

SHORT TAKES

SC lawyer mowed down by car, accused arrested

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 30

A 31-year-old Supreme Court lawyer was mowed down by a car in North Delhi's Civil Lines area on Holi. Police said that they have arrested the accused. The deceased has been identified as Aditya Chanakya Boxipatro, a permanent resident of Odisha, who was practising in Supreme Court. Police said that the accused has been identified as 67 year-old Preeti Gupta, a resident of Bengali market. According to a senior police official, at about 3:15 PM on March 29, a police control room (PCR) call regarding the accident was received following which a police team was dispatched for the spot. "The accident happened on a Royal Enfield bike and a Toyota Glanza had occurred in front of the Meridian hotel gate in the civil lines area. The bike was being driven by Aditya who was taken to Parmanand hospital in Civil Lines where he died during the treatment," said the senior police official. "A post mortem was conducted and the body was handed over to family members on Tuesday morning. A case under relevant sections of Indian Penal Code (IPC) has been registered at Civil Lines police station and the vehicle has also been seized," said police.

Over 3,400 challans for traffic violations

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 30

More than 3,400 challans were issued for various traffic violations on Holi, including 100 against those engaged in drunken driving, while 730 people were fined for not wearing a face mask, police said on Tuesday. Two accidents took place this year as compared to 23 last year and 28 in 2019, they said. "Several traffic police teams were deployed to check violations across the city. Due to awareness campaigns and the strict presence of police on the ground, there was better compliance observed by the general public this year," an official said. Police said 3,446 challans were issued this year on Holi, which was celebrated on Monday, for various traffic-related violations as compared to 4,918 challans last year and 16,556 challans in 2019, the police said. According to police data, out of the 3,446 challans issued, 1,255 challans were against those found riding without a helmet, 170 for triple riding, 100 for drunken driving, 121 for dangerous driving and 1,800 for other traffic violations. Out of the 4,918 challans issued last year, 964 were for riding without a helmet, 180 for triple riding, 726 for drunken driving, 150 for dangerous driving and 2,898 for other traffic violations.

Man hangs self after killing wife

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 30

A 25-year-old man allegedly hanged himself after his killing his wife inside a farmhouse in north Delhi's Alipur area, police said on Tuesday. The incident took place on Monday around 2 pm, they said. According to police, Mithilesh, who worked as a security guard there, used to live in the servant quarters. A quarrel took place between Mithilesh and his wife Monika after playing Holi. The couple were later found dead inside their room around 6 pm, police said. Mithilesh and his wife Monika (22), hailed from Samastipur in Bihar. Mithilesh suspected his wife having an extramarital affair. While they were fighting, two of their relatives intervened and told Mithilesh, who was drunk at that time, not to fight with Monika. Later, they left from there, a senior police officer said. Around 6 pm, they found Mithilesh hanging from the fan and Monika lying on the ground, police said. During probe, police said they suspect the woman was beaten to death with a lathi that was found in the room. The man then hanged himself with a rope, the officer said. Further investigation is underway, police added.

Switch Delhi: EV awareness campaign enters final week

Focus on sensitising youth on benefits of e-vehicles

New Delhi, March 30: The final week of the Switch Delhi EV (electric vehicle) awareness campaign will focus on sensitising the youth of Delhi on the benefits of e-vehicles and the city government's EV policy, an official statement said on Tuesday.

Calling Delhi's EV policy the "most progressive policy around the globe", transport minister Kailash Gahlot said the campaign, which has entered its eighth and final week, was aimed at sensitising, informing and encouraging Delhi's youth to adopt electric vehicles.

"The youth of Delhi can play a huge role in making the EV movement in Delhi a mass movement.

"They can drive change and be the torchbearers of this movement. The Delhi

▶ **AN AVERAGE** electric two-wheeler provides a lifetime savings of 1.98 tonnes of carbon emissions as compared to an average petrol two-wheeler which is equivalent to planting 11 trees, Delhi transport minister Kailash Gahlot said

government will engage with the youth via the Switch Delhi campaign to motivate them to adopt EVs and contribute to a cleaner and greener Delhi," the minister said.

Appealing to the youth of the city to pledge that the first vehicle they purchase would be an electric one, he said they must "come forward and own the ongoing EV movement in Delhi".

Gahlot also noted the range of financial and

non-financial incentives offered under Delhi's EV policy.

"By switching to electric two-wheelers, which have very low operating costs, an individual can make an annual saving of approximately ₹22,000 as compared to using a petrol scooter and ₹20,000 as compared to a petrol bike," the minister said.

An average electric two-wheeler provides a lifetime savings of 1.98 tonnes of carbon emissions as compared to an average petrol two-wheeler which is equivalent to planting 11 trees, he added. Switch Delhi is a mass awareness campaign by the city government to sensitise every Delhiite about the benefits of switching to EVs.

— PTI



Visitors at the India Gate during a cloudy and dusty weather in New Delhi on Tuesday. A yellowish haze enveloped Delhi on Tuesday as strong dust-raising winds, gusting up to 40 kilometres per hour, swept the city.

— PTI

IRFC bonds raise ₹1,375cr from domestic market

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 30

The Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC), the dedicated financing arm of the Indian Railways, on Friday raised ₹1,375 crore through issuance of domestic bonds. The fund has been raised at 6.80 percent coupon rate with 20-year maturity which is about 18 basis points lower than the benchmark par yield Government security as per yesterday's close in CCIL.

This is one of the rare occasions when a top-rated government issuer has pierced the sovereign curve in the domestic market with such a huge margin. This shows the confidence reposed by the large debt investors in the country for IRFC papers scotching the speculations in certain quarters about rising cost and heightened risk perception post IPO and dilution of Government stake.

"The bond issuance

received a very good response from the investors comprising long term / ultra-long-term investors including primarily the provident funds. The issue was oversubscribed by six times as compared to the base issue size of ₹500 crore," said a company statement.

The company has decided to retain a sum of ₹1375 crore, based on the borrowing target mandated by the ministry of railways for the current fiscal, it further said.

With the current issuance, the cumulative fund raising through 20-year bond issuance in the domestic capital market during the current fiscal has touched around ₹13,970 crore. The corporate bonds in the domestic market are liquid for tenure up to 10 years. Such large issuances by IRFC has deepened the corporate bond market for long / ultra-long tenors and has set a new benchmark yield curve for pricing similar issuances in the future.

22-yr-old man arrested for killing chartered accountant

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 30

A 22-year-old man was arrested for allegedly killing a chartered accountant in northwest Delhi's Adarsh Nagar during a suspected robbery bid, police said on Tuesday.

Jai Kumar Singh, who has been previously involved in nine other criminal cases, was arrested from Sarai Rohilla on Sunday, they said.

Anil Aggarwal and his wife Anju visited their under-construction house in Adarsh Nagar after morning walk on March 16. When they were standing on the ground floor, the accused wearing a helmet came inside the house and fired at Anil Aggarwal before fleeing from the spot on his scooter.

The victim suffered a bullet injury near his neck and was declared brought dead by doctors at the hospital.

Man wanted in armed robbery case arrested

New Delhi, March 30: A man wanted in a case of armed robbery of ₹14.95 lakh was arrested by a team of Delhi Police's Special Cell, officials said on Tuesday.

The accused, Dinesh (44), is a member of KP Fauzi and Hitender alias Chhotu gang. He was wanted in connection with robbing a cash collection agent in

Shahdara last year. The bike-borne accused and his five associates had waylaid and robbed one Naveen of ₹14.95 lakh at gunpoint while the victim was on his way to deposit the money in a bank located in Laxmi Nagar, police said.

The accused was arrested on March 27 from Vivek Vihar flyover near ISBT Anand Vihar.

— PTI

■ City records 992 coronavirus cases in 24 hrs, positivity rate 2.70 %

ICU beds for Covid-19 patients full in 14 pvt hospitals in Delhi

New Delhi, March 30: Fourteen private hospitals in Delhi have run out of ICU beds for Covid-19 patients amid a resurgence in daily cases in the national capital, government data showed on Tuesday.

Of the 787 ICU beds with ventilators in government-run and private hospitals, 278 were already occupied by 6 PM on Tuesday, according to the city government's "Delhi Corona" application.

Also, 379 of the 1,229 Covid-19 ICU beds without ventilators are full.

Shree Agarsain International Hospital (15 ICU beds) and Jaipur Golden Hospital (6) in Rohini, and Max SS Hospital (5) and Fortis Hospital (5) in Shalimar Bagh are among the private hospitals where not a single ICU bed with ventilator is vacant.

All ICU beds with ventilators were also full in Venkateshwar Hospital in Dwarka, Indian Spinal Injury Centre in Vasant Kunj and Maharaja Agrasen Hospital in Punjabi Bagh by 6 PM.

Indraprastha Apollo Hospital (24) in Sarita Vihar, Balaji Action Medical Hospital (21) in Paschim Vihar, Maharaja Agrasen Hospital in Punjabi Bagh and Max Super Speciality Hospital in Shalimar Bagh have all their ICU beds without ventilators occupied, the data showed.

According to the Health



A health worker takes a sample from a sadhu for Covid-19 test at Shri Harihar Udasin Ashram in New Delhi on Tuesday.

— PTI

Bulletin issued on Tuesday, 1,584 of the total 5,784 hospital beds reserved for Covid-19 patients in Delhi are occupied.

Earlier in the day, health minister Satyendar Jain said there were enough ICU beds available in government-run hospitals. "All ICU beds in a few private hospitals are occupied. The number will be increased soon," he told reporters.

Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal announced on Tuesday that the number of beds reserved for Covid-19 patients is being increased at a few hospitals in view of the surge in Covid-19 cases in the national capital.

"In view of Covid situation developing in Del, no. of normal and ICU beds

reserved for Covid is being increased in a few hospitals. This will improve bed availability. We r keeping close watch and will take all steps necessary. There is nothing to worry. But pl follow all precautions," Kejriwal tweeted.

Delhi reported 992 fresh Covid-19 cases on Tuesday with a positivity rate of 2.70 per cent, while four more persons succumbed to the pathogen, the health department said.

Officials said the low number of cases can be attributed to fewer tests conducted on Monday on account of Holi.

The city had recorded 1,904 cases on Monday, the highest in around three-and-a-half months. Delhi had recorded 1,881 fresh cases on Sunday, 1,558 on Saturday, 1,534 on Friday,

1,515 on Thursday, 1,254 on Wednesday and 1,101 on Tuesday — the first time since December 24 that the number of cases crossed the 1,000 mark.

The positivity rate was 2.77 per cent on Monday, 2.35 per cent on Sunday, 1.70 per cent on Saturday, 1.80 per cent on Friday, 1.69 per cent on Thursday, 1.52 per cent on Wednesday and 1.31 per cent on Tuesday.

Delhi's caseload stood at over 6.25 lakh on January 1 and the total fatalities were 10,557.

The number of daily cases had started to come down in February. On February 26, the month's highest daily count of 256 cases was recorded.

However, daily cases started rising again in March and have been steadily increasing over the past few days.

Last week, Jain had ruled out the possibility of another lockdown being imposed in Delhi, saying it was not a solution to check the spread of coronavirus.

Health experts and doctors have attributed this "sudden rise" in cases to people turning complacent, not following Covid-appropriate behaviour and "assuming all is well now".

The next two-three months could be challenging, they said, adding that the situation can be kept under control if vaccination is opened up for more people and Covid-19 protocols are strictly adhered to.

— PTI

IMPORTANT NOTICE

It is notified for the information of all concerned that in reference to the advertisement published on 27.03.2021 in newspapers regarding NTPC Exam Special Trains No. 03297/03298 between Patna-Anand Vihar T., Railways have decided to revise the dates of running of the trains as per details:-

REVISED DAYS OF RUN OF 03297/03298 PATNA-ANAND VIHAR (T)-PATNA EXAM SPECIAL EXPRESS TRAIN (VIA GAYA) FULLY RESERVED

Train No.	From - To	Announced Days	Revised Days
03297	Patna - Anand Vihar (T.)	30.03.2021 to 07.04.2021	01.04.2021 to 07.04.2021
03298	Anand Vihar (T.) - Patna	31.03.2021 to 08.04.2021	02.04.2021 to 08.04.2021

For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table of stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., must be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

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CANCELLATION OF TRAINS

It is notified for the information of passengers that due to operational reasons, following Special Trains will remain cancelled on the dates shown against each :-

CANCELLATION OF TRAINS	
Train No. & Train Name	Date from originating station
05483 Alipurduar Jn - Delhi Jn. Express Special	01.04.2021 to 30.04.2021
05484 Delhi Jn. - Alipurduar Jn Express Special	03.04.2021 to 02.05.2021
05074 Tanakpur - Singrauli Triveni Express Special (Via Bareilly & Lucknow)	02.04.2021 to 16.04.2021
05073 Singrauli - Tanakpur Triveni Express Special (Via Lucknow & Bareilly)	03.04.2021 to 17.04.2021
05076 Tanakpur - Shaktinagar Triveni Express Special (Via Bareilly, Hardoi & Lucknow)	01.04.2021 to 15.04.2021
05075 Shaktinagar - Tanakpur Triveni Express Special (Via Lucknow, Hardoi & Bareilly)	02.04.2021 to 16.04.2021

Note: All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., must be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

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SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

SHORT TAKES

EC: New EVMs will be used in coming polls

Chennai: The Election Commission on Tuesday informed the Madras High Court that it would use only new Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), manufactured three to four years ago, for the April 6 Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu. Following the submission, the court disposed of a petition from the DMK on the matter. The EC's submission was made in its counter-affidavit filed before the first bench of Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy when the PIL from DMK Organising secretary R.S. Bharathy came up for further hearing today. In response to DMK's plea to not to use EVMs which are beyond the expiry of 15 years, the EC agreed to use only M3-EVMs, manufactured between 2017-2019. On another plea of the DMK for provision of jammers, the EC submitted that the same are not required as the strong rooms, where the loaded EVMs will be stored after polling, cannot be tampered with by wifi, radio waves or by any other methods. — PTI

Battle lines drawn for Pipili bypolls

Bhubaneswar: With candidates of all the three major political parties in Odisha filing their nomination papers for the forthcoming Pipili assembly bypolls, the battle lines are drawn in the constituency to grab honour. The outcome of the battle, though will have little impact on the existence of the Naveen Patnaik government that has been in power in the state for 21 years now, it will have far-reaching consequences for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress who want to come to power in the state. Both the BJP and Congress are making their last-ditch efforts to win the seat to further their future in state politics. The ruling BJD has fielded Rudra Pratap Maharathy, son of incumbent lawmaker Pradeep Maharathy who passed away in October 2020, ostensibly to cash in on the sympathy factor.

