
RH: 22%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 37/20°C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Bahula Shashti
till 10.01 pm
Star: Vishaka till 11.58 pm
Varjyam: 6.49 am to 8.18 am;
3.45 am to 5.16 am (Friday)
Durmuhurtam: 10.39 am to
11.17 am; 3.12 pm to 3.58 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
Rajab 19, 1441 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.32 am
Zohar: 12.38 pm
Asar: 4.44 pm
Maghrib: 6.29 pm
Isha: 7.36 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.23 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.31 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 11.30 PM
MOONSET TODAY 10.17 AM

COUNTER POINT



Now, we have introduced platform reservation to avoid overcrowding!

SHORT TAKES

Force to guard Tibet trijunction

New Delhi: The government has sanctioned a dozen fresh Sashastra Seema Bai (SSB) battalions, comprising over 13,000 personnel for the Nepal and Bhutan borders guarding force, to "fortify" defences along these fronts including the tri-junction area in Sikkim that adjoins Bhutan and Tibet, officials said.

Prez gets Covid vaccine dose-1

New Delhi: President Ram Nath Kovind was administered the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine at an army hospital on Wednesday and urged all eligible citizens to get vaccinated. According to tweets on his handle, the president, 75, was accompanied by his daughter when the vaccine dose was administered to him at the army's Research and Referral Hospital here.

Taxmen raids Anurag Kashyap

Mumbai: The Income-Tax Department on Wednesday raided premises linked to filmmaker Anurag Kashyap, who launched the now dissolved production house Phantom Films, Reliance Entertainment group CEO Shishabhash Sarkar and Taapsee Pannu. Searches took place at 30 locations in Mumbai and Pune.

Full report on Page 5

NATION | 5

Sasikala quits politics ahead of TN polls



BJP FAILED TO GET ITIR TO HYD, MUST APOLOGISE TO PEOPLE: KTR

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 3

TRS working president K.T. Rama Rao on Wednesday demanded that the BJP offer an apology to the people of Telangana state for its failure to get the ITIR (IT Investment Region) project to Hyderabad.

Despite the statement by Union information technology minister Ravi Shankar Prasad in Parliament that the ITIR scheme has been shelved, BJP state president Bandi Sanjay was spreading lies on ITIR day in and day out, Rama Rao said.

In response to an open letter written by Sanjay on the ITIR on Tuesday, Rama Rao said, "His open letter showed his ignorance," adding that the ITIR has not gone ahead even in Bengaluru though the same party runs governments both at the Centre and in Karnataka.

"Apart from Hyderabad, the ITIR project was sanctioned for Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Karnataka but has not seen any development in any of these states. Is the TRS government responsible for lack of development there too," asked the TRS working president, the mocking directed the question at Sanjay. "We will provide all the letters written to the Union government since 2014 and also the Detailed Project Report of the ITIR to Mr Bandi Sanjay. Does he have the power to get ITIR to Hyderabad," Rama Rao asked.

Page 2: Let BJP get Centre's nod for ITIR: KTR

Though the Centre told Parliament that the ITIR scheme was shelved, KTR said TS BJP chief was spreading lies on ITIR

Fervour peaks



Devotees perform during procession ahead of Kumbh Mela 2021, amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, in Haridwar, on Wednesday.

PTI

SC says dissent is not sedition

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said that expressing views that are contrary to the stand or position of the government of the day cannot be termed as sedition.

"It is not seditious to disagree with the government," said a bench comprising Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Hemant Gupta, junking a PIL seeking action against former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah for making a statement on the scrapping of Article 370.

The Supreme Court also imposed a fine of ₹50,000 on the petitioners, Rajat Sharma and Neh Srivastava, after they failed to substantiate their allegation that Dr Abdullah had sought the help of China and Pakistan against India on the Article 370 issue.

"The expression of a view which is dissent from a decision taken by the Central government itself cannot be said to be

The Supreme Court also imposed a fine on the petitioners for not substantiate their allegations

seditious. There is nothing in the statement which we find so offensive as to give a cause of action for a court to initiate proceedings... Not only that, the petitioners have nothing to do with the subject matter and this is clearly a case of publicity interest litigation for the petitioners only to get their names in the press. We must discourage such endeavours," the bench said.

Describing the denuding of the state of its special status with the abrogation of Article 370 as the "trauma of August 5", Dr Abdullah had in an interview said that these changes were a "betrayal" of the trust reposed by the people of Jammu and Kashmir when the state had acceded to the Union of India in October 1947.

J&K SEPARATIST LEADER RELEASED FROM DETENTION

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, MARCH 3

The Jammu and Kashmir police said on Wednesday that All Parties Hurriyat Conference chief and Muslim cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq is no longer under house detention.

The Mirwaiz was among hundreds of people placed under house arrest or jailed ahead of J&K was stripped of its special status.

WORLD | 6

Tadon forced to exit WH nomination

SPORTS | 8

India vs England final Test from today



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KCR to call grads for MLC election

To counter Oppn claims against TRS govt

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 3

TRS president and Chief Minister K. Chandrababu Naidu will call a few graduate voters over phone and seek their votes for party candidates fighting the March 14 MLC polls for two seats.

Official sources in TRS said the CM took this decision at the party's 'MLC election strategy meeting' held with in-charge ministers and senior party leaders on Wednesday. This is for the first time that the Chief Minister will be speaking directly to voters over phone, seeking votes for the TRS in the elections.

The decision came as a surprise to party leaders and cadre who said that it showed the importance being given by the party chief to the MLC polls. In the past, the party never took the MLC elections seriously.

Rao is learnt to have directed ministers and party leaders to provide him with the phone numbers of graduate voters in six districts that are going to the polls.

The CM asked them to categorise the voters as

Sources say that, barring Assembly polls, the CM had never spent this much time on any election in Telangana since 2014

graduates, postgraduates, private employees, government employees, women, IT employees, advocates and other professionals and provide their mobile phone numbers accordingly.

The TRS chief said he would select the names of a few voters randomly covering Hyderabad, Ranga Reddy, Mahabubnagar, Warangal, Khammam and Nalgonda and speak to them directly over the phone, explaining the welfare schemes and development programmes undertaken by the TRS government.

The CM will also counter the claims of the Opposition that the TRS failed the youth, students and employees. Sources said he wanted to discuss with voters the high salary hikes and increments he had extended to government employees and the highest-ever filling of 1.32 lakh government jobs in six years.

The TRS chief wanted to assure the employees and students about the government's plans to implement the new Pay Revision Commission to employees and issuance of job notifications to fill over 50,000 posts soon after the MLC polls.

The CM was spending six to eight hours every day to discuss party's strategy for upcoming MLC polls and Nagarjunasagar Assembly bypoll for the past two weeks. This has boosted the morale of the party leaders and cadre.

Party sources say that, barring Assembly elections, the CM had never spent this much time on any election in Telangana since 2014 and had, instead, handed over all the election responsibilities to his son K.T. Rama Rao.

However, in the backdrop of the TRS suffering electoral setbacks in the recent Dubbaka Assembly bypoll and GHMC elections and the Congress intensifying its activities with padayatra, the CM is learnt to have decided to handle the party strategy for the upcoming elections himself if only to decisively check the growth of the two Opposition parties.

Karnataka minister quits over sexual abuse charge

Bengaluru, March 3: Karnataka water resources minister Ramesh Jarkiholi on Wednesday resigned from the state cabinet, following allegations of sexual harassment against him.

His resignation came after protests and criticism by opposition parties and several sections of society, causing a huge embarrassment to the government and the ruling BJP.

In his resignation letter to Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa just ahead of the cabinet meeting this afternoon, Jarkiholi claimed he was innocent.



Ramesh Jarkiholi

"The allegations against me are far from the truth. It has to be investigated at the earliest. Though I'm confident about my innocence, taking moral responsibility, I'm resigning from my position as the cabinet minister. I

request you to accept it," he said.

Social activist Dinesh Kallahalli had on Tuesday lodged a police complaint against Ramesh, alleging he had sexually harassed a 'job aspirant' and threatened the woman and her family with dire consequences.

Dubbing it as 'sex for job' scandal, purported video clips showing Jarkiholi getting intimate with an unidentified woman was widely aired by local news channels.

