

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI TUESDAY 9 MARCH 2021



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NIA takes over case of bomb scare near Ambani residence; Uddhav says ‘something fishy’



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Novak Djokovic sets all-time record of 311 weeks at No. 1, a week longer than Federer

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Kareena shares a glimpse of new baby, says there’s nothing women cannot do



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RNI No. 57290/94, Regd No: DL-SW-05/4189/15-17

Vol. 28 No. 22 | 16 PAGES | ₹5.00

WINDOWS



Janhvi Koor poses for pictures during the promotion of the upcoming Hindi film *Roohi* in Mumbai on Monday. — AFP

7 killed in fire at Kolkata building, toll likely to rise

Kolkata: Four fire brigade personnel, two railway staff, including an RPF constable, and an assistant sub-inspector of the Kolkata police were charred to death after they got trapped in a lift during a fire which broke out at an Eastern Railway building on Strand Road in Kolkata on Monday evening. The group of seven, trying to douse the flames, had got into the lift to reach the 12th floor of the multi-storied New Koilaghat Building where the fire broke out at around 6.10 pm. Several fire tenders were pressed into service. The blaze came under control after four hours. West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, who rushed to the spot, said, “The death toll may rise as there are reports of death of two more. It is really unfortunate.”

Batla House case: IM man convicted

New Delhi: A court on Monday convicted Ariz Khan, allegedly associated with the terror outfit Indian Mujahideen, for the murder of decorated Delhi police inspector Mohan Chand Sharma in a case related to 2008 Batla House encounter which was questioned by certain political parties and leaders. The court will hear arguments on the quantum of sentence on March 15. **Full report on Page 12**

COUNTERPOINT



The Opposition and the Treasury benches have staged a walkout to go to poll-bound states!

WEATHER

Max: 32°C
Min: 18°C
RH: 41%
Rain: Nil

Forecast: Partly cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Bahula
Ashtami till 6.13 pm
Star: Jyeshtha till 9.39 pm
Varjyam: Nil
Durmuhurtam: 6.34 am to 8.08 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
SUNSET TODAY 6.26 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.37 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 4.01 AM
MOONSET TODAY 2.31 PM

■ **Mamata ‘dares’ PM to compete with her ‘like a street fighter’**

5 sitting Trinamul MLAs denied tickets join BJP, in a jolt to Didi

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MARCH 8

Dealing yet another blow to their party supremo and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on the eve of the Assembly elections, five sitting Trinamul Congress MLAs on Monday joined the BJP after they were denied tickets by her this time. Another Trinamul leader, Sarala Murmu, who had got a ticket to a seat she did not want to contest from, walked into the saffron party after she was replaced. The five sitting MLAs who defected to the BJP are four-time legislator of Satgachhia in South 24 Parganas and a close aide of Ms Banerjee, Sonali Guha, Sital Sardar of Sankrail, Jatu Lahiri of Shibpur in Howrah, Rabinranath Bhattacharya of Singur in Hooghly and Dipendu Biswas of Basirhat Dakshin in North 24 Parganas. They made the switch to the saffron party in presence of its state chief and Midnapore MP Dilip Ghosh and national vice-president Mukul Roy, to whom many of them made a beeline after finding their names not in the TMC list of candidates on March 5. The five MLAs took the drastic step after Ms Banerjee, while announcing the TMC candidates’



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee at a rally with her party women candidates, who are contesting from different constituencies for the upcoming state Assembly polls, to mark International Women’s Day in Kolkata on Monday. — PTI

list, had regretted having dropped so many sitting MLAs of her party but assured that she would set up a Vidhan Parishad to accommodate the old guard like Ms Guha as Legislative Council members. The ruling TMC received another jolt during day after it replaced Ms Murmu, who wanted to contest from Old Malda, citing her “ill health”, with Pradeep Baskey at Habibpur in Malda in the morning. Disgusted, Ms Murmu joined the BJP. Besides, the BJP also took control of the Malda Zilla

Remember it is only me who is fighting in 294 seats. This battle is me versus the BJP.

— **Mamata Banerjee,**
West Bengal CM

Parishad by inducting its 14 members to its fold from the Trinamul Congress. Leading a rally of women TMC candidates, including several Bengali film and TV actors, for the Assembly polls in Kolkata on Women’s Day on

Monday, the country’s lone serving woman CM dared Prime Minister Narendra Modi to “compete with her on the road like a street fighter”. She told him: “When Cyclone Amphan hit Bengal, the entire state was shaking. You were nowhere. It was only me who, spending the night at the state secretariat Nabanna, protected people. How many times did you visit a hospital in the aftermath of Covid-19? How many times did you visit shops and markets since then? You hardly stepped out of the home. ■ **Turn to Page 4**

Opp. storm over fuel hikes forces adjournment of RS

TMC seeks early end to session due to state polls

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

The second part of the Budget Session of Parliament started on a stormy note on Monday with fiery scenes being seen in the Rajya Sabha. The Opposition parties, led by the Congress, demanded a discussion on the rising fuel prices. Addressing the Rajya Sabha, Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge, said: “Petrol and diesel prices are nearly ₹100 per litre and ₹80 per litre respectively. LPG prices have also gone up — and ₹21 lakh crores have been collected by putting excise duty/cess, and because of that the entire country, including the farmers, are suffering.” The Upper House had to be adjourned twice before being adjourned for

■ **CONG MPs raised the issue of the 3 farm laws and the farmers sitting in protest at Delhi’s borders against these laws**

the day as the Opposition persisted with its demand for a discussion on the rising fuel prices. Earlier on Monday, the Trinamul Congress sought the adjournment of the session in view of the Assembly elections in five states/UTs that are only a few weeks away, and the MPs may not be able to attend. Trinamul MPs Sudip Bandyopadhyay and Derek O’Brien have written to the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha authorities to adjourn the session due to the elections. The Congress MPs also raised the issue of the three farm laws and the farmers sitting in protest

at Delhi’s borders against these laws. They said it has been more than three months that the farmers have been sitting in protest at the borders of the national capital, braving extreme weather conditions. Both the farmers and the Congress are demanding that the three farm laws be withdrawn immediately. The government has told the Opposition that it is ready for a discussion on all issues, but in an organised fashion. The Opposition parties claimed they will not back down and continue to keep raising the issue of rising prices in both Houses of Parliament. During the Budget Session’s recess, protests had been organised by most of the Opposition parties demanding an immediate rollback of the hike in fuel prices.

18K+ Covid count 3rd day; Delhi’s cases remain high

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

New cases of Covid-19 infection in India were recorded above 18,000 for the third consecutive day, taking the total tally to 1,12,29,398, the Union health ministry’s data showed on Monday. The active cases also saw an increase for the sixth consecutive day and the Covid-19 active caseload rose to 1,88,747, comprising 1.68 per cent of total infections. The recovery rate has dropped further to 96.91 per cent, while the fatality rate remains unchanged at 1.41 per cent. A total of 18,599 new

infections were seen in the past 24 hours, while the death toll rose to 1,57,853 with 97 daily new fatalities. The states with the biggest rise in active cases are Maharashtra (5,090), Punjab (333), Karnataka (268), Haryana (133) and Gujarat (115). Delhi recorded as many as 239 fresh Covid-19 cases Monday. With this, the Covid-19 case tally in the national capital has reached over 6.41 lakh, while the death toll rose to 10,924. Three fatalities were recorded in the last 24 hours, according to the Delhi health department.

US wants India to join UN dialogue on Afghan future

Blinken writes to Ghani as US troop pullout looms

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

The United States has now sought India’s participation, as well as that of several other countries, in a UN-led international peace conference on the future of Afghanistan. According to international media reports, the Joe Biden administration has proposed a “UN-led peace conference in Turkey attended by the foreign ministers and envoys from Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India and the United States”. A BBC report said US secretary of state Antony J. Blinken has written a letter to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and called for a “90-day



reduction in violence and a transitional government formed from both sides”, adding that no decision had yet been taken about whether to stick to the planned American troop withdrawal by May 1 this year. Calling on President Ghani to show “urgent leadership”, Mr Blinken has reportedly warned in his letter that the Taliban could make

“rapid territorial gains” across the country in a “spring offensive”. The letter “reflected the difficult position the US finds itself in as it reviews whether to withdraw its last 2,500 troops”, according to the BBC report which further pointed out that a deal struck with the Taliban during the earlier Trump administration last year, in February 2020, had committed the United States to withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan by May 1, 2021. Mr Blinken also reportedly proposed a “transitional peace government” to usher Afghanistan through this precarious period, to be followed by national elections. ■ **Turn to Page 4**

Buzz in BJP on change of guard in Uttarakhand

CM Rawat in Delhi, meets Nadda

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

Amid growing speculation over a leadership change in BJP-ruled Uttarakhand, chief minister Trivendra Rawat reached New Delhi to meet the party top brass. Mr Rawat met BJP president J.P. Nadda late on Monday evening. Issuing notices to all states, five-judge Constitution Bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan said: “We are of the view that in view of the issues of seminal importance which have arisen before this Constitution Bench – on interpretation of the 102nd Amendment, the states have to be given an opportunity to have their say.” Besides Justice Bhushan, the Constitution Bench also includes Justices L. Nageswara Rao, S. Abdul Nazeer, Hemant Gupta and Ravindra Bhat. A pivotal question is whether the 50 per cent ceiling on reservations that came into force by the court’s 1992 judgment “needs to be referred to a larger bench or require a relook by the larger bench”. ■ **More on Page 3**

DMK seals deal with CPM, gives it 6 seats

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 8

The DMK has finalised its seat-sharing deal with the CPI(M) by giving the Left party six seats, less than the number asked for, and with other smaller allies like the Tamilaga Valvurimai Katchi of T. Velmurugan and Adi Tamilar Peravai of Athiyaman, giving them one

Minister Narendra Modi and Mr Shah on Tuesday. The CM also met BJP Rajya Sabha MP Anil Baluni before his meeting with Mr Nadda. A section within the BJP state unit is of the view that going to the polls, due next year, with Mr Rawat as CM can dent the party’s poll prospects. This section of BJP leaders, including some ministers and MLAs, are miffed with the CM over various issues, including administrative ones. However, those supporting Mr Rawat claim that the other faction is giving the Opposition ammunition when the elections are near. Another section ■ **Turn to Page 4**

seat each, which will be contested on the the DMK’s “rising sun” symbol. Another ally, Kongunadu Desiya Makkal Katchi of E.R. Easwaran, held talks on Monday but could not seal a deal as there was a tug of war with the DMK offering two seats and the party asking for three. ■ **More on Page 4**

Meghan tells Oprah she’d thought of suicide, says son’s skin colour worried ‘racist’ royals



Prince Harry and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, during an interview with Oprah Winfrey. — AP

within the royal ranks after being asked about their son Archie’s expected skin colour when mixed-race Meghan was pregnant with their first child. “I just didn’t want to be alive anymore,” Meghan

said, adding that when she went to the institution for help she was told it would not be forthcoming as it wouldn’t be good for the institution. The 39-year-old former American actress, who is pregnant

with her second child, revealed that the couple are expecting a baby girl and shared how the palace decided that their first-born, Archie, could not be a prince and would therefore have no security. She alluded to “concerns and conversations about how dark his skin might be when he’s born”. “Who is having that conversation?” asked a stunned Winfrey. Meghan replied: “That was relayed to me from Harry, those were conversations the family had with him, and I think it was really hard to be able to see those as compartmentalised conversations.” —PTI ■ **More on Page 6**

SHORT TAKES

Decomposed body of new born found

New Delhi: A highly decomposed body of a new born baby was recovered near the National Media Centre in central Delhi, officials said on Monday. The Parliament Street police station received information that the body of a baby had been found behind the National Media Centre, they said. The baby boy was found buried in the sand. There was a clip attached to the umbilical cord, a senior police officer said. The body was highly decomposed with maggots in most parts of the body, the officer said. An FIR under section 318 (concealment of birth by secret disposal of dead body) of the Indian Penal Code has been registered and investigation is being conducted to identify the baby and circumstances leading to his death, police added.

'Prioritise women's health under ASBY'

New Delhi: Women leaders representing doctors and corporates, on Sunday, underscored the need to change how women are perceived by the society and advocated that women must look after themselves before noting what others need. Attending the summit titled Women's Health Matters by the Integrated Health and Wellbeing (IHW) Council ahead of the International Women's Day, they hoped that a substantial part of the allocations for Atmanirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana, announced during the Union Budget last month, is allocated for women's health issues. Noting that gender discrimination is a critical component that impacts women's health, Dr Nandita Palshetkar, the director of Bloom IVF Centres, said: "We have launched a campaign to make women safer from violence and abuses, smarter in terms of her reproductive choices, and stronger by focusing on wellness and mental wellbeing."

City police celebrates Int'l Women's Day

New Delhi: The Delhi police celebrated 'International Women's Day' with its women police personnel taking lead in all areas of field policing, inter alia, managing of major traffic intersections, pickets, driving police control room (PCR) vehicles, attending to help desks at police stations, and working as duty officers. To mark Women's Day, a function was also organised at the police headquarters with Delhi police commissioner S.N. Shrivastava as chief guest. The CP also honoured 22 women police personnel for their efforts beyond the call of duty during the Covid-19 pandemic and 15 civilian women from various fields including medical services, social services, entrepreneurs, trainers, and good Samaritans who have made significant contributions to the society. Two policewomen, who had helped pregnant women in childbirth, were also felicitated.

239 NEW COVID CASES IN DELHI, +VITY RATE 0.50%

New Delhi: Delhi recorded 239 new coronavirus cases and three deaths on Monday, as the positivity rate rose to 0.50 per cent, the Health Department said. The new cases came from 47,689 tests, including 35,968 RT-PCR tests and 11,721 rapid antigen tests, conducted the previous day, the bulletin said. The number of active cases stood at 1,803. Three new deaths took the toll to 10,924, according to the data. The positivity rate stood rose to 0.50 per cent from 0.31 per cent a day before. On Sunday, 286 new cases and two deaths were recorded. The city had registered 321 new coronavirus cases, the highest daily count in nearly one-and-a-half months, and a death on Saturday, and 312 cases and a fatality on Friday. The number of people under home isolation on Monday rose to 947 from 937 on Saturday, the bulletin said, adding that over 6.28 lakh people had recovered till date. Health experts and doctors have attributed this "sudden rise" in the number of cases to complacency among people, not following Covid-19 appropriate behaviour and "assuming all is well now". — PTI

Outcome Budget: Edu, health depts top performers

1st govt in the country that gives account of previous budget: CM



Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, lieutenant-governor Anil Bajjal, Speaker Ram Niwas Goel during the Budget Session of Delhi Assembly in New Delhi on Monday. — G.N. JHA

'Focal point of govt policies has been to benefit women'

New Delhi, March 8: The focal point of all the schemes and policies of the Delhi government has been to benefit ordinary women, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Monday.

