

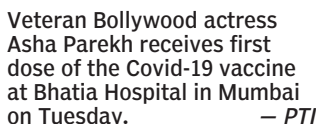
NEW DELHI WEDNESDAY 17 MARCH 2021



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TABLOID | 11

The Central government has challenged bail granted to Rhea by Bomby high court



SUNSET TODAY 6.30 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.27 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 9.15 PM

"The new institution is being set up in the context of the government's efforts to build infrastructure assets. The DFI will raise capital from the markets and offer long-term debt to infrastructure projects," Ms Sitharaman said.

Mr Chouhan's decision to shun eggs and introduce milk in anganwadi midday meal has drawn criticism from child health experts as well as the Opposition Congress.

SHORT TAKES

Delhi records 425 Covid-19 cases in 24 hours

New Delhi: Delhi recorded 425 new Covid-19 cases on Tuesday as its positivity rate rose to 0.61 per cent, according to data shared by the health department. The death toll climbed to 10,945 with one more fatality, according to the latest bulletin issued by the health department. The new coronavirus cases recorded on Tuesday took the infection tally to 6,44,489, the bulletin said. On Sunday, the daily case tally had crossed the 400-mark for the fourth consecutive day. However, on Monday, it had dropped to 368 with a positivity rate of 0.59 per cent. On Tuesday, the daily cases count rose again to 425, while the positivity rate increased slightly to 0.61 per cent. Delhi on Saturday had recorded 419 Covid-19 cases, with a positivity rate of 0.56 per cent, while 407 cases were reported on Sunday and the positivity rate was 0.60 per cent. On Friday, 431 cases were recorded, the highest in over two months, and the count on Thursday was 409. A total of 585 cases were reported on January 1 and 424 on January 3. The daily count had dropped to 306 on January 11 and risen again to 386 on January 12, according to official figures. The numbers had started to come down in February. On February 26, the month's highest daily count of 256 cases was recorded. The number of active cases of the disease in the city rose to 2,488 on Tuesday from 2,321 on Monday. Health experts and doctors have attributed this "sudden rise" in cases to people becoming complacent, not following Covid-19-appropriate behaviour and "assuming all is well now". The total number of tests conducted on Sunday stood at 70,049, including 39,425 RT-PCR tests and 30,624 rapid antigen tests, the bulletin said. The number of people under home isolation on Tuesday rose to 1,401 from 1,342 on Monday, it said, adding that over 6.31 lakh people have recovered from the infection till date.

— PTI

Delhi Speaker gets Covid-19 vaccine

New Delhi: Delhi Assembly Speaker Ram Niwas Goel was administered the Covid-19 vaccine on Tuesday, a statement issued by his office said. Goel appealed to all the eligible people to get registered for vaccination against the viral disease after receiving the first dose of the Covishield vaccine at the Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital at Tahirpur here. He was kept under observation for half an hour after being administered the vaccine, the statement said. Goel shared his experience of vaccination with the other recipients and asked them how they felt after receiving the jab. He also thanked the doctors and the staff of the hospital and encouraged them to ensure a smooth conduct of the Delhi government's vaccination drive. Nodal officer of the hospital Dr Chhavi Gupta informed that over 5,000 people have so far been vaccinated against Covid-19 at the facility, the statement said. The vaccines against the coronavirus are being administered to the beneficiaries for free at 56 hospitals run by the Delhi government. — PTI

Man held for selling stolen vehicles

New Delhi: A 28-year-old man was arrested for allegedly selling stolen vehicles in the national capital, police said on Tuesday. The accused has been identified as Mohsin Khan, a resident of Meerut in Uttar Pradesh, they said. Ten vehicles, one country-made pistol and two live cartridges have been seized from him, the police said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) Jasmeet Singh said they had laid a trap near GB Pant Hospital based on a tip-off on March 6 and arrested Khan. During interrogation, Khan said he purchased the stolen vehicles from one Babloo, an auto-lifter, from Moradabad in UP, the DCP said. He told investigators that he had sold more than 500 stolen vehicles in Delhi, UP, Haryana, Rajasthan and Punjab in the last seven years, the police added. — PTI

■ 22 Indian cities among world's 30 most polluted places: Swiss body IQAir

Delhi most polluted capital city globally, says report

New Delhi, March 16: Twenty-two of the world's 30 most polluted cities are in India, with Delhi being ranked as the most polluted capital city globally, a new report said on Tuesday.

The report is prepared by Swiss organisation IQAir in the form of the 'World Air Quality Report, 2020,' which has been released globally.

The report, however, shows that Delhi's air quality improved by approximately 15 per cent from 2019 to 2020. It said that despite the improvement, Delhi ranked as the 10th most polluted city and the top polluted capital city in the world.

"India continues to feature prominently at the top of the most polluted cities ranking, with 22 of the top 30 most polluted cities globally," the report said.

Besides Delhi, the 21 other Indian cities among the 30 most polluted cities in the world are Ghaziabad, Bulandshahr, Bissrakh Jalalpur, Noida, Greater Noida, Kanpur, Lucknow, Meerut, Agra

and Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh, Bhiwadi in Rajasthan, Faridabad, Jind, Hissar, Fatehabad, Bandhwari, Gurgaon, Yamuna Nagar, Rohtak and Dharuhera in Haryana, and Muzaffarpur in Bihar.

As per the report, the top most polluted city is Xinjiang in China followed by nine Indian cities. Ghaziabad is the second most polluted city in the world followed by Bulandshahr, Bissrakh Jalalpur, Noida, Greater Noida, Kanpur, Lucknow, and Bhiwadi.

The global cities ranking report is based on PM2.5 data from 106 countries, which is measured by ground-based monitoring stations most of which is operated by government agencies.

The report also reveals the impact of Covid-19 lockdown and behavioural changes on global particulate pollution (PM2.5) levels.

Major sources of India's air pollution include transportation, biomass burning for cooking, electricity

generation, industry, construction, waste burning, and episodic agricultural burning. "The transportation sector is one of the major contributors to India's leading PM2.5 emission sources across cities," the report said. Contextualising the global IQAir report in the Indian context, Avinash Chanchal, the climate campaigner at Greenpeace India, said that while many cities, including Delhi,

have recorded marginal improvements in air quality due to lockdowns, the health and economic cost of air pollution remains severe.

He said it is pertinent that governments prioritise sustainable and clean energy sources. The cities too need to encourage low cost, active, and carbon-neutral mobility choices such as walking, cycling, and accessible public transport.

"Speeding up the transition to clean energy and clean transport will not only save lives but also dramatically reduce health-care-related costs," Mr Chanchal said.

"The year 2020 brought an unexpected dip in air pollution. In 2021, we will likely see an increase in air pollution again due to human activity. We hope this report will highlight that urgent action is both possible and necessary to combat air pollution, which remains the world's greatest environmental health threat," said Frank Hammes, the CEO of IQAir.

— PTI



Vehicles move slowly during a traffic jam at Ghazipur in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

Why no female SHO at any police station, asks DCW

New Delhi, March 16: Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) has issued a notice to the city police, seeking reasons for no female station house officer (SHO) at any police station. The Delhi Police has been asked to file its reply before the DCW by March 19, the panel said on Tuesday.

In a statement, the DCW said according to reports, none of the 178 police stations in the national capital has a woman SHO.

The reports also state that while there are rules guaranteeing a 33-per cent reservation for women in the force, their participation remains to be particularly low, the statement

said.

In order to identify eligible women officers for the role, the commission has sought the details of the male and female officers of the rank of inspector, including their sanctioned and current number of posts, it added.

The DCW has asked the Delhi Police to submit a list of the steps taken to increase the participation of women officers at the higher level, the statement said.

The commission believes that it is pertinent to increase the participation of women in the police. Also, it is important that women SHOs are appointed at

sensitive police stations like Kamla Market, which covers areas such as the GB road, according to the statement.

"We have been informed that there are no women SHOs in any of the 178 police stations in Delhi. This is very shocking and disappointing at the same time. It is very important to ensure equal participation of women in the force. Further, areas like GB road must have women SHOs. We have issued a notice to the police in the matter and sought answers to our concerns," DCW chief Swati Maliwal was quoted in the statement as saying.

N-E Delhi violence: 4 accused granted bail

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday granted bail to four persons accused in a case pertaining to violence in northeast Delhi.

A single-judge Bench of Justice Suresh Kumar Kait said, "Without commenting on the merits of the case, prima facie I am of the opinion that petitioners cannot be made to languish behind bars for a long time and the veracity of allegations leveled against them can be tested during trial."

The court while granting bail to the four accused, Liyakat Ali, Arshad Qayyum alias Monu, Gulfam alias VIP and Irshad Ahmad, directed them to furnish personal bonds in the sum of ₹20,000 each.

The Court also imposed various conditions including that petitioners shall not directly or indirectly influence witnesses or tamper with evidence and they will appear before the court as and when directed.

Four of the accused were facing trial in a case

▶ **THE COURT** while granting bail to Liyakat Ali, Arshad Qayyum alias Monu, Gulfam alias VIP and Irshad Ahmad, directed them to furnish personal bonds in the sum of ₹20,000 each. The court also imposed various conditions including that petitioners shall not directly or indirectly influence witnesses or tamper with evidence.

pertaining to the northeast Delhi riots, which took place in the last week of February 2020.

According to police, Liyakat Ali and other accused were allegedly found promoting enmity and disharmony by rioting, burning vehicles, destroying food preparation at Bharat Vatika, stone pelting, and instigating mobs.

In February 2020, violence took place in the northeast area of Delhi between groups supporting and opposing the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which led to the deaths of at least 53 people.

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

Two men were allegedly stabbed to death by a juvenile and his accomplice in a road rage incident in outer Delhi's Paschim Vihar, police said on Tuesday.

The deceased have been identified as Rohit Aggarwal (23) and Ghanshyam (20), they said.

One of the culprits, Pardeep Kohli (19), has been arrested and the juvenile apprehended in the case, they said.

According to police, the victims were riding a two-wheeler when it collided with the accused's motorcycle Monday night. An argument broke out between the two sides following which the accused chased the victims for about half a kilometre.

The motorcycle-borne men later stabbed Rohit and Ghanshyam near the Udhog Vihar Metro Station, and fled from the spot.

"We received a call

2 men stabbed to death in road rage incident in Delhi

45-year-old chartered accountant shot dead

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

A 45-year-old chartered accountant was shot dead on Tuesday morning allegedly by unidentified men in northwest Delhi's Adarsh Nagar area, police said here. The deceased, Anil Aggarwal, was a resident of Majlis Park, they said.

"On Tuesday around 10 am, a PCR call was received regarding the incident of firing in which one person got injured. A

about two injured men lying near the Udhog Vihar Metro Station. The injured were taken to hospital where they were declared brought dead," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer) A Koan said.

With the help of technical surveillance, both the

Hindu man buried in Saudi Arabia as per Muslim rites

Wife runs from pillar to post for mortal remains, knocks HC door

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

A peculiar case came up before the Delhi high court, on Tuesday, where in the mortal remains of a Hindu man, an Indian citizen, were wrongly buried in Saudi Arabia as per Muslim rites due to incorrect translation of his religion on his death certificate by the Indian Consulate officials in Jeddah.

The deceased's wife, who has been running from pillar to post to get the mortal remains, has approached the high court seeking direction to the ministry of external affairs (MEA) to take steps to urgently exhumate the remains and repatriate them to India in a time-bound manner.

Justice Prathiba M. Singh said the woman has been approaching the authorities since January, since the passing away of her husband, and adequate steps ought to have been taken to bring back the body of the deceased to India to conduct the last rites.

Accordingly, the con-

cerned officer from the MEA not below the rank of deputy secretary shall join the proceedings on March 18 to apprise this court about the update on steps taken and status on transportation of the mortal remains of the deceased, the judge said, adding that it was an unfortunate case.

The Indian man, Sanjeev Kumar, had passed away on January 24 in Saudi Arabia, where he was working, due to cardiac arrest and his mortal remains were kept at a hospital there.

Petitioner Anju Sharma said in the plea that upon getting the news of her husband's death, the family requested the authorities to repatriate the mortal remains.

Shockingly, on February 18, the petitioner was informed that the body of her husband had been buried in Saudi Arabia while the family members of the deceased were waiting for the mortal remains in India. The officials in the Indian Consulate explained that it was due to a mistake committed by the official translator of

the Indian Consulate in Jeddah, who wrongly mentioned his religion as Muslim in the death certificate. They also shared a letter of apology tendered by the official translating agency of the Indian Consulate in Jeddah with the petitioner herein, said the petitioner, filed through advocate Subhash Chandran K. R. and Yogamaya M.G.

It also said that neither the woman nor any of the family members gave consent to bury Kumar's body in Saudi Arabia. Hereafter, the woman requested the officials of the Indian Consulate in Jeddah to ask the local authorities there to exhumate the mortal remains of her husband so that it can be transported to India for performing the last rites as per the faith of the family.

Unfortunately, even after seven weeks of the death of the husband of the petitioner, the authorities have failed to do the necessary formalities to repatriate the mortal remains of Sanjeev Kumar to India, the plea said.

Delhi govt will release ₹28.24cr for salaries of DU colleges staff: Kejri

New Delhi, March 16: The Delhi government is releasing funds amounting to ₹28.24 crore for salaries of the staff of Delhi University colleges funded by it, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Tuesday.

He asserted that in the future they will only be issued based on the directions of the court on whether the funds, currently available under different heads, can be used for salaries or not.

