

SHORT TAKES

13 new corona cases in Noida

Noida: Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddh Nagar recorded 13 new coronavirus cases on Thursday that pushed the district's infection tally to 25,568, official data showed. The active cases in the district remained at 69 as it was the previous day, according to data released by the Uttar Pradesh Health Department for a 24-hour period. Another 13 patients got discharged during the period with the overall recoveries reaching 25,408, the fifth highest in the state. Gautam Buddh Nagar has a death toll of 91 with a mortality rate of 0.35 per cent. The recovery rate of patients remained 99.37 per cent, the statistics showed. Meanwhile, the number of active Covid cases in the state rose to 2,029 from 2,025 on Wednesday while the overall recoveries reached 5,93,149 and the death toll reached 8,729 on Thursday, the data showed. — PTI

Air deteriorates in Noida, Ghaziabad

Noida: The average air quality plunged to very poor category in Faridabad, Noida and Ghaziabad, while it was recorded in 'poor' category in Greater Noida and Gurgaon, according to data issued by a government agency on Thursday. Pollutants PM 2.5 and PM 10 also remained high in the five immediate neighbours of Delhi, according to the air quality index (AQI) maintained by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). According to the index, an AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'. — PTI

2 Afghan women held with \$76,500 at IGI

New Delhi: Two women from Afghanistan were caught by the CISF personnel at the Delhi airport for allegedly carrying US dollars worth over ₹55 lakh in an unauthorised manner, officials said on Thursday. Mahmooda Sediqi and Estorai Gayomi were held for allegedly concealing a total of \$76,500 in their respective hand bags and in a sweets box. The two were intercepted by Central Industrial Security Force personnel separately and just before they were to board a flight to Kabul from terminal-III of the IGI on Wednesday around 1:30 PM, they said. The two "could not produce any valid document for carrying such an amount of foreign currency" and hence were handed over to Customs authorities at the airport, a senior CISF officer said.

Jindal Global Law School in world top 100

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

The Jindal Global Law School, based in Sonapat, Haryana, was ranked 76 out of all law schools globally in the QS World University Rankings. This makes JGLS the number one law school in India, and the only Indian one ranked this year. JGLS, a part of the O.P. Jindal Global University (JGU), has jumped from the 101-150 bracket in the previous year. JGLS is ranked 33 and 58 in the world in "Employer Reputation" and "Academic Reputation" respectively, the two most important parameters in the QS World University Rankings. Of 976 law schools considered globally, only 320 made it to the QS World University Rankings by subject. JGLS, as the first and only Indian law school to find a place in the top 100 this year, puts India on the global map for legal education and higher education. Industrialist Naveen Jindal, founding chancellor of O.P. Jindal Global University, said: "The year 2020 has been a challenging year for higher education institutions worldwide. JGLS has risen in the ranks to enter the top 100 in the QS World University Rankings. As the only law school in India to feature in these rankings, it gives me great pride to see Jindal Global Law School feature among the world's finest law schools. JGLS has put India on the world map of providing high-quality legal education, research and training."

Kejri, L-G Baijal get 1st dose of Covid vaccine

261 Covid cases in Delhi, infection tally crosses 6.40L

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, who along with his parents took their first dose of Covid-19 vaccine on Thursday, appealed to all eligible people to come forward and get vaccinated, asserting that there's "nothing to fear."

The vaccine was first administered to Mr Kejriwal's parents, Govind Ram Kejriwal and Gita Devi, and then to the chief minister at the government-run Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan hospital here. They all were given the Covishield vaccine.

"My parents and I got our first dose of Covid-19 vaccine on Thursday. We had no problems and are perfectly healthy. There is nothing to fear. Doubts in people's mind (about the vaccine) no longer exist. I appeal to everyone eligible for the vaccine to come and get themselves vaccinated," Mr Kejriwal told reporters after getting the jab. The 52-year-old chief minister, who has a history of diabetes, said the hospital has made adequate arrangements for the vaccination drive. The government will increase the number of vaccination



A medic administers the first dose of Covid vaccine to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal at LNJP Hospital in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

Serum Institute, Bharat Biotech to disclose vaccines capacity: HC

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

The Delhi high court, on Thursday, directed the Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech to disclose their capacities to manufacture Covaxin and Covishield vaccines.

The high court also asked the Centre to explain in an affidavit the rationale behind keeping strict control over the class of persons who can

be vaccinated against Covid-19 currently as under the present system those above the age of 60 years or between 45 to 60 years with comorbidities can receive vaccination.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli said the two institutes—Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech—have more capacity to provide the vaccines but it seems that they are not exploiting it fully.

tion centres if needed, he added.

"We are in constant

touch with the Centre and are working according to the prescribed guidelines.

Give X-Ray, post mortem report of dead farmer to Delhi cops: HC asks UP Police

New Delhi, March 4: The Delhi High Court Thursday directed the Uttar Pradesh police to provide original X-Ray plate and video of post mortem of the 25-year-old farmer, who died after his tractor overturned during the tractor rally on Republic Day.

Justice Yogesh Khanna said let both the original documents be handed over to the official of Delhi Police on March 5 at 2 PM and they shall be retained by the investigating officer in safe custody.

The high court was hearing a plea by deceased Navreet Singh's grandfather — Hardeep Singh — claiming that the victim suffered gunshot injuries to his head. His post mortem was conducted at Rampur district hospital in Uttar Pradesh.

However, both the Delhi and Uttar Pradesh Police claimed before the court that Navreet did not suffer any gunshot wounds.



Workers prepare a tent during farmers protest against new farm laws at Ghazipur border in New Delhi. — PTI

Delhi government standing counsel (criminal) Rahul Mehra, representing the Delhi Police, told the court that though they have requested the Uttar Pradesh Police to give original X-Ray plate and post mortem video but the officials of Rampur police and hospital denied the same, unless ordered by the court.

Advocate Garima Prashad, representing the

Uttar Pradesh Police and the CMO of the hospital, said they do not have X-Ray report and they only have the X-Ray plate and the post mortem report which they are willing to handover to the Delhi Police on the date and time fixed by the court. She said the original post mortem and inquest reports have already been handed over to the Delhi Police. Advocate Vrinda Grover,

representing the petitioner, sought a copy of the X-Ray report and post mortem and inquest reports.

As Mehra stated that they have no objection in giving those documents to the petitioner, the high court said, "let the needful be done" and listed the matter for further hearing on March 17.

Grover also said once the original X-Ray plate is received from the Uttar Pradesh Police, the court can ask AIIMS or any other forensic department to prepare a report out of the X-Ray plate for their perusal.

Delhi Police had earlier said that according to the post-mortem report the young farmer died due to a head injury as a result of the accident and all his injuries were possible in a road accident.

The petition, also filed through advocate Soutik Banerjee, has sought a court-monitored SIT probe into the death of the young farmer. — PTI

1 killed, 1 hurt in road accident while returning from office party in Dwarka

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

A 22-year-old man was killed while another got seriously injured after a speeding car rammed into another car in Dwarka here in the early hours of Thursday, police said.

The deceased was identified as Akash Rana (22), a resident of Haryana's Panipat. His colleague Rahul Rana (23) was seriously injured in the incident and was admitted to

the Deen Dayal Upadhyay hospital, the police said.

The deceased and the injured man worked in an insurance company. They were returning from a hotel in Dwarka sector 22 after attending an office party, a senior police officer said.

Around 1 am, the police received information regarding an accident at the red light crossing of Dwarka sectors 6 and 7, a senior officer said.

"A Mercedes and a Ford

AAP: Failing to win even 1 seat major setback for BJP

New Delhi, March. 4: A day after sweeping the municipal by-polls by winning four out of the five wards, the AAP, on Thursday, said failing to win even one seat is a major setback for the BJP, which is on a decline in Delhi.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), on Wednesday, swept the municipal by-polls in Delhi winning four of the five seats while the Congress bagged one and the BJP drew a blank.

Senior AAP leader and chief spokesperson Saurabh Bhardwaj claimed the BJP's vote share decreased in all the wards in which by-elections were held on February 28.

"The business class, which is the traditional voter of BJP, has also shifted from the BJP to the AAP," Mr Bhardwaj claimed at a press conference.

Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor, however, said that instead of analysing BJP's performance in the by-polls, Mr Bhardwaj should find reasons why the AAP was rejected by its traditional voters, the minority community, in Chauhan Bangar ward.

AAP candidate Mohammad Ishraq Khan was defeated by over 10,000 votes by Congress candidate Chaudhary Zubair



Saurabh Bhardwaj

Ahmad in Chauhan Bangar ward.

The BJP should wake up now because in its stronghold, Shalimar Bagh, the party's vote share has come down from 48 per cent to 36 per cent, Mr Bhardwaj claimed.

"In 16 booths of Shalimar Bagh's posh colonies, BJP's vote percentage came down from 45 per cent to 40 per cent while AAP's vote share increased from 35 per cent to 53 per cent," he claimed.

The Delhi BJP, led by its president Adesh Gupta, pursued the politics of campaigning to demand funds from the Kejriwal government while neglecting cleanliness in colonies, which annoyed even its traditional voters, he said.

"The BJP failed to win even one seat in the by-polls and was totally wiped out. This is an important issue as it is considered that the party in power usually wins the by-elections as

DELHI BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor, however, said that instead of analysing BJP's performance in the by-polls, Mr Bhardwaj should find reasons why the AAP was rejected by its traditional voters, the minority community, in Chauhan Bangar ward

well. By that logic, this is a major setback for the BJP," Mr Bhardwaj said.

In Trilokpuri ward, the AAP's vote share increased from 35 per cent to 49.9 per cent while that of Congress declined from 16.6 per cent to 1.6 per cent, he claimed.

In Kalyanpuri, AAP's vote share rose from 33 per cent to 56 per cent; BJP's vote share declined from 30 per cent to 28 per cent; and that of Congress dipped from 21 per cent to 10 per cent, he claimed.

Mr Kapoor said that though the AAP won four of the five wards in the by-elections, the loss at Chauhan Bangar was "extremely shameful" for the party.

The Delhi BJP spokesperson admitted that the loss of Shalimar Bagh ward was a "setback" for the party and asserted that it will stage a comeback in the municipal corporation elections in 2022. — PTI

Tiwari: Kejri govt befooling people of Delhi through ads

Ballia (UP), March 4: BJP MP Manoj Tiwari on Thursday accused the Arvind Kejriwal-led Delhi government of misleading and befooling people in the national capital through advertisements with a budget higher than that of any other state government.

Former Delhi BJP president and Bhojpuri Star Manoj Tiwari targeted the Kejriwal government during a private function here in Kotwari village of the Rasra area of the district.

The advertisement budget of the Delhi government is more than that of any other state in the country, claimed Tiwari, adding that the Kejriwal government is misleading and befooling common people through advertisements.

Accusing the AAP government of having a



Manoj Tiwari

stark difference between its words and actions, Tiwari also said contrary to Kejriwal's claims, the condition of schools in Delhi has deteriorated.

Due to a poor education system in Delhi, 4.98 lakh students have failed in Delhi in the last five years, he claimed.

Students are being taught in schools only for three days a week and only one and half hours a day, Tiwari claimed, adding he can show this to anyone. — PTI

Occultist murder case: Rival held for murder conspiracy

Ghaziabad, March 3: An occultist has been arrested for his alleged involvement in the murder of his rival here last month, police said on Wednesday.

Mustaqem, a resident of Muradnagar, was arrested on Tuesday in connection with the death of rival occultist, Aas Mohammad, they said.

On February 19, Mohammad was killed with a sword by one Salman, whose wife used to visit him frequently to

get rid of evil spirits, they said. Salman was told by Mustaqem that his wife and sister-in-law were being sexually abused by Mohammed. He then told Salman to behead the rival occultist, saying it would cure his wife.

Superintendent of Police Iraj Raja said. Salman killed Mohammad, who also worked as an auto driver, while he was waiting for passengers at an auto stand, the SP added. — PTI

Send ideas to boost women safety to Noida cops, become ACP for a day

Noida, March 4: The Noida Police has invited suggestions from residents on boosting women safety and empowerment, with the one giving the best propositions standing a chance to become assistant commissioner of police for a day, officials said on Thursday.

Though both men and women can send their suggestions under this initiative, the opportunity of becoming assistant commissioner of police (ACP) will be only open to women, they said.

Planned in view of International Women's Day on March 8, under the initiative, "the top three winners will be given cash prizes of ₹5,000, ₹3,000 and ₹2,000, respectively, and

the woman with the best entry gets the chance to serve as ACP (women safety) for a day," DCP (Women Safety) Vrinda Shukla said. "Not just women, any person in Gautam Buddh Nagar district can recommend practical ideas that can be implemented in the district to boost women safety and women empowerment," she said.

The entries can be e-mailed to "dep-polwsgb@up.gov.in" or sent on the Whatsapp number 9870395200 till March 7, according to officials. Those sending suggestions should clearly mention their name, address and telephone number in their e-mails or Whatsapp messages, the officials said. — PTI

Delhi 13th in govt's 'Ease of Living Index'

New Delhi, March 4: Of the 49 cities ranked on livability index in the 'million-plus population' category in the government's 'Ease of Living Index', Delhi figures at the 13th spot and Srinagar at the bottom.

According to the index released by Union housing and Urban affairs minister Hardeep Singh Puri, Shimla topped the category of cities with 'population less than million'.

