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Rajnath Singh: Judicial probe against Central agencies 'unfortunate'



SPORT | 8

Ronaldo shows anger as he is 'denied' World Cup qualifying goal



DELHI AGE | 16

Director Ajay Devgn uses 11 cameras to wrap up shoot of Amitabh Bachchan's Mayday

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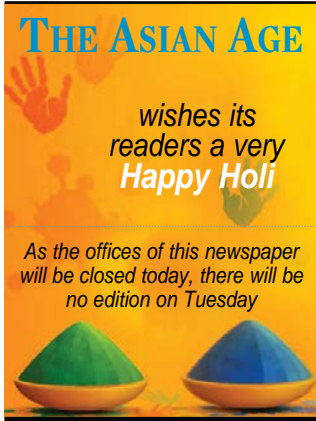


Tollywood actress and TMC candidate Arundhati Mitra (Lovely) plays Holi during her election campaign for Assembly elections in Sonarpur on Sunday.

— PTI

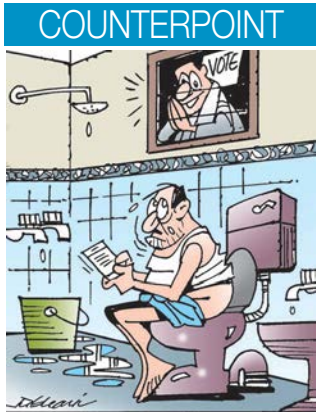
India will get 10-11 new Rafale jets in a month

New Delhi: Indian Air Force will be getting 10-11 new Rafale fighter jets from France in over a month which will be a major boost to its firepower. IAF has already got 11 Rafale which are stationed at Ambala Air Station. With the coming of new aircraft, IAF will have 21-22 Rafale jets which are armed with deadly weapon systems. Some of the new Rafale aircraft will be moved to Hashimara where the process of starting the second squadron has already begun. **Full report on Page 4**



Hizbul ultra among two killed in J&K

Srinagar: A Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) militant, who had gone to Pakistan for arms training and returned last week, was among the two ultras killed in an encounter with security forces in Shopian on March 27, police said on March 28. **Full report on Page 4**



One more important promise, our government will protect your data privacy!

WEATHER

Max: 38°C
Min: 21°C
RH: 25%
Rain: 0%

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Kartika Bahula Ashtami till 5.12 pm
Star: Pubba till 1.43 pm
Variyam: 8.32 pm to 10.03 pm
Durmuhurtam: 8.50 am to 9.34 am; 10.49 pm to 11.41 pm
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.37 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.13 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 8.31 PM
MOONSET TODAY 6.44 AM

Shah says BJP will win 26 of 30 phase 1 seats, Didi rejects

BJP wants to have rosogolla but without its ros (juice): Mamata

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/KOLKATA,
MARCH 28

Union home minister and senior BJP leader Amit Shah on Sunday exuded confidence that his party will win 26 out of the 30 West Bengal seats and more than 37 of the 47 Assam seats which went to polls in the first phase of Assembly elections in these states on Saturday. West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, however, questioned the home minister's claim and said that "the people's verdict will be evident after votes are counted."

The Trinamul Congress supremo, who will spend next four days at the hot seat till it goes to the polls on April 1 in the second phase, addressed two rallies, including one at Birulia Bazar where she got injured during her poll campaign on March 10 evening.

Citing the internal party feedback that he has received, Mr Shah claimed that the BJP is on course to achieve its target of winning over 200 seats in the 294-member West Bengal Assembly and improving its alliance tally of 86 seats in the 126-member Assam assembly, and asserted that people have voted for the "positive" agenda espoused by his party.

Addressing a press conference, Mr Shah also rejected West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's charge that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to a temple of the Matua community — which is in sizeable number in the state — during

TMC tribal face in NIA net for Maoist 'links'

Kolkata: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested Maoist frontman-turned-Trinamul Congress state committee member Chhatradhar Mahato early Sunday on the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and several Indian Penal Code charges for repeatedly skipping its summons for questioning in its case against him over the Naxals' guerrilla-style-attack on the Rajdhani Express at Jhargram in the Jangalmahal of West Bengal in 2009.

■ **More on Page 3**

his trip to Bangladesh violated the poll code.

He said that the visit had nothing to do with the elections and was aimed at fostering deeper ties between the two countries.

Mr Shah also parried a query about reports that he might have met leaders of the NCP, which is a key constituent of the Opposition-run government in Maharashtra, saying everything cannot be made public.

He said that peaceful polling in Assam and West Bengal and high voter turnouts are positive signs for the two states, noting that West Bengal often witnessed violence during polls held earlier.

The home minister hit out at the TMC after it released an audio in which BJP vice-president

■ **Turn on Page 4**

Suicide bomb hits Indonesia Sunday Mass, 20 wounded

Makassar (Indonesia), March 28: Two attackers blew themselves up outside a packed Roman Catholic cathedral during a Palm Sunday Mass on Indonesia's Sulawesi island, wounding at least 20 people, police said.

A video obtained by The Associated Press showed body parts scattered near a burning motorbike at the gates of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral in Makassar, the capital of South Sulawesi province.

Rev. Wilhelmus Tulak, a priest at the church, said he had just finished celebrating Palm Sunday Mass when a loud bang shocked his congregation. He said the blast went off at about 10:30 a.m. as a first batch of churchgoers was walking out of the church and another group was coming in.

He said security guards at the church were suspicious of two men on a motorcycle who wanted to enter the building and when they went to confront them, one of the men detonated his explosives.

Police later said both attackers were killed instantly and evidence collected at the scene indicated one of the two was a woman. The wounded included four guards and several churchgoers, police said.

— AP
■ **More on Page 6**

COVID-19 SURGING 62,714 new cases, 312 deaths reported in last 24 hours

India sees highest jump since Oct.

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

India clocked in 62,714 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours in its sharpest one-day spike in nearly five months. With 312 deaths, the highest surge in about three months, the total number of fatalities due to the deadly disease stands at 1,61,552.

With a steady increase in cases for the 18th day in a row, the fresh infections have taken the Covid tally in the country to 1.19 crore. The last recorded biggest spike was registered on October 16 when 63,371 cases were reported.

Eight states and UTs have reported a weekly positivity rate of coronavirus infection higher than the national average of 5.04 per cent, with Maharashtra topping the



Artists give finishing touches to an effigy based on coronavirus for Holika Dahan on the eve of Holi in Mumbai on Sunday.

— PTI

chart at 22.78 per cent.

Apart from Maharashtra, the other seven states and UTs with higher positivity

rate than national average are Chandigarh (11.85 per cent positivity rate), Punjab (8.45 per cent), Goa

(7.03 per cent), Puducherry (6.85 per cent), Chhattisgarh (6.79 per cent), Madhya Pradesh

■ **Modi lauds people's discipline, vaccine drive**

PM: Modernisation need of the hour in agri sector

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

Facing stiff resistance from farmers in some of the northern Indian states on the three farm laws, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that "modernisation in the field of Indian agriculture is the need of the hour" as "we have already lost a lot of time".

Addressing the nation in his monthly *Mann Ki Baat* address, which was its 75th episode, the Prime Minister added that "adopting new alternatives, new innovations, along with traditional farming is equally important to create new opportunities for employ-



Modernisation is essential in all fields of life, otherwise it becomes a burden at times. Modernisation in the field of Indian agriculture is the need of the hour.

— **Narendra Modi,**
Prime Minister

ment in the agriculture sector; to increase the income of farmers".

PM Modi also hailed the world's largest vaccination programme being carried out in India against the Covid-19 and stressed on *dawai bhi, kadai bhi* (medicines as well as strict preventive measures).

Asserting that adopting modern practices in the

agriculture sector are imperative, he said in every aspect of life, newness and modernisation are essential.

"Modernisation is essential in all fields of life, otherwise it becomes a burden at times. Modernisation in the field of Indian agriculture is the need of the hour. It is

■ **Turn on Page 4**

Waze case: NIA recovers laptop, CCTV

Investigative agency recovers articles from Mithi River in Bandra

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, MARCH 28



Sachin Waze

The investigators of industrialist Mukesh Ambani bomb scare case and Mansukh Hiren murder case on Sunday recovered a computer hard disk and number plates from Mithi River in Bandra East. These articles were allegedly thrown in the river by Mumbai cop Sachin Waze in order to destroy the evidence against him.

The NIA team had taken Waze to the Mithi River and under his direction, divers recovered a number of articles from the spot

including a laptop, two CPUs, CCTV, DVR (Digital Video Recorder), two number plates of same registration number and a hard disk drive that were thrown in the river.

However, the probe agency has not revealed how these objects are linked to the case. But the

▶ **HOWEVER, THE** probe agency has not revealed how these objects are linked to the case. But the agency confirmed that blood samples of the accused have been taken for DNA test

agency confirmed that blood samples of the accused have been taken for DNA test.

According to sources, the recovered DVRs are of Waze's housing society where the Scorpio car was allegedly parked between February 17-24, of shops where various number

plates were made and of other places where Waze suspected that his movement could have been captured. Mr Waze was in charge of the investigation into the Ambani bomb scare case and when he realised that he could get into trouble because of these CCTV footage he procured them and threw it into the river to destroy the evidence.

The NIA team took Waze to the spot in Bandra Kurla Complex around 3 pm, the official said, adding that the search is still underway and more evidences are likely to be recovered.

Myanmar Army jets bomb villages, '2 civilians' killed

Operation on Thai border raises fear of civil war

Yangon, March 28: Myanmar Army fighter jets launched air strikes on Saturday on a village near the Thai border in territory controlled by an armed ethnic group, the group said, as fears grow of civil war following last month's military coup.

The Karen National Union (KNU), the armed ethnic group that controls the southeastern region, said fighter jets attacked Day Pu No in Papun district, an area held by its Brigade 5 forces, at around 8 pm, forcing villagers to flee. "They bombed the area... The villagers from that area said two dead and

▶ **THE JUNTA'S** troops killed dozens of people on Saturday, including children, news reports and witnesses said. More than 3,000 people crossed to Thailand to take refuge.

two injured," a spokesperson for civil society group Karen Peace Support Network said.

Earlier on Saturday, the KNU said Brigade 5 forces overran an Army base, killing 10 soldiers including a lieutenant-colonel, as the junta celebrated its annual Armed Forces Day with a parade in the capi-

tal, Naypyitaw.

The KNU said it has been sheltering hundreds of people who have fled central Myanmar amid mounting violence in recent weeks. The junta's troops killed dozens of people on Saturday, including children, in one of the bloodiest days of protests since the coup, news reports and witnesses said.

"At the moment, villagers are hiding in the jungle as more than 3,000 crossed to Thailand to take refuge," a statement from the group said. Thai PBS reported about 3,000 had reached Thailand.

— **Reuters**
■ **More on Page 6**

India win ODI series 2-1 against England



England batsmen shake hands with Indian players at the end of the third One Day International cricket match between India and England at Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune on Sunday. Indian won the thrilling match by 7 wickets and three-match series by 2-1. — AP

■ **Report on Page 8**

SHORT TAKES

'Strict action for violators of Covid protocols on Holi'

New Delhi: The Delhi Police on Sunday said patrolling will be intensified during Holi celebrations and strict action will be taken against those who do not follow coronavirus guidelines issued by Delhi Disaster Management Authority. Amid a surge in Covid-19 cases, the DDMA had on Tuesday ordered that there would be no public celebrations in the national capital during upcoming festivals such as Holi and Navaratri. Delhi Police PRO Chinmoy Biswal said patrolling will be intensified during Holi. "Pickets will be placed by the district police in their respective areas. The patrolling will be increased during the festival. Police will focus on those who are involved in drunken driving and action will be taken against them. "As public gathering is not allowed this year during Holi celebrations, strict action will be taken against those who would not adhere to coronavirus protocols. Delhi Police appeals to the public to celebrate Holi with their family members at home," Biswal said. The Delhi Traffic Police has also made elaborate arrangements to check incidents of drunken driving, over-speeding among others. "Special checking teams will be deployed at major intersections and vulnerable points to detect and prosecute traffic violations. Special traffic police checking teams along with PCR and local police teams will be stationed on various roads and strategic locations or intersections across Delhi," Joint Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Meenu Choudhary said. In cases of drunken driving, red light jumping, using mobile phone while driving, dangerous driving and over speeding, the driving license will be seized and it will be liable for suspension for a period of minimum three months, police said. The Delhi Police also appealed to the citizens of national capital to avoid public gatherings on Holi and celebrate the festival inside their houses adhering to Covid-19 guidelines. Delhi chief secretary Vijay Dev had earlier directed the authorities to ensure strict compliance of the DDMA order. On Saturday, Delhi Police Commissioner S N Shrivastava had instructed his officers to ensure optimal visibility of the force and follow safety guidelines while strictly enforcing the DDMA orders amid the Covid-19 pandemic. In view of consecutive festivals in the coming week, he had stressed that the DDMA guidelines regarding Covid-appropriate behaviour should be strictly adhered to and enforced on the ground. The police commissioner had also instructed his staff to follow safety guidelines while enforcing the DDMA orders. — PTI

Children's overall wellbeing lies in learning: Sisodia

New Delhi: Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Sunday said it was time to push the overall wellbeing of children into domains of learning and mainstream educational subjects. Speaking at the Harvard Social Enterprise Conference on mental health and socio-emotional learning, Sisodia emphasised on the impact of teaching children to be mindful and resilient for their overall wellbeing. "I believe that wellbeing needs to be made as a mainstream subject in education. One of the initiatives we have taken, to develop resilient children, is the entrepreneurship mindset curriculum. Irrespective of what children pursue, we want our students to think like an entrepreneur — willing to dream big, try new and challenging goals, be able to recognise opportunities around, and then plan and execute to bring them to fruition," he said. He added that through the "happiness curriculum" of the Delhi government, they have been able to "encourage our ecosystems to think about long-term approaches to mental health". "The objective of our happiness curriculum has been to develop self-awareness and mindfulness, inculcate skills of critical thinking and inquiry, enable learners to communicate effectively and help children to apply life skills to deal with stressful and conflicting situations around them. — PTI

Wanted criminal, who escaped from custody, killed in shootout

Gangster had escaped from GTB Hospital where he was taken for treatment on Thursday

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

A wanted criminal, Kuldeep Mann alias Fajja, a member of notorious Jitender Mann alias Gogi gang, who had managed to escape from custody, was killed on Sunday following an exchange of fire in the Rohini area in Delhi.

According to the police, Kuldeep Mann alias Fajja was previously involved in 11 criminal cases including five murders and three cases of armed robberies, extortion and other cases. The plan of his escape was hatched by his associates to revive the Gogi gang.

"On March 28, at about 01:45 AM, after receiving specific inputs a police team raided a flat inside Tulsi Apartment in Sector 14, Rohini where the accused Kuldeep was hiding. On seeing the police team, Kuldeep started firing indiscriminately at the police team," said

Pramod Singh Kushwaha, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Special Cell.

"The police team also fired in self-defence and in the ensuing exchange of fire, Kuldeep was injured and was rushed to Baba Saheb Ambedkar Hospital where he was declared brought dead," said the DCP.

"One Yogender Dahiya, who was living with accused Kuldeep in Tulsi Apartment, Rohini was also found in possession of illegal arms-ammunition and he was arrested under section 25 of Arms Act. Bhupender Singh was also arrested under section 41.1 CrPC for harboring the absconding criminal Kuldeep," said the DCP.

Kuldeep escaped from police custody on Thursday afternoon, following a shootout inside the GTB Hospital in east Delhi.

