

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
KARIMNAGAR | SATURDAY | 6 MARCH 2021

WEATHER

Max: 36°C
Min: 17.4°C
RH: 22%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Partly cloudy sky. Haze. Max/ Min temp. 37/18°C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Bahula Ashtami till 6.13 pm
Star: Jyesta till 9.39 pm
Variyam: Nil
Durmuhurtam: 6.34 am to 8.08 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
HIJRI CALENDAR
Rajab 21, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.31 am
Zohar: 12.37 pm
Asar: 4.43 pm
Maghrib: 6.30 pm
Isha: 7.36 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.23 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.30 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 12.32 PM
MOONSET TODAY 11.57 AM

COUNTER POINT



We have a tie-up with one party, a secret pact with another, and an understanding with the rest!

SHORT TAKES

OTT regulations are toothless: SC

New Delhi: The Supreme Court Friday said the Centre's guidelines on regulating social media lacks teeth and do not have any provision for taking action for prosecution or punishment against digital platforms. The court also granted interim protection from arrest to Amazon Prime Video's India head Aparna Purohit in FIRs lodged over web series Tandav. It asked her to co-operate with the investigation.

Gold tumbles below ₹44,000

New Delhi: Gold prices on Friday tumbled by ₹522 to ₹43,887 per 10 grams in the national capital, due to muted trend in the international markets, according to HDFC Securities. The metal had closed at ₹44,409 per 10 grams in the previous trade. Silver crashed by ₹1,822 to ₹64,805 per kg as compared with the close of ₹66,627 per kg.

■ Report on Page 7

Abdullah contests ED attachment

Srinagar: National Conference president and former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah has challenged an Enforcement Directorate order attaching his residential and commercial properties worth ₹12 crore. Party MP Hasnain Masoodi said the petition challenging the ED order was filed before the Jammu and Kashmir HC here on Wednesday.

Swiss to vote on burqa ban

Geneva: At a time when seemingly everyone in Europe is wearing masks to battle Covid-19, the Swiss go to the polls Sunday to vote on a long-laid proposal to ban face-coverings, both the niqabs and burqas worn by a few Muslim women and the ski masks and bandannas used by protesters. The issue strikes at the intersection of religious freedom, security, and women's rights.

NATION | 4

Accused implicates Vijayan in smuggling

deccanchronicle.com, facebook.com/deccannews, twitter.com/deccanchronicle



IT and industries minister K.T. Rama Rao poses for a selfie at a CII Telangana conference in Hyderabad on Friday. The minister criticised the BJP-led government at the Centre on Friday for holding up sanctions for several new projects in the state. He said the Centre was making a lot of money from Telangana state through collection of various taxes but it does not give much in return.

— DEEPAK DESHPANDE

State economy bucks negative growth trend

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

Despite the Covid-induced economic slowdown, Telangana state has “outperformed” various and registered a 1.35 per cent GSDP growth in the current fiscal 2020-21.

The state also registered 0.61 per cent growth in per capita income, according to data submitted to the Centre by the state government's Directorate of Economics and Statistics. The growth rate is better than the national average.

The government has put the GSDP (state's GDP) at

₹9,78,373 crore and per capita income at ₹2,27,145. At the national level, the GDP was ₹203.51 lakh crore last year. This year, in 2020-21, it fell to ₹195.86 lakh crore, amounting to a decrease of 3.8 per cent. At the national level, the per capita income decreased by 4.8 per cent.

It came down from ₹1,34,186 in 2019-20 to ₹1,27,768 in 2020-21. Telangana's per capita income on the other hand increased from ₹2,25,756 to ₹2,27,145.

Telangana has been registering over 12 per cent GSDP growth since its for-

mation in 2014. This yet is the lowest-ever GSDP growth in the state at 1.35 per cent in 2020-21.

In 2014-15, the GSDP growth was 12.02 per cent, which shot up to 14.24 per cent in 2015-16. It fell slightly to 13.92 per cent in 2016-17, maintained steady growth at 13.93 per cent in 2017-18, 13.41 per cent in 2018-19 and 13.49 per cent in 2019-20.

Thanks to the Coronavirus pandemic, the subsequent lockdowns and the economic slowdown in 2020-21, the GSDP growth rate fell sharply to 1.35 per cent.

2 Dubai returnees catch UK strain

PULI SHARATH KUMAR | DC
JAGTIAL, MARCH 5

Two Dubai returnees of Jagtial district were tested positive to the UK strain of Covid-19. One was a native of Muthyampet village of Malayal mandal and the other a native of Venkata-pur village of Korutla mandal.

