


WEATHER



Max: 35.4°C
Min: 26.5°C
RH: 57%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: clear.
Max/Min temp. 35/26 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalguna Shuddha Dasami till 10.19 am
Star: Pushyami till 11.06 pm
Varjyam: 6.48 am to 8.26 am
Durmuhurtam: 11.58 am to 12.46 pm
Rahukalam: 12 noon to 1.30 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
Sha'ban 10,1442 AH
PRAYERS (SHAHI MASJID)
Fajar: 5.02 am
Zohar: 12.17 pm
Asar: 4.38 pm
Maghrib: 6.21 pm
Isha: 7.32 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.21 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.11 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 1.18 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 2.39 AM

COUNTER POINT



Congrats! You are selected for best actor award for your performance during polls!

SHORT TAKES

No loan freeze after Aug. 31: SC

Mumbai: The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to extend the six-month loan moratorium period offered by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) beyond August 31. The apex court also said that the waiver of complete interest is not possible as it affects depositors. However, the court ruled that all borrowers will be eligible for waiver of interest on interest (compound interest) with respect to EMIs which were not paid by borrowers after availing the loan moratorium scheme extended by the RBI during March 1 to August 31 in view of the Covid-19 pandemic.

■ Full report on Page 5

Colorado shooting leaves 10 dead

Boulder (Colorado): A shooting at a crowded Colorado supermarket that killed 10 people, including the first police officer to arrive, sent terrorized shoppers and workers scrambling for safety and stunned a state that has grieved several mass killings. A lone suspect was in custody, authorities said. Hundreds of police officers from throughout the Denver metropolitan area responded to the Monday afternoon attack, converging on a King Soopers supermarket in a busy shopping plaza in southern Boulder.

■ Full report on Page 6

FUTURE | READY

8,000 vehicles to collect waste from every house

Jagan to launch Clean AP

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 23

As many as 8,000 vehicles equipped with GPS and cameras would collect dry and wet waste from every house under the Clean Andhra Pradesh initiative. The service will be launched from July 8.

Announcing this on Tuesday, Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy asked officials to concentrate on keeping AP State clean and conduct the house-to-house waste collection work effectively. As many as 8,000

vehicles would be purchased, two vehicles would be used for the collection of dry and wet waste from every ward.

The CM also asked officials to take necessary measures for the shifting of Godavari river waters to Visakhapatnam to fulfill the needs of the city.

Jagan held a review meeting on CLAP (Clean Andhra Pradesh), infrastructure facilities in Jagananna colonies and prioritised the projects in Visakhapatnam, at the camp office. The CM said it is important that offi-

cials paid proper attention to keeping the state clean and must take measures for collection of garbage from time to time.

He said garbage would be collected from door to door and the government has procured 8,000 trucks. He said GPS and camera should be installed in every garbage collection truck and dust bin should be set up at the end of each street.

Jagan said that, as part of steps to process dry and wet garbage, treatment plants should be set up for treating sewage water. Officials

must also focus on sanitation and hygiene in rural areas.

Reviewing the development of infrastructure facilities in the YSR Jagananna colonies, the CM said quality is important in all the works in the colonies.

As per a preliminary estimate, ₹30,691 crore will be spent on roads, underground drains, drinking water supply, electricity and sanitation in Jagananna Colonies.

■ Page 2: Vizag will get Godavari water: Jagan



NATION | 5

Maha CM's wife tests Covid positive



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WORLD | 6

Israelis vote to seal Netanyahu's fate

SPORTS | 8

Shikhar Dhawan props up India



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Union home minister Amit Shah participates in a roadshow, ahead of West Bengal assembly polls, at Midnapore in West Medinipur district, on Tuesday. — PTI

BJP will win over 200 seats out of 294 in Bengal: Shah

Udalguri (Assam), March 23: Union home minister Amit Shah said on Tuesday that the Congress' tie-up with the AIUDEF will be a factor in the BJP-led alliance's win in the Assam assembly polls as voters will back the saffron party decisively because its main rival cannot stop the influx of illegal immigrants by joining hands with Badruddin Ajmal, accused by

the ruling bloc of protecting infiltrators.

In an interview to PTI, the senior BJP leader also predicted a thumping win for his party in West Bengal, asserting that people there are yearning for a change from the Trinamool Congress' "misrule" and will embrace Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for the state's development.

"We will win more than 200 seats in Bengal and improve our tally in Assam," he said.

Asked about the ground for his confidence about the BJP's big victory in the elections to 294-member West Bengal assembly, Shah said the party has only strengthened its position since the 2019 Lok Sabha polls while the TMC's support base has eroded. — PTI

No HC order on mandal, zilla poll

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 23

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has refused to issue interim orders directing the State Election Commission (SEC) to conduct elections to the ZPTCs and MPTCs and posted the next hearing in the case to March 30.

A single judge bench headed by justice D.V.S.S. Somayajulu heard a batch of petitions virtually on Tuesday with a plea to issue direction to the SEC to resume conduct of polls to the remaining ZPTCs and MPTCs as they were deferred earlier due to Covid-19.

The court observed that it was the prerogative of

the State Election Commission to take a decision to conduct the polls to the ZPTCs/MPTCs and said that as the state election commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar was made a respondent in the case, it could not issue direction without taking his version on the issue.

Moreover, the court further observed that as the state election commissioner intended to go on leave for a few days, it would not mean, he would not discharge his duty.

The SEC's counsel informed the court that the commission was considering the issue of conduct of polls to ZPTCs/MPTCs and would decide on it.

3-DAY HOLIDAY FOR PVT SCHOOLS IN RAJA VARAM

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, MARCH 23

The education department is put on the alert against spread of Covid-19 cases after 163 cases were reported from a junior college in Rajamahendravaram rural mandal.

A holiday has been declared for three days as a preventive step and school managements have been asked to take all precautionary steps.

Three cases were reported from JNTU. Two of these were non-teaching staff and one student. The two working in the academic audit section tested Covid-positive, said the registrar Ch Satyanarayana.

NAXALS BLOW UP BUS IN CHHATTISGARH, 5 COPS DIE

Raipur, March 23: Five police personnel were killed and 13 others injured as Naxals blew up the bus in which they were traveling in Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur district on Tuesday, senior police officials said. The landmine explosions took place between Kanhargao and Kadenar villages under Dhaudai police station limits. Personnel of the police's District Reserve Guard were returning in the bus to Narayanpur town, said IG (Bastar range) Sundarra P. — PTI

13 PEOPLE KILLED IN ROAD ACCIDENT IN GWALIOR

Gwalior, March 23: Twelve women and a man were killed after the auto-rickshaw in which they were traveling collided with a speeding bus in Old Chawni area of Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday. The accident took place around 5 am on Gwalior-Morena road when the bus driver apparently tried to avoid hitting a person on the road, said state transport minister Govind Singh Rajput while announcing an inquiry. PM Narendra Modi expressed grief over the incident in a tweet. — PTI

People aged over 45 to get vaccine

Centre allows states to take steps, including lockdown, to prevent spread of Coronavirus

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

With a major surge in the daily Covid-19 cases in India, the Centre on Tuesday decided to open up the vaccination drive for all persons above the age of 45 years from April 1, irrespective of their comorbidities. This will be the third phase of the vaccination drive against Covid-19. Till now only health and frontline workers, people above 60 and those above 45 but with comorbidities were allowed to take the vaccines. Till Tuesday, 4.85 crore people have been vaccinated across the country.

Information and broadcasting minister Prakash Javadekar, announcing this, said that people above 45 will no longer be required to carry a doctor's certificate and they can simply go and take the vaccine shot. "We request that all eligible persons should immediately register and get vaccinated," he said.

In a letter to all chief secretaries, Union health sec-

People above 45 will no longer be required to carry a doctor's certificate and they can simply go and take the vaccine shot. We request that all eligible persons should immediately register and get vaccinated.

PRAKASH JAVADEKAR, Information & Broadcasting minister

retary Rajesh Bhushan asked them to widely publicise this decision so that more people can take advantage of it.

The decision comes in the wake of the sudden spurt in daily fresh cases in several parts of the country. On Tuesday, 40,715 new cases and 199 deaths were recorded. Maharashtra had 28,699 new cases, of which 3,512 were in Mumbai and 5,722 in Pune. The national capital, Delhi, is also witnessing a sharp rise in daily cases.

The home ministry has, meanwhile, issued fresh guidelines for effective

control of Covid-19 and asked states to rapidly increase RT-PCR testing to at least 70 per cent.

"The states are free to impose restrictions at the local level but there must be no hindrance on inter-state and intra-state movement of persons and goods, including for cross land border trade under treaties with neighbouring countries, and no separate permission or permit will be required for such movements," the ministry said.

The new guidelines will be effective from April 1 to April 30.

In a letter to the chief secretaries, Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla asked states/UTs to take all measures to promote Covid-19 appropriate behaviour among the public, especially in crowded places and during festivals, while saying there was a general laxity in the observance of Covid-19 appropriate behaviour by people now.

The Delhi government too has banned Holi celebrations in public places while random testing at bus and railway stations have been ordered.

MANGALAGIRI, TADEPALLI CIVIC BODIES MERGED

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 23

The AP government on Tuesday issued orders constituting the Mangalagiri Tadepalli Municipal Corporation by merging Mangalagiri and Tadepalli municipalities. Half of Amaravati area will come under the new corporation.

Earlier, as many as 11 gram panchayats — Nowluru, Atmakur, Yerrabalem, Bethapudi, Chinakakani, Peda Vadlapudi, Nidamaru, Nutakki, Kaza, China Vadlapudi and Ramachandrapuram — had been included to form the Mangalagiri municipality. Tadepalli municipality was constituted with amalgamation of 10 panchayats Kolanukonda, Kunchanapalle, Undavalli, Gundimeda, Chirravuru, Mellem-pudi, Ippatam, Penumaka, Praturu and Vaddeswaram.

Now, the two municipalities themselves have been merged to form the Mangalagiri Tadepalli Municipal Corporation.

Municipal administration special chief secretary Y. Srilakshmi issued G. O. Ms. No. 19 on Tuesday notifying the creation of Mangalagiri Tadepalli Municipal Corporation.

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IN BRIEF

HC serves notices to state ministers

Vijayawada: The Andhra Pradesh High Court has served notices to the respondents, including ministers Botsa Satyanarayana and Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy, based on a petition filed by State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar, seeking the CBI probe on leakage of his communication with the Governor. A single judge bench headed by justice U. Durga Prasad Rao heard the petition on Tuesday and ordered for serving notices to the respondents in the case and posted the next hearing of the case to March 30.

POLL NOTIFICATION FOR TIRUPATI LS BYPOLL RELEASED

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 23

The stage is set for the Tirupati Lok Sabha by-election to be held on April 17, stated the notification for the election released on Tuesday. The last date for filing the nominations is March 30, while the scrutiny will take place on March 31.

The by-election for the Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency is being held for the first time in its history, which was necessitated following the demise of sitting YSRC MP Balli Durgaprasad Rao on September 16, 2020.

According to Nellore district collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu, the election authorities will accept nominations from the candidates between 11 am and 3 pm till March 30 at the Nellore collectorate on all working days for the Tirupati LS by-election. Nominations will not be accepted on March 27-28: Second Saturday and Sunday. Though the Holi festival is falling on March 29, candidates can file their nominations on the day as usual between 11 am and 3 pm.

As per the guidelines, only two persons are allowed along with the candidate to file the nomination. The last date for the withdrawal of candidatures is April 3, and the polling will be held on April 17. The counting of votes will be held on May 2 and the election process will draw to conclusion on May 5.

NO NOMINATIONS FILED ON DAY-1 TO TIRUPATI BYPOLL

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 23

No nomination has been filed on the first day of notification for conducting the bypoll to the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat (SC) on Tuesday.

The office of the chief electoral officer, in a statement issued on Tuesday, stated that as per schedule announced by the Election Commission of India for conducting the bypoll to the Tirupati Parliamentary Constituency earlier, such notice had been re-published in the AP state gazette and the concerned returning officer has also published the notice of election in Form-1 on Tuesday. The returning officer reported that no nominations had been filed so far.

PURANDESWARI: BJP WILL SECURE MAJORITY VOTES

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 23

Exuding confidence that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is going to get a majority of votes in the ensuing Tirupati by-election, BJP national general-secretary D. Purandeswari claimed that the people of Tirupati parliamentary segment are observing the development activities that the Union government took up under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Interacting with the media-persons on Tuesday, the former Union minister alleged that the AP state was lagging behind in the constructive rule. The ruling party won majority of seats in panchayat and civic body elections by creating fake voter IDs, she added. She said the facts were also revealed in some of the media channels.

"The new sand policy of the AP government is the biggest disaster and the common people are not getting sand for constructing their own houses on time. Instead, the common public is spending huge amounts on getting the sand", she alleged while lamenting that lakhs of workers have lost their daily bread with the non-availability of sand in the state.

Tribute to Martyrs



Students participate in Azadi Ka Amruth Rally for paying tributes to Martyrs in Vijayawada on Tuesday.

— DC

VSP stir to be intensified, meeting on Vizag beach

Walkout of YSRC MPs from Parliament boosts VSP agitation

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 23

The ongoing agitation against the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant's privatisation is being further intensified with two programmes slated for March 26 and March 28.

Bharat Bandh is being organised in support of the farmers whose stir in New Delhi crossed 100 days. The Visakhapatnam Utku Parirakshana Committee extended its support to the farmers' strike and appealed to all the political parties, trade unions and mass organisations to make the bandh a success. The steel plant employees raised ₹3.5 lakh and donated to the farmers' unions.