The chief minister on Tuesday convened a meeting with principals and chairpersons of the 12 fully funded DU colleges by the Delhi government.

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Arvind Kejriwal

▶ **IN FUTURE**, funds will only be issued based on the directions of the court on whether the funds currently available under different heads can be used for salaries or not. The Delhi government will release the amount so that the teaching staff and the colleges do not suffer till the matter is in court, the CM said at the meeting.

colleges in letter and spirit. It is an unfair and impractical approach to demand funds from one agency, but follow Pattern Of Assistance (POA) of some other agency, he said, adding that there should be 100 per cent transparency in their accounts and budgets which is required to bridge the gap between the Delhi government and Delhi University.

Along with the officials of the Delhi government, including secretary and principal secretary for Department of Higher Education, college principals, and AO's (account officers) of the 12 colleges were present in the meeting.

"Since the last few days, I have been reading news reports that the teaching staff of the DU colleges is not getting salaries. Our government is known and recognised for working to improve the education and health sectors in Delhi. But, there has been an unwarranted misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the intentions of the Delhi government.

"I want to clarify to all of the esteemed members present in this meeting, we are on the same side of the table. We do not oppose the pleas and concerns of the staff. Since the last few years, we have tried to initiate talks with the DU authorities and the VC, but there may have been differences, political and otherwise," he said.

Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia pointed out some administrative issues affecting the release of funds by the Delhi government.

"Since the last five years, I have sanctioned funds to various colleges for various project proposals. We are ready to fully fund the colleges that come under our ambit, irrespective of the heads those funds come under. There needs to be 100 per cent transparency on behalf of our constituent colleges.

"The colleges should have confidence in the Delhi government, and they should be 100 per cent Delhi government-funded colleges in letter and spirit. If you behave

The Special Cell of Delhi Police has arrested a 29-year-old criminal along with his associate from their hideout in Rajasthan's Jaipur area. Police said that the accused was wanted in cases of murder.

The accused has been identified as Priyavart alias Kala while his accomplice has been identified as Rohit (23), both residents of village Katewada near Bawana.

Police said that Priyavart is a "Bad Character" of Bawana police station and he is the right hand man of Sandeep alias Kala Jathedi. He was running wanted in a recent case of murder of a Civil Defence employee posted at SDM Office, Alipur and several other cases of murder.

According to Manishi Chandra, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Special Cell, on March 15, specific inputs were received that a wanted criminal

Wanted criminal held from hideout in Jaipur

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

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Priyavart along with his associate Rohit are staying in a hotel situated in Park Street area of Jaipur.

"Accordingly, a team was rushed who after painstaking efforts, located the wanted criminals. After a patient watch, the team nabbed both the accused persons in a swift and professional operation," said the DCP.

"Police also recovered two firearms at their instance from a hideout in Chhawla, Delhi. Efforts are being made and raids are being conducted to arrest the remaining absconding gang members," said the DCP.

"The accused Priyavart is previously involved in 15 cases, including 6 cases of murder and attempt to murder. Rohit also has previous involvement in cases of robbery and was an active accomplice of Priyavart in recent cases of Bawana and Najafgarh. His other involvements are being verified," said the DCP.

SHORT TAKES

EC: Byelections to 2 LS seats on April 17

New Delhi: Bypolls to two Lok Sabha seats — one each in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh — and 14 Assembly constituencies across 11 states will be held on April 17, the Election Commission announced on Tuesday. The byelection to the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat in Andhra Pradesh was necessitated following the death of sitting YSR Congress party MP Balli Durgaprasada Rao due to Covid-19 in September last year. The bypoll to the Belgaum Lok Sabha seat in Karnataka is being held following the death of former Union minister Suresh Angadi in September last year. The Election Commission also announced bypolls to 14 Assembly seats — three in Rajasthan, two in Karnataka and one each in Gujarat, Jharkhand, MP, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Telangana and Uttarakhand. — PTI

Legislators clash in Haryana Assembly

Chandigarh: The BJP and Congress had sharp exchanges in the Haryana Assembly on Tuesday during a discussion on the state budget when the main opposition party targeted the government on the farmers' issue. During Zero Hour in the House, BJP MLA Aseem Goel got up and showed a photo claiming that some Congress workers were among the farmers who protested outside his Ambala residence last week. As soon as he made the claim, former CM Bhupinder Singh Hooda asked him not to make wild allegations. Later, when the House took up discussion on budget estimates for 2021-22, Congress' newly-elected MLA from Baroda segment, Indu Raj Narwal said the government keeps saying they have done so much for farmers' welfare, but it has not said a word as nearly 300 peasants have died during the ongoing stir. — PTI

Discontent in Cong over candidates

Kannur: Discontent is brewing in the Congress in Kerala over the selection of candidates for the April 6 Assembly polls with senior party leader K. Sudhakaran attacking AICC general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal and veterans Ramesh Chennithala and Oommen Chandy, alleging they were responsible for all troubles. AICC general secretary Kerala in-charge Tariq Anwar rejected the allegations of Sudhakaran, party's Kannur MP, saying the candidates were selected after taking him also into confidence. Meanwhile, a convention of "A" group workers of the party in Kannur district on Tuesday decided to urge the party high command to withdraw the candidature of Sajeew Joseph from irikkur seat and field their leader Sony Sebastian. — PTI

9 MLAS BOOKED FOR TRYING TO GHERAO KHATTAR

Chandigarh: Nine Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) legislators from Punjab have been booked for their alleged attempt to gherao and confront Haryana CM Manohar Lal Khattar outside the Assembly last week, officials said on Tuesday. The booked legislators are former ministers Sharanjit Singh Dhillion and Bikram Singh Majithia, Baldev Singh Khaira, Sukhwinder Kumar, Harinder Pal Singh Chandumajra, Kanwarjit Singh Barkandi, Manpreet Singh Ayali, Gurpartap Singh Wadala and N K Sharma. The Shiromani Akali Dal termed the registration of case against its MLAs an "unfortunate and undemocratic step". The Chandigarh Police registered the case against the SAD MLAs under relevant IPC sections including 186 (obstructing public servant in discharge of public functions), 323 (punishment for voluntarily causing hurt) and 341 (punishment for wrongful restraint), according to a copy of the FIR. The SAD MLAs had confronted Mr Khattar outside the assembly hall on March 10 and had demanded that a resolution be passed in the Haryana Assembly against the Centre's new farm laws. Thereafter, the Haryana Assembly secretariat had decided to lodge an FIR against the group. — PTI

Nod to raise upper limit for abortions to 24 weeks

Parliament passes Bill permitting abortions for 'special categories of women', including minors

New Delhi, March 16: The Rajya Sabha Tuesday passed a Bill to raise the upper limit for permitting abortions from the present 20 weeks to 24 for "special categories of women" including rape survivors, victims of incest, minors and differently-abled. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020, to amend the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, was passed by voice vote. The Bill was passed by Lok Sabha about a year ago. A resolution moved by Congress leader Pratap Singh Bajwa to send the Bill to a select committee

of the Rajya Sabha was defeated by voice vote, along with some other amendments proposed by members. "The Bill as amended is passed," Rajya Sabha deputy chairman Hariवंश Narayan Singh said. Union health minister Harsh Vardhan said the amendments in the Bill have been made after studying global practices and wide consultation within the country. "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we will not frame any law which harms women. This is to preserve and protect the dignity of women," he said.

THE ACT bars registered medical practitioners from revealing the name and other particulars of a woman whose pregnancy has been terminated as per the new law except to a person authorised by any law during that time

The minister said the suggestions and objections made to the Bill by some members were symbolic in nature and aligned with their party ideology. Besides the Congress, members of various parties, including the Shiv Sena, AITC, CPI, CPI-M and Samajwadi Party had demanded to send the Bill

to the select committee. The Bill amends the act passed in 1971 to Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act, 2020. Under the new act, pregnancy in special can be terminated "where the length of the pregnancy exceeds 20 weeks but does not exceed 24 weeks" if no less than two registered medical practitioner are of the opinion that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve a risk to the life of the pregnant woman or of grave injury to her physical or mental health or there is substantial risk that if the child were born, it would suffer from any serious physical

or mental abnormality. The act bars registered medical practitioners from revealing the name and other particulars of a woman whose pregnancy has been terminated as per the new law except to a person authorised by any law during that time. Anyone who violates the privacy norms defined under the act may be punished with imprisonment of up to 1 year or fine or both under amended act. Every state government and Union territory will have to constitute a medical board to handle functions under prescribed by rules under the new act. — PTI

PANEL EXPRESSES WORRY OVER RISE IN HC VACANCIES

New Delhi, March 16: A parliamentary panel on Tuesday expressed concerns over rising vacancies in high courts and strongly recommended that vacant posts of judges be filled up immediately. "The committee is of the view that justice delivery system in the country is moving towards a stage where both vacancy positions of judges and pendency of cases are increasing year after year, and this state of affairs may erode the trust of public on the justice delivery system," the department-

related committee on law and personnel said in its report. It was tabled in Parliament on Tuesday. The committee said there are still a large number of vacancies of judges in the high courts, and it "strongly recommends" that the vacant positions be filled up immediately. Vacancies arising in the future should be filled strictly as per the extant guidelines, it added. According to the Department of Justice website, as on March 1, there are 419 vacancies in 25 high courts. — PTI



West Bengal chief minister and Trinamul Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee, sitting on a wheelchair, addresses an election campaign rally in Bankura on Tuesday, ahead of the state Assembly polls. — PTI

'Will back TMC post-poll to stop BJP from forming govt'

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, MARCH 16

Triggering speculation of a post-poll alliance with the Trinamul Congress after the Assembly elections in West Bengal, four-time Malda South Congress MP Abu Hasem Khan Chowdhury, in a startling revelation, has called upon his party to support chief minister Mamata Banerjee's party, if required, to stop the BJP from forming its government in the state. "If a situation arises before us to support either the TMC or BJP, I can say in my capacity that I will certainly support the TMC because of a few reasons which includes politics of Mamata. The BJP is trying to divide the country in the name of religion which is not applicable to Bengal," Mr



A.H. Khan Chowdhury

Trinamul govt is playing with emotions of Hindus, says Yogi

Balarampur/Raipur/Belda, March 16: Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday slammed the TMC government for "forcibly opposing" anything associated with Lord Ram and advised them to take lessons from a party in his state who are "nowhere now" due to similar act. Accusing Mamata Banerjee government of playing with the emo-

tions of the Hindus, the BJP's star campaigner said, if she did not mend her ways, people will remove her from power. In this context, without naming the SP, the UP CM said, "There was a government in my state which opposed Lord Ram. It is nowhere now". Addressing a poll rally, Mr Adityanath said, "Those who have opposed Ram have failed to be in power." — PTI

Khan Chowdhury said. His comments came at a time when his party is contesting the Assembly polls by sharing seats with the CPI(M)-led Left Front and a new outfit — Indian Secular Front — in an alliance to give a tough fight to the TMC and BJP. Congress Rajya Sabha

MP Pradip Bhattacharya, however, said, "It was his personal opinion. The polls are yet to be started. Let it get underway first. Once the results are out, the final decision will be taken in consultation with our central leadership and other parties in alliance with us."

Vijayan says govt has always stood by her

Mother of Walayar minor girls to fight against CM

GILVESTER ASSARY THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 16

The mother of two dalit minors who died under suspicious circumstances in 2017 after being sexually exploited has decided to contest against Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan in Dharmadam constituency in the forthcoming Assembly polls. She made the announcement about fighting elections against the chief minister at a press conference in Thrissur.

"I am contesting the polls to seek justice for my children. I want action against deputy SP Sojan who scuttled the probe and denied justice to my children. I have been forced to come out on the streets to agitate for justice. There are many police personnel who deny justice for poor people like us. There are several people who are suffering



ing injustice silently. I have taken the decision to contest the polls to fight for justice for all," she told mediapersons. Reacting to her decision to contest the polls, the chief minister said, "Anybody can contest elections. What can I say on that? We are not guilty conscious on this issue. We have always stood with the mother of the victims. At every stage the decisions were taken as per her wish and the last one was to hand over the case to the CBI for further probe. We never intended to cause any pain to her."

The chief minister said she must be having many thoughts in her mind. On that basis she must have taken a stand. "Let her take the stand," he added. Mr Vijayan said that she was raising certain questions regarding the case now when the matter has been recommended for a CBI probe. He said the woman was being misled by some people. "I cannot answer questions that are being prompted," he said. Meanwhile, the Walayar mother's decision to contest the polls was welcomed by the Opposition Congress-led UDF. Kerala PCC president Mullappally Ramachandran said his party would take a decision on supporting her in Dharmadam. "We have not announced the candidate so far. We are keeping all options open including fielding a formidable candidate and also supporting the mother of Walayar victims," he said.

Speculation rife as Captain calls Sidhu for lunch

Chandigarh, March 16: Punjab chief minister Capt. Amarinder Singh is expected to meet former minister Navjot Singh Sidhu over lunch on Wednesday, amid speculations that the cricketer-turned-politician might be given an important role ahead of the 2022 state polls, official sources said. This will be the second luncheon meeting between the leaders. The first such meeting had taken place in November last year, seen as the first step to break the ice between the two sides.

Capt. Singh had then said that he and Mr Sidhu would continue to have cordial meetings. Another meeting between the two leaders assumes significance as the Congress central leadership has been trying to rehabilitate Sidhu who had resigned as minister after he was divested of the local bodies portfolio in 2019.