When they landed at the RGI airport in Shamshabad on February 25, their samples were tested positive for Covid-19 and they were asked to remain in home quarantine. District health officials later shifted both to the TIMS hospital in Gachibowli.

On Friday, the health officials held a medical

camp in Muthyampet village and did the rapid antigen tests on the family members and others who came in contact with the Dubai returnee.

The medical tests were done on 14 primary contacts. Out of these, six were tested positive.

■ Page 2: Samples sent to Hyderabad for testing

HC contempt verdicts worry babus

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar has created a record of sorts, though for the wrong reasons, leading a group of officers facing the highest number of contempt of court cases in the Telangana High Court.

Recently, Chief Justice Hima Kohli categorically said that contempt of court is a reflection of the wilful disobedience exhibited by the executive on the judiciary. Contempt cases drew attention following

AS MANY AS 324 contempt cases have been filed against Somesh Kumar since 2013.

RAJESHWAR TIWARI, former special chief secretary, revenue, follows the Chief Secretary with about 120 cases.

SOME CASES have been dropped as they later implemented the court orders, but most cases are still pending.

the recent three-month imprisonment slapped on a collector while two other officers were given the option of deciding between imprisonment and social service.

As many as 324 contempt cases have been filed against Somesh Kumar since 2013. Rajeshwar Tiwari, former special chief secretary, revenue, follows the Chief Secretary with

about 120 cases. Some cases have been dropped as they later implemented the court orders, but most cases are still pending.

Though he becomes the de-facto respondent on behalf of the state government by virtue of his position as the Chief Secretary, Somesh Kumar had faced or is still facing many contempt charges for “wilful disobedience” in his other capacities also.

Inquiries by *Deccan Chronicle* revealed that the top officials had to face contempt for not imple-

menting orders relating to cases as small as sanction of financial assistance to patients from the Chief Minister Relief Fund.

While some cases pertain to demolitions against court orders, others relate to inaction against court directives to demolish.

“The root-cause for contempt cases getting piled up is a lack of fear of getting punished,” says senior advocate R.N. Hemendranath Reddy.

■ Page 2: Officials blame political bosses for inaction

vide conditions for progress in our bilateral relationship.”

The MEA also said, “Last week, External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar had a telephone conversation with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. A detailed press release was issued outlining the main points of conversation between EAM and his Chinese counterpart. EAM had emphasized that with the completion of disengagement in the Pangong Lake area, the two sides should now move

quickly to resolve the remaining issues along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh. The Senior Commanders in their last meeting (held on February 20) had also noted that the disengagement in the Pangong Lake area was a significant step forward and it provided a good basis for the resolution of other remaining issues along the LAC in the Western Sector. The two sides had a detailed exchange of views at the last meeting of Senior Commanders on the remaining issues.”

WORLD | 5

Beijing tightens control on Hong Kong

SPORTS | 8

Neeraj smashes national javelin record



KCR refuses to bet on sympathy for poll win

Decides to field local BC candidate for Nagarjunasagar seat

L. VENKAT RAM REDDY | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

TRS president and Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao has firmed up his decision to field a local candidate from Backward Classes, belonging to the Yadava community, for the upcoming byelection to the Nagarjunasagar Assembly constituency, according to TRS sources.

Rao is learnt to have taken this decision ostensibly not to bank on any ‘sympathy factor’, which failed to work in the Dubbaka Assembly byelection last December.

This implies that Nomula Bharat, son of Nagarjuna-sagar MLA Nomula Narasimhaiah, will not get the ticket as was widely speculated earlier as Bharath hails from Palem village of Nakrekal mandal in Nalگو-nda dis-

tribut. Narasimhaiah's death has necessitated the bypoll. Rao reportedly assured Bharat of a nominated post soon.

The Chief Minister is learnt to have considered three local candidates from the Yadava community: Peddaboyina Srinivas Yadav (Tripuraram mandal), Mannem Ranjith Yadav and Katteboyina Guravaiah Yadav (Nidam-anuru mandal).

Based on multiple survey reports, he has zeroed in on Guravaiah Yadav, son-in-law of former MLA

Ram-murthy Yadav and a close relative of the party's Rajya Sabha member Badugula Lingaiah Yadav.

An official announcement on Guravaiah's candidature is likely to be made immediately after the Election Commission announces the schedule for the bypoll.

The TRS chief gave a ticket to Solipeta Sujatha, widow of Solipeta Ramalinga Reddy in Dubbaka, relying on the ‘sympathy factor’. However, the BJP defeated the TRS by projecting itself as the principal opposition in the state.