Sources said Jarkiholi tendered his resignation on the directions from the high command. — PTI

TIMELY CHECK

HC rebukes Nalgonda collector for ignoring orders

Collector told to do social service

VUJJINI VAMSHIDHARA | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 3

Continuing to put officials who show disrespect in their place, the Telangana High Court on Wednesday asked Nalgonda collector Prashant J. Patil to do social service in lieu of the punishment imposed for contempt of court. Patil had violated court orders when he was joint collector of Warangal and had been ordered to pay costs.

A division bench of Chief Justice Hima Kohli and

The bench said officials in higher authority, who are well aware of the Constitution, must respect court orders instead of filing appeals after they have been punished.

Justice B. Vijaysen Reddy was dealing with an appeal filed by Patil, who sought the division bench to suspend the operation of imposing costs of ₹2,000 against him. The costs had been imposed on grounds of

willful disobedience of court orders issued in 2016. Sanjeev Kumar, special counsel, informed the division bench that the court directions had been complied with, and sought suspension of the orders that were issued against Patil.

To this, the bench said officials in higher authority, who are well aware of the Constitution, must respect court orders instead of filing appeals after they have been punished.

The bench said that it was suspending the costs imposed on Patil, but he

should do voluntary social service. The bench directed counsel to inform it by April 7 the service that the Collector would do.

A single judge had imposed costs on Patil for failing to implement a direction to allocate paddy to Parameshwari Rice Mill in Warangal district's Parvathagiri village for custom milling.

The mill was prohibited for providing custom milling of rice as it had violated rules and regulations of Essential Commodities Act 2015 by storing more rice than permitted.

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SHORT TAKES

PRO IN CMO
VIJAY KUMAR
'SACKED'DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 3

Gatika Vijay Kumar, public relations officer (PRO) in the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) since 2014, quit the post on Wednesday. He also quit his other post as general manager (corporate communications) of TS Transco.

Though Vijay Kumar tweeted that he had resigned due to personal reasons, it created a buzz in political and official circles as speculation was rife that he was sacked by Chief Minister K. Chandrababhan Rao for misusing his position and indulging in irregularities.

Though the CMO has a chief PRO, there are complaints that Vijay Kumar was reigning supreme there. There were also allegations that he had indulged in "settlements" of land disputes and transfers of officials and employees.

All these complaints reportedly went to the notice of CM, who took a serious view and decided to sack him, it is learnt.

US CONSUL
GENERAL
PATS KTRDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 3

Joel Reifman, US Consul General in Hyderabad, on Wednesday congratulated IT minister K.T. Rama Rao on receiving the SKOCH award recently.

Reifman posted on Twitter, "Kudos to the Telangana administration and @KTRTRS on receiving SKOCH awards for your efforts in e-governance and in implementing IT initiatives to improve public services (sic)." The minister responded, saying, "Many thanks CG Reifman (sic)."

The state was awarded SKOCH's 'e-Governance State of the Year' award while Rama Rao bagged the 'Best Performing IT Minister' award. Rama Rao had won the award in 2016 as well, making him the only state minister to be so honoured twice. The SKOCH governance report card is based on ongoing studies across states and the Centre since 2013.

WE-HUB SIGNS
MoU WITH
MEESHODC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 3

WE-Hub, the government-led incubator for women entrepreneurs, on Wednesday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Meesho, an Indian-origin socio-commerce platform. This year-long partnership aims to aid women entrepreneurs to achieve financial independence via fresh market exposure.

The MoU was inked between WE-Hub CEO Deepthi Ravula and Meesho founder and CEO Vinit Aatre in the presence of women welfare minister Satyavathi Rathod.

"The start-ups will benefit in the form of seamless onboarding, free cataloging, and market access on the national platform which will create avenues to increase business and trade opportunities," it was stated. Satyavathi Rathod said, "This will be a path-breaking partnership for the state that will enable women to use the power of technology for creating their own identity and will, in turn, help us take a big step forward towards diversity and financial inclusion."

Deepthi Ravula said, "Small businesses in Telangana will learn about taking the next step in expanding their markets and converting their customer base and sales in entirely new ways."

LET BJP GET
CENTRE'S NOD
FOR ITIR: KTR

From Page 1

If the Telangana BJP has any sincerity towards bringing ITIR to Hyderabad, they should make the Centre announce it.

"Bandi Sanjay's letter is full of lies. He wrote the letter for publicity," Rama Rao alleged, adding that Sanjay wrote the letter for misleading the people. "I challenge Bandi Sanjay to either bring the ITIR or an equivalent project to Hyderabad," said Rama Rao. The state IT minister added that BJP has disappointed the youth of Telangana who have been waiting for the ITIR to become a reality for jobs.

TS to reclaim ₹10K cr
from 28,000 deposits

Telangana has the highest number of PD accounts

L. VENKAT RAM
REDDY | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 3

The state government would close about 28,000 personal deposit accounts (PDAs) opened by various departments in which over ₹10,000 crore is lying unused for the past few years.

A scrutiny done by the finance department has revealed that the departments had opened the accounts in violation of norms. With the state government facing a funds crunch due to the Coronavirus-induced financial crisis, the finance department is exploring all the options to mobilise funds ahead of Budget 2021-22.

The scrutiny found that TS government tops the country in having the highest number of PD accounts at 28,087 in which ₹10,873 crore is lying unused. Though there are other states with higher PD accounts, they stand nowhere nearer to Telangana state. The other states with higher PD accounts include Odisha (827), Gujarat (478), Tamil Nadu (201), West Bengal (153) and Haryana (124).

On the one hand, the state government is borrowing at an average interest rate of 7.40 per cent to fund various welfare schemes and development programmes. On the other, the state government is not getting any benefit towards interest

on deposits accrued in Personal Deposit accounts. In this way, the government is suffering dual financial losses.

As per norms, funds deposited in PD accounts should be credited into the state government account if they remained unused for more than three years. But it was found that these norms were never followed.

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) too in its reports every year was finding fault with the state government for continuing with such a large number of PD accounts.

"Paying interest at higher rates (7.40 per cent) on borrowings while keeping huge amount in PD

accounts was a glaring example of poor cash and financial management of the state government," the CAG said and found the incidence of non-reconciliation was 67 per cent (₹73,783cr) of total expenditure and 77 per cent (₹55,116 cr) of total receipts".

"It will lead to a risk of non-detection of leakages in revenue and irregularities in expenditure," CAG said.

CAG recommended the finance department to review all the PD accounts and ensure that the amount unnecessary lying in these accounts are immediately remitted to the consolidated fund and all the inoperative deposit accounts are closed.



TPCC chief N. Uttam Kumar Reddy and Congress leaders visit the Lingamantula Swamy Temple in Suryapet on Wednesday on the occasion of the temple Nagara.

— DC

₹74.87L WORTH
GOLD IN PASTE
FORM SEIZED
AT AIRPORTDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 3

Customs officials at the Shamshabad seized 1,593 grams of gold worth ₹74.87 lakh from a woman passenger who had arrived from Dubai early on Wednesday.

The gold was being brought in in the form of paste and was discovered during regular checking by officials. The woman was detained by the Customs authorities for further action, a release said. In another case, the Customs officials at the airport seized about 40,000 pieces of foreign cigarettes which were being smuggled by a passenger who had arrived from Abu Dhabi. The cigarettes were valued at ₹4 lakh.

Centre, TS govt never
cared for Hyd: UttamDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 2

TPCC president N. Uttam Kumar Reddy on Wednesday accused the TRS government in the state and BJP government at the Centre of neglecting Hyderabad, especially the Old City.

"Chief Minister K. Chandrababhan Rao has never visited the Old City in the last seven years. He did not hold a single review meeting since 2014 to understand or resolve the problems being faced by the residents of the Old City though he had promised to develop it as another Istanbul," the TPCC president said during his campaign for Congress MLC candidate G. Chinna Reddy.

He was addressing a series of meetings in the Old City on Tuesday as part of campaign for the MLC candidate G. Chinna

Reddy of Hyderabad-Ranga Reddy-Mahabubnagar Graduates constituency. The TP-CC chief and Chinna Reddy performed puja at the Mahankali temple in Lal Darwaza and later visited Dargah Yousufain at Nampally.

Uttam Kumar Reddy alleged that the Chandrababhan Rao government had behaved as if the Old City did not exist. Not a single project had been launched there since 2014. Projects like Charminar Pedestrianisation and Musi river rejuvenation had remained incomplete.