Congress leader and Punjab affairs in-charge Harish Rawat has been pushing for an important position for Mr Sidhu. Mr Rawat had met Sidhu on March 10. After the meeting, Mr Sidhu



had said, "Was summoned by Harish Rawatji. Had a cordial meeting." For the past several weeks, party circles have been abuzz with the speculation that Mr Sidhu could be re-inducted into the state cabinet with some key portfolios. There have also been talks of the possibility of appointing him as party state unit president. Notably, both leaders had not been on best of terms. The tension between Capt. Singh and Mr Sidhu had come out in the open in May 2019 when the CM blamed the former cricketer for "inept handling" of the local government department, claiming it had resulted in "poor performance" of the Congress in urban areas in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Mr Sidhu was stripped of key portfolios in a cabinet reshuffle, after which he resigned from the state Cabinet. — PTI

Aasu calls for mega anti-CAA stir

Influential student body to take out bike rallies across Assam on March 20

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, MARCH 16

Just a week before the first phase of polling, the influential All Assam Students' Union (Aasu) has announced a mega statewide anti-CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) protest on March 20. Informing that Aasu activists are going to take out mega bike rallies across the state to educate and remind the voters about the draconian CAA introduced by the BJP government, Aasu president Dipanka Nath told reporters, "Our aim is to make all, especially those living

in the rural areas, aware of the draconian CAA introduced by the BJP government. We will reach out to all and make them aware of how the CAA is a threat to the identity and culture of Assam."

It is significant that the influential students body has also decided to issue directives to its members at the state executive meeting on March 21, to indirectly campaign in favour of the two new regional parties, the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) and Rajior Dal, for the upcoming Assembly election in the state. Aasu, which claims to be

an "apolitical" organisation, for the first time took a "political stand" by backing the formation of the AJP to oust the BJP-AGP combine from power

an "apolitical" organisation, for the first time took a "political stand" by backing the formation of the AJP to oust the BJP-AGP combine from power. The mass movement against the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act, which started in December 2019, gave rise to a call for a new political party. Aasu and another

allied organisation, the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad, played a key role in the formation of AJP. Later, AJP joined hands with Rajior Dal, floated by Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS), to keep the BJP-AGP and the Congress-AIUDF led alliance out of power. "It is very important that the AJP and Rajior Dal win to save regionalism from the hands of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP). Defeating BJP is necessary to save the interests of indigenous communities," Aasu general secretary Sankar Jyoti Baruah told reporters.

Administrative review & restructuring needed: Parl panel

New Delhi, March 16: The Indian administration has become heavily dependent upon a particular administrative service and it is time to give equal opportunity to officers belonging to other services having expertise in that specific domain, a parliamentary committee said in its report on Tuesday. The committee said it is of the view that while making appointments to higher echelons of the administration, priority should be given to integrity, calibre, aptitude and

interest of the officer among other things rather than the service to which he belongs. "The generalist versus specialist controversy is one of the major challenges facing the Indian civil service today. Today, India needs no generalists or specialists but specialised generalists, i.e. a generalist with knowledge, work experience in a particular domain. This calls for administrative review and restructuring along functional lines," it said.

The committee is of the opinion that the Indian administration has become heavily dependent upon a particular administrative service, the department-related parliamentary standing committee on personnel, public grievances, law and justice said in its 106th report on Demands for Grants (2021-22) of the ministry of personnel, public grievances and pensions. "They seem to have an edge over others in securing key decision-making positions in the govern-

ment," it said, without mentioning the name of any service. The panel's recommendation assumes significance as Prime Minister Narendra Modi last month said what can be achieved by handing over the nation to "babus" (government

officials). Just because somebody is an IAS officer, he is running fertiliser and chemical factories to airlines, Modi had said in a reference to public sector units being headed by bureaucrats, and asked what this will achieve. The committee noted with concern that 349 IAS officers have not submitted their Annual Immovable Property Returns for the year 2020 in the stipulated time limit. "During the examination

of Demands for Grants (2020-21), the committee was informed that 338 IAS officers had not filed Immovable Property Returns for 2019. This makes a case for institution of stringent measures other than denial of vigilance clearance against erring officers," it said. The committee recommended the department of personnel and training (DoPT) and the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) to increase surveillance on the activities of such officials. — PTI

The committee agrees with the view of the Central Bureau of Investigation that withdrawal of general consent by states impedes investigation, the parliamentary standing committee on personnel, public grievances, law and justice said in its 106th report on Demands for Grants (2021-22) of the ministry of personnel, public grievances and pensions. The committee, therefore, recommends the government to assess if there is a need to amend the existing laws or bring out a new law altogether in order to clearly define the mandate of CBI and vest more powers in it, it said. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Air Force bus meets with accident, 5 hurt

Mumbai: Five passengers were injured after an Air Force bus met with an accident in Vikhroli area of Mumbai on Tuesday afternoon, a police official said. The accident took place when the bus driver applied brakes suddenly due to some technical fault in the vehicle, the official said. There was 24 passengers in the bus of the Thane Air Force Station, he said. After being alerted, local police rushed to the spot and shifted the injured persons to hospital, he said. "It seems the driver applied emergency brakes due to some technical fault. The passengers included four to five girls in the age group of 8 to 10 years," the police said. — PTI

NIA searches Vaze's crime branch office

Mumbai: The NIA which is probing the case related to the recovery of an SUV with explosives near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's house has searched the crime intelligence unit's (CIU) office here, a police official said on Tuesday. It is also questioning a police official attached to the CIU, he said. Suspended police official Sachin Vaze, arrested in the case on March 13, was attached to the CIU of city police's crime branch. The office is located in the police commissioner's office compound in south Mumbai. — PTI

2 longest-serving artillery weapon systems retire

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

The Indian Army on Tuesday decommissioned two of the longest serving artillery systems, the 130mm Self Propelled M-46 Catapult Guns and the 160mm Tampella Mortars at Mahajan Field Firing Ranges. The ceremony was marked by the customary firing of last salvos. The decommissioning firing was attended by Lt Gen K Ravi Prasad, Director General Artillery and other senior officers. The 130mm Catapult, with a range of more than 27 km, was a successful merger of two existing weapon systems: Vijayanta tanks and 130mm M-46 guns. This hybrid platform was a response to the need for a mobile Artillery gun system to support strike formations on the Western borders, after the 1965 and 1971 wars. The guns were inducted in 1981 and were employed successfully during a number of operations. The 160mm Tampella mortars, with a range of 9.6km, were inducted after the 1962 war with China to fulfill the need for a weapon system to clear high crests of the Northern borders. Originally an import from the Israeli Defence Forces, this mortar was successfully deployed on the LoC in the Leepa valley and the Hajipir Bowl. The mortars also played a significant part in the 1999 Kargil war.

Panel will take stock of jab safety concerns

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

Amid growing concern over the safety of Oxford-AstraZeneca-SII's Covid-19 vaccine Covishield, the committee on adverse events following immunisation (AEFI) will meet this week to discuss the adverse effects reported in some countries from this vaccine. A blood clot is one of the side effects that has triggered fear in several nations prompting Germany, Italy and France to halt their rollout of the vaccine while Spain, Portugal, Slovenia, Latvia, Indonesia too has announced to delay the rollout of Covishield. However, unless it finds some evidence of these adverse effects in India, the Union health ministry is not keen to stop the vaccine in the country. The ministry sources said that till now there have not been any complaints of blood clotting reported in India among those who have taken the Covishield vaccine.

India has recorded 24,492 fresh Covid cases in the last one day out of which 15,051 cases are from Maharashtra while 1,818 from Punjab and 1,054 from Kerala. Cases have also started rising in Delhi and Gujarat. In order to contain the rise of cases, the Gujarat government has extended the night curfew in four cities — Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat and Rajkot — from March 17 to March 31. The number of active cases in the country has increased to more than 2.23 lakh while 131 deaths were reported. The Centre has asked Maharashtra to implement 14 public health measures to curb the spread. The state has been asked to strengthen active house to house surveillance to search for active cases/contacts in containment zones.

Shivraj scraps decision of previous govt MP CM swaps eggs with milk in midday meals

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, MARCH 16

The Shivraj government on Tuesday announced that instead of eggs, milk will be included in the menu of midday meals provided in anganwadi Centres in Madhya Pradesh to combat malnutrition among children.

The decision taken by the state Cabinet overrides the proposal mooted during the Kamal Nath government to add eggs to the menu of anganwadi midday meals.

The BJP had then accused the Kamal government of attempting to change the dietary habits of children belonging to a particular community and had warned that it might lead to cultural conflict in the state. The party had then warned that it might lead to cultural conflict in the state.

The Cabinet approved the proposal to provide milk to children in the age group of 3 to 6 in anganwadi centres thrice a week, state home minister



Shivraj

▶ **SHIVRAJ SINGH** Chouhan's decision to shun eggs and introduce milk in anganwadi midday meal drew criticism from child health experts as well as the Congress.

▶ **THE CABINET** approved the proposal to provide milk to children in the age group of 3 to 6

Narottam Mishra said.

Mr Chouhan's decision to shun eggs and introduce milk in anganwadi midday meal drew criticism from child health experts as well as the Opposition Congress. "Availability of milk coupled with the self-life of the liquid food raises a question mark over the feasibility of the decision to add milk in the menu of midday meals in the anganwadi centres," child health expert Sachin Kumar Jain has said.

The Congress also slammed the Shivraj government for reversing the decision taken by the Kamal Nath government to add eggs to the menu of anganwadi midday meal.

"Egg is known to be a high protein diet. Egg in a

diet can effectively combat malnutrition among children. Milk is not a complete nutrient. The Kamal Nath government had introduced eggs as well as milk in the menu of anganwadi midday meal, leaving it to the beneficiaries to choose between them. If eggs are dropped in the menu of anganwadi midday meal, then an alternative of compensatory value should have been added in the menu of anganwadi midday meal to combat malnutrition among children," Congress spokesman Bhupendra Gupta said.

He accused the state BJP government of unnecessarily dragging religion and culture in a sensitive matter like this for political mileage.

Fire rages in Goregaon slum



A fire broke out in a slum in the Khadakpada area in suburban Goregaon of Mumbai on Tuesday. The fire, that broke at around 6.50 pm, continued to rage at midnight, though there were no reports of injuries from the incident, civic officials said. The fire was reported in Samna Parivar locality and is restricted to a few scrap godowns and shanties over an area of 15,000-20,000 square feet, they added.

— PTI

Witnesses say they saw a dog holding body in mouth

Dog carries baby's body out of hospital

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 16

In an unfortunate incident, a stray dog was on Tuesday reportedly seen running away with the corpse of a newborn on the premises of a government hospital in Odisha's Bhadrak district.

The disturbing incident was reported from the Bhadrak district headquarters hospital. The stray dog was seen grabbing the body of the infant in its mouth and running on the hospital campus. When some people present in the hospital gave the dog a chase, it

dumped the corpse and fled.

"We saw the dog was holding the body of the newborn girl in its mouth and running on the hospital campus. We gave the dog a chase suspecting that the baby might be alive. The dog then fled leaving the body there," said an eyewitness.

Amar Barik, a local resident, asked, "If such an incident happens here at the district headquarters hospital, how will people dare to bring their near and dear ones to this place for treatment? We have totally lost faith in the hospital."

Though it is yet to be

▶ **THOUGH IT** is yet to be ascertained under which circumstances the newborn's body reached the hospital, the hospital authorities claimed that it was a premature girl child. The Bhadrak Town police has launched a probe into the matter.

ascertained under which circumstances the newborn's body reached the hospital, the hospital authorities claimed that it was a premature girl child.

The Bhadrak Town police has launched a probe into the matter.

"It looks like a prema-

ture foetus. It was lying on the hospital premises for some time. We do not know under what circumstances and from where the body reached the campus. We have informed the police and an internal probe will also be conducted and action will be taken accordingly," said Bhadrak chief district medical officer (CDMO), Santosh Kumar Patra.

In a related incident, the bodies of two newborn babies were found dumped along the roadside at Banarpal in Angul.

The police seized the bodies and launched a probe into the matter.

'3 youths saved from joining terror ranks'

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, MARCH 16

The Jammu and Kashmir police on Tuesday claimed that they prevented four youth belonging to central districts of Budgam and Ganderbal from joining separatist militants' ranks and subsequently handed them over to their parents after "proper counselling."

A statement issued by the police here said that the police authorities in Budgam received information that two teenagers had gone missing after leaving their respective homes on March 14. "Police teams were quickly constituted which tracked and recovered the youth in Tral area of Awantipora (Pulwama). Both had got influenced on social media to join terrorist ranks. They were instigated by Pakistan based recruiting handlers through social media handles (sic)," the statement said.

It also said that the Ganderbal police also "saved" two youth from the district's Batwina and Kurhama areas "who left their houses to join terrorist ranks and had initially gone to Shopian. However, when they reached (Srinagar's) Karan Nagar-Batmaloo axis, they were apprehended by the police."

The police claimed that the families of these youth appreciated the effort and thanked it for timely action.

J&K: Parents still reluctant to send kids to schools

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, MARCH 16

Days after educational institutions in Jammu and Kashmir were reopened fully after remaining shut for one year in view of the Covid-19 pandemic three students of a Srinagar women's college and a male student of a school in the hilly district of Doda have tested positive, setting alarming bells ringing among students and parents alike. However, the authorities said there was no reason to panic.