In this category, Bhubaneswar was ranked second, Silvassa came third, and they were followed by Kakinada, Salem, Vellore, Gandhinagar, Gurgaon, Davangere and Tiruchirappalli. Muzaffarpur was at the

A TOTAL of 32.2 lakh people residing across 111 cities participated in a 'Citizen Perception Survey' holding a weightage of 30%

bottom of the list of 62 cities that were ranked on livability index in the 'less than million population' category.

Ghaziabad and Meerut figured at the 30th and the 36th spot in the 'million-plus population' category respectively, while Allahabad is at the 32nd position and is followed by Patna (33rd). Faridabad is ranked 40th in this category.

Performance of the cities have been measured on four broad parameters gov-

ernance and social, physical and economic infrastructure.

The government said the 'Ease of Living Index' is an assessment tool that evaluates the quality of life and the impact of various initiatives for urban development.

A total of 32.2 lakh people residing across 111 cities participated in a 'Citizen Perception Survey' holding a weightage of 30 per cent.

"These cities have emerged as models of development who will inspire others to perform better. Further, their peers will also benefit from emulating their best practices," Mr Puri said.

In the 2018 'Ease of Living Index', Pune was

ranked the most liveable city in the country. Navi Mumbai and Greater Mumbai, which held the second and the third position in 2018, have slipped to the sixth and the 10th rank respectively in the 2020 edition of the East of Living Index.

Tirupati was at the fourth position, while Chandigarh had been ranked fifth in 2018, but in the 2020 'Ease of Living Index', Tirupati and Chandigarh have slipped to the 46th and the 29th position respectively.

Indore topped the 'Municipal Performance Index', involving 51 municipal corporations in the million-plus population category, while Guwahati figured at the bottom. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

SI ends life near UP Assembly complex

Lucknow: An on-duty Uttar Pradesh police sub-inspector allegedly shot himself dead at the parking lot located across the state Assembly complex on Thursday, officials said. In the suicide note left behind addressed to the chief minister, sub-inspector Nirmal Kumar Choubey said that “he is going” and asked the CM to take care of his children. He has also stated that he was ill, commissioner of police D.K. Thakur said. Choubey (53), a native of Varanasi district, was posted at the Banthra police station in the city as a sub-inspector. He was deployed on duty at Gate No. 7 of the Assembly complex. Around 3.30 pm, he shot himself in the parking lot near Gate No. 7, which is at the back of the Assembly building. The police personnel present there took him to the nearby Civil Hospital where he was declared dead, Mr Thakur said. — PTI

Jawan killed in C'garh Naxal hit

Bhopal: A security personnel was on Thursday killed when the improvised explosive device (IED), planted by Maoists, went off in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar district of Dantewada. The incident took place when the jawan of Chhattisgarh armed force (CAF) was taking his lunch under a tree. He was part of a joint team of security forces comprising personnel of CAF and district reserve group which was deployed at Pahurnar to provide security for construction of a bridge over Indravati river. Maoists had planted the IED under the tree to target the security personnel, a senior police officer posted in Bastar said. The explosion was so powerful that some limbs of the slain jawan, identified as Laxmikant Dwivedy, were dismembered.

Mantri denies girls forcibly stripped

Mumbai: A day after the BJP alleged in the Maharashtra Vidhan Sabha that women were stripped and made to dance at a government hostel in Jalgaon, state home minister Anil Deshmukh on Thursday made it clear that no such incident happened there. He added that the woman who had made such a complaint was, in fact, mentally unstable. Mr Deshmukh said, “The committee of six senior women officers from different departments, had made a probe by visiting the hospital in Jalgaon. In the findings that were submitted today, the allegations were found to be baseless.” No policemen entered the hostel premises as they do not have permission to do so.

MHA TO STATES: WILL PROVIDE ALL HELP ON VACCINE

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

The Union home ministry has once again reiterated to all states and UTs that it was willing to provide “all possible assistance and help” to ensure a smooth rollout of Phase-II of Covid-19 vaccination, which started on March 1 in the country. The MHA on Thursday asked the states that they can seek any possible help from the Centre is they face problems in smooth implementation of the vaccination programme. A week ago Union home minister Amit Shah had chaired a high level meeting to review the rollout of phase-II Corona vaccine and had instructed his officials to maintain close co-ordination with all States and provide all possible assistance to them. Now with some states reporting a sharp increase in corona cases, the home ministry, which has been working as the central or nodal agency, on Thursday asked various states if they required any help or assistance to ensure smooth implementation of the vaccination process. In the second phase of vaccination all those above 60 years of age or those above 45 but with any history of a serious disease. “The MHA control room is working round the clock and maintaining close contact with all states and UTs,” a senior ministry official said.

CM UDDHAV'S BABRI REMARK

Abu Azmi asks Muslim ministers to quit Cabinet

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, MARCH 4

A day after Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray claimed his father Bala-saheb Thackeray was proud of Babri mosque demolition, SP legislator and Abu Asim Azmi asked the Muslim Cabinet ministers to step down from the cabinet.

Replying to the governors' address on Wednesday, Mr Thackeray, who is also Sena president, had said, “Everyone else ran away after Babri demolition, but it was Shiv Sena supremo Bala-saheb who owned up the responsibility saying that if my Shiv Sainiks have done this, I am proud of them.”

Mr Thackeray's statement did not go down well with the Samajwadi party, which extended its support to the MVA government.

Speaking with the reporters on Thursday, Mr Azmi said that his party supported the Thackeray government in order to keep the BJP out of power. “The Congress and NCP had supported this government on the common minimum programme. Uddhav Thackerayji has forgotten that he is a CM (of Maharashtra). The Supreme Court had mentioned in its judgment that keeping an idol in Babri Masjid and demolition of Babri Masjid are ‘criminal activities’,” he said.

DMK signs seat-sharing deal with VCK, waits for Congress

VCK general secy says priority is to thwart BJP's plan to capture Tamil Nadu

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR and D. SEKAR
CHENNAI, MARCH 4

The VCK on Thursday agreed to contest in six seats — four in the reserved category and two general constituencies — in the April 6 elections to the Tamil Nadu Assembly on Thursday even as the DMK was waiting for the rest of its allies, particularly the Congress, to return to the negotiating table and sign pacts in the next two or three days.

After signing the poll agreement with DMK president M.K. Stalin, Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) general secretary Thol Thirumavalavan said their priority

▶ **WHILE CONG** sources said that talks with the DMK were deadlocked as the final offer they had been given was 20 seats against their demand of 35, but hoped that everything would be solved

▶ **AICC's TAMIL** Nadu in-charge Dinesh Gunda Rao had a meeting with the TNCC functionaries and the general perception was that the party should not accept the low offer

was to thwart the BJP's plan to capture the state and hence they did not want to haggle over the number of seats.

It is in the same spirit, other allies — the Congress, CPM, CPI and MDMK — would agree for the seats offered to them, sources in the DMK said. However, the mood in the other party offices was different.

While Congress sources

said that talks with the DMK were deadlocked as the final offer they had been given was 20 seats against their demand of 35, but hoped that everything would be solved amicably in a day or two.

AICC's Tamil Nadu in-charge Dinesh Gunda Rao, who is in Chennai to handle the negotiations for seats, had a meeting with the TNCC functionaries and the general

perception was that the party should not accept the low offer.

Though the cadre, in general, felt the need for an alliance with the DMK to defeat the BJP in the state, there were some voices favouring the party going it alone in the polls.

Senior TNCC leaders, however, clarified that the negotiations would yield positive results in a day or two.

Since the VCK, which was given 2 MP seats in the Lok Sabha elections, was given six seats, the Congress leaders feel that they were entitled for 27 seats, given the fact that they contested from nine constituencies for the Lok Sabha in 2019.

BJP names 'Metroman' as NDA's CM pick in Kerala

AGE CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 4

The Kerala unit of BJP on Thursday announced that “Metroman” E. Sreedharan would be the party's chief ministerial face in the forthcoming Assembly elections in the state to be held on April 6.

BJP state president K. Surendran made the announcement while addressing a public meeting in Pathanamthitta district on Thursday in connection with his Vijay Yatra. “If given a chance, under Metroman, Kerala will see a development culture like never before,” he said.

He said a sizable section of people in Kerala want a personality like E. Sreedharan to become the CM of the state. “In the present circumstances when corruption is rampant and development projects have hit a roadblock, a person of Mr Sreedharan's stature is needed at the helm. We requested him to join BJP with a clear purpose of utilising his services for the state and the country,” he said.

The BJP leader said Mr Sreedharan is known for completing the projects in a cost effective manner, without corruption and in a time bound manner.



Border Roads Organisation workers engaged in building a valley bridge over the Rishiganga river at Raini village of the disaster-hit Chamoli district in Uttarakhand on Thursday.

— PTI

BJP takes a dig at Cong campaign

‘Can’t even recognise Assam’: Himanta over Taiwan tea garden pics by Opp.

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MARCH 4

In what has caught the Congress campaign managers on the wrong foot, Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday attacked the Opposition Congress over using photos of a Taiwan tea garden in their campaign, saying Congress leaders couldn't even recognise Assam.

The mistake, he said, was an insult to the people of Assam and the tea garden workers of the state.

The problem started over a photograph of a Taiwan tea garden tweeted by the official twitter handle of the Congress

Congress leaders can't even recognise Assam? This is an insult of Assam and tea garden workers of our state. #CongressInsultsAssam
— Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam minister



party which has launched an aggressive campaign to what they said Assam Bachao (Save Assam) campaign.

Mr Sarma who is campaigning in New Delhi to finalise the seat sharing arrangement of the party for the state in New Delhi took to Twitter saying,

“Official Congress campaign page is using a photo of tea garden from

Taiwan to say ‘Assam Bachao’. Congress leaders can't even recognise Assam? This is an insult of Assam and tea garden workers of our state. #CongressInsultsAssam.”

Mr Sarma who is leading the campaign of the party in the state also shared a photograph that the Congress used for their “Assam Bachao (save Assam)” campaign,

alongside another screenshot that said it was a tea garden in Taiwan. It was a screenshot from Fotosearch that said it was a photo from the Nantou Tea garden in Taiwan. The issue of tea garden workers is one of the major ones in the upcoming Assembly elections.

While the Congress has been relentlessly campaigning in Assam and earlier this week Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi was seen interacting and dancing with tea garden workers in the state.

She was also seen plucking tea leaves at the Sadhuru tea garden in central Assam.

Top military commanders' meet begins

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

At a time when India is facing serious security challenge from China, country's top commanders from the Army, Navy and Air Force met for the three-day Combined Commanders' Conference in Kevadia, Gujarat, on Thursday to brainstorm and strategise an effective response to current and future threats.

PM Narendra Modi is expected to address the conference on Saturday

where he will lay down his strategic vision for the defence forces.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh will also address the conference on Friday.

The last Combined Commanders' Conference was held in Jodhpur in 2018.

Theaterisation of armed forces, self-reliance in defence sector, and emerging threats in the cyberspace and in the form of drones will also be discussed.

The conference is crucial as it will be attended

by the Commander-in-Chief rank officers of the three services and the tri-services organisations such as the Integrated Defence Staff Headquarters, Strategic Forces Command and the Port Blair-based Andaman and Nicobar Command.

Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Bipin Rawat will also be attending the meeting. Mr Modi is expected to be given a briefing on the progress made in the field of the creation of theatre commands. Of all the theatre commands under

plan, Air Defence Command is likely to be implemented first.

The PM will be given a detailed presentation on the restructuring of the Army formations in view of the recent Chinese aggression in the Ladakh sector.

During the Combined Commanders' Conference held in Jodhpur, the government had cleared the creation of the Defence Cyber Agency and Defence Space Agency along with their research components.

Meanwhile, Gen. Rawat said there is a need to study transformational concepts and to be prepared for threats for military primary arising from China and Pakistan. He said that India is facing complex security and a challenging environment. “Some important steps that we need to take include defining the national security strategy, higher defence strategic guidance, structural reforms in higher defence and operational organisations,” he said.

World varsity rankings: 12 Indian institutes in top 100

New Delhi, March 4: Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal on Thursday said the reforms made by the government in higher education has improved representation of Indian institutions in globally acclaimed rankings.

This year, 12 Indian institutions have made it to the top 100 of the QS World University Rankings by Subject 2021.

These are IIT Bombay, IIT Delhi, IIT Madras, IIT Kharagpur, IITSC Bangalore, IIT Guwahati, IIM Bangalore, IIM Ahmedabad, JNU, Anna University, University of Delhi, and O.P. Jindal University.

Among these, IIT Madras has been ranked

30th in the world for petroleum engineering, IIT Bombay has been ranked 41st and IIT Kharagpur 44th for minerals and mining engineering, and the University of Delhi has been ranked 50th in the world for development studies.

“Over the last few years, the government's continuous focus on improvement and reform in Indian higher education has resulted in significant improvement in the representation of Indian institutions in globally acclaimed and reputed rankings like QS,” the Union education minister said at the unveiling of the QS World University Rankings by Subject (2021). — PTI

5 top CPM ministers may not contest polls

AGE CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 4

KERALA

▶ **THE STATE** secretariat was of the opinion that the two-term norm needs to be complied with strictly while finalising the candidates

Five top ministers in Pinarayi Vijayan Cabinet may not contest Assembly elections this time if the deliberation held during the state leadership meet in Thiruvananthapuram is any indication.

The state secretariat meeting, held at the party headquarters AKG Centre, was of the opinion that the two-term norm needs to be complied with strictly while finalising the candidates.