He condemned the TRS government for not bringing Metro Rail to the Old City. Hyderabad Metro Rail had been started by the previous Congress government, he pointed out, to connect the Old City. He alleged that TRS and MIM had altered the

routes and did not allow Metro Rail to enter Old City. Consequently, he said, Old City residents were forced to spend huge time and money on transportation.

Uttam Kumar Reddy said that the Old City has a huge potential for tourism. But no efforts were made to improve roads and other facilities. He said TRS government was not interested in the affairs of the Old City. Similarly, the MIM and GHMC showed little interest in the development of Old City. "Both TRS and MIM apparently want Old City to remain backward and appear like a slum area," he said.

"MIM is contesting elections across the country. It is fielding its candidates on every seat where BJP could win due to division of votes. Why is MIM not contesting the MLC elections," he asked.

As D-Day draws near, top BJP
leaders reach out to graduatesIREDDY SRINIVAS
REDDY | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 3

Telangana BJP leaders, especially from the state's southern region, are worried about their political future if the party does not perform well in the ensuing graduate constituency elections to the Legislative Council. This fear is driving them to go the extra mile in convincing voters to back their nominees. Towards this, leaders from Nalgonda, Ranga Reddy, Mahabubnagar and Hyderabad districts are meeting young voters, in particular, in their respective Assembly constituencies. BJP vice-president D.K. Aruna has worked relentlessly to muster the support of voters in erstwhile Mah-

bubnagar district, besides coordinating with Assembly-wise and second level leaders. Aruna is concentrating on teachers, lecturers unions, student organisations, retired employees association and employees association for bolstering BJP prospects.

Electioneering and interaction with the Nalgonda electorate is spearheaded by Mothupalli Narasimulu and Sankineni Venkateswar Rao, who are touring their Assembly segments daily and pockets where they hold sufficient influence. They are appealing to the voters to ensure the win of party candidate Gujjula Premender Reddy.

Meanwhile, key leaders from Mahabubnagar like A.P. Jithender Reddy and

Yennam Srinivas Reddy are engaged in a field-level campaign for party candidate N. Ramchander Rao. Canvassing was actively taken up by A. Chandrasekhar, who recently joined the BJP, in Vikarabad district.

National BC Commission member Acharya and Mahabubnagar district president Erra Shekhar and other leaders are also working for Ramchander Rao's win.

In Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy districts, former MLAs Chinatala Ramachandra Reddy, N.V.S.S. Prabhakar, and Kuna Srisaillam Goud, former Mayor Banda Kartika, Ravikumar Yadav, Vikram Goud and others are extensively touring their respective constituencies.

MUNICIPAL DEPT
QUIETLY EXTENDS
PROPERTY TAX
SCHEMEMADDY DEEKSHITH | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 3

The municipal administration and urban development department has quietly released a government order extending the one-time settlement scheme (OTS) for property taxpayers, even as the model code of conduct (MCC) is in place for the MLC polls in nine districts.

The government had ordered a waiver of 90 per cent accumulated arrears on property tax provided that taxpayers cleared the principal amounts for 2019-20 with 10 per cent of arrear interest.

It had announced that the OTS would apply from August 1 to September 15. The scheme was extended till November prior to the GHMC polls. Now, via GO 207, the government had reintroduced the scheme ahead of the elections to the Mahabubnagar-Ranga Reddy-Hyderabad Legislative Council graduates constituency.

The OTS was introduced by across all 141 urban local bodies (ULBs) including GHMC. Under the scheme, property taxpayers were to clear the principal tax amount till 2019-20 in one go, with a 10 per cent interest against accumulated arrears. Initially, the government introduced the scheme for 45 days from Aug. 1 to Sept. 15. It then extended the deadline to Nov. 15. A total of 1,16,488 citizens availed the scheme during this three-month period. The scheme allowed for the waiver of 90 per cent of accumulated arrears on the interest component of property tax in all the ULBs, including the GHMC.

Covaxin 81%
effective against
Covid-19: FirmDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 3

Covaxin developed by Bharat Biotech and the Indian Council for Medical Research has shown 81 per cent efficacy against Covid-19, based on a survey done on 25,800 participants, says an interim analysis of clinical trial results provided by the company.

The symptoms were controlled and the disease did not become full-blown in 81 per cent of the cases, it said.

Dr Krishna Ella, chairman and managing director of Bharat Biotech, said, "Covaxin demonstrates high clinical efficacy against Covid-19 and also significant immunogenicity against rapidly emerging variants."

Among the participants were 2,433 persons aged over 60 years and 4,500 with comorbidities. The participants in the trials were between ages 18 years to 98. All of them had tested negative for Covid-19 before being given the first dose of Covaxin. In the controlled or placebo group, it was found that after the first dose, 36 participants contracted Covid-19. In the vaccinated group, after both the doses, it was observed that seven got Covid-19. The interim analysis observed that adverse events occurred at low levels and were balanced between vaccine and placebo groups.

The company will share further details of the trial results in 87 cases and the final analysis of 130 cases in the planned group. These second interim and final analyses will also be shared in peer-reviewed journals. An analysis by

FOR FIFTH TIME
NONE DIE OF
COVID IN STATEDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 3

No one died of Covid-19 in the state on Tuesday, the health department said on Wednesday, the fifth time this has been achieved since the first fatality was reported in Telangana last year and the first time this month.

Zero deaths due to Covid-19 are being seen as a positive outcome as it means that treatments are effective and the virus is mild.

The department in its bulletin said the state recorded 168 new cases, taking the caseload to 2,99,254. The toll stayed at 1,635. The GHMC area recorded 29 cases, Medchal Malkajgiri 15, Ranga Reddy 13 and Karimnagar 10.

The government has asked people to not let down their guard and follow safety protocols of wearing masks, washing hands and maintaining physical distancing.

National Institute of Virology indicated that vaccine-induced antibodies could neutralize the UK-variant strains and other heterogeneous strains. The analysis was published in the peer-reviewed journal bioRxiv.

Dr Kiran M., anesthetist at the government medical college, Nizamabad, explained, "The efficacy is proven by comparing the two groups that were being observed by the company."

Aged pianist tied, hit
at old age home in HydSANJAY SAMUEL
PAUL | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 3

The case of a nonagenarian who was "tied up and hit" by caregivers at an old age home here has turned more tragic with a former DGP bemoaning that cops are not only ignoring the victim's plight but also his request to register an FIR.

According to Benjamin Marthand, 91, a bachelor and well-known pianist here, he fell down at his rented house three months ago. The house owner called the police for assistance and had him admitted to Navjeevan Hospital in Karkhana, Secunderabad. Later, his nephew moved him to the Serene Senior Living Care Home in Bowenpally.

The aged eyes welling up with tears, Marthand told *Deccan Chronicle* at his brother's house in Yaprul, where he is currently staying, that he was treated cruelly at the old age home. "My hands and legs were tied up. They took away my cell phone and when I asked for it, I was punched at



Benjamin Marthand

and beaten by the staff," he said.

"Anytime I demanded something loudly, they would beat me up. They did not want anyone to hear my complaints. I want to do something with the 12 acres of land I own near Shamirpet and build a home for the aged where people like me will be taken care of," he said.

Marthand said that cops did not register a written complaint he gave on against the old age home to the Bowenpally police. Former director general of police Swarnjit Sen told *Deccan Chronicle* that he spoke with senior police officials about Marthand's plight and the

complaint on February 23. "I spoke to the DCP and ACP and urged them to investigate the case properly and take action. Justice must be done," Sen said, adding that no action was taken yet.

Bowenpally station house officer Ravi Kumar acknowledged the receipt of the complaint. "An investigation is going on. We will also be taking into consideration the medical report on him."

Deccan Chronicle spoke to Bibin Mathew who runs the Serene Senior Living Care home. He said, "When Marthand came here, his condition was not good." Admitting that Marthand was tied to his bed, Mathew said it was because his condition was such. "We wanted him to stay in bed and recover," he said, adding that the family was yet to pay the bill for Marthand's stay.

Mathew said there were around 35 inmates at the home and they were all being taken care of well. He alleged that there appeared to be some differences within the family over the land owned by Marthand.