In this backdrop, Rao is being extra cautious in the selection of the candidate where the Congress has decided to field its strongman K. Jana Reddy, who has won seven times from this seat but lost to Narasimhaiah in 2018.

Rao commissioned multiple surveys with various

agencies to get a feel of the pulse of the voters. TRS sources say that all the survey reports indicated that most voters preferred a ‘local’ candidate from the Yadava community which has a major chunk of voters in the Nagarjunasagar segment.

The surveys pointed out that the community had sacrificed the seat to Narasimhaiah, a non-local, in the 2018 Assembly elections respecting his vast political career and his ‘pro-poor attitude’ but they are not keen to support his son Bharat, a political novice.

Despite the fact that TRS leaders from the Reddy community like Gutta Sukhender Reddy, Tera Chinnappa Reddy, Koti Reddy are vying for the party ticket, Chandrashekar Rao is learnt to have favoured a Yadav candidate.

Pant's heroics



Rishabh Pant celebrates after scoring a century in fourth Test against England at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Motera on Friday. Pant's aggressive innings helped India to a comfortable position. ■ Full report on Page 8 — AFP

Police arrest aide of key accused in lawyers' murder

DC CORRESPONDENT
PEDDAPALLI, MARCH 5

Ramagundam police officials have arrested Udari Lakshman alias Lachai-ah, another accused in the brutal murder of advocate couple Gattu Vaman Rao and P. V. Nagamani at Kalvacherla in Ramagiri mandal of Peddapalli district on February 17.

Lachai-ah is the fifth accused to be arrested. He followed the couple, who were advocates practising in the Telangana High Court, like a shadow and kept passing on information about their movements to Kunta Srinu, who finally succeeded in killing the couple along with others at Kalvacherla village.

The fifth accused is stated to have been in the company of Kunta Srinu, Chiranjeevi and Akkapaka Kumar on the day of murder. Lachai-ah is also a native of Gunjapadugu village to which the advocate couple belonged.

After coming to know about the murder, Lachai-ah, along with Kumar, went to Gunjapadugu village through Centenary

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● Lachai-ah has been sent to Karimnagar jail for 14 days' judicial custody.

colony, Rachapally and Kannala Nagaram. He went absconding after police arrested Kumar.

Lachai-ah has been sent to Karimnagar jail for 14 days' judicial custody. Police have produced before the Manthani magistrate nine people as eye witnesses. They include driver and conductor of the bus, in front of which the murder took place, apart from Gattu Kishan Rao, father of murdered advocate Vaman Rao.

BORDER | ROW

Indian foreign minister asks China to quickly resolve all issues

India to China: Step back in other areas

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

India on Friday once again asked China “to ensure that disengagement in the remaining areas (of the Ladakh sector) is completed at the earliest” between the troops of both nations after the completion of disengagement around the Pangong-Tso lake which “alone will lead to the restoration of peace and tranquility and provide conditions for progress in our bilateral relationship”.

It also said the details of

establishment of a hotline between foreign ministers of the two countries “will be worked out subsequently through diplomatic channels”.

In a statement, the MEA said, “It is therefore our expectation that the Chinese side will work with us, both through the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) and Senior Commanders' meetings, to ensure that disengagement in the remaining areas is com-

● IT ALSO said the details of establishment of a hotline between foreign ministers of the two countries “will be worked out subsequently through diplomatic channels”.

pleted at the earliest. This would allow both sides to consider de-escalation of forces in Eastern Ladakh as that alone will lead to the restoration of peace and tranquility and pro-

SHORT TAKES

FOREST DEPT GETS
5,488 FIRE ALERTS
ACROSS STATEDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

The forest department received 410 fire alerts on Friday, 76 of them coming from the Komaram Bheem-Asifabad district. The state has so far received 5,488 fire alerts of which all 3,726 fires were attended to. These fires destroyed 4,167.41 hectares of forests, Nagarkurnool district was worst affected where the fire razed 666.88 hectares.

A total of 314 fires occurred relating to forestry works and 364 relating to the Recognition of Forest Rights (ROFR) Act and encroachments.

In view of the rising number of fires, the forest department on Friday organised an awareness program which saw village sarpanches and others from the Pocharam section in the Medak district in attendance. Officials said that they have planned similar awareness camps in other parts of the state.

CONGRESS: TRS,
BJP HAVE RUINED
HYD BRAND IMAGEDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

Sameer Waliullah, head of the Hyderabad City Congress Committee (HCCC) minorities wing, on Friday blamed both TRS and BJP for ruining the brand image of Hyderabad, which is getting reflected in the way its national ranking has nosedived across sectors.