According to party sources, if the norm is enforced strictly then industries minister E.P. Jayarajan, finance minister T.M. Thomas Isaac, PWD minister G. Sudhakaran, law-SC/ST welfare minister A.K. Balan and education minister C. Raveendranath will not be in the fray. Other MLAs who have completed three or four terms would also be kept out.

The district leadership of the party in Alappuzha had earlier recommended that ministers Sudhakaran and

Isaac should be given exemption and fielded considering their high prospects of victory. However, this recommendation has now been turned down.

But party sources said that the final word is yet to be spoken on the issue. The secretariat opinion will be presented before the state committee and taken back to the Assembly committees. In case if the assembly committee unanimously decides to recommend the names of ministers again, then the state leadership will be forced to reconsider its decision.

With the CPM planning to finalise its list by March 10, there is still enough time for consultations regarding the candidature of senior leaders within various levels of party fora.

UNRESERVED MAIL/EXPRESS SPECIAL TRAINS EXTENSION UP TO HATHRAS KILLAH STATION

It is notified for the information of all concerned that the following Unreserved Mail/Express Special trains have been extended upto Hathras Killah as per following details:-

Extension of 04417 Hathras Jn.-Delhi Jn. Unreserved Mail/Exp. upto Hathras Killah (w.e.f. 06.03.2021)		
STATIONS	ARRIVAL	DEPARTURE
Hathras Killah	--	05:55
Hathras Jn.	06:11	06:13
Delhi Jn.	10:00	--
Extension of 04418 Delhi Jn.-Hathras Jn. Unreserved Mail/Exp. upto Hathras Killah (w.e.f. 05.03.2021)		
STATIONS	ARRIVAL	DEPARTURE
Delhi Jn.	--	17:55
Hathras Jn.	21:10	21:12
Hathras Killah	21:40	--

As a result of extension of above trains, the train no. 04427/28 Unreserved Express Special (Daily) will run on the path of 64585/64586 Hathras Jn.-Hathras Killah MEMU as under:-

04427 Hathras Killah -Hathras Jn. (w.e.f. 05.03.2021)		04428 Hathras Jn. -Hathras Killah (w.e.f. 06.03.2021)	
ARR.	DEP.	ARR.	DEP.
--	22:00	Hathras Killah	05:25
22:25	--	Hathras Jn.	--

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

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

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NOTICE INVITING TENDER

- On behalf of Chairman APS Srinagar, sealed tenders are hereby invited from qualified and experienced firms by or before 12 March 2021 for supplying of below mentioned items:-
 - HR Commercial RO Water Plant of 500 liters with fitting & installation charges.
 - Musical Pipe Band items for contingent of 20 students.
 - Musical Jazz Band items.
- Interested parties to forward their quotations separately for above items mentioned at serial No. (a), (b) & (c) along with details like Name of firm, VAT/GST No., Permanent postal address, Mobile No., & business profile. For queries like nomenclature of items, quantity & quality can be had from the office during all working days between office hours on civil land line phone number 0194-2468224.

Sd/-
PRINCIPAL

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED

General public is hereby informed that a boy namely Fijja, D/o Aamir Khan, R/o Bakhtavarpur, Village Balmiki Moholla, Delhi has been missing/kidnapped since 12.02.2021 from her house. In this regard, FIR No. 0065/2021 dated 12.02.2021 u/s 363 IPC has been registered at P.S. Alipur, Delhi. Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to trace out the missing/kidnapped girl but no clue has come to light so far. The description of the missing/kidnapped girl is as under:



Name: Fijja, Gender: Male, Age: 5 years, Height: 2'5", Complexion: Fair, Face: Round, Built: Medium, Wearing: Red colour frock, pajama. If anyone has any information regarding this missing/kidnapped girl kindly inform SHO/Alipur, Delhi.

E-mail : clc@cbl.gov.in
Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641
Fax : 011-24368639
DP/819/ON/2021
SHO
P.S. Alipur, Delhi.
Ph. No. 011-72202265, 72202290

SHORT TAKES

Hindu Mahasabha to spread Godse's ideology in MP

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, MAR. 4

Hindu Mahasabha, which stirs controversy off and on by trying to lionize Mahatma Gandhi's assassin Nathuram Godse, on Thursday announced to launch a campaign to propagate the philosophy of the party's "idol" among the young generation. The Mahasabha declared to hold a rally from Gwalior to Delhi on March 14 for the purpose, a leader of the outfit said on Thursday. "We submitted an application to Gwalior district administration seeking permission to hold the rally. We will go ahead with our programme even if we are denied permission to organize the event", Hindu Mahasabha national vice-president Jaiveer Bhardwaj told this newspaper.

Gov accepts Sena mantri's resignation

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, MAR. 4

Maharashtra governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari on Thursday accepted the resignation of Shiv Sena minister Sanjay Rathod, who is facing serious allegations regarding alleged suicide of Pooja Chavan. The minister had tendered his resignation to chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday 'moral grounds'. However, the CM sent it to the governor only on Thursday. The BJP had alleged that the CM was shielding the minister and therefore delayed taking a decision in it. On Wednesday, the BJP threatened to protest as the CM didn't forward Rathod's resignation to the governor for four days after his resignation. Sources said that the governor office received the resignation letter from the Maharashtra government around 4.30 PM on Thursday.

MoU signed for steel plant in Odisha

Bhubaneswar: The Odisha government on Thursday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with ArcelorMittal-Nippon Steel India (AM/NS) for an integrated steel plant in Kendrapada district. The proposed 12-million tonnes for annum (MTPA) integrated steel plant will be set up with an investment of 50,000 crore, an official of the chief minister's office (CMO) said. Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik and steel tycoon Lakshmi N. Mittal were present during the signing of the MoU at Lokaseva Bhavan here in Bhubaneswar. Earlier, Mr Mittal met Mr Patnaik at Naveen Niwas and discussed his company's projects in the state. — PTI

Modi to hold virtual summit with Swedish PM

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAR. 4

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold a Virtual Summit with his Swedish counterpart Stefan Lofven on Friday during which the two leaders "will hold comprehensive discussions on the entire spectrum of the bilateral relations and exchange views on regional and global issues including further strengthening of cooperation in the post-Covid era". Around 250 Swedish companies are "actively operating in India in various sectors such as defence, health and life sciences, auto industry, clean technology, heavy machinery and equipment". In a statement, the MEA said, "This will be the fifth interaction between the two leaders since 2015. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had visited Stockholm in April, 2018 for the First India Nordic Summit. (Swedish) Prime Minister Stefan Lofven had visited India in February, 2016 for the special Make in India week. Earlier, the two leaders had met on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in September, 2015. In April, 2020, the two Prime Ministers had a telephonic conversation to discuss the situation arising out of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, Their Majesties Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia of Sweden had visited India in December, 2019."

Tie-up with Trinamul in Bengal would be suicidal for Left: CPM

Any such move will mean victory for BJP, says party mouthpiece

New Delhi, Mar. 4: Acknowledging that the advance of the BJP in West Bengal was "real", the CPI(M) has said that despite certain circles advocating its tie-up with the TMC in the state, such a move would be "suicidal" for the Left and will mean victory for the saffron party.

According to an editorial in the latest edition of the party mouthpiece People's Democracy, the CPI(M) and the Left parties have the biggest stakes in the elections in West Bengal and Kerala.

"The situation in West Bengal is the most complicated. The BJP is making a serious bid to capture power in the state. For

that, it is deploying all its men and resources backed by the RSS. The 2019 Lok Sabha election saw a polarisation between the TMC and BJP and the latter won 18 of the 42 seats polling 40.6 per cent (of votes). The Left Front got squeezed out in this polarisation and got only 7.4 per cent of the votes. The CPI(M) and the Left Front have been strenuously working to recover lost ground....," it said.

"The danger of BJP advance in West Bengal is real. This has led some liberal and Left circles outside Bengal to advocate cooperation with the TMC by the CPI(M) and Left Front. This would be suicidal for the Left and

actually facilitate a BJP victory," according to the editorial.

It also stated that the strong discontent against the TMC and its "thuggish misuse" and attitude to Mamata Banerjee and her party on the part of the Left will drive all the anti-TMC voters into the arms of the BJP.

"In fact, it is the projection of an alternative combination of the Left Front, Congress and other non-BJP, non-TMC forces that can rally these people and deprive the BJP of additional support," it said.

The contest in Kerala is between the CPI(M)-led LDF and the Congress-led United Democratic Front

(UDF). The BJP is aspiring to become the third pole as it knows very well that it cannot be the main contender in these polls. The Left Democratic Front (LDF) government under Pinarayi Vijayan's leadership has a remarkable record of performance in developmental work and social welfare measures, it said.

"In the run-up to this election too, the BJP leadership is indulging in rabid communal rhetoric with the patent aim of creating a communal polarisation. It is therefore of utmost importance to ensure the defeat of the BJP alliance in this election," the mouthpiece said.



A rickshaw puller looks at the advertisements displayed outside a shop in Kolkata on Thursday. — PTI

EAM for 'no crime, no death' border with B'desh

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAR. 4

External affairs minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar on Thursday said killings reported on the "border" with Bangladesh were because of criminal activities and actually took place deep inside Indian territory, even as pitched for a "shared objective" of a "no crime, no death" border with Bangladesh. The remarks—in response to queries from the Bangladesh media—were

made during his day-long visit to Dhaka in the presence of his counterpart there A. K. Abdul Momen. The two foreign ministers also discussed inclusion of Japan for trilateral connectivity projects in the Bay of Bengal, the EAM said.

The Teesta river-water sharing issue also came up for discussions, with the Water Resources Secretaries of the two nations scheduled to meet soon. EAM Jaishankar also said that India had so far despatched a whopping



S. Jaishankar

nine million doses of India-manufactured Covid vaccine to Bangladesh out of which two million doses were a "gift", even as Mr. Momen expressed "happiness" at the despatch of so many vaccine doses from India to his country.

The EAM's visit was essentially a preparatory one ahead of Prime

Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh at the end of this month. Bangladesh is celebrating 50 years of its existence this year and both countries are also celebrating 50 years of establishment of diplomatic relations with each other this year. The Indian armed forces' victory over Pakistan in the war in December, 1971, had led to the liberation of the erstwhile East Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh as an Independent nation.

In his remarks, the EAM said: "As all of you know, we are working to prepare for the planned visit of our Prime Minister. It will surely be a very memorable visit: if I recall right it would be his first visit outside India since the Coronavirus pandemic and his second as Prime Minister to Bangladesh. We see Bangladesh as a key neighbour and a valued partner not only in South Asia but also in the broader Indo-Pacific region."

India suggests inclusion of Chabahar in INSTC route

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MAR. 4

India on Thursday suggested the inclusion of the Iranian port of Chabahar in the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC) route on the occasion of "Chabahar Day". The port is being developed with Indian assistance that gives New Delhi sea-land connectivity to Afghanistan and Central Asia bypassing the land route through Pakistan. The INSTC meanwhile is

an important initiative taken by India, Russia and Iran to promote transportation cooperation and to enhance connectivity with central Asian countries. The INSTC is the "shortest multimodal transportation route linking the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf via Iran to Russia and North Europe".

On Indian help to Iran, New Delhi said that "India also assisted Iran to fight the worst ever locust invasion in the last 25 years by supplying 25 Metric tonnes of

Malathion in June 2020, again through the Chabahar port" and that "the second batch of 25 Metric tonnes has recently reached Chabahar Port".

EAM Jaishankar on Thursday said, "The INSTC is an important trade corridor project, wherein India is partnering with 12 countries to establish an economic corridor for the benefit of our peoples. We also welcome the interest of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan to join the multilateral corridor project."

Pradhan reiterates OBC quota demand in Odisha govt jobs

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, MAR. 4

Union petroleum minister and senior BJP leader Dharmendra Pradhan on Thursday reiterated his request to the Odisha government to implement reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in government jobs and educational institutions, and for Socially Educationally Backward Classes (SEBCs) in educational institutions in the state.

"I had written to chief minister Naveen Patnaik seeking reservations for OBCs in government jobs

and educational institutions and for SEBCs in educational institutions in Odisha. However, my request for 27 per cent reservation for socially and economically backward classes in government jobs and educational institutions in Odisha has remained unaddressed till date," Mr Pradhan told reporters in New Delhi.

"The current move for enumeration of SEBCs comes across as a dichotomous and dilatory step trying to mask the extant policies of the Odisha government denying reservations for OBCs and SEBCs categories," he added.

Supreme Court in favour of screening of OTT for 'showing porn'

■ Continued from Page 1

launched as an Amazon exclusive in January and a few days after there was outrage, mainly in right-leaning states, about the story it told. Objections were also raised about some scenes that some alleged were hurting religious sentiments and that it was derogatory towards Dalits. Some cuts were demanded and those were made. Unlike movies, which require the censor board's clearance before release in the theatres, there is no control on the content of OTT platforms. It was in the wake of this that the government framed stringent rules to regulate them and control content.

TMC rejects alliances, will fight all 294 seats

■ Continued from Page 1
chief. This left many in the TMC guessing their party supremo might release the candidates list in phases in consultation with those parties.

But a prompt campaign by the BJP wondering if Ms Banerjee was trying to invite "Bohiragoto" (outsiders) to the state at a time she herself is leveling the same allegation at the saffron party prompted her to change her mind, a TMC insider revealed.

According to sources, the names of those TMC MLAs and aspirants who are in their 80s will not get tickets this time.