SHORT TAKES

DELHI FARMERS
TO CONTINUE
AGITATIONDC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MARCH 3

All India Kisan Mazdoor Sangh leader M. Giri said that the agitating farmers in Delhi are very serious over their struggle and they will continue for more than one year if the three farm laws are not taken back by NDA government.

"The farmers are building permanent langurs and toilets and readying for longer struggle. The peasants are procuring provisions that need for one year. The commitment of them is surprised every one", he said.

A team comprising 180 delayed from South India visited Tikri, Ghazipur, Shahjahanpur and Singha borders from February 21 and 28. The team interacted the farmers, leaders and people of different walks and tried to know the feelings of them.

The farmers are ready to go any extent to show their commitment. He said that representatives of AIKMS, IFTU, POW, PDSU and PYL belonged to Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Kerala were among the team.

TECH A WEAPON
TO POLICE, SAYS
TAFSEER IQBALDC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MARCH 3

Khammam police commissioner Tafseer Iqbal said technology was a big weapon in the hands of the police to catch criminals.

He said police stations had been given 40 palm print live scanners and 26 mobile check devices. Using these, there were several instances where the police could identify dead bodies that were found without identity papers and hand them over to their families. The Telangana Print Bureau has been using such technology since 2017.

He checked the working of a live scanner in the police commissionerate on Wednesday and handed over the equipment to station house officers in Khammam town. He said that with the advent of live scanners, there was no need to collect palm prints on paper anymore.

"Police are using mobile security checks in passport verification. The persons, who are roaming on roads, can be verified by using the live scanner on the spot", he said.

200 PEOPLE
RECEIVE COVID
VACCINE AT RIMSDC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, MARCH 3

The vaccination was administered to eligible people who got their name registered for Covid-19 vaccine at Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) in the Adilabad on Wednesday.

According to sources, the medical staff administered Covid vaccine to nearly 200 registered people aged between 45 to 59 years who had chronic health problems and to all people aged above 60 years who had no health problems.

BJP LEADER:
NERELLA DALITS
TORTURED BY COPSDC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MARCH 3

The dalits in Nerella were subjected to third-degree torture by the police when they raised their voices against the TRS government and they are yet to receive justice, said BJP state general secretary Bangaru Sruthi.

Speaking to reporters here, she alleged that the TRS government is working against the Dalits in the state. "The government which should have allocated ₹50,000 crore for the development of Dalits didn't even spend ₹5,000 crore," she noted.

Speaking about the ongoing MLC elections for the Nalgonda-Warangal-Khammam graduates' constituency MLC elections, she demanded TRS nominee Palla Rajeshwar Reddy to explain to the people what he had done to them.

"Palla never discussed the issues like unemployment, pay revision commission (PRC) etc faced by the people," she said. Further, alleged that TRS leaders turned state-owned Haritha Hotel as their party office.

Fear of tiger attacks
haunts several villages

Villagers report tiger sightings on a daily basis

PILLALAMARRI
SRINIVAS I DC
KOMARAM BHEEM ASI-
FABAD, MARCH 3

The need of the hour is creation of water sources in forests and reduction of human-wildlife conflict during summer in the likelihood of high temperatures this season.

The possibility of animals, including tigers, visiting villages in search of drinking water will increase in the coming days. There has been an increased tiger movement on the outskirts of some villages in Komaram Bheem Asifabad district.

Water sources such as

● **WATER SOURCES** such as streams, rivulets and ponds are gradually getting dried up with soaring temperatures and the situation may worsen in the days ahead.

● **LOCALS SAY** that the human-wildlife conflict is now gradually becoming a conflict between villagers and forest officials as far as tiger conservation and tiger attacks are concerned.

streams, rivulets and ponds are gradually getting dried up with soaring temperatures and the situation may worsen in the days ahead.

Keeping this in view, forest officials should create drinking water sources like saucer pits, ponds that are filled with water with the help of solar pump sets to quench the thirst of forest

animals, especially tigers that are entering villages that are located on the fringes of forests.

People of interior villages in Panchikhalpet, Bejjur, Chintahalamanepalli, Sirpur (T), Dahegoan mandals are now eagerly waiting for a pro-active involvement of the monitoring committee that was constituted by the state gov-

ernment to resolve man-animal conflict.

Villagers are reporting tiger sightings on a daily basis in these mandals.

Villagers of Digida of Dahegoan mandal and Kondapelli in Panchikhalpet appealed to the committee to visit villages where people are scared of the increased tiger movement. Two persons were killed in separate incidents in these mandals last November.

Locals say that the human-wildlife conflict is now gradually becoming a conflict between villagers and forest officials as far as tiger conservation and tiger attacks are concerned.



Collector K. Shashanka along with ZP. Chairperson Kanumalla Vijaya facility inspecting for instaling the Diagnostic Testing Center at Government Main Hospital in Karimnagar on Wednesday.

— DC

Tirumal Rao says will
work for job securityDC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MARCH 3

N. Tirumal Rao, Aam Aadmi Party candidate for the Legislative Council graduates constituency election said that the party government is allocating half its budget to the medical and health and education sectors in Delhi. The aim of the AAP is that no citizen of Delhi should have to stand in a queue for to access any service.

Tirumal Rao, who is contesting from the Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal constituency, said that the AAP government in Delhi was delivering 40 essential

documents like caste and marriage certificates, driving licence at home. "With the same spirit, I will concentrate on the Pay Revision Commission (PRC) fitment to the government employees if I am elected. Employees working in the private sector will be provided job security. I will fight to extend unemployment allowance to the unemployed youth", he said.

He said he had worked 40 years as a teacher, journalist and writer and he studied the issues being faced by the poor and middle classes. There is a need to fill up all vacancies in the government and self-

employment loans should be increased.

He said that AAP is the only alternative to the BJP at the Centre. He said that the graduate voters should think twice while casting their vote in elections and send best candidates to the Legislative Council.

Tirumal Rao added that the TRS government had no right to ask the votes of graduates who were suffering due to lack of jobs. He said that the youths had promised to vote for the AAP during his election campaign. "The voters are referring to AAP schemes in Delhi during my tour in villages and towns", he said.

OFFICIALS TOLD
TO SPEED UP
BHAGIRATHA
WORKSDC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MARCH 3

Warangal Urban District Collector Rajeev Gandhi Hanumanth has directed the authorities to speed up the steps being taken to provide drinking water to households through taps from Ugadi festival.

He along with Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) Commissioner Pamela Satpathy held a review meeting with Public Health and R&B engineers to review the progress of the pipelines, tap connections to the houses, renovation of filter beds and road widening works under the Amrut scheme.

On this occasion, the Collector said that the unfinished works should be completed expeditiously and necessary arrangements should be made to provide clean mission Bhagiratha water to every household from Ugadi the city every day.

While there are 1,92,357 lakh households under GWMC, 1,76,965 lakh households have been given tap connections by the Municipal and Public Health Departments and the authorities have been directed to take necessary steps to give immediate connection to the remaining 15, 392 households.

Of the 72 elevated service level reservoirs (ESLR) under the GWMC, 22 are supplying drinking water to households and 18 ESLRs are undergoing trail run and the remaining 32 need to undergo trial-run by this month-end at any cost, he told officials.

Municipal and public health officials were instructed to work in coordination and take steps to install meters and taps in all homes in the pipeline-laid areas.

Increase the labour and complete the unfinished work within the stipulated time, Hanumanth suggested.



Goldsmiths burn Minister Thalasan Srinivasa Yadav against comments by the community in Karimnagar on Wednesday.

— DC

MAN KILLS HIS
WIFE, DIES BY
SUICIDEDC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MARCH 3

A man killed his wife and died by suicide at Rangam Banjara village in Tallada mandal on Wednesday. The couple is survived by two daughters, one of them settled in the USA and the other in Godavarikhani.

Police said the man, Sakranthi Subramanyeswara Rao, had come from Gudivada in 1984 and started farming and a dairy business. He was the first person to set up a dairy farm in Tallada mandal. Locals recalled his wife Vijayalaxmi as a friendly person. Police said Vijayalaxmi was making arrangements to visit their elder daughter in the US. Rao was not interested in accompany her, and the couple were said to have had heated arguments on the issue.

Police said Rao killed Vijayalaxmi in a fit of rage. Upon seeing her dead, he attempted suicide. Neighbours who went to the house in the morning found Rao struggling for life and shifted him to hospital but he died on the way.