The shootout took place around 12.30 pm, when the

■ ACCORDING TO the police, Kuldeep Mann alias Fajja was previously involved in 11 criminal cases including five murders and three cases of armed robberies, extortion and other cases. The plan of his escape was hatched by his associates to revive the Gogi gang.

third battalion of the Delhi Police was taking the accused to the hospital for treatment in the OPD.

Police said that around 20 rounds were fired — eight by Kuldeep and around 10 by the Special Cell team — during the exchange of fire.

The flat belonged to Yogender Dahiya, also an associate of Kuldeep. He has been arrested, they said.

According to a senior police officer, the escape plan for Kuldeep was hatched by his associates to revive the Gogi gang.

On March 25 afternoon,

Kuldeep escaped from custody after a gunfight broke out at a government hospital here.

At the hospital, the assailants first threw chilli powder at the police team and then started firing at them to which the security personnel retaliated with 12 rounds of fire, killing one of them on the spot and injuring another. The shootout took place when police were taking Kuldeep, who is a member of the Gogi gang, to the hospital for treatment.

Five to six men came in a Scorpio car and a motorcycle from the rear entrance of the hospital building and fired at police. The Gogi gang is involved in extortion, collecting ransom and protection money as well as committing car-jacking among others.

Kuldeep was arrested by the Special Cell of the Delhi Police in March last year from Gurgaon.

Over 1,800 Covid cases in Delhi, positivity rate 2.35%

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

Delhi reported over 1,800 coronavirus cases on Sunday, the highest in around three-and-half months, while the positivity rate rose to 2.35 per cent, the Health Department said.

Nine more people succumbed to the disease, taking the toll to 11,006, it said. The 1,881 new infections pushed the tally to 6,57,715, while over 6.39 lakh patients have recovered from the virus.

This is the highest number of cases since December 13 when 1,984 people tested positive for the virus, according to official data.

The city had recorded 1,558 cases on Saturday, 1,534 cases on Friday, 1,515 cases on Thursday, 1,254 cases on Wednesday and 1,101 cases on Tuesday — the first time since December 24 that the number of cases crossed the 1,000 mark. The positivity rate was 1.70 per cent on Saturday, 1.80 per cent on Friday, 1.69 per cent on Thursday, 1.52 per cent on Wednesday, 1.31 per cent on Tuesday, and 1.32 per cent on Monday. The number of active Covid-19 cases rose to 7,545 from 6,625 on Saturday.

A total of 79,936 tests, including 53,422 RT-PCR tests, were conducted a day ago, the bulletin said. The number of people under home isolation rose to 4,237 from 3,708 a day ago. The

Covid-19 vaccination centre set up in Tihar Jail for inmates

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

The Delhi Prisons Department has set up a Covid-19 vaccination centre inside Tihar Jail to vaccinate eligible inmates. The official said that the centre was set up on Tuesday in the central jail hospital at jail number 3.

A total of 326 inmates in Delhi's prisons are above 60 years, and over 300 are in the 45-59 age bracket with comorbidities. These two categories are eligible for vaccination in the

ongoing nationwide drive. According to jail officials, around 70 to 80 inmates of Tihar, Rohini and Mandoli jails have been vaccinated so far.

"If needed, a vaccination centre will be opened at Mandoli Jail too. Our teams from the central jail hospital in jail number 3 will visit the inmates at Rohini and Mandoli Jails to vaccinate them starting next week. If needed, a vaccination centre will also be opened at Mandoli Jail," said Sandeep Goel, the Director General, Prison.

number of containment zones in the city rose to 1,710 from 1,506 on Saturday, it said. The case-load in Delhi on January 1 had stood at over 6.25 lakh 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, the daily cases have begun to rise again in March and it has been steadily increasing over the past few days.

Health minister Satyendar Jain on Saturday dismissed any possibility of imposing another lockdown in Delhi,

saying it was not a solution to check the spread of the coronavirus that is again surging rapidly. The minister said there were enough hospital beds available for coronavirus patients and it could be increased if the need arises.

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 the situation can be kept under control if vaccination is opened up for more people and Covid-19 protocols are strictly adhered to.



Farmers during Holi festival amid their ongoing protest against farm laws at Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Sunday. — G.N Jha

Man takes to snatching jewellery for daughter's wedding; held with son

New Delhi, March 28: A 50-year-old man, who took to snatching jewellery in order to stock gold for his daughter's wedding, has been arrested along with his son, Delhi Police said on Sunday.

According to police, a complaint about two persons on a black scooter snatching the gold chain of a woman was registered on February 17. A similar case was registered in Dabri area on March 17.

"During investigation, police identified the scooter an apprehended Sarvapal Singh and his

24-year-old son Jasmeet from Bahadurgarh in Haryana," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka) Santosh Kumar Meena said.

Sarpapal used to wear a black mask, a black helmet, and hide the front number plate by pasting white paper on the last four digits and rear number plate by putting mud on it, the DCP said.

During interrogation, Sarvapal disclosed that he took to snatching as he wanted to stock gold for his daughter's marriage who is engaged, police added. — PTI

Delhi Zoo may get 3 more tigers for breeding

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

The Delhi Zoo may soon get three tigers from Chennai and Nagpur for "breeding purposes" under an animal exchange programme, officials have said.

The zoo director, Ramesh Pandey, said they plan to bring a pair of tigers from the Gorewada Zoo in Nagpur while another male tiger is likely to be brought from Chennai.

A Royal Bengal tigress was brought to the zoo from Kanpur for breeding purposes in November last year.

The Delhi Zoo is a participant in the "conservation

breeding programme" of the Royal Bengal Tiger.

According to the Central Zoo Authority, the conservation breeding programme is the science of conserving a species by preventing an imminent population collapse in the wild due to a large number of eliminative pressures such as habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, industrialisation, poaching, illegal trade, and climate change.

At present, the Delhi Zoo has seven tigers, including five white tigers, Mr Pandey said.

"A pair of sloth bears from the Nagpur facility is also on the cards," he

■ Policeman allegedly hit the victim on head Tilak Nagar tense after Nigerian national's death

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

A 43-year-old Nigerian national allegedly died on Sunday in west Delhi's Tilak Nagar area after a policeman hit him on head, however, police denied the allegations and said the deceased was not assaulted by them.

The Nigerian nationals later in the day created ruckus in Tilak Nagar area following the death of Leohand Lyeanyi. The known persons of Lyeanyi alleged that he was died after being hit by police lathi.

However, on the other hand, police said that the deceased was not hit by them and his MLC shows no fresh external injury on the body.

On Sunday around 3.30 am, police received information regarding the incident where one

■ POLICE SAID they found a CCTV from where it was seen that the deceased stepped out of an auto-rickshaw and sitting near a shop. He then collapsed, hitting his head on the ground and nobody was around him.

Lyeanyi was declared brought dead in DDU Hospital. The deceased used to live in Krishna Puri, Tilak Nagar area, a senior police officer said.

The other African nationals known to the deceased later on started alleging that he died because of "lathi injury" on his head. The MLC of the person for now shows no fresh external injury on body, the officer said.

The post-mortem got conducted and police are waiting for its report, they said.

Police said that the

Nigerian nationals broke the glass in DDU hospital. Initially, they were around 20 to 30, but later, they their numbers increased to around 100.

They attacked local people on the road. When the officials from the High Commission of Nigeria came to the meet them, they were also assaulted by violent mob and their vehicle was vandalized, police said.

According to police, two cases, one by DDU hospital, are being registered against the violent mob and investigation is underway.

Police said they found a CCTV from where it was seen that the deceased stepped out of an auto-rickshaw and sitting near a shop. He then collapsed, hitting his head on the ground and nobody was around him.

Part of under-construction elevated road collapses in Gurgaon, 3 injured

Gurgaon, March 28: A portion of an under-construction elevated road on the Dwarka Expressway collapsed here on Sunday morning injuring three workers, following which two personnel of the contractor and supervision consultant were suspended by NHAI, officials said.

The Gurgaon Police said the incident occurred around 7.30 am and three labourers sustained injuries. They were discharged from a hospital after treatment, officials said.

A team of officials from the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), including the regional officer and the project director, visited the site. When contacted, NHAI Member (Projects) Manoj Kumar said, "On first impression, it seems to be a case of mechanical failure. It is being investigated."

The NHAI said it has suspended key personnel of developer Larsen & Toubro and supervision consultant AECOM following the incident.

The personnel were suspended pending the outcome of investigation by an expert committee being constituted to probe the incident, it said.

"The authority has



Under-construction flyover a portion of which collapsed over Dwarka Expressway near Daultabad Chowk in Gurugram on Sunday. — PTI

viewed the incident seriously and pending the outcome of the investigation by the committee, the key personnel of the Contractor M/s L&T and Supervision Consultant M/s AECOM have been suspended as per standard operating procedure of NHAI," the NHAI said in a statement. The site is being secured with necessary precautions taken to prevent any further damage, the statement said.

It said, "An unfortunate incident happened in

Gurgaon wherein under-erection span and adjoining span (between pier number 107-108 and pier number 108-109) of the under-construction flyover of package-III Dwarka Expressway collapsed during the early hours of 28.03.2021 around 7:30 am."

Union road and transport minister Nitin Gadkari had earlier this month visited the expressway to inspect progress of the 30-kilometre project which is being built at the cost of ₹10,000 crore.

The expressway connects Dwarka in Delhi to Gurgaon in Haryana. The Dwarka Expressway being constructed under the Bharatmala Project.

Being built in four packages, the total length of the expressway is 29 kilometres out of which 18.9-kilometre length falls in Haryana while the remaining 10.1-kilometre is in Delhi. It starts from Shiv-Murti on National Highway-8 and ends near KherkiDaula Toll Plaza. — PTI

An adventurous way to eradicate fear of animals among children

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 22

When 'Raj' meets his magical friend 'Snowy' the cat, his life changes forever.

After that, nothing seems impossible. Together, they face daunting challenges and overcome those together.

Every story has a twist or a hidden obstacle to overcome. Well known author Pooja Nanda says that in her latest book for children — Adventures of Raj and Snowy — "Every story provides a sense of wonder and possibility. Fairies, elves and animals share the adventures of Raj and Snowy. Be it the wolf, the snake, the river or the hill, they never forget their love



for animals or the needy". "With every adventure they learn to become better and bolder. Every adventure has lovely treats, dance and songs that Raj and Snowy often sing. Everyone is invited to be a part of their adventurous safari. Master Coach drives away fear forever. Here animals teach life lessons. The Magic brush

enables Raj and Snowy to become the frontier force. Together with the elves they resolve the Corona problem", says Nanda.

The author had to eradicate the fears of children about animals. Her experience of being a teacher and her love for children flows into the stories where Raj and Snowy show courage and care. Illustrator, Shreya loves drawing children's illustrations.

Disney & Enid Blyton had a deep impact on her drawing while growing up. When she heard Raj & Snowy's story, she not only loved the characters but also formed a deep bond with them. Her love for animals creates magic for all her works.

Notice to DJB over pipelines through Asola sanctuary

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

The Delhi forest department has issued notices to the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), irrigation and flood control department (I&FC), and Indraprastha Gas Limited (IGL) for constructing a road and laying water and gas pipelines through the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary, officials have said.

Permission under the Forest Conservation Act is required from the Union environment ministry for such works in a wildlife sanctuary. The ministry also seeks the advice of the National Board of Wildlife on such matters, according to officials.

The road and gas and water pipelines lead to Asola Homes, a residential project in Chattarpur, deputy conservator of forests (South division) Amit Anand said.

Forest officials said Asola Homes has also come up on land that falls under the wildlife sanctuary. A case has been pending before the forest settlement officer in this regard for around six years.

Google Earth images show the road was constructed in 2017, he said.

Officials from the I&FC and IGL participated in a hearing before the forest department officials recently.

SHORT TAKES

DMK's Raja booked over TN CM remark

Chennai: DMK MP A Raja has been booked by the city police over a complaint from the ruling AIADMK for allegedly making vulgar personal remarks against chief minister K. Palaniswami, a senior official said on Sunday. The case was filed based on a complaint to the state Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) which was forwarded to the Greater Chennai Police, Commissioner Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal told reporters here. "On the basis, the case was filed under Indian Penal Code and Representation of People Act," he said, without divulging details. Earlier, Raja courted a controversy after he allegedly made vulgar personal remarks against Palaniswami during an election campaign, with the AIADMK knocking the doors of the EC with a plea to debar him from campaigning for the April 6 Assembly elections. — PTI

MLA attack: Punjab gov seeks report

Chandigarh: Punjab Governor V.P. Singh Badnore on Sunday condemned the recent attack on a BJP legislator in Muktsar district and sought a report from the Congress-led government in this regard. The governor also called up Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh, who holds the home portfolio, and conveyed his serious concern over the incident. BJP MLA Arun Narang was allegedly thrashed and his clothes ripped off by a group of protesting farmers at Malout in Muktsar district on Saturday. The BJP leader had gone to Malout to address a press conference. Badnore condemned the incident after a delegation of Punjab BJP leaders led by state unit chief Ashwani Sharma and Union minister Som Parkash called on him and submitted a memorandum. The memorandum highlighted the "increasing attacks" on BJP workers and leaders in "illegal and unconstitutional manner" at the behest of the Congress government, according to an official statement. — PTI

Srimandir to stay closed on Sundays

Bhubaneswar: Devotees will no more be allowed to enter Srimandir, the abode of Lord Jagannath at Puri, for a darshan of the deity on Sundays from next week. This was informed by Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) chief Krishan Kumar on Sunday. To curb spread of Covid, the temple will be sanitised on every Sunday as it used to be after reopening of the temple in December last year. The decision regarding restriction on devotees' entry inside the shrine was taken at Chhatisa Nijog meeting held on March 23, though the temple administration had not confirmed the day. At the meeting, the SJTA had given permission for holding of rituals of Agniutsav at the shrine on March 27 and Dola Purnima on March 28.

WILL SPEAK UP FOR PEOPLE OF J&K: MEHBOOBA

Srinagar: PDP president Mehbooba Mufti on Sunday sought people's support for the struggle for restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood and special status under the Constitution. Speaking at a daylong convention of party workers in Budgam district, Ms Mehbooba said she will not budge or shy away from speaking up for the people of Jammu and Kashmir. "I have decided for myself and taken a conscious decision to speak up for my people, struggle for their dignity and rights and advocate peace and reconciliation as a means to sustainable peace not only in J&K, but the whole of the subcontinent," she said. "I know the road is full of challenges and would test me every minute. But, as a citizen of J&K and the leader of PDP, this is expected of me and I assure you that the party would make no compromise on the agenda of (party founder) Mufti (Mohammad Sayeed) Sahab and won't leave our people in lurch, whatever pressures be," she said. Cautioning the people that the struggle will be a long and an arduous one, Mehbooba said the road is full of challenges and not for the faint-hearted. — PTI

Tamil Nadu CM 'trapped' as he's 'corrupt', alleges Rahul

Says ironically, because of the money he has stolen from the people of the state

Chennai, March 28: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday lashed out at AIADMK top leader and Tamil Nadu chief minister K. Palaniswami alleging he is trapped due to graft and he bowed in front of Union home minister Amit Shah as he had indulged in corruption. Addressing a public meeting here for the April 6 Assembly polls, Gandhi said when he saw Prime Minister Narendra Modi 'controlling' the chief minister of Tamil Nadu and making him "touch his feet silently I am not ready to accept it."