They will be replaced by new and young faces belonging to the party's grassroots and a long list of celebrities from the Bengali film industry — also known as Tollywood. Besides, some retired bureaucrats like ex-IPS officer Humayun Kabir are also among the proba-

AIMIM finalises names for 13 out of 22 seats in Murshidabad

PRANMOY BRAHMACHARI
BERHAMPORE, MAR. 4

All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimen (AIMIM) has finalised its candidates in 13 out of 22 seats in Murshidabad, one of the four key districts where it will contest in the ensuing West Bengal assembly election.

AIMIM Murshidabad district convener Asadul Sheikh said: "Our party will contest in several seats in minority dominated districts: Murshidabad, Malda, South Dinajpur and North Dinajpur. Our party chief Asaduddin Owaisi will kickstart the party's poll campaign on March 13 from Sagardighi. We have already selected eligible candidates for 13 seats."

He added, "We have also sent to party leadership a list of candidates for the remaining nine seats for approval. But our party leadership is yet to take a call on it. We are very optimistic that all the right candidates will be chosen very soon." Mr Sheikh informed that he himself would contest from Jangipur in the district.

Rahul hits out at Centre over I-T raids on Tapsee, Anurag

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAR. 4

A day after Income Tax searches on celebrities Anurag Kashyap and Tapsee Pannu, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi hit out at the Centre over making agencies 'dance to their tune'.

Mr. Gandhi took to Twitter and said the government is making its departments like Income Tax, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Enforcement (ED) etc., dance to its tunes while "friendly media" cows down before the government and the government meanwhile takes out its anger on people who are supporting the farmers' protest.

He tweeted in Hindi: "three idioms. Making someone dance to your tune—this is what the government does with ED, CBI, IT etc. To bow down—that's what friendly media does to the government."

bles to get tickets in place of the 19 MLAs who had switched sides to the BJP recently.

Altogether, 30 per cent of the 294 candidates to fight the polls will be first timers. The TMC, which fielded 33 per cent female candidates in the last Lok Sabha polls, is planning now to increase that percentage slightly.

But all eyes will be on Ms Banerjee — on whether she chooses to contest from Nandigram constituency alone, or whether she will also stand from her existing constituency Bhowanipore.

Newly inducted BJP leader and former Nandigram MLA, Shubhendu Adhikari, who attended a high-level party meeting at the residence of BJP president J.P. Nadda in New Delhi, has expressed his wish to fight from Nandigram against the CM.

THE ASIAN AGE

5 MARCH 2021

Dissent not sedition: SC sends govt clear signal

In a ringing endorsement of a universal democratic view that voicing anti-government views is not sedition, the Supreme Court shot down a so-called public interest litigation by a couple of individuals against Farooq Abdullah, the senior Kashmiri leader and former chief minister of J&K. Regardless of whether the litigation was inspired or not by the forces that be, the truth is freedom of speech in a democracy is being challenged every day. There is a clear pattern to be seen behind offence being taken at every turn at any view expressed that runs contrary to the rigid opinions of the majoritarians who are quite willing to be at odds with India's tradition of tolerance and pluralism.

The criminalising of dissent is the clearest sign of an authoritarian government. There was a stinging lesson for the authorities in the Disha Ravi case when a learned judge, quoting the Rig Veda, said — "Let noble thoughts come to me from all directions" — to uphold the right of the activist to internationalise the farmers' stir issue. The cause of action was described as intent "to wage economic, social, culture and regional war against India".

There is little reason to suspect that the income tax raids on certain Bollywood personalities this week were not inspired by people in power who are trying to throttle celebrities expressing views not in consonance with the inflexible opinion of the leaders of the majoritarians

How very conveniently the political is covered into an issue for patriotism is revealing of how any deviation from the State's view on an issue as humongous as the farmers' agitation involving a very sizeable section of the population was viewed as that of a heretic who had to be punished.

There is little reason to suspect that the income tax raids on certain Bollywood personalities this week were not inspired by people in power who are trying to throttle celebrities expressing views that are not in consonance with the inflexible opinion of the leaders of the majoritarians. Glib explanations of there being a logical cause for action against tax avoidance do not cut ice. The action, in fact, is suggestive of intimidating tactics against dissent that has been occurring in a pattern of retribution in keeping with a larger modus operandi of making criminals of dis-

senters through persecution using official India machinery like I-T, ED and the police to register FIRs and foist cases.

Events are all too suggestive of a democracy in decay. Our worst fears were confirmed when India was downgraded to "partly free" for the first time since 1997 in the annual ranking of democracies by the US-government funded research group Freedom House, which cited worsening civil rights under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. As the world's largest democracy, in which a variety of opinions including dissenting ones must coexist in diverse people who are thought of as conscience keepers of the nation, India can ill afford to drop the safeguards against making criminals out of dissenters.

Mercifully, the courts have not shied away from not only enlarging those accused of high crimes like sedition by using arcane laws out of the British colonial era but rapping the State agencies in presenting instruments of oppression as legitimate criminal and civil charges. Everyone holding an opinion different from the views of official India or the central ruling party is not an inducer of violence or intent on waging a war against the State. It is a blessing that courts are alive to the rule of law and is dismissive of "rule by law" as a wise judge put it while granting bail in one case.

Damp squib Sasikala

For all those who were expecting political fireworks in Tamil Nadu when V.K. Sasikala, the erstwhile confidante of late J. Jayalalithaa, drove down to Chennai on February 8, it was a damp squib when she suddenly called it quits on Wednesday night. There was speculation that she would make a political impact. She, too, was trying to live up to that image by making statements, addressing cadre and even celebrating Jayalalithaa's birth anniversary with pomp and fanfare.

So, coming like a bolt from the blue, her decision triggered a whole range of conjectures since people saw in it a conjuncture of two political events. One, the BJP desperately trying to force the AIADMK to patch up with Ms Sasikala, and AIADMK leaders digging in their heels refusing to let her or her nephew T.T.V. Dhinakaran into their fold. Since the BJP's intelligence was that Ms Sasikala and Mr Dhinakaran could take away some votes that would otherwise come to its coalition, it first put pressure on AIADMK and then on Ms Sasikala, asking her to scoot. Why this supposition found more takers in the state was because the people know Ms Sasikala as a power-hungry, diabolic operator who would not easily let go any opportunity to rule.

Also, when it is known that she cannot stand for election for another six years, what was the need to announce that she was leaving the turf? Besides, since her landing in Chennai, she had not made any significant breakthrough politically, other than having a few guests like actor Seeman, actor Sarathkumar and his wife Radhika and film director Bharathiraja. So, why should she say that she will pray and not play politics? Because the powers that be want her to not even be seen in the reckoning. It's a different matter that Bharathiraja spotted in her a "brave Tamil woman" not ashamed of going to jail and facing party cadre with fortitude.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Editor in Chief

Printer & Publisher: K. SUDHAKAR

The Asian Age office is located at:

New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 25211124.

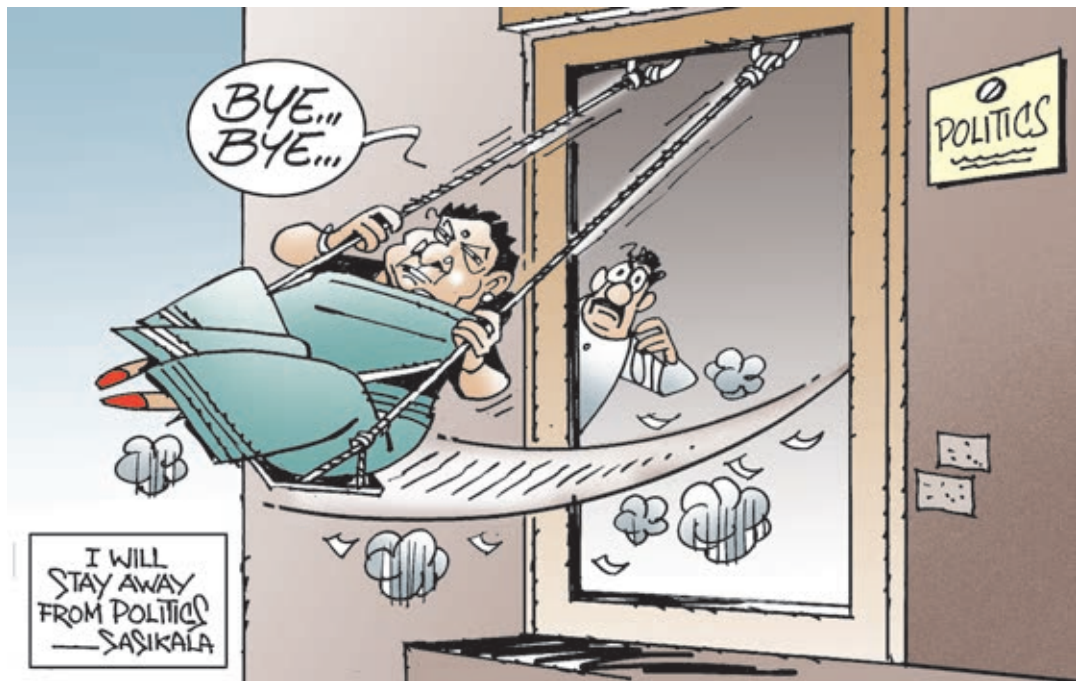
Published and Printed on behalf of and for

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

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

RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



The tragedy of Suu Kyi: Almost Shakespearean



Karan Thapar

As I See It

Shakespeare's tragedies have heroes, but they are not heroic. As the plays unfold you witness their crumbling. In fact, they destroy themselves because the law is embedded deep in their character. It's an inevitable and irresistible process. It's an outcome that cannot be prevented. That's why it's tragic.

I think that could also be true of Aung San Suu Kyi. I've known her since I was five. At the time, her mother was the Burmese ambassador in India, and Suu, as I have always called her, was an undergraduate at New Delhi's Lady Shri Ram College. Our parents became friends and Suu and my sister Kiran would often drive together to college.

Even as a teenager, Suu was drawn to politics. She sensed her future would ultimately lie in ruling Burma (the name she prefers for Myanmar) and didn't hide it even if she only spoke jocularly. A pencil-drawn portrait that she made of my sister Kiran, dated October 11, 1962, has inscribed at the bottom: "Kiran Thapar may be allowed entry into Burma at any time". Suu was only 17 at the time.

Years later her husband Michael told me at Oxford that when they married — and Suu was 27 at the time — she forewarned him that if Burma calls it would always be her priority. In fact, he sensed when she returned home in 1988 it was unlikely that she would come back. She didn't. They lived separately till he died. She was also cut off from her two young sons. Of the next 21 years, she spent 15 either in jail or under house arrest.

No doubt this hurt, and she suffered, but politics and the determination to come to power in Burma was more than a mission. It was a calling. It

defined Suu. Perhaps it was also her way of fulfilling her father's dream, which was cruelly aborted when he was assassinated months before Burma's independence.

When I last interviewed her, in September 2015, just before the election that brought her to power, the Rohingya issue was already a challenge she knew she would have to face if she won. At the time she was unable or unwilling to express concern and sympathy. I questioned her silence. Her explanation was that this was the only way of ensuring she would be seen as impartial by both sides. Silence would give her the opportunity and credibility to act impartially when she came to power. Her aim was to reconcile, and condemnation would get in the way. It would fan the flames, not douse them.

I had no reason to doubt her. It was also already clear she would never be President and internal security would lie with the Army, which had successfully thwarted her claim to the top job. Criticising them could endanger the limited power that she hoped to exercise. She had to tread carefully and speak cautiously. She had to compromise to survive. All of that was understandable.

Was her silence on the Rohingyas before elections impartiality, as she had claimed, or seeking favour with the Burmese majority? Today I feel it was her instinctive response to an unforeseen hurdle that could have obstructed the fulfilment of her ambition

The reaction happened internationally, not at home. The world viewed her attitude to the Rohingyas as a demeaning compromise. Her earlier reputation for valiant sacrifice was forgotten. That placed her on a high pedestal. This threw her down.

What wasn't was how terrible that compromise turned out to be. It only became clear after she won. Not for a moment did I think it would be tilted in favour of retaining power and influence whilst forsaking her own principles. Yet that was the undeniable outcome.

As State Counsellor if she spoke about the Rohingyas it was only in terms of terrorism and the killing of security personnel. She had nothing to say of the innocent men, women and children, killed in their hundreds and rendered homeless in their hundreds of thousands. It seemed political expediency dominated her principles completely. She would not express compassion. I didn't expect her to defy the Army or endanger Burma's fledgling democracy, but I also did not expect her lips to remain so firmly sealed.

This raised a disturbing question — was her silence on the Rohingya issue before the elections impartiality, as she had claimed, or seeking favour with the Burmese majority whose support she would need? Was it pragmatism or opportunism? Initially I thought it was both. Today I feel it was her instinctive response to an unforeseen hurdle that could have obstructed the fulfilment of her ambition to rule Burma. Just as separation from her husband and children and a decade and a half in detention did not deter her, nor would this.

The reaction happened internationally, not at home. The world viewed her attitude to the

Rohingyas as a demeaning compromise. Her earlier reputation for valiant sacrifice was forgotten. That placed her on a high pedestal. This threw her down. Once admired, she was now reviled. Outside Burma she became a fallen angel.

At home it was very different. Reverentially called "The Lady" and "Mother Suu", the majority she won in the 2020 elections was even greater than the landslide five years ago. And after the military threw out her government and put her under arrest, the admiration her people have for her seems to know no limits. But, alas, it's also likely to ensure that the generals do not change their mind and restore her to power.