Even as the number of positive coronavirus cases in J&K showed a slow trend upwards mainly in the Valley over the past few weeks, the authorities reopened schools for lower classes across the Union Territory as well from Monday. Earlier classwork had resumed at universities, colleges and middle, high and higher secondary schools in a phased manner beginning mid-February 2021.

The authorities said on Tuesday that J&K reported 97 fresh Covid-19 cases in the past 24 hours-78 in Kashmir Valley and the remaining 19 in the Jammu region-taking the number to 127, 831. Also, two more persons died of the virus, raising the toll to 1,976.

But even as all educational institutions have been reopened these have yet to go back to pre-Pandemic normal. Many parents are still reluctant

Night curfew in Bhopal, Indore

Bhopal: The Madhya Pradesh government imposed night curfew in Bhopal and Indore from Wednesday in the wake of sudden spurt in coronavirus cases in the state. The state government has also ordered closure of shops after 10 pm in 8 other cities in the state. The state government ordered closure of shops after 10 pm in the cities of Jabalpur, Gwalior, Ujjain, Ratlam, Chhindwara, Burhanpur, Betul and Khargone.

to send their children to schools saying the threat of Coronavirus is still looming large. Last week, Srinagar's government-run Islamia College of Science and Commerce and three schools in the central district of Budgam had to be closed again after their faculty members tested positive for Covid-19. A classroom at Delhi Public School, Srinagar was sanitised and then locked after a Class 10 student contracted the virus. The school management also immediately grounded the bus in which he had travelled.

However, the authorities said there is no reason to panic. Yet they urged the students and teaching and non-teaching staff of all educational institutions to take necessary measures to protect themselves from Covid-19.

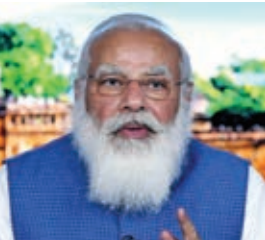
India, Finland launch digital partnership, focus on 6G, AI

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Finland counterpart Sanna Marin held a virtual summit on Tuesday evening in which the two countries decided to "further expand and diversify the relationship across sectors such as trade and investment, innovation, education, emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, 5G/6G, and quantum computing. Both sides also "noted the potential for India and Finland to cooperate in undertaking developmental activities in Africa".

India also confirmed that the PM had received an invitation to attend the second India-Nordic Summit to be held later this year. There are five Nordic countries — Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Iceland.

A joint statement said the two leaders had "announced a digital partnership in future ICT (information and communications technology), and mobile technologies, including research and



Narendra Modi

development in 6G, and the use of digital tools to transform education.

"Both leaders noted that the close relations between the two nations were based on shared values of democracy, rule of law, equality, freedom of speech, and respect for human rights. They reaffirmed their strong commitment to work for multilateralism, a rules-based international order, sustainable development and combating climate change."

"PM Modi appreciated Finland's leading role in clean and green technologies, and noted the potential for Finnish companies to partner India's drive towards sustainable development. In this context, he suggested enhanced cooperation in the areas like renewable and bio-

Modi will visit Dhaka March 26

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will undertake a two-day visit to Bangladesh from March 26 to attend the celebrations of the golden jubilee of country's independence and the birth centenary of founder "Bangabandhu" Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He will also hold consultations with his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina, with the two leaders expected to discuss the entire gamut of bilateral ties with a view to strengthening it.

energy, sustainability, edu-tech, pharma and digitization. ...The leaders exchanged views on regional and global issues, including the India-EU partnership, cooperation in the Arctic region, WTO and UN reforms. PM Modi invited Finland to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)," New Delhi added.

Didi targets Modi, Shah

■ Continued from Page 1

Sinha has been called on March 19 to appear at the ED office in CGO Complex, Salt Lake, and face questioning. Mr Dwiwedi was earlier the state finance secretary when the divestment took place.

A furious TMC chief, who is expected to release her party's manifesto on Wednesday, told a rally in Bankura, "While I have been on the road today, I came to know in the morning that my home secretary has been summoned. What will someone do now: work for the polls or depose as witness? Even Partha Chatterjee (TMC secretary general and education minister) was served a notice. Will he contest the polls or go to depose his statement as a witness?"

Referring to Mr Shah's state tour, she claimed, "Sitting in Bengal, Mr Shah is hatching a conspiracy about how to finish the TMC, kill Mamata and grab Bengal as the BJP will lose the polls. Syndicate Babu 1 and 2, you are interfering

in the Election Commission. If this continues, remember I will not hold myself back from sitting in dharna at the EC, even with a broken leg."

The CM also wondered whether Mr Shah has been intimidating the TMC "because of the low turnout" at his rally on Monday.

She also questioned the EC's suspension and removal of senior IPS officer Vivek Sahay from the post of director (security), also responsible for the CM security as the chief of the VVIP protection unit, for his lapses in the incident which left her injured during her poll campaign in Nandigram of East Midnapore last week.

In a stern response to Ms Banerjee, the Election Commission on Tuesday said it would not like to keep on being put in the dock for alleged proximity to any political entity. Despite meeting representatives of the TMC in Kolkata and the national capital in the recent past, "if it is stated by Hon'ble CM

that the commission should meet political parties, it is only an attempt to belittle the institution of commission with repeated innuendos and averments", the poll panel said in response to a letter from Ms Banerjee to Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora. "Commission maintains the position that they would not like to keep on being put in the dock for alleged proximity to any political entity," deputy election commissioner in charge of West Bengal Sudeep Jain wrote to Ms Banerjee. If the chief minister "persists in creating and attempting to perpetuate this myth for reasons best known to her, it is singularly unfortunate", he said, and added that it was only for her to adjudge why she was doing so.

Recently, the TMC had urged the panel to remove Mr Jain as in charge of West Bengal and had questioned his neutrality. The EC had defended him by coming out with a press statement.

Bank strike ends

■ Continued from Page 1

the general public. "Again we will tell them, whatever are the grievances against the running of the public sector banks, we are ready to talk and we will address the concern and then there is no need for privatisation. But still if you are not convinced... then more strikes will happen," Mr Venkatachalam warned.

Bank unions said the PSBs are earning operating profits and there is no need for privatisation. As on March 2020, these banks earned a total profit of ₹1,74,000 crore. However, since the banks provided ₹2,00,000 crore for bad loans, there was a net loss of ₹26,000 crore, they said.

"Hence if bad loans are recovered from the private corporate companies, banks will be earning much more. Private sector is responsible for the huge bad loans. In fact they should be punished for this crime. But the government is rewarding them by handing over the banks to the private sector," AIBEA said.

Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Tuesday that the interest of bank employees will be "completely protected" during privatisation. She also said the proposed privatisation of banks is a thought-out plan of the government and not all banks would be privatised.

"I want to assure it is not that the institutions are going to be closed or workers are going to be removed. Whether it is the salaries or scale or pension of employees, all will be taken care of. The interests of workers of such banks will be completely protected," Ms Sitharaman said while briefing the media about Tuesday's Cabinet decisions.

Is Swapan BJP's man

■ Continued from Page 1

"bhadralok", the "problem areas" could be administration and governance. In a politically sensitive state like Bengal, Mr Chakraborty "might not be the right man."

Even if Mr Adhikari emerges as the "giant killer" by defeating Didi, the grey area for him could be the CBI cases against him in connection with the Saradha scam.

While Mr Roy has always preferred to be a backroom boy, eyes were earlier on the state unit president, Dilip Ghosh. "Ghosh is a good organiser, but he's more of a rabble-rouser," a BJP leader pointed out. Over the years, Mr Ghosh has courted various controversies with his remarks. "He could be a loose cannon and somewhat unpredictable," the leader pointed out.

As for Babul Supriyo, the high command would prefer to keep him in the Centre. It was pointed out that as is the case with Mr Charkaborty, the singer-turned-politician might not be suited for a "politically volatile" state like Bengal.

It was argued that by fielding Mr Dasgupta the party high command has "somewhat made its indication clear" for the state about which it has often been said that "if there was a single

unifying symbol of bhadralok identity... it is culture."

Mr Dasgupta, according to some BJP leaders, could just be "tailor-made" for the post. He is not only "upper caste" but a scholar and belongs to a well-known family. His grandfather was a Bengali entrepreneur and proprietor of the Calcutta Chemical Company. And unlike most other Bengal leaders, his image has so far been "clean".

By fielding Mr Dasgupta, the BJP is not merely trying to "impress" the bhadralok, but is also targeting the Bengal intelligentsia which had opposed the BJP during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

But it's a tough battle ahead. Tarakeswar Assembly seat is a strong TMC bastion. In 2011 and 2016, the TMC's Rachpal Singh had won the seat by a margin of around one lakh votes. This time TMC has fielded a local man, Ramendu Sinha.

Tarakeswar, a place of pilgrimage, is dominated by Hindus. The Muslim population is merely 10 per cent.

In a communally charged electoral battle Hindu-dominated Tarakeswar might appear to be a "safer bet" for Mr Dasgupta, but locals believe that Ramendu Sinha, known as "Ramu da", could just "stop" Mr Dasgupta from breasting the tape.

Travel to China

■ Continued from Page 1

members going to China to carry on their employment contracts, work resumption and other relevant activities are — allowed to submit their visa applications."

The Chinese embassy added, "Foreigners who are family members of Chinese citizens or holders of Chinese Permanent Resident's Permit, such as their spouses, parents, children and the kinship of brothers, sisters, grandparents and grandchildren living in the same household, with the purpose of family reunion, providing filial piety for the aged, visiting relatives and other relevant humanitarian emergencies, are allowed to submit their visa applications... Foreigners with valid APEC Business Travel Cards (ABTC) can apply for a business visa with the valid ABTC and invitation letter from their counterpart in China."

It further said, "Foreigners who are flying from India to China will be required to present the Electronic Health Declaration for boarding... Foreign passengers can fill in the information, declare the health status and upload the negative certificate of nucleic acid test and IgM antibody test, passport page, as well as valid Chinese visa, which will then be examined and verified by the Chinese embassy or consulates in India for issuing QR code with the 'HDC' mark. Foreigners are obliged to follow the regulations and undergo the necessary quarantine by the Chinese local authorities upon their arrival in China."

THE ASIAN AGE

17 MARCH 2021

Competitive, compulsive: TN's 'poll freebie' culture

In Tamil Nadu the promise of freebies mark poll time and much of governance seems to revolve around delivering on populist measures that sustain vote banks favouring either of the Dravidian majors. The 2021 polls, slated for April 6, have triggered an even more frenetic push to promise freebies by the ruling AIADMK and the Opposition DMK, parties that have established a virtual duopoly in the 234-seat Assembly. The freebie culture has been ingrained in the psyche of the people of Tamil Nadu since the mid-1960s when the DMK came to power on top of a promise of three *padis* (measuring roughly 4.5 kg) of rice for a rupee, later watered down to one kg for a rupee due to financial constraints.

The 2021 freebie promise has been the most extensive on record with AIADMK offering a washing machine for each of about two crore families, besides a solar stove to go with the mixer grinder, fans and other household goods that went towards fulfilling Jayalalithaa's concept of easing the burden of housewives and working women of chores at home and winning them over. Besides white goods, laptops for students are free as well as data. Consider the promise of ₹1,500 a month for women, free TV cable service and affordable housing for the needy and it completes a comprehensive household package including free rations, condiments, spices and festival hampers that should ease lives. And for livelihoods there is an offer of one government job for each household, never mind if the government wage bill runs upwards of one lakh crore rupees.

The DMK's competitive offerings include ₹1,000 for women, 75 per cent reservation in private sector jobs for locals, a year's maternity leave and food, fuel and milk subsidies. How all the freebies add up is anyone's guess as the state is already burdened with public debt of ₹4.87 lakh crore as of March 31, 2020, on top of revenues earned from a highly industrialised state. There is even a promise of monetising housewives' work in the manifesto of fringe political player Kamal Haasan's party, which is to show how the aim for votes also somehow serves the purpose of creating a social net buttressed by health insurance and an almost free lunch that is nearly unique

There is even a promise of monetising housewives' work in the manifesto of fringe political player Kamal Haasan's party, which is to show how the aim for votes also somehow serves the purpose of creating a social net buttressed by health insurance and an almost free lunch that is nearly unique. There is no denying the state has been a forerunner in keeping students interested in learning in class through free education and midday meals.

The financial profligacy may create a burden that may never go away for seven crore people of the state. The concern for women, who constitute nearly 50 per cent of voters, does not, however, extend to political representation as the low number of seats, less than 10 per cent, allocated to them by major parties indicates. The outlier status of Tamil Nadu is further stressed as DMK and Congress promise to take state students out of the central medical entrance test NEET and emphasise their opposition to CAA as AIADMK, despite being in the NDA, has done too. Competitive freebie offers are a bizarre feature but that takes away only a little from the model welfare state Tamil Nadu has aspired to be and is in many ways a model for India.

Soul-search for Sarah

So dramatic — and disturbing — have recent events been in London in an overtly police versus citizen polarity that there is a risk that the demonstrations of women, and social media interventions by thousands of them following the kidnap and murder of a 31-year old woman, Sarah Everard, may end up being narrowly compartmentalised.

The London Metropolitan Police have arrested a policeman in the kidnap-murder case. Ms Everard was walking home from a friend's house to her own address on March 3 evening and apparently vanished. The remains of her body were found afterward. A large number of women gathered to lay flowers in her memory. The police, gathered in strength, manhandled the women, dragging some on the floor, tackling them violently, pinning some down.