In turn, the leaders of various farmers unions also extended support to the Vizag unions in their fight against the VSP privatisation.

Similarly, a massive public meeting is being organised at the Visakhapatnam Beach Road. The walkout of the YSRC MPs from Parliament boosted the agitation further. Some trade union leaders, led by Mantri Rajasekhar, called on the MPs in New Delhi to discuss the further action plan.

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CPM Rythu Sangham leaders give a representation to government adviser Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy at party's central office in Tadepalli on Tuesday, seeking its support to Bharath Bandh on March 26.

— DC

AP GOVT SUPPORTS BHARAT BANDH AGAINST STEEL PLANT PRIVATISATION

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 23

The YSR Congress has expressed solidarity for the Bharat Bandh on March 26 in protest against the Union Government's decision to privatise Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) and in support of the farmers unions opposing the farm laws brought forward by the Centre. Addressing a press conference here on Tuesday, transport minister Perni Venkataramaiah alias Nani said the state government is against privatisation of the steel plant. Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy had written letters to the Centre suggesting alternative steps.

Although the state government promised to take complete responsibility for the plant, the Union

government has asked the state to participate in an open auction and place a bid. Minister Nani stated that all government institutions will be open after 1 pm on that day. So will be the APSRTC buses, which will ply in the afternoon. Public life will not be completely obstructed and all emergency services will run as usual.

The minister said that it is in due respect to the farmers' feelings that the state government would support the nation-wide bandh on March 26. He appealed to farmers' associations to cooperate and observe the bandh peacefully without any incident and without causing any inconvenience to the general public. He affirmed that the state government opposed the central government's decision to privatise Visakh Steel.

TD SUPPORTS BHARAT BANDH ON MARCH 26

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 23

Telugu Desam AP president K. Atchannaidu on Tuesday hailed the Visakh Utku Vedika and the farmers' associations for giving a call for 'Bharat bandh' on March 26 in protest against the privatisation of the VSP and also against the new farm bills. He asserted that their party would extend its full support to the bandh call and it would continue its protests against the state government's decision to fix meters on the agricultural pump sets.

Atchannaidu said that the privatisation of the Vizag Steel Plant had hurt the sentiments of all sections of people in the state very badly.

Vizag will get Godavari water: Jagan

FROM PAGE 1

Reviewing the projects in Vishakhapatnam, the CM advised officials to start works on the Bhogapuram airport and the Beach Corridor project, as also on diversion of Godavari waters from Polavaram to Visakhapatnam through a pipeline project to fulfil the needs of Vizag city. "Focus your attention on the Metro project after these projects," he told officials.

Discussions were held

on the expansion of the existing beach road from Visakhapatnam to Bhimili and construction of the beach road from Bhimili to Bhogapuram. The CM said officials must complete the land acquisition for the construction of the road.

The officials said the preliminary estimate for the road from Bhimili to Bhogapuram, including for land acquisition, would be around ₹1.167 crore.

The CM said, "Consider the Beach Corridor project

as of first priority and start the works on a war footing. Focus attention also on construction of the Bhogapuram airport."

Reviewing the diversion of Godavari waters to Visakhapatnam, the CM said the pipeline project is to be treated as a prioritised project. An action plan is being prepared to meet the water needs of the city for the next 30 years.

On Visakhapatnam Metro Rail Project, the officials said DPR is pre-

pared for Metro connectivity from Vizag Steel Plant gate to Bhogapuram, covering a 76.9 km stretch with 53 stations. Proposals were also laid for a 60.2 km tram corridor. It's a total 137.1 km corridor including metro and tram. An amount of ₹14,000 crore would be spent for construction of metro and ₹6,000 crore for tram services. Jagan stressed for best designs for the metro and tram projects and said these should add to the beauty of the city.

Professional courses to be taught in regional languages

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 23

Union minister of education Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' said that the 15th Finance Commission recommended development of professional courses in regional languages as per the National Education Policy 2020.

The Union minister was replying to a question in Lok Sabha raised by Rajamahendravaram MP Margani Bharat. The MP asked the minister whether the 15th Finance Commission had recommended for identifying two colleges each in every state for taking up technical and medical education in regional languages and if it was feasible to impart education in regional language how it would help in bridging the rural urban divide. He also asked the minister if the Finance Commission recommendation is part of terms of reference given in the commission and if so, the reasons behind such recommendation.

The Union minister said that the NEP envisages imparting programmes in higher education, using mother tongue or local

● The Union minister said the NEP envisages imparting programmes in higher education, using mother tongue or local language, as a medium of instructions, and offer programmes bilingually, in order to increase access and Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER).

language, as a medium of instructions, and offer programmes bilingually, in order to increase access and Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and also to promote the strength, usage and vibrancy of all Indian languages.

He said that drawing upon the NEP 2020, the ministry of education has constituted a Task Force, for suggesting modalities for imparting technical education in regional languages, with the objective to nurture the talent among students who have pursued their education in local language for their smooth transition into technical education.

Meanwhile, replying to another question posed by Bharat, Union minister for petroleum and natural gas Dharmendra Pradhan

said that department of food and public distribution has informed that the total production capacity of alcohol and ethanol in the county is 684 crore litres per annum and the production of ethanol mainly depends upon a number of factors including plant capacity, efficiency of plant and machinery, availability of feed stocks, production cost of ethanol viz-a-viz its procurement price and available infrastructure.

Bharat asked the ministry whether the country has a capacity to produce 700 crore litres of ethanol, if so, the reasons that the country is not even able to produce 50 per cent of it, the details of ethanol produced and procured by the government during the last 10 years and the current year, and state-wise and the extent to which the use of cereals for ethanol helps in achieving the production target and the target of blending it with petrol, whether the government issues clearance for setting up of ethanol plant and whether the government proposes to set up ethanol plants in Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir and Jharkhand.

Official meeting



Minister Mekapati Goutham Reddy (left) at a meeting with Karin Stoll, consul-general of the Federal Republic of Germany at R&B office in Vijayawada on Tuesday.

113-yr-old British era building renovated

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 23

Home Minister Mekathoti Sucharita said the YSRC government was taking all measures for ensuring friendly policing and protecting women. She said this after inaugurating a modernised 113-year-old British era building as headquarters of the Guntur Rural Police on Tuesday.

Housing minister Ch. Sri Ranganatha Raju and AP DGP Gautam Sawang were present.

Sucharita recalled that once upon a time, police stations used to look like "Bhoot Bungalows" due to absence of maintenance and renovation. But after coming to power, the YSRC has started modernising police stations under the Nadu-Nedu programme.

The home minister asserted that police stations have become people friendly with Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's initiative. People are now approaching police stations without any hesitation. She stated that as many as 64 police stations in Guntur district have been renovated, which are providing hassle-free services to the public.

The DGP said the AP Police department has got 125 awards, which reflects the dedicated work of AP



Mekathoti Sucharita

Police with transparency. AP Legislative Deputy Speaker Kona

Raghupathi praised the police for renovating the 113-year-old building. AP Legislative Council chief whip Ummareddy Venkateswarlu asked MPs to sanction money from their constituency development fund for renovating at least two police stations.

Bapatla MP Nandigam Suresh, Guntur range DIG C. M. Trivikram Varma, Guntur rural SP Vishal Gunni, MP M o p i d e v i Venkataramana Rao, MLAs V. Rajani, V. Sriveidi, G. Srinivas Reddy, B. Brahman Naidu, K. Mahesh Reddy, K.V. Rosaiah, M. Nagarajuna, Md. Mustaf, A. Siva Kumar and M. Giridhar, apart from Guntur Mayor K. Manohar Naidu were among those who participated in the programme

GOVT | ORDER

Hospital and healthcare services will be revitalised

₹5,800 crore for 12 new med colleges

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MARCH 23

State government has accorded an administrative sanction of ₹5,800 crore for establishment of 12 new medical colleges in the state under Nadu-Nedu programme.

CM Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has initiated the proposal for additional colleges to improve medical facilities in every Lok Sabha segment.

Principal secretary Anil Kumar Singhal said funds

● Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has initiated the proposal for additional colleges to improve medical facilities in every Lok Sabha segment.

will be sanctioned for the 12 medical colleges based on available infrastructure, land and other facilities in each Lok Sabha segment.

₹75 crore have been sanctioned for establishment of the medical college in Hindupur LS area, which will cover all seven assembly segments of the parliamentary constituency. Similarly, ₹1,000 crore

have been allotted to two medical colleges, one each at Vizianagaram and Anakapalli areas. Two medical colleges will come up in East Godavari - Amalapuram and Rajahmundry, each at a cost of ₹475 crore. ₹525 crore has gone to Eluru medical college and ₹475 crore to Palakollu medical college in West Godavari district.

Bapatla in Guntur district and Markapur of Prakasam will have medical colleges with ₹475 crore each. An additional college will be set up at Madanapalli in Chittoor district with ₹475 crore.

A government order issued on the occasion revealed that hospital and healthcare services will be revitalised across the state, involving revamping of healthcare infrastructure and upgradation of primary and secondary healthcare facilities.

SHORT TAKES

CHILD MARRIAGES
RAMPANT IN
KURNOOL DISTRICTDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MARCH 23

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) member R.G. Anand said child marriages were rampant in Kurnool district. There is a need for coordination among the line departments of labour, children, women and girls development, to prevent hundred per cent targets in this matter, stated the NCPCR member. He, along with district collector G. Veera Pandian and SP K. Fakeerappa, held a review meeting on Tuesday.

Addressing the meeting, he said there is a need to prioritise child rights and their protection as it is their social responsibility. Efforts must be made to deploy one police officer at every police station to act as a Child Welfare Person and train them on Juvenile Justice Acts and Child Rights to monitor child issues perfectly. Also, the formation of Village-Level Child Protection Committees (VLCPC) at every gram panchayat led district revenue officer cadres of nodal officers.

The NCPCR member asked the district administration to establish a childline 1,098 to ensure distressed children in the district as soon as possible. There is a need to organise a separate grievance once a month to solve child issues in the district, he added.

He further said that NCPCR had been arranged a toll-free number 1800-121-2830 to provide counselling and psycho social support for the children under the name of SAMVED-NA particularly those affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

SRIVARI ANNUAL
TEPPOTSAVAM TO
BEGIN TODAYDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 23

Following the surge in the daily new Covid-19 cases in the state, the TTD will organise the annual teppotsavam of Srivari temple from March 24 evening, in total compliance with Covid-19 guidelines.

As part of the annual float festival held at Swamy Pushkarini, the processional deities of Lord Malayappa and his consorts take a joyful ride in the evening on a specially built float called a Teppa.

The TTD engineering department has built a float with electrical decorations and also put electrical lighting around Swami Pushkarini and this year, innovatively added water shower sprays around the float. Around 500 kg of flowers are being used for decking up the float every day, and the utsava idols will be adorned with scented jasmine garlands.



Students get hands sanitised before entering school in view of Coronavirus precautions at Ayodhya Nagar in Vijayawada on Tuesday.
— C. NARAYANA RAO

400 more students to
undergo Covid test

35 containment zones were set up in the district

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 23

Deputy chief minister and minister for health Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas said that all the 163 inter students infected with Coronavirus at a private junior college in Rajamahendravaram in East Godavari were being provided with medical care by arranging special rooms in the same college and added that arrangements were made to conduct Covid-19 tests on 400 more stu-

● The minister, in a statement issued on Tuesday, said that instructions were issued to take up sanitisation of the entire college premises, in addition to conducting RTPCR tests

deuts from the same college.

The minister, in a statement issued on Tuesday, said that instructions were issued to take up sanitisation of the entire college premises, in addi-

tion to conducting RTPCR tests for the remaining students in separate accommodation.

The minister said that 41 Covid-19 positive cases were reported from Kakinada, Mummidivaram, Ramachandrapuram and Rajamahendravaram areas in East Godavari district, and 35 containment zones were set up in the district as a preventive measure to contain the spread of the virus. He said that instructions were issued

to conduct Covid-19 tests in all educational institutions and called upon the people to come forward to undergo Covid-19 vaccination.

The minister spoke to the district collector D. Muralidhar Reddy and the district medical and health officer K.V.S. Gowriswara Rao and took stock of the developments related to the Covid-19 spread over the phone and issued directions to take necessary measures to curb the spread of the virus.

STATE REPORTS
492 +VE CASES,
TWO DEATHSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 23

Andhra Pradesh witnessed a surge in Covid-19 infections on Tuesday by registering 492 cases compared with the last seven days.

The state registered 310 Covid-19 cases with two deaths on March 22 while on March 21-368 cases with no deaths, March 20-380 cases with two deaths, March 19-246 cases with one death, March 18-218 cases with no death, March 17-253 cases with one death and March 16-261 cases with no death. The health authorities reported stating that out of 33,634 samples tested, 492 persons were infected.

Covid test must for Arjitha sevas

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 23

After a year of Covid-19 restrictions, the TTD has announced on Tuesday that devotees will be permitted for Arjitha sevas from April 14 onwards but with Covid-19 negative certificates only.

In a release, the temple body categorically stated that the devotees coming for all Arjitha sevas and Utsavas have to compul-

sorily submit only three days old Covid-19 negative certificates at the Vaikuntam queue complex.

Also, as part of a special drive to protect the Srivari Utsava Idols from excess-usage, TTD also decided to convert the weekly sevas Visesha Pooja (Monday's) and Sahasra Kalasabhishekam (Wednesday's) into annual sevas. Henceforth, both the Arjitha sevas

will be performed at the Srivari temple once in a year, as Circar Seva. Similarly, the festival of Vasanthotsavam will also be performed as an annual Seva.