He was speaking at an awards programme organised by the DCW on the occasion of the International Women's Day.

"The focal point of all our schemes has

always been to benefit the ordinary woman, and make their life easier. In the last five years, all the policies that the Delhi government has made, we have tried to ensure that it benefits the ordinary woman," he said. Among the policies that were made keeping in mind the welfare of women were making power and water free of cost, the CM said. — PTI

Most projects under DoE 'on track': Manish Sisodia

New Delhi, March 8: Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Monday presented a report card of the AAP government's 2020-21 budget which showed that projects under the Directorate of Education, including installation of CCTV cameras at 459 government schools, were "on track".

Mr Sisodia pre-



sented the fourth consecutive report card of the government in the Delhi Assembly on the progress and achievements of schemes, programmes and projects up to December 2020 under the 'Outcome Budget'. — PTI

Delhi's expenditure per student on education rises to ₹78,082

New Delhi, March 8: The expenditure incurred by the Delhi government per student annually on education has increased from ₹50,812 in 2016-17 to ₹78,082 in 2020-21, according to the Delhi Economic Survey report.

Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia tabled the Economic Survey report during the Budget session in the Delhi Assembly on Monday.

According to the report, there are 5,691 recognised schools in Delhi with an approximate enrolment of 44.76 lakh students.

The Delhi government has 1,230 government and government-aided schools which is 21.61 per cent of the total schools running in Delhi, whereas, the share of enrolment in government and government-aided schools is 37.18 per cent of the total enrolment of all schools in Delhi during 2019-20, the report said.

The total expenditure on education, including sports, arts and culture, increased from ₹6,555 crore in 2014-15 to ₹15,102 crore in 2020-21, it said.

The share of expenditure on education to the total Budget of the Delhi government has increased from 21 per cent in 2014-15 to 23 per cent in 2020-21, it added.

The report stated that the expenditure on educa-

Delhi's economy projected to contract by 5.68% in FY21

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

The economy of Delhi is expected to contract by 5.68 per cent in real terms while the per capita income is projected to fall to ₹3.54 lakh in the current financial year due to the impact of the pandemic, according to Delhi Economic Survey 2020-21.

However, the advance estimate of the gross state domestic product (GSDP) of Delhi at current price during 2020-21 is ₹7,98,310 crore, showing a contraction of 3.92 per cent over the previous year.

The GSDP at current prices increased by about 45 per cent in the last six years- from ₹5,50,804

crore in 2015-16 to ₹7,98,310 crore during 2020-21.

The per capita income also went down from Rs 3.76 lakh in 2019-20 to Rs 3.54 lakh in the current fiscal year, stated the survey tabled in the Budget session of Delhi

Assembly by deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia. In real terms, the contraction in Delhi's GSDP is expected at 5.68 per cent in 2020-21 compared to a degrowth of 8 per cent at national level, said the report.

Mr Sisodia said in the Assembly that the pandemic halted government activities for some months, causing decline in trade and revenue and financial constraints.

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Gadkari: Delhi to give scrapping incentives under city's EV Policy

New Delhi, March 8: Scrapping incentives, including up to ₹7,500 per vehicle for auto and light commercial vehicle, is being provided by the Delhi government under Delhi Electric Vehicle Policy 2020, Parliament was informed on Monday.

The Delhi government notified the Delhi EV Policy 2020 on Aug 7, 2020, with an intention to promote the adoption of clean mobility solution.

The policy aims to establish the feasibility for large scale adoption of electric passenger four wheelers, through transitioning its entire government fleet to electric.

"Under the provision, all leased/hired cars used for commute of GNCTD officers shall be transitioned to electric within a period of twelve months from the date of issue of this policy," road transport, highways and MSMEs minister Nitin Gadkari informed Rajya Sabha in a written reply.

The Delhi government order issued on February 25, 2021 in this regard mandates conversion of all vehicles owned/leased by the Government of NCT of Delhi to transition to electric by Aug 6, 2021, the minister said.

"Under the Delhi EV Policy, 2020 —scrapping incentive is provided for the vehicles in lieu of scrapping a more polluting conventional vehicle.



Nitin Gadkari

► **THE SCRAPPING** incentive is applicable on the evidence of matching contribution from the dealer or OEM, such that govt of NCT of Delhi will provide incentive matching the contribution made by the OEM or dealer on the scrapping value of vehicle, not exceeding ₹5,000 for two-wheelers and ₹7,500 for Auto, LCV

However, the scrapping incentive for vehicle is applicable on the evidence of matching contribution from the dealer or OEM, such that government of NCT of Delhi will provide incentive matching the contribution made by the OEM or dealer on the scrapping value of the vehicle, not exceeding ₹5,000 per vehicle for two-wheelers and ₹7,500 per vehicle for Auto and Light Commercial Vehicle," the minister said.

He said other incentives are also there.

Private and two-wheeler vehicles would also be included in this scheme, the minister said. — PTI

Batla House case: IM man convicted of inspector's killing

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

A Delhi court, on Monday, convicted Ariz Khan for the murder of Delhi police inspector Mohan Chand Sharma and other offences in connection with the 2008 Batla House encounter. Khan is allegedly associated with the terror outfit Indian Mujahideen. The court will hear arguments on the quantum of sentence on March 15.

Additional sessions judge Sandeep Yadav said the evidence produced by the prosecution duly proved the case beyond reasonable doubt.

The judge said that it was



Mohan Chand Sharma

"duly proved that Ariz Khan and his associates caused the murder of police official and fired gunshot at the police official."

The judge further said that Khan managed to flee and did not appear despite being declared a proclaimed offender.

► **INSPECTOR SHARMA** of the special cell of Delhi police was killed during the 2008 Batla House encounter. The accused is allegedly associated with the Indian Mujahideen. The court will hear arguments on the quantum of sentence on March 15.

"Khan, along with his accomplices, fired gunshots at head constables Balwant and Balvir Singh," the court said.

The court also asked the investigating officer (IO) to ascertain the financial position of the convict to decide on the amount of compensation to be given

to the victim's family.

Inspector Sharma of the special cell of Delhi police was killed during the 2008 Batla House encounter at Jamia Nagar in South Delhi.

In 2013, Shahzad Ahmed and Khan had escaped the Batla House shootout while two of their accomplices, Atif Amin and Mohammed Sajid, were killed during the shootout. A third, Mohammed Saif, was arrested from the location. Delhi police inspector Mohan Chand Sharma lost his life while two other officers were injured.

Later, Shahzad Ahmed was also arrested and a trial court, in July 2013,

had sentenced Indian Mujahideen terrorist Ahmed to life imprisonment in connection with the case. His appeal against the trial court's verdict has been pending in the high court. Khan, a native of Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh, was arrested by the Delhi police's special cell in February 2018.

The multiple bombings in 2008 that rocked cities like Jaipur and Ahmedabad, apart from the national capital itself, saw 165 people losing their lives and over 500 injured in all. A reward of ₹15 lakh had been declared on Khan besides an Interpol Red Corner Notice.



Women from Punjab and Haryana participate in farmers protest against the Centers new farm laws on International Womens Day at Tikri Border in Delhi on Monday.

— PTI

Farmer's stir: Women take centre stage at protest sites

New Delhi, March 8: Endless rows of women clothed in bright yellow and green colours, representing the hues of harvest, sat attentively under a collage of coloured canopies at Delhi borders on Monday.

Passionate speeches by fellow women farmers captured the attention of thousands of these women who have been protesting against the Centre's new farm laws.

On International Women's Day, hundreds of women took to streets while raising slogans of "kisan ekta" (farmer unity) and some broke into nonchalant rhythmic steps of 'bhangra'.

Similar scenes played out at all three protest sites around the national capital - Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur borders - to celebrate women's contribution to the 100-day strong farmers movement against the farm laws. Noting that women contribute significantly to the country's farming sector, the organisers had laid out elaborate plans to let the community manage the stage, arrange food and security, and share tales of their struggles on the occasion.

"The stage is being managed by women, the speakers are all women and the issues that are being discussed are of both farming and women farmers more specifically," farmer leader Kavitha Kuruganti said.

"The discourse of the debate is focusing on women farmers. The debate is also on the contribution of women in this movement," Kuruganti, who is also a member of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha, said. — PTI

Mercury rises in Delhi; min temp 19°C

New Delhi, March 8: Mercury rose by a few notches in the national capital on Monday as the minimum temperature settled at 19 degrees Celsius, the India Meteorological Department said.

The city had registered a low of 14.4 degrees Celsius on Sunday while the maximum temperature had stood at 34 degrees Celsius.

The minimum temperature recorded at Safdarjung Observatory, considered the official reading of the city, was 19 degrees Celsius early morning, five notches above the normal, as per data shared by the IMD on its website.

The weatherman has forecast strong surface winds during the day. — PTI

Water crisis: DJB moves SC against Haryana govt

New Delhi, March 8: The Delhi Jal Board (DJB) on Monday moved the Supreme Court against the Haryana government to "avert a potential severe water crisis" in Delhi, water utility's vice-chairman Raghav Chadha said.

Mr Chadha claimed the Haryana government has reduced the supply of raw water to Delhi, resulting in shortage of water supply in the national capital.

"Such behaviour of the Haryana government is not only undesirable, but also deeply disappointing. The regular fall in the level of Yamuna, especially during summers, along with the discharge of pollutants that cause rise in ammonia levels, is a matter of grave concern," he said in a statement.

"Delhi is facing a potential severe water crisis



Raghav Chadha

due to high ammonia levels in the Yamuna and the continuously depleting water level at Wazirabad barrage, which supplies drinking water to the Wazirabad, Okhla and Chandrawal water treatment plants of the DJB," he said.

The DJB has moved the SC against Haryana to avert a severe water crisis in Delhi. It has sought directions from the apex court to the neighbouring state to immediately

► **Water utility's** vice-chairman Raghav Chadha claimed the Haryana government has reduced the supply of raw water to Delhi, resulting in shortage of water supply in the national capital. Such behaviour of the Haryana government is not only undesirable, but also deeply disappointing

cease the discharge of untreated pollutants into the Yamuna and release sufficient water to the national capital, Mr Chadha said.

Raw water is sourced from the Yamuna and is drawn at Wazirabad barrage. The quantity and quality of raw water at Wazirabad Barrage is dependent on the release of water by the Haryana government, he said.

Haryana supplies water to Delhi through the

Carrier-Lined Channel (CLC), Delhi sub-branch (DSB) and the Yamuna. CLC and DSB supply water from Hathni Kund via Munak canal and Bhakra Beas Management Board.

At present, Delhi receives 479 million gallons water a day (MGD) against 609 MGD from Haryana. Besides, Delhi draws 90 MGD groundwater and receives 250 MGD from the Upper Ganga Canal.

"The continuous fall in the Yamuna's water level is a matter of grave concern. Despite notifying officers concerned of the Haryana government on a daily basis, no concrete action has been taken yet and there has been no improvement towards restoring any normalcy," Mr Chadha said.

As per a Supreme Court order of February 1996, the pond level in

Wazirabad has to be kept full.

The normal level of the Yamuna near Wazirabad Pond should be 674.50 feet but it has dropped to 670.90 feet.

The drastic fall in the water level at Wazirabad pond has affected water production at Wazirabad, Okhla and Chandrawal water treatment plants which supply drinking water to central, north, west and south Delhi.

Currently, Haryana through CLC canal is supplying only 549.16 cusecs against 683 cusecs and Delhi Sub-Branch canal is supplying 306.63 cusecs against 330 cusecs, Mr Chadha had said on Sunday. The treatment capacity at Wazirabad and Chandrawal water treatment plants has dipped by 30 per cent. The same has reduced by 15 per cent at Okhla WTP, he had said. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Spurned lover kills girl's mom in Odisha

Bhubaneswar: In an unfortunate incident, a youth allegedly killed the mother of a girl he was in love with at Karalakhunta in Kalahandi district on Monday. The deceased identified as Sindhu Bag (55) faced the wrath of the youth while trying to save her daughter Ranjita from the murderous attack. The incident took place when Ranjita along with her mother was returning from a nearby pond after having a bath. According to reports, the accused — Tilakar Naik, who is a resident of the same village had developed a one-sided love affair with Ranjita. However, his love proposal was turned down by the girl.

2 C'garh ministers test corona positive

Bhopal: Two ministers in the Bhopal Baghel government on Monday tested positive for coronavirus. State health minister T.S. Singhdeo and state revenue minister Jai Singh Agrawal have contracted Covid-19, Chhattisgarh health department has confirmed. Incidentally, Mr Singhdeo had earlier registered strong opposition to introduction of Covaxin vaccine candidate in mass vaccination programme in Chhattisgarh till the data of its third stage of clinical trial was made public. He had also written a letter to Union health minister Harsh Vardhan urging not to supply the indigenously produced Covaxin to Chhattisgarh for mass vaccination till all stages of clinical trials of the vaccine candidate were completed. Mr Singhdeo had visited Agartala in Tripura to attend a meeting of local Congress workers a couple of days ago. He returned to Sarguja in Chhattisgarh from Agartala on Sunday. He reached Raipur on Monday morning.

Odisha task force to contain forest fires

Bhubaneswar: Worried over the burning of several forests across the state, the Odisha on Monday constituted a taskforce to fight forest fire. The taskforce includes three experts from Hyderabad and Dehradun and it will be headed by Dr Sandeep Tripathy, Odisha's former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) and Head of Forest Force (HoFF). The high-level team includes the incumbent PCCF Jitendra Kumar, PCCF (wildlife) Sashi Paul, Pankaj Agarwal, Representative of DG, ICFRE Dehradun, Head of Forest & Ecology, NRSC, Hyderabad, P.K. Mallick, J K Panigrahy and Bijay Agarwal.