Couple seeks divorce over settling in India

Bhopal: A couple here have filed divorce suit in a family court here following dispute over shifting to India from USA. The family court is trying to save their 4-year-old marriage by conducting counseling sessions for them. Both husband and wife have been absorbed in a multinational company in New York and have a son. According to a counselor of the family court, the husband came to India in January 2020 and stayed put in his house in Bhopal following the pandemic induced lockdown then. However, during his stay at home, he could realise his responsibility towards his old parents and decided to settle down here to look after his parents.

'WON'T WITHDRAW STIR TILL FARM LAWS REPEALED'

Banga: The umbrella body of the farmer unions protesting the Centre's farm laws held a rally to mark Shaheed Diwas here on Tuesday and said they will not withdraw their stir till the legislations are repealed. March 23 is observed as "Shaheed Diwas" to pay tributes Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru, who were hanged on this day for killing British police officer J.P. Saunders. The farmers' gathering was earlier to be held at Khatkar Kalan, the ancestral village of Bhagat Singh, but the venue was shifted to Dana Mandi at Banga because of inclement weather. The programme was attended by several Punjabi singers. Several Samyukta Kisan Morcha leaders who addressed the gathering reiterated that nothing short of repeal of the farm laws would make them withdraw their agitation. They are prepared for a long agitation, the farmer leaders said. Addressing the gathering, Punjabi singer Babbu Maan urged the Centre to repeal the laws. Maan appealed to farmers' organisations across the country to unite under one banner to save their interests. — PTI

■ Bhattacharjee: Singur, Nandigram conspirators throwing muck at each other 'TMC, BJP brought Bengal to ruin'

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, MAR. 30

Former West Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has called for votes to the Sangjukta Morcha against the ruling Trinamul Congress and BJP in an audio clip released by the CPI(M), on Tuesday, to galvanise its rank and file on the eve of the second phase of the Assembly elections in the state.

"Dear citizens of Bengal, the Assembly polls have been underway. All of us understand this is a juncture in the politics of this state. In the previous polls we set our slogan-Agriculture is our base, Industry is our future. We progressed on that thought. Like success came in agriculture, industry saw expansion," Mr Bhattacharjee said in his plea.

He added, "But the TMC has created a dangerous situation after the ouster of the Left Front from power in the state. In the last 10 years, no mention-worthy industry has come up. The silence of the graveyard has engulfed Nandigram and Singur. While anarchy prevails in education, the health system has collapsed."

Mr Bhattacharjee said the TMC's autocratic rule on one hand and the BJP's politics of divide and religious polarisation on the other have

The conspirators of that cunning drama are divided today and slinging mud at each other. The environment of communal amity, which was the pride of Bengal, has been turned poisonous.

— Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, CPI(M) stalwart

brought the state to ruins.

The former two-time CM also warned the voters about the dangers of a communal Bharatiya Janata Party in a statement issued by his party a day before.

"The conspirators of that cunning drama are divided today and slinging mud at each other. The environment of communal amity, which was the pride of Bengal, has been turned poisonous. On one hand you have the despotic Trinamul while on the other the Bharatiya Janata Party's destructive and capitalistic economic policy, its divisive politics, and communal polarisation, behind which there is the dangerous ideology of the RSS. The result is the destruction of this state," he said.

According to Mr Bhattacharjee, the dreams of the youth have been shattered.



An artist makes sweet-idols of PM Narendra Modi, West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee and other leaders at a sweets shop, ahead of Assembly polls in Howrah, Tuesday,

Probe finds TMC's allegation against Central forces 'false'

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 30

An internal probe conducted by paramilitary forces, like CRPF, BSF and SSB, which are deployed for Bengal elections, has revealed that "there was no concrete evidence to suggest that Central forces tried to influence or pressurised public to vote for a particular political party or candidate." Sources said a close watch is being kept on the conduct of Central forces deployed in Bengal to ensure they remain impartial during the poll

process. TMC has alleged that Central forces were trying to help BJP.

During the first phase of polling, TMC had alleged that at a number of polling centres, the paramilitary forces were asking people to vote for the BJP. TMC also claimed that paramilitary forces from BJP ruled states like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh were being deliberately sent to Bengal to help BJP.

Following this, Central forces including BSF, CRPF and SSB, which have been deployed in large number in Bengal

Assembly polls, initiated an internal probe and even discussed the issue with the EC. "We are committed to an impartial election under the overall supervision of the Election Commission. So we conducted a detailed internal inquiry but did not find any evidence to substantiate allegations levelled by different political parties. Security forces deployed in Bengal elections have been diverted from a number of states and not just the BJP ruled states. So this allegation is wrong," a senior CRPF official added.

PM slams Cong-DMK for 'anti-women' mindset

Modi dubs former Union telecom minister A. Raja as 'outdated 2G missile'

Dharapuram (TN), March 30: In a veiled attack, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday dubbed former union telecom minister A Raja, an 'outdated 2G missile' of the Congress and DMK that targeted Tamil Nadu women and slammed the opposition parties for their 'anti-women' mindset.

In his first poll rally for the April 6 Assembly polls, PM Modi rooted for the Tamil language, culture and invoked the welfare legacies of M.G. Ramachandran and J. Jayalalitha, late chief ministers and AIADMK icons.

He underscored the importance of farm sector reform and his government's support to Micro Small and Medium Enterprises.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, during his recent campaigns in the state, had attacked PM on farm laws, weakening MSMEs through initiatives like the GST and 'disrespecting' Tamil culture.

The PM alleged it was part of Congress-DMK culture to insult women and targeted the Trinamool Congress, the Congress and Left parties for their 'anti-women' mindset vis-vis the death of Shova Majumdar, moth-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a public meeting as part of election campaign of their NDA candidates for Tamil Nadu Assembly polls at Dharapuram in Tiruppur district on Tuesday.

er of a BJP worker in Bengal.

He said while the NDA's agenda is development,

the Congress and DMK have their own 'dynasty agenda,' had nothing positive to offer and all they did was to 'demean' others and spread 'lies.'

Without naming Raja, Modi said Congress and DMK have launched their 'outdated 2G missile' and this missile has one clear target, the women of Tamil Nadu.

Congress and DMK have insulted the respected mother of Tamil Nadu chief minister K. Palaniswami, he alleged.

"God forbid, if they come to power, they will insult many other women of Tamil Nadu," the prime minister said. — PTI

■ Former Kerala MP apologises for his derogatory remarks 'Rahul unmarried trouble-maker'

AGE CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 30

The offensive remarks made by former LDF MP Joice George against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in connection with the latter's frequent interaction with college girls evoked widespread condemnation and sharp reaction from the Congress.

With the issue snowballing into a major controversy, Mr George was forced to apologise and withdraw the offensive remarks.

At an election meeting in support of power minister and senior CPM leader M. M. Mani, who is contesting from Udumbanchola constituency in Idukki district, the former MP said,

Priyanka targets LDF govt for failing to provide jobs to youth

AGE CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 30

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi on Tuesday hit out at the CPM led LDF government for failing to meet the aspirations of the people of the state during its five year rule.

Ms Gandhi who began her campaign in the state on Tuesday addressed a series of meetings in Thiruvananthapuram,



Kollam and Alappuzha districts in support of UDF candidate. She said Gandhi the LDF government had failed to provide 20 lakh jobs after coming to power. She said the LDF had sold off the fishermen interests for ₹5000 crore to a US company while referring to the MoU signed by the government for deep sea trawling & ship building.

"Rahul Gandhi only visits women's colleges. Therefore, girls should be

cautious while dealing with the Congress leader. Rahul Gandhi is a bache-

lor and is a troublemaker. So, the girls should be wary of him."

He was indirectly referring to an event held at St Teresa's College in Kochi recently in which the Congress MP gave a demonstration of the principle of resistance and empowerment in Aikido, a martial art form. He also made the students perform the exercise on the stage.

Chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan distanced himself from the comments made by Mr George. He said the LDF (Left Democratic Front) would oppose him politically and not at a personal level.

With the CM disapproving his remarks and the issue snowballing into a major controversy, Mr George tendered an unconditional apology.

Shivraj slams Nath, accuses him of leading corrupt govt

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, MARCH 30

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, on Tuesday, launched a scathing attack on his predecessor and senior Congress leader Kamal Nath, saying that the latter had turned the state secretariat into a den of racketeers when he headed the government in MP.

Launching a campaign for Rahul Singh, the BJP candidate for Damoh Assembly constituency—the by-election to which was scheduled to be held on April 17—Mr Chouhan alleged that his predecessor was running a corrupt government ignoring the interest of the state. "Mr Nath had no time

CAA an attack on Assam's culture, history, says Rahul

Guwahati, March 30: The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is an attack on the language, history and culture of Assam and the Congress will not allow it to be implemented, party leader Rahul Gandhi said in a video message on Tuesday.

Mr Gandhi posted the video message for the people of the Northeastern state as he was unable to attend his scheduled election-related programmes due to heavy rains.

The Congress-led Grand Alliance, if voted to power, will fulfil the five guarantees it has given to the people of the state, he said.

"The first guarantee is we will not allow CAA to be implemented. It is an attack on Assam, your language, history, your tradition and culture," Gandhi said in his video message.

The objective of the CAA is to grant Indian citizenship to people of minority communities Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi and Christian of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, who had come to India till December 31, 2014 due to religious persecution in these countries.

The state witnessed violent protests against the CAA in 2019 and five persons lost their lives. The protesters saw the law as a threat to their cultural identity and livelihood.

The other four guarantees are five lakh government jobs in five years, increasing the daily minimum wage of tea garden

workers to ₹365, 200 units of free electricity per month for all, and ₹2,000 per month for every homemaker, Mr Gandhi said.

He alleged that the hill tribes people are under attack from the BJP as the saffron party seeks to scrap Article 244A of the Constitution.

Article 244A deals with formation of an autonomous state comprising certain tribal areas in Assam and creation of local legislature or council of ministers or both. The Congress leader was scheduled to address a poll rally each at Haflong in Dima Hasao hill district and Bokajan in Karbi Anglong hill district, besides an interactive session with women at Silchar.

"Due to bad weather, I was unable to reach you today. But my and the Grand Alliance message is clear - we will take Assam to the path of progress and prosperity with the five guarantees," he said in the video message posted on his official Twitter handle. — PTI

Campaigning for second phase ends in Assam

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, MARCH 30

The high-decibel electioneering for the second phase of Assembly elections in Assam came to an end on Tuesday which will decide the fate of 345 candidates including 26 women in fray for the 39 Assembly constituencies that will go to polls on Thursday.

There are three main alliances this time including the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance with partners Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the United

People's Party Liberal (UPPL) and Mahajot or Grand Alliance led by the Congress. It includes All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), Bodoland Peoples' Front (BPF) and the Left parties while yet another conglomerate of Asom Jatiya Party (AJP) and Rajior Dal is also in the fray.

The ruling BJP has fielded 34 candidates, Congress has 28, AJP-19, AIUDF seven, AGP six and BPF has four while 176 independents and others are also trying their luck.

MP BYELECTION



S.S Chouhan Kamal Nath

even to meet the MLAs of his party when he was the chief minister. The MLAs had later given a befitting reply to him by dislodging him from power," Mr Chouhan said.

He was referring to the resignation of the 22 Congress MLAs from the Assembly as well as the party in March last year to pull down the 15-month-old Kamal Nath government.

They were loyalists of Jyotiraditya Scindia, who

also quit Congress and joined BJP then.

State BJP president V. D. Sharma called Mr Nath an ex-accidental chief minister and said the latter did not even know the names of many MLAs and leaders of Congress.

BJP candidate Rahul Singh, on Tuesday, filed his nomination for Damoh seat in the presence of the chief minister and state party president.

The by-election to Damoh Assembly constituency was necessitated following the resignation of then Congress MLA Rahul Singh from the Assembly four months ago.

Mr Singh later quit Congress and joined BJP. He has been nominated by BJP to contest the by-elections to Damoh.

Government approves issuance of electoral bonds from April 1-10

New Delhi, March 30: Amidst Assembly elections in four states and a Union territory, the government on Tuesday approved issuance of the 16th tranche of electoral bonds which will be open for sale from April 1 to 10. Electoral bonds have been pitched as an alternative to cash donations made to political parties as part of efforts to bring transparency in political funding. However, Opposition parties have been rais-

ing concerns about alleged opaqueness in funding through such bonds.