The devotees who have hitherto booked the three arjitha sevas between March 20 of 2020 and April 13 of 2021 were given the option to either claim refund or a one-time option to get the facility of VIP break darshan.

5 workers killed, 4
injured in accidentDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 23

In a tragic incident, five daily-wage workers were killed, and four others sustained severe injuries when a speeding milk van rammmed a TATA Ace vehicle on the Nellore-Mumbai national highway near Duvvuru in Sangam mandal of Nellore district in the early hours on Tuesday.

The incident took place when the daily wage workers were boarding the TATA Ace vehicle to reach a workplace at Raju Palem. The deceased were identified as K. Malakondaiah, 50, G. Seenaiiah, 50, T. Ramanaiah, 60, K. Babu, 55 and M. Seenaiiah, 55, all hailing from Duvvuru's SC Colony.

According to the reports reaching here, all the victims were eking out their livelihood on daily wages – earned by fishing in small canals and water bodies.

On Tuesday early morning, around 14 workers were boarding a TATA Ace on the national highway to reach a workplace at Rajupalem village in Kodavalur when a

speeding milk collection van hit the vehicle.

In the incident, four were killed on the spot and one died when he was being shifted to the hospital, while four others, including the vehicle driver, received severe injuries.

Buchireddypalem CI B. Suresh Babu and Sangam SI Srikanth and his staff rushed to the spot and monitored the rescue operation on being informed. The injured persons were shifted to a local government hospital and the police have registered a case and further investigation is being done.

Governor Biswa Bhusan Harichandan expressed shock and profound grief over the road accident. The Governor offered his heartfelt condolences to members of the bereaved families and wished for a speedy recovery of the injured persons.

Minister for Industries Mekapati Goutham Reddy expressed his grief over the incident and directed the officials to provide better treatment for the injured.

3 HELD FOR STEALING FROM HUNDI

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 23

The officers of TTD vigilance and security wing on Tuesday took three persons into custody for trying to steal cash offerings being made by devotees from a

hundi inside the Lord Venkateswara temple in Tirumala and recovered ₹30,000 from their possession.

The vigilance sleuths detained the three offenders, who managed to steal away ₹30,000 cash.

ED raids houses
at Nandyal townDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MARCH 23

Enforcement Directorate (ED) teams simultaneously conducted searches at Nandyal, Yemmiganur, Kanala, Ayyalur village and other undisclosed places in houses of those who were red flagged for taking money.

A top official said unusual frequency of visits to Abudhabi has been noticed from these places. Local police are tight lipped while mild tension prevailed at Kanala village. "We don't know anything about this. Five teams of Enforcement Directorate from Hyderabad arrived and sought our help. Beyond this I am not aware of anything," said a district police official. ED teams escorted by local police were spotted at Saptagairi Shine apartments and Upparipet in Nandyal town on Tuesday, said a local resident.

It was learnt that, the officials conducted searches in houses of key activists of Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) and Popular Front of India (PFI) as they suspected that their bank accounts have been of several transactions. These people also worked and returned from Dubai recently, revealed sources.

Escorted by local police the ED official teams identified some houses at

● A top official said unusual frequency of visits to Abudhabi has been noticed from these places.

● Local police are tight lipped while mild tension prevailed at Kanala village.

● The officials verified about the suspected persons

different places in Nandyal, Kanala, Ayyalur and Yemmiganur of Kurnool district and collected information from identified houses. The officials verified about the suspected persons and also demanded them to produce bank accounts, it is said. Meanwhile, villagers noting the presence of officials started to gather outside their houses. A local police official team tried to pacify the agitated villagers at Kanala and asked them not to worry as they would only collect information. Not satisfied with this, the villagers began agitating which led to mild tension in Kanala. A similar situation prevailed at Nandyal and Yemmiganur towns. The ED officials approached the local police for their help to conclude their searches in the said areas. When the local mediapersons tried to seek details, the officials refused to comment.

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DECCAN Chronicle

24 MARCH 2021

Optics key, Uddhav must act fast to kill racket stink

It is no exaggeration to say that the political situation in Maharashtra has turned fragile following on allegations levelled by a DGP rank IPS officer, Param Bir Singh, who was removed from the post of commissioner of Mumbai Police by the state government last week.

The allegations are grave. After being displaced from the post of CP, Mr Singh told chief minister Uddhav Thackeray in a letter that home minister Anil Deshmukh had ordered junior officers, including assistant sub-inspector Sachin Vaze who has been suspended for his suspected role in an explosives-laden SUV near the residence of business magnate Mukesh Ambani, to collect ₹100 crore per month, obviously sanctioning extortion.

The former CP followed up his letter with a petition in the Supreme Court on Monday, seeking a CBI inquiry in this matter and in an alleged transfer-posting racket run by Mr Deshmukh.

It is up to the apex court to consider the reliability of Mr Singh as a complainant, not least because he had been removed for not being exercising sufficient control of the police force and, by implication, letting API Vaze run amok. It may also need to be considered why the former CP had kept quiet over the alleged criminality of the home minister for over a year. Did he stand to gain through prolonged silence? At the same time, delayed disclosure — provided allegations in question are not ungrounded — cannot justify inaction.

NCP leader Sharad Pawar, widely thought to hold the whip hand in politically shepherding the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) coalition government, at a Delhi press conference on Monday, strongly defended Mr Deshmukh, who is from the his party. Mr Pawar appeared to stoutly refute the factual basis of Mr Singh's allegation against Mr Deshmukh. But this supposition has been emasculated by Mr Deshmukh himself. In the public mind, now, serious doubts are apt to have arisen about the integrity of the state government although Mr Thackeray did appear to be gaining in popularity and stature since he took office in November 2019. The CM has kept mum on the Vaze-Singh-Deshmukh matter, allowing Mr Pawar to call the shots. Circumstances now do not permit him to withhold comment — and action — for long, else he will be at risk of completely losing the initiative in a wobbly situation.

At the risk of annoying NCP, the first logical step is to oblige Mr Deshmukh to step away from the position of home minister and simultaneously set in train a probe conducted by a retired Supreme Court or high court judge. Even if it is true, as many suspect, that the BJP, which has no love lost for Mr Thackeray and his party Shiv Sena, may have manipulated events behind the scene to trigger the current denouement, with a view to playing politics to return to power in Maharashtra, the CM is obliged to discharge his *raj dharma* not only politically but by being technically and constitutionally correct.

Wins for merit, politics

Controversies, politics and criticism of the incumbent government for using the National Film Awards to reward its darlings are now par for the course. Almost every year, as soon as the long list of awards is announced, congratulatory messages and carping begin a parallel race. Questions are raised about the relevance of the awards, faults are pointed out in the selection of the jury, processes and choices. And yet, National Film Awards remain the most prestigious and respected. Were it left to the devices of Mumbai's film-magazine backed awards, it would seem that India only churns out melodramas that prance around five songs. The National Film Awards are the only truly "national" awards that celebrate cinema and artists from across the country.

Given Indians' obsession with films and movies' power to influence, it is naive to think that the government of the day won't use the national awards to its benefit. And the 67th National Awards, announced on Tuesday for films released in 2019, is no different.

Kangana Ranaut, the BJP's most vocal flag-bearer on social media, has received her fourth national award for her performance in two films — *Manikarnika* and *Panga*. Ms Ranaut is a very talented actress, but this would be her third national award since 2014. In these six years there have been other, much better performances, but they have only been on the screen.

This year's list also includes several films that neatly align with the BJP's ideology, like the best direction award for Sanjay Puran Singh Chauhan's *Bahattar Hoerein* (72 Virgins), and *Holy Rights*, Farha Khatun's film on Triple Talaq bagging the award for the best film on social issues.

It would be churlish to cast aspersions on the merit of these films based simply on the fact that deal with issues that are currently palatable because also included in this year's list are two sublime performances by actors portraying characters very relevant to our times. Manoj Bajpayee and Dhanush have both won the best actor award — the former for his performance in and as *Bhonsle* (Marathi), and Dhanush for his role in Vetrimmaaran's Tamil film, *Asuran*. Bajpayee plays an ageing police constable who fights the rise of communalism in his chawl and Dhanush plays a dalit villager who fights off upper caste landlords to save his family. In these bleak times, that's reason enough for celebration.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

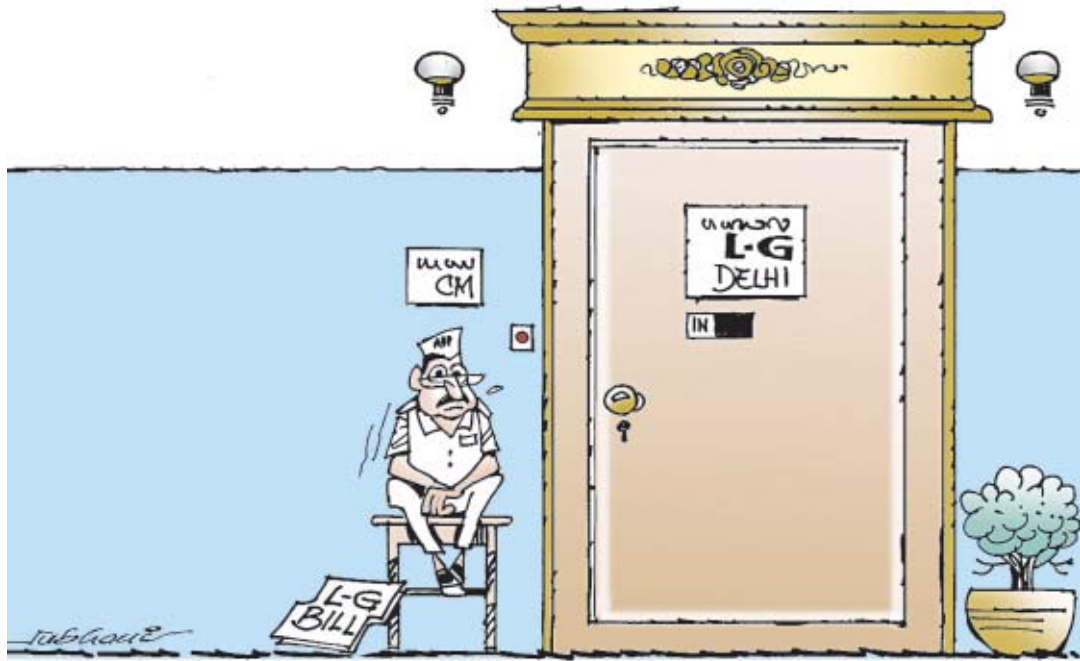
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Subhani



India should not fall for China's charm offensive



Abhijit Bhattacharyya

Is gullible India once again falling for the Dragon's charm offensive? After the betrayal and battering this country and its valiant forces faced at the hands of the People's Liberation Army in Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso, Depsang and Gogra/Hot Springs last summer, and at the Doklam tri-junction earlier, why do we forget this humiliation and treachery when, for good reasons of its own, the adversary puts on its benign mask and pretend to place all animosities on the backburner. How else does one deal with the words of Wang Yi, China's foreign minister, who also holds the weightier post of state councillor, as he appeared to reach out to New Delhi earlier this month: "China and India are friends. Should end suspicion." "Should not undercut each other." "Boundary dispute not the whole story", as the "rights and wrongs of the Line of Actual Control conflict clear", and "let's resolve border issues".

Too good to be true? It's all beautifully crafted, carefully scripted and tries to bypass the real issues to paint India as the villain, with the aggressor playing the victim card! The press, of course, laps it all up, and forgets to play its real role — to ask the tough questions? Of WHY China is doing this, and at the present juncture. Instead, there are headlines like: "Dragon turns dove, talks peace, partnership with India".

It is a truism — but worth repeating now — that peoples and nations which forget their own history are condemned to repeat it. Have we forgotten that when Chairman Mao's People's Republic was born in October 1949, India, which had attained independence just two ears earlier, was one of the first major countries outside

the Communist bloc to extend the hand of friendship to the new revolutionary nation? And how did Mao and his cohorts respond to Jawaharlal Nehru's overture for peace and partnership across the Himalayas? By invading Tibet in 1950, driving out the Dalai Lama into exile in 1959 and then, just three years later, trying to invade India in 1962. For Nehru, who actually believed in the concept of "*Hindi Chini bhai bhai*", it was a shock and a betrayal from which he never recovered, but what excuse do we have today for forgetting the lessons of history? Is that what Wang hopes for, that Nehru's successors in Delhi will similarly be taken in by Beijing acting nice?

But why criticise Wang alone? Is he the only one showing India in poor light? Aren't Indians themselves busy pulling down their country in the face of the Communist Party of China's ferocious aggression? It's because China's biggest consumer-supporters are inside India; along with Delhi's powerful business and trade elite. So even if India's Prime Minister ceaselessly impresses upon the nation to pursue the goal of "Atma Nirbhar Bharat", top Indian corporates are singing a different tune. Said one corporate leader: "We like to believe we are global company... and must continue to trade with China. Because if we conduct our business by excluding such a large country ... and market ... we will be poorer for the loss of that experience".

This unabashed dependence on China, and by extension of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC), is all pervasive, and extends to the nation's largest corporations, whose motto clearly seems: "Company first; country later". This, of course, is

true for most large companies worldwide. No wonder several countries, from the United States to Australia, and to China, are now busy trying to rein in mega corporates who have become too big for their boots — and feel emboldened to challenge the State with impunity!

But some business deals have more serious implications than others. It was recently reported in the Indian media that "Bharti Airtel has awarded a telecom infrastructure expansion contract worth ₹300 crores to China's Huawei". What is disturbing is that Airtel's national long-distance network — which will carry inter-circle and international traffic, as well as Internet traffic and that from main landing stations — will now be run by Huawei, which has connections to the CPC.