The video of this is distressing. The police trotted out banality: unlawful gathering, Covid-19 restrictions. Not a word about men police attacking a peaceful assembly of condoling women.

In India, or in countries outside Western Europe and North America, such happenings will be criticised but will not be unusual. But in Britain?

The whole catechism of an advanced capitalist, liberal democratic, order-free speech, free assembly, gender parity, right to protest—went out of the window. In citizen versus state, the state was seen to be grotesque.

The Everard story is well beyond being a common crime. It underscores violence against women in public places. According to a UN report, 70 per cent of British women complain of sexual harassment in public. The outpourings of anger, grief, even helplessness, of thousands of British women on social media in which they detail the lengths to which they go to keep themselves safe (taking longer but better-lit routes, wearing bright clothes for visibility), are compelling.

In this grim background is also discernible the spirit to challenge and change. As a movement, "Reclaim Our Streets" is catching on in Britain. There have been protest marches, one in Parliament Square. We need this in India too. Ask any girl or woman. Of course, London Police must be held to account as the police in urban India, both infamous for "institutionalised violence".

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



India needs hate crimes law on lines of Scotland



Sunanda K. Datta-Ray

Reflections

India, with its increasingly assertive majoritarian culture, would benefit from an equivalent of the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill that the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh's Holyrood House passed last week by 82 votes to 32, following the previous day's five-hour debate when legislators considered a raft of amendments. In a nutshell, the controversial new measure will extend protection to vulnerable groups and take a far stricter view of the offence of "stirring up hatred".

As Victoria Atkins, a junior minister in the British government, said in another context recently, the minorities and marginalised communities need such protection. Such Indian groups need it far more than quotas and reservations which, as wise observers have pointed out repeatedly, create a vested interest in backwardness. Indians who would qualify under Ms Atkins's definition are Muslims, the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Sikhs and people from the Northeast who do not fit into the common man's notion of the national stereotype. Myanmar's Rohingya are a tragic illustration of the outsider in this sense, as were Jews and the gypsies in pre-World War II Europe.

"Through the passing of this landmark bill, Scotland's Parliament has sent a strong and clear message to victims, perpetrators, communities and to the wider society that offences motivated by prejudice will be treated seriously and will not be tolerated", declared Scotland's justice minister Humza Yousaf. Around 18 hate crimes are committed every day in the kingdom; 6,448 were recorded in 2019-20. "I am delighted Holyrood has backed this powerful legislation that is fitting for the Scotland we live in" Mr Yousaf added.

Although born in

Glasgow, Mr Yousaf is of Pakistani origin and can be expected to bring a measure of personal commitment to the cause of equal treatment for people of all creeds and colours. "The bill's passage has shown Holyrood at its very best—a collaborative, diverse and determined Parliament which we should all be proud of", he says. "Robust scrutiny has ensured we have met the right balance between protecting groups targeted by hate crime and respecting people's rights to free speech."

He has been at pains to reassure everyone that the new law will not try to instigate any kind of witch hunt. Nor will it curb free speech. Asked about racist jokes and drunken anecdotes, he was quick to stress that the "behaviour has to be threatening or abusive and intended to stir up trouble, so a racist joke is clearly not going to reach that threshold. There will be no prosecutions under the new law."

"If your unreconstructed uncle comes in, has too many sherries at Christmas dinner and says something they shouldn't do, which creates great offence to his bisexual niece, for example, that is not going to be prosecuted." He fleshed out the point by recounting an abusive tweet he had received but would ignore. "The beauty of the Hate Crime Bill is that you can say that all day long (not that I'd encourage it) and it would not be a criminal offence."

That may seem like a

The bill anticipates religious bigotry and defangs bigots in advance by abolishing the offence of blasphemy. Actually, modern Scotland is a liberal and civilised nation which has not known any blasphemy prosecution for over 175 years.

The 1968 Race Relations Act made it illegal to refuse housing, jobs or services to anyone on the grounds of race or national origins. The expectation was that the law would change people's outlook, and indeed, it has been transformed.

tolerant and sensibly lenient attitude to take. Yet, leniency can be mistaken for tacit official sanction or condonation. Nazi anti-Semitism did not spring up overnight. German and Austrian culture had a long history of anti-Semitic witticisms which may have concealed a real societal bias. Nirad C. Chaudhuri recalls a Bengali rhyme in which the people of Odisha and Bihar are presented in negative terms to illustrate insularity. Similarly, the English have "jokes" at the expense of the Scots and the Welsh.

Believing laughter to be the best antidote to hatred, the British once offered prizes to comedians who could tell jokes about their own communities. The 1968 Race Relations Act made it illegal to refuse housing, employment, or public services to anyone on the grounds of colour, race, ethnic or national origins. The deeper expectation was that the law would change people's outlook because the law-abiding British would avoid anything illegal. And, indeed, race relations and social attitudes have been completely transformed. The three Race Relations Acts (two others followed in 1976 and 2000) accomplished what the old laws could not.

Stirring up racial hatred has been an offence in Scottish—and British—law for decades. But the old laws were not regarded as providing adequate protection to minority groups. Hence Scotland's Hate Crime Bill was introduced in April 2020 following an independent review by Lord Bracadale, a distinguished Scottish judge, who recommended that all the old laws on the subject be consolidated into one new bill. The mea-

sure updates the list of entities protected by the law while also expanding the list. It also identifies new "stirring up of hatred" offences that apply to all the categories—age, disability, race, religion, sexual orientation, transgender identity and variations in sex characteristics—that the bill mentions.

It is also noteworthy that the bill anticipates religious bigotry and defangs bigots in advance by abolishing the offence of blasphemy. Actually, modern Scotland is a liberal, secular and civilised nation which has not known any blasphemy prosecution for more than 175 years. But the authorities are taking no chances.

"I look forward to overseeing the implementation of this legislation which will ensure Scotland's justice system can bring perpetrators to account and provide sufficient protection for individuals and communities harmed by hate crimes," Mr Yousaf promises.

There is no reason why he should be disappointed provided freedom of speech is not curbed and justice is speedy and effective. India has not forgotten the 1968 Kilvenmani massacre when 44 Dalit men, women and children were burned alive, and an appeal court acquitted the convicted murderers on the ground that landlords of their status did not commit such crimes. A new law must also punish rumour mongering about beef, killing cattle and romance across religious borders.

India demonstrates that the law by itself is simply not enough. It must also be administered by politicians of goodwill and integrity.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

India has not forgotten the 1968 Kilvenmani massacre when 44 Dalit men, women and children were burned alive, and a court acquitted the convicted murderers on the ground that landlords of their status did not commit such crimes

LETTERS

CURIOUS SCHEDULE

Whereas the forthcoming polls in West Bengal will be conducted in eight phases (from March 27 to April 29), the same for the populous states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu will be held on a single day. Why the Bengal polls are being staggered and scheduled on different dates is simply inexplicable. In the likelihood of a fiercely contested electoral battle in Bengal, ordinary prudence demands that the entire polling process is completed within the shortest possible time to forestall the chances of malpractice and violence. Staggering elections certainly entail a sizable drain on the exchequer in terms of staff and resources.

Why this anomaly?

Amit Banerjee
Mumbai

LEFT OUT IN THE COLD

THE PRO-BUSINESSMEN and anti-worker attitude of this government is no secret. The bank and insurance employees' strike is not going to deter the government from its chosen path of privatisation. This group of employees would, therefore, do well to examine its own attitude towards the other agitations. More often than not, they supported the government's stand. Now, when they need public support, there is none. Unless there is a united approach in opposing the government, it is going to crush all pro-people enterprise one by one.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

STUDENTS STRANDED

INDIANS HAVE BEEN barred from travelling to China since November last year. For the purpose of resuming people-to-people exchanges in an orderly manner, starting from March 15, 2021, China will allow travellers only if they have taken Chinese vaccines. As Chinese-made vaccines are not available in India, the announcement will bring little relief for at least 23,000 Indians studying there, most of them in medical colleges. A new diplomatic imbroglio has been thus precipitated. The ministry must step in now.

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



Fresh push for lateral entry of babus likely

Last year, Arvind Panagariya, former vice-chief of the government Niti Aayog, wrote in his book, *India Unlimited — Reclaiming the Lost Glory*, that Indian babus suffered from the socialist hangover, which has slowed down the pace of reforms the Modi *sarkar* wishes to introduce. To support his view, he cited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiative for lateral entry at the top levels of the bureaucracy. According to Mr Panagariya, babus slowed down the process to the extent that at the very end of his term only nine officers could be inducted from outside.

But the government has not given up, yet. It is making another push to induct 30 more private sector specialists into different government departments at the crucial decision-making level of joint sec-

retaries and directors on a contract basis. The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) will shortlist the candidates for interviews.

Prime Minister Modi has introduced the mechanism of recruiting fresh talent in the bureaucracy from the private sector during his first tenure. But the first round hasn't been the success that the government was expecting. It could recruit only nine of the 10 domain experts it had selected, and one of them, Arun Goyal, who had joined the commerce ministry as joint secretary, put in his papers barely a year later. It appears that far from changing the system, the lateral entrants are more likely to be subsumed by it. Further, a year after their appointment, the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) had issued a notice to the UPSC after a petition from whistleblower

Indian Forest Service (IFoS) officer Sanjiv Chaturvedi alleged irregularities in the recruitment of three of the nine lateral entrants by the government.

The government is catching flak already. Some Opposition leaders are calling for the policy to be withdrawn. Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhkar Azad has threatened to "gherao" Parliament, calling the government's move a violation of constitutional rights. Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Tejaswi Yadav has said that UPSC's lateral recruitment an injustice to the youth.

Will the Modi *sarkar* overcome the political resistance from outside and from the babus within who may try to defend their turf?

ED AND KERALA POLLS
The Enforcement Directorate (ED)

has reportedly registered a case against senior officials of the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB) for alleged FERA violations. But things get blurred around election time when the stakes are high. Questions are being raised about the timing of the probe, with the ruling LDF claiming the ED action as a "political conspiracy" by the BJP, which is trying hard to make a dent in the state.

Sources say that ED has served notices to KIIFB CEO Dr K.M. Abraham, former chief secretary of Kerala, and deputy managing director Vikramjit Singh, a serving IPS officer of the Kerala cadre. As it so happens, chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan is chairman of the board. Not surprisingly, therefore, the ruling party has linked the ED action to the forthcoming elec-

tions. The LDF leaders have said that the ED moved only after Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's statements against the Board.

The Centre has denied the allegations. It is being said that ED's investigations discovered that the board earned ₹2,100 crores by issuing bonds for infra projects, but the money was used by cultural, fisheries and tourism departments. Besides, the state government issued the bonds without the Centre's permission, which violated rules.

Politics, or not, the dust will only settle once the state elections are done with.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

SHORT TAKES

PHILIP LEAVES HOSPITAL AFTER TREATMENT

London, March 16: Britain Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, on Tuesday left King Edward VII's Hospital in central London after a month since he had been admitted there and went on to have a "successful heart procedure".

The 99-year-old husband of Queen Elizabeth II was pictured being driven out in a black BMW after a 28-night stay, his longest spell in hospital. He was first admitted to the King Edward VII Hospital on Feb. 16 before moving to a National Health Service (NHS) specialist St Bartholomew's Hospital two weeks later, where he underwent a procedure for a pre-existing heart condition.

3 DIE WHEN CAR HITS 9 PEOPLE IN SAN DIEGO

San Diego, March 16: A driver plowed through a crowd on a sidewalk in downtown San Diego on Monday morning, killing three people and injuring six others, including two who are hospitalised in critical condition, police said.

The driver — whom authorities identified only as a 71-year-old man — appeared to be driving while impaired when his car suddenly veered off the street shortly after 9 a.m. near a community college and went up onto the sidewalk briefly before returning to the road, said San Diego Police Chief David Nisleit.

Nisleit said the driver identified himself to police and he was arrested. Earlier police had stated that he had tried to flee. Multiple ambulances responded to the scene near City College.

UGANDA OPPN LEADER ARRESTED

Kampala, March 16: Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine was arrested on Monday as he took part in a protest in the capital, according to a post on his Twitter page. The 39-year-old popstar-turned-presidential contender last week had called on Ugandans to "rise up peacefully and unarmed" against President Yoweri Museveni who won a sixth term in office following disputed elections in January.

"Bobi Wine arrested as he led MPs and other leaders in a peaceful protest against the abduction, torture and murder of his supporters," said the post. Around 15 MPs and activists from Wine's National Unity Platform political party took part in the protest which was quickly halted by police officers and soldiers.

DUTCH PM'S ELECTION LEAD SHRINKS

Amsterdam, March 16: The lead of Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte's conservative party in polls continued to shrink Tuesday, according to a new survey published ahead of the second day of voting in coronavirus-affected national elections.

Rutte's People's Party for Freedom and Democracy still retains a lead of some 10 percentage points over its nearest rival, the anti-immigration Party for Freedom led by anti-Islam firebrand Geert Wilders. According to the respected Peilingwijzer survey, Rutte's party is in line to win between 34 and 38 seats in the 150-seat lower house of parliament.

On the other hand, Wilders' party is forecast to win about 17-21 seats.

INDIA GIVES TRAINING AIDS TO LANKAN NAVY

Colombo, March 16: India's envoy in Sri Lanka has underlined the importance of close cooperation between the navies of the two countries as an essential part of the overall bilateral engagement, as he handed over training aids worth 22 million LKR (about ₹81,00,000) to the island nation's Navy for capacity building.