Police rushed to the spot and sent the two bodies for postmortem and the case is being investigated.

TWO ARRESTED FOR SELLING GANJA,
426KG WORTH ₹64 LAKH RECOVEREDDC CORRESPONDENT
KOTHAGUDEM, MARCH 3

Bhadradri district ASP Rohitraj said on Wednesday that the police seized 426 kilo ganja, worth of ₹64 lakh at Brindavanam in

Chunchupalli mandal.

He said that two persons were taken in to custody and two cars were recovered in this connection. The ganja was transported from Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh to Bidar in Karnataka.

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DECCAN Chronicle

4 MARCH 2021

Cyber warfare and state surveillance new normal

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

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

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

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

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

India is out of recession, but...

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

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

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

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Subhani



India must learn from Chanakya, not a Shah!



Mohan Guruswamy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

JAIL FOR COLLECTOR

Telangana High Court judge M.S. Ramchandra Rao has delivered a landmark judgment for state officials disobeying court orders and sentenced Sircilla district collector and other officials to three months simple imprisonment and a fine of ₹200. (*High Court jails collector, 2 officials for contempt, DC, March 3*). This sets an example to other officials that no one can escape the law and all are equal before it.

D. Manoj Kumar
Secunderabad

It is highly distressing to note that Sircilla collector and two officials have not obeyed the interim orders of the court and had to be punished under the contempt of court provision. Government officials at all levels must follow court orders and avoid such punishments and black marks in their service registers.

G.V.N. Murthy
Hyderabad

SUPERB CARTOON

The cartoon by Subhani (*The shot, DC, March 3*) is hilarious and it's a fact. I too felt the pain by the "shot" of the rising prices of all essential commodities. I also enjoyed the sly look of the PM in the cartoon. How I wish Subhani could send this cartoon to our dear PM so that he too can have a hearty laugh.

Jyothi David Raj
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Yahya calls for leaders' meet

NEW DELHI, March. 3 As the flames of protest kindled by the postponement of the Pakistan National Assemblée sessions engulfed the entire Eastern Wing, leading to the imposition of curfew on at least two towns, President Yahya Khan today called the country's political leaders to a conference in Dacca on March 10 to thrash out their differences over constitution-making. Mr. Rehman declared that no power could suppress the majority verdict given in his party's favour in the December 7 elections to the National Assemblée.

Addressing a meeting he said, "the voice of the people of East Pakistan cannot be stifled".

Sunanda K. Datta-Ray
Reflections



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

SHORT TAKES

FOREST FIRE RAGES AT SIMILIPAL SANCTUARY

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 3

A major forest fire raging in Similipal sanctuary spread across 2,750 square km for the past one week and has endangered the lives of animals. Several trees in the sanctuary have been turned into ashes.

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

Union environment minister Prakash Javadekar has directed officials to take immediate action to bring the Similipal fire under control. "I have ordered officers to take immediate action and report it to me," Javadekar tweeted on Tuesday.

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

Earlier on March 2, Union petroleum and natural gas minister Dharmendra Pradhan drew the attention of the Union environment minister on the Similipal fire by tagging him on the social media. Pradhan also tagged Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on the social media post.

IT RAIDS ANURAAG KASHYAP, TAAPSEE PANNU PROPERTIES

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 3

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

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

Speaking about these raids, Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar in a briefing stated that the Income Tax department probes someone based on whatever information they get and the issue goes to court later.

Anurag Kashyap and Taapsee Pannu are outspoken critics of the government and have lent their voice to various causes, including the ongoing farmer protests against central laws.

According to an IT official the searches were carried out as there have been instances of tax evasion. The movies produced by the production house have been super hit, but the profits and account statements of the company are showing disproportionately low income. The action drew severe criticism from the opposition parties and activists.

ARMY OFFICER, JAWAN DIE BY SUICIDE

DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, MARCH 3

Any Army officer and a young soldier on Wednesday ended their lives by shooting themselves with their service weapons at two different places in Jammu and Kashmir.

The police and Army sources said that the officer Colonel Sudeep Bhagat Singh reportedly shot himself dead inside the unit he was posted at in Khanmoh area on the outskirts of capital Srinagar.

On hearing the gunshots, some soldiers rushed to the spot and found the officer lying on ground in pool of blood. He was taken to the hospital where doctors pronounced him dead, the sources said. Earlier during the day, the bullet-riddled corps of an Army jawan was found at a camp in Gurdan area of frontier Rajouri district in Jammu region. The police said that preliminary investigation into the incident point out to the 24-year-old soldier's shooting himself dead with his service weapon.

Rajouri Government Medical College (GMC) Hospital Superintendent Dr. Javid Iqbal Choudhary said that the soldier had died on way to the hospital and that it appeared to be a case of suicide.

SASIKALA ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT FROM POLITICS

DC CORRESPONDENTS CHENNAI, MARCH 3

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

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

Great expectations in some quarters of Sasikala storming the AIADMK citadel and establishing her supremacy have evaporated.

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

During a seat-sharing talk in Chennai a few days ago, the BJP gave great importance to her by putting pressure on AIADMK leaders to accommodate Dhinakaran and Sasikala in their alliance, which was vehemently resisted.

The reason given by the BJP leaders was that the AIADMK votes would be split if AMMK was to stand alone.

In Wednesday night's statement, Sasikala repeatedly urged the followers of MGR and Jayalalithaa to be united in the coming elections and defeat DMK, the common enemy identified by Jayalalithaa herself.

She did not exactly say if she was referring to the AIADMK party of the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) as the one that would usher in the 'golden rule of Amma.'

‘Khela Hobe’ vs ‘Jai Shri Ram’ even at sweet shops

Kolkata, March 3: The bitter fight for elections in Bengal has reached the sweet shops with popular retailers in the state churning out new delicacies, capturing the mood of the season — ‘*Khela Hobe*’ vs ‘Jai Shri Ram’.

Balaram Mallick Radharaman Mallick, one of the iconic sweet shops of Kolkata, has launched sandesh with the two slogans written on them. While ‘*Khela Hobe*’ is written on the sandesh in white and green, the ‘Jai Shri Ram’ sandesh is in white and orange.

‘*Khela Hobe*’, meaning ‘Game On’, is a slogan first given by Trinamul Congress as scores of its leaders switched to the BJP, pitching Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee against all the opposition faces.

The slogan has since become popular with a pop version of it being played at TMC rallies and hoardings coming up across West Bengal. The opposition parties have also launched their own versions of the slogan, making it a flavour of the poll season. Besides, ‘Jai Shri Ram’ — the popular BJP slogan has turned into the party's battle-cry ahead of the closely watched elections, which will begin on March 27.

The soft-rolled Nalen Gur sandesh with either ‘*Khela Hobe*’ or ‘Jai Shri Ram’ embossed on them are already being bought by the respective political parties,” Sudip Mallick, said the owner of the sweet retail chain. Modi sandesh and Didi Sandesh, with images of the two leaders etched on them, and other ‘*mishitis*’ (sweets)



Security personnel conduct a flag march, ahead of the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections in Kanyakumari district on Wednesday. — PTI

TN alliances in turmoil over sharing of seats

TNCC leaders to take a final call after a meeting today

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, MARCH 3

Both the Dravidian majors were unable to finalise their alliances for the April 6 elections to the state assembly as their coalition partners were digging their heels in and refusing to accept what was being offered to them. A dramatic realignment does not, however, seem possible.

While it looked that all differences were settled in the DMK camp on Tuesday night with the Congress representatives agreeing for 24 seats in principle, in the TNCC there was resentment over the low offer with functionaries saying that they were given 40 seats in the 2016 elections.

The issue may be sorted out on Thursday when TNCC leaders meet and take a final call on it, say party sources, expressing hope of saving the alliance. Yet a section of leaders in the TNCC was

not in favour of continuing with the alliance if the DMK refused to give in to their demand.

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

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

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

state parties.

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

Most of the seats that the BJP is eyeing at are also being sought by either the PMK or certain AIADMK functionaries, who had expended their resources in developing the constituencies.

The earlier hitch in the AIADMK-BJP ties has been ironed out with the BJP not insisting on the AIADMK accommodat- ing the AMMK of T.T.V. Dhinakaran.