Is this a Greek tragedy? At a time when the PLA soldiers are forcibly entering Indian territory and killing Indian soldiers, a CPC-run Chinese company will earn crores in the guise of managing sensitive, secret, critical communications deep inside India. Is this the kind of unequal war we want to engage in?

That's a basic contradiction in India today. The PM is pushing for self-reliance, while our corporate honchos appear to have another agenda.

Sadly, the matter doesn't end there. The entire world knows about China's global cyberattacks, with India being a priority target due to the CPC's deep penetration in Delhi. So, when reports emerge of a "Red Echo over India", there's

The Chinese have dug so deep within India that they have learnt to take in their stride the occasional outbursts by Delhi, with some minor glitches like a few anti-dumping duties or the ban on a few Chinese apps...

hardly a whimper, only deafening silence. It's akin to acceptance of the Dragon's malice: with Chinese malware on the rampage, targeting India's power grid utilities.

The Chinese have dug so deep within India that they have learnt to take in their stride the occasional outbursts by Delhi, with some minor glitches like a few anti-dumping duties or the ban on a few Chinese apps — which are really too insignificant for the CPC to worry about. For they know that Indians have a weakness for all things Chinese — from consumers to corporate bosses — just as in the nineteenth century the Middle Kingdom was addicted to Indian produce. Today, in a bewildering role reversal, Indians seem totally addicted to Chinese cars, computers, cellphones, toys and lamps.

At the same time, the rising anti-Chinese sentiments among some sections are giving birth to new forces and alliances like the "Quad". Has Delhi suddenly become the pivot for both the success and failure of China's geostrategic goals in 2021? As Xi Jinping's CPC looks ahead to celebrating its centenary on July 1, 2021, this year is critical to establishing the success of "Xi's Way" in its capitalist wonderland. Beijing thus suddenly feels the need to mend fences, but can Delhi take advantage of such overtures, and for once act in its own self-interest?

Post-script: As the "Quad" raises the heat, the Dragon is at it again, trying to blackmail soft target Delhi. A new dam on the Brahmaputra will control the waters flowing into India, and no Indian will get a Chinese visa without a "Made in China" Covid-19 jab. Can India reciprocate, using the same formula to deny Indian visas to aspiring Chinese without an India-made jab? How long can India take this Chinese blackmail, humiliation and battering?

The writer is an alumnus of the National Defence College. The views expressed are personal.

LETTERS

L-G BILL

After being denied power for over 20 years in Delhi, the BJP at the Centre has taken indirect control of Delhi by giving more powers to the L-G through the passage of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill in the Lok Sabha (*L-G Bill: BJP has cheated people, DC, March 23*). Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal who had welcomed the abolition of Article 370 in J&K which paved way to its forming a Union Territory, is now crying when his powers are being clipped in Delhi.

Sajid Farooq
Kurnool

The Bill that has been passed in the Lok Sabha to grant the Lieutenant Governor extensive powers to intrude in the functioning of the elected government is a regressive step. It tantamounts to asking the Delhi government to stop governing. The ruling dispensation at the Centre is still unable to stomach the two successive mandates of AAP. The amendment is deeply hurtful for Indian democracy.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

State's bifurcation ruled out

HYDERABAD, March. 23 Finance Minister K. Vijayabhaskara Reddy today ruled out bifurcation of the State and said that the demand for a separate Telangana State was unjustified.

Replying to a discussion on the Appropriation Bills, in the State Assembly, the Finance Minister said that bifurcation of the State was not an easy thing, and that the problems faced by this region could and should be tackled within the framework of an integrated State.

The House later approved the Appropriation Bills.

The Finance Minister said that the formation of Andhra Pradesh was a great event in the history of the Telugu-speaking people and that it was a dream come true.

Maleeha Lodhi



The Biden administration has launched its first diplomatic initiative to accelerate the Afghan peace process even as it continues its review of Afghan policy. This is reflected in a leaked letter from secretary of state Antony Blinken to President Ashraf Ghani that sets out its proposed plan. It is also evident from the discussion draft of a peace agreement shared by the US with Afghan parties and the regional diplomacy now underway by special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad.

These moves signal three things — a renewal of US commitment to withdraw from Afghanistan, its desire to do so after securing a peace settlement among the warring Afghan parties and the willingness to use pressure to quickly achieve this. This raises several questions. Is the Biden administration overreaching with an ambitious plan that it wants to accomplish in a limited timeframe? In deciding to mount pressure on the parties does the US have the leverage to get them to agree? Is the proposed "new, inclusive" interim government an achievable goal as bitter foes will have to share power? With Washington having drafted a peace agreement, albeit for discussion, will Afghan parties take ownership of this?

The Biden team is vigorously engag-

ing Kabul, the Taliban and other Afghan leaders in discussions over the peace plan and the May 1 deadline for US withdrawal with the proviso that final decisions will emerge once the review concludes. President Joe Biden has said that meeting the May 1 deadline will be tough but it won't be extended by "a lot longer". Meanwhile, the Taliban have warned against any delay in this deadline and of an unspecified "reaction" if this happens.

The US diplomatic initiative — according to the leaked letter — has four elements. One, a meeting to be convened by the UN of representatives of Russia, the US, Pakistan, Iran and India to forge regional consensus to support the peace plan. Two, a draft peace agreement to expedite negotiations on a settlement and ceasefire. A key proposal is to set up a transitional government once agreement is reached. Three, Turkey to host a meeting between the two sides to seal a peace deal. And four, a 90-day reduction in violence to avert a spring offensive by the Taliban. This plan is punctuated by the US warning that it is considering full withdrawal of forces by May 1 but not ruling out other options.

By clearly communicating that a political settlement is a priority — not just the military withdrawal, as it was for president Trump — a prudent path

seems to have been outlined especially as diplomatic parleys underway will shape the conclusions of the US review.

Regional consensus to back a peace deal is clearly necessary. This is also a way for Washington to ensure that Iran is included in the diplomatic process. No timeframe has been set for this. But the UN will have to deftly play the role expected of it. Moscow, while welcoming the transitional government idea, has not said anything on the US plan and is embarked on its own regional diplomacy including a peace conference hosted last week on Afghanistan. The Pakistan-India dynamic also has to be kept in view; Islamabad has already conveyed its misgivings over India's inclusion in the proposed conference to US officials.

With two new processes now envisaged in addition to that in Doha it would be important not to allow the intra-Afghan negotiations in Doha to be diluted or complicated by the proposed new ones. They should facilitate the Doha process and not replace it. The principal diplomatic effort should remain in the Doha talks.

Washington is clearly in a hurry. Trying to force the pace of the peace process reflects US frustration with the stalled intra-Afghan talks. It also shows impatience with President Ghani's obstructive tactics, evident from the

tough tone of Blinken's letter. The tight timeframe in which the US wants a settlement done and dusted aims to compel the two sides to negotiate seriously. Even so the expectation for negotiations to yield an expeditious outcome runs up against an ineluctable reality that the tough compromises needed for an agreement are unlikely to emerge quickly just because Washington has set a deadline. The US can intensify pressure on both sides but that doesn't mean it has enough leverage over them to reach a speedy settlement. A senior Afghan official recently told PBS that the US has adopted a "fast food" approach, forcing everybody to consume something that is "too quick to succeed".

There is also the question of whether in order to expedite the process Washington has overprescribed the elements of an agreement — drafting one itself rather than letting it emerge from negotiations. This lays it open to being viewed as an "imposed" solution. While the US says it is not seeking to dictate terms and its peace agreement is a discussion draft it is yet to be determined whether Afghan parties see it the same way.

The idea of a transitional government, vehemently opposed by Ghani, makes sense before a more permanent government can be installed following

adoption of a new constitution and elections. But can the two sides and other Afghan leaders show the accommodation needed for a workable power-sharing arrangement? In an initial response a Taliban spokesman asserted that interim governments have proven ineffective in the past but the Taliban have yet to take a firm position.

Pakistan's interest lies in the success of intra-Afghan talks that can produce a negotiated end to the war and a lasting settlement before the full withdrawal of US forces. That is what Islamabad means by its repeated calls for a "responsible withdrawal". It does not want its neighbour to descend into political chaos or a civil war, and sees an inclusive post-settlement government in Kabul as the best way to ensure peace and stability. It seeks assurances that Afghan territory will not be used against Pakistan. US officials have also been told that Islamabad stands ready to do what it can to help the peace process. It is however up to the Afghan parties to seize the moment as the US plan starts to unfold and faces critical tests in the months ahead.

The writer is a former Pakistani ambassador to the United States and the UN By arrangement with Dawn

US peace plan for Afghanistan to face critical challenge ahead

SHORT TAKES

POLICE
LATHI CHARGE
RJD WORKERSNAYEAR AZAD | DC
PATNA, MARCH 23

The RJD leaders and workers were injured in Patna on Tuesday when police lathi charged in order to stop them from marching towards the Bihar Assembly.

The situation occurred when thousands of RJD workers went on a rampage and started damaging private vehicles and also pelted stones at the police who were trying to stop their protest march. Leader of the Opposition Tejashwi Yadav and his brother Tej Pratap along with several others were later detained by the police. The RJD had organised the march on Tuesday to protest against unemployment, rising crime graph, inflation, corruption, fuel price hike and Bihar special armed police bill.

Sources said that the RJD workers turned violent after Tejashwi Yadav reached Dak Bungalow crossing to join the protest. "Don't stop, don't get tired and don't bow to the power. Our fight against unemployment and autocratic rule will continue. We will not stop till youth get their rights", Tejashwi had said in a tweet before joining the protest.

Yadav had also announced earlier that his party would be leading a protest march against several issues especially against the Bihar armed police bill inside and outside Bihar Assembly.

The police bill which was introduced a week earlier seeks to give more powers to the force. Before leading the march Tejashwi had also tweeted the famous revolutionary couplet "*Sarfaroshi ki Tamanna ab hamare dil mein hai. Dekhna hai zor kitna bazoo-e-qatil mein hai*".

REBELLION IN MP
BJP UNIT, BYPOLLS
LIKELY TO BE HITRABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, MARCH 23

Former minister Jayant Mallya who went into a sulk after being denied ticket by BJP for the April 17 by-elections to Damoh Assembly constituency in Madhya Pradesh, may dent the prospects of the ruling party in the polls if the party failed to pacify him, sources said on Tuesday.

Mallya, a four-time MLA from the seat, was an aspirant for party ticket for the ensuing by-elections to Damoh Assembly constituency, necessitated by the resignation of sitting MLA Rahul Singh Lodhi, from the Assembly four months ago.

Lodhi who quit Congress and joined BJP has been nominated as BJP candidate from the seat in the upcoming by-elections, much to the chagrin of Mallya who has been mounting pressure on the party leadership to either nominate him or his son Siddhartha for the constituency.

Mallya was defeated in the 2018 Assembly elections in the seat by a narrow margin of 1,100 votes by his then nearest Congress rival Lodhi. Congress has fielded Ajey Tondon.

KANGANA: I HAVE
NO CONNECTION
WITH POLITICS

Mumbai, March 23: A day after Kangana Ranaut won her fourth National Film Award, the actor said though she takes interest in matters of national importance, she has "no connection with politics at all".

Ranaut, who is known for her provocative statements, recently made headlines for her Twitter spat with actor-singer Diljit Dosanjh over the ongoing farmers protests and locking horns with the Maharashtra government after her office was demolished by the BMC.

Asked if she would join politics, Ranaut said issues related to the country affect her "directly" but that does mean she wants to take a political plunge. "For me, the world of politics is quite unknown. If today I talk about the country, nationalism, farmers or laws which directly affect me, I'm told that I want to become a politician. It's not like that. I react to everything as a citizen. I have no connection with politics, at all," the actor, who turned 34 on Tuesday, told reporters here.

She was speaking at the trailer launch of her upcoming film "*Thalaivi*", the multilingual biographical film about the life of J. Jayalalithaa, former chief minister of Tamil Nadu and actor.

Bhatija & Co. looted ₹10k-cr,
will go to jail, says Shah

Home minister says Didi hasn't fulfilled even 82 of 282 promises made

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, MARCH 23

Going all out against West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's MP nephew Abhishek with large-scale corruption charges, union home minister Amit Shah on Tuesday accused "Bhatija & Company" of amassing central funds to the tune of ₹10,000 crore which were disbursed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for relief and rehabilitation to the state after it was devastated by Cyclone Amphan last year.

Mr Shah also made it clear that the entity would be sent to jail by a special investigation team (SIT), mentioned in the BJP manifesto, following a probe after the party forms its first government in the state.

In a blistering attack on the Trinamul Congress supremo, he then ridiculed her for running "115 scams" in comparison to "115 schemes," run by Mr Modi while mocking her for failing to fulfill even 82 out of her 282 promises made last time.

The union home minister told a BJP rally at Gosaba in South 24 Parganas, "Modiji has been sending a lot of funds here. Cyclone Amphan hit the state. Modiji released ₹10,000 crore. Did you get anything out of it? Where did it go? Bhatija & Company amassed it. You do not need to worry. Forming an SIT the BJP government will put those, who looted each and every pie of the funds sent by Modiji, behind bars. All scams, be it on Cyclone Amphan or Bulbul or Aila, will be probed by us through the SIT."