ABDULLAH SLAMS BJP FOR DELAY IN WOMEN QUOTA BILL

Jammu: National Conference president Farooq Abdullah slammed the BJP on Monday over the delay in the passage of the women's reservation bill in Parliament despite enjoying a majority. Abdullah said the passage of the women reservation's bill would be the "biggest service" to the women in the country. Addressing a function to mark the International Women's Day at party headquarters in Jammu, Abdullah said men could basically talk about empowering women, but they do not want it to happen. "The BJP is enjoying majority in the Parliament, and had passed farm bills and that of revocation of Article 370 even as the people were not in their favour. Why are they not passing this (women reservation) bill when the entire country wants it?" Mr Abdullah asked. "I will see whether they will pass it or not this time," the Srinagar MP said. Abdullah, who surprised the well-attended gathering by seating himself on the floor instead of taking a chair at the dias as a respect for the women on the occasion, said empowering women was the empowerment of each household in the country. The bill was first introduced by the United Front government in 1996 and then the Vajpayee government tabled it a few times. However, it could never be passed in any of the two Houses on all these occasions. The prospects of its passage brightened when the UPA government tabled it in the Rajya Sabha in 2010 and managed to get it passed in the Upper House.

Women's Day: Shivraj ensures 'only women' show in MP

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, MARCH 8

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Monday observed International Women's Day in style by ensuring "only women" show in all his schedules on the day. Mr Chouhan had tea with his women security guards deployed in his official residence in the morning before attending his various official engagements in the day. He ensured that his convoy of cars had only women drivers and his pilot vehicles carried only women security officers. He was escorted by 2 women police officers as his personal security officers during his visit to various places in Bhopal to attend his scheduled programmes.

He had tea with women municipal workers and joined them in cleaning a road in the city.

He planted trees at Smart City Park here along with women scribes, women anchors of various TV news channels and women representatives of various organisations. Later, he along with his wife Sadhna Singh had lunch in a café here run by a women self-help group. He witnessed a martial art show by Paramjit Saurya team, an all women group skilled in martial art for self-defense.

Later, he disbursed a total loan of ₹200 crore to various women self-help groups in the state at 2 percent interest to expand their businesses.

He was scheduled to host dinner for women security guards deployed in his official residence in the night.



Congress MLA from Barkagaon, Amba Prasad, rides on a horse to mark International Women's Day, as she arrives at Jharkhand Assembly in Ranchi on Monday. — PTI

■ It's an attack on personal freedom, violation of Constitution: Cong MP House clears 'love jihad' bill

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, MARCH 8

The controversial Freedom of Religion Bill, 2021, providing 10 years imprisonment for religious conversion of a girl through marriage or by any other fraudulent means was on Monday passed in the Madhya Pradesh assembly.

The bill, popularly known as "Love Jihad" law, was passed in voice vote amid opposition by Congress which described it as "an attack on personal freedom and violation of Constitution".

State home minister Narottam Mishra however justified the bill saying

that instances of some people marrying girls of other religions by concealing their real identities for conversion have of late come to the fore, forcing the government to legislate the law to check such illegal practices.

"I am not against 'love', but against 'jihad' (religious war)", he observed.

Mr Mishra took a dig at Congress for opposing the bill, saying that the Opposition party always pursued politics of appeasement to cultivate vote banks.

Participating in the debate, BJP MLA Rameswar Sharma said the bill was necessary to check the disturbing trend witnessed in tribal

regions of the state in which Christian and Muslim men were found marrying tribal girls to usurp various privileges provided to adivasis by the government.

Senior Congress leader Govind Singh said the bill was a clear violation of the Constitution which guaranteed freedom of religion to people of India.

He also described the bill as an 'attack on personal freedom of a person'.

The law was enforced in MP through an ordinance on January 9.

The bill provides maximum 10 years imprisonment and ₹1 lakh fine for religious conversion of a girl through marriage or by allurement or inducement.

The bill provides that a couple seeking to convert have to intimate the local district magistrate in this regard 2 months before their marriage, failing which their marriage would be declared null and void.

The bill has been challenged in the Madhya Pradesh high court.

Came to India with a hope, say Rohingyas

Urge J&K admin to treat them like humans as eviction process begins

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, MARCH 8

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has justified the Jammu and Kashmir administration's move to identify and deport Rohingya Muslims who are allegedly living in ghettos on the peripheries of winter capital Jammu illegally, asserting they pose a "serious threat" to the security of the country. "The authorities" taking them out of Jammu and putting them in detention camps is part of the process to drive them out of here. It is a good beginning and we welcome it. We have been saying from the very beginning that they are too dangerous for the security of Jammu and their presence here is not any good," said BJP spokesman Brigadier (retired) Anil Gupta. He added, "They must be taken away from J&K and repatriated."

At the weekend, the J&K authorities detained 155 male members of the Rohingya refugees and subsequently lodged them in a jail in Hiranagar area, about 56-km south of Jammu city, after holding an identification parade in a local stadium. The officials said that these Rohingyas were detained after invoking Section 3(2) of the Foreigners Act and lodged in a 'holding centre', pending their deportation to Myanmar "as they are not possessing valid travel documents required by the law".

They said that this was

■ At the weekend, the J&K authorities detained 155 male members of the Rohingya refugees and subsequently lodged them in a jail in Hiranagar area, about 56-km south of Jammu city, after holding an identification parade

part of the government's exercise initiated to identify illegal immigrants and then deport them to their respective countries. They, however, also said that the purpose of taking Rohingyas to Jammu's Maulana Azad Stadium from ghettos was also to check if any one of them has been affected by Coronavirus.

The authorities' action created panic among Rohingya Muslims living in three different areas—Sunjwan, Belicharana and Samba. A few elderly refugees told reporters that they and many other Rohingyas putting up in ghettos did not sleep whole night nor did they eat for they are worried over the plight of those detained by the authorities.

On Sunday, hundreds of Rohingya refugees packed up and then along with their women and children started marching towards Myanmar saying since their fate was the same in Jammu it would be better for them to return to their country. However, after walking a distance of about four kilometers they returned to their ghetto at Karyani Talab in Narwal area on the outskirts of the winter capital Jammu.

■ SUV with explosives was found on Feb. 25

NIA takes over Ambani house bomb scare case

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

Home ministry has directed the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to investigate the case related to recovery of a Scorpio SUV packed with explosives found near the residence of industrialist Mukesh Ambani in Mumbai a few days ago. NIA will look into possible terror and underworld links in the case.

The Scorpio SUV had 20 gelatin sticks inside and was found near the Mumbai residence of Mukesh Ambani on February 25. Initial investigations by the Mumbai Police had revealed that the vehicle was stolen from the Airol-Mulund Bridge on February 18.

But in an interesting twist to the case the body of the owner of the Scorpio, Mansukh Hiran, was also recovered from outskirts of Mumbai a few days. Hiran's wife had expressed suspicion that her husband may well have been murdered.

Home ministry sources said that considering the sensitive nature of the entire case it was important that the investigations be done by a profession counter-terror agency like the NIA. The investigating agency will now register a fresh case and take over all the relevant records from the Mumbai Police's Anti-Terror Squad (ATS) which was investigating the case so far.

The ATS registered a case against unidentified persons under IPC Sections 302 (murder), 201 (causing disappearance of evidence of offence) and 120(b) (criminal conspiracy).

Something is fishy, says CM Thackeray

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, MARCH 8

The probe into the death of Mansukh Hiren, the owner of the explosives laden vehicle that was found outside industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence, has been transferred from Maharashtra Anti Terrorism Squad (ATS) to the National Investigation Agency (NIA). Reacting to this Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray has stated that transfer of Mansukh's murder case from ATS to NIA suggests something was fishy. The investigation into Hiren's death was transferred to the NIA on Monday and the NIA was in the process of re-registering the case into his death.

Speaking to the reporters in Mumbai on Monday, Mr Thackeray said that governments come and go, but the official administrative machinery remains the same and one needs to trust it.

Mr Thackeray also said that the state had handed over the case of the vehicle laden with explosives and the mysterious death of Hiran to the ATS.

"There could be inter-State ramifications of this case or maybe some elements from abroad may also have a role in it. So it was important that a central agency conducts these investigations as NIA was fully equipped to handle such investigations," a senior NIA official said.

Home ministry sources



Uddhav Thackeray

According to him, the NIA taking over the case shows something was fishy.

"If the Centre is planning on taking over the case, there is something fishy about it. We are also investigating another matter, that of the suicide of MP Mohan Delkar. The opposition has no guts to speak about it as they know who calls the shots in union territories," he said.

A Scorpio car carrying 20 gelatin sticks was seized near Ambani's residence 'Antilia' in South Mumbai on February 25. Police had said it had been stolen from Airol-Mulund Bridge on February 18.

Later, the police identified 46-year-old Hiren, an automobile accessories dealer, as owner of the said vehicle. He however, was found dead in a creek in district Thane in neighbouring Mumbai. He had gone missing around 5 hours before his dead body was found.

said they were in touch with Mumbai Police also which had already strengthened the outer security cordon near Mukesh Ambani's residence.

All vehicles going towards the residence were being thoroughly scanned and checked before they were allowed in the area.

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NORTHERN RAILWAY CORRIDGENDUM

Tender for Halt Contract of 38 Halt Stations was called and opened on 11.01.2021 at Commercial Branch, DRM Office, New Delhi, Due to some technical reasons tender is cancelled by Railways.

No. 631-CP-231-Pt-I-Halt Tender-2020 Date : 08.03.2021 522/21

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

IN BRIEF

ZILLA PARISHAD IN MALDA SLIPS OUT OF TMC'S HANDS

Kolkata, March 8: The ruling TMC was rocked by a fresh bout of defections to BJP on Monday before the West Bengal state polls as five of its sitting MLAs quit it after being denied tickets and lost control of Malda zilla parishad.

This was TMC's second largest single-day exodus after political heavyweight Suwendu Adhikari along with 35 TMC leaders, including five MLAs and an MP, switched over to BJP December last year.

The BJP took control of the 38-member Malda Zilla Parishad after its 23 members changed sides during the day.

Sonali Guha, four-time TMC MLA and a close associate of Trinamul Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee for two decades joined the disgruntled leaders to quit the party and join the BJP, as did 80-year-old Rabindra Bhattacharya, who was a prominent face of the Singur anti-farmland acquisition movement.

Both the leaders had been denied tickets by TMC for the coming polls.

With Mr Bhattacharya joining the saffron camp, TMC has lost both its prominent faces of the Singur and Nandigram anti-land acquisition movement to the saffron camp.

The movement had catapulted TMC to power ending 34 years of Left Front rule in the state. Suwendu Adhikari will now take on Banerjee, his former mentor at Nandigram.

— PTI

NTPC GRAFT CASE: 6 MORE OFFICIALS UNDER CBI LENS

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

Days after registering an FIR against nine officials of NTPC for their alleged involvement in financial irregularities pertaining to a 4,000-MW super thermal power plant project in Chhattisgarh's Raigarh, six more senior officials of the public sector undertaking are now under the scanner of the central probe agency in connection with the case.

Sources said, "During the course of investigation, investigators found evidences against six more officials of the NTPC. They will soon be called for interrogation". Those officials of the NTPC who were recently booked by the CBI are: former DGM Bishwanath Prasad, DGM Shyama Nanda Mandal, assistant manager Mahesh Kumar Mishra, engineer Rupendra Kumar Sahu and junior engineers Kanak Saha, Harshvardhan Mathia, Sudhir Purohit and Laxmi Prasad Ratre.

The NTPC was setting up the plant in Lara village of Raigarh — its zero date was December 13, 2012 — for which it bought a huge quantity of steel and cement.

Buzz in BJP

■ Continued from Page 1

of BJP leaders is not in favour of a change in leadership when the next polls are less than 10 months away.

The Opposition — the Congress and AAP — lapped up the factionalism brewing in the ruling BJP camp and has claimed that many dissenting BJP MLAs are in touch with them.

Talk of a leadership change in Uttarakhand ahead of the elections next year gained ground after two central party observers, Raman Singh and Dushyant Gautam, were sent to Dehradun on Saturday. However, BJP state unit chief Banshidhar Bhagat denied that the party leadership is considering a leadership change in the state.

The BJP leaders met with MLAs, ministers and also with the CM and some RSS leaders. The two observers then submitted a report to Mr Nadda. Among the names in circulation as possible replacements for Mr Rawat are state education minister Dhan Singh Rawat, Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal "Nishank" and Rajya Sabha member Anil Baluni.

Many MLAs have reportedly pushed for a change in leadership as they feel that the BJP does not stand a chance of being re-elected under Mr Rawat's leadership. The 60-year-old CM is a low-profile politician who does not have any corruption charges against him. But he is accused of not taking decisions and many in the party feel that this may go against the BJP. Some opinion polls have placed him as below average in performance.

Vijayan takes on Shah, says he insulted Kerala

During a rally, home minister had termed Kerala as 'most corrupt state'

GILVESTER ASSARY
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
MARCH 8

Chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Monday hit out at Union home minister Amit Shah saying that he had insulted the people of the state by terming Kerala as "most corrupt state".

Mr Vijayan while addressing an election meeting in his constituency Dharmadam in Kannur district said that several agencies had adjudged Kerala as the least corrupt state. The home minister is trying to mislead the people by creating smoke-screen. You created "achche din" by facilitating 16,000 per cent increase in wealth," he said while referring to the allegations related to Shah's son.

At the public meeting

held in Thiruvananthapuram on Sunday, Amit Shah had put certain questions to the chief minister about the involvement of his former principal secretary in gold smuggling case, appointment of key accused in government department, her trips to Gulf along with senior official, corruption and mysterious death of a person allegedly involved in gold smuggling.

Mr Vijayan put counter questions to Amit Shah. Why have the Central agencies not been able to crack the gold smuggling case even after eight months? How did Thiruvananthapuram international airport, which is under Centre's complete control, become a gold smuggling hub under the NDA regime? Isn't the main person who



Pinarayi Vijayan

▶ **Amit SHAH** had put certain questions to the CM about the involvement of his former principal secretary in gold smuggling case, appointment of key accused in government department

▶ **VIJAYAN** CRITICISED the Congress for failing to utter a word against Shah and his party

conspired gold smuggling a Sangh Parivar man?

He also took a dig at Mr Shah saying that he had not been in jail on the charges of murder, fake encounter, snooping, kidnapping. "Amit Shah should remember that he faced such serious charges. "People of Kerala know who Pinarayi Vijayan is. They have seen our work," he said.

About mysterious murder as alleged by Shah, Mr Vijayan said that let the

home minister clearly state the facts instead of creating a smokescreen. "If he reveals the name of the person, I am sure Kerala police will probe the matter," he said.

The chief minister said Mr Shah personified "communal politics."

He said Kerala does not believe in the communal politics that he espoused. "Our culture is not his culture. We are following the footsteps of our great social reformers Sree

Narayana Guru, Chattampi Swami, Mahatma Ayyankali, Ayya Guru who spoke about communal harmony and universal brotherhood," he said.

Mr Vijayan criticised the Congress for failing to utter a word against Shah and his party.