Not only did BJP leader C.T. Ravi make it clear that it was for the AIADMK to take the call on uniting with the AMMK, fisheries minister D. Jayakumar once again ruled it out on Wednesday, saying that

the BJP had never interfered in the internal affairs of the party.

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

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

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

2 IISc students die on campus

Bengaluru, March 3: Two students of the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) died on campus in separate incidents, the institute said here on Wednesday.

In the first incident, a PhD student from Bihar died by suicide. "The reason behind the suicide is not known as no note was found. Police are investigating," an IISc faculty said.

In the other incident, a student of MTech collapsed

● **IN THE first incident, a PhD student from Bihar died by suicide. In other incident, a student of MTech collapsed and was found unresponsive.**

and was found unresponsive while playing football. "After first-aid at the IISc health centre, he was taken to a hospital where he was declared dead," the institute said in a statement. — PTI

Hectic parleys on in the 3 major fronts in Kerala

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 3

The CPM, Congress and BJP-led Fronts in Kerala are engaged in hectic deliberations to finalise their candidates for coming Assembly polls.

The district leadership of the CPM has almost finalised the list of prospective candidates in all 14 districts. Barring some leaders, the names of most sitting MLAs including senior ministers have been recommended by the district leadership for the coming polls.

The issue of exemption for four and five time legislators will be taken up at the CPM state committee meeting on March 5.

The No 2 party in the LDF, CPI which contested 27 seats in 2016 Assembly polls is likely to get 25 seats this time. Some of the seats of the CPI are likely to be given to the new allies. Similarly, the number of CPM seats will also come down to accommodate the alliance partners.

The CPI leadership has asked the district councils to prepare a panel of candidates in each district.

The panel will be discussed at the state executive meeting. Subsequently the final list will be announced.

The Congress-led UDF is also in the process of final-

ising the candidates. Congress election committee meeting held in Thiruvananthapuram decided not to field sitting MPs in the coming polls. The members of the committee submitted separate recommendations about candidates to the top leaders.

KPCC president Mullapally Ramachandran has decided to opt out the elections this time as he wants to concentrate on the campaigning of the UDF. However, the final decision in his case will be taken by the high command.

Many veteran leaders including P.J. Kurien, P.C. Thomas, V.M. Sudheeran have requested the leadership to give tickets to young leaders.

The BJP is conducting its seat sharing and candidate level discussions on the sidelines of the Vijaya Yatra of party state president K. Surendran. The BJP and its allies in the NDA are likely to finalise the candidates by next week. The bulk of seats will be contested by BJP. All top leaders of the party are likely to be in the fray this time.

Union minister V. Murlaedarhan has said he would contest if there is any direction from the central. "Metroman" E. Sreedharan will be fielded from Thrissupunnithura or Palakkad.

Delhi civic bypolls: AAP wins 4 wards

New Delhi, March 3: The AAP on Wednesday won four of the five civic wards in Delhi in a bypoll, with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal asserting that people were desperate to bring the party to power in the three municipal corporations in the national capital.

The AAP, however, suffered a shock defeat in the minority-dominated Chauhan Bangar ward, where Chaudhary Zubair Ahmad of the Congress defeated the party's candidate Mohammad Ishraq Khan by a whopping margin of 10,642 votes.

The BJP failed to open its account in the bypolls, being seen as the semi-final ahead of the civic polls due in 2022, and even lost the Shalimar Bagh seat held by it to the AAP.

"We honour the mandate given by people. Losing Shalimar Bagh North is a matter of introspection. The shortcomings will be removed and I am sure BJP will win the elections for three municipal corporations in 2022," said Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta.

The AAP candidates won from Kalyanpuri, Rohin-C, Trilokpur and Shalimar Bagh wards.

According to the state elec-

tion commission, the AAP polled the highest 46.10 per cent votes in the bypolls, followed by 27.29 per cent by the BJP and 21.84 per cent by the Congress.

"The people of Delhi have once again voted in the name of work. Congratulations to all. The people are fed up with misuse of the BJP at MCD for 15 years. People are desperate to bring the AAP to rule the MCD," Kejriwal tweeted after the AAP's victory.

AAP candidate Dhirender Kumar won the Kalyanpuri ward by 7,043 votes.

The party candidate Vijay Kumar from Trilokpur defeated BJP's Om Prakash by a margin of 4,986 votes. AAP's Sunita Mishra defeated Surbhi Jaju of the BJP in Shalimar Bagh ward by 2,705 votes. The seat was earlier held by the BJP.

Ram Chander of the AAP defeated BJP candidate Rakesh Goyal by 2,985 votes in Rohini C ward.

Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia in a tweet congratulated the party workers for the victory and said people were fed up with the BJP and would bring in Kejriwal's politics of honesty and work, in MCD polls next year.

— PTI

Career Chronicle

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SHORT TAKES

OZ AG DENIES
RAPE CHARGE,
WON'T RESIGN

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

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

15 KILLED AFTER
SUV CRASHES
INTO SEMITRUCK

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

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

BUDGET CHIEF:
NEERA TANDEN
WITHDRAWS

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

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

Tanden, president of the left-leaning think tank Center for American Progress, would have led a key economic post that oversees the production of the President's proposed budget for his agenda if she had been confirmed. The OMB is in charge of the budget-drafting process in the White House, as well as having a large role in the issuance of new regulations.

Biden on Tuesday accepted her withdrawal and indicated that Tanden might be brought in the administration in some other capacity. Her withdrawal marks the first high-profile defeat of one of Biden's nominees. Eleven of the 23 Cabinet nominees requiring Senate approval have been confirmed, most with strong bipartisan support.

10 rockets hit US
airbase in Iraq

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

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

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

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

It was the first attack since the US struck Iran-aligned militia targets along the Iraq-Syria border last week, killing killed one militiaman and stoking fears of a possible repeat of a series of tit-for-tat attacks that escalated

last year, culminating in the US drone strike that killed Iranian Gen. Qasim Soleimani outside the Baghdad airport.

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

Dozens of US service members were injured, suffering concussions in that strike. British Ambassador to Iraq Stephen Hickey condemned the attack, saying it undermined the ongoing fight against the Islamic State group.

Coalition forces are in Iraq to fight Daesh at the invitation of the Iraqi government, he tweeted, using the Arabic acronym for IS. These terrorist attacks undermine the fight against Daesh and destabilize Iraq. Denmark said coalition forces at Ain al-Asad were helping to bring stability and security to the country.

Despicable attacks against Ain al-Asad base in #Iraq are completely unacceptable," Danish Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod tweeted. The Danish armed forces said two Danes, who were in the camp at the time of the attack, are unharmed. —AP

Myanmar security men gun
down at least 6 protesters

Authorities extend crackdown on protests against last month's coup

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

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

A second death was reported later. At least four other deaths were reported elsewhere. Demonstrators have regularly flooded the streets of cities across the country since the military seized power on Feb. 1 and ousted the elected government of leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Their numbers have remained high even as security forces have repeatedly fired tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds to disperse the

crowds, and arrested protesters en masse.

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

But any kind of coordinated action at the United Nations would be difficult since two permanent members of the UN Security Council, China and Russia, would almost certainly veto it. Some countries have imposed or are considering imposing their own sanctions. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, of which Myanmar is a neighbour, held a teleconference meeting of foreign ministers on Tuesday to seek a consensus on helpful measures. The region-

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

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

Snubbing Asean's appeal, Myanmar's security forces on Wednesday continued to attack peaceful

protesters. Details of the crackdowns and casualties are difficult to independently confirm, especially those occurring outside the bigger cities.

But the accounts of most incidents have been consistent in social media and from local news outlets, and usually have videos and photos supporting them. It is also likely that many incidents from remote areas go unreported or generally unnoticed. In the central city of Monywa, which has turned out huge crowds to protest the military takeover, three people were shot on Wednesday, including one in the head, reported the Democratic Voice of Burma, an independent television and online news service.

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

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

One person was reported shot in Pyinoolwin, a town in central Myanmar better known to many by its British colonial name, Mawmyo. The town is popular with tourists because of its cool climate and was once a colonial hill station set up for British administrators during the hot season. The shooting was said to have broken out when security forces blocked a road to protesters.