High Commissioner Gopal Baglay, during a visit to the Northern and Eastern Provinces, formally handed over the training aids to the Commander Eastern Naval Area of the Sri Lanka Navy at a ceremony held on Sunday at the prestigious Naval and Maritime Academy (NMA) Trincomalee.

Baglay reiterated the importance of close cooperation between the two navies.

Tokyo talks: US, Japan to share China worry

Tokyo, March 16: Japan and the United States joined forces Tuesday to criticise China's "coercion and aggression" in Asia as senior ministers from both countries held their first in-person talks since President Joe Biden took office in January.

Aside from the sharp rhetoric aimed at Beijing, the meeting in Tokyo and a planned stop next in Seoul are as much an effort by the Biden administration to reassure worried allies in Asia after four years of occasionally confrontational dealings with the Trump administration. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, after holding the so-called "two plus two" security talks with Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and their Japanese counterparts — Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi — said democracy and human rights in the region are being challenged and the United States will push with its partners for a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Blinken said the Biden administration is committed to work with US allies and those in the region as they face challenges from China and its ally North Korea, which is pursuing an illicit nuclear weapons programme. "We will push back if necessary, when China uses

N. KOREAN LEADER'S SISTER WARNS U.S.

Seoul, March 16: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's influential sister warned the United States against actions that could make it "lose sleep", state media reported Tuesday, as top Biden administration officials began a visit to key allies Tokyo and Seoul. Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Japan on Monday on their first overseas trip, aimed at rallying military alliances as a bulwark against China and cementing a united front against the nuclear-armed North.

— AFP

coercion or aggression to get its way," he said. In a joint statement released after the talks, the ministers shared strong worry over Beijing's human rights violations in Xinjiang, "unlawful maritime claims and activities in the South China Sea" and "unilateral action that seeks to change the status quo" over the Japan-controlled East China Sea islands that China also claims.

— AP

Myanmarese flee martial law area

Yangon, March 16: Residents of a protest flash-point district in Myanmar's biggest city fled on flatbed trucks and tuk-tuks Tuesday after security forces escalated the use of lethal force against anti-coup protesters, despite international appeals for restraint.

Much of the country has been in uproar since the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi last month, with hundreds of thousands taking to the streets to demand a return to democracy. Police and soldiers have used tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds to subdue crowds in nearly daily crackdowns, along with blanket nightly internet shutdowns to stop protesters from mobilising. Monday saw fresh violence by security forces in several cities, leaving at least 20 dead, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), a local monitoring group that has been tracking arrests and fatalities.

It followed the deadliest day so far in the six weeks since the army deposed Suu Kyi's government, with the AAPP reporting 74 killed on Sunday after the violent suppression of anti-coup unrest across Myanmar.

Many of those deaths came from the impoverished Hlaing Tharyar township in Yangon, a garment-producing area in the commercial hub with mostly Chinese-owned factories — several of which were razed on Sunday. The junta reacted by imposing martial law over the area and five

other townships that are home to around two million people — more than a quarter of the sprawling city's population.

Anyone arrested there faces trial by military tribunal, with sentences ranging from three years' hard labour to execution. Myanmar law expert Melissa Crouch said the martial law declaration effectively gave complete control to military commanders and sidelined civilian administrators and judges.

"The use of martial law is extremely troubling and... represents a significant decline in the situation in Myanmar," the University of New South Wales academic said.

The AAPP said in a statement that even civilians who were not participating in anti-coup protests had died in cross-fire on Monday.

By Tuesday morning, local media outlet *The Irrawaddy* published photos of residents fleeing the township, crowding onto flatbed trucks stuck in columns of snaking traffic.

Some carried their pets on the back of motorbikes, while others crammed their belongings in vinyl bags on tuk-tuks.

"We can see the people on the roads for as far as one's eye can see," reported local outlet *Democratic Voice of Burma*.

A resident confirmed the mass exodus to AFP, saying that people wanted to leave at dawn and protesters removed makeshift barricades — erected to slow security forces down — to let them out.

Sweden is latest country to stop using AstraZeneca vax

Country takes step amid reports of dangerous blood clots in some recipients

Berlin, March 16: Sweden on Tuesday became the latest European country to pause use of the AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine amid reports of dangerous blood clots in some recipients. The company and international regulators continue to say the vaccine is safe, however, and many countries elsewhere in the world are forging ahead with their vaccination campaigns.

The move by the Swedish Public Health Agency is pending an investigation by the European Medicines Agency. "The decision is a precautionary measure," Swedish chief epidemiologist Anders Tegnell said in a statement.

Germany, France, Italy and Spain were among countries that suspended use of the vaccine on Monday. AstraZeneca's formula is one of three vaccines in use on the European continent. But the escalating concern is another setback for the European Union's vaccination drive, which has been plagued by shortages and other hurdles and is lagging well behind the campaigns in Britain and the US.

The EU's drug regulatory agency will review experts' findings on the AstraZeneca shot and decide whether action needs to be taken. Much of Asia has shrugged off concerns about the AstraZeneca jab, with Thailand's prime minister receiving a shot at the start of the country's use of the vaccine on Tuesday. "There are people who have concerns," Prayuth Chan-ocha said after his vaccination. "But we must believe doctors, believe in our medical professionals." Thailand initially was the first country outside Europe to temporarily suspend using the AstraZeneca vaccine.

But Thailand's health authorities later decided to go ahead with it, with Prayuth and members of his Cabinet receiving the first shots. Indonesia suspended use of the vaccine



Workers clean the exterior of Bang Khae Market, after more than a hundred residents in the district tested positive for the Covid-19, in Bangkok on Tuesday.

— AFP

WHO: Vaccine rollout unaffected by concerns

Geneva, March 16: The UN health agency said its global rollout of Coronavirus vaccines remains unaffected even as a growing number of countries, especially in Europe, suspended use of AstraZeneca's vaccine on Monday amid concerns about blood clots in some people who received it.

The World Health Organisation says the AstraZeneca vaccines for its COVAX programme, which is shipping vaccines mostly to low- and middle-income countries, are being produced in India and South Korea — and the suspensions have been ordered over batches made in Europe. "We understand these are precautionary measures," WHO assistant director-general Mariangela Simao said.

— AP

"I would like to say this to countries from other regions that are not Europe: That the vaccines (at issue) so far are from European manufacturing not vaccines that are provided through the COVAX facility," Germany, France, Italy and Spain joined the growing list of mostly European countries — starting with Denmark last week — that temporarily halted use of the AstraZeneca vaccine in recent days to investigate cases of blood clots that occurred after vaccination.

Others include Thailand and Congo. "This does not necessarily mean these events are linked to vaccination," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a news conference.

— AP

HAALAND, 1ST NATIVE, OKAYED AS INTERIOR SECY

Washington, March 16: The Senate has confirmed New Mexico Rep. Deb Haaland as interior secretary, making her the first Native American to lead a Cabinet department and the first to lead the federal agency that has wielded influence over the nation's tribes for nearly two centuries. Haaland was confirmed by a 51-40 vote on Monday, the narrowest margin yet for a Cabinet nomination by President Joe Biden.

Four Republicans voted yes: Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan of Alaska, Susan Collins of Maine and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina. Democrats and tribal groups hailed Haaland's confirmation as historic, saying her selection means that Indigenous people — who lived in North America before the United States was created — will for the first time see a Native American lead the powerful department.

— AP

Will block Twitter in a month, threatens Russia

Moscow, March 16: Russian authorities said Tuesday they would block Twitter in a month if it doesn't take steps to remove banned content, a move that escalates the Russian government's drawn-out standoff with social media platforms that have played a major role in amplifying dissent in Russia.

Russia's state communications watchdog, Roskomnadzor, last week announced it was slowing down the speed of uploading photos and videos to Twitter over its alleged failure to remove content encouraging suicide among children and information about drugs and child pornography. The agency said Twitter has failed to remove more than 3,000 posts with banned content, including more than 2,500 posts encouraging suicide among minors.

The platform responded by emphasizing its policy of zero tolerance for child sexual exploitation, promotion of suicide and

drug sales.

On Tuesday, deputy chief of Roskomnadzor Vadim Subbotin argued that Twitter still wasn't complying with the demands of the Russian authorities. "Twitter doesn't react to our requests appropriately, and if things go on like this, then in a month it will be blocked, on an out-of-court basis," Subbotin told the Interfax news agency, adding that Roskomnadzor at this point "is not registering specific steps by Twitter to remove prohibited content."

Twitter did not respond immediately to an email request for comment. Authorities have criticized social media platforms that have been used to bring tens of thousands of people into the streets across Russia this year to demand the release of opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

The wave of demonstrations was the largest in years and posed a major challenge to the Kremlin. The authorities alleged social media platforms fa-

iled to remove calls for children to join the protests.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has urged police to act more to monitor social platforms and to track down those who "draw the children into illegal and unsanctioned street actions." The government's efforts to tighten control of the internet and social media date back to 2012, when a law allowing authorities to blacklist and block certain online content was adopted. Since then, a growing number of restrictions targeting messaging apps, websites and social media platforms have been introduced.

In 2014, authorities adopted a law requiring online services to store the personal data of Russian users on servers in Russia and have since tried to make Facebook and Twitter comply with it. Both companies have been fined, first small amounts of around \$50 and last year the equivalent of \$63,000 each.

— AP



Bidya Devi Bhandari

3 NEPAL EX-PMs DON'T ATTEND ALL-PARTY MEET

Kathmandu, March 16: Nepal's three former prime ministers on Tuesday boycotted an all-party meeting called by President Bidya Devi Bhandari to discuss contemporary issues amid the political crisis that has gripped the country.

Former premiers Baburam Bhattarai, Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhala Nath Khanal skipped the meeting called by President Bhandari at Shital Niwas, questioning her role in the row of the erstwhile Nepal Communist Party (NCP), *My Republica* newspaper reported. While both Khanal and Nepal belong to the rival faction of the ruling Communist Party of Nepal (UML), Bhattarai heads the federal council of the Janata Samajbadi Party.

They have publicly alleged that President Bhandari had failed to act as a custodian of the Constitution, supporting even unconstitutional moves taken by Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli who had dissolved the House of Representatives in December.

PM Oli, CPN (Maoist Centre) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda, Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba, Chairman of Janata Samajbadi Party Mahanta Thakur, and former Chairman of Council of Minister Khil Raj Regmi attended.

— PTI

SIGNIFICANT | FIND

Most of the text is in ancient Greek, a widely used language at the time

Israel unearths 2K-yr-old biblical scroll fragments

Jerusalem, March 16: Israel on Tuesday unveiled fragments of a biblical scroll dating back some 2,000 years, in what experts described as the most significant find since the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The artifacts were unearthed during excavations by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) in the Judean desert, which spans parts of southern Israel and the occupied West Bank. In a site known as the "Cave of Horrors," archaeologists found fragments of a scroll with a Greek translation of the Hebrew bible, the first such find since the early

1960s. "For the first time in approximately 60 years, archaeological excavations have uncovered fragments of a biblical scroll," the IAA said.

Oren Ableman, an IAA curator, said parts of the same scroll from the Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets were first discovered in the Cave of Horrors by Bedouins in the 1950s.

The Cave of Horrors took its name from the numerous skeletons found inside it and the treacherous terrain nearby.

Most of the text is in ancient Greek, a widely used language at the time, but the word Lord appears

● **OREN ABLEMAN, an IAA curator, said parts of the same scroll from the Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets were first discovered in the Cave of Horrors by Bedouins in the 1950s.**

in ancient Hebrew script.

Oren said that among the most striking features of the new fragments is a deviation with all other known versions of the Old Testament: in one passage, the word "gates" is replaced by the word "streets."

The significance of that deviation is "what we are

trying to discover now," he said. Yosef Garfinkel, head of the Institute of Archaeology at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, described the find as "exciting," telling it could enrich the "study of the history of the Greek translation of the bible."

The items were discovered in a cave believed to have been used by Jews rebelling against the Romans during the failed second-century Bar Kochba revolt.

The IAA compared the find to the extraordinary discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, some 900 manuscripts found between 1947

and 1956 in the Qumran caves above the Dead Sea in the West Bank.

They are some of the earliest biblical texts ever found. The Judea desert excavation also unearthed a cache of rare coins, a six-millennia-old skeleton of a child and a basket described by the IAA as "likely the oldest in the world", which been carbon-dated to 10,500 years old. "I shook for days," after the basket was found, IAA archaeologist Chaim Cohen said.

The woven basket was found remarkably intact, with a rock resting on its top — an indication that

its users wanted to keep the contents safe and intended to come back for them, Cohen said.

Organic material like the wood used for the basket typically decays, but this unprecedented discovery was preserved by the Judean desert's dry climate and protective conditions in the cave, he said.

Cohen added that very little is known about the society that lived in the area at the time.

"From this ancient period, we have nothing: We can tell, and I want to be very cautious, that they are likely nomads or half-nomads," he said.

— AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,363.96	-0.06
Nifty 50	14,910.50	-0.13
S&P 500*	3,973.39	0.11
Dollar (₹)	72.55	-0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.30	0.67
Euro (₹)	86.53	-0.10
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,481.45	0.10
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.99	-1.29
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.180	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.595	-0.012

* As of 8:30 PM IST

India adds 9.7 GW capacity this fiscal till end-Feb.