Earlier, Mr Vijayan who arrived in Kannur was given a warm reception by LDF workers at the international airport. He was taken in a procession to Dharmadam.

The chief minister was elected from Dharmadam constituency in 2016 with a huge margin of 36,905 votes. Though the Congress and BJP are yet to announce their candidates, political observers say Mr Vijayan might retain the seat comfortably considering the support his party enjoys in the constituency.

Modi likely to address 5 poll rallies in Kerala

AGE CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
MAR. 8

The BJP has decided to field party vice-president A.P. Abdullahkutty from Malappuram Lok Sabha constituency for the bypoll to be held along with the assembly elections. The decision was conveyed in a statement issued by BJP's central election committee in Delhi.

The decision to field Abdullahkutty has been taken in view of the peculiarity of the Muslim dominated Malappuram constituency. This is Abdullahkutty's first election after joining the BJP. Earlier, he was MP twice from the CPM and later MLA from the Congress

for one term.

The BJP has projected Abdullahkutty as the party's Muslim face by elevating him to the post of national vice president. The Muslim League and the CPM have not decided the candidates for the Malappuram constituency as yet.

The Malappuram Lok Sabha bypoll was warranted by sitting MP and Muslim League leader P K Kunhalikutty's resignation. Kunhalikutty who returned to Kerala politics, would be contesting the forthcoming Assembly polls.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is slated to address five public meetings as part of the campaign in Kerala.

Remarks on rape case completely misreported: SC

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde on Monday said his remark to a rape accused that "will you marry her" was taken out of context and "misreported".

Expressing dissatisfaction with the "misreporting" of the proceedings, Chief Justice heading a bench also comprising Justice A.S.Bopanna and Justice V. Rama subramanian said that "We have the highest respect for womanhood". "We have given highest respect to womanhood. We asked 'are you going to marry'. We did't order (to) marry," the CJI said. The clarification from the top court came in the course of the hearing of a petition by a 14-year old girl from Haryana seeking court's nod for the termination of her 26 week old pregnancy. Agreeing with the bench that it was a case of misreporting, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said "You asked a question in a different context. You were quoted

out of context." Lawyer Biju for the petitioner girl seeking termination of pregnancy described the alleged misreporting as "tarnishing of the image of the highest court".

The question had arisen in the context of an understanding between the victim girl's mother with the mother of the accused, who is now 23, that he would marry her (victim) after she becomes an adult.

In a hearing on March 1, the CJI had asked the petitioner accused if he would marry the victim making it clear that court was not compelling him or offering an option.

However, entire thing got closed after accused petitioner seeking anticipatory bail said that he had offered to marry the victim girl but she refused and now he is married to another woman.

Rejecting his plea for anticipatory bail, the top court in the last hearing granted him four weeks of protection from arrest, giving him liberty to seek bail from the trial court.

JEE Mains results out, 6 kids score perfect 100

New Delhi, March 8: Six candidates scored perfect 100 in JEE-Mains, results of which were announced on Monday, according to officials of the National Testing Agency.

The perfect scorers are Pravar Kataria and Ranjim Prabal Das from Delhi, Guramrit Singh from Chandigarh, Saket Jha from Rajasthan, Sidhanth Mukherjee from Maharashtra and Ananth Krishna Kidambi from Gujarat.

According to officials, NTA scores are normalised scores across multi-session papers and are based on the relative performance of all those who appeared for the examination in one session. "The marks obtained are converted into a scale

ranging from 100 to 0 for each session of examinees. NTA score is not the same as the percentage of marks obtained," a senior official said.

The National Testing Agency had conducted the February session examination from February 23 to 26, 2021. The exam was conducted at over 800 centres in 331 cities, including nine centres abroad — Colombo, Doha, Dubai, Kathmandu, Muscat, Riyadh, Sharjah, Singapore and Kuwait.

This year, a total of 6.52 lakh candidates had registered for the entrance examination, 95 per cent of whom had appeared in the B.E/B.Tech papers and 81.2% appeared in B.Arch/B.Planning paper.

— PTI

■ Centre aims to promote peace, harmony, ideas of PM 'Old boy' sets up NaMo centre near AMU

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

Inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech delivered at the centenary celebrations of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in December last year, an old boy (alumnus) of the university, Prof. Jasim Mohammed, has set up the Centre for Narendra Modi Studies near the varsity campus. The centre will run as a think tank to promote peace, harmony and ideas promoted by the leadership of Narendra Modi.

Mr Mohammed, who teaches comparative literature at Arunachal University of Studies, has registered the centre as a public trust on land purchased near the law faculty of AMU. He says that initially, the centre will

operate from Aligarh and then shift base to Delhi.

Mr Jasim adds that the centre is also called NaMo Kendra or NaMo Centre and its functional area is the entire world. "It means the centre can organise events under its banner anywhere in the world," explains Mr Jasim.

Elaborating further on the activities of the centre, Mr Jasim said that apart from holding seminars and conferences, from the next academic year, the centre plans to hold short-term workshops for college students and teachers on themes like atmanirbhar bharat, India's freedom movement, democracy and the Constitution of India. Among other academic activities to be undertaken by the centre include Narendra Modi model of nation-building,

defining parameters of the concept of secularism, liberal democracy, non-alignment and social justice as spelt by Narendra Modi to enable and facilitate policymakers.

"The centre will also create inter-linkages with NGOs and academic institutions to prepare and provide authentic data," he added.

Interestingly, Mr Jasim, who has compiled and edited many books on PM Modi, had once filed an FIR against him after the 2002 Gujarat riots. "But like Modi's confidante Zafar Sareshwala who was also against PM Modi after 2002 events and later got convinced when he met Mr Modi, I also changed my opinion about him when I met him and got to know him more," said Mr Jasim.

Mr Jasim has been actively garnering support for Mr Modi among Muslims and the teaching community of AMU. He has also faced a lot of flak because of his stance.

"But, I know how to navigate my path. Many people who have opposed me initially have joined hands with me later. I am sure this will happen with the NaMo centre also. People will raise eyebrows initially and then will vie to be part of this," said Mr Jasim.

Mr Jasim plans to run the centre on the lines of Vivekananda Foundation and Observer Research Foundation and is busy contacting former diplomats, bureaucrats, senior academics and experts of other fields to join the centre as advisors and contributors.

■ Odisha CM lauds role of women in fight against Covid 'Moms are natural leaders by birth'

Bhubaneswar, March 8: Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik on Monday said mothers are natural leaders by birth.

Mr Patnaik said this while addressing the party's women wing which celebrated the International Women's Day here. He said the mothers are born leaders and they have the leadership qualities to run the nation as well as society.

"As mothers, who can smoothly take care of their home and children, they too can take responsibility of the nation and society with ease," Patnaik said, adding that every mother has leadership qualities.

"We must create opportunities to develop their skills and use them for the development of the nation," Mr Patnaik said,

adding that his party has been empowering women based on the ideologies of legendary leader Biju Patnaik.

While addressing the state-level function marking International Women's Day, Mr Patnaik said the Odisha government's Mission Shakti launched on March 8, 2001, has turned out to be the aspiration of about 80 lakh women across the state.

Noting that about 1 crore women will soon reap benefits from the Mission Shakti initiative, Mr Patnaik said his government has meanwhile created a separate department for the Mission Shakti. He said Odisha's Mission Shakti will soon emerge as the largest women movement across the globe.

He said the role of women self help group



Naveen Patnaik

members, anganwadi workers, nurses and other females during the Covid-19 pandemic is commendable.

Mr Patnaik also distributed awards to best performing banks, best SHGs as Covid Champions, best district social welfare officer, best district child protection officer and best performing districts.

Mr Patnaik also, on the occasion of International Women's Day, launched

new portals, Mission Shakti Website, Mobile Apps and a Special Portal on Bank Linkage along with an IEC package to abolish witch-hunting through a Video Conference.

He also inaugurated working women's hostel at Jharsuguda, Jajpur and Bhubaneswar.

Meanwhile, the state's principal opposition BJP came down heavily on the BJD government and accused it of using women as its vote bank through Mission Shakti.

Odisha BJP in-charge D. Purandeswari, while addressing a programme organised at Baraipur in Cuttack district said: "BJD has been using women as vote banks. However, BJP has immense respect for women."

— PTI

Iran denies role in blast near Israel embassy

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

Slamming "unsubstantiated allegations" from any quarter, Iran on Monday squarely denied any role in a minor explosion outside the Israeli embassy January 29 in New Delhi and added that it had already "expressed its readiness to cooperate with the Indian friends in order to unravel the wicked intentions of the spoilers of (Indo-Iranian) relations".

Iran also insinuated in its statement that "third parties" could be involved in the terror incident to damage bilateral ties between India and Iran at a time "when long-standing and cordial (bilateral) relations are further being boosted and developed in all domains, including in the form of exchange of the two countries' high rankings political, economic, security and defence delegations".

"While respecting the honourable government and authorities of India in their endeavour to thoroughly investigate and probe the above-mentioned incident in order to identify the orchestrators of such actions and to bring them to justice, this embassy strongly repudiates any unsubstantiated allegations or irresponsible comments in this regard and considers them as steps towards realising the sinister intentions of the enemies of Iran-India relations," the Iranian embassy in New Delhi said.

"Is the presumption that this act must have been conducted by third parties who are angry and dissatisfied with the progress in relations between the governments of Iran and India illogical? ...The culture, civilisation, history and also national and religious beliefs of the government and people of Iran will never allow conduct of any actions which are inhumane, terrorist, barbaric," it added.

5 sitting MLAs join BJP

■ Continued from Page 1

Whatever you did during that period was virtual. Later, you used to make them viral. If you have the guts, come out on the streets and do something, standing there."

Ms Banerjee added: "Remember it is only me who is fighting in 294 seats. This battle is me versus the BJP."

Belittling Mr Modi's mega campaign rally on Sunday, which attracted a

crowd of around four lakhs at the Brigade Parade Ground, she argued: "Yesterday you turned your Brigade rally into a B-grade event. Even the strength of the crowd, whatever it may be, in my rally today was missing at yours. Money cannot buy everything."

Attacking the PM over his self-obsession, Ms Banerjee alleged: "Covid-19 is a scary disease. But he ensured his photo on

the vaccine, flaunting it as a Modi vaccine. Even a stadium and school-college were not spared. One day he will perhaps rename India after him. He sent his photo to Isro also. When all of us will become a photograph after some days, then who will look at you? Everyone has to become a photograph one day. Do you really believe someone would look at your photo? No one will."

US wants India to join UN talks on Afghan

■ Continued from Page 1

It may be recalled that last month Prime Minister Narendra Modi had expressed concern over the increasing violence in the war-torn nation and had called for a ceasefire and an immediate end to the violence in

Afghanistan. Mr Modi had reiterated New Delhi's stand in favour of a peace process that is Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled, while pointing out how innocent citizens, journalists and activists are being targeted in a

cowardly manner in that strife-torn nation. The prime Minister had added: "It is very important to strengthen internal solidarity among the people of Afghanistan. I believe that a united Afghanistan is capable of facing any challenge."

THE ASIAN AGE

9 MARCH 2021

Regional power strong in TN, alliances ready

The regional satraps of the South were always powerful enough politicians to make this region of India mostly stay off rule by mainstream national parties and not just in the couple of decades of the new millennium. As a bastion of Dravidian rule since 1967, Tamil Nadu has been even more of an outlier in national politics. The regional versus the national is at play once again as alliance talks on seat-sharing meandered in compulsory coalition politics in which the Dravidian majors seek out the national parties to be partners or vice versa, but without ever conceding a share in power in Tamil Nadu by way of a coalition government. Both the Congress, an older player in Tamil Nadu's politics, and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party may have been miffed but still had no recourse but to accept a lesser number of seats in their respective alliances.

The battle lines are drawn for the Tamil Nadu leg of the polls, which is due on April 6, with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)-Congress alliance pitted against the twice triumphant All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)-led front of 2011 and 2016, but which has a new ally now in the BJP. There were never any great ideological barriers against joining either alliance as most parties in the Tamil Nadu mix have been allies on either side in the past. The presence of the BJP in an alliance for the Assembly polls triggers the secular versus majoritarian religious politics debate whereas majoritarian religious politics debate whereas the two Dravidian fronts used to be separated in the past only by theism versus atheism theme of religious politics. The narrowness of the 2016 verdict suggests that the contests may be even tighter this time.

Friends have remained friends like the Pattal Makkal Katchi (PMK) with the AIADMK since 2011 and "frenemies" have stayed back for now after abandoning fleeting thoughts of switching alliances. Fringe players like Kamal Haasan, whose fledgling party Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) fared reasonably well in a few urban pockets in the Lok Sabha polls of 2019, may make things a bit interesting at the hustings, even though the electorate can be expected to continue to vest power in one of the two major Dravidian parties. The big difference this time around is that Tamil Nadu has moved on from the days of its larger-than life leaders like M. Karunanidhi, M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) and Jayalalithaa, and the Assembly polls for 234 seats without them is a first since the mid-1950s, when M. Karunanidhi of the DMK made his poll debut.

The anti-incumbency factor after two terms will be weighing heavily on the ruling party-led combine while his father's longtime lieutenant M.K. Stalin will be hoping the trends favour his vaulting to the gaddi for the first time. Association with the BJP did not work for the AIADMK in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, which was a 37-1 washout, which means the pressure may be even more on Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswami and his deputy O. Panneerselvam, who have kept the state government going for four long years. And, however hard Kamal Haasan may have tried to stress on ridding the state of the corrupt Dravidian parties, institutionalised graft has never appeared to have been an issue with the franchisees somewhat accustomed to accepting cash-for-votes besides freebies from their rulers.

Heed Pope's call for peace

The pictures that the world got to see through the lenses of Pope Francis' entourage on his recent visit to Iraq reflect the destruction the region has witnessed in the last two decades and the urgent need to rebuild it by ushering in peace. The Pope's call for an end to violence was meant for all those who were responsible for it, which started with the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003. Each player who held sway in the region, the Islamic State included, bathed itself in inglorious acts in the land which created and nurtured one of the most ancient of human civilisations. As St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, "no one was righteous, not even one", in this deadly game.

The import of the visit, the first one by the head of the Roman Catholic Church, is that it was not meant for photo ops alone. Pope Francis met leaders of every community that has been hit. He visited Qaraqosh, a Christian town, and Mosul, a Sunni heartland, both overrun by the Islamic State, and Erbil, capital of the autonomous Kurdish region. He met Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, one of the most senior leaders in Shia Islam, in the holy city of Najaf. He had an emotional meeting with the father of Alan Kurdi, the boy whose body was washed up on a Turkish beach six years ago, epitomising the sufferings of Syrians who tried to escape the savagery of war. He also visited Ur, the land of Prophet Abraham, the patriarch of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths.