"Most of the time, it is the citizen's perception that plays a major role in a city earning a rank. The TRS government has failed in consolidating the brand image of Hyderabad. Consequently, this has changed people's perception about the city," he said. He said that the earlier Congress governments worked hard in transforming Hyderabad and made it a global brand. It was on top in Mercer's Quality of Living Index in India in 2015. However, the incumbent government's mismanagement in the last seven years, has destroyed the city's image and also its branding," he said.

SRILAKSHMI ASKS
HC TO QUASH
CBI CASESDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

Y. Srilakshmi, principal secretary in the AP government, has filed an additional affidavit before the Telangana High Court seeking to quash the CBI cases registered against her in relation to granting of mining licence to Obulapuram Mining Company (OMC) and others in Anantapur district when she was secretary, industries and commerce, in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh government.

This adds to her earlier application for quashing of CBI cases which has been pending before the court since 2015.

In the additional application, Srilakshmi said the allegations against her were with regard to the exercise before grant of licence to OMC. The CBI hadn't raised any contentions in its report about granting of licence to the OMC. This shows the allegations of quid pro quo against her were not maintainable.

CYBER FRAUDS
CHEAT WOMAN
OF ₹11 LAKHDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

A woman from Hyderabad was allegedly cheated of ₹11 lakh by inter-state cyber fraudsters who claimed to be NRIs on a matrimonial site.

The Hyderabad cybercrime police said the victim, a dancer, had posted her personal details on a matrimonial site to seek a suitable alliance. She received a call from a man who expressed interest and claimed to be an NRI from the United Kingdom, working with a leading car manufacturer.

After a few weeks of being in touch, they decided to get married. The man then told her that would send her gifts of jewellery and costly gadgets.

Two days later, she received a call from another person claiming to be a Customs official

Protest for salaries



Police detain BJYM activists who were protesting at the Intermediate Board Office in Nampally demanding salaries for college lecturers and to cancel the licence of colleges that are collecting extra tuition fee from students, in Hyderabad on Friday.

— P. SURENDRA

Congress promotes
social justice: Uttam

Rising unemployment, fuel prices will help Cong win MLC polls

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) president N. Uttam Kumar Reddy on Friday said Congress has shown its commitment to social justice by nominating Sabavath Ramulu Naik, a Girijan, as its candidate in MLC elections from Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda graduates' constituency.

He claimed that the no party has ever made an SC or ST leader as its candidate from graduates' constituencies so far. He pointed out that all parties have nominated Reddy community leaders as their candidates for Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda constituency. To ensure social justice, Ramulu Naik was nominated by

Congress president Sonia Gandhi for a general category seat. Therefore, he said, it becomes the duty of entire Congress cadre to work hard for the victory of Ramulu Naik in MLC elections.

Uttam Kumar Reddy slammed the BJP government at the centre and state government in the state for the huge rise in prices of petrol, diesel and cooking gas. He maintained that this itself will majorly contribute for the defeat of BJP and TRS candidates.

The Congress MP accused Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao of doing nothing for the nearly 30 lakh unemployed youth in Telangana, 19 lakh of whom have registered with the Telangana State Public Service Commission (TSPSC). He demanded

that the state government immediately fill all the 1.91 lakh vacancies identified by the Pay Revision Commission (PRC), besides taking measures to generate employment opportunities for the remaining 28 lakh jobless persons. In the interim, the state government should provide the promised allowance of ₹3,016 to all unemployed youth with retrospective effect from December 2018.

The TPCC chief said Prime Minister Narendra Modi too had promised to give two crore jobs every year. Instead of providing 14 crore new jobs since 2014, BJP government's wrong policies have resulted in 18 crore people losing employment.

The Nalgonda MP said TRS MLC Palla

Rajeshwar Reddy has no moral right to seek votes in the MLC elections as he has done nothing for unemployed graduates or youth during the past six years as MLC. He charged that TRS leaders are now trying to win elections by spending their ill-gotten money and supplying liquor to voters.

The TPCC chief asserted that the main contest in the MLC election from Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda constituency is between Congress and TRS. He said voting for Telangana Jana Samithi (TJS) president Prof. M. Kodandaram will be a waste as he is not a strong contender. He said all graduates should unite for victory of the Congress candidate.

TOP COP ATTENDS
WOMEN'S DAY
CELEBRATIONDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

Hyderabad police She Teams organised women's day celebrations at the Begumpet airport auditorium on Friday.

Hyderabad police commissioner Anjani Kumar, Vasundhara Sinha, Chief Commissioner of Income Tax, Hyderabad, and top police officials and Dr Tejaswini Manogna, Miss Earth India, attended the programme.