A 'leader' in Uttar Pradesh was forced to bow in front of Shah as he was corrupt and this person lost his freedom due to

The tragedy is, the TN CM does not want to bow in front of Amit Shah and no Tamil person will want to do that. However, He is forced to bow in front of Shah because of the corruption he has done.

— Rahul Gandhi, Cong leader

graft and Palaniswami too faced a similar situation, he claimed.

The former Congress party chief did not specify the name of the UP leader.

"The tragedy is, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu does not want to bow in front of Amit Shah and no Tamil person will want to do that." However, Mr Palaniswami is forced to bow in front of Shah because of the "corruption he has done," Mr

Gandhi alleged.

"Ironically, because of the money he has stolen from the people of Tamil Nadu, he is now trapped," the Congress MP alleged.

The Congress leader said he was angered to 'see' that Palaniswami, belonging to the great Tamil civilisation, touched the feet of PM Modi and Mr Shah and bowed in front of them.

One has to touch the feet of Modi and Shah and bow

before them, whether a person was in the BJP or in an alliance with that party, he claimed adding the Saffron party does not understand any other kind of relationship.

"We have a different idea, for us a relationship that is not equal is a useless relationship."

Mr Gandhi, like in his previous poll campaign meetings in Tamil Nadu, reiterated that his party stood for mutual respect, love and affection and treated the Tamil people like brothers and sisters.

While the BJP wanted everyone in the country to 'bow' before PM Modi and Mr Shah duo, the Congress party believed in the ethos of brotherhood and equality, he said.

— PTI

Yechury targets EC for delay in RS poll in Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram, March 28: Senior CPI(M) leader Sitaram Yechury on Sunday raised suspicion over the EC decision to keep in abeyance the elections to fill three Rajya Sabha seats from Kerala, and called it 'unconstitutional'.

Mr Yechury, who reached the southern state to campaign for the Left parties, said the EC's move amounts to 'denial of representation' to Kerala in the Council of States.

The EC had recently decided to put the elections to three RS seats on hold after the Centre flagged some issues.

Targeting the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre, he said it is known for "misusing" central agencies and in Kerala they are being used "unscrupulously and in a targeted manner".

To a reporter's query on Union defence minister Rajnath Singh's comments about the Kerala government's decision to recommend a judicial inquiry against the ED, Yechury said the honourable union minister must re-read the Constitution.

"The honourable Defence minister must reread the Constitution. No central agency can



Sitaram Yechury

interfere or work in any state without the concurrence of the state concerned. And if the state concerned is not willing to give

concern, they approach the judiciary," Mr Yechury said.

Attacking the Congress, he said the national party wants to raise more Hindutva slogans than the BJP-RSS leaders and was feeding communal polarisation. "Now there is hindutva competitiveness between them (Congress and BJP), it's only feeding hindutva communal polarisation. It's for them to answer where they stand."

The Left is now the principal target of the BJP, precisely because we are the only force uncompromising and without deviating from its position and standing up for secularism," he told reporters here.

The CPI(M) general secretary asserted that the Left wants the separation of religion or faith from politics and the government, which makes the communist party a principal target of the communal organisations.

— PTI

NIA: PDP's Wahid paying terrorists for political gains

New Delhi, March 28: The NIA has alleged that PDP youth leader Wahid-Ur-Rehman Parra is involved in "dirty" gun-running, providing finance to terror groups and being "part of the larger conspiracy" hatched by Pakistan-based terrorist outfits to make "inroads" into important institutions in Jammu and Kashmir to carry forward their secessionist agenda.

According to a supplementary charge-sheet filed at a Jammu court recently in the terror funding case, which also involves a deputy superintendent of police, Davender Singh, the agency has listed Parra's activities since 2010 and alleged that he had formed a group of 20 to 25 youths who indulged in stone pelting during

protests at his behest.

This was done by Parra to yield political mileage for himself from the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the National Investigation Agency (NIA) alleged. The party was in the opposition in 2010 in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir.

It may be mentioned that in 2010, an agitation had taken place against the killing of three youths in the Macchil area of north Kashmir and they being labelled as terrorists. The protests, in which 126 lives were lost, were carried out despite police filing a charge-sheet against army personnel.

Parra, who is at present in judicial custody, has denied the charges of he being involved with terror groups, and his party has said that he has been framed in the case only

because he refused to join political parties being supported by the BJP.

The NIA alleged that banned terror group Hizbul Mujahideen had sought the support of some mainstream political leaders like Parra.

The nexus clearly establishes that some of mainstream politicians are involved in "politics of convenience and deceit wherein they are seeking help" from terrorist organisations for "securing cooperation during election campaigns and for assisting their workers in management of election process, the agency said in its charge-sheet."

"These mainstream politicians are seeking this cooperation through payment of money thereby making mockery of the electoral process," the NIA said.

— PTI

Pilot: Assam polls a struggle to save people from BJP's misrule

Silchar/Karimganj (Assam), March 28: Congress leader Sachin Pilot on Sunday claimed that the assembly election in Assam is a struggle to save the people of the state from the "misrule" of the BJP.

The BJP government never stood by the people during the hour of crisis, Pilot alleged while addressing two election meetings at Silchar and Karimganj in Barak Valley region. "We are not fighting to

come to power, but to save the people of Assam from the misrule of the BJP," he said. The BJP is dividing people on religious lines and they need to remain united in Assam and India, the former deputy chief minister of Rajasthan said.

"When people were in crisis during the demonetisation, GST and lockdown, the BJP government was nowhere to be seen. So, it is time that we remove the party from power," he added. — PTI

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, MARCH 28

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday lauded the efforts of Sikari Tissau, a resident of Assam for his life-long mission to document the Karbi language.

Karbi is a Tibeto-Burman language, spoken by the indigenous community of Karbi in parts of Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Burma and Bangladesh. The Prime Minister in

his 75th episode of Mann Ki Baat said, "Tisso of Karbi Anglong district of Assam has been documenting Karbi language for 20 years. Language is now disappearing from the mainstream, so he decided to dedicate his life to protect the identity of language. Today his efforts have resulted in the documentation of information about the language."

He said, "Once upon a time, in another era, 'Karbi', the language of

NIA arrests TMC leader Mahato over 2009 murder

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, MARCH 28



Chhatradhar Mahato

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested Maoist frontman-turned-Trinamul Congress state committee member Chhatradhar Mahato early on Sunday under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and several Indian Penal Code charges for repeatedly skipping its summons for questioning in its case against him over the Naxals' guerrilla-style attack on the Rajdhani Express at Jhargram in the Jangalmahal of West Bengal in 2009.

At around 3.30 am, a 40-member NIA team raided the home of the former convener of the People's Committee Against Atrocities (PCAPA)—a frontal outfit

of the Maoists for the tribals during the Communist rule—at Amlia village in Lalgarh of Jhargram. Chhatradhar and his family members were asleep then.

On Saturday morning, the 57-year-old, who became the BJP's target for his entry to the ruling TMC over his influence among the tribals, cast his vote in Jhargram in the first phase of the Assembly election in the state for the first time

after languishing in jail for over a decade in many high profile cases of Maoist violence.

Chhatradhar, who has been accused by the NIA in another fresh case of CPI(M) worker Prabir Mahato's murder in 2009, was grilled three times by the NIA at the CRPF camp in the Jangalmahal before another round in Kolkata on March 15.

He, however, skipped the next summons of the NIA on March 16 citing toothache but attended chief minister Mamata Banerjee's rally at Lalgarh on March 17 and gave a speech there. The NIA then summoned Chhatradhar on March 18 and 22, which he avoided.

His wife, however, complained that the NIA arrested Chhatradhar for refusing to join the BJP.

Kerala: BJP & CPM spar over CAA implementation

Puthuppally/Purameri (Ker), March 28: As the campaign for the Kerala assembly poll entered its crucial phase, the BJP and CPI(M) on Sunday raked up the issue of CAA with the saffron party pledging to fulfill its promises and the Left declaring that the controversial law will not be implemented in the southern state.

Kerala had witnessed separate massive protests by CPI (M)-led LDF and the Congress-led UDF seeking to withdraw the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), describing it as 'discriminatory' and 'anti-

Muslim.'

Senior BJP leader and Union Defence minister Rajnath Singh said the party will implement the promises made by it to the people during elections.

Addressing an election meeting at Puthuppally Assembly constituency in Kottayam district, Mr Singh said the BJP had made promises that a party-led government at the Centre would abrogate Article 370, enact Citizenship Amendment Act and bring law against triple talaq to protect the marriage of Muslim women.

— PTI

Efforts on to shut the case: Shivakumar

Bengaluru, March 28: A day after the family of the woman in the purported sex video allegedly involving former minister Ramesh Jarkiholi blamed him for the scandal, Karnataka Congress president D.K. Shivakumar on Sunday said all efforts are on to close the case and the law will take its own course.

"...the law will take its own course. All kinds of efforts are being made. They are bringing people and making them give statements. Let the government do

whatever they want, but I just want to tell the police that they should safeguard their respect" (do the probe impartially), Mr Shivakumar said.

Speaking to reporters here, he alleged that efforts were on to close the case. "Let them do it."

On the statement of the woman's parents against him before the Special Investigation Team probing the case, Shivakumar said they had complained against him, after which she also issued a statement to the media.

SEX SCANDAL

ON THE statement of the woman's parents against him before the Special Investigation Team probing the case, Shivakumar said they had complained against him, after which she also issued a statement to the media

happen," he said.

To a question on whether he wants the woman to come out and give her statement to the SIT after

the developments on Saturday, he merely said he did not wish to speak on it now and wants to focus on coming bypolls in the state, as he also ruled out filing any defamation case.

The scandal had taken a new twist on Saturday with the woman's family blaming Shivakumar and accusing him of playing "dirty politics" by using their daughter.

After appearing before the SIT, her father and brother had said that Shivakumar would be responsible if anything happens to their family

and urged him to send their daughter, who is at an undisclosed location, back to them.

Minutes after the family's statement, Jarkiholi too had slammed the state Congress chief, stating that "There is not a politician who is worse than Mr Shivakumar" and had announced a political and legal battle against him.

Jarkiholi had even used a Kannada expletive against Mr Shivakumar multiple times, which triggered a protest by Congress workers, following which he had expressed regret. — PTI

Rajnath says Kerala challenging federal structure of Constitution 'Probe against govt agencies unfortunate'

Thiruvananthapuram, March 28: Union Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday said the Kerala government's decision to recommend a judicial inquiry against central probe agencies, including the Enforcement Directorate (ED) probing the gold and dollar smuggling cases, was "unfortunate" and amounts to challenging the federal structure of the Constitution.

Mr Singh, who is in Kerala to campaign for the BJP-NDA candidates in the April 6 Assembly polls, also said the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) will be implemented only after taking all the communities into confidence.

The UCC is there in the BJP manifesto.

"We will take all the communities into confidence and go forward. We are firm on that decision," Mr Singh told reporters here. On the rising fuel prices,



Defence minister Rajnath Singh offers prayers during his visit to Sivagiri Mutt in Varkala.

— PTI

he said the Centre had requested all the states to reduce the state duty on petrol.

On the smuggling cases, he said: "I came to know that the case is being probed by the ED and then a judicial commission has been appointed against

the central agency. It's very unfortunate. This means the state government is challenging the federal structure of the Constitution. This is 100 per cent against the constitution."

The CPI(M)-led LDF government had recently

decided to order a judicial enquiry against the central agencies, including ED, for allegedly "derailing the probe" in the gold smuggling and dollar scams, days after the Kerala Crime Branch registered an FIR against some ED officials.

While the gold scam relates to the seizure of about 30 kg gold worth ₹14.82 crore from a diplomatic baggage at Thiruvananthapuram International airport in July 2020, the dollar smuggling case pertains to alleged smuggling of \$ 1,90,000 (equivalent to ₹1.30 crore) by a former finance head of the UAE Consulate in Thiruvananthapuram to Muscat in Oman.

Besides the ED, the Customs and the National Investigation Agency (NIA) are also inquiring into the scams.

— PTI

PM hails man on mission to save Karbi language

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, MARCH 28

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday lauded the efforts of Sikari Tissau, a resident of Assam for his life-long mission to document the Karbi language.

Karbi is a Tibeto-Burman language, spoken by the indigenous community of Karbi in parts of Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Burma and Bangladesh. The Prime Minister in

his 75th episode of Mann Ki Baat said, "Tisso of Karbi Anglong district of Assam has been documenting Karbi language for 20 years. Language is now disappearing from the mainstream, so he decided to dedicate his life to protect the identity of language. Today his efforts have resulted in the documentation of information about the language."

He said, "Once upon a time, in another era, 'Karbi', the language of

KARBI IS a Tibeto-Burman language, spoken by the indigenous community of Karbi in parts of Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Burma and Bangladesh

'Karbi tribal' brothers and sisters...is now disappearing from the mainstream. Tissau decided that he would protect the identity of theirs. He has also received accolades at many places for his

efforts, and has also received awards."

PM Modi also thanked listeners for their continued support as the monthly radio programme 'Mann Ki Baat' reached the milestone of 75 episodes.

"It seems like just yesterday when in 2014 we began this journey called Mann Ki Baat. I want to thank all listeners and those who have given inputs for the programme. During this journey, we have discussed a

wide range of subjects. We all have learnt so much. Diverse topics have been covered," PM Modi added.

The Karbis inhabiting in hills traditionally practice "jhum cultivation" whereas those dwelling in plains earn their livelihood by engaging in agriculture and livestock rearing. According to Assam Human Development report 2003, this tribe has the highest number of people in human poverty.

SHORT TAKES

2 militants killed in Shopian encounter

Srinagar: A Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) militant, who had infiltrated from Pakistan last week, was among the two ultras killed in an encounter with security forces in J&K's Shopian district on March 27, the police said on Sunday. Inspector general of police, Kashmir, Vijay Kumar said the encounter in Shopian's Wangam area began on Saturday evening and got over with the killing of two militants belonging to HM and LeT. "Two deadly terrorists have been killed in the operation. One of them, Inatullah Sheikh, a resident of Shopian, was active since 2018 and had gone to Pakistan that year for arms training. He returned last week only. He was with HM," the IGP said. The other militant, Adil Malik, a resident of Anantnag, belonged to LeT, he said. "One AK-47 rifle, one M4 rifle and a pistol have been recovered from the encounter site," he said, adding that so far this year, security forces have recovered two M4 rifles from militants. The IGP said it was more likely that Sheikh had brought the M4 rifle with him from Pakistan. — PTI

8 pilgrims from TN die in road mishap

Amaravati: Eight people were killed and seven others injured on Sunday when the tempo in which they were travelling hit a stationary lorry in Sri Potti Srimululu Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh, the police said. The victims from Tamil Nadu were on their way back home after a pilgrimage to Srisaillam in Andhra Pradesh when the mishap occurred, the police said. Seven died on the spot while another died while being shifted to a hospital, the police added. The police suspects a thick fog might have caused the mishap. — PTI

Tigress Bijaya gives birth to 3 new cubs

Bhubaneswar: Happiness spread all across in Nandankanan Zoological Park in Bhubaneswar after white tigress Bijaya gave birth to three cubs on Sunday. The three newborns are also white in colour. As per the information provided by the zoo authorities, Bijaya delivered one cub in the morning and then delivered two more cubs in the afternoon. Nandankanan now has a total tiger population of 27, out of which seven are white, four are melanistic tigers and 13 are Royal Bengal Tigers, informed the zoo authorities.