Winding up the visit, the Pope, who commands no military divisions, made an urgent appeal to humanity: we must reaffirm our conviction that fraternity is more durable than fratricide, that hope is more powerful than hatred, that peace more powerful than war. Now, he who has ears, let him hear.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Editor in Chief

Printer & Publisher: K. SUDHAKAR

THE ASIAN AGE office is located at:

New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.

Published and Printed on behalf of and for

Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.

London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.

RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



Stop meddle & muddle: Rework regional policy



Mohan Guruswamy

Much as we would like to exalt our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru as the founder of modern India's foreign policy, like all other major countries our policy too derives its basis from one man, France's Cardinal Richelieu, who enshrined national interest as the only guiding principle to conduct affairs with other nations. The French have an elegant phrase for it. *Raison d'état*. Richelieu rejected the notion that policy should be based on values and sentimental considerations. He believed, as we all still do, that the State has permanent interests, the singular pursuit of which requires much intellectual and moral flexibility. He believed that the only challenge facing a policymaker is to decide what the national interest was and what it required? It was this singular pursuit that had Catholic France intervening in the Thirty Years War (1618-48) on the Protestant side to block the increasing power of the Pope. At Richelieu's prompting, the philosopher Jean de Silhon defined the concept of reason of state as "a mean between what conscience permits and affairs require".

How we see our national interest depends on how we see ourselves. Therein lies the rub. The rump Republic of India sees itself as the successor to the British Raj, which left these shores in 1947. For the two centuries that Britain was the paramount power in India, India's national interests were synonymous with those of Britain. The paramount power's paramount interest, as far as India was concerned, was to keep the goose that laid the golden egg healthy and well. Lord

Curzon of Kedleston, who was Viceroy of India (1898-1905) and later Britain's foreign secretary (1919-24), is still regarded by many of our foreign policy elite as the man who outlined India's grand strategic vision and its focus on fixing borders. It is argued by these people that while the political context might have changed, geography has not. Physical geography may not have changed, but political geography has changed very much. Afghanistan is no longer the glacis on which the war for India will be fought. Neither are Tibet and Xinjiang buffers any longer against northern threats. The threats are at our doorsteps now.

In the immediate period after 1947, India's foreign policy was still conducted by the Western educated elite who had imbibed their lessons in Cambridge and Oxford and believed they were legatees of the white man's burden, including the defence of India. India's immediate neighbours, for their own reasons, still largely see India's conduct towards them as the continuation of the British legacy. It didn't help very much when the Oxbridge elite were followed by St. Stephen's elite who were also cast about the same last "laat sahib" mould.

Consequently, our diplomats have tended to be overbearing with the smaller non-hostile neighbours, often treating them like errant schoolboys. This is the constant lament heard in the neighbourhood, whether it is in Colombo or Kathmandu. Increasingly, such voices are being heard in Timphu as well. With Bangladesh, too, we have rapidly descended from being the liberator to the neighbourhood bully. The dominant Indian discourse

of "the demographic aggression" by Bangladeshi "ghusbaits" has created a certain unhelpful mentality in both countries. What after all must a nation think when its larger neighbour thinks of it as an unending source of human vermin?

To add to our woes, we still seem to be wearing those Curzonian blinkers that have bequeathed us the Great Game mentality with its focus on highways, railway lines and sea lanes and ports as military threats. South Block still doesn't seem to have realised that modern military means and technology have made the theories of Mahan and Mackinder largely irrelevant. It is this kind of infantilism that makes us see every Chinese investment in the cash-starved region as a threat to India's hegemony, when even our worst fears about Hambantota or Gwadar make them juicy and easy targets.

While excoriating foreign secretary Earl Russell in the House of Lords on February 4, 1864, Edward Stanley, the Earl of Derby, said: "The foreign policy of the Earl may be summed up in two short homely but expressive words — meddle and muddle." But we are now no longer prepared to behave like Lord Curzon either. The tension between that Curzonian tendency to meddle and the passive spirit of Jawaharlal Nehru to muddle still persists. We see this manifested in New Delhi's policy responses to the current situations in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh or the Maldives — with more muddle than meddle. The muddle in

Our diplomats have tended to be overbearing with the smaller non-hostile neighbours, often treating them like errant schoolboys. This is the constant lament heard in the neighbourhood, whether it is in Colombo or Kathmandu.

South Block is not due to the limited number of options. There is no *l'embarras des richesses*, but a poverty of clarity.

The most significant development of this century so far has been the rise of China as an economic powerhouse, with its military not lagging far behind. Former Chinese foreign minister Yang Jeichi, responding to criticism about China's assertiveness, just said: "China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and that's just a fact." Indeed it is, and at this point in time even India is much too small to be able to compete with it in its spree of chequebook diplomacy. Most of India's regional neighbours are poor countries and if their adversity forces them not to look at Chinese gift horses in the teeth, then we must understand it. In other circumstances, we too might have done so too? Debt doesn't kill. I recall the dictum enunciated by Walter Wriston, the legendary Citibank chairman who told my class at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy over 40 years ago: "Countries don't go under, they just roll over".

But our inherited Curzonian vision and now a little bit of the American-induced notion of containment are pushing India into a confrontationist posture with China. India will do well to remind itself that of the four countries that are a part of the "Quadrilateral", only India has a long and contentious land border with China. The other three players are hooked up to China's growth engine and are also the most responsible for its rise — America with its trade profligacy, and Japan with its massive investments and transfer of technology. They have created today's China. India must be wary about becoming their cat's paw.

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

STOP THIS WASTE

It is quite shocking to learn that, according to the Food Waste Index Report, every Indian household wastes an average of 50 kg of food per person per year. A third of the food either rots in godowns or is otherwise not consumed. And nearly 61 per cent of the consumer-level food goes waste at our homes. There is a large percentage of the population living below the poverty line. This number has only increased during the pandemic. Many children die due to malnutrition or become stunted. Awareness should be created right from our schooldays against the wasting of food.

N.R. Ramachandran
Chennai

HIMANTA FOR CM?

THE BJP has announced that Himanta Biswa Sarma will contest the elections in Assam from his constituency, Jalukbari. This has given a new lease of life to the debate over the chief ministership. Much to everyone's surprise, the BJP list, that was to have the names of candidates only for the first and second phases of the election, included Mr Sarma, whose constituency will go to the polls in the third phase. Is this a signal that, should the BJP win, Assam may have a new CM?

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

WHY A NEW BOARD?

THE ANNOUNCEMENT by Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal that the national capital will soon have its own educational board is not a good idea. The need of the hour is for a common syllabus and mode of evaluation throughout India. What is the need for one more board? In the past, many state boards were seen compromising with educational standards. Boards also become a tool for advertisement in the hands of various state governments.

D.B. Madan
New Delhi

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

Aakar Patel



India's image in free fall, but govt in denial on real causes

In 2020, the Narendra Modi government decided to improve India's standing on various indices that showed a deterioration in governance. These indices that were upsetting New Delhi spanned from those produced by non-profits working in specialised areas, multilateral bodies like the United Nations, institutions traditionally seen as being on the Right, like the World Economic Forum and The Economist, and also the government's own data.

The government was clearly concerned about its drop. We know this as it put out a press release on July 10 with the headline: "Niti Aayog organises a virtual workshop to monitor performance of 29 select Global Indices". At this workshop it was decided that the government would prepare a "single, informative dashboard for all the 29 Global Indices" which would allow for "monitoring of the parameters as per official data as well as the data source used by the publishing agencies".

This monitoring exercise was "not just to improve rankings but to improve systems and drive reforms to attract investments and to shape India's perception globally".

The government appeared to

believe that the issue was one related to image rather than reality. A report the next month said the government was "working to improve India's ranking on 29 global indices, and it wants the message to reach everyone loud and clear". The way it would do this was "a massive publicity campaign" that would "shape India's perception" through advertising and "micro-sites of ministries" and it would also "publicise the problems, parameters and data sources of global indices".

Would this address the problem at hand? It would not. The issue was not one of perception or bias, but one of fact. The world was not conspiring to show us in a bad light. The solution lay in acknowledging that India had been declining in several areas since 2014 and working on trying to improve them. Spending money on a media campaign would not change the numbers. India's discrediting the data of all these agencies and institutions was unlikely to reverse the views of those who had looked at and understood the facts.

Under Prime Minister Modi, India's ranking rose on three indicators (including the World Bank's Doing Business index), it remained the

same on two but and fell on forty-one. The decline was so broad and so pronounced that organisations captured similar results through different methodologies. India since 2014 has done poorly on six indices that tracked civil liberties and pluralism, five that tracked health and literacy, two tracking religious freedom and minorities, two tracking Internet denial, six tracking national power of various types, four tracking the rule of law and corruption, four tracking sustainability and environment, four tracking gender issues and their safety, four tracking economic freedoms of Indians and four tracking urban spaces.

The record leaves little room for debate or dispute. The scale and rapidity of decline in governance is manifest. It may appear strange that the Modi government should have thought reversing this performance required "a massive publicity campaign" which would "shape India's perception" through advertising and more websites, but it is how the government thought. A more credible response might have been to say that the decline was not the Modi government's doing entirely; to deny it altogether was to run away from the problem. The solution was not

"image correction" but improving performance through governance.

After the publicity strategy had fallen through for whatever reason, the government then decided at the end of 2020 that if it asked ministries to "ensure swift and updated data" it would help on the indices. This was based on the assumption that the government's work was excellent; it was merely data lag that caused it to plummet. This was also of course wrong, and the indices that have come out after that showed continued decline.

The latest report has come last week from Freedom House, which says that India is not free but "partly free". This is not opinion; it is based on a set of indicators. India says it is democratic. Freedom House agrees. It gives India 34/40 on political rights. Full marks for free and fair elections, Election Commission impartiality, freedom to start political parties, opportunities for the Opposition to increase their power. Not full marks on whether voting is hampered by violence and affected communal tension. All this we already know. The fact is that we do very well on political rights, and in fact the government gets 3/4 on transparency, which is

hardly accurate.

The real problem is political rights are only 40 per cent of the Freedom House score. The other 60 per cent is civil liberties. Here we perform poorly (33/60). On the issues of freedom of expression, religion, academic freedom, freedom of assembly, freedom for NGOs to work (the report names the attack on my former organisation Amnesty India specifically), rule of law, independence of judiciary, due process by the police and so on, our rating is poor. Can we disagree with this? We cannot. The answer is not to deny, as the government has done through a one-page response. This will not work because another report is coming soon: the reputable Varieties of Democracy report from the University of Gothenburg. Last year's report had said: "India has continued on a path of steep decline, to the extent it has almost lost its status as a democracy."

Our precipitous decline is being noticed and recorded abroad with alarm. It is strange that within India we are carrying on as if it is business as usual.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

SHORT TAKES

PHILIPPINE COPS
KILL 9 IN RAIDS
ON REBELS

Manila, March 8: Philippine police backed by military forces killed nine people over the weekend in a series of raids against suspected communist insurgents, with authorities saying the suspects opened fire first. Others, however, said those killed were unarmed activists. Police said Monday that all of those killed were associated with “communist terrorist groups” and had shot at officers while they were serving search warrants. The suspects died while being brought to hospitals, police said. Police served at least 24 search warrants, mostly for illegal firearms and explosives, in a number of locations.

THREE DEAD IN
KENTUCKY
OVERDOSES

Hazard (Kentucky), March 8: Police in a southeastern Kentucky community are working with a federal drug enforcement agency to identify the source of suspected overdoses that resulted in three deaths and sickened several other people, including two officers. The Hazard Police Department said on Facebook that officers responding to a report of suspected overdoses in an apartment found three bodies Thursday.

A fourth person suspected of overdosing was taken to a hospital while eight more overdoses have since been reported in the city, the statement said.

Police urged residents to use caution if they see any substance that is not easily recognizable.

FIVE BALOCH
ULTRAS KILLED
IN PAKISTAN

Karachi, March 8: Pakistan's security forces on Monday killed five militants of the outlawed Balochistan Liberation Army in the country's restive Balochistan province.

The militants of the separatist outfit were killed following an intelligence-based operation in Splinji area of Mastung district, a senior official of the Counter Terrorism Department in Quetta said.

They were planning a big terror attack in Quetta. Explosives, detonators and arms were recovered from their hideout. The five militants were involved in carrying out attacks on labourers and security forces. “When we raided their hideout, they opened fire on the police officials instead of surrendering,” he said.

UN SAYS FIRE IN
YEMENI MIGRANT
CENTRE KILLS 8

Cairo, March 8: The UN migration agency said a fire broke out Sunday in a detention centre for migrants in Yemen's capital, killing at least eight people and injuring more than 170 others.

The International Organisation for Migration said the cause of the fire at the detention centre in Sanaa was not immediately clear. Over 90 wounded migrants were in serious condition, IOM said. The detention centre is run by the Houthi rebels, who have controlled the capital since the outbreak of Yemen's conflict more than six years ago.

The Houthis said they were investigating to determine the cause of the fire. A UN official said the fire broke out in a hangar close to the main building of the detention centre.

SEDITION CHARGE
AGAINST MORE
THAI ACTIVISTS

Bangkok, March 8: Prosecutors in Thailand charged 18 pro-democracy activists with sedition on Monday, while lodging additional charges of insulting the monarchy against three of them.

The charges, which carry a maximum penalty of up to seven years in prison, stem from an anti-government rally in September.

The three charged with violating the lese majeste law, which outlaws criticism of senior members of the royal family, are Panusaya Sithithirawattanakul, Jatupat Boonpattararaksa and Panupong Jadnok. A court denied bail for all three, and they were being transferred to prison. Thai authorities have stepped up their legal offensive against those involved in a student-led protest movement.

Meghan alleges royal racism in tell-all

Former actress tells chat show host Oprah Winfrey that she had contemplated suicide

Los Angeles/London, March 8: Meghan Markle struggled as a new member of Britain's royal family after her marriage to Prince Harry to such a degree that she even contemplated suicide, the Duchess of Sussex revealed in an explosive tell-all interview with American chat show host Oprah Winfrey.

The two-hour special, aired on the CBS network in the US on Sunday and set to be aired on ITV in the UK on Monday night, saw Prince Harry joining his wife half-way through as the couple also spoke about concerns of racism within the royal ranks after being asked about their son Archie's expected skin colour when mixed-race Meghan was pregnant with their first child.