Mr Shah, in view of a portion of Hindu migrants' votebank in the district, also touched the party's top electoral promise. He said, "We will implement the Citizenship Amendment Act to give citizenship to the refugees after coming to power



Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam Women's Wing Secretary Kanimozhi during an election campaign rally in support of the party's Thiruvurumbur constituency candidate Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozi, ahead of Tamil Nadu Assembly polls, in Tiruchi district, Tuesday on March 23.

— PTI

here." According to him, "For the poor, the PM has undertaken 115 Yojana which is called scheme. But Didi has started 115 scams. The money of the poor is looted by those who take cut-money. The BJP government will bring an end to it."

Training his guns on Ms Banerjee over her false promises, Mr Shah highlighted the sops for the Sundarbans delta in the

BJP manifesto.

He claimed, "Didi had announced 282 promises but could not meet even 82 of them. In 2016 she talked of building a multiple integrated fisheries zone. Till date no one knows where it is. She should furnish an account but she would not. So you will give your account on April 1 by pressing the button of Kamal (Lotus). We had also sent ₹5,000 crore for the development of the

Sundarbans. But the fund was misappropriated. In 2015, 2017 and 2019, Didi had claimed to turn Sundarbans into a district. Did it happen? Cast your vote for a BJP CM. We will make Sundarbans a district within a year."

Later the union home minister and BJP president J P Nadda led roadshows at Midnapore and Ghatal in West Midnapore respectively in the afternoon.

15 % quota for govt
school students in
Odisha clearedAKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 23

The Odisha Legislative Assembly of Odisha on Tuesday adopted a resolution proposing reservation for government school students in higher educational institutes in the state.

Chief minister Naveen Patnaik had introduced the resolution for 15 per cent reservation for state-run school students in the engineering and medical courses.

The CM's proposal came in the backdrop of recommendation by a High Power Committee suggesting quota for the government-run school students in the state.

"As per the pass percentage indication, 86 per cent of government high school students occupy 23 per cent in medical and 21

per cent engineering colleges. In the same breath, 12 per cent private school pass-outs occupy 57 per cent of government medical colleges 63 per cent government engineering colleges," the Chief Minister said while introducing the resolution.

He said that the reservation will help students of government high school students especially in rural belt get better avenues to stay ahead at the national level.

In 2020, the state Cabinet had proposed reservation for students who passed from government schools for admissions into various medical and engineering colleges. The government on January 7, 2021 constituted a High Power Committee for making necessary recommendations in this regard.

ODISHA WANTS INCORPORATION
OF 'AHIMSA' IN THE PREAMBLEAKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 23

The Odisha Legislative Assembly of Odisha on Tuesday adopted unanimous resolution calling for incorporation of word "Ahimsa" (non-violence) in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution.

With the entire Odisha celebrating the centennial anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's first visit to the state on Tuesday, the Assembly passed the historic resolution as a "fitting tribute" to the Father of the Nation.

State tourism and culture minister Jyoti Prakash Panigrahi had introduced the resolution. Odisha government and out-

its crossing party lines have been urging for the inclusion of non-violence, which is the Mahatma's most propounded doctrine, in the constitution.

A special discussion was tabled in the Assembly on this occasion. Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik while addressing the House during the discussion said Odisha was where Mahatma's heart was. Gandhiji had visited Odisha on eight different occasions and toured several places across the state.

Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, Pradipta Naik said, "Tributes to the Mahatma can only be reflected in ways how much we all have lived up to inculcate his doctrines in our lives."

Maoist attack in C'garh
leaves five jawans deadRABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, MARCH 23

Five jawans were on Tuesday killed and 12 others injured when the mini bus in which they were traveling was blown up by Maoists in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar district of Narayanpur.

Maoists triggered three command initiated improvised explosive device (IED) explosions targeting the bus carrying jawans of district reserve group (DRG) when it was passing through a bridge over a culvert in Kodenar region, leading to the tragedy, director general of police (DGP) (anti-Naxal operation) of Chhattisgarh Ashok Juneja said.

The mini-bus fell off the bridge under the impact of the explosions, he added.

While three jawans including the driver of the police bus died on the

spot, two others succumbed to their injuries in the hospital.

At least 12 jawans were injured, three of them grievously.

All the 12 injured jawans were admitted in the district hospital in Narayanpur. Three of them were later airlifted to Raipur for treatment when their condition deteriorated.

This was the biggest Maoist attack on security forces in Bastar in the current year so far.

The bus was carrying around 44 DRG jawans, Narayanpur district superintendent of police Mohit Garg said.

The incident took place at around 4.15 pm.

The jawans were returning to their base camp in district headquarters of Narayanpur in the ill-fated bus after carrying out counterinsurgency operations in the region when the incident took place, Mr Juneja

BJP PROMISES
CORRECTED
NRC IN ASSAMMANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, MARCH 23

Bharatiya Janata Party national president J.P. Nadda on Tuesday released the manifesto called "Sankalp Patra" for the Assembly polls in Assam, promising to increase the amount of — Orunodoi scheme, a cash transfer scheme for women from ₹830 to ₹3,000 besides two lakh government jobs and correct National Register of Citizens (NRC) to protect the state from influx.

The Orunodoi scheme launched months before polls, a cash scheme for women is proving to be the game changer for the BJP in the polls. In every constituency, over 15,000 women have started getting ₹830 per month. The BJP has promised to extend this scheme to 30 lakh deserving families.

The party also promised to speed up the delimitation process to protect Assam's political rights. "We will protect genuine Indian citizens and detect infiltrators to ensure the Ahom civilisation stays safe," said Nadda while releasing the party's "Sankalp Patra".

He told reporters, "We have gained momentum of development. We are standing for a big leap. With these aspirations, we have put our words in 10 commitments to the people of Assam."

On the Citizenship Amendment Act, Nadda said that it has been passed by the parliament and will be implemented in "letter and spirit."

The BJP said that it will launch the multi-pronged "Mission Brahmaputra" to eliminate losses to lives, livelihoods and property due to annual floods.

ATS: Waze key
conspirator in
Hiren's murderSHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, MARCH 23

The Maharashtra ATS has claimed that its investigation has revealed that suspended API Sachin Waze was prime conspirator in Mansukh Hiren murder and the agency is likely to seek his custody for interrogation in this case.

Meanwhile the NIA has claimed that Waze used a fake Aadhaar card to book a room in a 5-star hotel in South Mumbai a day before the Scorpio car, which was later parked near Mukesh Ambani's residence with explosives, was reported to be missing. He was seen carrying five bags in CCTV footage of the hotel.

ATS chief Jaijeet Singh on Tuesday revealed that very next day of registering the FIR in connection with the death of Mansukh Hiren, in which his wife Vimla has stated that she suspect involvement of API Sachin Waze in her husband's death, the probe officers had recorded Waze's statement in which he had refuted the claim that the Scorpio was in his use. He had also said that he didn't have any relation with Hiren and denied any role in Hiren's death, the ATS chief informed. However, the subsequent investigation revealed that Waze's statement was a lie.

According to ATS chief Singh, the probe revealed that at the instance of Waze the SIM card used in the crime was procured by bookie Ramesh Ramniklal Gaur from Gujarat. The said SIM card was bought in the name of a Gujarat based company. It has also come to light that Gaur had given this SIM card to Waze's aide, former police constable Vinayak Shinde. Shinde was sentenced to imprisonment for life in connection with the fake encounter of Ramnarayan Gupta alias Lakhani Bhaiya. But in 2020, he was released on parole due to Covid pandemic. After coming out of jail, Shinde got in touch with Waze and started working for him.

The ATS has claimed that they have procured evidence showing their involvement in Hiren's murder. The ATS so far has recovered 14 SIM cards from the accused persons. But it has been revealed that the mobile phones that were used in the crime have been destroyed.

With the help of inputs received from interrogation of accused and suspected persons an ATS team on Tuesday returned from Union Territory Deu Daman with a seized Volvo car and suspect. This car is allegedly owned by Waze's business partner and is suspected to have been used in the crime. A team of forensic experts from Kalina Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) is inspecting this car.

Even though the accused have destroyed CCTV footage from some vital places, the ATS has seized CCTV footage of various routes and spots leading to offices and other places believed to have been used in the crime.

PLEA IN HC SEEKS
PROBE AGAINST
DESHMUKH, SINGHSHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, MARCH 23

A Mumbai based lawyer has filed a petition in the Bombay High Court seeking an investigation by CBI and ED into the corruption allegations against Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh and also the role played by former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh into this matter.

Petitioner Dr Jaishri Laxmanrao Patil has alleged that Deshmukh is not trustworthy to hold the position of home minister of state after the information that has come to light recently through a letter of Mumbai's ex-police commissioner Param Bir Singh. She has stated that as per details revealed in the letter Deshmukh was abusing his powers by calling and instructing officers to extort money from common citizens and business persons.

It has been mentioned in the petition that the home minister has been instructing the police officers to carry out official assignments and collection schemes including financial transactions as per his instructions based on his expectations and targets to collect money.

The petitioner has also stated that being a superior police officer and having powers under section 154 of CrPC, Param Bir Singh had failed to register an FIR against Deshmukh and the reasons for this inaction was a matter of the investigation.

FADNAVIS
ALLEGES GRAFT
IN TRANSFERSSONU
SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, MARCH 23

Leader of opposition in Maharashtra Assembly Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday accused Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray of covering up corruption in transfers and postings in the Police department.

Fadnavis submitted the report prepared by former state intelligence commissioner Rashmi Shukla to the Union home secretary and demanded CBI investigation into the report. With the report, Fadnavis also submitted 6.7 GB data of telephone interceptions. The NCP denied the charges and alleged that Shukla was a BJP stooge.

Speaking with the reporters at Maharashtra BJP headquarters in Mumbai, Fadnavis said, "The report has been with the government since August 2020 but till date no action on it. Seems like he shielded and protected this entire racket to save his government."

He said that instead of taking action, the MVA government transferred the officer who informed about the transfer and posting racket.

CASES | SURGE

Maha CM's wife in home isolation after testing Covid positive

Maha cities may face lockdown

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, MARCH 23

Several cities in Maharashtra may face lockdown as the MVA government is contemplating strict measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the state.

Lockdown is the last resort, but it may be implemented if people do not follow restrictions, said health minister Rajesh Tope.

Maharashtra is witnessing the second wave of Covid, which has seen a sudden surge in coronavirus cases across the state.

Mr Tope said people

must follow Covid safety protocols if the state is to avoid another lockdown.

"Chief minister Uddhav Thackeray will have the final word in imposing the lockdown in the state. He will take the decision in discussion with senior officials after considering all the aspects," he said.

The Chief Minister had told me that if the number of daily cases in the state remains in the range of 25,000 to 30,000 for the next some days, then we will have to take some stringent steps. He is of the opinion that if the numbers continue to increase, we will have to impose lockdown in some cities. I

appeal to people to respond to Chief Minister's warning positively and follow the Covid-19 protocols such as mask wearing, hand hygiene and physical distancing to avoid lockdown, Mr Tope said.

The health minister also hinted about taking a tough decision about the local train services.

"The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation has already appealed to people not to flock the trains unnecessarily. If people do not respond to it, the relaxations given to them might be reconsidered," he said. Meanwhile, one-week lockdown will be

imposed in Parbhani district in Maharashtra's Marathwada region owing to a surge in Covid cases.

District Collector Deepak Mugaliakar said the lockdown will be in force in Parbhani from March 24 to March 31. The district administration had earlier prohibited people from stepping out of their homes at night, but the move failed to curb the cases, he added.

Meanwhile, Rashmi Thackeray, wife of Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, on Tuesday tested positive for Coronavirus.

Ms Thackeray has been home isolated at Varsha,

the official residence of the Chief Minister, as her condition is stable. She had received the first dose Covid vaccine on March 11 at Sir J.J. Hospital, Mumbai.

Maharashtra chief minister too had received the first jab of Covid vaccine. Last week, her son Aditya Thackeray, who is also a cabinet minister in his father led MVA government, had also tested positive for the coronavirus.

Maharashtra is facing a huge surge in daily coronavirus cases. The state on Tuesday reported 28,699 cases taking the total number of cases to 25,33,026.

SHORT TAKES

CONVERSION: U.S. MAN DETAINED IN YGANDA

Kampala, March 23: Ugandan police said an American man has been detained over alleged involvement in "subversive activities" against the government.

Police said the man identified as Guy Smith was arrested in a remote town and is being detained at a police facility in Kampala. The statement gave no more details, and it was not immediately possible to get a comment from the US Embassy. Ugandan authorities accuse foreigners of meddling in the country's affairs, charges that have raised tensions between President Yoweri Museveni and the country's development partners.

VOLCANIC ASH: GUATEMALA CITY AIRPORT SHUT

Guatemala City, March 23: A shift in wind blew ash from an eruption at the Pacaya volcano over Guatemala City on Tuesday, and authorities closed the airport as ash coated planes and planes parked at the terminal. The 8,373-foot (2,552 metre) volcano, just 30 miles (50 km) south of Guatemala's capital, has been active since early February. Civil Aviation Director Francis Argueta did not say how long the closure would last.

Tourists frequently hike up to visit Pacaya's peak, but those trips have been temporarily cancelled.

Pacaya has a clear view of the nearby Volcano of Fire, which erupted in 2018, emitting a fast-moving avalanche of super-heated muck that killed at least 110 people and left about 200 missing.

OZ EAST COAST RAIN TO EASE; FLOODING ON

Sydney, March 23: Heavy rainfall was forecast to ease across Australia's east coast but floodwaters will linger for days across New South Wales state where 15,000 people were nervously waiting on Tuesday for potential orders to evacuate. Some 18,000 residents of Australia's most populous state have fled their homes since last week, with warnings the cleanup could stretch into April. New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian on Tuesday said several weather fronts continued to effect large swaths of the state.