Raut article hints Sena-NCP ties are souring

■ **Continued from Page 1** Maharashtra government's character has been questioned many times due to what happened in past few months," the article said, referring to former Mumbai police chief Param Bir Singh's allegations against Mr Deshmukh. Mr Raut's article has not gone well the NCP.

Deputy chief minister and NCP leader Ajit Pawar said that the alliance partners of MVA should not make such statements, which would create trouble to other partners. "Nobody should try to play a spoilsport in a coalition government. The allotment of cabinet berths is the prerogative of head of every political party (in the coalition). No one should play spoilsport when the three-party government is functioning properly," Mr. Pawar said.

NCP spokesperson and cabinet minister Nawab Malik said, "Mr. Deshmukh has been MLA from last five times. He had worked 18 years as a minister. The allotment of cabinet berths is the prerogative of the head of every political party. No one should play spoilsport when the three-party government is functioning properly."

According to reports, Union home minister Amit Shah met NCP leaders Sharad Pawar and Praful Patel at a top industrialist's residence in Ahmedabad on Saturday. At a press conference in New Delhi on Sunday, the Union home minister deflected a question on the said meeting, saying that these things cannot be made public.

However, Mr. Malik told this newspaper that no such meeting took place.

India to get 10 new Rafale jets soon

With the coming of new aircraft, IAF to have 21-22 jets ■ Some new fighters will be moved to Hashimara

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

The Indian Air Force (IAF) will be getting 10-11 new Rafale fighter jets from France in over a month which will be a major boost to its firepower.

The IAF has already got 11 Rafale which are stationed at Ambala Air Station.

With the coming of new aircraft, IAF will have 21-22 Rafale jets which are armed with deadly weapon systems.

Some of the new Rafale

aircraft will be moved to Hashimara where the process of starting the second squadron has already begun.

India is likely to get three Rafale jets this week and then 7-8 more will come in the second half of April.

In 2016, India had signed a ₹59,000 crore deal for 36 Rafales.

The Indian Air Force will like to operationalise the new batch of Rafale jets as soon as possible due to ongoing tensions with China.

In 2016, India had signed

■ **RAFALE JETS** give India an edge over China and Pakistan as it is armed with the most advanced beyond visual range Meteor air-to-air missiles which have a range of upto 150 km

■ **RAFALE FIGHTERS** will also be armed with Scalp cruise air to surface missiles, which have a range of over 300 km

a ₹59,000 crore deal for 36 Rafales which will be based in Ambala and

Hasimara (West Bengal) air bases.

The 4.5 generation fighter aircraft, capable of carrying nuclear weapons provides Indian Air Force unmatched air superiority in the region with its advanced avionics and deadly weapon package which include Meteor, Scalp and Hammer missiles.

Rafale jets give India an edge over China and Pakistan as it is armed with the most advanced beyond visual range Meteor air-to-air missiles which have a range of

upto 150 kilometers. Meteor has the ability to chase down and destroy agile hostile fighters at even the furthest of ranges and has a no-escape zone many times greater than any other air-to-air missile.

Both Pakistan and China Air Force don't have a missile to counter it. These Meteor air-to-air missiles will prove deadly during a dogfight.

Rafale fighters will also be armed with Scalp cruise air to surface missiles, which have a range of over 300 kilometers.



Indian and US navies take part in an exercise in the eastern Indian Ocean Region.

India, US begin 2-day Navy drill

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

In growing India and US military cooperation, the Indian Navy and Air Force on Sunday started a two-day exercise with nuclear-powered US aircraft carrier *USS Theodore Roosevelt* and its escorting warships in the Eastern Indian Ocean Region.

What is significant is that the Indian Air Force fighter jets carried out air inception and air defence exercises with US Navy close to Indian Coast.

"Fighter aircraft from Southern Air Command are participating in the exercise," said a senior official.

The Indian Navy said that *INS Shivalik* with integral helicopter and Indian Navy's long-range maritime patrol aircraft P8I participated in a Passage Exercise (PASSEX) with US Navy's *USS Theodore Roosevelt*

Carrier Strike Group in the Eastern Indian Ocean Region.

For the US, India is an important country to contain China's influence in Indo-Pacific region which is increasing investment in PLA Navy (PLAN).

There is now greater inter-operability between Indian and US navy and both can now securely share information. There is also increasing confidence in each other between the two navies.

The new US secretary of defence, Lloyd James Austin, was in New Delhi two weeks back, in his first overseas visit to enhance the strategic partnership between India and US for peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

The exercise is aimed at consolidating the synergy and interoperability achieved during the Malabar exercise that took place in November last.

After CBI raids, ED to start probe into ₹555.65cr fraud

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

Days after the CBI conducted searches at the premises linked to Indian Technometal Company Limited and its directors in connection with a bank fraud case to the tune of ₹555.65 crore, another Central probe agency — Enforcement Directorate — is now preparing to register a money laundering case against the promoters — R.K. Sharma and V.K. Sharma — of the accused firm.

Sources said, "ED sleuths are in touch with CBI officials, who are investigating the case. Immediately after regis-

tering a separate case under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, properties, worth several crores, linked to the accused will be attached". The CBI recently conducted searches at the premises linked to Indian Technometal Company Limited and its directors Rakesh Kumar Sharma and Vinay Kumar Sharma in connection with the case. The ED will soon collect all relevant documents pertaining to the case from the CBI sleuths, they added.

CBI officials had carried out searches at the premises of the company and its directors, based in Himchal's Kangra.



Patients are shifted to a hall after a fire broke out at the LPS Institute of Cardiology in Kanpur on Sunday. — PTI

Truck ploughs into roadside restaurant in Bihar, 8 killed

Bihar Sharif, March 28: Eight people were killed and several others seriously injured when a speeding truck ploughed into a roadside eatery in Bihar's Nalanda district on Sunday, the police said.

Irate locals set fire to the vehicle and indulged in heavy stone-pelting when the police and administrative officials reached the spot, a senior police officer said.

The accident took place in Telhada police station area in the evening when the driver of the truck coming from neighbouring Jehanabad district lost control over the vehicle, deputy superintendent of police Krishna Murari Sharan said.

Employees of the eating joint and customers are among the deceased, he said.

The driver and other occupants of the truck abandoned the vehicle and fled the spot, following which infuriated spectators set it on fire.

Police personnel were pelted with stones while they tried to take the bodies for post-mortem examination and the injured to hospitals.

The vehicle of the block development officer concerned was also vandalised, the deputy SP said. — PTI

Prepare plan for lockdown, says Uddhav

Maha CM mulls implementation of Covid curbs which will have minimum impact on economy

Mumbai, March 28: In view of the rise in fresh Covid-19 cases, Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday asked officials to prepare a plan for implementation of a lockdown which will have a minimum impact on the economy on the recommendation of the state Covid-19 task force, an official release said.

In a meeting held with the chief minister, health minister Rajesh Tope and other officials, members of the task force expressed apprehension that the

state might report 40,000 fresh cases in the next 24 hours, it said.

During the meeting, the CM reviewed health infrastructure including availability of beds, oxygen, medicines etc. in the state to treat Covid-19 patients.

The task force then recommended that the state government implement measures like a stricter lockdown to stem the rise in Covid positive cases.

The chief minister then asked officials to prepare a detailed plan for implementation of a lockdown which will have a mini-

■ **MAHARASHTRA** HAS seen a huge rise in coronavirus positive cases over the last week. As many as one lakh new infections were added to the state's tally in such short period

mum impact on the economy of the state, the release said.

"There should not be any kind of confusion among the people once a lockdown is announced," the CM is quoted as saying. Maharashtra has seen a

huge rise in coronavirus positive cases over the last week. As many as one lakh new infections were added to the state's tally in such short period.

"24,619 cases had been reported on a single day in September, 2020. However, on March 27 this year, the state reported 35,726 new cases in a day. This number could touch 40,000 in the next 24 hours," the release said quoting the members of the task force.

Struggling to arrest the upsurge in coronavirus positive cases, the CM on Friday directed officials to

impose section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure under which gathering of five or more persons will be banned in night in the state, beginning March 28.

On Saturday, the state government announced a ban on holding of all types of gatherings, including political and religious. It also ordered that restaurants, gardens and malls will remain shut between 8 pm to 7 am beginning Saturday night. People will also not be allowed to visit beaches during 8 pm to 7 am. — PTI

Man upset with airline makes hoax bomb call, held in Nashik

Nashik, March 28: A Nashik-Hyderabad flight of the Alliance Air was delayed due to a bomb threat call received shortly before its take-off, which later turned out to be a hoax, the police said on Sunday.

The incident took place on Saturday evening and the police later arrested the caller, who allegedly made the call after failing to get a seat in the flight, they said.

The flight was scheduled to take-off at 8.25 pm on Saturday from the airport here in Maharashtra.

About 20 minutes before the scheduled take-off, the Nashik rural police control room received a call that a bomb was planted in the plane, an official from the Dindori police station said.

As a result, the passengers were deplaned.

A police team and the Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad rushed there and checked the plane, but no bomb or any other suspicious thing was found, the official said.

The flight later left for its destination in the wee hours of Sunday, he said.

The police arrested a person, identified as Pabbinedi Viresh Venkat Narayan Murthy (33), an engineer from Kakinada, in Andhra Pradesh, who had booked a ticket with the airline to go to Hyderabad.

As his ticket PNR status was not updated, he reached the airport where the staff of the airline told him to get another ticket.

He later left the airport and made the bomb threat phone call as he was upset with the airline, the official said. — PTI

Rape survivor tied, paraded with accused in MP, 6 held

Alirajpur (MP), March 28: A 16-year-old girl was allegedly raped by a 21-year-old man on Sunday in tribal-dominated Alirajpur district of Madhya Pradesh, following which villagers paraded both the accused and the victim in public by tying them with ropes, the police said.

A total of six persons, including the man who is accused of rape, and five villagers, have been arrested.

A video showing the girl and the accused tied with ropes, being beaten and forced to walk in public in the village under Jobat

police station amidst slogans of "Bharat Mata Ki Jai" has gone viral on social media.

The girl was rescued by police, a senior officer said.

Sub-divisional officer of police Dilip Singh Bilwal said two cases were registered on Sunday on the FIRs lodged by the victim.

"One of the cases was registered against the 21-year-old man who is accused of rape. Another FIR was registered against family members of the girl and villagers for parading her in the village and beating her," Mr Bilwal said. — PTI

PM: Modernisation need of the hour in agri sector

■ **Continued from Page 1** already late and we have already lost a lot of time. To create new employment opportunities in the agriculture sector, to increase the income of farmers, it is equally important to adopt new alternatives and innovations, along with traditional farming practices. The country has experienced it during the white revolution," he said.

The Prime Minister's call for embracing modern practices in agriculture comes at a time when hundreds of farmers have been camping at Delhi's border points at Ghazipur, Singhu and Tikri since November last year demanding that the Centre repeal the three contentious farm laws.

The government has maintained that these reform laws will boost farmers' income by bring-

ing investment, modern practices and allow them to sell their produce anywhere across the country at the best prices.

Noting that bee farming is becoming the foundation of a honey revolution or sweet revolution in the country, Mr Modi said farmers in large numbers are associating with it.

The natural organic honey of the Sundarbans areas of West Bengal is in great demand in the country and the world, he said.

"Just as a village Gurdum in Darjeeling, West Bengal. ... people here started the work of honey bee farming, and today, there is a sizeable demand for honey harvested at this place. This is also increasing the income of farmers. I also have had one such personal experience in Gujarat... You will be happy to know that in such a short time,

Banaskantha has become a major centre for honey production. Today, farmers of Banaskantha are earning lakhs of rupees annually through honey," PM Modi added.

"In Yamuna Nagar, farmers are producing several hundred tons of honey annually, enhancing their income by doing bee farming. The production of honey in the country is continuously increasing, and annually, nearly 1.25 lakh tonne of honey is produced," he said.

During his radio broadcast, Mr Modi also recalled that in March last year, the nation first heard about the Janata curfew.

On *Mann Ki Baat* completing 75 episodes, Mr Modi said it feels like just yesterday when in 2014 "we began this journey" and thanked all the listeners.

'BJP will win 26 of 30 phase 1 seats'

■ **Continued from Page 1** Mukul Roy is allegedly telling industrialist and party leader Shishir Bajoria about their approach to the EC, saying this shows that phones of Opposition leaders were being tapped in the state.

"Is this a democratic practice?" he asked.

Targeting Mr Shah, Ms Banerjee at a TMC rally at Chandipur of East Midnapore said, "A BJP leader today claimed to have won 26 out of 30 seats. Why 26 only? Why don't you say 30 out of 30? Only then it will sound

like getting more seats! They want to have Rosogolla but without its Ros (juice)! Why didn't you count the remaining four also? Are these left for the CPI(M) and Congress?"

She wondered, "Someone should have some shame at least. Only a day before polling were held in 30 seats. Now if you ask me how many seats I am winning then should I go inside the voting machines for a check? How would I know how many seats I will win? People know because they

cast their votes. I can only say in view of an 84 per cent voters' turnout that my brothers and sisters, farmers and labourers voted for us."

Ms Banerjee argued, "They have given their votes for us in those seats during the Lok Sabha polls where we were lagging behind. If it is not true then why were the Central forces sent for beating the people at Kanthi (in East Midnapore) on Saturday? They need to work under the state police. I do not know who ensured it."

Highest Covid-19 jump since October

■ **Continued from Page 1** from Punjab. The health ministry said that more than 70 per cent of the deaths have occurred due to comorbidities.

While the fatality rate stands at 1.35 per cent, over 1.13 crore people have also recovered from the highly infectious disease that has affected mil-

lions across the world. But the recovery rate has further dropped to 94.58 per cent despite over six crore people being vaccinated in the country with over 2.5 lakh doses administered in the last 24 hours

The total tests for Covid conducted across India have exceeded 24 crore while the cumulative

Positivity Rate continues to remain below five per cent.

Fifteen states/Union territories now have lower tests per million than the national average (1,74,602).

These states include Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Ruckus at J&K music event, stage vandalised

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, MARCH 28

A music event being held at Srinagar's famed Badamwaer or almond garden to mark the beginning of Spring in Kashmir turned ugly when an arate crowd attacked the dais, thrashed musicians and damaged their instruments on Sunday.

The witnesses said that the event turned into ruckus after dozens of youth came and attacked the stage and those who were performing at Badamwaer. Hordes of people, including families which had come to the garden on the foothills of Hari Parbat hills to witness the spring blossom and enjoy pleasant weather after the long and harsh winter, ran helter-skelter to get away from violence.

Several musicians were thrashed. However, famous Kashmiri singer Shazia Bashir, who was performing on the stage at the time of the incident escaped unhurt.

Some locals said that those who attacked the stage were indignant at a music event being held and broadcast very loud through amplifiers at a time when people were heading for mosques for Shab-e-Barat, the night considered by Muslims as extremely important as it is believed that fortunes for the whole of mankind, for the coming year, are decided on this night and it is also believed that God may forgive sinners on this occasion. "Some of them were saying that they were unhappy over such an event being held when spilling of human blood continued unabated in Kashmir," said a resident.

The police, however, said that the event turned ugly after a boy's request that Shazia may sing a particular song of his choice was ignored by her and the former while showing annoyance over it snatched the mic, the act which prompted one of the male members of the cultural group to slap him. This evoked anger from a section of the audience, leading to vandalism.

The police statement said, "A group of miscreants created ruckus on the stage when thousands of people, including large number of women and children were present."