The ECI has accorded 'no objection' from the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) angle on March 17 with certain conditions, including that no political functionary would make any reference in this regard during any public speech or communication to the press or public in the constituencies going for polls, the finance ministry said in a state-

ment. "The SBI, in the XVI Phase of sale, has been authorised to issue and encash electoral bonds through its 29 authorised branches w.e.f. 01.04.2021 to 10.04.2021," it said.

The 29 specified SBI branches are in cities such as Kolkata, Guwahati, Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram, Patna, New Delhi, Chandigarh, Shimla, Srinagar, Dehradun, Gandhinagar, Bhopal, Raipur, Mumbai, and Lucknow. — PTI

UNIDENTIFIED DEAD BODY

General Public is hereby informed that one female Namely: Unknown W/o: Unknown, Address: Unknown was found dead on road side, Street No. 2, Shradhdhanand Park, Bhalswa Dairy, Delhi on 22.03.2021 in the area of P.S. Bhalswa Dairy, Delhi. In this regard a case has been lodged vide DD No. 126A U/s 174A Cr. P.C. dated 22.03.2021 at P.S. Bhalswa Dairy, Delhi. The description of the dead female is as under:- Age: 65 years, Sex: Female, Height: 5', Complexion: Shallow, Built: Medium, ID Mark: A tattoo mark on right hand, Wearing: Colourful saree. If any one having any information about this dead female please inform undersigned.

SHO
P.S. Bhalswa Dairy, Delhi
Ph: 011-27811933, 7065036328
DP/915/ON/2021

TENDER NOTICE

The High Commission for Pakistan New Delhi invites sealed bids from reputable and registered firms for the Repair of boundary wall of the High Commission.

All eligible contractors may submit their sealed bids with prices and specification at the address below by 19 April 2021 till 1430 hrs.

Bids will be opened on 19 April 2021 at 1500 hrs, in the presence of all the bidders/contractors.

The High Commission reserves the right to accord contract depending upon the bid quoted for each item & also reserve the right to reject any bid with no liability to contractors/bidders under Public Procurement Rules 2004 available at www.ppra.org.pk/Rules.asp.

Interested parties can obtain Bidding documents/complete details about the requirement from the following address:

Ghazanfar Bashir,
Third Secretary (Finance & Accounts)
High Commission for Pakistan,
2/50-G, Shantigaah, Chanakyaapuri,
New Delhi - 110021
(Ph: 011-26889186, Fax: 011-26872339)
Mob 9971437312 | Email: acv1234@gmail.com
Email: pakncv@gmail.com

TENDER NOTICE

The High Commission for Pakistan New Delhi invites sealed bids from reputable and registered firms for the replacement of Electric transformer of the High Commission.

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Mob 9971437312 | Email: acv1234@gmail.com
Email: pakncv@gmail.com

SHORT TAKES

9 kids die in 2 fire incidents in Bihar

Araria/Bhagalpur, Bihar: Nine children have been charred to death in two separate incidents of fire in Araria and Bhagalpur districts of Bihar, officials said on Tuesday. Six children were burnt alive in Kavaiya village of Palasi police station area of Araria in the afternoon, deputy superintendent of police Ejaz Hafiz said. The deceased included two girls aged four and six years while the remaining were boys in the age group of four to five years, he said. The kids belonged to families living in the same locality and they had got trapped inside a hut made of straw when it accidentally caught fire, the deputy SP said. In Bhagalpur, three siblings were charred to death while their parents sustained serious burn injuries when their house caught fire Monday night. — PTI

'Pak mulling India trade resumption'

New Delhi: Pakistan is strongly considering resumption of bilateral trade with India, including sugar and cotton imports from New Delhi, sources confirmed. A note on sugar and cotton imports from India is expected to be presented before the Pakistani Cabinet soon for consideration, sources indicated. Pakistan had suspended bilateral trade with India in August, 2019, after India revoked Article 370 pertaining to Jammu and Kashmir. This is the latest indication of improved ties between the two neighbours.

India hands over 1L vaccines to Fiji

New Delhi: Despite a resurgence of Covid cases at home and the ongoing massive domestic vaccination exercise, India continues to assist small and vulnerable countries in providing the Covid vaccines to them. Earlier on Monday, India handed over one lakh Covishield vaccine doses to the tiny pacific nation of Fiji which has a large population of Indian origin too. The Indian high commission in Fiji said the vaccine doses were provided under grant assistance (free of cost) as a special gesture of friendship and solidarity with the people of Fiji.

'Record BJP win in Nandigram to usher change'

■ **Continued from Page 1**
the scenario of women's safety when a woman is raped in your presence within a radius of 5 km? A few days ago, a BJP worker's aged mother was brutally assaulted. She succumbed to her injuries on Monday. Still Mamata Didi talks about women's safety. People of the state know this contradiction very well."

He claimed: "The whole of Bengal does not want infiltration. It wants the refugees to be given citizenship through the Citizenship Amendment Act, industries to flourish here for development, employment to the youth, world class education to the children, existence of global infrastructure, Kolkata to be a global city and the rejuvenation of Bengali culture and its expansion nationally and internationally."

Meanwhile, in an interview to PTI, West Bengal BJP chief Dilip Ghosh said it was not necessary that only a sitting MLA would become the chief minister, as he exuded confidence that his party would form the next government, saying there was a "strong undercurrent" for the BJP that has now come to the surface in West Bengal.

Mr Ghosh, a sitting MP, said the momentum "in favour" of the BJP will continue till the last phase. "After the first phase of polling only the BJP is confident of its victory, whereas the TMC and its leaders are frustrated. As the election will progress, the trend set by the BJP in the first phase will gain momentum and with every phase of polling TMC workers will themselves realise their defeat," Mr Ghosh told PTI.

The BJP has fielded four sitting MPs, but Mr Ghosh is not among them.

To a query on whether a sitting MLA will become the chief minister if the BJP wins, Mr Ghosh said: "It is for the party to decide but it is not necessary that a sitting MLA will become the CM."

Durable peace contingent to resolve Kashmir row: Imran

Responds to Modi's letter sent a week ago, thanks him for Pak National Day greeting

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 30

Pakistan is "convinced that durable peace and stability in South Asia is contingent upon resolving all outstanding issues between India and Pakistan", in particular the Kashmir issue, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has told Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a letter. Pakistan desires "peaceful, cooperative relations with all neighbours, including India", he added. The "creation of an enabling environment is imperative for a constructive and result-oriented dialogue", the

Pak desires peaceful, cooperative relations with all neighbours, including India. The creation of an enabling environment is imperative for a constructive and result-oriented dialogue.

— Imran Khan,
Pakistan Prime Minister



Pakistan PM added. The letter dated March 29 was a reply to Prime Minister Modi's letter a week ago to wish his counterpart on the occasion of Pakistan National Day on March 23, in which he had India wanted cordial relations with its neighbour but that for this, an environment of trust devoid of

terror and hostility was imperative.

The developments come in the wake of a sudden perceptible improvement in Indo-Pak ties in the past five weeks following implementation of the ceasefire on the LoC by both countries.

The developments further highlight a tangible

thaw in ties between the two nuclear-armed neighbours who have seen ties go from bad to worse in the past five years.

The Pakistan PM thanked PM Modi for greeting him on Pakistan National Day which he said was a day for his country's people to pay tributes to Pakistan's founding fathers for envisioning a nation where the Pakistani people could "live in freedom".

Mr Khan also conveyed his best wishes to India in the fight against the Covid pandemic. PM Modi had earlier wished his counterpart a speedy recovery after Mr. Khan was down with Covid last week.



Commuters rush to board a suburban train at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus station prior to the night curfew in Mumbai on Tuesday, amid spike in cases across the country.

— PTI

NIA seizes luxury car registered in Waze name

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, MARCH 30

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Tuesday seized a high-end car apparently registered in the name of arrested Mumbai Police officer Sachin Waze from Navi Mumbai. The probe team had been looking for this Mitsubishi Outlander SUV for the last several days.

According to sources, the car was parked in Kamothe area of Navi Mumbai around 15 days

ago. It was discovered after locals informed the police about the abandoned car.

Meanwhile, a special court in the city on Tuesday extended NIA custody of convicted police constable Vinayak Shinde and a bookie Naresh Gaur till April 7. Both the persons have been arrested in connection with Mansukh Hiren's murder case. Hiren was the caretaker of the car, which was found stuffed with explosives near industrialist Mukesh

HC to hear Param Bir's plea today

Mumbai: The Bombay high court would hear on Wednesday the PIL filed by former Mumbai police chief Param Bir Singh seeking a CBI probe against Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh. Mr Singh has claimed that Mr Deshmukh asked police

officer Sachin Waze to collect ₹100 crore from bars and restaurants.

The chief justice of Bombay high court Dipankar Datta agreed to hear this petition on Wednesday after Mr Singh's lawyer Vikram Nankani mentioned the matter before him.

Ambani's residence. His body was found in the Mumbra creek in Thane

on March 5. Seeking 10 days additional custody, NIA prosecutor

had argued that Waze and former policeman Shinde were present at the meeting where Hiren's murder was planned. He also informed the court that Waze had used a mobile phone to contact the "conspirator".

The agency also informed special judge P.R. Sitre that it was close to unravelling the conspiracy and the motive behind the crime.

According to the police, a team of NIA officers went to Kamothe area and recovered the SUV.

18 arrested for attack on cops during Holi in Maha

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, MARCH 30

The police has arrested 18 people for the violence and an attack on policemen at Nanded in Maharashtra. They have also registered a case against 410 people for attempting to take out a "Hola Mohalla" procession outside Sachkhand Gurdwara without permission.

According to the police, an FIR has been registered under IPC sections for attempt to murder, causing grievous hurt and rioting. The situation around the gurdwara in

Nanded is tense but under control at present.

On Monday, several hundred Sikhs gathered at the gurdwara for "Hola Mohalla" despite being denied permission by the police. When the police tried to disperse the crowd in a bid to maintain social distancing, the crowd became violent and attacked them.

The Sikh community in Nanded takes out the procession every year on the occasion of Holi. However, this year the police denied them permission due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Need to calibrate vaccine supplies keeping in mind domestic needs: FS

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 30

India "will need to calibrate" its external supplies of Indian-manufactured Covid vaccines keeping in mind its domestic production and domestic needs, foreign secretary (FS) Harsh Vardhan Shringla said on Tuesday, adding that "there is every expectation that the two current (Indian) manufacturers will rapidly expand their manufacturing capacities to cater to the increasing domestic and external demand". Speaking at



Shringla

a thinktank event, he also said "the number of vaccine doses shared with our partner countries so far is the same as the number we ourselves have used in our domestic immunisation programme".

The FS said, "The number of vaccine doses shared with our partner countries so far is about the same as the number we ourselves have used in our domestic immunisation programme. The

resurgence of COVID-19 cases has highlighted the need for an accelerated vaccination programme in our country, and from 1st April, we will be extending this facility to all our citizens above the age of 45 years. Naturally, we will need to calibrate our external supplies keeping in mind our domestic production and domestic needs."

He added, "There is every expectation that the two current manufacturers will rapidly expand their manufacturing capacities."

Manipur lifts order to deny aid for refugees

■ **Continued from Page 1**
pro-democracy movement in Myanmar had then asked why "one of the greatest democracies in the world" sent a representative to "shake hands with the generals whose hands are soaked with our blood".

Myanmar's ambassador to the United Nations, who is supporting the government-in-exile and has broken off with the military junta, has appealed to all border states in India to provide shelter to all those fleeing Myanmar while reminding them: "The two countries have a long history, let's never forget that."

The situation along the international border with Myanmar in Manipur and Mizoram still remains very fluid, amid reports that a large number of people are continuing to cross over into India for shelter.

active Covid-19 cases are Pune, Mumbai, Nagpur, Thane, Nashik, Aurangabad, Bengaluru Urban, Nanded, Delhi and Ahmednagar. Eight of the top 10 districts with active cases are in Maharashtra," Mr Bhsuhan said. Maharashtra has 3.37 lakh active cases.

He added that Punjab too is reporting high cases and it is neither doing adequate number of tests, nor is it isolating infected people properly, and Karnataka too needs to improve testing and isolation. Schools and colleges have been shut till April 10 in Punjab and chief minister Amarinder Singh has ordered intensifying of vaccination drive. Similarly, Delhi, taken as one district, is among the top 10 Covid-19 high-burden districts in India. The Centre has written to states and UTs asking them to focus on district-level action to curb the surge in Covid infection. Meanwhile, Uttarakhand has said that from April 1, travellers from Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Haryana, UP, Delhi and Rajasthan need to carry negative RT-PCR test report.

Covid-19 situation going from bad to worse: Govt

■ **Continued from Page 1**
eliminated. We want to emphasise that without contact tracing, quarantining, isolation etc, we cannot contain the virus," said Dr Paul. He added states have been told to enforce Covid-appropriate behavior, including the use of masks and increased testing and tracking of patients. "Use the law, use fine as an option... people need to wear a mask," he said.

Already the Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has issued a circular saying passengers not adhering to Covid-19 safety protocols should be fined at airports. "Our fight against Covid-19 continues. Advisory issued to all airports to ensure compliance of Covid-19 protocol. People must wear face masks (covering nose and mouth) and maintain social distance. We are moving in the direction of punitive action by police against passengers who do not comply," Union civil aviation minister Hardeep Singh Puri tweeted.

Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan said states reporting higher cases are neither testing enough nor isolating infected persons in time. "The top 10 districts in India with

■ Jaishankar stresses on 'double peace' for nation

'Situation in Afghan still cause for grave concern'

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 30

External affairs minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar on Tuesday said that "for durable peace in Afghanistan, what we need is a genuine 'double peace', that is, peace within in Afghanistan and peace around Afghanistan" that "requires harmonising the interests of all, both within and around that country". He was speaking at the ninth Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia — Istanbul Process (HoA-IP) on Afghanistan at Dushanbe, Tajikistan. The HoA-IP was launched in 2011 to encourage security, political and economic cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbours and assist the war-ravaged nation. Afghanistan is geographically considered the "Heart of Asia".

In a blunt assessment of the reality, the EAM said, "The situation in Afghanistan continues to give cause for grave concern. Violence and bloodshed are daily realities and the conflict itself has shown little sign of abatement, whatever may be the promises. The last few months have also witnessed an escalation in targeted killings of civil society. The year 2020 sadly marked a 45 per cent increase in civilian casualties in Afghanistan over 2019. 2021 does not look very much better."

Pointing out that "collective success may not be easy but the alternative is only collective failure", the EAM said that the "continued involvement of foreign fighters in Afghanistan is particularly disturbing. Heart of Asia members and supporting countries should, therefore, make it a priority to press for an immediate reduction in violence leading to a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire". He added that "India welcomes any move towards a genuine political settlement and a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire in Afghanistan".

India has been "supportive of all the efforts being made to accelerate the dialogue between the Afghan

No meet scheduled with Pak mantri at conference

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 30

No meeting was scheduled on Tuesday between external affairs minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar and his Pakistan counterpart, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, on the sidelines of the ninth Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia — Istanbul Process (HoA-IP) on Afghanistan at Dushanbe, Tajikistan,

despite much speculation in the past few days. Mr Qureshi had told the Pakistani media earlier that no meeting with Mr Jaishankar had been either requested for by Pakistan or finalised.

EAM Jaishankar, meanwhile, met other dignitaries on the sidelines, including the Tajik defence minister and Kazakh foreign minister. He also called on the Tajik President.

government and the Taliban, including intra-Afghan negotiations" but that "if the peace process is to be successful, then it is necessary to ensure that the negotiating parties continue to engage in good faith, with a serious commitment towards reaching a political solution", the EAM further suggested.

Observers see New Delhi's suggestion of "harmonising interests" outside Afghanistan too as a veiled suggestion towards Pakistan which is seen as the main backer of the Taliban.

"A notable gain of the last two decades is the democratic framework under which elections were held through universal suffrage," Mr Jaishankar said.

126 judges transferred in J&K & Ladakh in major rejig

Jammu, March 30: In a major reshuffle in subordinate judiciary, the Jammu and Kashmir high court on Tuesday transferred 126 civil judges including special judges of anti-corruption courts in both Jammu and Srinagar.

The court also appointed presiding officers of 27 vacant courts, Justice Juvenile Boards (JJBs) and District Legal Service Authorities in different districts of J&K and Ladakh.

The order, issued by the high court's registrar general Jawad Ahmad, said the transfers and posting of judicial officers were made in the interest of administration.

Those transferred included 60 district judges and 66 munsiffs' across J&K besides a few in the Union Territory of Ladakh which also falls under the jurisdiction of the J&K high court.

The order said the transferee judges would ensure that all matters pending for judgments or part heard, are completed and judgments and orders are pronounced in such matters before they move to new positions. — PTI

Locals not to blame for injuries: Didi

■ **Continued from Page 1**
locals responsible for her injuries in the past few days of the campaign. The injured CM, helped by some TMC leaders, was later seen rising from her wheelchair briefly to show her respect for the national anthem at the dais of her party rally.

Seeing their firebrand leader back on her feet, the TMC workers erupted in jubilation. Soon after Ms Banerjee's campaign ended, TMC workers clashed with some BJP cadres in the area.

On the leak of the audio clip, which recorded her plea to Mr Pal to work for her victory, the Trinamul Congress chief angrily said: "I had some information that the person concerned wanted to talk to me. I have every right to have that conversation as a candidate. What he did was a criminal offence. I am not at fault. I will not forgive those who backstabbed us here in Nandigram. I will continue to have such conversations whenever I feel like."

On a day when Union

home minister Amit Shah led roadshows for her nemesis Suwendu Adhikari in Nandigram and predicted his victory, Ms Banerjee, to drive a wedge within the BJP, argued: "Mukul Roy is a better element than Suwendu, not as harmful. At least that is what I feel. If they are happy where they are, my best wishes are with them."

The chief minister however faced "Jai Shri Ram" slogans shouted by BJP workers twice during her roadshows and rallies throughout the day.

LDF deceived people of Kerala, says Modi

■ **Continued from Page 1**
votes for 11 BJP candidates contesting from the district, including Metroman E. Sreedharan, who is in the fray from Palakkad constituency. "The BJP would offer a vision to Kerala which would be different. Metroman Sreedharanji, a man who has done excellent work to make modern India and improve connec-

tivity, a man admired by all sections of society, has devoted himself to Kerala's progress," he added.

The Prime Minister came down heavily on the CPM over politics of violence. He said despite being in power for so long, some junior level leaders behave like anti-social elements. Political rivals are killed

with their blessings. He said if the BJP came to power it would bring an end to the saga of political violence. "Differences in political sphere are normal. But killing the opponents in the name of ideology is not acceptable. So many of our young BJP karyakartas have lost their lives," he reminded the gathering.

THE ASIAN AGE

31 MARCH 2021

Let not Covid 2nd wave destroy economy again

The spike in the daily numbers of new Covid-19 infections across the country is truly alarming and it reminds us of the period when the pandemic had peaked last year. The country has seen a steady surge in new cases for the past couple of weeks and the active cases at present are 5,40,720, which is little over half of the September 18 peak of 1,017,754. When Tuesday's new infections of 56,211 are added, India's total Covid-19 caseload has risen to 1,20,95,855. The death toll has reached 1,62,114, or 1.34 per cent of total confirmed infections.

While the infection killed lakhs across the globe, it paralysed the economy and threw many millions out of their jobs and into abject penury. Governments had to announce several special economic packages to bring them back to life; and India was no exception. And the worst affected were the people at the lowest strata of the economic pyramid. The fate of lakhs of guest workers who had to walk back home hundreds of miles away was an experience no one would like to see repeated. From economic to social and psychological breakdown, the micro-organism has sowed seeds of disquiet in societies and families.

The sad part is that we as a people are still at the mercy of the virus despite an expansion of our knowledge base to fight it and the discovery of vaccines. There are treatment protocols that help save lives. There have been research findings that elaborate on the virus activity in the human body once it enters it. We are much better equipped to fight the infection and we now know the consequences which we had not known last year. But still, there is no stopping the virus and its effects.

The Union government has, on its part, speeded up the vaccination programme, and has rectified the technical glitches in the software; at present, one crore people can register for the jab in one day. There are still logistical issues to be addressed and coupled with vaccine hesitancy, they drag down the vaccination programme which aims at inoculating 30 crore people by June this year. The number now stands at 6.5 crore after two-and-a-half months.

The worsening of the pandemic situation could force another national lockdown which the economy, and the nation, can ill-afford. The government and the people must realise it and return to the strict adherence of Covid-appropriate protocols and behaviour.

Some of the developed countries have added "meetings outdoors" to the standard prescription of social distancing, mask wearing and washing of hands. This means group functions will no longer be allowed in closed environs. This measure could help avoid gatherings turning into super spreader events.

The government must consider introducing this idea here too. It must also relaunch the awareness campaign on the Covid-19 protocols and direct the state governments to enforce them. The people have been lax in following them, and the governments have been equally lax in enforcing them. This combined neglect will land the nation in deeper trouble. There will be no justification for that, should it happen.

Suez lesson proves costly

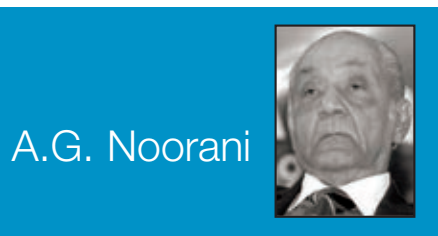
Proof of Murphy's Law could not have come in a worse scenario than in the Suez Canal being blocked by the skyscraper-sized, 2,24,000-tonne container ship *Ever Given*, which is as long as the Empire State Building is tall. As \$9 billion of daily trade was blocked for a week in terms of goods in transit, from crude oil to cattle, nature's helping hand came to the rescue as an unusually high tide followed a full moon. How helpless man was for days as tugs, sand dredgers and various other salvage equipment battled on to refloat a symbol of man's ambition in making things bigger and bigger in order to benefit from economies of scale, which, in this case, includes environmental benefits too in terms of carbon footprint.

The all-Indian crew of the Japan-owned, Panama-flagged giant ship will be among those eagerly awaiting the result of a blame game that will probably be resolved at the end of a thorough probe of what went wrong, how and why. Human error is not ruled out either as the ship was gathering speed to 13 knots on an uneven course in the channel. The explanation that the stacked-up containers could have acted as a huge sail to gusts from dust storms not uncommon to the area may seem logical enough. For all the high fees in hundreds of thousands of dollars, including costs of pilots, to use the canal to save 5,000 km on Europe-Asia journeys Suez Canal pilots, the responsibility of steering is solely that of the ship's captain.

The Suez Canal, completed in 1869, has saved uncountable time and money in cutting global shipping costs and today 13 per cent of maritime trade moves through the crucial waterway. An occasional tanker getting grounded used to be solved with the simple principle of tugging it out but a catastrophe of this size had never been envisaged. This serves up the elementary lesson that bigger is not necessarily better as man is still vulnerable to nature's random acts as much as his vehicles are subject to the laws of locomotion.

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A.G. Noorani

India in Nato? Is New Delhi ready for such a major shift?

WHILE it is not fair to impute motives to a writer, one cannot help wondering if he is flying a kite, especially given his background. A. Wess Mitchell was US assistant secretary of state for Europe and Eurasia from 2007-2019 and co-chair of the Nato 2020 Reflection Process. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, headquartered in Brussels, has long been in a reflective mood regarding its own fatuous irrelevance. That did not inhibit him from writing recently in an Indian publication: "When the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) leaders meet later this spring, they will debate the recommendations from a group of experts [which Mr Mitchell co-chaired] that advocates, among other things, extending a formal offer of partnership to India. Such an idea has been discussed before but has always foundered on India's aversion to entanglement in rival geopolitical blocs. It's time to overcome this obstacle. "China's meteoric rise has dramatically heightened India's need

for closer security relationships with politically reliable, like-minded states. ... Beijing is increasingly willing to depart from its hide-and-bide strategy to directly challenge even the largest of its neighbours." China's military spending is three times that of India. India's policy of equidistance, with tilts towards Russia and China, is not viable enough to meet the juggernaut of China's power. Hence its moves for ties with the United States, Japan and Australia in the "Quad". Now for the moth-eaten carnet: "While Nato partnerships do not carry the Article 5 guarantee of collective defence against armed attack, they nevertheless come with regular defence dialogues, military-to-military planning and joint exercises that improve readiness, interoperability and predictability. In the event of a conflict, India would benefit from having prior planning and arrangements in place for cooperating with Nato and its Mediterranean partners...." Nato has spread a web of partners, namely Egypt, Israel, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland and Finland.

Now comes the crunch. "However, the obstacles to partnership are not only on the Indian side; in the past, some Nato allies have effectively blocked discussion of the matter insisting that any offer of partnership to India be accompanied by similar invitations to Pakistan. This may have seemed attractive to some in the era when Nato militaries were mainly focused on conducting operations in Afghanistan. But with the winding down of operations there, Nato has little in common with a Pakistan that is increasingly radicalised at home and aligned with, and beholden to, China. "... The Nato leadership should extend to India an offer of opening partnership talks. Doing so would signal that it is seriously evaluating all of its tools, including partnerships, according to how well they equip its members for dealing with a new era of great-power competition...." "In this emerging competition, India is a vital player in its own right and should be treated as such. But Indians should be under no illu-

sions that a truly nonaligned path remains a viable option." Nonalignment is a worn-out misnomer. India's non-alignment did not prevent its first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru from seeking covertly — behind the back of India's ambassador Asaf Ali — a written alliance with the United States in 1948. Note that the Nato partnership is shorn of guarantee of help in Article 5 of the Nato Treaty of 1949, which reads: "The parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all; and consequently, they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the party or parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force...." This is a worthless guarantee as its prime architect, US secretary of

state Dean Acheson, had said. He told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: "This naturally does not mean that the United States would automatically be at war if one of the other signatory nations were the victim of an armed attack. Under the treaty we would be bound to make an honest judgment as to what action was necessary to attain that end and consequently to take such action. That action might or might not include the use of armed force." As Charles De Gaulle remarked, treaties, like roses and pretty girls, last only as long as they last. How did Pakistan's pacts with the United States help, in its moments of crisis in the 1965 and 1971 wars? Treaties are concluded in the national interest purely. Help is extended in the same spirit. In 1962, it took the US long to support India's case on the border and even that was confined to the McMahon Line; not the Aksai Chin in Ladakh. India has unwisely let skirmishes on an undefined border ratchet its dialogue and diplomacy.