So, like Shakespeare's tragic heroes, she may well ask if the price she paid for achieving her ambition was worth it? If it turns out to be only five years in power, with no credible possibility of restoration, did she compromise her principles and her international reputation for an office that was so easily snatched away and for authority that was never complete, often checked and so easily revoked?

Shakespeare's tragic heroes face similar dilemmas. But rarely do they live to address or answer them. With their denouement there is also usually death. Suu, however, is alive to face hers, even if in incarceration. She will have all the time she needs to reflect, and it won't be easy.

In that interview in 2015 she described herself as "a pragmatic leader". At the time, the adjective conveyed a sense of careful balance. Today it suggests a cover for unbecoming compromise. When I asked if she was ready for the challenge of ruling Burma, she answered: "It's a daunting challenge... I hope it brings out the best in me". Sadly, it did not. But as Shakespeare might add, that was inevitable. Suu would not be Suu if it could have been otherwise.

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

GOVT MUST SPEND

Covid today, having wrought universal economic distress, will yield only to innovative economies that are committed to growth and not too fixated on fiscal purity and foreign investors tend to prefer such economies, post pandemic. On the heels of The Economic Survey 2021, S&P had rated our sovereign credit at BBB minus; a 10th rank rating for the fifth largest economy. We should not be unduly depressed by such ratings. Instead, we look for initiatives reminiscent of fiscal spend akin to the New Deal of the US in the 1930s. An accelerated growth is the key to reclaiming economic prosperity.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

GOOD RIDDANCE

AS EXPECTED, BJP leader Ramesh Jarkiholi has resigned from the Karnataka Cabinet after facing allegations of seeking sexual favours from a woman in return for a government job. We believe that the water resources minister had to quit following a nudge from the BJP high command, whose direction the chief minister had sought. The purported sleaze videos have shown the minister in poor light besides causing embarrassment to the BJP ahead of the upcoming Assembly and Lok Sabha bypolls and panchayat elections in Karnataka.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

METRO MAN TO FAIL

METRO MAN E. Sreedharan will be the Bharatiya Janata Party's chief ministerial candidate in the upcoming Kerala Assembly elections. Mr Sreedharan joined the BJP in Kerala on February 26. He has not only backed the saffron party on the issue of love jihad but also said it is a true patriotic party. With this outlook, he is likely to come a cropper in a progressive state like Kerala where the BJP is very weak. Mr Sreedharan is, perhaps, not as versatile as he sees himself to be, after all.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

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

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Diplomatic pool to get eight new joint secys soon

The ministry of external affairs (MEA) has been quite keen to add more joint secretaries to the diplomatic pool to staff new embassies and consulates being set up in various countries. Now, after some wait, headway has been made in this direction with the government planning to empanel eight IFS officers of the 2003 batch as joint secretaries.

According to sources, the cadre controlling authority of the IFS was ready with its list in December last year but was asked to wait since the government was about to empanel 41 IAS officers from the 2003 batch. The department of personnel and training (DoPT) reportedly informed MEA that there should be a gap of one month in the empanelment process between the IAS and IFS. It is further learnt

that, except for Devesh Uttam who is posted in the country, the remaining seven IFS officers are posted abroad.

It is a known fact that India's foreign service is woefully understaffed, with most Indian missions abroad having too few diplomats. This could be a small step towards addressing this grievance.

SREEDHARAN PADS UP FOR ANOTHER INNINGS

The BJP wants to be a serious contender in Kerala and is hoping that "Metro Man" E. Sreedharan's induction in the party will help it make inroads in the impending Assembly elections. Will the gamble pay off?

Mr Sreedharan has enjoyed a full innings in his illustrious career, immense credibility with the *aam aadmi* as an honest and efficient

technocrat as well as respect among politicians across party lines, and picked up a Padma Shri, Padma Vibhushan and a host of other national and international honours.

Why would the man who shot to fame with the Delhi Metro project and who advised the Kerala government on Metro projects in the state and who is also involved in the other Metro projects in Jaipur and Lucknow want a stab at politics (and chief ministership, no less!) at the ripe age of 88 years?

Clearly, he enjoys wearing many hats. And a politician's *topi* would be the crowning glory of his career if he can manage the challenge of transforming from technocrat into a नेता. His future progress will be watched closely by not just politicians but also bureaucrats who may be nurturing similar

ambitions themselves.

MP CHIEF MINISTER FINDS HIS MOJO

The usually affable and soft-spoken Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan is a different man in his fourth term, according to the babus in the state. By some accounts, he seems to have set the proverbial cat among the pigeons! Mr Chouhan, it appears, is attempting an image makeover. The soft-spoken veneer has been replaced by a hard-nosed leader in "full action" mode.

The result of this transformation has been directed at the babus who, sources say, have begun to dread the CM's new-found penchant to order the transfer of officers, sometimes during a meeting itself. According to sources, Mr Chouhan has unceremoniously transferred

more than six district magistrates and SPs so far and seems to be in an unrelenting mood. One IPS officer, Vahini Singh, the SP of Niwari district, was transferred during a meeting by Mr Chouhan, who also told the gathered officials in as many words that he was keeping a close tab on them. Other officers transferred in this period are the SP of Guna Rajesh Singh, and the DMs of Neemuch and Betul, J.S. Raje and Rakesh Singh.

Those in the know say that the chief minister is using the monthly meetings with state officials to scare them into submission through these tactics. Mr Chouhan means business is the unmistakable message and it seems to be hitting its mark quite effectively!

Share a babu experience! Follow [@dilipcherian](https://twitter.com/dilipcherian) on Twitter.com.

SHORT TAKES

GUNMEN KILL
7 WORKERS,
BOMB KILLS DOC

Kabul, March 4: At least seven Afghan civilians were shot and killed by a group of gunmen in the country's east and a physician died when a bomb attached to her rickshaw exploded on Thursday.

The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the bombing, saying its fighters had detonated a so-called sticky bomb placed on the vehicle of a woman. They claimed she worked for the Afghan intelligence service in Jalalabad. Gen. Juma Gul Hemat, provincial police chief in Nangarhar, said the attack victims were workers at a plaster factory in the Sorkh Rod district. Police arrested four suspects.

HK COURT KEEPS
47 ACTIVISTS
IN CUSTODY

Hong Kong, March 4: A Hong Kong court on Thursday ordered all 47 pro-democracy activists charged under a Beijing-imposed national security law to be kept in custody after the Department of Justice appealed an initial decision to grant bail to 15 of them. Thirty-two of the activists were denied bail outright. The next court hearing is on May 31.

The activists were charged with conspiracy to commit subversion under the security law and detained over their involvement in an unofficial primary election last year that authorities said was a plot to paralyze Hong Kong's government. The charges against the activists were the most sweeping action taken against the city's pro-democracy camp.

INDIAN IN UAE
WINS ₹24 CR IN
LUCKY DRAW

Dubai, March 4: An Indian man, living in the UAE for the last 15 years, has won a whopping 12 million dirhams (₹24 crore) in a raffle, the latest addition to the long list of lucky winners from India, a media report said on Thursday.

Shivamurthy Krishnappa, who is a mechanical engineer and hails from Shimoga district of Karnataka, has been living in the UAE for the last 15 years. He bought the winning ticket number 202511 on February 17 this year; the Gulf News reported. Krishnappa was excited as he watched the draw live from home. When the host Richard called him on his mobile, Krishnappa said: "I am watching the live draw. Thank you so much. I cannot believe I have won."

TOSSED INTO SEA
OFF YEMEN, 20
MIGRANTS DIE

Nairobi, March 4: The International Organisation for Migration says at least 20 migrants are dead after smugglers threw 80 overboard during a voyage from Djibouti in East Africa to Yemen.

A statement says "smugglers started shouting there were too many on board" after the boat with 200 migrants, including children under 18, set off on Wednesday. The IOM says five bodies have been recovered, and survivors are being treated in Djibouti. This has happened before as thousands of migrants continue to try to make their way from the Horn of Africa to Yemen and then on to rich Gulf countries.

The Coronavirus pandemic and the resulting closed borders have slowed but not stopped the flow of migrants.

SHEIKH HASINA'S
POLITICAL
ADVISER DIES

Dhaka, March 4: HT Imam, the political adviser to Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, died on Thursday at a military hospital here.

Imam, 81, breathed his last at 1.15 am. He was undergoing treatment at the Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka, Awami League Office Secretary Biplab Barua said in a social media post. Imam, who was the cabinet secretary to the 1971 wartime government, was hospitalised with various age-related problems, *Dhaka Tribune* reported. After the Awami League headed by Hasina formed the government following the 2008 election, Imam was appointed as the public administration affairs adviser to the prime minister. Following the 2014 elections, he was made the political affairs adviser.

Law on H-1B visas
in US Congress

Legislation to end allure of cheap foreign labour

Washington, March 4:

Three Republican US lawmakers have introduced a legislation in Congress to bar American employers from hiring H-1B workers, who are mostly highly-skilled Indian IT professionals, if they have recently, or plan to fire their local workers, seeking to put an end to the allure of cheap foreign labour.

Introduced in the House of Representatives by Republican congressmen Mo Brooks, Matt Gaetz and Lance Gooden, the American Jobs First Act proposes to overhaul the H-1B visa programme by making necessary changes in the Immigration and Nationality Act.

The H-1B visa, most-sought after among Indian IT professionals, is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

According to its text released on Wednesday, a foreign guest worker may not be admitted or provided status as an H-1B non-immigrant in an occupational classification unless the petitioner employer has filed with the Secretary of Labour an application stating the employer is offering an annual wage to the H-1B non-immigrant that is the greater of the annual wage paid to the US citizen or lawful permanent resident employee who did identical or similar work during the two years before the petitioner employer filed such applica-

China may disrupt
5G network: US**Washington, March 4:**

Observing that the Biden administration views 5G as a high priority, the US on Wednesday expressed concern about the dangers of installing networks with equipment that can be manipulated, disrupted, or even controlled by China which it alleged has no regard for human rights or privacy.

"The Biden administration views 5G as a high priority, of course. We advocate for a vibrant digital economy that enables all citizens to benefit from the promise of 5G wireless networks. We also know that the stakes for securing these networks

could not be any higher," State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said.

He said 5G, of course, is transformative and will touch every aspect of lives, and this is critical for infrastructure sectors: transportation, electrical distribution, healthcare, public health, and many more. "And so that is why we are concerned about the dangers of installing networks with equipment that can be manipulated, disrupted, or even controlled by the People's Republic of China, which as we know, of course, has no regard for human rights or privacy," Price said. —PTI

tion; or \$110.

The petitioner employer also needs to file with the Secretary of Labour an application stating the employer will not require an H-1B non-immigrant to pay a penalty for ceasing employment with the petitioner employer before the date agreed to by the H-1B non-immigrant and the petitioner employer.

The bill referred to the Committee on the Judiciary, and in addition to the Committee on Education and Labour among other things suspends the F-1 Optional Practical Training programme, which grants all foreign students extendable work permits and exacerbates job market competition among American graduates.

It ends the diversity visa lottery programme, which the lawmakers alleged fails to serve US interests by issuing 50,000 green cards to foreigners from around the world regardless of their qualifications. Given that the Democrats have a majority in the House of Representatives, the bill has little chance to be passed. "My American Jobs First Act will bring much needed reform and oversight to the H-1B visa programme to ensure that US workers are no longer disadvantaged in their own country. To end the allure of cheap foreign labour, the bill will require employers to pay any H-1B workers a minimum amount of \$110,000," Congressman Brooks said. —PTI

Sweden axe attack:
3 grievously injured**Stockholm, March 4:**

Hospital officials say three people wounded in an assault by a man using an axe in southern Sweden are in life-threatening condition and police have reduced the overall number of victims to seven.

The suspected assailant, a man in his 20s, was shot, arrested and is being treated in a hospital, police said.

A press conference was expected later Thursday on the attack. The other victims of Wednesday's assault in the small town of Vetlanda, 190 kilometres southeast of Goteborg, Sweden's second-largest city, include two seriously injured people, two with moderate injuries and one who is slightly injured, the Jonkoping region said in a statement late Wednesday. The attack took place in the afternoon and police say there are five crime scenes in Vetlanda, a town of 13,000.

The man's motive was not immediately known. Police said the man, who they would not identify in line with Swedish policy, is known to them for petty crimes. Overnight, officers raided an apartment where he was reportedly staying.

The *Expressen* tabloid said the suspect was a 22-

● **ALTHOUGH MINIMUM**

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● **THE SUSPECTED** assailant, a man in his 20s, was shot, arrested and is being treated in a hospital.

● **THE MAN'S** motive was not immediately known. Police said the man, who they would not identify in line with Swedish policy, is known to them for petty crimes.

year-old man from Afghanistan.

Sweden's Home Affairs Minister Mikael Damberg told broadcaster SVT on Thursday that the case was being investigated as attempted murder but all aspects would be considered, including whether it was a terror attack.

"It is obvious that you look at whether there are terrorist motives behind it, you have to get to the bottom of it," he said. Regional police chief Malena Grann said police were investigating whether there were any terrorist motives in the case. —AP

PROTESTERS
MARCH AGAIN
IN MYANMAR**Nay Pyi Taw, March 4:**

Demonstrators in Myanmar protesting last month's military coup returned to the streets Thursday, undaunted by the killing of at least 38 people the previous day by security forces.