India added 9.7 gigawatt (GW) of generation capacity during this financial year till February 28. This includes 3.8 GW of conventional energy and 5.9 GW from renewable sources, power and new & renewable energy minister R. K. Singh said in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha. In 2019-20, India had added 15.8 GW of power generation capacity, including 7.1 GW of conventional sources and 8.8 GW of renewable sources.

Gland Pharma inks pact to make Sputnik V vaccine



Gland Pharma said it has entered into an agreement with the Russian Direct Investment Fund to supply up to 252 million doses of Sputnik V Covid-19 vaccine. The agreement will see Gland utilising its Drug Substance and Drug Product facilities in Hyderabad. Production is expected to commence from the third quarter of 2021 for delivery starting from the fourth quarter of 2021, the firm said in a filing.

Anupam Rasayan IPO subscribed 44 times

The initial public offering of speciality chemicals company Anupam Rasayan India Limited was subscribed 44.06 times on the last day of bidding. The Rs 760-crore issue received bids for 42,74,80,578 shares against 97,01,80,9 shares on offer. The category for qualified institutional buyers (QIBs) was subscribed 65.74 times, non-institutional investors 97.42 times and retail individual investors 10.77 times.

Mercedes-Benz drives in new E Class at ₹63.6 L

Mercedes-Benz introduced the Mercedes-Benz E-Class long-wheelbase facelift with prices starting from Rs 63.60 lakh at Delhi showroom. The sedan is available in five variants with three engine options and powered by both petrol and diesel. The automaker has done comprehensive changes on exterior styling and design and updated the interiors. The company has sold more than 46,000 units of the E-Class till date in India.

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■ Bill to be tabled in Parliament soon Infra push: Cabinet clears mega DFI bill

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, MARCH 16

As a part of the government's pan-India infrastructure push, the Union Cabinet, on Tuesday, approved the setting up of a development finance institution (DFI), which will raise capital from the markets and offer long-term debt to infrastructure projects.

Initially, the Centre will infuse Rs 20,000 crore in the DFI and an additional grant of Rs 5,000 crore will be given. There will also be additional increments of the grant over the years. Through infrastructure funding, the government aims to create jobs and boost demand in the economy.

Announcing the Cabinet decision, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said a bill would soon be tabled in Parliament to give effect to the new institution, for which the government has allocated Rs 20,000 crore in the FY22 Budget.

"Besides, the government plans to raise up to Rs 3 lakh crore in the next few years. An additional grant of Rs 5,000 crore will also be given and there will be additional increments of the grant over the years," she told the reporters.

The DFI is part of the government's mega infrastructure spending initiative to generate employment and boost demand. The plan also includes a capital expenditure target of Rs 5.54 lakh crore for



FUND FOR INFRA PROJECTS

- ▶ The Centre will infuse ₹20,000 crore in the DFI, along with an additional grant of ₹5,000 crore
- ▶ Gradually government's ownership in the DFI will be brought down to 26 per cent

FY22, compared with a revised estimate of Rs 4.39 lakh crore for FY21. "The new institution is being set up in the context of the government's efforts to build infrastructure assets. The DFI will raise capital from the markets and offer long-term debt to infrastructure projects," Sitharaman said.

When asked about its ownership status, the finance minister said, "The DFI will start with 100 per cent ownership of Government of India, and gradually government's ownership will be brought down to 26 per cent. The DFI will have a professional board and 50 per cent of them will be non-official directors. The government, she added, will provide tax exemption and also amend the Indian

Stamp Act to attract global pension funds and sovereign funds to invest in the DFI.

Sitharaman further said that PM Narendra Modi was always keen to give effect to budget announcements swiftly so that the economic stimulus gains momentum. "The government plans to take up around Rs 111 lakh crore under the National Infrastructure Pipeline project. While several attempts have also been made in the past to create a DFI, for different reasons there is currently no bank or institution which can take long-term risk and fund development projects. There are over 6,000 brownfield and greenfield projects which need to be funded," she added.

Kesoram sells junk-rated bonds offering 21% yield



RAHUL SATIJA &
SUVAISHREE GHOSH
MARCH 16

Goldman Sachs Group Inc, Cerberus Capital Management and Edelweiss Financial Services Ltd bought into a junk-rated rupee bond sale, a rare issue yielding as much as 21 per cent.

The firms invested in the Rs 1,600-crore (\$221 million) issuance from Kesoram Industries Ltd through various vehicles, according to an exchange filing on Tuesday. The Indian cement manufacturer defaulted on its debt last year and is working to restructure repayments.

The investments reflect growing interest in Indian distressed assets. Global heavyweights such as Apollo Global Management Inc and Oaktree Capital Group have either struck deals or scaled up their local

teams in recent years to bet on businesses struggling to stay afloat in the nation, which has a worsening pile of bad loans.

Kolkata-based Kesoram, whose history dates back over 100 years, this month allotted equity shares and preference securities to 10 creditors as part of its plan to restructure debt. Funds from the bond sale will be used in part to repay existing loans and overdue liabilities.

Kesoram hadn't complied with certain financial covenants and defaulted on Rs 4,600 crore of debt as of December 31, the company said in a statement last month.

As security, the company's founder unit Manav Investment and Trading Co also pledged 3.175 million shares, or 1.93 per cent, of the total share capital for the bond investors.

—Bloomberg

Kalyani Rafael rolls out surface-to-air missile

FC BUREAU
HYDERABAD, MARCH 16

Kalyani Rafael Advanced Systems (Kras), a joint venture between Pune-based Kalyani Group and Israel's defence equipment major Rafael Advanced Defense Systems (RADS) on Tuesday rolled out its first batch of medium range surface-to-air missile (MR-SAM) for the Indian Army and the Air Force.

The six-year-old defence joint venture firm was awarded the contract to manufacture 1,000 medium range missile kits in July 2019 for the Indian Army. The missile sections will be sent to PSU Bharat Dynamics Limited for further integration.

The missiles known as Barak 8 were co-developed by Israel and India. The missile was expected to play crucial role in the air defence systems.

The system extends the range of Israel's aerial defence and should be operational in about two years. Israel tested fired it in 2018, while India tested it last year.

Barak-8 incorporates phased array multi-mission radar, two-way data link, and a flexible command and control system, enabling users to engage multiple targets day and night.

"This is the beginning of a new era, filled with self-confidence," said Baba Kalyani, chairman, Kalyani Group, on the development.

India home to 4.12 lakh millionaire households

Mumbai, March 16: With 56,000 dollar-millionaire households, Maharashtra leads the country in wealth creation, followed by Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Gujarat, says a report.

These states together account for 46 per cent of the 4.12-lakh millionaire households in the country.

According to a wealth report by Hurun India, known for its annual rich list, there were 4.12 lakh dollar-millionaire households last year in the country, which has been one of the fastest wealth-creating economies producing the third-most number of billionaires annually.

A household having an annual income of more than \$1 million is considered as a dollar-millionaire household.

Maharashtra—which has the highest GSDP among all the states contributing around 16 per cent of national GDP—has 56,000 dollar-millionaire households last year. Between FY13 and FY19, the state's economy has been growing annually at 6.9 per cent and the state is also home to 247 richest individuals.

Uttar Pradesh has the second largest number of millionaire households at 36,000. Its economy has been annually growing at 10.6 per cent in the past one decade.

At the third spot is Tamil Nadu with 35,000 dollar-millionaire households. In the past five financial years, its economy has clipped at 12.2 per cent annually. The state is also home to 65 of the



HURUN INDIA REPORT

- ▶ Maharashtra leads the country in wealth creation, followed by Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Gujarat
- ▶ Other states in the top ten list of dollar-millionaire households are West Bengal, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, MP and Telangana
- ▶ Mumbai has 16,933 millionaire households, followed by Delhi with 15,861 households

richest Indians.

Karnataka is ranked fourth with 33,000 households having an annual income of over \$1 million. The state has been growing almost 10 per cent for many years now and its per capita income jumped 11 times in the last two decades. The state is home to 72 of the richest individuals in the country, as per the report.

Gujarat is home to 29,000 dollar-millionaire households and is placed at the fifth position. The state has 60 of the richest Indians.

Other states in the top ten list of dollar-millionaire households are West Bengal (24,000), Rajasthan (21,000) and Andhra Pradesh (20,000). Madhya Pradesh and

Telangana each have 18,000 millionaire households.

When it comes to cities, Mumbai—which generates 6.2 per cent of the national GDP—leads with 16,933 millionaire households, followed by Delhi with 15,861 millionaire households.

The national capital contributes 4.94 per cent of the country's GDP.

Kolkata is home to nearly 42 per cent of the 24,000 millionaires households in the state.

Bengaluru comes fourth with around 7,582 millionaire households.

With 4,685 millionaire households and home to 37 of the richest Indians, Chennai is at the fifth position.

—PTI

Retail sales inch closer to pre-Covid levels

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 16

Retail sales have inched closer to pre-Covid levels in February, led by positive growth in QSR and consumer durables.

Retail sales across categories in February have reached 93 per cent of pre-Covid levels—down by just 7 per cent. The sales have picked up from a year-on-year decline of 18 per cent in the December quarter.

The recovery has been led by consumer durables and quick service restaurants (QSR) categories, which have shown positive growth of 15 per cent and 18 per cent, respectively, in February. In January both the categories had registered growth of 10 per cent.

"Except for states like Maharashtra, where Covid cases are rising, the restaurant business has seen recovery in other places. Generally take-aways and deliveries have improved, but dine-in has still not reached pre-Covid levels," said Dilip Datwani, spokesperson for the Federation of



Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India.

According to him, the low base of February 2020 too has helped the growth. "In February 2020, the fear had already set in and this had started affecting the restaurant business. Against this lower base, we are seeing a growth this February," he said.

Consumer durables, especially cooling devices, had started moving in February. As summer last year was a washout due to the lockdown, the low base has helped consumer durables as well.

"It is heartening to see recovery across categories. We hope that the uncertainty regarding the rising cases of Covid-19 in a few states will not cast

its shadow on the growth momentum with the roll-out of the vaccine. Restrictions or not, it has now become imperative for every retailer to adopt phygital in various ways—be it social media, messaging platforms, or digital shopping in addition to their normal channels—to align themselves with the changing consumer mindsets of the Next Normal," said Kumar Rajagopalan, CEO, Retailers Association of India (RAI).

However, categories like footwear, beauty, wellness & personal care, sports goods and food & grocery have still registered decline in February, despite showing steady month-on-month recovery.

Recovery in retail has been happening across different regions, though in a varying manner. Eastern India has recorded a positive growth of 2 per cent in February, while southern and northern regions are closer with -6 per cent and -9 per cent growth, respectively. Western India has progressed slower at -16 per cent.

UK startup pickles carbon dioxide to make chicken feed

AGNIESZKA DE SOUSA
MARCH 16

UK startup Deep Branch secured funds from backers, including French oil giant Total SE, for its plan to turn carbon dioxide emissions into food for chickens, fish and pigs.

The company uses a fermentation process similar to winemaking or pickling, except that microbes feed on CO2 and hydrogen instead of sugars. The result is a 70 per cent protein product called Proton that can replace conventional livestock feed such as fishmeal and soybeans. The agriculture

industry's reliance on the two ingredients has been linked to the depletion of wild fish stocks and caused large-scale deforestation.

"We can be price competitive with those ingredients without being bad for the planet," chief executive officer Peter Rowe said in an interview. "Not only is it a way to produce protein where you don't require farmland and deforestation or overfishing, but also because the total carbon footprint of it is extremely small."

Deep Branch said on Tuesday it raised 8 million euros (\$9.5 million) for a

pilot project to scale up its technology. Investment fund Novo Holdings A/S and DSM Venturing led the financing round, which also included Barclays Sustainable Impact Capital. It brings the company's funding to about 13 million euros.

The startup is one of several using fermentation technology to develop more sustainable protein. US-based Air Protein and Finland-based Solar Foods are working on converting gases into food, while in India, String Bio recycles methane into protein for animals.

—Bloomberg

TIKTOK PARENT BYTEDANCE EYEING CHIPS FORAY



ZHEPING HUANG
MARCH 16

The standout Chinese startup ByteDance Ltd has begun hiring employees for a possible push into semiconductors, exploring an expansion well beyond the hit video app TikTok for which it is best known.

The Beijing-based company has posted at least a dozen job openings related to semiconductors, including hardware and software engineers in cities like Shanghai and Beijing. A spokesperson for the company confirmed it's hiring talent as it explores initiatives in the field, including building server chips based on Arm Ltd designs.

ByteDance, founded by Zhang Yiming, has become the most valuable startup in the world on the success of TikTok and its domestic clone, Douyin. The company, last valued at about \$180 billion, is said to be exploring an initial public offering for some of its businesses in Hong Kong, including Douyin.

In pushing into chips, Zhang is delving into a business that has become a top priority for China's Communist Party. During the National People's Congress this month, the government pledged to boost spending and drive research into cutting-edge chips and artificial intelligence, in an effort to vie with the US for global influence.