The usual daily protests in Yangon and Mandalay, the country's biggest cities, were again attacked by police. In Mandalay, riot police backed by soldiers broke up an anti-coup rally, chasing around 1,000 teachers and students from a street with tear gas. —AP

Blast damages Dutch virus test
centre; experts probe reason

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

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

He said it was clear that the explosive didn't "get there by accident. But we have no idea at the moment who exactly left it there and what the intention was." Police said a metal cylinder that had exploded was found outside the building. The northern regions of North Holland province have been identified as a virus hotspot in recent weeks, with infection numbers higher than the national average. In January, rioters torched a Coronavirus test facility in the fishing village of Urk on the first night of a 9 p.m.-to-4:30 a.m. nationwide curfew imposed as part of the government's latest Coronavirus lockdown. Attacks on health workers and facilities around the world have increased amid the Co-



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

vid-19 pandemic. A new report by the Geneva-based Insecurity Insight and the University of California, Berkeley's Human Rights Center identified more than 1,100 threats or acts of violence against health care workers and facilities last year.

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

Texas biggest state
to lift mask mandate

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

"It is now time to open Texas 100%, Abbot said on Tuesday. The announcement by the Republican leader in Texas, where the virus has killed more than 42,000 people, has rattled

doctors and city leaders who said they are now bracing for another deadly resurgence.

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

Sciamma's work: A gentle, warm
ode to the power of imagination

SUPARNA SHARMA | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

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

This creation of our imagination is a correction to fill the gaps that life and those we love have left unattended, and to live the life we think we deserve. French screenwriter and director Celine Sciamma, who has been consistently climbing up the ladder of critical acclaim with her films since the 2007 *Water Lilies*, really made her presence felt on the world stage when her stunning fourth feature, *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2019.

On Wednesday, Sciamma's fifth feature, *Petite Maman*, a story about three generations

of women, had its world premiere at the International Film Festival of Berlin, online. The film opens when Marion's (Gabrielle Sanz) mother (Nina Meurisse) has passed away at an old age home. Nelly (Joséphine Sanz), Marion's daughter, is eight but caring and curious beyond her age. They share a warm, loving relationship, but Nelly is also acutely aware of her mother's silence and sadness. Nelly is helping her parents clean out her mother's childhood home and in between chores, often at night, she asks Marion questions about her childhood, the wood hut she had built, the operation she had to undergo. But Marion doesn't want to tackle her past. "You always ask so many questions at bedtime."

"I only see you at bedtime." Next morning, Marion is gone, leaving Nelly with an unexplained, disturbing absence. In between helping her father, Nelly ventures out into the woods carrying fragments of memories her mother and

grandmother shared with her. There she discovers a friend and together they create a world complete with a hut in the forest and warm meals. They write a play, act out their roles, play board games and help each other find some answers. *Petite Maman* (Petite Mom) is an intimate, gentle, gorgeous ode to the power of imagination.

Though less dazzling in its scale and ambition than Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, *Petite Maman* is more assured, mature filmmaking. Shot in a house and a forest lit by yellow and red autumnal leaves, *Petite Maman* has few dialogue and yet it beautifully conveys feelings and emotions through the simplest of daily routines and interactions.

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



quick
BITES

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

* As of 8:30 PM IST

India ahead in terms of women in senior mgmt

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

Services expand at fastest rate in a year in Feb.



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

Podcast series on Indian entrepreneurs

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

Oye! Rickshaw launches battery swapping platform

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

■ Spectrum auction helps market regain momentum
Bulls in 'pawri' modeRAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 3

The stock market moved up for the third consecutive session, gaining over 2 per cent on Wednesday and making investors richer by over Rs 10 lakh crore since the steep, over 3.5 per cent fall last Friday.

This week's spectrum auction, which fetched the government Rs 77,814 crore, seems to have buoyed market sentiments. Index heavyweight Reliance Industries and rival telecom company Bharti Airtel gained 4.52 per cent and 0.92 per cent, respectively, after they put in majority of the bids in the spectrum sale.

Despite mixed global cues, with the overnight US market closing in the red, the Sensex opened higher and kept the momentum to close with a gain of 1147 points, or 2.28 per cent, at 51,444 points. The Nifty-50 gained 326

points, or 2.19 per cent, to close at 15,245.

The return of foreign investors after last Friday's heavy selling seems to have stabilised the domestic market. Foreign portfolio investors were net buyers of equities worth Rs 2,088.70 crore on Wednesday after Rs 2,223.16 crore buying on Tuesday. Domestic institutions also turned net buyers on Wednesday by Rs 392.91 crore.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies crossed the Rs 210-lakh crore mark for the first time. The BSE Mid-cap and Small-cap indices gained 1.45 per cent and 1.34 per cent, respectively.

"A stellar rally across BFSI & Metals powered indices higher today by 2.3 per cent with the market breadth improving dramatically in afternoon trade. Investors cherry-picked AMCs, HFCs and the day also witnessed keen interest in sugar

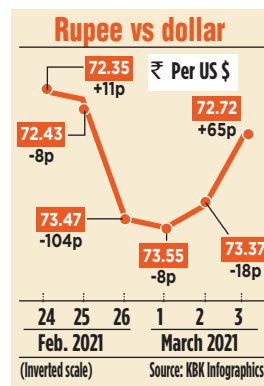
₹ gains 65p, but rising trend may not last

FALAKNAZ SYED
MUMBAI, MARCH 3

The rupee on Wednesday closed 65 paise stronger, as investor appetite for emerging market assets improved after the US treasury yields continued to cool off and weakened the dollar globally. However experts said that further appreciation of the rupee will be limited due to the hardening of the US 10-year yields.

Sriram Iyer, senior research analyst, currency and commodities, Reliance Capital, said, "The rupee has been appreciating for the last two-three sessions due to corporate dollar and portfolio inflows in our equity markets, but this appreciation could be limited due to expectation of further hardening of the US treasury yields as the market is factoring good economic outlook supported by the US government stimulus plan and steps taken by the US Federal Reserve to support the economy."

"The 10 year US yields, which is at 1.4 per cent right now, could harden



to 1.8 per cent which will support the US dollar, and if that happens, the rupee would weaken. In the short-term 72.50 will remain a key support for the USD-INR pair while on the upside 73.25 will remain a key resistance point," added Iyer.

The US Fed will be worried if the US yields harden further as it wants to pump money at lower rates, added Iyer. At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened at 73.26 and after hitting an intra-day high of 72.71 and a low of 73.26, finally settled at 72.72 against the dollar.

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

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

Insurance brokers brought under ombudsman in expanded mandate

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

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

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

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

Lexus drives in LC 500h at ₹2.15 crore

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, MARCH 3

Lexus, the Japanese car giant Toyota's luxury arm, on Wednesday launched a limited-edition model of its sports coupe, the LC 500h in the country at Rs 2.15 crore at pan-India showroom.

The company claims that the model is inspired by the graceful flight of birds and airplanes to elevate the sense of driving with refined aerodynamics.

The grand-touring coupe's special edition features borrow from an earlier partnership between air race pilot Yoshihide



Muroya and Lexus engineers that helped him win the 2017 Red Bull Air Race World Championships. A team consisting of the same engineers worked on the design of the Lexus LC 500h.

"We are very excited to announce the addition of the exclusive limited edition of the LC 500h. With

its bold, aviation-inspired design language, we are confident that it will be well received by our discerning guests," PB Venugopal, president at Lexus India said.

The limited edition model has been built by the same set of engineers who have built the LFA supercar.

Amazon, Google vie for digital payments platform to rival NPCI

SARITHA RAI
MARCH 3

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—Bloomberg

Extreme weather puts ₹6.2 L cr debt at risk

ARCHANA CHAUDHARY
MARCH 3

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

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

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

the effects of cyclones and floods on loan repayments in farming and related sectors. Lenders accounted for 87 per cent of the total risk, valued at about \$97 billion, across 67 Indian companies that responded to CDP.

"Climate is the biggest risk to businesses in the long run. Financial institutions are beginning to understand it," said Damandeep Singh, Delhi-based director of CDP India. "As investors look at funding companies based on environmental, social and governance disclosures, we've seen many more companies report climate change risk."

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

ses from 220 small and large Indian companies.

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

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

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

—Bloomberg

TRACKING VITALS

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

Startup offers remote patient monitoring

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

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

The startup has already tied up with 70 hospitals across the country in three months for remote patient monitoring.