I just didn't want to be alive anymore, Meghan said, adding that when she went to the institution for help she was told it would not be forthcoming as it wouldn't be good for the institution. The 39-year-old former American actress, who is pregnant with her second child, revealed that the couple are expecting a baby girl and shared how the palace decided that their first-born, Archie, could not be a prince and would therefore have no security. She alluded to “concerns and conversations about how dark his skin might be when he's born”.

Who is having that conversation?” asked a stunned Winfrey. Meghan replied: “That was relayed to me from Harry, those were conversations the family had with him, and I think it

● **THE 39-YEAR-OLD** former American actress, who is pregnant with her second child, revealed that the couple are expecting a baby girl and shared how the palace decided that their first-born, Archie, could not be a prince and would therefore have no security.

was really hard to be able to see those as compartmentalised conversations. They were saying they didn't want him to be a prince or a princess and that he wasn't going to receive security.”

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex's children do not automatically become princes or princesses because of a rule that has been in place since 1917, unless the Queen steps in.

Both Meghan and Harry refused to divulge who exactly made remarks about their son's skin tone, with Meghan admitting that if she revealed who was involved in such talks it would be very damaging to them.

That conversation I'm never going to share,” asserted Harry. The 36-year-old Duke of Sussex, who is still sixth in line to the British throne, also spoke of his hurt at his father Prince Charles not taking his calls after the couple decided to step back as frontline royals last year.

[I had] three conversations with my grandmother [Queen Elizabeth II] and two conversations with my



Britain's Prince Harry (L) and his wife Meghan (C), Duchess of Sussex, in a conversation with US television host Oprah Winfrey.

— AFP

father [Charles], before he stopped taking my calls, he said. It was, like, I needed to do this for my family. This is not a surprise to anybody. It's really sad that it's got to this point. But I've got to do something for my own mental health, my wife's and for Archie's as well, because I could see where this was headed, he said, in reference to the couple's decision to relocate. They have since moved

to California after formally stepping down from royal duties in March 2020, and it was announced last month that they would not be returning as working members of the royal family. Harry said the couple were only able to afford their new life in California because of his mother Diana Princess of Wales. My family literally cut me off financially. I've got what my mum left me. Without

that, we never would have been able to do this I think she saw it coming, he said.

Asked by Winfrey how they would respond to accusations that they were money-grabbing because of deals they have signed with Netflix and Spotify since moving to California, Harry replied: First of all this was never the intention. We're certainly not complaining. Life is great. We've got a beautiful hou-

se, beautiful family. The dogs are really happy.

From my perspective all I needed was enough money to be able to pay for security, to keep my family safe, he said. During the interview, the royal family were also accused of failing to protect the Duke and Duchess, with Meghan saying the situation “started to really worsen” after the couple married in 2018.

— PTI

Myanmar forces
kill 2 protesters

Mandalay (Myanmar), March 8: Security forces shot dead two people in northern Myanmar on Monday, local media reported, as the military government continued its attempt to stamp out opposition to its February 1 coup. The Irrawaddy newspaper said the victims were shot in the head during anti-coup protests in Myitkyina in Kachin State. Graphic video on social media showed protesters in the street backing away from tear gas, responding with rocks, then fleeing after a fusillade of what seemed to be automatic gunfire.

Demonstrators hurriedly carried away a number of casualties, including one apparent fatality, a person who had clearly sustained a severe head wound. A second body was seen a little later, on a stretcher, his head covered with a cloth.

Security forces also clamped down on anti-coup protesters elsewhere Monday, firing tear gas to break up a crowd of around 1,000 people who were demonstrating in the capital, Naypyitaw. The protesters deployed fire extinguishers to create a smoke screen as they fled from authorities. Meanwhile, thousands of protesters marching in Mandalay, the country's second-largest city, dispersed on their own amid fears that soldiers and police were planning to use force to break up their demonstration.

Large-scale protests have occurred daily across many cities and towns in Myanmar since the

AUSTRALIA ENDS
DEFENCE TIES
WITH MYANMAR

Canberra, March 8: Australia has suspended its defence cooperation with Myanmar and is redirecting humanitarian aid because of the military takeover of the government and ongoing detention of an Australian citizen. Foreign Minister Marise Payne said on Monday that Australian diplomats only had access to economic policy adviser Sean Turnell twice since he was detained in early February.

She described the access as “very limited consular support.” “We continue to absolutely call for the release of Professor Sean Turnell,” Payne told *Australian Broadcasting Corp.* Australia announced late Sunday it had suspended a defence training programme with Myanmar worth about 1.5 million Australian dollars (\$1.2 million) over five years. The programme had been restricted to non-combat areas. — AP

country's military seized power, and security forces have responded with ever greater use of lethal force and mass arrests.

The coup and its violent aftermath have led foreign governments and international organizations to impose measures against Myanmar's military leaders.

— AP

20 dead in E. Guinea blasts

Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), March 8: A series of explosions at a military barracks in Equatorial Guinea killed at least 20 people and wounded more than 600 others on Sunday, authorities said. President Teodoro Obiang Nguema said the explosion at 4 pm local time was due to the “negligent handling of dynamite” in the military barracks located in the neighbourhood of Mondong Nkuantoma in Bata.

“The impact of the explosion caused damage in almost all the houses and buildings in Bata,” the president said in a statement, which was in Spanish. The defence ministry released a statement late Sunday saying that a fire at a weapons depot in the barracks caused the explosion of high-calibre ammunition. It said the provisional toll was 20 dead and 600 injured, adding that the cause of the explosion will be fully investigated. The country's president said the fire may have been due residents burning the fields surrounding the barracks.

State television showed a huge plume of smoke rising above the explosion site as crowds fled, with many people crying out “we don't know what happened, but it is all destroyed.” Images on local media seen by *The Associated Press* show people screaming and crying running through the streets amid debris and smoke. Roofs of houses were ripped off and wounded people were being carried into a hospital. Equatorial Guinea, an African country of 1.3 million people located south of Cameroon, was a colony of Spain until it gained its independence in 1968. Bata has roughly 175,000

Sweden sentences woman
for taking child to IS area

Stockholm, March 8: A southern Swedish court on Monday sentenced a woman to three years in prison for taking her 2-year-old son to Syria in 2014, to an area that was then controlled by the Islamic State (IS) group.

The woman, who lived in the southern town of Landskrona, has allegedly told the child's father that she and the boy were only going on a holiday to Turkey.

However, once in Turkey, the two crossed into Syria and IS-run territory. The Lund District Court said the woman, who was not named, took the child to an area “where there was war and an environment characterised by the violent ideology of the Islamic State group.”

The court, which did not identify the woman's nationality, rejected her claims that she had only

● **A SOUTHERN** Swedish court on Monday sentenced a woman to three years in prison for taking her 2-year-old son to Syria in 2014, to an area that was then controlled by the Islamic State (IS) group.

● **THE COURT**, which did not identify the woman's nationality, rejected her claims that she had only intended to go to Syria for a few days to see how it was and then return.

● **SHE MANAGED** to escape to Turkey where she was arrested with her son and two other children she had given birth to in the meantime.

intended to go to Syria for a few days to see how it was there and then return home.

inhabitants. Earlier, the Health Ministry had tweeted that 17 were killed and the president's statement mentioned 15 dead.

The Health Ministry made a call for blood donors and volunteer health workers to go to the Regional Hospital de Bata, one of three hospitals treating the wounded. The ministry said its health workers were treating the injured at the site of the tragedy and in medical facilities, but feared people were still missing under the rubble.

The blasts were a shock for the oil rich Central African nation. Foreign Minister Simeon Oyono Esono Angue met with foreign ambassadors and asked for aid. “It is important for us to ask our brother countries for their assistance in this lamentable situation since we have a health emergency (due to Covid-19) and the tragedy in Bata,” he said.

A doctor calling into TVGE, who went by his first name, Florentino, said the situation was a “moment of crisis” and

that the hospitals were overcrowded. He said a sports center set up for Covid-19 patients would be used to receive minor cases. Radio station, Radio Macuto, said on Twitter that people were being evacuated within four kilometers of the city because the fumes might be harmful.

Following the blast, the Spanish Embassy in Equatorial Guinea recommended on Twitter that “Spanish nationals stay in their homes.”

— AP

U.S., S. KOREA
AGREE ON NEW
COST-SHARING
TROOP DEAL

Seoul, March 8: South Korea and the United States have reached agreement on Seoul's contribution to the costs of the US troop presence on the peninsula, Seoul said Monday, as the two allies kicked off annual joint military exercises.

The issue had bedevilled the two allies' security alliance under former president Donald Trump, who had a transactional approach to foreign policy and repeatedly accused the South of free-riding.

Washington stations 28,500 troops in the country to defend it from the nuclear-armed North, which invaded in 1950. They are a key part of US forces' deployment in Asia, but negotiations over funding had been gridlocked by the former US administration's demands that the South pay billions of dollars more towards their costs.

The Trump administration initially insisted on \$5 billion a year — a more than fivefold increase. Under the previous deal, which expired at the end of 2019, Seoul paid Washington about \$920 million annually.

Seoul's foreign ministry said the two sides had reached an agreement “in principle” without specifying the agreed amount. “The government will resolve a gap that has lasted for more than a year through a swift signing of an agreement,” it said in a statement. The new deal must still be approved by the South Korean legislature. US President Joe Biden has vowed to revive frayed US alliances under his predecessor to counter the challenges posed by Russia, China, Iran and North Korea.

The two sides “will now pursue the final steps needed to conclude the Special Measures Agreement for signature and entry into force that will strengthen our Alliance and our shared defence,” it added. — AP

CHINA PLAN TO
INSTAL PATRIOTS
NOT PURGE OF
OPPN: LAM

Hong Kong, March 8: Hong Kong's leader on Monday praised China's plan to ensure only “patriots” remain in politics, denying the move was a purge of the opposition. Chief Executive Carrie Lam ruled out any need to consult the public on the changes, as they were decreed by Beijing. Legislation to vet all election candidates in Hong Kong is currently being discussed by China's rubber-stamp parliament and is expected to be adopted on Thursday. China has said only those deemed “patriotic” will be allowed to stand.

Critics say the radical overhaul of the city's already limited democratic system will demolish what remains of the pro-democracy opposition and ensure only loyalists remain, an argument that Lam rejected on Monday. “The improvements to the electoral system are not designed to favour someone, it is designed to ensure that whoever is administering Hong Kong is patriotic,” Lam, a pro-Beijing appointee, told reporters after returning from the gathering in Beijing.

“The decision is timely, necessary, lawful and constitutional, and the central authorities' leadership and decision-making power are out of question.” Authoritarian China promised Hong Kong would keep a degree of autonomy and certain freedoms when it reverted from British colonial rule in 1997.

The city has a partially elected legislature and China also promised to one day grant residents universal suffrage. Critics had for years complained freedoms were being steadily eroded. Beijing then ramped up the dismantling of the financial hub's democratic pillars.

— AP

MYTHICAL ANGELS

Seven hail from Afghanistan who are receiving posthumous honours

15 nations' women feted by Jill Biden for courage

Washington, March 8: First lady Jill Biden says nearly two dozen women the State Department is honouring for their courage made an intentional decision to persist and demand justice despite their fear. The 21 women being recognised Monday with the department's International Women of Courage Award include seven from Afghanistan who are receiving posthumous honours. The first lady says that the women's stories make it easy to think of them as mythical heroes or angels among us but that they're also humans

who want to enjoy life's simple pleasures.

Some of these women have spent their lives fighting for their cause. Others are just starting out on a journey they didn't ask for, Biden says in remarks prepared for the ceremony, which were obtained by *The Associated Press*.

Some were called to service, and some couldn't escape it, Biden says. They are fighting for their own lives and for their children. They want to right the wrongs of our past, to build a brighter future for everyone. They aren't

● **SOME WERE** called to service, and some couldn't escape it, Jill Biden says. They are fighting for their own lives and for their children. They want to right the wrongs of our past, to build a brighter future for everyone. They aren't immune to fear.

immune to fear. No one is.

Biden says that in the course of ordinary lives, each of the women made an extraordinary choice.

You see, courage isn't really found, Biden says. “It doesn't conjure away

our doubts. It's an intentional decision made.

The ceremony is being held virtually and not at the State Department because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

The 14 living awardees are from Belarus, Cameroon, China, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, Iran, Myanmar, Nepal, Somalia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Venezuela.

“These women made an extraordinary choice, to persist, to demand justice, to believe that, despite the obstacles and fear they faced, there is a future

worth fighting for,” Biden says.

Touching on the past year, the first lady says the pandemic shows how the things that connect us, our love for family and friends, our hope that we will be together soon transcend language and distance. She says that diplomacy, at its best, is a recognition of this connection and that the United States, under President Joe Biden's leadership, will support women around the world.

We will make the choice to lead, to be bold and to lift up the women and girls

everywhere who light our way, Biden says in her prepared remarks. For 15 years, we have honoured women around the world who have made the extraordinary choice to fight for something bigger than themselves.

Today, we recommit to being worthy of that courage, to understanding that our lives are tied together in immeasurable and powerful ways and to choosing, every day, to honor that connection, she says. We will stand with you as we build a brighter future for us all.

— AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	50,441.07 0.07
Nifty 50	14,956.20 0.12
S&P 500*	3,870.96 0.76
Dollar (₹)	73.25 -0.30
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.94 -0.02
Euro (₹)	86.96 0.17
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,114▼122 0.27
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.27 -1.57
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.223 0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.592 0.038

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Govt nets over ₹53,300 cr from Vivad Se Vishwas

The Centre has realised Rs 53,346 crore through direct tax dispute resolution scheme Vivad Se Vishwas till February 22. To a query in the Lok Sabha on whether the government has been able to achieve the objective of settling income tax cases after launching the Vivad se Vishwas scheme, minister of state for finance Anurag Singh Thakur said, "Yes". He said over 1.28 lakh declarations have been filed under the scheme.

Tata Motors gets shareholders nod for PV hiving off



Tata Motors said its shareholders have approved hiving off its passenger vehicles business into a separate entity. On March 5, the shareholders voted to consider and approve the transfer of the passenger vehicles business unit to TML Business Analytics Services Ltd as a going concern on a slump sale basis for a lump sum consideration. The firm had said that its PV business has been valued at Rs 9,417 crore.

BEML shares surge over 20% over bid response

Shares of BEML Ltd soared as high as over 20 per cent to lock into the upper circuit limit and touch 52-week-high values on exchanges amid reports that multiple firms are looking to buy the government's 26 per cent stake in the firm. On the BSE, the scrip surged 20 per cent to its 52-week high value of Rs 1,406.25, also its upper circuit limit. On the NSE, the shares jumped 20 per cent to Rs 1,416.