By arrangement with Dawn

Subhani



Weak Britain reluctant to confront aggressive China

Sunanda K. Datta-Ray
Reflections

British history books claim that before the First Opium War against Manchu China in 1839, the Chinese hoped there would be a lot of "talk-tee before fight-tee-fight-tee". This time around, it is the British who seek discussions and negotiations before the war of words over China's alleged human rights abuses spills over into action. The United States also drew back when similar arguments erupted with China. One reason was that China held \$3,399.9 billion of the American Treasury's foreign exchange reserves. Another factor was the calculation that the American cost of living would shoot up without access to cheap Chinese footwear, clothing, electricals and household goods.

No wonder British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy skirted around the subject of China. The 100-page review even hinted that Russia was Britain's most serious threat and the reason for acquiring high-tech drones and the expensive paraphernalia of cyber warfare and satellites to control space while increasing the stockpile of nuclear warheads by 40 per cent. No wonder Britain's response was limited to grieving rhetoric when Beijing imposed sanctions on five ruling Conservative Party MPs, two peers, a barrister and an academic. They can no longer travel to China, and any assets they there will be frozen. "Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike/ Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike", as in Alexander Pope's poem, Mr Johnson "noted that China has chosen to sanction individuals and entities that are

while improving our ability to respond to the systemic challenge that it poses," the review says.

A showdown seemed imminent when British foreign secretary Dominic Raab told the House of Commons that British businesses should not profit from what he called the "industrial scale" forced labour of Uighurs. However, Mr Raab tactfully refrained from mentioning sanctions on Chinese Communist Party officials allegedly involved in human rights abuses. The omission confused listeners because the government had earlier indicated sanctions under a law modelled on the US Global Magnitsky Act. Mr Raab's explanation that the possibility of sanctions was being kept "in reserve" did not satisfy Sir Iain Duncan Smith, a former Conservative Party leader who supports sanctions. He asked in Parliament who in the government might be blocking Mr Raab from following through with the planned measures.

Whoever was responsible, the reversal exposed the inconsistency of official British thinking about China. The UK government's last white paper on China was published in 2009, before the CCP became aggressively authoritarian after Xi Jinping assumed power in 2012. The softer tone of Mr Raab's speech also reflected Mr Johnson's desire to keep his options open as the UK assumes the G-7's annually rotating presidency and prepares to host the next climate change conference in Glasgow later this year, reaches out to the Indo-Pacific destiny that the review eulogises, and

seeks economic and strategic alternatives to EU membership. He cannot be anxious to provoke a China that has recently imposed punishing tariffs on Australian imports of everything from wine to timber and coal, in retaliation for Canberra's calls for an investigation into the origins of Covid-19. Chinese investments in Britain, assessed at £8.63 billion, represent a 12.5 per cent year on year increase. Chinese investment in London real estate rose from £2.69 billion in 2016 to £3.69 billion in 2017. Bilateral trade totalled £80 billion (roughly \$110 billion) in 2019.

Chinese companies play a vital role in British infrastructure. The state-owned China General Nuclear Power Group holds a one-third stake in the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station, a £20-billion project being built in south-western England. Last year, Chinese steelmaker Jingye Group paid about £50 million to acquire British Steel. Other Chinese firms have large stakes in British offshore oil fields, as well as transport networks and utilities. Ramping up criticism of Beijing not only risks deterring future Chinese investment but could undermine British businesses in China. Hence the review's diplomatic claim: "We will pursue deeper engagement in the Indo-Pacific in support of shared prosperity and regional stability, with stronger diplomatic and trading ties ... This approach recognises the importance of powers in the region such as China, India and Japan and also extends to others including South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines."

With their acute sense of history, the Chinese know that they have little to fear. European writers and politicians have spoken down the centuries of "La Perfidie Albion", or Perfidious Albion.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

LETTERS

HINDUTVA'S FAILURE

Ideologies do need to be driven centrally, but modern-day governance is effective only when node based. If the RSS represents the former, the BJP is an example of the latter. Did not the Congress go into decline when it closed its eyes to regional undercurrents? But in reverting to the primacy of regional leadership, it reaped electoral dividends in Punjab. Today the BJP is seen increasingly riding on central dominance and the personality cult. The RSS, which has all along been averse to personalities overriding ideology, could be apprehensive lest, in time, the BJP loses its grip over nuances specific to states. But does the BJP have that grip in the first place?

R. Narayanan
Mumbai

TEESTA IS THE KEY

THIS REFERS to the editorial, "Good start in Bangla, but Teesta is credibility test" (March 29). The first foreign visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi amid the Covid-19 pandemic to Bangladesh indicates India's firm support to the government of Sheikh Hasina. But the Teesta water-sharing fiasco has certainly been a major foreign policy failure. The government must be constantly mindful of the significance of this factor to its overall relationship with Bangladesh. If Delhi fails to deliver on Teesta, India will lose the trust of a reliable neighbour.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

NO LOCKDOWN?

THE SECOND WAVE of the Covid-19 assault is a matter of serious concern for the government as well as citizens. While many states have restricted the number of guests at weddings and other functions, there is no such embargo on the huge numbers at political rallies. These are attended by thousands and are clearly super-spreaders. Why such dichotomy? Also, why did the Modi government, which has such huge support among the masses, shy away from imposing a strict one-day lockdown, like last year's "janata curfew", during Holi? The chickens will come home to roost.

Bhaskar Roy
New Delhi

SHORT TAKES

SOUTH DAKOTA
FIRES: 400
HOMES VACATED

South Dakota, March 30: Three separate wildfires in the Black Hills of South Dakota have forced evacuations of more than 400 homes northwest of Rapid City and shut down Mount Rushmore.

A fire that started near Schroeder Road in the Nemo area, about 24 kilometres northwest of Rapid City, had burned as much as 11/2 square miles and was "still moving" on Monday afternoon, according to the Pennington County Sheriff's Office. Several out-buildings and possibly two homes have been destroyed.

PIO NOMINATED
DC DISTRICT
COURT JUDGE

Washington, March 30: US President Joe Biden on Tuesday announced his intent to nominate Indian-American Rupa Ranga Puttagunta as a federal judge, among 10 other diverse picks for top judicial positions which include African-American and Muslim American candidates.

Among the presidential nominations, 10 are for Federal Circuit and District Court judge posts, and one is for Superior Court Judge for the District of Columbia. These highly-qualified candidates reflect the president's deeply-held conviction that the federal bench should reflect the full diversity of the American people — both in background and in professional experience, the White House said. If confirmed by the US Senate, Judge Puttagunta would be the first Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) woman to serve on the US District Court for the District of DC, the White House said.

Judge Puttagunta currently serves as an Administrative Judge for the D.C. Rental Housing Commission. Prior to joining the Commission in 2019, Judge Puttagunta was a solo practitioner from 2013 to 2019, representing indigent criminal defendants in trial and on appeal. Before opening her own practice, Judge Puttagunta practised family and appellate law at Delaney McKinney, LLP from 2012 to 2013.

Judge Puttagunta also provided hundreds of hours of pro bono legal services by volunteering at D.C. Superior Court's Family Court Self-Help Center and Attorney Negotiator Programme and representing victims of domestic violence in D.C. Superior Court. She began her legal career as a law clerk for Judge William M. Jackson of the D.C. Superior Court from 2008 to 2010, as well as the Senior Judges of the D.C. Court of Appeals from 2010 to 2011.

I WITNESSED A
MURDER: FLOYD
CASE WITNESS

Minneapolis, March 30: A man who was among the onlookers shouting at a Minneapolis police officer to get off George Floyd last May testified Tuesday that he called 911 after paramedics took Floyd away, "because I believed I witnessed a murder."

Donald Williams, a former wrestler who said he was trained in mixed martial arts, including chokeholds, returned to the witness stand a day after describing seeing Floyd struggle for air and his eyes roll back into his head. He said he watched Floyd "slowly fade away ... like a fish in a bag."

Prosecutor Matthew Frank played back Williams' 911 call, on which he is heard identifying officer Derek Chauvin by his badge number and telling the dispatcher that Chauvin had been keeping his knee on Floyd's neck despite warnings that Floyd's life was in danger. She offers to switch him to a sergeant. As he is being switched, Williams can be heard yelling at the officers, "Y'all is murderers, bro!"

On Monday, Williams said he thought Chauvin used a shimmie motion several times to increase the pressure on Floyd. He said he yelled to the officer that he was cutting off Floyd's blood supply. Williams recalled that Floyd's voice grew thicker as his breathing became more laboured, and he eventually stopped moving.

Williams was among the first prosecution witnesses as Chauvin, 45, went on trial on charges of murder and manslaughter in Floyd's death.

The death of the PoC man after he was held down by the white officer touched off sometimes-violent protests around the world and a reckoning over racism and police brutality. Prosecutors led off their case by playing part of the harrowing bystander video of Floyd's arrest.

90% US adults to be eligible
for vaccine by April 19: Biden

Urges state authorities to make mask-wearing obligatory in public places

Washington, March 30: President Joe Biden has announced that 90 per cent of the adults in the US would be eligible for Covid-19 vaccination by April 19 and the rest 10 per cent no later than May 1. Biden also urged state authorities to once again to make mask-wearing obligatory in public places to combat the disease as the "war is far from won".

Biden's announcement on the vaccination schedule came on a day when the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Dr Rochelle Walensky warned that the US faces "impending doom" as Coronavirus cases and hospital admissions rise across America, the worst-hit by the pandemic.

The US has recorded around 60,000 new cases daily for the past week, a rise of around 7 per cent. The US has reported more than 30,331,000 confirmed cases and over 550,000 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University Covid-19 tracker.

The vaccination drive under the Biden administration has been going in at an unprecedented pace. As many as 100 million shots have been administered in less than 60 days of his administration and they are now moving on to the next 100 million shots in just 40 days.

"I'm pleased to announce that at least 90 per cent of all adults in this country will be eligible to be vaccinated by April the 19th, just three weeks from now, because we have the vaccines," Biden told reporters at the White House on Monday. "For the vast, vast majority of adults, you won't have to wait until May 1. You'll be eligible for your shot on April 19th. Finally, the final 10 per cent will be eligible no later than May 1," he said.

"Due to the steps we're taking today, 90 per cent of Americans will be within five miles of a location where they can get a shot as of April the 19th."

"The progress we're making is a significant testament to what we can do when we work together as Americans. But as I've always said, we still need everyone to do their part. We still are in a war with this deadly virus. And we're bolstering our defenses, but this war is far from won," Biden said.

According to Biden, the progress on vaccination is a stunning example that there is nothing this country cannot do if "we put their minds to it".

Biden said just 10 weeks after he became the president, nearly 75 per cent of Americans over the age of 65 had received at least one vaccination shot.

"When I took office on January 20th, that number was 8 per cent. It's going to 75 per cent," he said.

— PTI



A Spanish police officer checks PCR Coronavirus test results of motorists willing to enter Spain at the border between France and Spain in Le Perthus, on Tuesday, amid the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

— AFP

CDC warns of virus rebound

Washington, March 30: President Joe Biden and a top health official warned that too many Americans are declaring virus victory too quickly, appealing for mask requirements and other restrictions to be maintained or restored to stave off a fourth surge of Covid-19. The head of the CDC said she had a feeling of impending doom if people keep easing off.

The double dose of warnings on Monday came even

as Biden laid out hopeful new steps to expand Coronavirus vaccinations, with all adults to become eligible over the next five weeks. Biden announced plans to expand the number of retail pharmacies that are administering vaccines, and investments to help Americans get to vaccination sites. But the optimism was tempered by stark warnings about the potential for another wave of cases.

This is deadly serious,

Biden said, urging governors to reinstate mask mandates and other restrictions that some states have been easing.

Hours earlier, during a virtual White House health briefing, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, grew emotional as she reflected on her experience treating Covid-19 patients who are alone at the end of their lives. "We have so much to look forward to, so much

promise and potential of where we are and so much reason for hope," she said. "But right now, I'm scared. I'm going to lose the script, and I'm going to reflect on the recurring feeling I have of impending doom." Cases of the virus are up about 10% over the past week from the previous week, to about 60,000 cases per day, with both hospitalisations and deaths ticking up as well, Walensky said.

— AP

VIETNAM FLIGHT
ATTENDANT GETS
2 YRS FOR SLIP

Hanoi, March 30: A Vietnamese court on Tuesday sentenced a flight attendant to two years probation for violating Covid-19 quarantine rules and spreading the virus to others, becoming the first person in the country to stand trial for such offences, state media said.

Duong Tan Hau, 29, was found guilty of the charges for leaving his home during a mandatory home quarantine routine after he returned from a trip to Japan while working for the national carrier Vietnam Airlines, *Vietnam News Agency* reported.

The newspaper said Hau frequently met a friend, who is a teacher, went to a cafe and attended an exam at an English centre in Ho Chi Minh city before he tested positive for the virus toward the end of his scheduled quarantine period last November.

— AP

Leaders call for
pandemic treaty

London, March 30: More than 20 heads of government and global agencies on Tuesday called for an international treaty for pandemic preparedness that they say will protect future generations.