Some parts of the state had recorded two-thirds of their annual rainfall in less than a week. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the rain emergency was expected to ease by late Wednesday.

FRANCE CALLS CHINESE ENVOY OVER COMMENTS

Paris, March 23: France's foreign ministry said it has summoned China's ambassador over "unacceptable" comments in recent days that included alleged insults and threats towards lawmakers and a researcher.

Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian tweeted on Monday that "comments of China's Embassy and actions against elected officials, researchers and European diplomats are unacceptable."

French authorities will "firmly reiterate the message" when meeting with Chinese Ambassador Lu Shaye, he added.

The Chinese Embassy in France called a Paris-based researcher, Antoine Bondaz, "a thug" on Twitter on Friday after Bondaz denounced China's pressure on French lawmakers over an upcoming visit to Taiwan.

UN rights body slams poor Lanka situation

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI/GENEVA

In a setback to Sri Lanka, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva on Tuesday adopted a resolution titled "Promotion of Reconciliation Accountability and Human Rights in Sri Lanka" against the country's human rights record with 22 out of the 47 countries supporting the resolution and 11 opposing it, with 14 countries includ-

ing India abstaining from the voting.

Asserting its support to both "the Tamils of Sri Lanka for equality, justice, dignity and peace" and also "ensuring the unity, stability and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka", India said "these two goals are mutually supportive and Sri Lanka's progress is best assured by simultaneously addressing both objectives" while urging "the Government of Sri Lanka to carry forward

the process of reconciliation, address the aspirations of the Tamil community and continue to engage constructively with the international community to ensure that the fundamental freedoms and human rights of all its citizens are fully protected".

Striking a balance in its Explanation of Vote (EoV) statement, India "supported the call by the international community for the Government of Sri Lanka to fulfill its commitments

● **TWENTY-TWO OUT OF the 47 countries supported the resolution and 11 opposed it while 14 countries, including India, abstained from voting.**

on the devolution of political authority... in accordance with the 13th amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution" while at the same time making it clear that the "the work of the (UN's) Office of the High

Commissioner, Human Rights (OHCHR) should be in conformity with mandate given by the relevant resolutions of the UN General Assembly". The 13th amendment in Sri Lanka stands for devolution of power to the provinces there. India has been a supporter of the "reconciliation process" in the island nation between the majority Sinhala and the minority Tamils.

New Delhi's vote is being seen as an exercise of

political balance and one key factor could be the upcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly elections since some political parties there had already made it an issue. The continuing proximity of the Rajapaksa brothers (President Gotabaya and Prime Minister Mahinda) to China could have also been another key factor in New Delhi's decision.

The UNHRC resolution called upon "the (Sri Lankan) government to

ensure prompt thorough and impartial investigation, if warranted, prosecution of all alleged crimes relating to human rights violations and serious violations of international human rights law".

The resolution was tabled by a Core Group on Sri Lanka consisting of the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Malawi, Montenegro, and North Macedonia at the 46th Session of the UNHRC in Geneva.

Israelis vote to seal Bibi fate

Fourth poll in two years as Netanyahu's corruption charge trial continues

Jerusalem, March 23: Israelis returned to polling stations early Tuesday for an unprecedented fourth time in two years in what is being largely seen as a referendum on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's continuance at the helm of affairs amid his ongoing trial on corruption charges as well as his handling of the pandemic.

The elections were called barely seven months after the last government was formed after the Likud and Blue and White party failed to agree on a budget by a December 23 deadline. The two parties had fought each other bitterly in the three ultimately inconclusive elections throughout 2019 and 2020 but agreed in May 2020 to form a power-sharing government with a rotating premiership between PM Netanyahu and Blue and White leader Benny Gantz. The unity government collapsed in December.

As per the election commission, 6,578,084 Israelis are eligible to vote for any of the 38 parties running in the elections in 13,685 polling stations across the country, including 750 special polling stations for the sick and quarantined due to COVID-19.



Yesh Atid party leader Yair Lapid and his wife Lihi vote for Israel's parliamentary election at a polling station in Tel Aviv, Israel, on Tuesday.

Exit polls will be broadcast by the leading channels Tuesday night but the final results will be out only on March 31 after the votes from special polling stations, of soldiers, emis-

saries and prisoners are also properly tallied by Thursday or Friday.

Buoyed by a successful vaccination drive, one of the fastest in the world per capita, Netanyahu, 71, has

put it at the forefront of his campaign claiming that under his leadership Israel has become the first country in the world to beat the Covid-19 pandemic. He yet again faces a

tough challenge of putting together a coalition post-elections with some determined "friends turn foes" looking to end his long-run.

— PTI

10 shot dead in US supermarket

Boulder (Colorado), March 23: A shooting at a Colorado supermarket killed 10 people Monday, including a police officer who was the first to respond to the scene, authorities said. Police arrested a suspect, but didn't reveal his name or any details about the shooting at an evening news conference where Boulder police Chief Maris Herold fought back tears.

Investigators had just begun sorting through evidence and witness interviews and didn't have details on a motive for the shooting at the King Soopers store in Boulder, which is about 25 miles northwest of Denver and home to the University of Colorado, said Boulder County District Attorney Michael Dougherty. "This is a tragedy and a nightmare for Boulder County," Dougherty said.

"These were people going about their day, doing their shopping. I promise the victims and the people of the state of Colorado that we will secure justice." The attack was the seventh mass killing this year in the US, following the March 16 shooting that left eight people dead at three Atlanta-area massage businesses, according to a database compiled by *The Associated Press*, *USA Today* and Northeastern University.

It follows a lull in mass

killings during the pandemic in 2020, which had the smallest number of such attacks in more than a decade, according to the database, which tracks mass killings defined as four or more dead, not including the shooter.

The slain officer was identified as Eric Talley, 51, who had been with Boulder police since 2010, Herold said. He went to the store after a call about shots fired and someone carrying a rifle, she said.

"He was by all accounts one of the outstanding officers of the Boulder Police Department, and his life was cut too short," Dougherty said of Talley. Identities of the other victims were not disclosed as police were still notifying family members. Matthew Kirsch, the acting US attorney for Colorado, pledged that "the full weight of federal law enforcement" will support the investigation. He said investigators from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives were at the crime scene, along with FBI agents. Officers had escorted a shirtless man with blood running down his leg out of the store in handcuffs but authorities would not say if he was the suspect. They did say the suspect was receiving medical care and was the only person injured who did not die.

— AP

14 ULTRAS GIVEN DEATH FOR B'DESH PM KILL BID

Dhaka, March 23: Fourteen Islamist militants were on Tuesday given death sentence by a Bangladeshi court here for attempting to kill Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2000. Judge Abu Zafar Md Kamruzzaman of Dhaka's Speedy Trial tribunal-1 pronounced the verdict as nine of them were brought to the court from jail to face the trial in person.

The rest five convicts are on the run. They were tried in absentia and defended by state-appointed lawyers.

"The verdict will be executed by a firing squad to set an example, unless the law barred it," the judge said. Otherwise, the convicts could be hanged in line with the prevailing practice, following mandatory review of the death sentences by the High Court Division of the Supreme Court under the Bangladesh law, the judge said. Under the Bangladesh law, the death sentences would require to be endorsed by the High Court following an automatic death reference hearing. The convicts are allowed to file an appeal as well.

— PTI

Certify Rana extradition, US admin to court

Washington, March 23: The Biden administration has urged a federal court to certify India's request to extradite Pakistani-origin Canadian businessman Tahawwur Rana, who is sought for his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack.

Assistant US Attorney John J. Lulejian, in his submission before a federal US court in Los Angeles, said Rana, 59, meets all the criteria to be extradited to India for his trial in the Mumbai terror attack. On February 4, Rana's attorney had opposed his extradition. US District Court Judge in Los Angeles Jacqueline Chooljian has scheduled the extradition hearing for April 22.

"The United States respectfully requests that following the April 22, 2021, extradition hearing, the Court certify India's request for Rana's extradition for the Secretary of State's surrender decision," Lulejian said in his court submission on

Monday. Rana, a childhood friend of David Coleman Headley, was re-arrested on June 10 in Los Angeles on an extradition request by India for his involvement in the Mumbai attack in which 166 people were killed.

He has been declared a fugitive by India. "Fugitive Tahawwur Hussain Rana is wanted in India to stand trial for offences related to his role in the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India, that resulted in the death of 166 people, injury of 239 people, and damage to property in excess of \$1.5 billion," Lulejian said.

As per the India-US Extradition Treaty, the Indian government has requested the formal extradition of Rana, and the United States has initiated this extradition proceeding. Lulejian said the criteria warranting certification of extradition are satisfied in this case. These are: the court has both personal and subject matter jurisdiction.

— PTI



WAGE | WISE Migrant workers: US Labour Dept seeks public comments

H-1B visa pay estimate: 18-mth delay

Washington, March 23: The Biden Administration has proposed an 18-month delay in the effective date of a final rule on calculating the prevailing wages of certain immigrants and non-immigrant workers, including those on the popular H-1B visas.

The proposed delay will provide the Department of Labour with sufficient time to consider the rule's legal and policy issues thoroughly and issue an upcoming Request for Information and

gather public comments on the sources and methods for determining prevailing wage levels, an official release said following the announcement on Monday. This proposed rule follows an initial 60-day delay announced earlier this month.

The department based that action on a January 20, 2021, White House memo, the media release said. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign work-

ers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

The Department of Labour in its federal notification published earlier this month said that it is considering whether to propose a further delay of the final rule's effective date and accompanying implementation periods.

The Department proposed to delay is in accordance with the Presidential directive as expressed in the memorandum of January 20, 2021, from the Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff, entitled Regulatory Freeze Pending Review.

The Department invited written comments from the public for 15 days on the proposed delay of effective date. All comments had to be received by February 16, 2021.

— PTI

quick BITES

INDICATORS

		%
Sensex	50,051.44	0.56
Nifty 50	14,814.80	0.53
S&P 500*	3,944.91	0.11
Dollar (₹)	72.42	-0.05
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.78	0.49
Euro (₹)	86.15	0.001
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,374▲116	0.26
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	62.14	-3.84
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.144	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.654	-0.028

* As of 8:30 PM IST

NCLAT closes proceedings against Jyoti

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal has shut the insolvency proceedings initiated against motor and generator manufacturing company Jyoti Ltd after settlement of claims raised by financial creditors. A two-member bench, including acting chairperson Justice B. Lal Bhat, allowed the company's plea after observing that it has already paid Rs 16.5 crore as per the compromise proposal.

Cipla board okays another 5-year term for Vohra



Pharma major Cipla said its board has approved the re-appointment of Umang Vohra as the managing director and global CEO of the company for a further period of five years, with effect from April 1, 2021. Vohra had joined Cipla in 2015 and has been its MD & global CEO since Sept. 1, 2016. After gaining degrees in engineering, marketing and finance, Vohra worked with Eicher Motors, PepsiCo and Dr Reddy's Lab.

Hero MotoCorp to increase prices from April

Hero MotoCorp said it will make an upward revision in the ex-showroom prices of its motorcycles and scooters, with effect from April 1 to partially offset the impact of higher commodity costs. "The price hike has been necessitated to partially offset the impact of increased commodity costs," Hero MotoCorp said in a BSE filing. The price increase across the range of two-wheelers will be up to Rs 2,500, it added.

Glenmark gets \$40 mn as IFC Covid credit-line

International Finance Corporation said Glenmark Pharmaceuticals has become the first Indian drugmaker to get a \$40-million (about Rs 290 crore) credit-line from its \$8-billion fast-track Covid-19 facility. The loan to Glenmark will help the drug firm increase the availability of affordable, quality medicines in the country as well in other countries, including treatment for the pandemic.



■ Waiver of 'interest on interest' applicable to all SC refuses to extend loan moratorium beyond Aug.

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, MARCH 23

The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to extend the six months' loan moratorium period offered by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) beyond August 31. The apex court also said that the waiver of complete interest is not possible as it affects depositors interest.

However, the apex court ruled that all borrowers will be eligible for waiver of 'interest on interest' (compound interest) with respect to EMIs which were not paid by them after availing of the loan moratorium scheme extended by the RBI during March 1 to August 31 in view of the pandemic. And whatever the amount is recovered by lenders by way of interest on interest/compound interest/penal interest for the period during the moratorium, the same shall be refunded and to be adjusted in the next instalment of the loan account.

The court effectively set aside the direction of the central government and the RBI to restrict waiver of interest on interest to certain categories of borrowers who had taken loans of less than Rs 2 crore.

"There is no justification shown to restrict the relief of not charging interest on interest with respect to the loans up to Rs 2 crore only and that too restricted to the aforesaid categories. What are the basis to restrict it to Rs 2 crore are

PRAYERS THAT WERE REJECTED

- ▶ Total waiver of interest during the moratorium period
- ▶ To extend the period of moratorium
- ▶ To extend the period for invocation of resolution mechanism
- ▶ Sector-wise reliefs provided by RBI
- ▶ Further reliefs over and above the packages already offered

NPA's FELL TO ₹5.7 L CR: MINISTER

New Delhi, March 23: Non-performing assets of banks declined to Rs 5.70 lakh crore in December 2020 and the recovered amount stood at Rs 2.74 lakh crore following a slew of measures taken by the government, minister of state for finance Anurag Singh Thakur told the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday.

During question hour, he also said the IBC has helped in the recovery of NPA. "There has been a reduction in gross NPAs. The NPAs—which stood at Rs 8.96 lakh crore in 2018—have reduced to Rs 5.70 lakh crore in December 2020. Recovery of Rs 2.74 lakh crore was also made," he said.