"It is our tradition to respect women and they are equally empowered in all fields. The representation of women in the police department has increased, 30 per cent," Anjani Kumar said.

Dr Manogna said, "She teams are doing a great job. Every day is women's day," she said, adding, "We can change the world if we take anything as a challenge."

POST | LOCKDOWN

SANJAY SAMUEL PAUL | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

With economic activities back in full force, TSRTC is now playing 80 per cent of its buses in rural areas and 75 per cent in urban areas, compared to pre-Covid-19 times, Corporation officials have said.

The footfall too has risen in urban areas after colleges and schools reopened, they said. It may be recalled that after the janata curfew on March 22, 2020, TSRTC stopped its services for 58 days. When it resumed services across 32 districts on

More people in rural areas take state buses

More people opt for RTC buses

May 19 last year, it operated 6,000 buses. With the lockdown and closure of nearly all public services for a long time, RTC launched cargo services to shore up its revenues. This service has fetched ₹16 lakh a day on an average.

After all lockdown restrictions were lifted, RTC began services by allowing 50 per cent occupancy in its buses, a restriction that has now been removed. In urban areas, the passenger number currently varies between 50% and 60 per cent of pre-Covid times.

TSRTC recovers
income, deposits PFDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

The TSRTC on Friday reported that after the loss-making period during the Covid-19 lockdown, it is slowly earning an average of ₹11 crore every day as revenue.

During the lockdown, the RTC earned about ₹2 crore

by providing bare minimum essential services. The financial turnaround for TSRTC also enabled it to deposit around ₹32 crore into the Provident Fund accounts of its employees, the corporation said, adding that salaries for February were paid on Friday to the employees.

Central govt ignoring
Telangana projects: KTRDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

IT and industries minister K.T. Rama Rao came down heavily on the BJP-led government at the Centre on Friday, saying it is meting out grave injustice to the state since its formation in 2014.

Addressing a conference, 'T-Next: Reimagining and catalysing growth for a sustainable tomorrow', organised by the Telangana chapter of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) here, the minister said several requests from the state government for sanction of new projects remained held up in Delhi.

These included proposals on a dry port, the IT Investment Region (ITIR), the Kazipet rail coach factory, a textile mega cluster, a branch of the National Textile Research Institute and Export Promotion Council, an Indian Institute of Handlooms, technology institutes, a defence incubator, a centre of excellence, a vaccine testing centre, a

● **K.T. RAMA RAO** also took a dig at the Centre's Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India initiatives.

medical devices park, a plastics park and a leather park. All such requests have all fallen on deaf ears, he said.

The minister said the Centre was making a lot of money from Telangana state via collection of various taxes but giving nothing in return.

Rama Rao urged the BJP government to place economics above politics in the interest of the country. "Political considerations should not come in the way of sanctioning strategic projects. I would like to tell the central government that talks about Team India to make sure that they deliver on this promise and help states like Telangana to grow with the support of the industry," he said. The minister also took a dig at the Centre's Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India initiatives, saying mere slogans

will not work unless concrete steps are taken to achieve the desired goals. No company would like to invest under the Make in India programme unless the import duties on machinery are relaxed, he said.

"We sought strengthening of the existing railway network, but there has been no response.

While construction of eight railway lines and survey of three more lines are pending, the proposals from the state for sanction of four new railway lines have been ignored.

While the Centre has sanctioned a bullet train project for Gujarat, it has not allocated even a single corridor to the southern states. Is Telangana not eligible for bullet train project," Rama Rao asked.

"Rather than supporting the Hyderabad Pharma City, the Centre brought the new bulk drugs parks scheme which led to unnecessary competition between major states, delaying establishment of pharma industries here," he alleged.

OFFICIALS BLAME
POLITICAL BOSSES
FOR INACTION

From Page 1

Unfortunately, nowadays implementation (of court orders) has become an exception and violation is the rule of law, he said adding that the courts also should introspect on why they are losing respect.

Hemendranath Reddy, in a contempt case he filed on behalf of former badminton international Chetan Anand, secured a direction from Justice S.V. Bhatt to a tahsildar and a sub-inspector to rebuild the player's sports complex spending ₹45 lakh from their pockets.

Analysing the final outcome of contempt cases, Reddy said the appellate courts very rarely uphold single judges' tough orders and either suspend or dilute the punishment. Data available with the Telangana High Court also revealed that even contempt cases have been pending for almost a decade now.

Senior officials on condition of anonymity however rue that they fall victim due to inaction of their political bosses or pressure from them. "In several cases, the decision has to be taken by the highest political authority and due to inaccessibility and lack of proper mechanism to address these issues, we are facing the music," a senior official pointed out.