But there are few details to explain how such an agreement might actually force countries to act more cooperatively. World Health Organisation Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and leaders, including Boris Johnson of Britain, Mario Draghi of Italy and Paul Kagame of Rwanda, called for a renewed collective commitment to reinforce the world's pandemic preparedness and response systems, that would be rooted in the UN health agency's constitution. "We are convinced that it is our responsibility, as leaders of nations and international institu-

tions, to ensure that the world learns the lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic," the authors wrote in a commentary that was published Tuesday. Although they called for solidarity, and greater societal commitment, there was no indication any country would soon change its own approach to responding to the pandemic.

Last week, Tedros pleaded with rich countries to immediately donate 10 million Covid-19 vaccines so that immunisation campaigns could start in all countries within the first 100 days of the year. Not a single country has yet publicly offered to share its vaccines immediately. Of the more than 459 million vaccines administered globally, the majority have been in just 10 countries and 28 per cent in just one.

— AP

PAK MIN JUMPS
QUEUE, GETS KIN
VACCINATED

Islamabad, March 30: A federal minister in Pakistan found himself in hot waters on Tuesday after video clips showing his family getting shots of Coronavirus vaccine surfaced online, creating a stir as netizens accused him of "jumping the queue" and demanded an apology from him.

The clips showed a nurse giving vaccine jabs to family members of Minister for Housing Tariq Bashir Cheema, which seems to be a clear violation of government policy regarding Covid-19 vaccination. Cheema belongs to the Pakistan Muslim League Quaid (PML-Q), which is an ally of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI). Pakistan's vaccination drive began on Feb. 2 starting with frontline workers followed by health workers and people over 60 years.

— PTI

Crackdown in
Myanmar: Death
toll passes 500

Yangon, March 30: The death toll in the Myanmar military's crackdown on protesters has passed 500, as armed rebel groups on Tuesday threatened the junta with retaliation if the bloodshed does not stop. World powers have ramped up their condemnation of the military's campaign against the anti-coup movement that is demanding the restoration of the elected government and the release of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Washington suspended a trade pact with Myanmar and UN chief Antonio Guterres called for a united global front to pressure the junta after more than 100 protesters were killed in a bloody weekend. Adding to that pressure campaign, a trio of ethnic rebel groups on Tuesday condemned the crackdown and threatened to fight alongside protesters unless the military reined in its violence.

Daily rallies across Myanmar by unarmed demonstrators have been met with tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) said it had confirmed a total of 510 civilian deaths but warned the true toll was probably significantly higher.

On Tuesday, protesters in Yangon emptied rubbish bags in the streets as part of the latest action, while in the town of Muse in Shan state a 35-year-old protester was shot dead.

VILLAGERS NOT
SENT BACK, SAYS
THAILAND

Mae Sam Laep (Thailand), March 30: Thailand's prime minister denied Tuesday that his country's security forces have sent villagers back to Myanmar who fled from military airstrikes and said his government is ready to shelter anyone who is escaping fighting.

His comments came a day after humanitarian groups said the Thai military had begun sending back some of the people who have fled airstrikes by Myanmar's military. "There is no influx of refugees yet. We asked those who crossed to Thailand and if they have any problem in their area. When they say no problem, we just asked them to return to their land first. We asked, we did not use any force," PM Prayuth Chan-ocha said.

— AP

There was also another fatality at Myitkyina, Kachin state, rescue workers confirmed. Three of the country's myriad armed ethnic insurgent groups — the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, the Myanmar Nationalities Democratic Alliance Army and the Arakan Army (AA) — issued a joint statement threatening retaliation.

— AFP

China reduces
elected seats in
HK legislature

Hong Kong, March 30: China has sharply reduced the number of directly elected seats in Hong Kong's legislature after video clips showing his family getting shots of Coronavirus vaccine surfaced online, creating a stir as netizens accused him of "jumping the queue" and demanded an apology from him.

The clips showed a nurse giving vaccine jabs to family members of Minister for Housing Tariq Bashir Cheema, which seems to be a clear violation of government policy regarding Covid-19 vaccination. Cheema belongs to the Pakistan Muslim League Quaid (PML-Q), which is an ally of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI). Pakistan's vaccination drive began on Feb. 2 starting with frontline workers followed by health workers and people over 60 years.

— PTI

PALAU PREZ IN
TAIWAN DESPITE
CHINA PRESSURE

Taipei, March 30: The president of the Pacific island nation of Palau was visiting Taiwan on Tuesday along with the US ambassador to his country, a show of solidarity as China increases diplomatic, economic and military pressure on Taiwan. Palau President Surangel Whipps said during a meeting with Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen that he and his delegation "feel like home when we are here."

In her welcoming statement, Tsai noted Whipps was the first foreign leader to visit Taiwan since the beginning of the pandemic and said a travel bubble established between the two sides would be a "model for safe two-way travel that has been closely watched not just by our own people but also by the entire world." China has banned its citizens from visiting Palau.

— AP

China's top legislature, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, amended Hong Kong's constitution to pave the way for the changes. The Hong Kong government is now tasked with revising its electoral laws and holding an election.

— AP

Probe into Suez Canal blockage begins

Suez (Egypt), March 30: Experts on Tuesday boarded the massive container ship that had blocked Egypt's vital Suez Canal and disrupted global trade for nearly a week, seeking answers to a single question that could mean billions of dollars in legal implications: What went wrong? As convoys of ships again began travelling in this artery linking East and West

through the Mediterranean and Red Seas, hundreds more idled waiting for their turn in process that will take days.

Egyptian government officials, insurers, shippers and others similarly waited for more details about what caused the skyscraper-sized Ever Given to become wedged across the canal's southern single-lane on March 23.

When blame gets assigned, it could turn into years of litigation over the costs of repairing the ship, fixing the canal and reimbursing those who saw their cargo shipments disrupted. And with the vessel being owned by a Japanese firm, operated by a Taiwanese shipper, flagged in Panama and now stuck in Egypt, matters become an international morass.

"This ship is a multinational conglomeration," said Capt. John Konrad, the founder and CEO of the shipping news website gcaptain.com. Experts boarded the Ever Given as it idled Tuesday in Egypt's Great Bitter Lake, just north of the site where it previously blocked the canal.

A senior canal pilot, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was

not authorised to talk to journalists, told *The Associated Press* that experts were looking for signs of damage and trying to determine the cause of the vessel's grounding.

Damage to the vessel could be structural, Konrad warned. Stuck for days across the canal, the ship's middle rose and fell with the tide, bending up and down.

— AP

GOVT | NOTIFICATION

In May last year, the central govt had allowed certain OCI card holders to come to India

India trip: OCI card holders won't need old passports

Washington/New York, March 30: People of Indian origin and the Indian diaspora having Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) cards are now not required to carry their old, expired passports for travel to India, as required earlier, according to a government notification that has been welcomed by members of the community.

The Overseas Citizens of India or OCI card is issued to people of Indian origin globally which gives them almost all the privileges of

an Indian national except for the right to vote, government service and buying agricultural land. The OCI card gives them a visa free travel to India.

In a March 26 press release, the Indian missions in the US said that in order to ease the travel of OCI card holders, it has been decided that the time line for reissuance of OCI cards in r/o OCI card holders, who may be required to get their OCI card reissued has been extended until 31 December, 2021.

Further requirement of carrying old and new passports along with the OCI card has been done away. Henceforth, the OCI card holders travelling on the strength of their existing OCI card bearing old passport number are not required to carry their old passport. However, carrying a new passport is mandatory. New York-based social activist Prem Bhandari, who has been taking up the cause of OCI card holders for the past several years, welcomed the announcement.

He expressed gratitude to the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of External Affairs and the Government of India for not only extending the renewal up to December 31 this year but also for relaxing the guidelines and not requiring OCI card holders to carry their old, expired foreign passports.

The OCI card holders can heave a sigh of relief worldwide, with these new guidelines, he said. He expressed thanks to Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla

for the new guidelines. Bhandari said that he had seen first-hand the inconvenience caused to members of the Indian diaspora due to certain OCI card rules as they undertook travel to India during the pandemic.

He said some of the passengers were not allowed to board flights to India and were sent back from airports as they were not carrying their old foreign passports, which was required as per government rules. The OCI card, am-

ong other benefits, allows multiple entry, multi-purpose life long visa to an Indian-origin foreign national to visit India. Under the provisions of the OCI card, which gives the cardholder lifelong visa to India, those below 20 years and above 50 years need to renew their OCI card every time they have their passport renewed.

The Indian government has relaxed the provisions since last year due to the Coronavirus. The timeline has been extended multi-

ple times so far. However, this is for the first time that the guidelines have been relaxed for carrying old passports and the new passports along with the OCI cards for overseas Indians. In May last year, the central government had allowed certain categories of OCI card holders, who were stranded abroad, to come to the country. Earlier, visas of foreign nationals and OCI cards were suspended as part of the new international travel restrictions.

— PTI

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50136.58	2.30
Nifty 50	14845.10	2.33
S&P 500*	3,952.54	-0.47
Dollar (₹)	73.38	-1.19
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.99	-0.47
Euro (₹)	86.14	-0.68
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,113	138 0.31
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.00	-1.51
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.143	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.753	0.032

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Govt may extend current foreign trade policy

The government is expected to further extend the existing foreign trade policy (FTP), which is scheduled to lapse from April 1, for a few more months, an official said. On March 31, 2020, the government had extended the Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20 for one year till March 31, 2021, amid the coronavirus outbreak and the lockdown. The official said that stakeholder consultation is going on for the new policy.

Torrent Gas signs pact to take over Sanwariya Gas



Torrent Gas said it has signed an agreement to take over Sanwariya Gas, which has a licence to retail CNG to automobiles and piped gas to households in Mathura. The acquisition adds to the Torrent group's gas distribution network that is now spread over 33 districts in seven states and one union territory. The firm did not provide the value of the deal. Torrent Gas plans to invest Rs 8,000 crore in CGD over five years.

UltraTech Cement prepaays ₹5,000-cr loan

UltraTech Cement said it has prepaid its long-term loans of Rs 5,000 crore. The loan repayment has been done through free cash flows that the company has generated over the last few quarters despite the pandemic, the Aditya Birla Group firm said. But it did not share the deadline by which the long-term loans were to be prepaid. It said the prepayment is in line with the company's policy.

Tamilnadu Petroproducts to invest ₹435 crore

Chennai-based Tamilnadu Petroproducts Ltd, a member of the petrochemicals arm of AM International Group, is investing Rs 435 crore to expand its production facilities. As part of the investment plans, the liner alkaline benzene capacity would be increased from 120,000 tonne per annum to 145,000 tpa at a cost of about Rs 240 crore. The project would be commissioned in about 24 months.

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Global investors court dollar as bond yields spike Dollar rally trips rupee

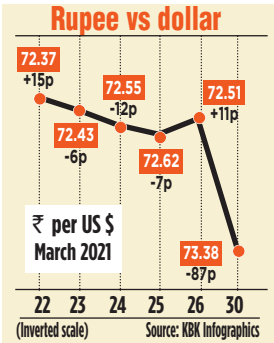
FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MARCH 30

The rupee on Tuesday depreciated by 87 paise against the US dollar as the accelerating pace of Covid-19 vaccinations and massive fiscal stimulus package in the US stoked inflation concerns, causing a spike in US treasury yields. Global investors are moving towards safe-haven dollar, which dampened the appetite for Asian currencies, including the rupee. According to currency experts, the rupee is likely to further weaken and could touch 74 soon. At the interbank forex market, the local unit

opened at 72.85 against the greenback. It weakened to an intraday low of 73.43, its lowest level since March 9, before finally closing at 73.38. On Friday, the rupee had settled at 72.51 against the dollar.

Oil prices rose as investors expect delays at the Suez Canal to persist despite the large container vessel was freed.

Sriram Iyer, senior research analyst at Reliance Securities, said, "The US economy is on track because of the large fiscal stimulus of the government, which is supporting the dollar and hardening the yields, which in turn weighed on the rupee.



Secondly, the month-end importer demand and reduced fiscal year-end exporter dollar selling also weighed on the local currency. "Additionally, worries

over second wave of coronavirus infections in India have also waned risk appetite and kept investors away from the markets."

Technically, the USD-INR spot pair has given a strong breakout above a pivotal level at 73.00, indicating a strong upside momentum in the counter. Resistance is at 73.50-73.80 levels. INR spot could trade in a range of 73.20-73.70 levels in coming session.

Close to the end of financial year, currency traders may refrain from placing large bets on the rupee, given the lack of clear trajectory on the Indian currency in the truncated trading week.

FY21 sees record mop-up of ₹1.89 L cr equity capital

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 30

Despite the entire financial year 2020-21 being overshadowed by the pandemic, Indian corporates managed to raise an all-time high amount of Rs 1,88,900 crore from public equity markets. This was more than double the amount of Rs 91,670 crore raised in 2019-20, according to data base provider Prime Database.

The previous highest amount raised in a financial year was Rs 1,75,680 crore in 2017-18.

"Strong retail participation in IPOs, huge listing gains and highest-ever amount raised through QIPs and InvITs/RelTs were the key highlights of the year," Pranav Haldea, managing director, Prime Database Group, said.



Thirty main-board IPOs came to the market during the pandemic-ruined year, raising Rs 31,268 crore. This marked an increase of 54 per cent from the Rs 20,350 crore raised through 13 IPOs in 2019-20.

The largest IPO in FY21 was from Gland Pharma, for Rs. 6,480 crore.

The overall response from the public to the mainboard IPOs of the year was very good; 18 IPOs received a mega response of more than 10

times while four IPOs were oversubscribed by more than three times and the balance eight IPOs were oversubscribed between 1 to 3 times.