— PTI

not forthcoming. Therefore, as such, there is no rational to restrict such relief with respect to loans up to Rs 2 crore only," the court said.

The court, therefore, partly allowed the petitions which had challenged the decision of the Centre and RBI to restrict waiver of interest on interest to those borrowers who had availed of loans of less than Rs 2 crore.

The SC also lifted the temporary freeze on letting banks classify accounts as non-perform-

ing assets (NPAs) after the moratorium has ended. This according to rating agency Ica Ltd would result in bad loans rising by Rs 1.3 lakh crore for banks and an outgo of Rs 7,000-Rs 7,500 crore as reimbursement of interest on interest to those with loans outstanding during the moratorium period.

Also noteworthy was that the SC said no direction could be issued to the government or the RBI to announce any particular financial package or relief, and held that it will, there-

fore, ordinarily not engage in exercising judicial review over matters of economic and fiscal policies.

The judgment was delivered by a bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan, R. Subhash Reddy and M.R. Shah in a batch of petitions filed by companies, individuals and business associations challenging the decision of the Centre and RBI to charge interest during the moratorium period and restrict waiver of interest on interest to eight categories of borrowers who had taken loans of less than Rs 2 crore.

Anil Gupta, vice president-financial sector ratings, Ica said, "As per Ica's estimates, on a pro-forma basis, the GNPA of the banks stood at Rs. 8.7 lakh crore or 8.3 per cent of advances as against the reported GNPA of Rs 7.4 lakh crore (7.1 per cent) as on December 31, 2020. Also, on a pro-forma basis, the Net NPA for the banks stood at Rs. 2.7 lakh crore or 2.7 per cent of advances as against the reported NNPA for all banks of Rs 1.7 lakh crore (1.7 per cent) as on December 31, 2020. Hence in absence of standstill by Hon'ble supreme court, the Gross NPAs for the banks would have been higher by Rs 1.3 lakh crore (1.2 per cent) and Net NPAs would have been higher by Rs one lakh crore (1 per cent).

"As per our estimates, the compounded interest for six month of moratorium across all lenders is estimated at Rs 13,500-14,000 crore."

DIGITAL MAPPING OF INDIA TO BE OVER BY 2024

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 23

The digital mapping initiative by the Survey of India is expected to cover the entire country by 2024. The departmental budget for this in FY21 is Rs 449 crore.

The project by the Survey of India, with support from the Department of Science and Technology (DST) had started in 2019. The entire country will be covered mostly with high resolution satellite imagery and some areas with UAV/drones as per the request of state governments for large-scale mapping. Sol will be covering 31.67 lakh sq km of area, minister of science of technology Harsh Vardhan told the Rajya Sabha.

The high resolution satellite imagery work involves five stages. The fifth round of Final National Topography Data Base has been completed in around 2,324 sq km.

The departmental budget for FY21 is Rs 449 crore. Further, funds have been received from some extra departmental projects.

JLR starts electric journey with ₹1.06 cr I-Pace SUV

With the launch of the Jaguar I-Pace SUV on Tuesday, Jaguar Land Rover, Tata Motors-owned British luxury carmaker, has now entered the electric vehicle, or EV, market in India. With a price tag of Rs 1.06 crore for the base S trim, going up to Rs 1.12 crore at pan-India showroom for the top-end HSE trim, the Jaguar I-Pace will compete against the likes of Mercedes-Benz EQC and the upcoming Porsche Taycan and Audi e-tron in India. **Rohit Suri**, president & managing director at Jaguar Land Rover India spoke with **Michael Gonsalves** on the company's electric plans and challenges in the Indian market.

How significant is the launch of Jaguar I-Pace in India?

Jaguar I-Pace is the first all-electric SUV that we've launched in India and it marks the beginning of our electrification journey. With our electrified products we look forward to playing a significant role in India's electrification drive into the future.

Is the Indian market is

Govt raises PF tax floor to ₹5 lakh

New Delhi, March 23: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday raised the limit for tax exemption on interest earned on provident fund contribution by employees to Rs 5 lakh per annum in specified cases against Rs 2.5 lakh proposed in the Budget.

However, the minister in her reply to discussion on Finance Bill 2021 in the Lok Sabha, said the concession would be available to employees only in cases where his or her employer does not make any contribution to the retirement fund.

The Finance Bill was later passed by the Lower House with 127 amendments by voice vote.

With the passage of the Finance Bill, which contains tax proposals for the next fiscal, the Lok Sabha has completed the budgetary exercise for 2021-22. The Bill is to be taken up by the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

Replying to the debate, she said the proposal for taxing interest income on contributions of more than Rs 2.5 lakh would affect less than 1 per cent of the total number of EPF subscribers.

"I intend to raise this limit to Rs 5 lakh only in those cases, where there is no contribution by the employer in that fund.

"So, most often, it is employee contribution and employer's contribution, but there are contributions which are only employee and no employer contribution is made, in such cases that amount is raised to Rs 5 lakh," she said.

— PTI

Petrol issue can be taken up at GST Council meet: FM

New Delhi, March 23: Amidst an outcry over the high taxes on motor fuel, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said she would be "glad" to discuss the suggestion of bringing petrol and diesel under the ambit of the Goods and Services Tax at the next meeting of the GST Council.

State levies and central excise duty account for more than half of the retail selling prices of petrol and diesel.

For instance, taxes make up for 60 per cent of the present retail price of petrol of Rs 91.17 a litre in Delhi. Excise duty constitutes 36 per cent of the retail price.

Over 53 per cent of the retail selling price of Rs 81.47 a litre for diesel in Delhi is made up of taxes. As much as 39 per cent of the retail price comprises central excise.

Replying to the debate on Finance Bill 2021 in the Lok Sabha, Sitharaman said both the centre as well as state governments levy taxes on petrol and diesel. However, the Centre shares its collection on the fuel with states.

"I would honestly think based on today's discussion, many of the states would be watching this. In the next GST Council (meeting), if that discussion comes up, I'll be glad to have it on the agenda and discuss it. I have no issues. Let the states come and discuss it. The call has to be taken there (at the Council)," the minister said.

The GST Council, headed



Nirmala Sitharaman

by the union finance minister and comprising state finance ministers, is the highest decision making body regarding GST.

Earlier in the day, members from the Opposition benches said high prices of diesel, petrol and LPG were hurting the common man across the country and asked the government to reduce their rates.

Petrol and diesel prices are hovering at historic highs following a relentless increase in rates over the past nine months. There have been calls by Opposition parties as well as sections of society to reduce excise duty to ease common pain.

Supriya Sule (NCP) said excise component in the prices of petrol is close to Rs 38 per litre while state value-added tax (VAT) is about Rs 19 per litre in Delhi. The government should consider slashing this high excise duty, she said. She urged the government to bring down prices of petrol, diesel and LPG cylinder.

Ritesh Pandey (BSP) and Nama Nageswara Rao (TRS) too raised the issue of high prices of petrol and diesel.

— PTI

GOVT CHALLENGES CAIRN ARBITRATION AWARD IN HAGUE



New Delhi, March 23: India is believed to have challenged in a court in The Hague an arbitration tribunal verdict that overturned its demand for Rs 10,247 crore in back taxes from Cairn Energy Plc—the second time in three months that it has refused to accept an international award against retrospective tax.

The appeal was filed on Monday, a source with knowledge of the matter said.

The finance ministry spokesperson did not respond to an e-mail sent for comments.

The appeal against a three-member tribunal at the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague invalidating India's Rs 10,247-crore tax claim on Cairn Energy and ordering the government to return the value of shares it had sold, dividends seized and tax refunds withheld, comes weeks before UK prime minister Boris Johnson's visit to India.

The British prime minister is widely expected to broach the topic of India honouring international arbitration awards during his April 26 visit, another source said.

In December, the government had challenged in a Singapore court an international arbitration tribunal verdict that overturned its demand for Rs 22,100 crore in back taxes from Vodafone Group Plc.

Since the seat of Vodafone arbitration was Singapore, an appeal was filed in a court in that country. In the case of Cairn, the seat was The Hague and so an appeal has been filed in a court in the Netherlands, the first source said.

The tribunal's 582-page detailed verdict asked India to return \$1.2 billion-plus interest and cost to Cairn.

— PTI

States, UTs borrow ₹7.78 L cr from mkt

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 23

With 15 states raising a total of Rs 17,783 crore through auction of government securities on Tuesday, the market borrowings of all states and union territories have touched Rs 7.78 lakh crore this fiscal, 28 per cent higher than last year.

Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand and West Bengal were the main states that participated in the auction of government securities on Tuesday. The borrowing cost witnessed a sharp decline and fell to the lowest level since the end of

August 2020. The weighted average cost of borrowing for the states was 6.21 per cent.

With this, 28 states and two union territories have so far cumulatively raised Rs 7.78 lakh crore via market borrowings in the current fiscal and this is 28 per cent more than the borrowings in the corresponding period of 2019-20 at Rs. 6.07 lakh crore, as per the data from Care Ratings.

The states have collectively utilised 94 per cent of the scheduled market borrowings of Rs 8.24 lakh crore as per the indicative calendar for 2020-21. In 2019-20, the states had raised Rs 6.35 lakh crore.

Olectra deploys 50 e-buses in Goa

FC BUREAU
HYDERABAD, MARCH 23

Olectra Greentech, a leading electric bus manufacturer, has deployed 50 electric buses for public transport in Goa.

Goa chief minister Pramod Sawant on Tuesday flagged off the "Make in India" buses in Tiswadi. The zero-emission, noiseless buses will be operated by the state road transport undertaking, Kadamba Transport Corporation.

According to a release, the company has deployed more than 320 electric buses in various states and has got orders for making another 1,225 electric buses.

The electric buses have features like Monocoque chassis and 48-seat capacity. It has electronically controlled air suspension



at front and rear, disc brakes with ABS at the front and back to ensure a comfortable and safe ride for the passengers.

The buses are equipped with CCTV cameras, emergency button, USB sockets for mobile charging, GPS tracking, among other features.

Olectra electric buses have covered more than four crore kilometres on Indian roads and have reduced CO2 emissions of around 37,000 tonnes and

saved burning of 13.5 million litres of diesel.

Announcing the deployment of the buses, K.V. Pradeep, group director, MEIL (Olectra Greentech), said, "Olectra is proud and thankful to Kadamba for giving the opportunity to operate its world-class electric buses in Goa. Our buses would now contribute to preserving the rich ecology of Goa. Olectra is committed to its efforts to reduce pollution levels through an efficient electric public transport system. We are sure that, like other states, our 50 electric buses will be successful in the Goa state. Our electric buses have already proved their reliability and efficiency as they have been successfully deployed in Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, Hyderabad, Surat, Silvassa, Dehradun and Kerala."

SHORT TAKES

Bottas eyes better show this season

Paris: After finishing even further behind his Mercedes teammate Lewis Hamilton last season, Valtteri Bottas took stock. If he ever wants to really challenge for the Formula One championship, he realized, he needs a stronger mindset. "I've realized that a lot of that is the mental side of things," Bottas said. "I'm trying to be mentally at my best, trying to find the right way of approaching every single Grand Prix weekend, (finding) more of the 'flow' state."

When Nico Rosberg wrestled the F1 title from his then-teammate Hamilton after an intense battle in 2016, he put much of his success down to mental strength. Bottas has not mounted a serious challenge in the same way. Bottas started the past two seasons brightly with victories, only for his challenges to quickly fade as Hamilton imposed his superiority. — AP

Espargaro ready for Honda debut

Doha: The 2021 MotoGP World Championship is about to commence, Pol Espargaro is excited for his first race on the RC213V after a strong test as Stefan Bradl lines up alongside him. Sunday will see the lights go out on the Grand Prix of Qatar and begin another thrilling MotoGP World Championship season. After a difficult 2020, the Repsol Honda Team enter the new season with rejuvenated determination and desire to return to the front. This will be the first of two races at the 5.4-kilometre-long Losail International Circuit, Round Two coming the following week.

A productive test has Espargaro and his side of the garage feeling positive ahead of the first race but has set no expectations for the weekend, wanting to focus on continuing to deepen his understanding of the Honda.

Zlatan returns to Sweden squad

Stockholm: An unusually reserved and humble Zlatan Ibrahimovic had to hold back the tears on Monday as he arrived in Sweden ahead of his return this week to the Swedish national squad after nearly five years away.

Veteran striker Ibrahimovic showed a more sensitive side to his usually brash public persona when he was asked about what his two teenage sons, Maximilian and Vincent, thought of his international comeback. "It's not a good question you're asking. I had Vincent here, who actually cried when left him. But it's OK, it's OK," he said with tears in his eyes. Sweden's most successful player, the AC Milan forward retired from international football with 116 caps and 62 goals for his national team. — AFP

Marseille fans jailed for violence

Marseille: Four people were handed jail terms on Monday and two were cleared on charges stemming from violent incidents outside Ligue 1 football club Marseille's training centre in January. The leaders of two hardcore Marseille fan groups, a secretary who helped the organisation and a fan carrying fireworks, were handed custodial sentences of up to a year in jail. In France a defendant would normally avoid actually going to jail if sentenced to less than two years. The six defendants, including Rachid Zeroual, 50, leader of the South Winners group, and Christophe Bourguignon, the 49-year-old head of the CU84 group, were being prosecuted for "participation in a group formed to plan violence". Three were charged with damage and "violence with the use or threat of a weapon". The accused also include the secretary of the South Winners, a lorry driver and a deliveryman. — AFP

Live on TV

SHOOTING

World Cup: 50m Rifle 3P Men Final from 9:30 am; 25m Pistol Women Final from 11:15 am; 50m Rifle 3P Women Final from 3:30 pm on Sony Six, HD

FOOTBALL

European Qualifiers for 2022 World Cup: Turkey vs The Netherlands from 10.30 pm; Portugal vs Azerbaijan from 11.5 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2; France vs Ukraine from 1.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Six; Belgium vs Wales from 1.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1

EXTRAORDINAIRE

Rookies Krishna, Krunal shine as India begin ODI series with a bang

Pune, March 23: Debutants Krunal Pandya and Prasad Krishna made the big stage their own to give an all-round India a convincing 66-run victory over world champions England in the first ODI of the three-match series here on Tuesday.