SAMPLES SENT TO
HYDERABAD
FOR TESTING

From Page 1

The samples of all 14 people were sent to Hyderabad for further test of the new UK strain.

District medical and health officer P Sridhar suspects the two might have been infected by the new strain while they travelled through the UK.

He said health officials also conducted tests on six primary contacts of another Dubai returnee, of Venkatapur village, and the samples were sent to Hyderabad for RT-PCR tests. The results were yet to come.

Education USA
centre launched
for studentsDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

A new EducationUSA centre that provides advising to students intending to study in the United States was inaugurated in the city on Friday. The centre, will provide US higher educational advising to prospective students free of charge.

The US, is by far, the destination of choice for Indian students. Most of them come from this part of India, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, US Consul General Joel Reifman said after inaugurating the centre in Jubilee Hills.

Underscoring the numbers of Telugu speaking people going to the US to study, Reifman said, "One in four Telugu families has a US connection."

On the issue of granting student visas to the US, Reifman, referring to the changes in education that were forced by the Covid-19 pandemic, said, "Our visa policy has remained constant. The US welcomes all qualified students. We prioritise student visa interviews. One in five international students in the US is Indian."

23,149 SENIOR CITIZENS TAKE COVID JAB

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

As many as 23,149 senior citizens and those aged 45 years and above with co-morbid conditions got vaccinated against Covid-19 in government and private hospitals on Friday, the state health department said.

A total of 1,613 health-care and frontline workers took their first dose of the Covid vaccine during the day and 6,491 who took their second dose.

The bulletin said so far 71,588 senior citizens and those with co-morbid conditions had been vaccinated.

The overall vaccination in the state stood at 5,35,472.

TS RECORDS 166

NEW COVID-19

CASES, 2 DEATHS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

The state found 166 new cases of Covid-19 on Thursday after testing 40,443 samples, the health department said on Friday. It said two persons had succumbed to the disease on Thursday.

The overall caseload now stands at 2,99,572. There are 1,963 active cases undergoing treatment at home and in hospitals, the bulletin said. The death toll stands at 1,639.

Owaisi says YSRC, TD
have unholy ties with BJPDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MARCH 5

The All India Majlis Ittehadul Mussalman (AIMIM) president and Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi has slammed the YSRC and TDP for failing to achieve the Special Category Status (SCS) for Andhra Pradesh even as they had won a huge mandate in successive polls.

"These parties are having an unholy relationship with the BJP at the cost of people's interests," he said on Friday.

● **OWAISI SAID**, "I have no company, no contract work, no pecuniary interest. My mission is to enlighten Muslims of their rights and stand for them against all odds."

Owaisi was addressing a meeting here ahead of the municipal polls. MIM is contesting 9 wards in Adoni and 6 wards in Kurnool where sizeable chunks of Muslim population reside.

Dismissing the criticism over his outreach to Andhra Pradesh, Owaisi said "the MIM

is the face and voice of Muslims". Wherever Muslim population existed, he would go and stand in support of them, he said.

Owaisi said, "I have no company, no contract work, no pecuniary interest. My mission is to enlighten Muslims of their rights and stand for them against all odds." He said privatization of the Vizag Steel was not in the interests of the people. He would raise the issue in the Parliament, he said.

OTHER STORIES

HEALTH CAMP FOR WOMEN COVID WARRIORS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, MARCH 5

A free health camp for women of Covid-19 warriors will be conducted on March 6 at the Government General Hospital premises. The government doctors' association and GGH are conducting the camp. Cervical and breast cancer screening tests, including a pap smear test, will be conducted. The women aged above 30 years suggested attending the health camp. Government general hospital superintendent Prathima Raj, deputy superintendent N. Balaraj said that the camp would be conducted from 9 am to 12 noon.

POLICE DISTRIBUTE SOLAR LIGHTS IN TRIBAL AREAS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOMARAM BHEEM ASIFABAD, MARCH 5

Asifabad police distributed solar bulbs and panels to 50 tribal families in the interior Maosts affected four villages in Govena gram panchayat in Tiryani mandal on Friday.

There is no power supply to Kursiguda, Kolamguda, Nayakapuguda in Govena grampanchayat even today.

Under Police Mee Kosam, the Tiryani police with the support of Kasthuri Foundation distributed the Solar Bulbs and panels for the convenience of the local tribals.

Additional SP Sudheendra and DSP Acheswar Rao and Tiryani SI Ramarao and foundation chairman Charan took part in the distribution of Solar bulbs and panels.