The IPOs also received tremendous response from retail investors. The highest number of applications was received by Indigo Paints (25.88 lakh) followed by MTAR Technologies (25.87 lakh) and Mazagon Dock (23.56 lakh).

IPOs also saw strong list-

ing performance, led by Burger King (return of 131 per cent) Happiest Minds Technologies (123 per cent) and Indigo Paints (109 per cent).

The IPO pipeline remains strong with 18 companies holding Sebi approval, proposing to raise nearly Rs 18,000 crore and another 14 companies are awaiting the regulator's nod to raise nearly Rs 23,000 crore.

SME IPO activity declined in FY21 compared with FY20: there were only 28 SME IPOs, which collected a total of Rs 243 crore compared with 45 IPOs in FY20, collecting Rs 436 crore.

At the same time 31 companies mobilised Rs 78,731 crore through qualified institutional placement or QIPs, highest ever in a financial year.

ByteDance India bank a/cs frozen in tax case

ADITYA KALRA & ABHIRUP ROY NEW DELHI, MARCH 30

Indian authorities have blocked bank accounts of ByteDance in the country for alleged tax evasion and the company has asked a court to quash the directive which it fears will hit its operations hard, two sources with direct knowledge said.

ByteDance in January cut its India workforce after New Delhi decided to retain a ban on its popular video app TikTok, first prohibited last year following a border clash between India and China.

ByteDance still has around 1,300 employees in India, most of whom service its overseas operations.

In mid-March, two of ByteDance India's bank accounts in Citibank and HSBC were ordered blocked by authorities for alleged evasion of certain taxes in online advertising dealings between the ByteDance unit in India and its parent entity in Singapore, TikTok Pte Ltd, the two sources said.

Other than the two accounts, the authorities also directed Citibank and

HSBC to not allow ByteDance India to withdraw funds from any other bank accounts linked to its tax identification number, the first source said.

In a court filing which is due to be heard soon at the Mumbai High Court, ByteDance India has argued that while it had only about \$10 million in its accounts, the blocking decision was an abuse of the legal process and will make it hard for it to pay salaries and taxes, the source added.

Both the sources declined to be identified as the details of the bank freeze or company's court challenge were not public.

ByteDance India, as well as HSBC, Citibank and India's finance ministry, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The directive to freeze ByteDance India's bank accounts came after tax authorities last year inspected documents at the company's office, scrutinised documents and questioned some executives in relation to the advertising and other transactions with its parent entity, the first source said. —Reuters

NAZARA DEBUT TURNS VOLATILE AFTER 80% GAIN

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 30

The first gaming platform to be listed in India, Nazara Technologies, made a highly volatile debut on the bourses, with shares issued at Rs 1,101 listed at Rs 1,990 on the NSE, a premium of 80.4 per cent and at Rs 1,971 on the BSE. But later heavy profit taking led to shares hitting the 20 per cent lower circuit and closing at Rs 1,576.80 on the BSE and Rs 1,592 on NSE. Still Nazara shares closed 43.22 per cent higher compared to the public issue price of Rs 1,101 on the BSE and 44.59 per cent up on the NSE.

\$10-BN-A-DAY | CLOSURE Legal issues arising from the mishap are enormous

Suez Canal crisis: Time to add up damages

AARON CLARK, CINDY WANG & ANN KOH MARCH 30

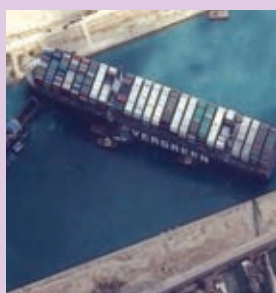
The immediate crisis of the Suez Canal blockage may have ended, but the battle over damages from the waterway's longest closure in almost half a century is just beginning.

The long-term cost of the canal's estimated \$10-billion-a-day closure will likely be small, given that global merchandise trade amounts to \$18 trillion a year. Yet with cargoes delayed for weeks, if not months, the blockage could unleash a flood of claims by everyone affected, from the shipping lines

to manufacturers and oil producers.

"The legal issues are so enormous," said Alexis Cahalan, a partner at Norton White in Sydney, which specialises in transport law. "If you can imagine the variety of cargoes that are there—everything from oil, grain, consumer goods like refrigerators to perishable goods—that is where the enormity of the claims may not be known for a time."

The Ever Given was successfully pried from the sand on Monday, and traffic has resumed through the canal. But the blockage, which began last Tuesday, was the canal's



longest closure since it was shut for eight days following the 1967 Six-Day War.

Egyptian authorities were desperate to get traffic flowing again through the waterway that's a conduit for about 12 per cent of

world trade and around 1 million barrels of oil a day.

It may take as long as four days to return the canal to normal, Suez Canal Authority chairman Osama Rabie said at a Monday evening press conference. That assessment may be optimistic, and it could take weeks for the situation to be fully resolved, according to Arthur Richier, senior freight analyst at energy market intelligence firm Vortexa.

The canal's blockage will reduce global reinsurers' earnings, which have already been hit by winter storms in the US and flooding in Australia, as

and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. Bangladesh, China, India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Vietnam are among the world's top 10 remittance recipients.

"The most predominant example is India, which issued five-year diaspora bonds in 1991, 1998 and 2000, generating \$32 billion in total," UNESCAP said.

In general, diaspora bonds' interest rates can be lower than those of sovereign bonds because diasporas often have a lower country risk perception than other international investors.

New Delhi, March 30: Come April there will be no automatic recurring payment for many services, including recharge and utility bill as the RBI has made Additional Factor of Authentication (AFA) mandatory after March 31.

On December 4, RBI had directed all banks including RRBs, NBFCs, and payment gateways that the processing of recurring transactions using cards or prepaid payment instruments (PPIs) or UPI under arrangements/ practices not compliant with AFA would not be continued beyond March 31, 2021.

gained 2.90 per cent ahead of the fourth quarter earnings starting early next month, Pharma's 2.79 per cent and Metal's 2.72 per cent gains were also on better earnings prospects. The FMCG Index also gained 2.25 per cent ahead of the annual earnings show.

Domestic institutions were net buyers of equities worth Rs 2,181 crore while foreign portfolio investors were net buyers by Rs 769.47 crore.

The Nifty IT index impact on our markets at the opening post the extended weekend. A lot of sector and stock specific movement was seen today wherein the IT, Pharma, Metals and FMCG pack saw good buying interest along with the heavyweights HDFC twins-HDFC (3.05 per cent) & HDFC Bank (3.86 per cent)," said Ruchit Jain, technical and derivatives analyst, Angel Broking.

The Nifty IT index Non-readiness of some of the players could impact recurring payment such as of utility bills, recharge of phone, DTH and OTT from Thursday. Under the new norms, banks will be required to inform customers in advance about recurring payment due and transaction would be carried following nod from the customer. So the transaction would not be automatic but would be done after authentication from the customer. For recurring payments above Rs 5,000, banks are required to send OTP to customers. —PTI

Hospitals hold ₹2.3 lakh crore investment scope: Niti Aayog

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 30

Investment opportunities worth more than \$32 billion (Rs 2.3 lakh crore) are available in hospital infrastructure in India, finds Niti Aayog.

India's healthcare industry has been growing at an annual rate (CAGR) of around 22 per cent since 2016 and is expected to reach \$372 billion in 2022. There are nearly 600 investment opportunities worth \$32.16 billion in hospital/medical infrastructure as an additional 3 million beds will be needed for India to achieve the target of 3 beds per 1,000 people by 2025.

Though 100 per cent FDI has been allowed for greenfield hospitals, between April 2000 and June 2020, Indian hospitals and diagnostic centres received only \$6.7 billion FDI. The hospital sector was valued at \$61.79 billion in FY17 and is expected to reach \$132 billion by 2023, growing at a CAGR of 16-17 per cent.

Pharma, biotech and life sciences have 81 opportunities worth \$364.37 million. The market size for pharmaceuticals is expected to grow from \$41 billion to \$130 billion by 2030, while that of biosimilars from \$3 billion to \$12 billion by 2025 and the biotechnology market is expected to grow at an average 30 per cent per year to reach \$100 billion by 2025.

As a sunrise sector, medical devices also provide enough opportunities for investment. The size of the Indian medical



HUGE OPPORTUNITY

- ▶ Healthcare industry has been growing at a CAGR of 22% since 2016 and is expected to reach \$372 billion in 2022
- ▶ 600 investment opportunities worth \$32.16 billion exist in hospital/medical infrastructure
- ▶ The country requires additional 3 million beds to achieve the target of 3 beds per 1,000 people by 2025

devices market is estimated to grow from \$11 billion to \$50 billion by 2025, while providing opportunities for export. India's diagnostics market is currently valued at \$4 billion with the organised sector having a share of 25 per cent. The diagnostics market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 20.4 per cent to reach \$32 billion by 2022.

Medical travel is projected to double its value to \$13 billion by 2022. While medical value travel has been adversely affected by Covid-19, it is expected to recover over the next few months and continue to grow rapidly thereafter.

The market size for telemedicine was around \$830 million in 2019. It is projected to increase to \$5.5 billion by 2025 growing at a CAGR of 31 per cent during 2020-25. Low presence of doctors in

semi-urban, rural and remote areas has resulted in limited access to healthcare facilities for large numbers of people. Telemedicine and e-Health are considered to be potential solutions for addressing this lack of access, on account of the extensive smart phone penetration in India and improving mobile connectivity.

While the Indian healthcare industry has huge scope of growth and investment, in the past two decades between 2000 and 2020 the foreign funding received by the sector has not been adequate. The sector received only \$25.35 billion FDI in these two decades, of which drugs and pharmaceuticals garnered \$16.50 billion, hospital and diagnostic centres, \$6.72 billion and medical and surgical appliances, \$2.1 billion.

EV EFFECT: VW TO REBRAND USA UNIT AS 'VOLTSWAGEN'

DAVID SHEPARDSON WASHINGTON, MARCH 30

German automaker Volkswagen AG's US unit confirmed Tuesday it will rename its US operations as "Voltswagen of America" as it shifts its focus to electric vehicles.

The revised name takes effect in May and the announcement came after several outlets on Monday reported on a draft release mistakenly posted on the automaker's US website.

"We might be changing out our K for a T, but what we aren't changing is this brand's commitment to making best-in-class vehicles for drivers and people everywhere," said Scott Keogh, president and CEO of Voltswagen of America.

The German automaker has committed to sell one million EVs worldwide by 2025.

The VW Dark Blue colour logo will remain for gas-powered vehicles and it will use a new light blue logo for electric vehicles. The company will use "Voltswagen" as an exterior badge on all EV models. —Reuters

HONDA RIDES IN CBR650R, CB650R SPORTS BIKES

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, MARCH 30

Honda Motorcycle & Scooter, India's second largest two-wheeler maker, on Tuesday introduced the 2021 CBR650R and the CB650R sports bikes priced at Rs 8.88 lakh and Rs 8.67 lakh, respectively.

The bookings have opened at the firm's premium BigWing Topline dealerships. Both the models have taken the CKD (completely knocked down) route to enter India. The new Honda CBR650R and the Honda CB650R are powered by a 649cc, DOHC, 16-valve, in-line 4-cylinder engine that develops 86hp of maximum power.

SHORT TAKES

India boxers test +ve in Turkey

New Delhi: Eight members of an Indian boxing squad, including three pugilists, tested positive for Covid-19 during a competition trip to Turkey and have been quarantined in Istanbul. Commonwealth Games silver-medallist Gaurav Solanki (57kg), Prayag Chouhan (75kg) and Brijesh Yadav (81kg) tested positive for the virus a week back, leading to them being quarantined following the event which ended on March 19. Coaches Dharmendra Yadav and Santosh Birmole, physiotherapists Shikha Kedia and Dr Umesh along with video analyst Nitin Kumar are the others in isolation, a team source said. They were in Istanbul to compete in the Bosphorus Tournament. Solanki had claimed the lone medal — a bronze — among men. Among women, Nikhat Zareen (51kg) had also fetched a bronze helping India finish with two medals overall. — *PTI*

Pak football stares at long FIFA ban

Karachi: Pakistan football is staring at a long-term ban from the FIFA after a forced take over of the national federation headquarters in Lahore by a group which won the last elections but annulled by the world governing body of the sport. The world body has now given until Wednesday for the PFF group, led by Ashfaq Hussain, to vacate the Football House and give its control back to the FIFA Normalization Committee headed by Haroon Malik. “If the government’s sports minister does not intervene and resolve this issue Pakistan football could be banned for a very long time from all international competitions,” a member of the normalization committee said on Tuesday. He said if FIFA imposes a ban, the PFF will not get any fund from the world body, leaving the sport in the country in a financial mess and development projects on hold. — *PTI*

Naser gets date for doping rules case

Lausanne: World champion sprinter Salwa Eid Naser will have a two-day appeal hearing next month that could lead to a ban from the Tokyo Olympics for breaking anti-doping rules. The Court of Arbitration for Sport said on Tuesday it will hear the case involving the 400-meter runner over two days on April 22-23. The World Anti-Doping Agency and World Athletics both filed appeals at CAS to challenge an independent tribunal ruling last year that cleared Naser on a technicality for doping tests she missed. A verdict could be announced urgently with the Diamond League track series set to start in May. The first women’s 400 race is on May 23 in Rabat, Morocco. The women’s 400 event at the Tokyo Olympics is scheduled from August 3-6. Naser ran the fastest women’s 400 since 1985 to win the world title 18 months ago in Doha, Qatar, while she was under investigation. — *AP*

Aguero to leave Manchester City

Paris: Argentina striker Sergio Aguero said on Monday he was “proud” of his time at Manchester City after announcing his departure when his contract runs out this July. Aguero joined City from Atletico Madrid in 2011 and has 257 goals in 384 games since, making him their record goalscorer. He scored the dramatic winning goal as they edged local rivals Manchester United to the 2012 Premier League. “When a cycle comes to an end, many sensations arise,” he posted on social media. — *AFP*

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

European Qualifiers for the 2022 FIFA World Cup: Armenia vs Romania from 9.30 pm on Sony Ten 2; Spain vs Kosovo from 12.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2; Bosnia-Herzegovina vs France from 12.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Six; England vs Poland from 12.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1; Germany vs North Macedonia from 12.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 3

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OLD IS GOLD

Former selector feels Rohit-Dhawan best openers for T20 WC

New Delhi, March 30: India should stick to the experienced opening combination of Rohit Sharma and Shikhar Dhawan in the T20 World Cup, feels former selector Sarandeep Singh, calling the duo the “best option” despite skipper Virat Kohli’s recent interest in the slot. Sarandeep, whose term ended with India’s historic win in Australia earlier this year, also gave his take on split captaincy, asserting the issue was never even discussed in his time as Kohli performed in all three formats.