After under-fire opener Shikhar Dhawan delivered with a solid 98, Krunal (58 not out off 31) smashed the fastest fifty by a debutant to fire India to 317 for five following England's decision to field.

At 135 for no loss in the 15th over, with Jason Roy (46 off 35) and Jonny Bairstow (94 off 55) going strong, England seemed to be running away with the chase before Krishna (4/54) and Shardul Thakur (3/37) shared seven wickets between them to script a winning comeback.

The 25-year-old Krishna's figures were the best by an Indian debutant as England's innings ended at 251 in 42.1 overs.

Considering the nature of the surface, it was a commendable effort from the Indian bowlers, who carried on from the T20 series to defend gettable targets with remarkable ease.

Krishna, who leaked 37 runs in his first three overs, came back strongly and troubled the batsmen with his ability to generate extra bounce.

Thakur once again provided the breakthroughs when the team needed and senior pro Bhuvneshwar Kumar too chipped in with a couple of wickets towards the end.

England had the game in the bag but were guilty of throwing it away, failing to build on the flier of a start given Bairstow and Roy.

Earlier, Dhawan and Virat Kohli (56 off 60) shared 105 runs for the second wicket before Krunal (58 not out off 31) and K L Rahul (62 not out off 43) sent England on a leather hunt with their unbeaten 112-run stand off 57 balls to take the team



India's Shikhar Dhawan en route to his 98 against England in the first one-day international at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune on Tuesday.

— AFP

SCORECARD

India: Rohit Sharma c Jos Buttler b Stokes 28, Shikhar Dhawan c Morgan b Stokes 98, Virat Kohli c Moeen b Mark Wood 56, Shreyas Iyer c (sub) Livingstone b Mark Wood 6, K.L. Rahul (not out) 62, Hardik Pandya c Bairstow b Stokes 1, Krunal Pandya (not out) 58. Extras (lb-3, w-5) 8. **Total (for 5 wkts, in 50 Overs) 317.**
FoW: 64-1, 169-2, 187-3, 197-4, 205-5.
Bowler: Mark Wood 10-1-75-2, Sam Curran 10-1-48-0, Tom Curran 10-0-63-0, Ben Stokes 8-1-34-3, Adil Rashid 9-0-66-0, Moeen Ali 3-0-28-0.

England: Jason Roy c sub (SA Yadav) b Prasad Krishna 46, Jonny Bairstow c Kuldeep Yadav b Thakur 94, Ben Stokes c sub (Shubman Gill) b Prasad Krishna 1, Eoin Morgan (c) c Rahul b Thakur 22, Jos Buttler lbw b Thakur 2, Sam Billings c Kohli b Prasad Krishna 18, Moeen Ali c Rahul b Kumar 30, Sam Curran c sub (Shubman Gill) b K. Pandya 12, Tom Curran c Kumar b Prasad Krishna 11, Adil Rashid c Rahul b Kumar 0, Mark Wood (not out) 2. Extras (lb 3, w 10) 13. **Total (all out in 42.1 overs) 251.**
FoW: 1-135, 2-137, 3-169, 4-175, 5-176, 6-217, 7-237, 8-239, 9-241, 10-251.
Bowling: Bhuvneshwar Kumar 9-0-30-2, Prasad Krishna 8-1-54-4, Shardul Thakur 6-0-37-3, Krunal Pandya 10-0-59-1, Kuldeep Yadav 9-0-68-0.

● **After under-fire opener Shikhar Dhawan delivered with a solid 98, Krunal Pandya (58 not out off 31 balls) smashed the fastest fifty by a debutant to fire India to a strong 317 for five following England's decision to field after winning toss.**

SECOND | ODI

BANGLADESH BLUNDERS GIFT NZ SERIES WIN

Christchurch (New Zealand), March 23: New Zealand secured a series-clinching five-wicket win in the second one-day international against Bangladesh on Tuesday after a string of fielding errors dashed the tourists' hopes of victory.

Black Caps skipper Tom Latham scored an unbeaten 110 after being dropped twice with New Zealand chasing 272 at Christchurch's Hagley Oval.

New Zealand batsman Jimmy Neesham was also given a life, with the errors undoing Bangladesh's good work in making 271 for six after losing the toss and being put into bat.

Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal was left frustrated after seeing his side come close to a maiden victory on New Zealand soil.

"We should have won this game. We created chances but we just couldn't hold on to those dropped catches," he said. "We hardly ever win games but in this kind of situation we have to make sure that we do everything 100 percent. I'm disappointed."

Tamim top-scored for the tourists with 78 and Mohammad Mithun contributed an unbeaten 73 off 57 balls.

Latham's 110 came off 108 balls and was his fifth ODI century, while Devon Conway's 72 helped anchor the innings.

The Black Caps reached the target after 48.2 overs, finishing on 275 for five to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match ODI series. — AFP

Brief scores: Bangladesh 271/6 in 50 overs (Iqbal 78, Mithun 73 n.o., Santer 2/51) lost to New Zealand 275/5 in 48.2 overs (Latham 110 n.o., Conway 72, Mahedi 2/42).



India's Angad Veer Singh Bajwa (left) and Ganemat Sekhon pose with their gold medals in the skeet mixed team event at the World Cup in New Delhi on Tuesday.

India's gold rush continues at WC

New Delhi, March 23: The gold rush continued for Indian shooters at the ISSF World Cup here as Ganemat Sekhon and Angad Vir Singh Bajwa claimed the skeet mixed team top honours on the fifth competition day here on Tuesday.

The 20-year-old Ganemat and 25-year-old Angad, who had topped the qualification with a score of 141, produced another good show to beat the Kazakh pair of Olga Panarina and Alexandr Yechshenko 33-29 in the gold medal showdown. It was the only final lined up for the day.

With this, table-topper India's gold haul at the ongoing event went up to seven. The hosts have also won four silvers and as many bronze medals for a total of 15 medals so far in the tournament.

Another Indian pair of Parinaaz Dhaliwal and Mairaj Ahmad Khan, however, missed the bronze medal by a whisker at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range on Tuesday.

Qatar's Reem A Sharshani and Rashid Hamad claimed the bronze medal with a score of 32 against the Indian team's 31. The duo had produced a perfect score in the final four shots even as 19-year-old Dhaliwal crumbled under pressure and missed a shot to miss out on a third place finish.

In the gold medal match, the 25-year-old Angad, world no.62, looked in fine form as he produced a

● **Ganemat and Angad produced another good show to beat the Kazakh pair of Olga Panarina and Alexandr Yechshenko 33-29 in the gold medal showdown. It was the only final lined up for the day.**

near-perfect show, missing just one out of his 20 shots even as Ganemat stumbled six times.

It was a nail-biting showdown as India and Kazakhstan were level at 16-16 after the first set of 20 targets.

Ganemat got her act together in the second half, producing perfect next four shots and even though Angad missed one, Olga and Alexander both missed two each to give India a 23-20 lead.

In the final four shots, Angad once again produced a confident performance and even though Ganemat missed her last shot, it didn't matter as the Kazakhs were guilty of missing three.

It was the Ganemat's third medal in the ongoing tournament, having claimed a silver along with Parinaaz. Dhaliwal, Kartiki Singh Shaktawat in the women's skeet final on Monday.

Indian men won the skeet team event, while the women settled for silver. — PTI

India women end series on high

Lucknow, March 23: World number one T20I batswoman Shafali Verma blasted 60 runs off 30 balls after left-arm spinner Rajeshwari Gayakwad's fine bowling display to power India to a consolation nine-wicket win over South Africa in the third and final match here on Tuesday.

Gayakwad picked up three wickets for just nine runs to help India restrict South Africa Women to 112 for 7 and then Verma and captain Smriti Mandhana (48 not out off 28 balls) shared 96 runs for the opening wicket to canter to an easy win with nine overs to spare.

Shafali hit seven fours and five sixes during his blistering knock while Mandhana had nine boundaries in his unbeaten innings.

SHARJEEL HAPPY TO BE BACK IN PAK COLOURS

Karachi, March 23: Pakistan opener Sharjeel Khan said Tuesday he was delighted with the welcome he had been given since being recalled to the national squad after completing a lengthy ban for spot-fixing.

The 31-year-old was banned in 2017 for five years — with half the sentence suspended — for his part in rigging Pakistan Super League (PSL) matches in the United Arab Emirates.

Although illegal in Pakistan, gambling on cricket is widespread with punters betting on specific outcomes during the game — such as the number of no-balls or wides bowled in a particular over.

This gives individual players the opportunity to "spot-fix" — influencing the lucrative betting market without, supposedly, affecting the overall outcome of the match. — AFP

SHAFALI REGAINS TOP SPOT IN T20 RANKINGS

Dubai, March 23: Big-hitting teenage Indian batter Shafali Verma rose a rung to reclaim the top spot in the ICC women's T20 rankings, riding on her fine performances in the ongoing series against South Africa at home.

The 17-year-old, who grabbed the top position for the first time after helping her side reach the knockout phase of the T20 World Cup last year in Australia, has leapfrogged Australia's Beth Mooney with scores of 23 and 47.

The Indian team, however, has conceded a decisive 0-2 lead to the visitors in the three-match series. South Africa opener Lizelle Lee is another one to gain in the rankings even though the big-hitting opener lost her top spot in the ODI rankings within a week of replacing England's Tammy Beaumont, the ICC said in a statement. — PTI

SA Women clinched the three-match T20I series 2-1, having won the first two matches.

Chasing 113 for victory,

the 17-year old Shafali went on a rampage from the word go by picking up 18 runs (3 fours and a six) off the first over bowled

by Shabnim Ismail. She smashed three more sixes in the next three overs, including two off Nadine de Klerk's second over.

The South Africa bowlers came in for severe punishment from Shafali as she produced a wide array of shots during her audacious hitting show.

Nondumiso Shangase ended the young Indian opener's knock by having her caught by Ismail in the deep in the ninth over. But by then, the match was as good as over in India's favour.

Mandhana showed her class by producing the final flourish, taking India to 114/1 in 11 overs. **Brief Scores: South Africa 112/7 in 20 overs (Sune Luus 28; Rajeshwari Gayakwad 3/9) lost to India 114/1 in 11 overs (Shafali Verma 60, Smriti Mandhana 48 not out).**

Cornwall blasts WI back into contention

North Sound (Antigua & Barbuda), March 23: Rahkeem Cornwall blasted a maiden Test half-century and dominated an eighth-wicket partnership of 90 with Joshua da Silva to lift the West Indies to 268 for eight in their first innings, a lead of 99 runs, at the close of the second day of the first Test at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium on Monday.

Outstanding seam bowling by Suranga Lakmal, who claimed his fourth five-wicket innings haul in 64 Tests, had restricted the home side to 171 for seven just after tea in reply to the tourists' modest first-day effort of 169.

However the burly Cornwall, selected pri-



West Indies' Rahkeem Cornwall celebrates his half century against Sri Lanka in North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda, on Monday.

— AFP

marily for his off-spin bowling but also well-known for his powerful hitting in the domestic game, joined wicket-keeper-batsman da Silva in first resisting the best efforts of the Sri Lankan bowlers before opening into an array of expansive

strokes upon the arrival of the second new ball.

His unbeaten 60 has come of 79 balls with two sixes and nine fours embellishing an entertaining innings. — AFP

Brief scores: Sri Lanka 169 in 69.4 overs vs West Indies 268/8 in 101 overs (Cornwall 61, Lakmal 5/47).



Los Angeles Clippers guard Luke Kennard (right) shoots as Atlanta Hawks centre Clint Capela defends during an NBA basketball game in Los Angeles on Monday.

— AP

'Perfect' Kennard clips flying Hawks

Los Angeles, March 23: Luke Kennard conjured a perfect shooting display and Terance Mann added 21 from the bench as the Los Angeles Clippers overturned a 22-point deficit to end the Atlanta Hawks eight-game winning streak on Monday.

Kennard went eight-from-eight and made four three-pointers to take the Clippers — who had trailed 88-66 with four minutes remaining in the third quarter — to a 119-110 win at the Staples Center.

Kennard's 20-point haul came from just over 18 second-half minutes as coach Ty Lue sent on the bench in a desperate bid to turn the tide with Atlanta romping towards a blowout victory.

Mann was another vital contributor from the bench, hauling down 10

rebounds in addition to his 21 points.

"It's heart — that was all heart," Kennard said afterwards.

"Just staying ready. Guys have been staying ready throughout this entire year. We just needed to bring a little boost to the floor, a little energy, and that's what we did. That was a hard-fought win. We showed a lot of heart and guts," he added.

Atlanta, chasing a ninth straight win, had exploded for 34 points in the second quarter to open up a 63-48 lead at half-time.

They retained that healthy lead until the arrival of the Clippers bench swung momentum in the closing stages of the third period and final quarter, with the home side ending on a 53-22 run.

— AFP