THE ASIAN AGE

29 MARCH 2021

Good start in Bangla, but Teesta is credibility test

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's just-ended visit to Bangladesh is likely to be noted as an effort on India's part to pull back from the brink and rescue what is inarguably the most mutually fruitful relationship this country has with any other neighbor. It is to be welcomed.

No matter how the effort is eventually assessed, a genuine attempt has doubtless been made. The tone struck in Dhaka by both sides was one of warmth, indicating that a return to a positive normal, and then moving to a higher plane, is an aspiration of both countries.

India's governing party's regrettably communal pitch on the question of citizenship, as manifested through the Modi government's relentless pursuit of NRC, specifically in the context of being the primary step toward giving effect to the CAA, cast a shadow on a perfectly productive relationship with Bangladesh.

Since then it would appear that the Modi government is learning that it is a bad idea to play domestic politics in a manner that adversely impacts India's diplomatic ties and hurts its heritage of being a country that promotes high human values in a mind-bogglingly diverse democracy.

In its own years since liberation from Pakistan, Bangladesh has travelled a fairly rocky path. Communalists and Islamists in that country, finding encouragement from influential political quarters, acted as obstacles to friendship with India. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has shown immense courage to counter that trend, and continues to do so. Mr Modi's visit was viciously opposed by Islamist elements. The Hasina government stood up to them, and this could cost her.

If India is to strengthen the hands of secular politics in Bangladesh in order to strengthen bilateral relations with that country as a key element of our neighbourhood policy, in its dealings with Dhaka, a higher profile must be accorded to aspects that touch ordinary people. Easing trade, transport, and irrigation bottlenecks suggest themselves.

It is in this context that the interim agreement to share the waters of the Teesta river with Bangladesh, signed in January 2011, was flagged yet again by the Bangladesh leader in her conversation with the Indian PM. New Delhi is yet to find creative ways to help West Bengal overcome its reservations on the sharing of the Teesta waters. It is time for India to apply itself with diligence to this subject, lest in Bangladesh it acquire the status of being the touchstone of good intentions on India's part.

During Mr Modi's visit, India signed five important agreements in areas such as disaster management and trade. Better border management, starting new train services to connect the people of the two countries, invitation to innovative Bangladesh start-up entrepreneurs to find angel investors in India, looking at cooperation in the fields of civil nuclear energy and artificial intelligence, besides supplying the anti-Covid vaccine, are among the many likely areas of future cooperation. The going will be smoother in these and other important areas if past promises and agreements are not lost sight of.

The 50th anniversary of Bangladesh as an independent country and the centenary of the birth of its charismatic founder Sheikh Mujibur Rehman was seized on by Mr Modi to try to re-invigorate ties with our neighbour. In the fitness of things, the PM should have taken with him an all-party delegation to Dhaka and not made the journey a purely governmental affair. The liberation of Bangladesh was a non-partisan affair in India, and this should have been reflected.

Killings by junta an outrage

The Myanmar Army is shooting to kill protesters. Even as the senior general, Min Aung Hlaing, was mouthing platitudes about protecting the people and restoring democracy after the next elections, his soldiers were carrying on with their brutal repression of protests, firing indiscriminately at people, including children, and killing at least 114 persons on Saturday. Ironically, it was Myanmar's 76th Armed Forces Day while the rebels marked it as Resistance Day whose history goes back to World War II. At least 400 civilians may have been killed, besides at least one policeman who had joined anti-coup protesters demonstrating against the February 1 coup that displaced the government led by of Aung San Suu Kyi of NLD.

The lack of a strong international response, thus far limited only to sanctions against top military brass and a few companies they deal with, may be contributing to a worsening situation in which the people are under the thumb of a blood-letting junta, which had backed Opposition parties in the November 2020 polls. The response of India, which shares a long border with its eastern neighbour and hence is likely to be affected more than the others, has also been wishy-washy in merely expressing the hope that democracy would be restored soon. Saturday's bloody incidents should draw a much harsher response, to do which India must abandon thinking only about its old ties with the junta, which used to prove useful in pushing back rebels who run insurgency movements in India's Northeast.

India's soft power may be seen to be declining these days when its own freedoms are in peril. But, if it still retains its ambitions of a seat at the high table at the UN and a voice to be reckoned with in international affairs, it must learn to stand up against injustice. It may seem intriguing that Suu Kyi's people are protesting suppression while they had discriminated against Rohingya Muslims who were forced to flee Myanmar. But India must stand up for the rights of the Myanmarese citizens against a brutal Army that thinks nothing of shooting civilians.

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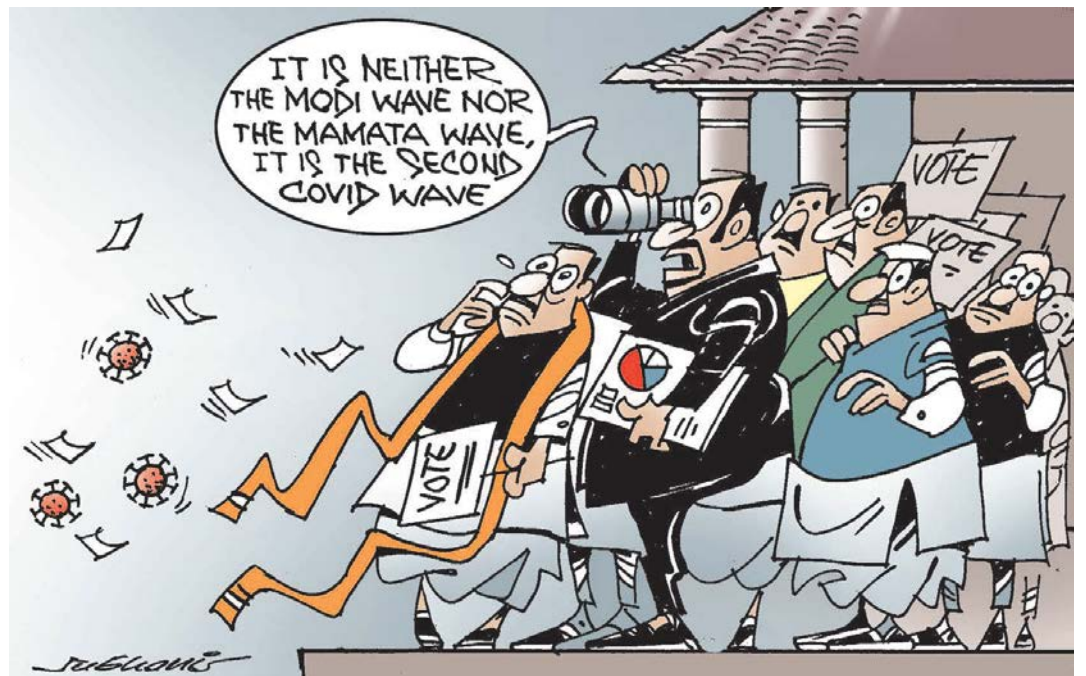
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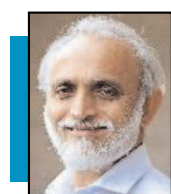
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Subhani



Hosabale's rise: RSS-BJP ties still remain opaque



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

The myth about the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the BJP is that they are independent entities, though umbilically linked through ideology. That is, each one of them functions on its own, and the one — that is the RSS — does not interfere in the internal and day-to-day affairs of the other — that is the BJP. The BJP leaders have always maintained that it is not true that they follow the directions issued from Nagpur, the headquarters of the RSS. But the suspicion has lingered among BJP watchers that the saffron party does not have total freedom. That is, the president of the BJP has to be approved by the RSS. Though there are organisational elections in the BJP, there is never a contest, and this is especially so in the case of the president of the party. And there is always a representative of the RSS in the BJP, and many of the RSS folk are seconded to the party. This has been so right from the time when Syama Prasad Mookerjee set up the Bharatiya Jan Sangh with members lent by the RSS, including Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, Balraj Madhok and Atal Behari Vajpayee. Those who joined the BJP in 1980 and who were not members of the RSS were not seen as insiders. This was the case with Jaswant Singh, Sushma Swaraj and even Arun Jaitley.

The equation between the RSS and the BJP became prickly when the BJP came to power in 1996 for a short while, and again in 1998 and 1999 under Atal Behari Vajpayee. It became clear that Vajpayee was older and more senior to then RSS chief K. Sudarshan, and the sus-

sle for dominance became quite embarrassing. Was it because Vajpayee was by nature more liberal and the RSS was dogmatically communal? Vajpayee was as much a dyed-in-the-wool RSS communalist as any other, but the question seemed to be one of personal dominance and tactics. The defeat of the BJP in 2004 came as a blessing in disguise.

In the run-up to the 2014 election, a middle-rung BJP leader indicated that the RSS would be working for the party in the elections, and this was the first time after 1977 that this was happening. The impressive victory of the BJP under Narendra Modi then was a collaborative effort by the RSS-BJP. In many ways, the RSS had kept away from election campaigns in 2004 and in 2009. A middle-rung Congress leader from Uttar Pradesh had opined that the importance of the RSS was exaggerated by the media, and if it was actually true then the BJP should never lose an election.

A senior RSS functionary was once quite irritated when I had sent him a questionnaire for an interview, and he said there were too many questions on RSS-BJP relations, and that the RSS should not be seen through the BJP prism

The argument that has arisen after the elevation of Dattatreya Hosabale as the RSS's second in command, replacing Bhaiyaji Joshi, is that Mr Modi and Mr Hosabale are seen as fairly close, and are on the same page

The BJP's strategy is that the party must have its own foot soldiers. It is also questionable whether the BJP really needs the RSS to formulate Hindutva ideology since it remains a crude, simplistic ideology of majoritarianism.

or even the other way around. The implication was that the RSS had its own self-defined goals and could not be reduced to the politics of the BJP. But many political observers have no doubt that the BJP's rule is in effect the rule of the RSS, and that Hindutva is the ideological glue. Most BJP leaders are not willing to admit that they are mere pawns and the real command rests with the RSS, and most BJP leaders avoid using the word "Hindutva" though they may be practising it in toto as in the pursuit of measures like the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the abrogation of Article 370 in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The electoral victories of 2014 and 2019 have made it clear that the BJP is now the leading party of Hindutva and it no longer has any need to serve an ideological apprenticeship with the RSS and play second fiddle. And that Mr Modi is the undisputed icon of Hindutva, and he doesn't have to depend on the RSS for ideological ballast. He can articulate it himself. The BJP then doesn't have to look to the RSS for ideological inputs. The argument that has arisen after the elevation of Dattatreya Hosabale as the RSS's second in command, replacing Bhaiyaji Joshi, is that Mr Modi and Mr Hosabale are seen as fairly close, and are on the same page, which is hardly a strange formulation given the common ideological roots of the RSS and BJP. It showcases the old dilemma of what should be the nature of the relation-

ship between the two organisations. As Mr Modi remains the dominant figure, the RSS will have to play second fiddle to the BJP. If and when Mr Modi loses his star position, the BJP will have to fall back to the secondary position of being a RSS affiliate.

One of the RSS's vaunted strengths has been its huge army of foot soldiers through its cells or *shakhas*, running into millions. It is this amorphous, anonymous army that got activated at election time and which was the invisible strength of the BJP. Amit Shah changed this when he was made president of the BJP by Mr Modi in 2014. He vowed to transform the BJP into a 10 million-strong organisation, and even after J.P. Nadda took over the party, the membership drive continued, and the number has reached 18 million. The BJP's strategy seemed to be that the party must have its own foot soldiers and that it should not depend on the RSS volunteers. But a friend pointed out that there is a big difference between the BJP's millions of members and the RSS cadres. The members are only BJP voters and they are not necessarily party workers. The RSS will still have the advantage as it has a dedicated cadre base.

It is also questionable whether the BJP really needs the RSS to formulate or refine the Hindutva ideology because Hindutva remains a crude, simplistic ideology of majoritarianism. There is not much need for redefining it, much less refining it. A new generation of RSS and BJP leaders are not inclined to update the Hindutva ideology because glorifying a dead national past is their basic principle. If the BJP survives in power, it may not need the RSS much longer. The RSS then will have no option but to slowly wither away.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

LETTERS

PLAY SAFE ON HOLI

With the daily caseload crossing the 63,000 mark, most of them drawn from Maharashtra, and the new strains of Covid making their presence felt, it is imperative upon us to celebrate Holi only symbolically and desist from gatherings, and exchange of gual and affections. Yet, shockingly, it has been observed that in many people have not only stopped wearing masks but have also started hugging and shaking hands. Please follow the Holi advisory. Hope the government declares a partial lockdown, including a nightly curfew, soon.

Yugal Kishore Sharma
Faridabad

FAULT IN LEFT LOGIC

CPI(M)'S SITARAM YECHURY has said that the sole aim of his party is to secure total isolation of the BJP at the national as well as state levels. However, this policy of his clearly has not been put into practice. Why oppose the Trinamul Congress in West Bengal and split the anti-BJP vote? Such a line would also have sent out a ringing message to the cadre who had secretly voted BJP in the 2019 elections. No point then declaring "We are coming home", as a 2019 defector recently has, and publicising it. The bus has left.

Arun Malankar
Mumbai

SORDID SAGA

IN ANOTHER sensational twist, the parents of the woman allegedly involved in the sleaze CD accused Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) president D.K. Shivakumar of trying to settle a score and forcing Ramesh Jarkiholi to resign from the Cabinet. But the woman sought to dispute the statement given by her father in a video clip that surfaced later. Expectedly, the BJP and Congress have held the other culpable and traded barbs at each other.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Syed Abdul Monim (Mar. 27). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Kishwar Desai
London Diary



India wave hits UK's vax drive, amid adulation for Poonawala

At last, the Sun is shining both literally and figuratively. This is "Happy Monday" as another phase of lockdown comes to an end and we can meet in groups of two families. Or so we were told a while ago. But the Covid situation keeps changing like the London weather, and strict international travel bans come into force.

Earlier last week, India was headlined on the front page — fortunately in a way it was a compliment not a criticism. But now the news that our vaccine supply may be interrupted because the new wave in India will impact vaccine exports to UK has spread gloom. We have had only the fantastic success of the vaccination programme thus far to cheer us. By now, 32 million doses have been delivered catering to 43 per cent of the population. Second only to Israel. All adults were due to be "vaxxed" by end April. Now we are not sure and have to wait.

There is awe and wonder at how the Serum Institute has become the largest supplier of vaccines with special features on Adar Poonawala appearing in the media every day. (Makes a change from debates on farmers' protests being discussed in Parliament.)

And so now we have stories on the "prince of vaccines", with a fortune of 11 billion pounds, hiring a mansion on Mayfair for 50,000 pounds a week. We also know all about his property portfolio including the homes in India and about his fleet of 35 luxury cars which includes a Mercedes redesigned as a batmobile... Of course it may be modelled on the vehicle owned by the fictional superhero, Batman, but with Covid, bats have a special significance, wouldn't you say, hmm? But to be honest, while he vaccinates the world, Adar has become a superhero as well... who can grudge him his reported collection of Picasso and Dalí? Well deserved — as lives have been saved, after Adar took a risk

and invested in the "Oxford" vaccine, long before anyone else thought of it.

The country remains obsessed by vaccines. On the news channels, in newspapers in daily conversations, Covid and vaccines dominate, as now we await the Covid annual booster jabs just like we have for flu.

We are also eagerly awaiting our final release in end-June. Even so, Boris Johnson keeps on hedging his bets. Twice bitten, three times shy is his story. People are demanding a final decision but no luck. The angry ones want an inquiry into the mistakes made over the last fifteen months but Boris is in no hurry. These inquiries take so long that he may have retired by the time they give their report.