New protests were held in at least three areas of Yangon, the country's largest city, that have been scenes of violence for the past few days. Police again used force to try to disperse the crowds, according to social media accounts. Protests also continued in Mandalay, the second-biggest city. A formation of five fighter planes flew over the city on Thursday morning in what appeared to be a threatening show of force. The UN special envoy for Myanmar, Christine Schraner Burgener, said 38 people were killed Wednesday, a figure consistent with other reports.

The death toll was the highest since the Feb. 1 takeover, when the military ousted the elected government of leader Aung San Suu Kyi. More than 50 civilians, mostly peaceful protesters, are confirmed to have been killed by police and soldiers since then. —AP

Farmers demonstrate in France



French farmers stand behind a banner reading "Our job: feed you well. No more denigration and misinformation" as they take part in a demonstration to alert about their financial situation and a large number of suicides in their profession, in Paris, on Thursday. —AFP

Did Markle bully royal staff?
Buckingham Palace probes**London, March 4:**

Buckingham Palace has launched an investigation into allegations that Meghan Markle, the Duchess of Sussex, bullied staff during her time as a frontline royal with Prince Harry in Britain. Markle, 39, lived at Kensington Palace for nearly a year after her marriage to Prince Harry, 36, the Duke of Sussex, in May 2018.

The probe comes as *The Times* published a leaked email on Wednesday from a staff member alleging that the former American actress drove two personal assistants out of the household and undermined the confidence of a third member of staff. "We are clearly very concerned about allegations in the 'Times' following claims made by former staff of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex," Buckingham Palace, which is responsible for all Royal Household staff, said in a statement.

"Accordingly, our HR team will look into the circumstances outlined in the article. Members of staff involved at the time, including those who have

Palace perpetuating
falsehoods: Meghan**Los Angeles, March 4:**

Meghan Markle says Buckingham Palace is "perpetuating falsehoods" about her and her husband Prince Harry, according to part of an interview she has done with Oprah Winfrey.

The explosive claim is the latest salvo in an increasingly heated public relations battle between the British royal family and the US-based couple. The clip, released

Wednesday, came hours after Buckingham Palace said it was investigating claims Markle had bullied household staff in the months after her fairytale wedding to the prince.

"I don't know how they could expect that after all of this time we would still just be silent if there's an active role that The Firm is playing in perpetuating falsehoods about us," Markle told Winfrey. —AFP

left the Household, will be invited to participate to see if lessons can be learned," it said. "The Royal Household has had a Dignity at Work policy in place for a number of years and does not and will not tolerate bullying or harassment in the workplace," it said.

Past and present royal employees are to be invit-

ed to speak in confidence about their experiences of working for the Duchess as part of the investigation. Lawyers for the couple, who stepped back as frontline royals last year, have said they are the victims of a calculated smear campaign based on "misleading and harmful misinformation". —PTI

Houthi rebels: Missile hits
Saudi oil facility in Jiddah**Dubai, March 4:**

Yemen's Houthi rebels said they struck a Saudi oil facility in the port city of Jiddah on Thursday, the latest in a series of cross-border attacks the group has claimed against the kingdom amid the grinding war in Yemen.

Saudi Arabia's state-owned media did not immediately acknowledge any incident in Jiddah. Brig. Gen. Yehia Sarie, a Houthi military spokesman, tweeted that the rebels fired a new Quds-2 cruise missile at the facility. He posted a satellite image online that matched Aramco's North Jiddah Bulk Plant, where oil products are stored in tanks.

The rebels claimed they

● **IN RECENT** weeks the group has stepped up its attacks, repeatedly crashing drones and missiles into the kingdom's Patriot missile batteries.

hit the same facility last November, an attack the Saudi-led coalition later admitted had sparked a fire at the plant. The facility sits just southeast of Jiddah's King Abdulaziz International Airport, a major airfield that handles Muslim pilgrims heading to Mecca.

Flights coming into airport diverted or otherwise flew in circles early Thursday morning without explanation, accord-

ing to tracking data from website FlightRadar24.com. Since 2015, the Houthi's battling the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen have targeted international airports, along with military installations and critical oil infrastructure, within Saudi Arabia. In recent weeks the group has stepped up its attacks, repeatedly crashing drones and missiles into the kingdom's Patriot missile batteries. A Saudi-led military coalition intervened in Yemen after the rebels seized the country's capital, Sanaa. The war has settled into a bloody stalemate, with Saudi Arabia facing international criticism for its airstrikes killing civilians. —AP

PRINCE PHILIP HAD
SUCCESSFUL HEART
PROCEDURE

London, March 4: Britain's Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, has had a "successful procedure" for a pre-existing heart condition at a London hospital where he was moved earlier this week, Buckingham Palace said on Thursday.

The 99-year-old husband of Queen Elizabeth II has now spent 16 nights in hospital first at the private King Edward VII's Hospital and now at St. Bartholomew's Hospital where he was transferred for further tests and observation for a pre-existing heart condition.

"The Duke of Edinburgh yesterday [Wednesday] underwent a successful procedure for a pre-existing heart condition at St. Bartholomew's Hospital," Buckingham Palace said in a statement about Prince Philip. —AP

NEPAL SIGNS
PEACE DEAL
WITH REBELS**Kathmandu, March 4:**

Nepal's government signed a peace agreement Thursday with a small communist rebel group widely feared because they were known for violent attacks, extortion and bombings.

The government agreed to lift a ban on the group, release all their members and supporters in jail and drop all legal cases against them, while the group agreed to give up all violence and resolve any issues through peaceful dialogue. Details of the agreement would be made public at a joint ceremony Friday with PM K.P. Oli and the leader of the rebel group Netra Bikram Chand. —AP

FILM | FEST Radu Jude's 'Loony Porn' lays bare a country that has revised its history to legitimise its past

A teacher, a porn clip and the hypocrisy of a nation

SUPARNA SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

Romanian writer-director Radu Jude's *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn* opens with a naughty, kinky pornographic scene. Emi (Katia Pascariu), a school teacher, is having sex with her husband and they are recording the proceedings for a bit of extra thrill.

But somehow the sex tape leaks and is soon making the rounds of giddy WhatsApp groups of her students and their parents. Some download it, purportedly as evidence to beat Emi with. The fact

that the sex is consensual, between a husband and wife is irrelevant. There is outrage, and it's mostly about how could a middle-aged, married woman be so raunchy.

Radu Jude's film, which premiered in the main Competition section at the 71st International Film Festival of Berlin, uses this porn clip and the subsequent "trial" of Emi in the school's yard to draw circles around a society's hypocrisy.

The film is split in three parts. In the first, *Loony Porn* walks with Emi as she visits her school principal, goes to a book store and a pharmacy. Shot dur-

● **RADU JUDE'S** film, which premiered in the main Competition section at the 71st International Film Festival of Berlin, uses this porn clip and the subsequent "trial" of Emi in the school's yard to draw circles around a society's hypocrisy.

ing the Coronavirus pandemic, this segment has visuals of a city all masked up and wary of social interactions. But it's also a city busy consuming, enraging, eradicating the past. We watch arguments and fights in a supermarket, with owners of big

cars who block the sidewalk as a matter of their right. Each clash is an assertion of the entitlement of the rich and marginalisation of others.

The film's second part is polyphonic and here, through commentary, archival footage, statistics, words, nudes in newspapers, building rising and in ruins, *Loony Porn* tells the story of Romania — about its role in the Holocaust, its attitude to Jews, Romas, love for dictators, attitude to sex and children. It also tells us that in Romania, 6 out of 10 kids are subjected to family violence.

This fact hovers over the film's last segment — the

meeting called by the school principal and parents to interrogate and then vote on Emi's future. It is kicked off by a parent who insists on playing the sex clip for the benefit of all those gathered.

This scene, framed like an inquisition — the "accused" is in the middle, flanked by a judge who will rule based on the mood of the people and the enforcer of morality — is both dark and funny. Though allegations, tangential discussions, innuendoes, inappropriate remarks, shrill sanctimony and, finally, the judgment, *Loony Porn* lays bare a nation that has revised its



history to legitimise its past and current criminal acts and feels emboldened to air its prejudice, bigotry and misplaced rage. Because many speak in the same tongue, collective hypocrisy gets elevated to a

sanctimonious, narcissistic chorus.

What's striking is how familiar it all feels. This searing portrait of a nation and its people could well be a day in the life of India.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,846.08	1.16
Nifty 50	15,080.80	1.08
S&P 500*	3,827.09	0.19
Dollar (₹)	72.83	-0.15
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.45	0.22
Euro (₹)	87.63	0.41
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,372*217	0.48
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	65.79	2.68
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.212	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.481	0.011

* As of 8:30 PM IST

FDI equity flow rises 40% in April-Dec: Govt

Foreign direct investment grew 40 per cent to \$51.47 billion during April-Dec. 2020-21. India has attracted 22 per cent higher FDI inflow (including re-invested earnings) of \$67.54 billion during the first nine months of FY21 against \$55.14 billion in the same period of FY20. "FDI equity inflow grew by 40 per cent in the first nine months of 2020-21 (\$51.47 billion) compared to the year ago period (\$36.77 billion)," the govt said.

Arcelor Nippon inks pact for ₹50K cr plant



ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India (AM/NS India) inked an MoU with the Odisha government for setting up a 12 mtpa integrated steel plant in Kendrapada district with an investment of Rs 50,000 crore, officials said. Steel tycoon Lakshmi N. Mittal met chief minister Naveen Patnaik at his residence Naveen Niwas earlier in the day and discussed ArcelorMittal's projects in the state, an official said.

Companies garner ₹9,100 cr via NCD issues

As many as eight companies raised over Rs 9,118 crore through retail issuance of non-convertible debentures in the first ten months of the ongoing fiscal. In comparison, firms had garnered Rs 14,161 crore through this route in the April-January period of 2019-20. Most of the funds have been mobilised to support lending activities, working capital requirements and other general corporate purposes.

Kabira electric bikes sells 6,100 units in 96 hours

Kabira Mobility, the Goa-based EV startup and manufacturer of two electric model bikes, said it had reached a total bookings of 6,100 electric bikes on February 28 with a down payment of Rs 3,000. Delivery of the bikes will start from the first week of May. The company had launched India's fastest electric bikes called KM3000 and KM4000 on February 25 priced at Rs 1.27 lakh and Rs 1.37 lakh, respectively.

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

May seek \$35 bn valuation in blank-cheque deal Flipkart weighs US listing by merging with a Spac

BAIJU KALESH & ANTO ANTONY MARCH 4

Walmart Inc's Flipkart is exploring going public in the US through a merger with a blank-cheque company as it seeks to quicken its listing process, according to people familiar with the matter.

The Bengaluru-based online retailer has been weighing a US initial public offering and it's now also looking at other options, the people said. Flipkart's advisers have approached several Spacs, said one of the people, who asked not to be identified as the information is not public. Flipkart could seek a valuation of at least \$35 billion in a blank-cheque transaction, the people said.

Deliberations are at an early stage and Flipkart could still explore other options, the people said. A representative for Flipkart had no immediate comment.

The e-commerce firm is joining other Indian firms like online grocer Grofers in exploring a US listing through Spac deals. ReNew Power last week agreed to merge with a US-listed special purpose acquisition company (Spac) in a deal that will give India's biggest renewable power producer an enterprise value of \$8 billion.

Merging with Spacs will allow Walmart to take its India unit to market at a faster pace than the usual IPO route. As many as 10

Spacs look to India for next wave of targets: Nomura

BAIJU KALESH MARCH 4

Blank-cheque companies are increasingly looking to India for acquisition targets, which will keep the country's recent deal-making streak going, according to Nomura Holdings Inc.

"Spac-led transactions are expected to increase in the coming years in India," Utpal Oza, head of investment banking for India at Nomura, said in a phone interview. "Wherever you've got businesses which have caught the fancy of international investors especially in sectors such as renewables, tech or e-commerce, where the corporate structure enables it to be merged quite easily, you will see Spac activity."

A blank-cheque company is a shell company that raises money from public investors with the goal of acquiring a business within two years. These deals—some sponsored by the

rich and famous including Hong Kong billionaire Richard Li and ex-Credit Suisse chief Tidjane Thiam—have raised more than \$66 billion in the US alone just this year, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

Singapore could join the bandwagon soon. The country's exchange is consulting the market on allowing Spacs to go public, and could see its first such listing this year if it gets enough support. As many as 10 Indian companies could go public through Spac deals before the end of the year and the trend could accelerate if Singapore's blank-cheque firm listings are permitted, Oza said.

In India, Nomura expects equal revenue contributions from equity capital markets, mergers & acquisitions as well as financing, Oza added. In a further boost to its business, the Japanese bank plans to hire four bankers across debt origination,

corporate finance and sector coverage, he said.

Nomura also expects more initial public offerings in India this year, with sentiment buoyed by the post-debut performance of recently listed companies, said Mangesh Ghogre, its head of equity capital markets for India.

In 2020, companies raised about \$4.6 billion through first-time share sales in the South Asian nation and their shares are now trading more than 50 per cent above their IPO prices on average, data compiled by Bloomberg show. Nomura ranked second as IPO arranger in India last year, just behind Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd, according to the Bloomberg league table.

About \$1.7 billion has been raised so far this year, while State Bank of India is preparing its mutual fund joint venture for an offering that could raise \$1 billion.

—Bloomberg

Indian companies could go public through Spac deals before the end of the year, according to Nomura Holdings Inc.

Flipkart, which is bat-

ting with e-commerce arch-rival Amazon.com Inc and Mukesh Ambani's retail venture for market share in India, started operations in 2007 and now

sells 80 million products on its platforms. Walmart acquired a majority stake in Flipkart in a \$16 billion deal in 2018.