TVS Motor rides in Apache RTR 200 4V at ₹1.28 L

TVS Motor introduced Apache RTR 200 4V (single-channel ABS) motorcycle with innovative "segment-first features" priced at Rs 1.28 lakh at Delhi showroom. Introduced at a premium of Rs 1,000 over the outgoing model, the 2021 variant boasts of a host of segment-first features like three ride modes, adjustable front suspension, adjustable brake and clutch levers, and race-tuned slipper clutch.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: T.Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

Groundwater extraction causing them to sink four times faster: Study

JONATHAN TIRONE
MARCH 8

The economic impacts of rising sea levels will be felt four times faster by people living in some of the world's biggest coastal cities, which are sinking beneath their own weight into manmade cavities created below the surface. The scientific assessment published on Monday in Nature Climate Change is the second in a month to show that coastal economies are more vulnerable than previously thought to the danger of rising sea levels. The extraction of groundwater and other resources from beneath cities, including Jakarta, New Orleans and Shanghai, is causing them to slowly sink, a phenomena called subsidence, resulting in greater risks from flooding and storm surges.



"Due to its coincidence with major population centres, subsidence has global social and economic implications," reads the peer-reviewed research written by scientists from China, France, Germany and the UK. "These results indicate that the impacts and adaptation needs are much higher than reported global sea-level rise measurements suggest."

While sea-levels have

risen at about 2.5 millimetres a year globally over the last two decades, coastal residents representing some 58 per cent of the world's population have experienced average relative sea-level increases of 7.8 to 9.9 millimetres annually, according to the research, which used satellite data to gauge changes in land elevation.

The risks of groundwater extraction have long been

known but the new research suggests policy makers can regulate development and groundwater extraction to slow down and mitigate the impact of higher oceans.

"Human-induced subsidence in and surrounding coastal cities can be rapidly reduced with appropriate policy for groundwater utilisation and drainage," the researchers wrote. "Such policy would offer substantial and rapid benefits to reduce growth of coastal flood exposure due to relative sea-level rise."

For cities like Jakarta, the window to mitigate sinking ground levels and rising seas is already closing. Indonesia is relocating its capital to higher ground on the island of Borneo, a move that will cost billions of dollars by the time it begins later this decade.

—Bloomberg

IMF suggests carbon tax for India

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 8

Levying a carbon-tax will help India accelerate the shift away from thermal power generation in order to become a global leader in achieving emission reduction targets while boosting revenues to reduce the country's fiscal deficit, finds the International Monetary Fund.

While India is expected to achieve both its 40 per cent non-fossil fuel target and

its emissions intensity target by 2030, the country's current emissions target is not as strong compared to some other countries. India's mitigation policy is of central interest to the global community as significant economic and population growth is likely to account for a larger share of global emission in the next 10 to 20 years. India has an opportunity to become a world leader by taking bolder steps toward mitigation, says the IMF.

To achieve larger emission reductions, India may need to focus on phasing out its reliance on coal-fired power plants. For this, levying a direct tax on fossil-fuel production, in proportion to carbon content and carbon emissions would accelerate the shift away from thermal power generation while also providing a fiscal dividend. A \$50 per tonne carbon tax would reduce carbon dioxide emissions by about 35 per cent below a "no-policy-change" baseline scenario by 2030.

Unlike subsidisation for renewable energy, which carries a fiscal cost, a substantial carbon tax could provide a large fiscal boon to India. A \$50 per tonne carbon tax would generate 1.5 to 2 per cent of GDP in additional fiscal revenues by 2030. If this boost to revenues were used to cut the country's deficit, it would play a large role in counteracting the deterioration in India's fiscal position.

~

—Bloomberg

DEBT INDEX FUND WITH SIX-YEAR MATURITY LAUNCHED

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 8

Edelweiss Asset Management Company announced the launch of Edelweiss Nifty PSU Bond Plus SDL Index Fund-2026, a unique index fund investing in state development loans (SDLs) and PSU bonds. Passively managed, this index fund, with a defined maturity date, will invest in AAA-rated PSU bonds and SDLs.

"This is a first ever, opened, target maturity index fund. Proportion of investments of AAA PSU bonds and SDLs will be equally divided with a weightage of 50 per cent each," the fund said.

Exposure to any single company's bonds or loans would be capped at 15 per cent of the corpus. Subsequently, there will be a quarterly rebalancing and review of the index constituents, Edelweiss AMC said.

The Edelweiss Nifty PSU Bond Plus SDL Index Fund – 2026 NFO will be open for subscription between March 10 and March 16.

The fund with a minimum investment amount of Rs 5,000 will have a defined maturity date of April 30, 2026.

The fund will aim to hold the bonds till maturity.

India poised to weather global bond rout with record reserves

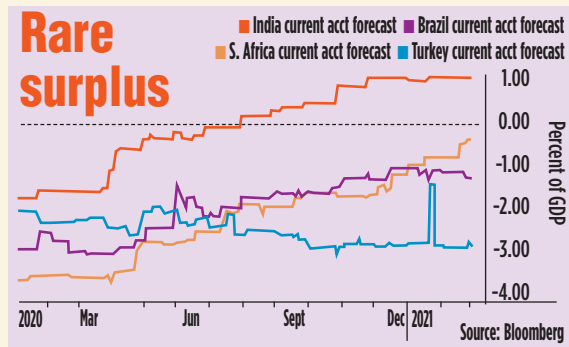
SUBHADIP SIRCAR &
KARTIK GOYAL
MARCH 8

India's record foreign-exchange reserves and a rare current-account surplus look set to cushion the nation's currency and bonds from a global surge in interest rates.

While the central bank does have its hands full managing the government's large debt issuance, strategists see the country in a much stronger financial position now than it was during previous bouts of turmoil in world markets. They cite the rupee, which has eked out a gain this year, defying the slump seen in most emerging-market currencies, and relative stability of India's bonds.

With reserves closing in on \$600 billion and a current-account surplus forecast to exceed 1 per cent of gross domestic product, talk of India as one of five fragile emerging markets has mostly faded away. When the description was coined during the taper tantrum in 2013, inflation in India was running at around 10 per cent.

Data due on March 12 is projected to show con-



sumer prices rising at less than half that level, and well below the 6.6 per cent average of last year. Meanwhile, benchmark 10-year bond yields have largely been capped since last year by the central bank and the nation's stocks continue to see foreign inflows.

"India's markets are likely to be relatively immune to higher US yields in the weeks ahead," said Mitul Kotecha, chief EM Asia and Europe strategist at TD Securities Ltd in Singapore. "India has been a key beneficiary of equity inflows into Asia and we do not see outflows persisting."

According to analysts, Indian stocks have attracted about \$6 billion of foreign inflows this year, the

highest in emerging Asia after China, and well above those of the country's erstwhile "Fragile Five" peers. The prospect of strong economic growth has been underpinned by an early start to India's coronavirus inoculation campaign, aided by domestically produced vaccines.

India's central bank has added \$127 billion to its foreign-exchange kitty since the beginning of January last year, the biggest increase among major Asian economies. At the current rate of accumulation, India is on course to pass Russia and take fourth place in global rankings for reserves, behind China, Japan and Switzerland.

—Bloomberg

ANUPAM RASAYAN PRICES IPO IN ₹553-555 BAND

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 8

Surat-based specialty chemical maker Anupam Rasayan' Rs 760-crore initial public offering opens on March 12.

The price band for the public issue has been fixed at Rs 553 to Rs 555 per equity share of Rs 10 face value.

"The issue aggregating up to Rs 760 crore is a fresh issuance of equity shares...The company proposes to utilise the net proceeds towards repayment of debt and for general corporate purposes," the company said during a virtual press conference.

The company has two distinct verticals of life science related specialty chemicals comprising products related to agrochemicals, personal care and pharmaceuticals; and other specialty chemicals, comprising specialty pigment and dyes, and polymer additives.

Anupam Rasayan has developed long-term relationships with various multinational corporations, which has helped the company expand its product offerings and geographic reach across Europe, Japan and United States, the company said.

As of December 31, 2020, the company operates through six multipurpose manufacturing facilities based in Gujarat, with four facilities located at Sachin, Surat.

Larger firms recover better than smaller ones

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 8

Larger companies have demonstrated better recovery in terms of sales and profitability compared to their smaller counterparts, finds an analysis by CMIE.

"India's smart economic recovery is described as one in which large companies did well for themselves even as the smaller ones languished. MSMEs have suffered as they are unable to survive the sudden and prolonged lockdown and the consequent shrinking of overall business. Large companies are not only better placed to ride out the storm but also gain by cannibalising markets of the withering smaller companies," says Mahesh Vyas, CEO of CMIE.

The private think-tank studied the quarterly financial statements of 3,220 listed non-finance companies to understand growth in net sales, wages and profitability.

Listed companies have been recording a fall in net sales in year-on-year comparisons well before the lockdown pounded them. Then, in the first quarter of the lockdown net sales were down by a massive 39 per cent, followed by 10 per cent in the September quarter and a little less than one per cent in the December quarter.

The lockdown affected companies of all sizes severely. But, the recovery was selective. Larger



companies have recovered in terms of sales growth while smaller companies still see shrinking sales.

The largest companies by size saw their sales shrink by 1.5 per cent in the December quarter. If petroleum refining and aviation industries are removed, the largest companies showed positive growth. Sixty-two per cent of such companies reported growth in net sales. Large companies too registered a growth of 6.6 per cent.

All the other companies in the mid- and small segment recorded a fall in sales and the extent of the fall in sales was inversely proportional to the company size.

Similarly, the wage bill of all the companies increased by 3.5 per cent in the December quarter. The largest companies saw a higher 4.7 per cent increase in the wage bill while large companies saw a 1.2 per cent increase. All other companies saw a fall in their wage bill. The fall in the wage bill increases as the size of the companies becomes smaller.

Blackstone calls off Mphasis stake sale

BAIJU KALESH
MARCH 8

Blackstone Group Inc. has shelved a planned sale of its majority stake in Indian IT outsourcing services provider Mphasis Ltd over valuations, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The private equity firm rejected the two bidders in the final round as their offers didn't meet its expectations, said the person, who asked not to be identified as the information is private.

Blackstone has informed the interested parties that it has halted the sale, the

person added.

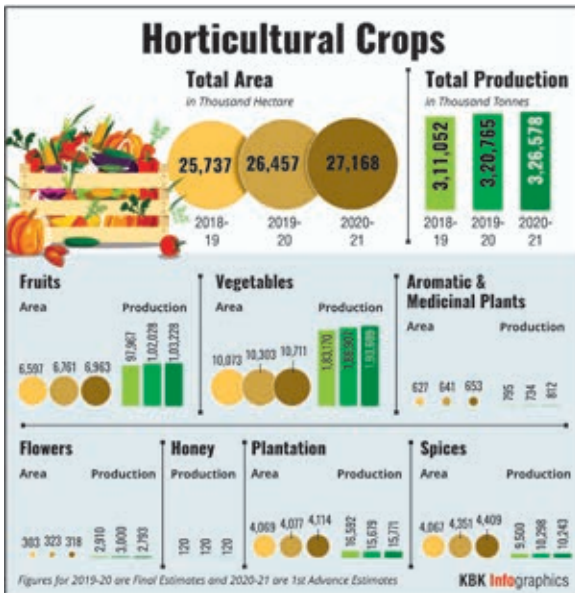
Blackstone bought a 60.5 per cent stake in Mumbai-listed Mphasis from Hewlett Packard Enterprise Co in 2016 at Rs 430 (\$5.87) per share. The private equity firm also made an open offer to acquire additional shares from other shareholders. As of end of 2020, Blackstone owned about 56 per cent in the tech firm.

The asset manager started identifying buyers for its majority stake in Mphasis a few months ago. It had held talks with prospective investors, including Carlyle Group

Inc. and Singapore state investment fund GIC Pte. Shares in Mphasis reached an all-time high at Rs 1,788 each on February 23. While the stock has receded from the peak, it's still trading at around Rs 1,600, almost four times above Blackstone's offer price five years ago.

A media report on Monday said that negotiations between Blackstone and Carlyle have hit an impasse over valuations.

Representatives for Blackstone and Carlyle declined to comment, while a representative for GIC couldn't immediately comment. —Bloomberg



BOSCH TO OPEN AUTOMOTIVE CHIP FACTORY IN GERMANY MID-YR

Frankfurt, March 8: German technology group Bosch said on Monday it would open an automotive chip factory in Dresden in June to build on its leadership in sensor chips that will boost the electric car industry.

The one billion euro (\$1.2 billion) plant will produce sensor chips to be installed in electric and hybrid electric vehicles.

Bosch began testing the fully automated production of prototype chips, a step towards starting full-scale production at the end of the year, it said.

The plant will not produce all of the sort of semiconductor chips now in short supply, causing disruptions to the global car industry, but so-called ASICs (application-specific integrated circuit) microchips, remedying parts of the bottlenecks and only from the end of 2021 onwards.

The factory, partly financed by the Free State of Saxony and federal government in Berlin, will employ 700 people. Plans for the plant were announced in 2017.

The local and federal governments want to make Dresden a centre for semiconductor research and manufacturing.

—Reuters

DEPRIVED | GENDER

Legal limits on economic opportunities persist

Women still fired for pregnancy in 28 nations

KATHLEEN HAYS &
MICHAEL HEATH
MARCH 8

There are still almost 30 countries where women can be fired from their jobs simply for getting pregnant, World Bank chief economist Carmen Reinhart said in a discussion on how the pandemic is making it even harder for women to escape poverty.

Speaking in a television conversation with Ceyla Pazarbasiglu, director of strategy and policy at the International Monetary

Fund, Reinhart said the economic fallout from Covid-19 had been "very regressive," hitting the most vulnerable hardest, included women and girls.

"We are seeing big setbacks on schooling, girls are taken out that will not return," said Reinhart, speaking on International Women's Day. She cited a report late last year that found extreme poverty was expected to rise for the first time in more than two decades with a disproportionately high share of women among the new poor.



Carmen Reinhart

The pandemic has contributed to an increase in violence against women and is reinforcing gender inequality in many countries, with women on average having roughly three-quarters of the legal rights of men, according

to the World Bank.

While laws have improved in some countries, women in many nations still face legal limits on economic opportunities, including restrictions on travel without a male guardian, the lender said.

Pazarbasiglu of the IMF said it's very important to have "a women's lens in policies."