FARMERS PLAN TO START AGITATION TO REOPEN NSF

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, MARCH 5

To reopen the only sugar factory in Telangana's cooperative sector, farmers have decided to take up agitation programmes. They formed the Nizamabad cooperative sugar factory (NCSF) protection committee and gave an ultimatum to the state government to respond on NCSF issue by March 15. Otherwise, they will intensify the agitation in different forms.

Shareholders of NCSF, including sugarcane farmers, employees and workers, constituted a committee of Indur farmers Ethanol producers. The protection committee leaders urged the state government to conduct a meeting with the sugarcane farmers within ten days to decide the fate of NCSF. Otherwise, they will take up padayatra in all villages under NCSF limits from March 15.

They also planned to conduct a public meeting in Nizamabad on April 10. The farmers said that as per the Cooperative Act, 1965, the sugar factory should be handed over to the farmers. "We will run the sugarcane factory with the support of state and central governments and Nabard financial aid", they said. Ethanol production from sugarcane and broken rice juice will be taken up, they explained.

TRS INFLUENCING VOTERS IN MLC POLLS: BJP TO SEC

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

The BJP has told the State Election Commission that the TRS was influencing voters in the upcoming MLC elections, and Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhara Rao's visit to Yadadri on Thursday was a part of this.

A BJP delegation led by former legislator N.V.S.S. Prabhakar met State Election Commissioner Shashank Goyal on the matter on Friday and complained against the Chief Minister, and ministers Niranjan Reddy and Sabita Indra Reddy.

Prabhakar alleged that the TRS was violating the election code and abusing power. He said that the CM's visit to Yadadri was meant to get votes from a section of people. The temple visit only exposed that the CM is scared of the BJP, he said.

Prabhakar claimed that minister Niranjan Reddy had "terrorised" teachers at a meeting and Sabita Indra Reddy had allegedly threatened private school owners.

Drinking water problem in Adilabad tribal areas

Mission Bhagiratha taps are installed but there is no supply

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, MARCH 5

A drinking water problem is looming large in the interior tribal areas with the onset of summer and people are forced to drink contaminated water despite Mission Bhagiratha and putting taps in place. The fact is that water is not being supplied to many villages in tribal areas of erstwhile Adilabad district.

There is every danger of villagers falling victims to diarrhea after drinking water from abandoned wells and polluted water bodies.

Adivasis women of Tukaramnagar village in Utnoor mandal met ITDA project officer Bhavesh Mishra and urged him to take steps to solve the drinking water problem in their village. He promised to solve the drinking water problem as soon as possible.

Thodasam Godu of Tukaramnagar said that they had taken along polluted water in bottles to show ITDA officials the health haz-



Adivasi women of Thukaramguda bring polluted water in bottles to show officials of ITDA, Utnoor in Adilabad two days ago. —BY ARRANGEMENT

ards they were braving.

Villagers from Tukaramnagar in Utnoor mandal said that it would be good if the officials can divert drinking water tanks to their village or at least supply potable drinking water.

Already the water bodies are on the verge of drying up and the villagers are going long distances for getting drinking water while some are bringing water in plastic drums

During marriage functions many are getting affected after eating food cooked with

on bullock carts.

The villagers are now using water from the agriculture wells for drinking purposes and also fetching water from agriculture bores.

Villagers say that there are many leaks in the Mission Bhagiratha water pipelines and water is not reaching the targeted destinations.

During marriage functions many are getting affected after eating food cooked with

● **VILLAGERS FROM** Tukaramnagar in Utnoor mandal said that it would be good if the officials can divert drinking water tanks to their village or at least supply potable drinking water.

● **ALREADY THE** water bodies are on the verge of drying up and the villagers are going long distances for getting drinking water while some are bringing water in plastic drums on bullock carts.

polluted water. Such food poisoning incidents occur during summer because of use of contaminated water.

Thudum Debba leader Purka Bapurao said Adivasis are depending on polluted water for drinking and cooking purposes in many interior villages and added that panchayat raj and rural water supply departments should take steps for supplying quality water in order to avoid untoward incidents.

Farmers, traders to benefit with RRR in TS: Tummala

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MARCH 5

Former minister Tummala Nageswara Rao said that the regional ring road (RRR) - 289.95 kilometers distance-60meters width - linking 20 towns and 125 villages will change the facelift of Telangana in all fronts.

The RRR will give impetus to the economic growth of the state and Hyderabad will shape as one of the major metropolitan cities in India.

He said that RRR will connect the towns like Ibrahimpatnam, Bibinagar, Bommalararamam, Mulugu, Kothur,

Malkapur, Shadnagar, Toopran, Duntli, Sivampet, Narasapur, Daulatabad, Isamilapet, Eddulamailaram and Shankarapalli.