The half-serious speculation is that Boris will quit being Prime Minister — not because he can't win — but because he can't afford it. Compared to what he made as a columnist (at £2500 per column) the

Prime Minister only gets a low six figure salary. The house at No. 10 Downing Street has just the top floor flat for living purposes. There is no government budget for decoration. So when they moved, his fiancée decided that the place needed redecoration. There was no money from the government kitty. So private donations had to be made to buy a decent sofa and repaint the walls. This created another scandal, which has been running for some time... Where did the quarter million come from? This must be the only country where the citizens don't want their rulers to spend money officially on their homes but also don't approve if they help themselves to their friends' money. So what can a poor Prime Minister do? Unlike in India, no one here gets huge budgets to redecorate their homes when they shift into an "official residence". But in India — politicians to bureaucrats — everyone is entitled to a redecoration spree.

Perhaps the saddest event of the week has been the accidental death of a seal, who had made his home in the Thames. Freddie, as the locals called him, had washed up from colder climes into the river some time back and decided to settle down. He had become a much-loved attraction. Alas, the other day, a woman, QC no less, was walking her dog by the river when the dog escaped her control and mauled poor Freddie. Freddie died but there are no guilty parties. The dog owner was helpless, as the dog would not let go. It was as if they had known each other and had a score to settle. Seals may be cute but the English treasure their dogs. After all, we are told that highly placed advisers to the Prime Minister have been transferred for being rude to Dilyn the Number 10 dog.

Kishwar Desai's latest book, The Longest Kiss: The Life And Times of Devika Rani, has just been published and she is the Chair of the Trust that set up the world's first Partition Museum in Amritsar

SHORT TAKES

MORE THAN 100 PROTESTERS HELD IN BELARUS

Kyiv, March 28: Police in the capital of Belarus arrested more than 100 people who assembled for a protest march Saturday to call for the resignation of the country's authoritarian president.

The planned event in Minsk indicated that supporters of the political opposition seek to revive the wave of mass protests that gripped Belarus for months last year but were dormant during the winter. During the first sizable anti-government protests of 2021, more than 200 people were detained Thursday.

EGYPT BUILDING COLLAPSE TOLL CLIMBS TO 18

Cairo, March 28: Egyptian state media said Sunday that at least 25 people were killed in a 10-storey building collapse in Cairo the day before, revising the toll up as rescue operations continued.

Al-Ahram newspaper said the number of injured in Saturday's incident in the capital's eastern Gesr Suez district rose to 75.

Rescue workers continued to sift through cement and rubble on Sunday, a security source said. *Al-Ahram* quoted local reports as claiming four of the building's floors had been added illegally.

Cairo governor Khaled Abdel Aal toured the site on Saturday and ordered a team of experts to be formed to inspect nearby buildings for damage.

GOTABAYA: WON'T SUCCUMB TO UNHRC PRESSURE

Colombo, March 28: President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on Sunday said the recent UNHRC resolution against Sri Lanka was the doing of "local and foreign forces" which do not want the country to progress, and vowed that his government would not succumb to such pressures.

The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) adopted a resolution against Sri Lanka's rights record on March 23, giving the UN body a mandate to collect evidence of crimes committed during the country's brutal three decade-long civil war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Rajapaksa said: "We will never succumb to (such) pressures (UNHRC resolution); we are a free nation. We will not be a victim of big power rivalry in the Indian Ocean."

FLOYD MURDER: ARGUMENTS TO BEGIN TODAY

Minneapolis, March 28: Opening arguments begin on Monday in the trial of the white police officer accused of killing George Floyd, a PoC man whose death was captured on video and touched off protests against racial injustice across the United States and around the world.

Derek Chauvin, a 19-year veteran of the Minneapolis Police Department, faces murder and manslaughter charges for his role in the May 25, 2020 death of the 46-year-old Floyd.

Chauvin, 44, who was fired from the police force along with three other officers, could be sentenced to up to 40 years in prison if convicted of the most serious charge — second-degree murder.

Opening arguments are to begin at 9:00 am Central time (1400 GMT) in a heavily guarded Minneapolis courtroom for a trial expected to last about a month. Fifteen jurors have been selected for the high-profile case.

Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill is expected to drop one juror on Monday and proceed with 12 and two alternates. The panel seated after two weeks of jury selection is racially mixed: Six white women, three PoC men, three white men, two mixed race women and one PoC woman.

Police officers are rarely convicted in the United States when charges are brought against them and the trial is being closely watched around the world. A conviction on any of the charges — second-degree murder, third-degree murder or manslaughter — will require the jury to return a unanimous verdict.

Floyd's cause of death is expected to be the central issue in the trial and a key piece of evidence is likely to be the viral video that triggered a summer of anti-racism protests.



Anti-coup protesters run around their makeshift barricade they burn to make defence line during a demonstration in Yangon on Sunday. — AP/PTI

A day after 100 killed, Myanmar protests on Demonstrators are back, demand return to democracy

Yangon (Myanmar), March 28: Protesters in Myanmar returned to the streets Sunday to press their demands for a return to democracy, just a day after security forces killed more than 100 people in the bloodiest day since last month's military coup. Protests were held in Yangon and Mandalay, the country's two biggest cities, as well as elsewhere. Some of the demonstrations were again met with police force.

At least 114 people were killed Saturday as security forces cracked down on protests against the Feb. 1 coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government, according to the online news service *Myanmar Now*. The reported fatalities included several children under 16 years old.

Similar tallies of the death toll were issued by other Myanmar media and researchers, far exceeding the previous highest death toll on March 14. The number of killings since the

● **UN SECRETARY-GENERAL** Antonio Guterres said he was shocked by the killings of civilians, including children. The continuing military crackdown is unacceptable and demands a firm, unified & resolute international response, he wrote on Twitter.

coup is now more than 420, according to multiple counts. The coup reversed years of progress toward democracy after five decades of military rule and has again made Myanmar the focus of international scrutiny.

The Saturday killings by police and soldiers took place throughout the country as Myanmar's military celebrated the annual Armed Forces Day holiday with a parade in the country's capital, Napyitaw.

The bloodshed quickly drew international condemnation, both from diplomatic missions within

Myanmar and from abroad. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was shocked by the killings of civilians, including children.

The continuing military crackdown is unacceptable and demands a firm, unified & resolute international response, he wrote on Twitter.

In the United States, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a tweet that his country was horrified by the bloodshed perpetrated by Burmese security forces, showing that the junta will sacrifice the lives of the people to serve the few.

The military chiefs of 12 nations issued a joint statement condemning the use of force against unarmed people.

A professional military follows international standards for conduct and is responsible for protecting not harming the people it serves, it said. We urge the Myanmar Armed Forces to cease violence and work

to restore respect and credibility with the people of Myanmar that it has lost through its actions."

The statement was issued by the defence chiefs of Australia, Canada, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Korea, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The human rights group Amnesty International revived criticism that the international community was not doing enough to end the state violence in Myanmar.

United Nations Security Council member states' continued refusal to meaningfully act against this never-ending horror is contemptible, said Ming Yu Hah, the organisation's deputy regional director for campaigns.

The Security Council has condemned the violence but not advocated concerted action against the junta, such as a ban on selling it arms.

2 tugboats speed to free stuck ship

Suez (Egypt), March 28: Two additional tugboats sped Sunday to Egypt's Suez Canal to aid efforts to free a skyscraper-sized container ship wedged for days across the crucial waterway, even as major shippers increasingly divert their boats out of fear the vessel may take even longer to free.

The massive Ever Given, a Panama-flagged, Japanese-owned ship that carries cargo between Asia and Europe, got stuck Tuesday in a single-lane stretch of the canal. In the time since, authorities have been unable to remove the vessel and traffic through the canal valued at over \$9 billion a day has been halted, further disrupting a global shipping network already strained by the coronavirus pandemic.

The Dutch-flagged Alp Guard and the Italian-flagged Carlo Magno, called in to help tugboats already there, reached the Red Sea near the city of Suez early Sunday, satellite

data from MarineTraffic.com showed.

The tugboats will nudge the 400-metre-long (quarter-mile-long) Ever Given as dredgers continue to vacuum up sand from underneath the vessel and mud caked to its port side, said Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement, which manages the Ever Given.

Workers planned to make two attempts Sunday to free the vessel coinciding with high tides, a top pilot with the canal authority said.

"Sunday is very critical," the pilot said. It will determine the next step, which highly likely involves at least the partial offloading of the vessel.

Taking containers off the ship likely would add even more days to the canal's closure, something authorities have been desperately trying to avoid. It also would require a crane and other equipment that have yet to arrive.

The pilot spoke to *AP* on condition of anonymity. — AP

EUROPE TIGHTENS VIRUS CURBS WITH FRANCE 'CRITICAL'

Paris, March 28: France, Belgium and Poland on Saturday tightened curbs as Coronavirus cases surged in Europe while the Philippines readied for a giant lockdown and Chile confined over 80 percent of its population. France admitted the situation is "critical" and added three more departments to the 16 already under tight restrictions.

Twenty million people in France, including the greater Paris region, are classed as living in high-infection zones.

They are not allowed to travel further than 10 kilometres (six miles) from home without an essential reason.

Daily cases in France have nearly doubled since the start of the month and there have been more than 200,000 new cases every week.

But that did not stop a crowd turning out for a protest concert outside Saturday evening in central Paris. — AFP

20 hurt as suicide bomber targets Mass in Indonesia

Makassar (Indonesia), March 28: Two attackers blew themselves up outside a packed Roman Catholic cathedral during a Palm Sunday Mass on Indonesia's Sulawesi island, wounding at least 20 people, police said.

Canada library stabbing: 1 dead

Vancouver (British Columbia), March 28: A man went on a stabbing spree inside and around a library, killing one woman and injuring six other people in North Vancouver, British Columbia, authorities said.

Sgt Frank Jang of the Integrated Homicide Investigation Team said a suspect was in custody. He said the man is in his 20s and has had interactions with police in the past.

Jang said officials didn't have any information yet about a motive.

☞ There was a man, there was an older woman, there was a younger woman, a mom, a random group of individuals in the wrong place at the wrong time," Mossop said. "It seemed like he was just running in a direction, whoever was in his path happened to be victimised."

— STEVE MOSSOP
A witness

One witness, Steve Mossop, said he and his partner stopped in traffic when they saw a bloodied woman who told them she had just been stabbed. They then saw several victims within about 100 meters of each other, he said. "There was a man, there was an older woman, there was a younger woman, a mom, a

random group of individuals in the wrong place at the wrong time," Mossop said. "It seemed like he was just running in a direction, whoever was in his path happened to be victimised," Mossop said of the attacker.

On Twitter, Canadian Public Safety Minister Bill Blair expressed shock and sadness over the incident, calling it a senseless act of violence. — AP

Indonesia has been battling militants since bombings on the resort island of Bali in 2002 killed 202 people, mostly foreign tourists. Attacks aimed at foreigners have been largely replaced in recent years by smaller, less deadly strikes targeting the government, police and anti-terrorism forces and people militants consider as infidels.

President Joko Widodo condemned Sunday's attack and said it has nothing to do with any religion as all religions would not tolerate any kind of terrorism.

I call on people to remain calm while worshipping because the state guarantees you can worship without fear, Widodo said in a televised address. — AP



An Indonesian policeman manages the traffic after an explosion outside a church in Makassar on Sunday. — AFP

Police: 2 dead, 3 arrested in Virginia Beach shootings

Virginia Beach (US), March 28: Overnight shootings near the Atlantic oceanfront in Virginia Beach left two people dead and eight wounded in a scene described by authorities as very chaotic.

Three men ranging in age from 18 to 22 have been arrested and face charges that include felonious assault and reckless handling of a firearm, Virginia Beach police said in a statement on Saturday.

The first shooting occurred shortly after 11 pm Friday along an outdoor strip of hotels, clubs and restaurants that was densely packed with people on one of the first warm days of the year.

Witness Akereia Drayton said Saturday that she was coming out of

● **THREE MEN** ranging in age from 18 to 22 have been arrested and face charges that include felonious assault and reckless handling of a firearm, Virginia Beach police said in a statement.

● **INVESTIGATORS BELIEVE** the first shooting stemmed from a fight involving a group of people.

● **SEVERAL INDIVIDUALS** produced firearms and began shooting at each other, resulting in numerous people being wounded, the police department statement said.

People were literally falling over themselves, Drayton said.

Investigators believe the first shooting stemmed from a fight involving a group of people, police said.

Several individuals produced firearms and began shooting at each other, resulting in numerous people being wounded, the police department statement said.

Officers patrolling the area quickly responded, police said. But more gunfire followed several minutes later.

Police said they found a female bystander about a block away who died of her injuries from a second shooting incident. Investigators believe the woman's death was not related to the initial shooting. — AP

a club on Friday night after the shooting ended and saw mass chaos and many people running.

ENGLAND | FIND The markings found during garden digging mean it is likely a Rugosa coral PIO boy unearths fossil, millions of years-old

London, March 28: A six-year-old Indian-origin boy says he is really excited after he found a fossil from millions of years ago while digging in his garden in the West Midlands region of England.

Siddak Singh Jhamat, known as Sid, was using a fossil-hunting set he received as a Christmas present when he came across a rock that looked like a horn.

"I was just digging for worms and things like pottery and bricks and I just

came across this rock which looked a bit like a horn, and thought it could be a tooth or a claw or a horn, but it was actually a piece of coral which is called horn coral," the schoolboy said.

"I was really excited about what it really was," he said. According to a BBC report, his father Vish Singh was able to identify the horn coral through a fossil group he is a member of on Facebook and estimates the fossil is between 251 to 488 million years old. "We were surprised he

● **ACCORDING TO** a BBC report, his father Vish Singh was able to identify the horn coral through a fossil group he is a member of on Facebook and estimates the fossil is between 251 to 488 million years old. In that there were loads of little molluscs and sea shells, and something called a crinoid

found something so odd-shaped in the soil... he found a horn coral, and some smaller pieces next to it, then the next day he went digging again and found a congealed block of sand, said Vish Singh.

In that there were loads of little molluscs and sea shells, and something called a crinoid, which is like a tentacle of a squid, so it's quite a prehistoric thing," he said.

Singh believes the fossil's markings mean it is most likely a Rugosa coral and

that the period that they existed from was between 500 and 251 million years ago, the Paleozoic Era.

"England at the time was part of Pangea, a landmass of continents. England was all underwater as well... that's quite a significant expanse of time," said Vish Singh.

The family, from Walsall, said they do not live in an area known for its fossils, like the Jurassic Coast in the south of England, but that they do have a lot of natural clay in the garden

where the fossils were found.

Singh added: "Lots and lots of people have commented on how amazing it is to find something in the back garden.

"They say you can find fossils anywhere if you look carefully enough, but to find a significantly large piece like that is quite unique."

They now hope to tell Birmingham University's Museum of Geology about their discovery. — PTI



quick BITES

| INDICATORS | | % |
|------------------------|------------|-------|
| Sensex | 49,008.50 | 1.17 |
| Nifty 50 | 14,507.30 | 1.27 |
| S&P 500* | 3,974.54 | 1.66 |
| Dollar (₹) | 72.5 | 0.17 |
| Pound Sterling (₹) | 100.00 | -0.50 |
| Euro (₹) | 85.50 | 0.31 |
| Gold (10gm)* (₹) | 44,081▼147 | 0.33 |
| Brent crude (\$/bbl)* | 64.69 | 4.42 |
| IN 10-Yr bond yield | 6.123 | 0.00 |
| US 10-Yr T-bill yield* | 1.641 | 0.027 |

* As of Friday/Saturday

Banks to conduct special clearing operations: RBI

Banks will conduct special clearing operations for annual closure of government accounts on March 31, which is the last day of the current fiscal year, the RBI has said. With regard to annual closing of accounts related transactions of the governments, special measures are put in place for 2020-21, the RBI has instructed all the banks to maintain sufficient balance in their clearing settlement account.