After the T20 series win against England, Kohli had said he will open in the IPL raising the possibility of him opening with Rohit in the World Cup. Dhawan was dropped after the opening game of the series and Ishan Kishan was picked ahead of him in one of the games. Kohli and Rohit opened in the final T20. “It was surprising. He (Dhawan) did well in the IPL, he did well in Australia. Whenever he plays he performs. He is mentally very strong. May be they want to try out options but in my view the left-hand right-hand combination of Rohit and Dhawan is the best option for the India at World Cup,” Sarandeep said. “You can’t judge him on basis of one match. He did well in ODIs after that. The IPL will decide a lot of the team. There are no easy places in the team. Ishan Kishan too will need to do exceptionally well to make the team,” he added.

He also said that K.L. Rahul should continue keeping in the ODIs and the in-form Rishabh Pant will have to wait for his turn when Shreyas Iyer returns. The IPL beginning April 9 will decided bulk of the spots for the World Cup squad and Sarandeep feels Yuzvendra Chahal and Kuldeep Yadav, who became India’s go to pair in the middle overs after the 2017 Champions Trophy, are no more sure starters in the T20 or ODI format. — *PTI*



Shikhar Dhawan (left) and Rohit Sharma in this file pic.

— AP

India tour a lesson for England: Coach

Pune, March 30: England may have suffered series defeats across all formats but head coach Chris Silverwood feels his team has learnt valuable lessons from the tour of India that will come in handy when it returns here for the T20 World Cup later this year. India completed triumphs in all three formats against England, with a seven-run win in the series-deciding third ODI on Sunday. Silverwood, in an interaction with the British

● **Silverwood, in an interaction with the British media, reflected on the India tour with pride and said the English will be stronger when they come back here for the T20 WC in the last quarter of the year.**

media on Monday before the side headed home, reflected on the long tour with pride and said the English will be stronger when they come back here for the T20 World in the last quarter of the year. “It was a good, competitive game and a good, competitive series

PIECE OF GLASS FOUND INSIDE JOFRA’S FINGER

London, March 30: An accident while cleaning his fish tank was the cause of Jofra Archer’s hand injury that troubled him during the series against India along with an elbow issue and a glass fragment was found lodged in the England pacer’s right middle finger that had to be operated. England’s director of cricket Ashley Giles made this revelation while giving an update on Archer, who underwent the surgery on Monday. The elbow problem has ruled him out of this year’s IPL. “They (surgeons) have operated and I think they found a small fragment of glass still in attendance. It obviously healed but there was part of the fish tank still in his finger,” Giles said on a BBC’s show, as reported by *ESPNcricinfo*.

“This is going to sound like an awful conspiracy ... But it’s true. But, yeah, he was cleaning at home. He’s got a fish tank. He dropped the fish tank, cut his hand, and he’s been in surgery...”

Archer suffered a cut on his right hand’s middle finger in the accident that took place in January.

— *PTI*

Osaka breezes into quarters

Miami, March 30: Reigning US and Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka advanced to the Miami Open quarter-finals on Monday, stretching her win streak to 23 matches by defeating Belgian 16th seed Elise Mertens 6-3, 6-3.

The second-ranked Japanese star will next face Greek 23rd seed Maria Sakkari, who outlasted US 29th seed Jessica Pegula 6-4, 2-6, 7-6 (8/6) at the WTA and ATP Series event.

“I started off really well and then for some reason I became a little sluggish. My speed didn’t really feel the same. I thought it was really mental from then on. In the end, it was who fought the hardest,” Osaka said.

Top-ranked defending champion Ashleigh Barty battled into the quarter-finals by outlasting former world number one Victoria Azarenka 6-1, 1-6, 6-2.

Australia’s Barty broke five times, the last when Azarenka netted a fore-hand volley to end matters after one hour and 52 minutes at Hard Rock Stadium.

Barty, who had to save a match point on the way to a three-set victory over Kristina Kucova in the second round, plays Tuesday against seventh seed

● **Top-ranked defending champion Ashleigh Barty battled into the quarterfinals by outlasting former world number one Victoria Azarenka 6-1, 1-6, 6-2.**

Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus, who downed Czech 19th seed Marketa Vondrousova 6-1, 6-2.

TSITSIPAS, RUBLEV WIN

On the men’s side, Greek second seed Stefanos Tsitsipas defeated Japanese 28th seed Kei Nishikori 6-3, 3-6, 6-1 after an hour and 56 minutes to reach the last 16.

Tsitsipas will next face Italian 24th seed Lorenzo Sonego, who dispatched Colombian Daniel Galan 7-6 (8/6), 6-3.

Russian fourth seed Andrey Rublev routed Hungarian 29th seed Marton Fucsovics 6-2, 6-1, to reach the fourth round.

The 23-year-old from Moscow will next face Croatia’s Marin Cilic, the world number 45 who beat Italy’s 19-year-old Lorenzo Musetti 6-3, 6-4. — *AFP*



Japan’s Naomi Osaka returns to Elise Mertens of Belgium in the Miami Open third round match in Miami Gardens, Florida, on Monday. Osaka won 6-3, 6-3. — *AP*

HARMANPREET TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

Patiala, March 30: The Indian women’s T20 team captain Harmanpreet Kaur has tested positive for Covid-19 and is experiencing mild symptoms.

Kaur, who did not play in the T20 series against South Africa in Lucknow after injuring herself in the fifth ODI on March 17, got herself tested on Monday after developing mild fever.

“She is self-isolating at home. She got tested yesterday and the report came positive today morning. She had mild fever since four days so thought it was best to get tested. She is doing fine otherwise and should recover soon,” a source close to the player said.

“She was getting tested regularly during the South Africa series so she must have caught the virus after that only,” the source added.

India, who returned to

international cricket after 12 months, lost both the ODI and T20 series.

SHAFALI CONSOLIDATES TOP SPOT IN T20 RANKS

Following a blistering 30-ball 60 in the final against South Africa, India opener Shafali Verma consolidated her position at the top among batters in the latest women’s T20I rankings issued on Tuesday.

Verma, who had regained the top position last week, garnered 26 rating points for her knock in the final and is now currently on 776 rating points. The young Indian now has a 35-point lead over Australia’s Beth Mooney.

Verma’s opening partner Smriti Mandhana, with whom she was associated in a decisive 96-run stand, has gained one spot and is sixth after her unbeaten 48 off 28 deliveries. — *PTI*

Morris ready to lead RR pace attack

Mumbai, March 30: IPL auction’s most expensive buy Chris Morris says leading the Rajasthan Royals’ pace attack in the absence of injured Jofra Archer in the upcoming IPL will be an added responsibility but it doesn’t change his role in the team. In a major blow to the Royals’ campaign, pace spearhead Archer was ruled out of the first half of the tournament due to an elbow injury he suffered during the recently concluded England’s tour of India.

In his absence new-recruit Morris is set to lead the fast-bowling attack. “Every single team that I have played in the IPL, my role has been with the new ball and at the death. That doesn’t really change. I have always had fast bowlers in the team and I’ve been there supporting act,” Morris said at a virtual press conference.



“It won’t be a new role if I am leading an attack, won’t be new if I am supporting. There is a little bit of responsibility when it comes to leading the attack. But like I said, since it wouldn’t be able to be alien to me.”

Morris became the most expensive buy in the IPL auction history with the

Royals shelling out Rs 16.25 crore for the South African all-rounder last month.

Talking about the pressure that comes with such an expensive price tag, Morris said “I think it’s natural to have a little bit of a pressure when something like that has happened. I’d be lying to

you if there wasn’t any pressure but fortunately enough in the past, I have been coming in with quite a big price tag on my head.

“At the end of the day, you need to perform, no matter what the price tag is.” Morris feels his role in the team is different to that of fellow all-rounder Ben Stokes, who he feels possess the “magic touch in cricket”.

RCB BEGIN TRAINING

Royal Challengers Bangalore on Tuesday started a nine-day conditioning camp in Chennai as part of their preparation for the IPL.

As many as 11 players, including spinner Yuzvendra Chahal, pacers Navdeep Saini and Mohammed Siraj, began their training under the guidance of Mike Hesson, director of cricket operations and head coach Simon Katich. — *PTI*

NZ seal Bangladesh T20 series with win

Napier (New Zealand), March 30: New Zealand downed Bangladesh by 28 runs in a rain-affected second Twenty20 International in Napier Tuesday to secure the three-match series and complete a home sweep against all comers.

New Zealand made 173 for five off 17.5 overs after losing the toss and batting, before the weather ended their innings prematurely.

As a result, Bangladesh’s run chase was set at 170 from 16 overs under the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern formula.

There were bizarre

scenes as Bangladesh began their innings without a clear target being set, then officials halted play after 1.5 overs while they worked out the sums.

“I’ve experienced a few things in cricket and this is not one of them,” New Zealand veteran Ross Taylor said on commentary.

The tourists made 142 for seven before the required run rate proved too much and their innings petered out.

Brief scores (D/L method): New Zealand 173/5 (Phillips 58*, Mitchell 34*, Mahedi 2/45) bt Bangladesh 142/7 (Sarkar 51, Naim 38, Southee 2/21).

Brathwaite on 99 against ‘disciplined’ Lanka bowling

North Sound (Antigua and Barbuda), March 30: Kraigg Brathwaite batted through the day for an unbeaten 99 as the West Indies reached a respectable 287 for seven at stumps on the opening day of the second and final Test against Sri Lanka here on Monday.

Personifying patience and perseverance in a manner so typical of the right-handed opening batsman, Brathwaite did all he could to defy a bowling attack in which senior seamer Suranga Lakmal again led the line.

Put in on a pitch which offered some assistance to the seam bowlers, Brathwaite’s gritty defiance was necessary after Lakmal had claimed the early honours for the visitors with two early wickets and added the scalp of the struggling Jermaine Blackwood in the afternoon session to end the day with three for 71 from 20 overs.

With opening partner John Campbell gone along with first Test century-maker Nkrumah Bonner between the space of a few deliveries to Lakmal in the first hour,

SMITH KEEN TO LEAD OZ BUT COACH DENIES

Sydney, March 30: Steve Smith is interested in becoming Australia skipper once again if the opportunity comes but head coach Justin Langer has made it clear that the position is not available right now.

The 31-year-old Smith served a one-year ban from playing and was disqualified from leading Australia for two years because of his role in the 2018 ball-tampering scandal in which Australians were caught using sandpaper to alter the condition of the ball against in a Test against South Africa. “I’ve certainly had a lot of time to think about it and I guess now I’ve got to a point where if the opportunity did come up again I would be keen,” Smith told *‘News Corp’*. — *PTI*

Harden, Westbrook shine in NBA wins

Washington, March 30: Washington’s Russell Westbrook and Brooklyn’s James Harden delivered impressive triple-doubles on Monday, sparking their clubs to NBA victories and making some personal history for themselves.

Westbrook unleashed 35 points, a career-best 21 assists and 14 rebounds to power the Wizards over the visiting Indiana Pacers 132-124 for the 162nd triple-double of his career.

It was the first triple-double in NBA history with 35 or more points and 20 or more rebounds. Only Magic Johnson and Oscar Robertson had previously produced triple-doubles of 30 points, 20 rebounds and 10 assists.

“I take pride as a leader in making my teammates better. Tonight the guys helped me out making shots and keeping it moving,” Westbrook said.

It was Westbrook’s 16th

triple-double with the Wizards, the 32-year-old US guard setting a club one-season record in only his 38th appearance for Washington.

“Mindset was to go out and be aggressive and make sure I set the table for my teammates like I’ve been doing all year long and make sure they have confidence going into the fourth,” Westbrook said.

“When the fourth hits, it’s time to take over.”

In New York, Harden scored 38 points, passed off 13 assists and pulled down 11 rebounds, while Kyrie Irving added 27 points in his return as the Nets beat visiting Minnesota 112-107.

Harden delivered his 12th triple-double in only 32 games with the Nets, tying Jason Kidd’s one-season club record, as Brooklyn moved a half-game back of Eastern Conference leader Philadelphia at 32-15. — *AFP*