Baidu Inc, the dominant search provider in China and a ByteDance rival, recently raised \$230 mn for its AI chip division. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Mann books slot for Oly qualifiers

New Delhi: National champion Sandeep Singh Mann booked the 74kg slot in the Indian wrestling team for the upcoming Asian Olympic Qualifiers, edging out comeback-man Narsingh Pancham Yadav and seasoned Amit Dhankar in the trials, held here on Tuesday. The 74kg being the most competitive category, bouts were close despite absence of two-time Olympic medalist Sushil Kumar, who opted to skip trials, saying he was not prepared. Sandeep beat Dhankar 2-1 in the final bout, earning the right to be on the flight to Almaty, Kazakhstan where the Olympic Qualifiers will be held from April 9-11. Sandeep had got the better of Narsingh Yadav 4-3 in the semi-finals. Amit had made the final after winning his semifinal against Jitender Kinha on criteria. He scored the last point in the 3-3 tie to emerge winner. — *PTI*

Diya retains youth national TT crown

Indore: Defending champion Diya Chitale retained the youth girls title with a hard-fought win while Swastika Ghosh came from behind to claim her maiden junior girls crown at the UTT 82nd Junior and Youth National Table Tennis Championships here on Tuesday. Diya's 4-3 win was full of a character-assessment lesson for any youngster watching the match, as the Maharashtra paddler, down 2-3 and 3-5 in the sixth game, first built up confidence and then the points to outsmart Karnataka's Yashaswini Ghorphade. Meanwhile, Swastika, also from Maharashtra, claimed the junior girls title with a 4-2 victory over Haryana's Suhana Saini in the final. Suhana had everything going for her until the second game. She took the vital 2-0 lead, winning the second game on extended points. — *PTI*

Ankita, Sania to lead challenge

New Delhi: Country's best singles player Ankita Raina and veteran Sania Mirza will lead India in the next month's Billie Jean King Cup World Group Play-offs away tie against formidable Latvia as the AITA named a five-member team on Tuesday for the tournament. The team also have Karman Kaur Thandi, Zeel Desai and Rutuja Bhosale. The All India Tennis Association selection committee picked the team after a virtual meeting on Tuesday. Riya Bhatia, who was a playing member last year, will be the reserve player of the team, which will be captained by Vishal Uppal. Unlike the Davis Cup, where doubles is played as third match after the two singles and before the two reverse singles, in the Billie Jean King Cup format, doubles is played as the last match. — *PTI*

LeBron leads LA Lakers rout

Los Angeles: LeBron James bagged his fourth triple-double of the season as the Los Angeles Lakers thrashed the Golden State Warriors 128-97 on Monday. James finished with 22 points and 10 rebounds as the Lakers dominated almost from start to finish for an impressive win on the road. Stephen Curry led the Golden State scoring with 27 points but the much hoped-for duel with All-Star game team-mate James never materialised as the Dubs struggled to contain the Lakers' offense. — *AFP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

India vs South Africa women: Fifth ODI from 9 am on Star Sports 2

BADMINTON

All England Open: Round of 32 matches from 2.30 pm on Star Sports 2 HD, Star Sports 3

FOOTBALL

Italian League: Torino vs Sassuolo from 7.30 pm on Sony Ten 2; Juventus vs Napoli from 11.15 pm on Sony Six, HD

Champions League: Chelsea vs Atletico Madrid from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2; Bayern Munich vs Lazio from 1.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1

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BUTTLER HOUSE

Jos quickfire floors India in third encounter

Ahmedabad, March 16: Virat Kohli's brilliance wasn't good enough to paper over an otherwise inept Indian batting performance as England humbled the hosts by eight wickets in the third T20 International to take a 2-1 lead in the five-match series, here on Tuesday. Eoin Morgan unleashed his fast bowlers Mark Wood (3/31) and Chris Jordan (2/35) to restrict the hosts for 156 for six, which the visitors surpassed easily in 18.2 overs, riding on Jos Buttler's unbeaten 83 off 52 balls.

Skipper Kohli had mistakenly said at the toss that his team led 2-1 but Morgan, in his 100th T20 International appearance, made sure that opposite happened. Buttler showed his mastery in white ball format after Kohli single-handedly carried the team to a reasonable score with an unbeaten 77 off 46 balls.

Buttler in the Powerplay pounced on Shardul Thakur and Yuzvendra Chahal in successive overs and England were never in danger of falling behind the run-rate after that.

He played the pacers and spinners with comforting ease, playing reverse slog sweeps interspersed between the lofted straight hits into the empty stands. In all, Buttler hit five fours and four sixes.

More than the Buttler's blade, the difference between two sides was the sheer pace generated by England pacers after Morgan won another good toss.

Mark Wood rocked the Indian top order during the Powerplay overs and even Kohli's magnificence wasn't good enough to save the night for the 'Men In Blue'.



England's Jos Buttler (right) congratulated by batting partner Dawid Malan after scoring half century against India in the third T20 at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Tuesday. England won by 8 wickets. — *AP*

SCORECARD

India: Rohit Sharma c Jofra Archer b Mark Wood 15, K.L. Rahul b Mark Wood 0, Ishan Kishan c Jos Buttler b Chris Jordan 4, Virat Kohli (not out) 77, Rishabh Pant run out (Jos Buttler/Sam Curran) 25, Shreyas Iyer c Malan b Mark Wood 9, Hardik Pandya c Jofra Archer b Chris Jordan 17. Extras (b-1, lb-5, w-3) 9. **Total (for 6 wks, in 20 overs) 156.** **FoW:** 7-1, 20-2, 24-3, 64-4, 86-5, 156-6.

Bowler: Adil Rashid 4-0-26-0, Jofra Archer 4-0-32-0, Mark Wood 4-0-31-3, Chris Jordan 4-0-35-2, Ben Stokes 2-0-12-0, Sam Curran 2-0-14-0.

England: Jason Roy c Sharma b Chahal 9, Jos Buttler (not out) 83, Dawid Malan st Pant b Washington Sundar 18, Jonny Bairstow (not out) 40. Extras (b-4, lb-2, w-2) 8. **Total (for 2 wks, in 18.2 over) 158.** **FoW:** 1-23, 2-81.

Bowling: Bhuvneshwar Kumar 4-0-27-0, Shardul Thakur 3-2-0-36-0, Yuzvendra Chahal 4-0-41-1, Hardik Pandya 3-0-22-0, Washington Sundar 4-0-26-1.

India women look to end series on a winning note

Lucknow, March 16: The series already out of their grasp, the Indian women cricketers, who are struggling to put together a cohesive team show, will have pride at stake when they clash with South Africa women in the fifth and final ODI, here on Wednesday.

Barring the convincing nine-wicket win in the second match, the Indian women have barely fired in unison while the South Africans, who have already clinched the series 3-1, have excelled as a team.

To be fair to the home side players, they were a bit rusty as they are playing their first international series after more than a year due to

● **Barring the convincing nine-wicket win in the second match, the Indian women have barely fired in unison while the South Africans, who have already clinched the series 3-1, have excelled as a team.**

the Covid-19 pandemic while South Africa recently beat Pakistan 3-0 at home.

The Indian team also missed the flair of young Shafali Verma at the top of the order and the experience of Shikha Pandey in bowling department. Indian spin-

ners, save Rajeshwari Gayakwad (5 wickets from 4 matches), were a big let down on the slow tracks and that has played a big part in India's series loss when the South Africans chased down 249 and 267 in the third and fourth matches.

Senior leg-spinner Poonam Yadav could not get a single batter out in the four matches she has played so far. Veteran pacer Jhulan Goswami continued to be the pick of Indian bowlers as she topped the bowling charts with eight wickets from the three matches she has played but she did not get much support from her colleagues except for spinner Gayakwad. — *PTI*

UAE players get 8-yr ban for corruption

Dubai, March 16: The ICC on Tuesday slapped eight-year bans on United Arab Emirates (UAE) cricketers Mohammad Naveed and Shaiman Anwar Butt for their attempted role in trying to fix matches in the T20 World Cup qualifier in 2019.

The bans are backdated to October 16, 2019, when they were provisionally suspended for attempting to corrupt matches and found guilty of breaching global body's Anti-Corruption Code.

The 33-year-old former captain and right arm pacer Naveed has played 39 ODIs and 31 T20 Internationals for his country, while 42-year-old middle-order batsman Butt has played 40 ODIs and 32 games in the shortest format.

"Mohammad Naveed and

Shaiman Anwar represented their adopted country, the UAE at the highest level in cricket," Alex Marshall, ICC General Manager — Integrity Unit, said in an ICC release.

"Naveed was the captain and leading wicket taker. Anwar was the opening bat. Both had long international careers and were well versed in the threat from match fixers.

"That they both chose to engage with this corrupt activity was a cynical betrayal of their positions, their teammates, and all supporters of UAE cricket."

Naveed was also found guilty of breaching the following two counts of the Emirates Cricket Board Anti-Corruption Code for Participants of the T10 League 2019: — *PTI*

BCCI INVITES BIDS FOR BOARD, IPL DIGITAL ASSETS

New Delhi, March 16: The BCCI on Tuesday invited bids for its digital properties as well as those of the Indian Premier League through a tender process.

The Board said it is issuing two Request for Proposals (RFP), one concerning its website and mobile applications and the other relating to the same properties regarding the IPL.

"The BCCI invites bids to provide services in relation to the design, hosting and maintenance of the Digital Properties of BCCI through a tender process," the BCCI Secretary Jay Shah said.

"The BCCI is issuing two Request for Proposals (RFP) — for Digital Properties of BCCI i.e., BCCI website and BCCI Mobile Applications for BCCI international and domestic Matches and for Digital Properties of IPL i.e., IPL website and IPL Mobile Applications for IPL Matches." — *PTI*

ALL ENGLAND | CHAMPIONSHIPS

Best chance for Sindhu to excel

Birmingham, March 16: World champion P.V. Sindhu will look to shrug off her demoralising Swiss Open final defeat and take advantage of a depleted field when she spearheads India's challenge at the prestigious All England Open Badminton Championships, beginning here on Wednesday.

Sindhu looked a pale shadow of herself in her defeat against Carolina Marin, going down without much fight as she struggled to contain errors.

Carolina, the three-time world champion from Spain, though has pulled out of the prestigious tournament due to an injury, taking some shine off of the event.

Also missing in action will be the Chinese, Koreans and Chinese Taipei shuttlers, who decided not to compete in the Super 1000 event as it is not part of the Tokyo Olympic qualification period.

It affects the quality of the competition but also provides the 19-member Indian contingent an opportunity to go deep in the draw and recapture the trophy which has been won by just two Indians so far — the legendary Prakash Padukone (1980) and P. Gopichand (2001).

While former world number one Saina Nehwal had

● **Carolina Marin, the three-time world champion from Spain, though has pulled out of the prestigious tournament due to an injury, taking some shine off of the event. Also missing in action will be the Chinese, Koreans and Chinese Taipei shuttlers.**

a runner-up finish in 2015, Sindhu's best finish was a semifinal in 2018 but none of the other Indian shuttlers have been able to go deep in the tournament till now.

Sindhu will again be one of the top contenders but Saina is nowhere near her best with just two quarter-final finishes to show in the last two years.

Among other Indians, former No. 1 Kidambi Srikanth and young men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, currently ranked 10 in the world, had a good run in Swiss Open and will look to put their best foot forward.

Fifth seed Sindhu will kick off her campaign with a clash against Malaysia's Soniia Cheah. — *PTI*

DHANALAKSHMI PIPS DUTEE FOR 100M GOLD, HIMA DISQUALIFIED

Patiala, March 16: National record holder Dutee Chand was beaten to second place by S. Dhanalakshmi, while Hima Das was disqualified after a false start in a much-anticipated women's 100m sprint final in the Federation Cup Senior National Athletics Championships here on Tuesday.

The 22-year-old Dhanalakshmi of Tamil Nadu took the gold by clocking 11.39 seconds ahead of Dutee (11.58) of Odisha to become the fastest woman of the championships on the second day of competitions at the NIS Campus.

Another Tamil Nadu runner Archana Suseendran was third in 11.76.

This was after Hima, who was running in the shorter sprint races of 100m and 200m instead of her pet event 400m, was disqualified after a false start.

The much-anticipated final did not live up to the expectations as Hima was shown the red card, while Dutee and Dhanalakshmi did not come anywhere near the Olympic qualification mark of 11.15 seconds.

Dhanalakshmi had qualified for the finals as the fastest runner with a time of 11.38 in the preliminary round on Monday and she did not make any improvement in her timing on Tuesday. The same was in case of Dutee, who had run 11.51 on Monday. — *PTI*



Barcelona's Lionel Messi scores against Huesca in their Spanish League match at the Camp Nou Stadium in Barcelona on Monday. — *AFP*

Messi levels Xavi's record in Barca win

Madrid, March 16: Lionel Messi scored a spectacular double the same night he equalled Xavi Hernandez's appearance record for Barcelona, the Argentinian inspiring his team to a 4-1 win over Huesca on Monday.

Messi tied Xavi's 767 games in all competitions for Barca and marked yet another milestone with a brilliant brace, a curling effort in the first half flying in off the crossbar at Camp Nou before a late shot nestled in the corner.

Antoine Griezmann had earlier followed suit with another impressive shot into the top corner before Huesca pulled one back, Rafa Mir converting a doubtful penalty on the stroke of half-time.

But Messi helped Barca pull away, sending in a cross for Oscar Mingueza to head in and then scoring

his second as the Catalans moved to within four points of league leaders Atletico Madrid.

Messi's performance had all the key elements of the 33-year-old's genius. In a game that celebrated his longevity, he showed his class with perhaps his best goal of the season, his creativity with an assist and his consistency, by making it 13 consecutive campaigns that he has reached 20 La Liga goals.

Barcelona, meanwhile, continue their own excellent form, with 11 wins and a draw from their last 12 matches putting them within sight of Atletico, who they still have to play at home in May.

"You're (Messi) still breaking records," said Luis Suarez. "I think this one says a lot about you as a player and what you represent for Barca." — *AFP*