Coal import drops 14% in 11 months of fiscal 2020-21



India's coal import dropped 13.6 per cent to 196.13 million tonne (MT) in the April-February period of the ongoing fiscal year. The country had imported 227.23 MT of coal in the year-ago period, according to a report by junction services. "For April-February 2020-21, total coal and coke imports stood at 196.13 MT, about 13.69 per cent lower than 227.23 MT imported during April-February 2019-20," it said.

Procurement from GeM portal crosses ₹1L cr

Public procurement of goods and services has crossed ₹1 lakh crore from government buying portal GeM since the platform was launched in August 2016, on account of a sharp increase in buying activities by different ministries, an official said. The Government e-Market (GeM) portal was launched on August 9, 2016, for online purchases of goods and services by all the central government ministries and departments.

Trai writes to all agencies on new bulk SMS norms

Trai has written to key ministries, associations like COAI and Nasscom and nodal agencies like NIC as it pulls out all stops to ensure smooth implementation of its new regulations on bulk messages after March 31. Sources in the Trai said NIC has assured it that it is in a state of readiness to assist government organisations and agencies, and resolve issues, as new rules for commercial messages come into force.

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Global liquidity, buoyed market trigger IPO rush

New Delhi, March 28: Global liquidity and bull run in domestic equity market helped Indian companies raise over ₹31,000 crore through initial share-sale in the ongoing fiscal year and the IPO pipeline remains strong for 2021-22 too, experts said on Sunday.

This also marks the highest fund-raising through IPOs in last three years. Sandeep Bhardwaj, CEO, retail at IIFL Securities, said the IPO pipeline remains strong with 28 companies holding markets regulator Sebi's approval for raising nearly ₹28,710 crore through initial share-sale going forward. Moreover, companies including LIC, HDB Financial Services, NCDEX, ESAF Small Finance Bank are expected to come out with their IPOs in 2021-22, said Rajendra Naik, managing director, investment banking, Centrum Capital.

● Thirty firms raised ₹31,277 crore through IPOs in 2020-21, significantly higher than ₹20,352 crore mopped up through 13 initial share-sales in the preceding fiscal year.

● The IPO pipeline remains strong with 28 companies holding markets regulator Sebi's approval for raising nearly ₹28,710 crore through initial share-sale going forward.

● Companies such as LIC, HDB Financial Services, NCDEX, ESAF Small Finance Bank are expected to come out with their IPOs in FY22

According to an analysis of data available with the stock exchanges, 30 firms raised ₹31,277 crore through initial public offerings (IPOs) in 2020-21, significantly higher than ₹20,352 crore mopped up through 13 initial share-sales in the preceding fiscal year.

Prior to that, 14 companies had floated IPOs in 2018-19 to raise ₹14,719 crore and 45 main-board IPOs during 2017-18 collectively raised ₹82,109 crore. Apart from IPOs, the fiscal 2020-21 witnessed a

₹15,000-crore follow-on public offer of Yes Bank.

Adding depth to the IPO markets, companies from diverse sectors like jewellery, technology, specialty chemicals, banking and financial services have made their way to the IPO space during the period under review. "The biggest factor driving companies to fund-raising through IPO is the bull run in the stock market. Improved sentiments in the secondary market acted as a support for the primary market," Naik said.

According to him, ample liquidity, better than expected economic recovery uplifted the market sentiment and the same was visible in the primary market.

Making similar statement, IIFL Securities' Bhardwaj said the availability of ample liquidity in the system across the world, new sectors businesses with immense opportunities and optimism around the Indian demography, demand and growth story triggered the IPOs' gold rush.

V.K. Vijaykumar, chief investment strategist at Geojit Financial Services, believes that there is exuberance in the market and this has attracted large number of retail investors into the market.

He, further, said new retail investors are actively and a bit irrationally applying for the initial public offers and suggested that such investors should be discrete in selecting IPOs. — PTI

Higher PF cap won't help most staff

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

The government's decision to double the cap on an individual's investment in general provident fund (PF) is unlikely to benefit an employee in the lower or middle ranks compared to ultra-high salaried persons.

According to the law, any organisation that employs 20 or more people on a per-

manent basis is supposed to provide the PF facility to its employees. An amount that is 12 per cent of the basic pay needs to be contributed by the employee every month.

Recently, the government had amended PF rules to increase the cap on Employees' Provident Fund or EPF contribution — whose interest income is tax-exempt — from ₹2.5 lakh to ₹5 lakh per

annum. This amendment will allow even the individuals, who are earning an annual salary of ₹83.33 lakh or a monthly salary of ₹6.94 lakh to benefit from tax-exempt interest from EPFO. Earlier, the benefit of tax-free PF interest was available only to those who received an annual income of ₹41,66,666 or a monthly income of ₹3,47,222.

A source in the govern-

ment said that the recent amendment on the EPF contributions would benefit only a very small section of staff who contribute higher amounts in provident fund because employees receiving a salary upwards of ₹3.47 lakh a month make up just one per cent of the total workforce in the country. Ordinary employees, he said, may have nothing much to gain.

OVER 4 CRORE OLD VEHICLES ON INDIAN ROADS, SAYS ROAD MIN



New Delhi, March 28: Over four crore vehicles older than 15 years are plying on roads pan-India and fall under the ambit of green tax, with Karnataka occupying the top slot with more than 70 lakh such vehicles.

The ministry of road transport and highways has digitised the data of such vehicles throughout the country, excluding Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana and Lakshadweep as their records were not available.

A proposal to levy green tax has already been sent to the states.

More than four crore vehicles have been found to be older than 15 years, including over two crore which are more than 20 years old, as per the data.

The digitised vehicle records are as per the centralised Vahan database that excludes "AP, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, and Lakshadweep", the ministry said.

Uttar Pradesh occupies the second spot with 56.54 lakh vehicles, of which 24.55 lakh are older than 20 years. The capital Delhi is at the third place in terms of old and polluting vehicles at 49.93 lakh, of which 35.11 lakh are older than 20 years.

The digitisation of vehicle numbers revealed that Kerala has 34.64 lakh such vehicles, followed by 33.43 lakh in Tamil Nadu, 25.38 lakh in Punjab and 22.69 lakh in West Bengal. Maharashtra, Odisha, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Haryana have these vehicles in the range of 17.58 lakh and 12.29 lakh. The number of such vehicles ranges between 1 lakh and 5.44 lakh for Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, HP, Puducherry, Assam, Bihar, Goa, Tripura and UTs of Dadra-Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu. — PTI

39% PM housing units completed

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 28

Out of the Centre's target houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G), only 2.77 per cent housing units have been completed in FY20-21. On the other hand, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U) has completed only 39 per cent of the target houses since 2015.

In FY20-21, the Centre had set a target of sanctioning 63.76 lakh houses under PMAY-G. Out of this, sanctions were provided for 34.47 lakh units, which is 54 per cent of the target. According to data from the ministry of rural development, only 2.77 per cent of houses have been completed till February. In 2019-20, 56.63 per cent of the target houses were completed.

According to the ministry, the pace of completion has slowed down drastically. "This slow pace can be attributed to some factors like inactivity due to Covid-19, election in a few states, saturation of eligible beneficiaries from SC and ST categories, slow pace of working of remand module and lack of timely allocation of targets to districts,"

finds the ministry.

The PMAY-G being implemented from April 1, 2016 with the target of construction of 2.95 crore houses by the year 2022, has completed 1.35 lakh units, as per the data from the ministry of rural development.

Similarly, against the validated demand of 1.12 crore houses across the country, so far 1.11 crore houses have been sanctioned under the four verticals of PMAY-U Mission.

Out of the sanctioned houses, more than 75 lakh houses are in various stages of construction, and over 43 lakh houses have been completed, which is 39 per cent of the target houses as well those sanctioned. This also includes incomplete houses under the National Urban Renewal Mission run by the United Progressive Alliance government.

The ministry of housing and urban affairs has been implementing PMAY-U Mission since June 25, 2015 to assist states and union territories technically and financially in providing all-weather pucca houses with basic civic infrastructure to all eligible urban households by year 2022.

Manappuram MFI may get listed

Kochi, March 28: Manappuram Finance, the second largest gold loan company in the country, is toying with the idea of hiving off and taking its microfinance arm Asirvad Microfinance public within a year, a top company official said.

With a loan portfolio of over ₹5,360 crore and close to 25 lakh customers across 23 states, the Chennai-based Asirvad is the fourth largest microfinance lender in the country in terms of the loan book.

Founded in 2008 by S.V. Raja Vaidyanathan, Asirvad was taken over by Manappuram in February 2015 for ₹48.63 crore. The V.P. Nandakumar-led company first bought 71 per cent stake which was later increased to 95 per cent and the rest is with the founder Vaidyanathan.

Under Manappuram, Asirvad has grown leaps and bounds.

From a loan book of just ₹300 crore and a few lakh customers across 115 branches in Tamil Nadu,

Kerala and Karnataka when it was bought over, the company has over 1,030 branches across 314 districts in 23 states (excluding Andhra Pradesh and Telangana) and a loan book of over ₹5,358 crore as of 2020-end, of which over ₹1,000 crore is in Tamil Nadu alone.

As of the December 2020 quarter, Asirvad had a loan book of ₹5,357.71 crore, a growth of 6.68 per cent from ₹5,022.14 crore in the year-ago quarter. — PTI

Govt unlikely to continue with zero-coupon bonds

New Delhi, March 28: The government is unlikely to take zero-coupon bond route to further recapitalise public sector banks after the RBI expressed some concerns in this regard, sources said.

The government, they said, would resort back to recapitalisation bonds bearing a coupon rate for capital infusion in these banks.

To save interest burden and ease the fiscal pressure, the government last

year decided to issue zero-coupon bonds for meeting the capital needs of the banks.

The first test case of the new mechanism was a capital infusion of ₹5,500 crore into Punjab and Sind Bank by issuing zero-coupon bonds of six different maturities last year. These special securities with tenure of 10-15 years are non-interest bearing and valued at par.

However, the RBI raised some concerns with

regard to calculation of an effective capital infusion made in any bank through this instrument issued at par, sources said.

Since such bonds usually are non-interest bearing but issued at a deep discount to the face value, it is difficult to ascertain net present value, they added. As a result, sources said, it has been concluded to do away with zero-coupon bond for recapitalisation. — PTI

forward. "The government has given a bold option to the farmer leaders, the government is willing to put these farm laws on hold for one-and-a-half years," the Niti Aayog member (agriculture) said.

Chand pointed out that the government is willing to discuss the three farm laws clause by clause, and farmer leaders should consider this offer.

"There was enough time to think coolly, to think in a balanced manner. Initial reaction could be emotional, initial reaction could be under some pressure, but now I think

everybody has thought coolly.

"So farmer leaders must come up with their reaction, they must seek change wherever they think this is going against their interest," he argued.

According to Chand, protesting farmers must speak up and open their minds, otherwise their silence will go against them.

"In the society, image is coming that it is becoming political... so they (farmers) must study in detail... they must say 'look this clause is against us'," the Niti Aayog member added. — PTI

KFC believes in India story, to expand stores

New Delhi, March 28: The US-based fast food chain KFC will continue to expand its restaurant network in India despite the coronavirus pandemic bringing structural changes in the business, believing the country to be a growth market in the coming years, according to a top company official.

KFC India, which opened around 30 new restaurants last year during the peak of the Covid-19-induced disruptions, is looking at adding new outlets this year too as it looks to enhance access of the brand to its consumers.

"Our intent is definitely to keep growing the brand. One of our biggest strategic pillars is what we call as access. We have to ensure that access to the brand continues to grow for the consumers, both physical and digital," KFC India managing director Samir Menon said.

Despite the Covid-19 disruptions, he said, "We actually have more restaurants now than we had in pre-Covid. During the course of the year, our franchisees have opened new restaurants. So we actually are a bigger business now than we were in pre-Covid in terms of number of restaurants."

Before Covid-19 hit, KFC India had a restaurant count of about 450 and at present it has over 480 restaurants in more than 130 cities across India.

"We believe very strongly in the India story and we don't really have any doubt that India is definitely going to be a growth market for KFC in the coming years. Definitely, it was a tough year but it



● We believe very strongly in the India story and we don't really have any doubt that India is definitely going to be a growth market for KFC in the coming years. Definitely, it was a tough year but it hasn't deterred us from that intent

SAMIR MENON, MD, KFC India

hasn't deterred us from that intent," Menon emphasised.

From a physical access perspective, he said the company continuously identifies new trade areas and potential areas and starts setting up restaurants there through its franchise partners.

"Physical access is definitely going to be a key part of growth strategy. As the year goes, a better sense of what kind of numbers we are trying to chase will emerge. It will

be more than 25 for sure," Menon said.

With the pandemic bringing about a change in consumer behaviour with online orders and off-premise consumption growing, he said KFC India has also accelerated its efforts to address the changing consumer needs.

"I do feel our online portion of business would have grown at least by 50 per cent between pre- and post-Covid and that has also led us to a larger shift in the way we are communicating with the consumers, a part of it is the aggregators and part of it is our own assets," he said.

Giving a sense of how the pandemic has brought about a structural change in the business, he said more than half of the sales were on premise in pre-pandemic times and in post-Covid, delivery has seen huge growth with over two-thirds of the business now moving to off premise, including takeaway. — PTI

PORSCHE FINDS INDIA TO BE A MARKET FOR NEW PANAMERA



Mumbai, March 28: Sports luxury car maker Porsche has said India is a potential market for its recently-launched new-generation Panamera sedan, even as its focus will remain on all models across segments.

Porsche India also said the launch of the new-format showrooms in Delhi and Mumbai in a short span of three months exhibits investors confidence in its business here despite the pandemic.

The company, which is part of the German auto giant Volkswagen group, had early last month rolled out the 2021 edition of Panamera in four variants — Panamera, GTS, Turbo S, and Turbo S E-hybrid, priced between Rs 1.45 crore and Rs 2.43 crore (both ex-show-room).

After setting up its first Porsche Studio in Delhi in January, the company opened another one in Mumbai early this week under a new dealer partner Infinity Cars Pvt Ltd, a luxury car dealership group, which represents a variety of marquee brands across different cities.

"For sure, India can also become a Panamera market in future. It is also one important segment which we want to develop in future," Monolito Vujicic, brand head at Porsche India, said.

He said the company delivered the first Panamera to a customer just after one week of the opening of the new outlet in Delhi in January. "It means there are customers here, we have to communicate it the right way."

Vujicic said that even Panamera Exclusive, which is the limited edition of the luxury sedan, is an option for the India market. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Krishna-Vishnu falter in final

Badminton: The Indian pair of Krishna Prasad Garaga and Vishnu Vardhan Goud let slip a strong start to go down to England's Ben Lane and Sean Vandy in the men's doubles finals of the Orleans Masters badminton tournament here on Sunday.

The unheralded Indians, the only ones left in contention from the country on the final day, lost 21-19, 14-21, 19-21 in a 56-minute battle with the fourth seeds.

Krishna and Vishnu had paired for the first time in this event and would be pleased with the results they managed.