—Bloomberg

EPF rate retained at 8.5%

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 4

Giving a much-needed relief to the employed class worried about the falling interest regime, the Employees Provident Fund Organisation has retained the interest rate on EPF deposits at 8.5 per cent for the current fiscal (FY20-21).

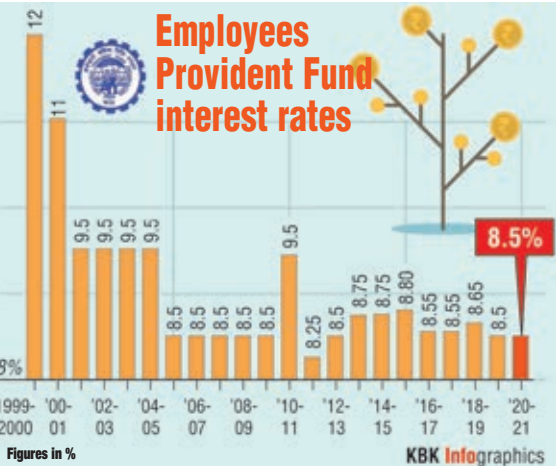
The EPFO had to liquidate investment in equities to maintain the rate at the current level, but it would still be making a profit this year. Though the EPFO's Central Board has recommended 8.50 per cent rate, the final call on the rate is taken by the finance ministry.

At 8.5 per cent, the EPF rate is better than most government small savings scheme rates, ranging from 6.9 per cent to 8.4 per cent, and bank fixed deposit rates of 5.5 to 6.3 per cent.

A government release on Thursday said the Central Board of the EPFO has recommended an annual interest rate of 8.5 per cent to be credited on deposit accounts of more than five crore members for the financial year 2020-21. The decision on interest rate would be sent to the finance ministry for concurrence and later notified in the gazette, after which interest will be credited into the subscribers' accounts.

For FY21, EPFO decided to liquidate investment in equity and the interest rate recommended is a result of combined income from interest received from debt investment as well as income realised from equity investment.

As per reports, EPFO had an income of Rs 70,500 crore for distribu-



tion and even after keeping interest rates for current year at 8.5 per cent, it would have a surplus of around Rs 300 crore.

From 2015-16, the EPFO had started investing in equity through exchange-traded funds (ETFs) based on the NSE-50 and BSE-30 indices. The investment in equity assets started from 5 per cent for FY15 and is now at 15 per cent of the incremental portfolio.

The EPFO's decision comes amidst speculations that the interest rates would be lowered for FY21 due to the pandemic impact. In FY20, the EPFO had cut the interest rate on PF deposits to a seven-year low of 8.5 per cent.

The rate of interest was 8.8 per cent in 2015-16, which came down to 8.65 per cent in FY19.

In the last budget, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced that the depositors investing more than Rs 2.5 lakh in EPF in a year would not enjoy tax exemption. This restriction is applicable for contribution made on or after April 1, 2021.

"The interest rate offered by EPF is better than most of the small savings schemes. So, even if you have 8.5 per cent with tax exemption till a contribution of Rs 2.5 lakh and 8.5 per cent for the remaining portion with tax, it remains a good option. It is a risk-free investment and is better than the bank fixed deposit rates ranging between 5.5 per cent and 6.3 per cent," said Suresh Sadagopan, founder of Ladder7 Financial Advisors.

The current interest rate on EPF is higher than most of the small savings scheme rates. Public Provident Fund and National Savings Certificate provide 7.9 per cent interest rate. Kisan Vikas Patra offers 7.6 per cent and Sukanya Samridhi Yojana 8.4 per cent. The five-year Post Office Monthly Income Scheme offers 7.6 per cent interest rate and post office term deposits of 1-3 years offer interest rate of 6.9 per cent. Post office 5-year recurring deposits offer 7.2 per cent.

Wipro to buy UK's Capco for \$1.45 bn

New Delhi, March 4: IT services major Wipro on Thursday said it has signed an agreement to acquire London-headquartered Capco, a global management and technology consultancy, in a \$1.45-billion (over Rs 10,500 crore) deal.

This will be the biggest ever acquisition by Wipro.

In a regulatory filing, Wipro said the acquisition will strengthen its position as a consulting and IT services provider to the banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI) sector, provide access to marquee BFSI clients and create a large global financial services practice for the company with a strong consulting footprint.

Clients will benefit from a combination of Wipro's capabilities in strategic design, domain and consulting, digital transformation, cloud, cybersecurity, data and IT services with Capco's deep domain and consulting capabilities across banking, payments, capital markets, insurance, risk and regulatory offerings, it added.

The transaction is expected to be completed during the quarter ending June 30, subject to requi-



Thierry Delaporte

Capco works with more than 100 clients. It has over 5,000 consultants based in 30 global locations in 16 countries

site regulatory approvals and customary closing conditions.

Founded in 1998, Capco works with more than 100 clients and has many longstanding relationships with the world's leading financial institutions. It has over 5,000 consultants based in more than 30 global locations across 16 countries. The company's consolidated revenues for the year ended December 2020 was \$720 million.

"We are very excited to welcome Capco's admirable leadership team and employees, and

global clients, to Wipro. Together, we can deliver high-end consulting and technology transformations, and operations offerings to our clients.

"Wipro and Capco share complementary business models and core guiding values, and I am certain that our new Capco colleagues will be proud to call Wipro home," Wipro CEO and managing director Thierry Delaporte said.

Capco CEO Lance Levy said the companies will together offer bespoke transformational end-to-end solutions, now powered by innovative technology at scale, to create a new leading partner to the financial services industry.

"We look forward to leveraging the complementary capabilities and similar cultures of both companies to drive industry change and offer exciting opportunities for both our clients, and our people," Levy said.

The deal will require anti-trust approvals under the competition laws of the US, Germany, Canada, Brazil and Austria along with other regulatory approvals, the filing said.

—PTI

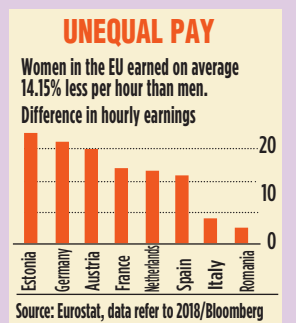
EU to bar employers from asking candidates' pay

AOIFE WHITE MARCH 4

Employers may be prevented from quizzing job candidates on their current earnings under European Union rules that aim to help women secure higher pay, EU Equality Commissioner Helena Dalli said.

"If it happens, it would be a form of discrimination. We are saying it shouldn't happen. The candidate can report this," she told reporters ahead of the Thursday publication of draft rules on pay transparency. "Previous pay has no bearing on skills and the abilities of the applicant for work and that's why we believe this must not be revealed if the employee does not want to."

The European Commission is proposing binding pay transparency legislation to help close a pay gap that sees women paid 14.1 per cent less than men across the 27-nation bloc. The proposals are subject to potential amendments and approval by EU governments and the European



Parliament before they become law applying throughout the EU.

Candidates should have the right to ask prospective employers for pay information under the proposal "which aims at empowering workers in the negotiations on pay," Dalli told reporters. Exposing pay information will help women see if they are being paid fairly for the same work, regulators say, and may help equality advocates and trade unions seek compensation for pay discrimination.

Women have been hit badly by the pandemic, she said, since many are in precarious employment. The pay transparen-

cy rules are only "one tiny move" in larger efforts to help women gain equal pay, including efforts for men to take more leave for child-rearing. Women's reduced hours or maternity leave can hit their pension contributions. Women receive pensions that are 30 per cent lower on average.

The EU's proposal requires governments to set penalties, including fines, at a level they think will be effective, if companies aren't supplying information on potential pay gaps. Large firms with more than 250 employees should publish information on the pay to female and male workers and supply more detailed information to their staff. Smaller firms will be required to supply pay information at a worker's request.

The rules cover basic salary, bonuses, overtime, pensions and travel and housing allowances. The proposal isn't asking for women to be paid the same as men but that any pay differences must be based on clear criteria.

—Bloomberg

Cyber attack behind NSE glitch?

FC BUREAU MUMBAI, MARCH 4



NSE's technical glitch on February 24 could have been due to a cyber attack and not telecom service provider's failure, given the way the system came to a halt slowly, according to a report published by Moneylife Foundation, an NGO, engaged in spreading financial literacy and consumer awareness.

The manner in which NSE's operations shut down have all signs of a cyber attack, rather than a telecom failure, according to the report.

The problem on February 24 began around 9.54 am when traders couldn't place orders or exit and the trades seemed to have frozen. By 10.06 the problem had affected

other parts of the system and indices were not getting updated. But there was no announcement or a closure by the NSE till 11.11 am. The exchange closed the derivatives market at 11.40 am and the cash market at 11.43 am. This slow shutdown may be due to hacking rather than a telecom issue, the report said.

The NSE is yet to name which telecom service provider failed though it

said that it has multiple telecom links with two service providers, the report said.

"Communication failure would have brought trading to a halt immediately," the report said.

The NSE not able to restart operations from disaster recovery site despite testing it every quarter under a Sebi mandate also could have been for some other reasons, as it would have hindered large traders, who invest heavily in NSE's colocation servers placed inside NSE building and may have lost their advantage a day before options expiry.

"5 per cent of all orders and 95 per cent of all trades come from the colocation servers within the NSE building," the report said.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE RETURNS TO PRE-LOCKDOWN LEVELS IN FEB.



SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 4

At 6.9 per cent, the unemployment rate has recovered to its pre-lock-down levels. However, the labour participation rate (LPR) and employment rate continue to be weak.

In February 2021, the unemployment rate stood at 6.9 per cent, lower than the February 2020 unemployment rate of 7.8 per cent. The unemployment rate had ranged from 6.5 per cent to 9 per cent in the post-lock-down period since July 2021, according to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy.

"The return of the unemployment rate to pre-lockdown times is not worth celebrating because it is more a reflection of a shrinking labour force than a decline in the count of the unemployed," said Mahesh Vyas, CEO and MD of CMIE.

Meanwhile, the Naukri JobSpeak Index shows hiring in the IT-software/software services industry registered a record growth of over 33 per cent in February compared to January because of the increased adoption of digital technologies in India.

The index witnessed an uptick of over 22 per cent in hiring activity in February at 2,356 job listings compared to 1,925 in January.

It said most industries saw a positive sequential uptick in recruitment activities after a long gap.

SHORT TAKES

Sania bows out of Qatar semis

Doha: Sania Mirza's first tournament in more than a year ended with a semifinal defeat as she was ousted from the Qatar Total Open along with her partner Andreja Klepac, here on Thursday. Sania and her Slovenian partner lost 5-7, 6-2, 5-10 to America's Nicole Melichar and Dutch player Demi Schuurs in one hour and 28 minutes.

Playing against players, who are ranked 11 and 12 in the world was tough but it was a decent outing for Sania, who recovered from Covid-19 recently, and her partner. It was first tournament for the Indian since last February. Sania and Klepac split \$100,000 and earned 185 ranking points each. Since Sania was not defending much points, it will help her improve her ranking. Sania will break back into top-200 and is expected to climb to the 177th spot from the current 254. — PTI

Nagal posts best win of ATP career

Buenos Aires: India's Sumit Nagal registered the biggest win of his career when he stunned second seed Cristian Garin of Chile in straight sets to enter the quarterfinals of the Argentina Open ATP 250 tournament here. Nagal, ranked 150, produced high-class tennis on Wednesday to register an impressive 6-4, 6-3 second round win over his Chilean rival, who is ranked way above at the 22nd spot in the ATP chart.

Nagal will play Spain's Albert Ramos-Vinolas, in what will be the Indian's maiden quarterfinal appearance at the ATP Tour level.

Ramos-Vinolas had defeated Dominik Koepfer of Germany 7-5 6-4. — PTI

Rani rules in semis, Lovlina out

New Delhi: Asian champion Pooja Rani (75kg) entered the semifinals to secure a medal but two-time world bronze-winner Lovlina Borgohain (69kg) bowed out after a quarterfinal loss at the 35th Boxam International Boxing Tournament in Castellon, Spain. In late night bouts on Wednesday, Olympic-bound Rani defeated Italian Assunta Canfora to join the seasoned M.C. Mary Kom (51kg), Simranjit Kaur (60kg) and debutant Jasmine (57kg) in the last-four stage. The three had won their quarterfinals earlier in the day.

Rani is a three-time Asian medalist and also a 2014 Asian Games bronze-winner. However, Borgohain, who has also qualified for the Tokyo Games, lost 0-5 to Russia's Saadat Dalgatova to make a surprisingly early exit from the tournament. Asian bronze-winner Manisha Moun (57kg) was another Indian to be ousted from contention when she was defeated 0-5 by Italian Irma Testa in the quarterfinals. — PTI

Sharath loses in pre-quarters

Doha: Indian challenge at the World Table Tennis Contender series ended after veteran Sharath Kamal suffered a loss to world no 7 Lin Yun-Ju of Chinese Taipei in the men's singles pre-quarterfinals here on Thursday. The 38-year-old Indian suffered a 6-11, 4-11, 8-11 defeat against Lin. Earlier, Manika Batra and Sreeja Akula also lost their respective final qualifying round matches in the women's singles category. While Batra lost to World No. 69 Ganna Gaponova 5-11, 6-11, 14-12, 5-11, Akula went down fighting 9-11, 11-5, 11-6, 6-11, 5-11 to Russia's Mariia Tailkova.