"We are looking to part-

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

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

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



through the pandemic and beyond.

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

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

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

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

the ICU.

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

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

—PTI

SHORT TAKES

Sania-Andreja sail into semis

Doha: Indian tennis star Sania Mirza and her Slovenian partner Andreja Klepac sailed into the women's doubles semifinals of the Qatar Open with a straight sets win over their rivals here on Wednesday.

Sania and Andreja made short work of fourth seeds Anna Blinkova and Gabriela Dabrowski 6-2, 6-0 to reach the last four round.

The Indo-Slovenian pair will next play top seeds Czech Republic's Barbora Krejickova and Katerina Siniakova. Krejickova and Siniakova defeated Dutch duo of Kiki Bertens and Lesley Pattinama Kerkhove 4-6, 6-4, 13-11 in another quarterfinal duel.

Elsewhere in Rotterdam Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik mauled champion Alexander Zverev in straight sets 7-5, 6-3 in the Round of 32 at the ABN Amro World Tennis Tournament on Wednesday. — *Agencies*

Paddler Sharath off to flying start

Doha: Ace Indian paddler Achanta Sharath Kamal advanced to the second round of the World Table Tennis Contender series with a hard fought 3-2 win over Czech Republic's Pavel Sirucek here on Wednesday.

Sharath toiled hard before defeating Sirucek 17-15, 9-11, 11-6, 8-11, 11-9 in the first round.

However, Sathiyar Gnanasekaran, who alongside Sharath secured a direct entry into the main draw, made a first round exit after going down to world no 20 Aruna Quadri 7-11 4-11 8-11.

World No.32 Sharath struggled initially when he was seen trailing by five points in the first game before recovering well with a strong counter attacking display to take an early 1-0 lead in the match.

Despite losing the next game, the nine-time national champion kept firing attacking shots to bag the third game comfortably. — *PTI*

Jesus brace helps City hunt Wolves

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

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

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

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

Ronaldo digs deep to blank Spezia

Milan: Juventus gave their hopes of a 10th straight Italian league title a timely boost as they beat struggling Spezia 3-0 on Tuesday to move within seven points of league leaders Inter Milan. Juventus were frustrated for long periods, but second-half goals from Alvaro Morata, Federico Chiesa and Cristiano Ronaldo clinched an important win. Juve sit three points behind second-placed AC Milan with Inter Milan four points further clear ahead of their match at Parma on Thursday. The Turin giants have won the last nine Italian league titles. — *AFP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

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

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Fulham vs Tottenham from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1; West Brom vs Everton from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 2

Italian League: Parma vs Inter Milan from 1.15 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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THE LAST GAMBIT

Resurgent India plot final move to trap England

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

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

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

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

Axar Patel bowled ram-rod straight and England had their heads "spinning" from the start. The ploy has worked well for the hosts.

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

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

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

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

STEYN SORRY FOR HIS POST CRITICISING IPL

New Delhi, March 3: South Africa pace great Dale Steyn on Wednesday apologised for his criticism of the Indian Premier League, saying he never intended to "degrade or insult" the world's biggest franchise-based T20 tournament.

The 37-year-old veteran fast bowler said his statement that cricket is sometimes forgotten amid all the money talk in the IPL was taken out of context in social media.

"IPL has been nothing short of amazing in my career, as well as other players too. My words were never intended to be degrading, insulting, or comparing of any leagues. Social media and words out of context can often do that. My apologies if this has upset anyone," Steyn tweeted.

Steyn's apology came after he claimed on the sidelines of the Pakistan Super League 6, where he is representing Quetta Gladiators, that money is given more importance than the game in the IPL.

Steyn had said that this was one of the reasons why he had not featured regularly in the event.

"I think when you go to the IPL, there are such big squads and so many big names and so much emphasis on maybe the amount of money players earn and everything like that, so sometimes, somewhere down the line, cricket gets forgotten," he had stated. — *PTI*



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

— AP

Virat shuts spin-track noise

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

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

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

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



Virat Kohli

Kohli said at the pre-match press conference.

"I am sure if our media is in a space to contradict those views or present views which say that it is unfair to criticise only spin tracks, then it will be a balanced conversation," he added.

Kohli, at the end of the third Test, had blamed the batsmen's technique for their failure on the Motera track.

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

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

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

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

NUMBERS GAME

TESTS AT NARENDRA MODI STADIUM:

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

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

● Axar Patel took 18 wickets in their first two Tests. The number for Axar Patel to shoot at in the final Test is 31, by Narinder Hirwani, so he needs the little matter of 14 wickets to beat that.

● "Terror" Turner of Australia had 29 wickets after three Tests.

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

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

— *S. PERVEZ KAISER*

Kohli bats for rotation policy in bubble times

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

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

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

"The kind of systems

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

— **VIRAT KOHLI**
India cricket captain

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

Bio-bubbles became imperative for resumption of sporting action

after COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc in 2020.

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

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

Sindhu, Srikanth start off in style

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

Meanwhile, world champion Sindhu beat Yigit Neslihan of Turkey 21-16, 21-19 in her first round match that lasted just 42 minutes.

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

He will be up against France's Thomas Rouxel in the Round of 16. Rouxel beat Canada's Xiaodong Sheng 21-18, 21-14 in another first round match while the second seeded Sindhu will next face Iris Wang of USA in her Round of 16 match on Thursday.

Sourabh Verma also won his first round match against Switzerland's Christian Kirchmayr 21-19 21-18.

Sourabh will next face eight seed Kunlavut

Vitidsarn of Thailand in the Round of 16.

PRANNOY CRASHES

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

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

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

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

STAR MARY CRUISES INTO SPANISH TOURNEY SEMIS

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

The 37-year-old defeated Italian Giordana Sorrentino with a split verdict in the quarterfinal stage of the event.

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

It was a watchful start by the experienced Indian as she took her time to get a measure of her aggressive opponent. Both the boxers preferred to counter-attack in the opening round, adopting a cautious approach for most part.

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

On a high, HFC set bigger goals

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 3

Hyderabad Football Club just about slipped out of semifinal contention to finish a creditable fifth in the Indian Super League and coach Manuel Marquez is understandably satisfied.

That was a big leap, considering they finished at the bottom of the table in the previous season. The odds were against HFC with matches being played away from home and injuries to players but the team logged 29 points from 20 games winning six, losing three and drawing 11 to be nudged out by Goa (31 points) for a semis place.

"We are very satisfied about the season. We could not make it to the semifinals but it is very difficult to look for something to criticise the players in this situation. This group is amazing, one of the best that I have trained in my life," Marquez said during a media interaction here on Wednesday.

The rewards were overwhelming as six players from the side were picked for the Indian camp by national coach Igor Stimac. "That's the most any ISL club has in the list and makes all of us really proud. They are quality players and deserve greater exposure," Marquez said.

Marquez was all praise for the home fans' virtual support. "We have been playing away but knew that the Hyderabad fans were behind the team. We felt very close to them and can't wait to play in front of our supporters at home next season," he said.

"Imagine that this is a film and we are the romantic story. We fought against the odds through the tournament. For Hyderabad, the club and supporters to win six games was quite something," the Spaniard added.

He wants to expand the love story by involving local players. Asked about Aadarsh Narayanapuram, an 18-year-old Hyderabad



Hyderabad Football Club coach Manuel Marquez at a press conference in Hyderabad on Wednesday.

who has recently acquired a European player licence in the junior category and is currently playing for lower division side CD Olimpic de Xativa in Valencia, Spain, Marquez said: "You can count on players from your city. It's very difficult though and is a step-by-step process. But for me one important thing would be that players from Hyderabad could play in the first team. I have always liked working with local players — I have done that all through my stints at Spanish clubs."

"This team is practically new, you have start from a scratch. Now we are taking the first step and the intention of the club — and one that I like in this project — is to try and take players from Hyderabad. However, that's not easy and is something that needs time. But this is a big city which has contributed many players to the national team in the years gone by, we hope to bring back the good old days," the 52-year-old said.

"This year because of the Covid situation it has been tough else we would have had the youth teams and everything in place. Now, slowly and steadily we are building from bottom-up. All our grassroots programs and youth level teams are being chalked out. Probably in the coming days we will have more information and will execute our plans," Mayur Karanjkar, Hyderabad FC Head of Media, added.