"That's what we are pushing in our surveillance, in our lending, in our analytical work and in our capacity development," she said.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Bajrang takes gold, No.1 rank

Rome: Olympic-bound Indian wrestler Bajrang Punia pulled off a two-pointer in the last 30 seconds of the gold medal bout to defend his title at the Matteo Pellicone Ranking Series event, a result that propelled him back to world number one rank.

Up against Mongolia's Tulga Tumor Ochir, Bajrang was trailing 0-2 till the final moments of the 65kg final but managed to level the scores, 30 seconds from the final whistle.

Since the last scoring point came from the Indian, he was declared the winner on criteria on Sunday night.

Bajrang's leg defence seemed to be a particularly improved aspect of his game in the one-year break, forced by the coronavirus pandemic.

Bajrang was placed second in the rankings before the event and is now on top of the table in the 65kg category with 14 points. — PTI

Mumbai pip Goa for historic final

Goa: Two hundred and ten minutes of football over two legs, yet there was no winners to head into the final between Mumbai City FC and FC Goa!

Such was the battle, that it came down to ISL's first-ever sudden death in a penalty-shootout to decide the first finalists of Season 7. And it turned out to be Mumbai City who had the last laugh as they edged FC Goa on penalties 6-5.

One of the highlights of the thriller was when both coaches decided to substitute their goalkeepers with the contest heading into the penalty shootout. Goa brought on Naveen Kumar while Mumbai raised some eyebrows when they decided to field Phurba Lachenpa in place of skipper and one of the best goalkeepers of the season Amrinder Singh. But, as it turned out to be, the Sikkimese gloveman survived the battle of nerves, helping Mumbai City book a place in the final for the first time.

Sharath, Sathiyam and Batra in Rd 2

Doha: Ace Indian paddlers Achanta Sharath Kamal, Sathiyam Gnanasekaran and Manika Batra started their campaign at the WTT Star Contender Doha on a winning note by progressing into the second round of their respective singles categories, here on Monday. Sharath struggled in the initial stages as he lost the first game against Brian Afanador before the world no. 32 recovered well to seal the match 8-11, 11-8, 11-7, 11-1 against the Puerto Rican in the first round. World no. 37 Sathiyam was also trailing 0-2 in his opening match before making a remarkable comeback to pull off a sensational 9-11, 7-11, 11-7, 11-4, 11-4 victory against France's Emmanuel Lebeson. Commonwealth Games gold medalist Batra notched up a comfortable 11-5, 11-9, 11-9 win against Chinese Taipei's Hsein-Tzu Cheng in the first round.

Team LeBron dominate All-Star

Atlanta: Damian Lillard nailed a game-ending three pointer from just inside half court as LeBron James improved to 4-0 as an NBA All-Star Game captain with a 170-150 win over Team Durant on Sunday night. Two-time NBA MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo captured the Kobe Bryant MVP Award going a perfect 16-of-16 from the field for a game high 35 points in Atlanta.

James improved to 4-0 in All-Star games he has served as a team captain. He finished with four points in just 13 minutes of playing time. — AFP

Live on TV

CRICKET

Vijay Hazare Trophy: Quarterfinal from 9 am on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL

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

Champions League: Round of 16, Second Leg — Juventus vs Porto from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2; Dortmund vs Sevilla from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawahar Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002. and Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C-9, Sector-III, Noida-201301.

Editor — T. Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 572990/94. Price in Nepal — Rs. 20.00 per copy.

CATCH 20-20!

Team management in dilemma to pick players for T20 series

Ahmedabad, March 8: The Indian team management faces a problem of plenty going into the five T20 Internationals against England, an assignment which marks the beginning of the side's build-up to this year's T20 World Cup at home.

There are 19 players available for selection and with two in contention for each slot, the XI for the five games, starting here on Friday, will be an indication to how head coach Ravi Shastri, captain Virat Kohli and bowling coach Bharat Arun are looking at the next six to seven months for the shortest format.

Will they look for a settled combination to first clinch the series and then experiment or will they field absolute rookies in the squad looking at the bigger picture?

For a team that's so closely followed, the result does matter and that's why one can expect a settled first eleven for the first three games since all matches are at the same venue on similar kind of tracks.

The roaring comeback of Rishabh Pant will lead to a lot of interesting developments at the top of the order.

Pant's inclusion means that K.L. Rahul, who till a few months back was the first choice keeper-opener, is unlikely to don the big gloves.

Shikhar Dhawan and Rohit Sharma were a settled white ball opening pair till recently but Rahul's emergence as a potent white ball specialist has spiced up the competition. Dhawan recently had a score of 150 odd in the Vijay Hazare Trophy for Delhi and when it comes to Rohit, there's nothing to be discussed.

So where does the team management fit in Rahul, who has been a successful



Shikhar Dhawan



K.L. Rahul



Deepak Chahar



Shreyas Iyer



Bhuvneshwar Kumar

IPL opener? Will he be slotted in the middle-order as Dhawan's game is not suited to batting lower down?

These are two pertinent questions and in the answer, will be a follow-up question.

With skipper Kohli himself coming in at No 3 and two game-changers like Pant and all-rounder Hardik Pandya expected to play the big shots at Nos 5 and 6, where does it ideally leave Rahul?

The only place he can be slotted is No 4 but Shreyas

Iyer and Suryakumar Yadav are also jostling for a place.

If one closely follows the pattern of picking the playing XI, Surya, a sentimental favourite, will have to wait for his turn as Shreyas has done nothing wrong.

But when it comes to a three-way battle between Rahul, Shreyas and Surya, the Karnataka man beats the two Mumbai boys hollow with his repertoire of strokes and ability to shift gears.

Similarly, in the pace

department, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, once upon a time India's best white ball exponent, is coming back after a long lay-off and will be engaged in a two-way fight with Deepak Chahar and Shardul Thakur.

For Bhuvneshwar, his experience and being a better bowler at the death compared to Chahar holds him in good stead but he hasn't played a lot of cricket save a few Mushtaq Ali games.

Yuzvendra Chahal, Washington Sundar and

Axar Patel are the three spinners expected to feature in the playing XI on the sluggish Motera tracks.

In all, there are too many good players and very little space to fit all of them with three sure-shot picks — Mohammed Shami, Ravindra Jadeja and Jasprit Bumrah already resting or recuperating from injury.

Once they comeback, it will be a bigger selection headache for the management but one that they won't mind. — PTI

Blown away in opener, India eye turnaround

Lucknow, March 8: A rusty Indian women's cricket team will be seeking some rhythm in the second ODI against South Africa here on Tuesday after being outplayed by the visitors in the series-opener.

Though captain Mithali Raj and her deputy Harmanpreet Kaur had insisted that rustiness won't be an issue in their first series in 12 months, India clearly looked a side which had not played for a long time in the opener of the five-match series on Sunday.

A better prepared South Africa, on the other hand, were clinical and will be hard to beat in the coming games.

After the game, Kaur realised the players needed some time to gel as a unit. Barring Kaur, Raj and Deepti Sharma to a certain extent, none

ICC WOMEN EVENTS TO HAVE MORE TEAMS FROM 2026

Dubai, March 8: The ICC tournaments for women cricketers will have more teams from 2026 onwards with the governing body on Monday announcing its expansion plan for the game to mark the international women's day.

The ICC said the T20 World Cup will have 12 teams instead of 10

from the 2026 edition. The ODI World Cup will also be expanded — from eight teams to 10 — from the 2029 edition. The T20 T20 edition will continue to be a 10-team affair and the next two ODI World Cups will have eight teams which is the norm at the moment. — PTI

of the batters could apply themselves on a decent batting surface.

The spinners, who are traditionally considered India's strength, hardly troubled the South African duo of Lizelle Lee and 21-year-old Laura Wolvaardt, who put up the highest ever

opening wicket stand against India to run away with the contest.

There were some positives, however, such as Raj scoring a gritty half-century and pacer Jhulan Goswami showing she is still among the best in the business. — PTI

Samarth puts Karnataka in semis

New Delhi, March 8: Young opener Devdutt Padikkal sent a strong message to the national selectors before England ODIs as he slammed his fourth consecutive List A ton as Karnataka beat Kerala by 80 runs in a quarter-final game of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Monday.

Karnataka rode on skipper Ravikumar Samarth's knock of 192 off 158 balls and a stroke-filled 101 by 20-year-old left-handed Padikkal (off 119 balls) to post an imposing 338/3 and then bundled out the opposition for 258.

Kerala's decision to put Karnataka into bat at the Air Force ground backfired badly, as Samarth and Padikkal toyed with their attack with a massive 249-run partnership for the first wicket.

Samarth, a 28-year-old right-hander, hammered 22 boundaries and three



Priyank Panchal

sixes in his 158-ball knock. He completed his century in 112 balls and was aggressive right from the start, while Padikkal hammered 10 boundaries and two maximums.

PANCHAL'S TON TAKES GUJARAT TO SEMIS

Skipper Priyank Panchal's stroke-filled 134 and an equally impressive show from the bowlers set

up Gujarat's massive 117-run win over Andhra in the quarter-final here.

Gujarat rode on Panchal's 134 to post a 299 for 7 and then bundled out the opposition for 182, to make it to the semi-final. India Test star and Andhra captain Hanuma Vihari was out for a five-ball duck.

Opting to bat at the Arun Jaitley Stadium, Gujarat lost Dhruv Raval

(18) early, after he was dismissed by medium pacer KV Sasikanth (2/55).

However, skipper Panchal took on the Andhra attack and found an able partner in one-drop batsman Rahul Shah (36 off 59 balls; 3x4) as the two rallied the Gujarat innings with their 80-run second-wicket stand. But just when it looked like the duo would take the game away, Andhra slow-left arm spinner A Lalith Mohan (2/55) broke the partnership by trapping Shah leg before. — PTI

BRIEF SCORES
■ Gujarat 299/7 (Priyank Panchal 134; Rahul Shah 36; M Harishankar Reddy 3/60; A Lalith Mohan 2/55) bt Andhra 182 (Ricky Bhui 67; Arzan Nagwaswalla 4/28; Piyush Chawla 3/33).
■ Karnataka 338/3 (Ravikumar Samarth 192, Devdutt Padikkal 101; Basil N.P. 3/57) bt Kerala 258 (Vathsal Govind 92; M Azharuddeen 52; Ronit More 5/36, Shreyas Gopal 2/64).

Djokovic on top for record weeks

Surpasses Federer's World No. 1 mark

Paris, March 8: Novak Djokovic set a new landmark of 311 weeks as world number one on Monday, one week longer than Roger Federer whose tally of a record 20 Grand Slam titles is now firmly in the Serb's sights.

"Big day today", tennis superstar wrote on Twitter. Djokovic, 33, won his 18th major at the Australian Open in February.

With Federer turning 40 in August, the Serb has time on his side. He is also a year younger than Rafael Nadal who also has 20 majors.

"It really excites me to walk the path of legends and giants of this sport," said Djokovic, in a statement released by the ATP.

"To know that I earned my place among them by following my childhood dream is a beautiful confirmation that when you do things out of love and passion, everything is possible."

He has spent 88 weeks at number one, across two different stints.

Djokovic reclaimed the top ranking from Nadal in February 2020 and finished as year-end number one for the sixth time, tying the record set by Pete Sampras.

ATP Chairman Andrea Gaudenzi said: "Novak's

● The Serb set a new landmark of 311 weeks as world number one on Monday, one week longer than Federer.

many achievements in tennis are nothing short of extraordinary. Among them this record may stand as his single most impressive.

"Reaching No. 1 is something many players dream of and very few ever accomplish, and to have held the top spot for longer than anyone is testament to the levels of sustained excellence that Novak has redefined in our sport."

Federer, who returns to action in Doha this week after more than a year out of action to recover from two knee operations, slipped out of the top five on Monday to sixth.

Djokovic made his top 100 debut in July 2005, just weeks after Nadal had won his first Roland Garros.

He was top 50 in June 2006, top 20 for the first time in October 2006 and top 10 by March 2007.

He first became world number one at the age of 24 on July 4, 2011, the day after winning Wimbledon for the first time, beating Nadal in the final. — AFP



Manchester United's Luke Shaw (centre) celebrates scoring against Manchester City in their English Premier League match in Manchester on Sunday. — AFP

Red Devils shatter City's winning run

London, March 8: Manchester United shattered Manchester City's record winning streak with an impressive 2-0 victory against the Premier League leaders, while Liverpool hit a new low as relegation-threatened Fulham won at Anfield on Sunday.

Pep Guardiola's side were on an English top-flight record run of 21 successive wins in all competitions heading into the Manchester derby.

But United ruined City's 28-game unbeaten run in all competitions thanks to an early penalty from Bruno Fernandes and Luke Shaw's second-half strike at the Etihad Stadium.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's team, unbeaten in their last 22 away league games, moved above Leicester into second place, but they are still 11 points behind City with 10 games left.

Likely to be replaced by City as champions,

THE RESULTS

Liverpool	0
Fulham	1
<i>(Lewin 45)</i>	
Manchester City	0
Manchester United	2
<i>(Fernandes 2-pen, Shaw 50)</i>	
Tottenham	4
<i>(Bale 25, 49, Kane 52, 77)</i>	
Crystal Palace	1
<i>(Benteke 45+1)</i>	
West Brom	0
Newcastle	0

Liverpool have now lost six consecutive home league games after third-bottom Fulham's well-deserved 1-0 win.

That dismal run is all the more remarkable as Jurgen Klopp's men had gone nearly four years without a league defeat at home in 68 games between April 2017 and January this year. — AFP

ATLETICO DENIED DERBY WIN BY LATE BENZEMA EQUALISER

Madrid, March 8: Atletico Madrid squandered the chance to inflict a heavy blow on Real Madrid's La Liga title hopes on Sunday as Karim Benzema's late equaliser earned the champions a 1-1 draw and kept them in the race at the top.

Luis Suarez's flicked finish early in the first half looked to be enough to give Atletico a crucial win that would have put them eight points clear of their opponents, with a game in hand.

But they failed to make their authority count and Benzema punished them in the 88th minute, his goal earning Real Madrid a draw that ensures the gap between the two city rivals stays at five points.

"They took the first half

and we took the second, the draw was more or less a fair result," said Zinedine Zidane. "There remains a lot of the season left and we'll fight to the end."

Atletico's lead is still considerable and they can extend it to eight points with 12 matches left if they win their game in hand at home to Athletic Bilbao on Wednesday night.

Yet at full-time, it was Real's players who had smiles on their faces, while Suarez left the pitch shaking his head. The title race remains very much in Atletico's favour but still up for grabs, especially for Barcelona, who were perhaps the biggest beneficiaries of this result. — AFP