Live on TV

CRICKET

India vs England: Fourth Test, Day 2 from 9.30 am on Star Sports 1

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: First Semifinal, 1st leg — Goa vs Mumbai from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, HD

WWE

SmackDown: Bouts from 6.30 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawahar Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002. and Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C-9, Sector-III, Noida-201301.
Editor — T. Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 57290/94, Price in Nepal - Nep. Rs. 20.00 per copy.

POLLARD 6x6 PACK

Kieron hits 6 sixes in an over off hat-trick man Dananjaya

St. John's (Antigua and Barbuda), March 4: West Indies captain Kieron Pollard on Wednesday became only the third man to hit six sixes in an international over in his team's four-wicket Twenty20 victory over Sri Lanka.

The feat came in the sixth over of a bizarre West Indies innings, bowled by off-spinner Akila Dananjaya who moments earlier in his previous over had been celebrating taking a hat-trick. Pollard followed in the footsteps of South Africa's Herschelle Gibbs against the Netherlands in the 2007 World Cup and India's Yuvraj Singh, who also achieved the feat in the 2007 Twenty20 World Cup against England.

Pollard was eventually out for 38 off 11 balls as the West Indies chased 132 to win at the Coolidge Cricket Ground, reaching their target in the 14th over when Jason Holder clobbered his side's 13th six. "I felt I could hit six sixes after the third one," said 33-year-old Pollard.

"Once I had five sixes I knew I had the bowler on the back foot. He was going around the wicket and it was difficult for him. I just told myself: 'Go for it'."

Sri Lanka skipper Angelo Mathews hailed his opposite number.

"Pollard as we know is very destructive," Mathews told the post-match presentation.

"What I told Akila was to go for his wicket even if he gets hit for six sixes. If he misused one we could have got him out.



I felt I could hit six sixes after the third one. Once I had five sixes I knew I had the bowler on the back foot. He was going around the wicket and it was difficult for him. I just told myself: 'Go for it'.

— KIERON POLLARD
West Indies captain after hitting 6 sixes

Kieron Pollard celebrates hitting 6 sixes off Akila Dananjaya of Sri Lanka during a T20 match at Coolidge Cricket Ground in Osbourn, Antigua and Barbuda, on Wednesday. — AFP

Unfortunately it didn't happen."

Only eight men have hit six sixes in an over in all forms of cricket with fellow West Indian Garfield Sobers the first to do so in an English county game in 1968.

West Indies' openers

Evin Lewis and Lendl Simmons bludgeoned 52 off the first 20 balls as the two-time T20 World Cup winners looked comfortably on course.

However, having hit three sixes off three balls off Mathews' opening over, Lewis was caught by

Danushka Gunathilaka in the deep off Dananjaya for a brisk 28. That brought 41-year-old Chris Gayle to the crease for his first international appearance in two years. But he lasted just one ball when he was plumb lbw to Dananjaya who then completed his

hat-trick by having Nicholas Pooran caught behind by Niroshan Dickwella. — AFP

Brief scores: Sri Lanka 131/9 in 20 overs (Nissanka 39, Dickwella 33, McCoy 2/25) lost to West Indies 134/6 in 13.1 overs (Pollard 38, Holder 29 n.o., Hasaranga 3/12, Dhananjaya 3/62)

Axar, Ashwin put Eng in spin

Ahmedabad, March 4: England's batsmen lost the battle of both mind and skills in yet another shoddy performance to surrender the momentum to India with Axar Patel and Ravichandran Ashwin calling the shots on the opening day of the fourth and final Test here on Thursday.

After five innings, England crossed the 200-run mark but a total of 205 in 75.5 overs was certainly not what Joe Root had expected when he called it right at the toss on a day which would have ideally been best for batting.

There was turn and bounce but the pitch was far from being a minefield that some of the England batsmen save Ben Stokes (55, 121 balls) made it out to be.

For India, spinners Axar Patel (26-7-68-4), Ravichandran Ashwin (19.5-4-47-3) and Washington Sundar (7-1-14-1) toyed with the already messed up minds, clueless on how to deal with the conditions.

Mohammed Siraj (14-2-45-2) also played his part to perfection with the semi-new and old ball, hurrying the batsmen with sheer pace as he did with Jonny Bairstow.

India ended the day at 24 for 1 with wily old James Anderson (5-5-0-1) accounting for an out-of-form Shubman Gill (0). Rohit Sharma (8 batting) and Cheteshwar Pujara (15 batting) were holding fort for the home side.

A cursory look at the England line-up, loaded



Axar Patel (right) celebrates the dismissal of England's Dom Bess with Virat Kohli on the first day of the fourth Test in Ahmedabad on Thursday. — BCCI

with an extra batsman, will reveal that four — Stokes, Bairstow (28, 67 balls), Dan Lawrence (46 off 74 balls) and Ollie Pope (29 off 87 balls) got starts but failed miserably on the conversion part. The others came in and went without breaking a bead of sweat. It was as if already in their minds, they were playing on a track they thought would turn square.

Stokes was a cut above the rest both in defence and offence before a moment's indecision cost him his wicket. — PTI

NUMBERS GAME

FIVE LEG BEFORE IN ENGLAND'S 1ST INNINGS

● Five batsmen were dismissed leg before wicket in England's first innings on the opening day of the fourth and final Test match against India at Ahmedabad on Thursday (March 4). ● It was fifth instance in India and seventh overall when five England batsmen were dismissed in this manner in an innings against India.

● Shubman Gill's duck was his second in 13th innings of seventh Test match. ● England scored 205 runs in 75.5 overs without a duck in their first innings. They managed to creep past 200 for the first time in six innings.

● The highest partnership of the innings was 48 runs for the fourth wicket between Ben Stokes and Jonny Bairstow. Since piling up 578 in benign conditions at the outset of the series in Chennai, England's batsmen have yet to produce another fifty stand.

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

SCORECARD

England 1st Innings: Zak Crawley c M. Siraj b A. Patel 9, Dom Sibley b A. Patel 2, Jonny Bairstow lbw b M. Siraj 28, Joe Root lbw b M. Siraj 5, Ben Stokes lbw b W. Sundar 55, Ollie Pope c S. Gill b R. Ashwin 29, Dan Lawrence st R. Pant b A. Patel 46, Ben Foakes c A. Rahane b R. Ashwin 1, Dom Bess lbw b A. Patel 3, Jack Leach lbw b R. Ashwin 7, James Anderson not out 10. Extras (b-3, lb-5, nb-1, wd-1) 10. **Total: (all out in 75.5 overs) 205.**

FoW: 1-10, 2-15, 3-30, 4-78, 5-121, 6-166, 7-170, 8-188, 9-189. **Bowling:** Ishant Sharma 9-2-23-0, Mohammed Siraj 14-2-45-2, Axar Patel 26-7-68-4, Ravichandran Ashwin 19.5-4-47-3, Washington Sundar 7-1-14-1.

India 1st Innings: Shubman Gill b J. Anderson 0, Rohit Sharma (batting) 8, Cheteshwar Pujara (batting) 15. Extras (nb-1) 1. **Total (For one wicket in 12 overs) 24.**

FoW: 1-0. **Bowling:** James Anderson 5-5-0-1, Ben Stokes 2-1-4-0, Jack Leach 4-0-16-0, Dom Bess 1-0-4-0.

Following a meeting with the team owners and considering the health and well-being of all participants is paramount, the Pakistan Cricket Board has decided to postpone the HBL Pakistan Super League 6 with immediate effect.

— PAKISTAN CRICKET BOARD

of halting proceedings for a few days but in the last few days there was huge concern even among the franchisees and players.

"Collectively we could have done a lot of things better and this is not a

blame game but we have to look with a microscope at what went wrong and we have to provide confidence and assurance in the future to touring teams and players," he added.

Khan said the priority of the board right now is to ensure that players are able safely travel back to their respective destinations.

"...We all had a responsibility for self-policing and unfortunately we were not able to do that."

The three players, who have tested positive most recently, were not part of the sides that featured in Wednesday's double-header, and had been tested in

the afternoon after showing symptoms.

Only 14 games could be completed in the 34-match tournament.

The PCB said it "will focus on the safe and secure passage of all participants, and arrange repeat PCR tests, vaccines and isolation facilities to the six participating sides."

The board was apparently forced to take the decision after some of the foreign players and few local team officials expressed their concern over the situation and Australian all-rounder, Dan Christian decided to fly home immediately.

— PTI

Sindhu, Srikanth shuttle into last 8

Basel, March 4: Indian shuttlers P.V. Sindhu, Kidambi Srikanth and Ajay Jayaram had a good day in office as they advanced to the quarterfinals of singles competition at the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament here on Thursday.

Indian mixed doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponnappa also progressed to the quarterfinals, continuing their recent good run in international badminton.

World champion Sindhu hardly broke any sweat, beating USA's Iris Wang 21-13, 21-14 in the women's singles competition, while former world no. 1 Srikanth notched up a 21-10, 14-21, 21-14 victory over world no. 50 Thomas Rouxel of France and Jayaram eked out a hard-fought 21-18, 17-21, 21-13 against third seeded Dane Rasmus Gemke in their respective men's singles second round matches.

Satwik and Ashwini, who reached the semifinals at Toyota Thailand Open Super 1000 in January, defeated the Indonesian combination of Rinov Rivaldy and Pitha Haningtyas Mentari 21-18, 21-16 in a mixed doubles second-round match.

While second seed Sindhu meets fifth seeded Thai Busanan Ongbamrungphan next,

● **Two-time former champion Saina Nehwal bowed out of the tournament after a hard-fought first-round loss in the women's singles opening round of the Swiss Open.**

while fourth seed Srikanth, who had won the title in 2015, will face sixth seeded Thai Kantaphon Wangcharoen and Jayaram will be up against another Thai Kunlavut Vitidsarn, seeded eighth, in the last-eight stage.

However, Sourabh Verma lost 17-21, 14-21 to eighth seeded Thai Kunlavut Vitidsarn to crash out of the men's singles event.

Earlier, two-time former champion Saina Nehwal bowed out of the tournament after a hard-fought first-round loss in the women's singles opening round on Wednesday night.

The London Olympic bronze-medallist battled for 58 minutes before going down 16-21, 21-17, 21-23 to Phittayaporn Chaiwan of Thailand.

Saina's husband and fellow shuttler Parupalli Kashyap too went down 15-21 10-21 to Spain's Pablo Abian, while young Lakshya Sen lost 16-21 12-21 to Victor Svendsen in the men's singles first round.

— PTI

Red Devils fire blanks at Palace

London, March 4: Manchester United were left a huge 14 points behind Premier League leaders Manchester City as Crystal Palace held them to yet another goalless draw on Wednesday.

The stalemate at a foggy Selhurst Park was United's third successive goalless draw in all competitions ahead of Sunday's Manchester derby against City, who are on a record-breaking 21-game winning streak.

Elsewhere, third-placed Leicester had captain Kasper Schmeichel to thank for a point in a 1-1 draw at Burnley.

Aston Villa missed the chance to move to within two points of the top four as they suffered a shock 1-0 loss to bottom-of-the-table Sheffield United, who held on for the final half an hour with 10 men.

A point in south London left second-placed Man United just one ahead of Leicester, with the main aim now for Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side to cling on to a top-four place that will secure Champions League football next season.

— AFP

BARCA TAKE EXTRA TIME TO BOOK SUPER CUP BERTH

Madrid, March 4: Barcelona needed extra-time to reach the Copa del Rey final on Wednesday, with a 3-2 aggregate win over Sevilla.

Having trailed 2-0 from the first leg, Martin Braithwaite hit the crucial goal in the fifth minute of extra-time with a diving header off a Jordi Alba cross.

Gerard Pique had equalised in the fourth minute of stoppage time with virtually the last play of the game to save Barca.

The veteran international headed in at the near post after a fine cross from Antoine Griezmann.

That was after Ousmane Dembele, who scored in the 2-0 win at Sevilla in La Liga at the weekend, had given the 30-time Spanish Cup winners a 12th-minute lead in the second leg with a right-foot drive from outside the area.

— AFP

Moves that made Nikhat & Dipika

ABHIJEET KUMAR SINGH
HYDERABAD, MARCH 4



Nikhat Zareen

Boxer Nikhat Zareen, squash star Dipika Pallikal along with Miss World 2017 Manushi Chhillar punched one for the women, talking their hearts out to depict their inspiring journeys on Thursday.

In a virtual meet to announce the launch of 'Watch Us Move,' a campaign by Adidas to celebrate womanhood and their freedom of movement, the three spoke of their personal struggles against the backdrop of unrealistic stereotypes and how they battled through them to inspire young girls who aspire to emulate them.

"I still remember my father's words when he said *beta ladkiyo me itna dam nahi hota boxing karne ke liye* (girls don't have the strength to box) and that actually challenged me to pursue boxing and change the societal mentality that girls are geek and can't punch," Nikhat, the Nizamabad-based amateur woman boxer, said.

"I took the move and started it off. Fortunately in 2011, when I won the Junior Championship gold

medal, everyone was shocked. I was elated while my father was very proud of my achievement," the toughie added.

"Eventually, I started getting calls from young girls who too wanted to take up boxing as a career which really motivated me. I finally proved my point and opened the doors for many more budding talents," she added.

Record breaking squash player Dipika Pallikal said it's time for women to take the centrestage and shine. "I think we as a women have really broken the stereotypical barriers and carved out our own paths," she said.

Model Manushi felt "Watch Us Move celebrates women, their achievements and inspires us to adopt a positive approach to life."