Krishna, 21, is India's no. 1 ranked doubles player and used to pair up with Satwiksairaj Rankireddy in his junior days. He and Ishaan Bhatnagar had reached the finals at the 2019 Bulgarian Junior International.

On Saturday, Saina Nehwal bowed out in straight games in the women's singles semifinals to end India's singles challenge at the tournament. — PTI

Badrinath tests Covid positive

New Delhi: Former India batsman S. Badrinath on Sunday said he has tested positive for Covid-19 and is currently in home isolation, making him the third ex India cricketer from Road Safety World Series tournament to be infected by the virus in the last couple of days.

The 40-year-old Badrinath recently played in the veteran's tournament in Raipur, just like the legendary Sachin Tendulkar and former India all-rounder Yusuf Pathan, who also tested positive for Covid-19.

"I have been taking all necessary precautions and have been getting tested regularly. However, I have tested positive for Covid-19 and have some mild symptoms," Badrinath said in his Twitter handle.

"I will follow all protocols and will be isolating myself at home and will take needful action as per advise (advice) from my physician," said Badrinath who announced retirement from all forms of cricket in 2018. — PTI

Repsol Honda eye Qatar success

Doha: Pol Espargaro and Stefan Bradl kept their heads down and focused on Sunday as the first Qualifying of 2021 got underway in Losail, the pair lining up on the fourth and sixth rows of the grid. Saturday in Qatar started under an even more punishing sky as track temperatures pushed 50°C, the MotoGP field made the most of the track time in Free Practice 3 regardless but the temperatures meant there were no changes on the combined times. As on Friday, the conditions would steadily improve throughout the evening.

As a result, Espargaro earned direct passage to Q2 and accomplished the first goal of his opening weekend with the Repsol Honda Team. Saturday overall proved to be a more complicated day for Espargaro as he continued to learn the Honda in the varying conditions of the day.

Espargaro will line up on the fourth row of the grid for his first race in Honda colours.

Mitchell's hot start fuels Jazz

Los Angeles: Utah's Donovan Mitchell scored 35 points and handed out seven assists as the Jazz boosted their NBA-leading record on Saturday with a 126-110 victory over the Memphis Grizzlies.

With Mike Conley taking the night off to rest a hamstring injury, Mitchell took charge early. He made his first five shots on the way to scoring 28 first-half points — his most ever in a half.

Jordan Clarkson came off the bench to add 28 points. Joe Ingles added 15 points and seven assists and the Jazz notched their fifth straight victory and 33rd of the season. — AFP

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

FIFA Friendly: India vs UAE from 8.30 pm on Eurosport, HD

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INDIA 3, ENGLAND 0

Kohli & Co. complete hat-trick of series wins after edging a thriller

Pune, March 28: The Indian cricket team completed one of their best four-month spells across formats, pipping England by a mere 7 runs in the third and final ODI after surviving Sam Curran's determined assault in an exciting contest for a well-deserved hat-trick of series victories.

For India, near domination of England in all three formats at home comes straight after humbling Australia in their own backyard earlier this year during a gruelling tour.

The 2-1 win against the reigning world champions will certainly please Virat Kohli but he will not at all be amused by the fact that India nearly let the game slip away with some unimaginative bowling and poor fielding at the death.

Rishabh Pant and Hardik Pandya hit stroke-filled half-centuries but Indian lower-order also caved in meekly to settle for a below-par 329 on a great batting track. But Bhuvneshwar Kumar (3/42) and Shardul Thakur (4/67) got the breakthroughs at just the right times before Curran (95 not out off 83 balls) almost changed the result single-handedly. England finished on 322 for 9.

Yorker specialist T. Natarajan bowled a brilliant final over with England needing 14 but Curran could manage only six runs because the Indian bowled mostly in the block-hole.

It was a gettable total on a flat pitch but Kohli's ploy to attack with predominantly pace attack paid off for the better part of the game before Curran launched a swift counter-assault.

Bhuvneshwar brought



India's Shardul Thakur (second from left) celebrates with teammates after dismissing England's Liam Livingstone during their third ODI at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune on Sunday. India won by seven runs. — AP

SCORECARD

India: Rohit Sharma b Rashid 37, Shikhar Dhawan c & b Rashid 67, Virat Kohli b Ali 7, Rishabh Pant c Buttler b Curran 78, KL Rahul c Ali b Livingstone 7, Hardik Pandya b Stokes 64, Krunal Pandya c Roy b Wood 25, Shardul Thakur c Buttler b Wood 30, Bhuvneshwar Kumar c Curran b Topley 3, Prasidh Krishna b Wood 0, T Natarajan (not out) 0, Extras (lb-1, w-10) 11. **Total (all out, in 48.2 overs) 329.**

FoW: 1-103, 2-117, 3-121, 4-157, 5-256, 6-276, 7-321, 8-328, 9-329

Bowling: Sam Curran 5-0-43-1, Reece Topley 9.2-0-66-1, Mark Wood 7-1-34-3, Ben Stokes 7-0-45-1, Adil Rashid 10-0-81-2, Moeen Ali 7-0-39-1, Liam Livingstone 3-0-20-1.

England: Jason Roy b Kumar 14, Jonny Bairstow lbw b Kumar 1, Ben Stokes c Dhawan b Natarajan 35, Dawid Malan c Sharma b Thakur 50, Jos Buttler (c) lbw b Thakur 15, Liam Livingstone c & b Thakur 36, Moeen Ali c H Pandya b Kumar 29, Sam Curran (not out) 95 Adil Rashid c Kohli b Thakur 19, Mark Wood run out (H. Pandya/Pant) 14, Reece Topley not out 1. Extras (lb-1, w-12) 13. **Total (for 9 wks, in 50 overs) 322.**

FoW: 1-14, 2-28, 3-68, 4-95, 5-155, 6-168, 7-200, 8-257, 9-317.

Bowling: Bhuvneshwar Kumar 10-0-42-3, T. Natarajan 10-0-73-1, Prasidh Krishna 7-0-62-0, Shardul Thakur 10-0-67-4, Hardik Pandya 9-0-48-0, Krunal Pandya 4-0-29-0.

Ronaldo fumes after WC qualifying winner denied

Paris, March 28: Cristiano Ronaldo threw his captain's armband to the ground in anger after being controversially denied an injury-time winner as Portugal blew a two-goal lead against Serbia in World Cup qualifying on Saturday, while Romelu Lukaku's 59th international goal salvaged Belgium a 1-1 draw with the Czech Republic.

The Netherlands saw off Latvia 2-0 after their opening Group G defeat by Turkey, who backed up that performance with an impressive 3-0 victory over Norway.

Portugal drew 2-2 in Belgrade, despite Ronaldo believing he had scored the winner in the third minute of stoppage time when the ball appeared to cross the goal line before Stefan Mitrovic cleared. But without technology in use, the goal was not awarded and a fuming Ronaldo was then booked for his protests.

At the final whistle he stormed from the pitch, throwing his captain's armband to the ground.

"I always give and will



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo (centre) and Bruno Fernandes react during the World Cup 2022 Group A qualifying match against Serbia in Belgrade, Serbia, on Saturday. — AP

give everything for my country, that will never change," Ronaldo later posted on his Instagram page.

"But there are difficult times to deal with, especially when we feel that an entire nation is being harmed."

Portugal had appeared to be cruising to three points

in Belgrade when 2-0 up through Liverpool striker Diogo Jota's first-half double.

But Nemanja Radonjic's half-time introduction proved crucial for Serbia as he set up Aleksandar Mitrovic and Filip Kostic to net in the first 15 minutes of the second period.

— AFP

India ready for desert storm

Dubai, March 28: On a high after an impressive 1-1 draw against a fancied Oman, India are pitted against the formidable United Arab Emirates in their second football friendly here on Monday, with head coach Igor Stimac again set to experiment with a fresh set of rookies.

Ten players made their debut against Oman on Thursday as India made a fine comeback in the second half to hold the gulf side who are 23 places above them in the FIFA charts.

Oman completely dominated the first half with the Indians not being able to hold the ball for any length of time. The visitors were rather busy defending in their own half in their first international outing in more than a year.

The UAE are ranked eighth in Asia and 74th overall while India are at 104th. The UAE had won three matches out of the four played

● **The UAE had won three matches out of the four played between the two sides in the last decade while one game ended in a draw.**

between the two sides in the last decade while one game ended in a draw. But India will draw inspiration from their match against UAE during the 2019 Asian Cup group stage where they had created a lot of scoring chances even though they lost 0-2.

India paid dearly for poor finishing in that match while luck also did not favour them as two shots hit the framework. "UAE are even tougher than Oman, so I expect a very tough match tomorrow. They (UAE) are technically better side and they will give a lot of pressure on us," Stimac said. — PTI

SHOOTING | WORLD CUP

India finish with best-ever results

New Delhi, March 28: India pulled the curtains down on its best-ever ISSF World Cup campaign with two more gold medals here on Sunday, somewhat making up for missing out on the chance to swell its unprecedented tally of 15 Olympic quotas.

Dominating the event from start to end, hosts India topped the chart with an incredible tally of 30 medals, half of them being gold.

The country also bagged nine silver and six bronze medals in what could be the last major international outing for rifle and pistol shooters before this summer's Tokyo Olympics.

On the last competition day, shotgun shooters Prithviraj Tondaiman, Lakshay Sheoran and Kynan Chennai ended India's campaign with a gold medal in the men's trap team event.

Before that, the trio of Shreyasi Singh, Rajeshwari Kumari and Manisha Keer claimed the gold medal in the women's trap team final after blanking Kazakhstan 6-0.

In the gold medal match, the team fielded by the host nation did not break a sweat as it romped to a crushing win over Kazakhstan's Sarsenkul Rysbekova, Aizhan Dosmagambetova and Mariya Dmitriyenko, taking the number of gold won by India to 14 in the tournament.

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ing the number of gold won by India to 14 in the tournament.

Vijayveer Sidhu, Gurpreet Singh and Adarsh Singh looked off colour and settled for the silver medal in the men's 25m rapid fire pistol team event.

The USA's Keith Sanderson, Jack Hobson Leverett III and Henry Turner Leverett won the gold medal with a 10-2 victory over the home team.

TEAM SELECTION FOR OLYMPICS SOON

The head of Indian shooting body Raninder Singh on Sunday said the team for Tokyo Olympics will be announced on April 3 or 4 and it will include two reserves per event owing to the threat posed by Covid-19 pandemic.

Indian shooters have secured 15 Olympic quota places but, as per the federation's selection policy, the final team will be picked taking into the account the scores in all tournaments and trials leading up to the Games. — PTI



Lakshay Sheoran (from left), Prithviraj Tondaiman and Kynan Chennai celebrate after winning the trap men's team event at the World Cup in New Delhi on Sunday.

Hamilton opens season with win

Sakhir (Bahrain), March 28: Lewis Hamilton produced another stunning demonstration of his supreme racing talent on Sunday to resist a charging Max Verstappen and win a thrilling season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix.

The defending seven-time champion defended with supreme skill over the closing laps in his Mercedes to hold off the Red Bull driver and claim a record-stretching 96th Formula One victory.

Hamilton came home seven-tenths of a second ahead of the Dutchman, who was forced to hand back the race lead in the closing laps after passing the champion with a move that had taken him off the track and beyond the limits.

As expected, Hamilton and his heir apparent delivered an exhilarating exhibition of racing as they stormed to the flag -

the pair leaving third placed Valtteri Bottas, in the second Mercedes, to finish adrift by 37 seconds.

It was Hamilton's first season-opening triumph since 2015 and surprised many observers after Red Bull had dominated pre-season testing and two days of practice and qualifying ahead of the race.

"Firstly, can I just say it's the first time I've seen fans in a long time," said a delighted Hamilton.

"What a difficult race that was — stopping early we knew it was going to be tough, but we had to cover Max and it was always going to take something pretty special to do it," he added.

A disappointed Verstappen said: "Of course, it's a shame, but you also have to see the positives. We're putting the fight on to them so it's great to start the year like that" — AFP

Is modern cricket making it more difficult for umpires?



Hemant Kenkre

Silly Point

As the cricket world gathered momentum with the last One Day International (ODI) of the India-England series being the last fixture (in India) before the start of the Indian Premier League (IPL) a news report must have been a dampener for cricketers and fans alike. The report cited that the Cricket Committee of the International Cricket Council (ICC) had conferred and decided that the Umpires Call element of the Umpire Decision Review System (DRS) should continue without

change.

The DRS has, in the recent past, come under fire from players and experts for the aspect of inconsistency that kept cropping up more often than not in the post lockdown era.

In the first series (since the cricket world opened up) between the West Indies and England, Michael Holding prized open a debate and hinted that it was the DRS that saved the on-field umpires from decisions that skewed towards the home team — England.

With the new normal fea-

turing only local umpires, Holding's thoughts had laid bare many errors that were committed by English on-field umpires during the first Test against the Windies. He based them on the fact that five on-field decisions were overturned post DRS and eventually went in favour of West Indies. These included three lbw decisions and two involving Windies opener John Campbell who was saved twice after being declared 'out.'

With the ICC ruling that non-neutral umpires officiate to help overcome travel and quarantine issues in pandemic times, these calls made it look as though there was a distinct inclination towards the home team, a highly debatable point.

Coming to recent times, the 'bias' element was

reversed when Indian skipper, Virat Kohli, thought the other way after India's wins in the Test and Twenty20 series' against England.

Kohli's view was towards the Umpire's call part of the DRS and thought that it is creating a lot of confusion. In his opinion, there should be not be any debates if the ball is clipping the stumps or missing them, a call based on common sense. He decried decisions taken by the third umpire which are based on the percentage of the ball that will or will not hit the stick. To him, the ratio/part hitting or missing the stumps does not matter. In short, his assessment was to keep it simple and not cause any confusion.

Many years ago, while discussing neutral umpires, many former

arbitrators who had officiated in international matches had shown a dislike for the word neutral when it came to umpires. Famed umpire Pilo 'PD' Reporter who, along with V. K. Ramaswamy, stood in a non-home Test series between Pakistan and West Indies for the first time in 1986-87 had stated categorically that an umpire, whether local or not was meant to be fair and unbiased. "How can anyone call an umpire neutral? Isn't that what he's supposed to be in the first place?" The genial umpire who stood in 14 Tests and 22 ODIs squashed any further debates on the issue.

Coming back to DRS, the arguments of umpires call and other aspects of the system have been highlighted ever since local umpires have been given the charge to officiate in

home games. Their decisions, particularly the contentious ones that are reviewed through DRS get noticed and cause people to form opinions on the intent of the man on the spot.

Standing for six hours, doing diligent duty, often in adverse conditions with partisan crowds and handling egocentric cricketers isn't easy and has always been referred to as a thankless job.

Modern cricket, with all its technological advances has made it even more difficult for the men in coats as, more often than not, they become soft targets. The discussions, post game/series where analysts and fans contribute their two bits, with social media accentuating opinions, add to the situation and make it worse for the adjudicators.

Another sticky issue which came further into the limelight during the India-England series' is the 'soft signal' ingredient.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has decided that no soft signals from the on-field umpire will be allowed while referring a decision to the third umpire in the impending IPL while the ICC has indicated that it would revise this protocol before the India vs New Zealand World Test Championship final.

Kohli's view of getting decisions straight and clear of any doubts is what most players would want. The last thing on their minds should be any kind of confusion on umpiring decisions, an aspect that the erudite panel on ICC's Cricket Committee (themselves former internationalists) should consider.