He said that the farm produce and industrial products of Telangana can easily be shifted to ports and other states so easily with it.

Any goods can be shifted from one district to other district without delay by plying on the road.

"The fuel and time will be saved and vehicles' life time will be increased with it. The rural people in Telangana will be benefited more and the farm-

ers can transport vegetables and other essential goods in a speedy manner", he said.

Former minister said that the RRR project corridor is divided into four quadrants with reference to the crossing points of National Highways. The North East Quadrant will cover 93.6 kilometers, South East with 78.150 kilometers, South West with 68.150 km and North West with 50 km. He said that RRR was envisaged for decentralised growth of Hyderabad and proposed to develop multiple sub-centres around Hyderabad.

Rani assures jobless youth of better job prospects

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MARCH 5

Yuva Telangana Party candidate from the Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal graduate constituency Rani Rudrama has promised to bring a workable employment policy in Telangana if she is elected.

She said that she would endeavour to convince the government on the need to issue a job notification calendar every January 1 in order to ensure that recruitment can be completed within six months. "I will try to set up coaching centres for

those jobs and ensure that poor students derive maximum advantage," she said.

Rudrama said that half of the government positions were vacant and no effort was being made to fill them up, which is leading to unemployment.

With regard to the private sector, she said that she would fight for 80 per cent reservation to the locals in all private industries. There is a need to extend loans to youth under self-employment schemes. The loan amounts should be between Rs one lakh and Rs 10 lakh,

she said.

Recalling her campaign experience, she said that by and large graduates were disheartened with the TRS government and were extremely critical of the party nominee Palla Rajeswar Reddy.

She said that Reddy had gone back on her open debate challenge to him on the issue of 'recruitment notifications'. She said that even TRS leaders were not hopeful of Reddy's win and added that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao had lost credibility as no one trusts him now.

MAHA SHIVARATRI JATARA TO BE HELD IN VEMULAWADA

DC CORRESPONDENT
SIRCILLA, MARCH 5

District administration is making elaborate arrangements for Maha Shivaratri Jatara at the famous Sri Raja Rajeshwara Swamy temple in Vemulawada of Rajanna Sircilla from March 10 to March 12. Around 3-4 lakh devotees from all over Telangana as well as neighbouring states are expected to offer prayers on these days to Lord Shiva at the Vemulawada temple, which is also referred to as Dakshina Kashi.

The Municipal Department has been given the responsibility for ensuring sanitation in and around the temple premises while also creating parking facilities at 10 locations.

TRS, BJP blame each other over wagon factory fiasco

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MARCH 5

With the central government making it clear that it does not intend to pursue the matter of setting up a railway coach factory in Kazipet, the locals who have been aspiring for the project were left high dry.

Though the AP reorganisation act indicates that the central government set up the Wagon factory in the newly formed Telangana state, the present BJP government says it does not have a requirement to set up a wagon factory anywhere in the country.

However, political parties, railway unions and railway employees are seriously condemning the decision. In the wake of the MLC elections, the issue is being used as a blame game between the ruling and opposition parties.

While the TRS accuses the union government under the leadership of the BJP for the setback to the aspirations of the people of Warangal, the BJP contends that it was the negligence of the TRS gov-



Kazipet railway station

ernment.

Government Chief Whip and Warangal West MLA under whose constituency the Kazipet railway station falls, Dasyam Vinay Bhaskar said that the BJP has deceived the people of Telangana by denying such a big project to the state.

He warned that the TRS party would organise agitations against the BJP government and intensify the fight until the coach factory is achieved. An effigy of the central government was burnt in front of the railway station on Friday in protest.

MLC candidate supported by the Left parties, K

Jayasaradhi Reddy staged a sit-in in front of the Kazipet Railway station blaming the state and central government for failure in setting up the factory.

Meanwhile, BJP senior leader and former MP G Ram Mohan Rao said the BJP is not to be blamed for the factory as it was the Congress government that shifted it to Kaputala in Punjab in 1984.

"The TRS leaders are raking up the issue only because of the ensuing elections. The coach factory was shifted away from Warangal thrice under the Congress rule but the TRS leaders did not question them," he said.

Warangal no longer 2nd largest city in TS: V.H.R

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MARCH 5

Warangal used to enjoy the status of the second-largest city in Telangana but now the TRS government is leaving Warangal and developing Siddipet, said Congress leader V. Hanumanth Rao while campaigning in Warangal on Friday as part of the Nalgonda-Warangal-Khammam graduates' constituency MLC elec-

tions.

Speaking on the occasion, he reminded that the Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhara Rao has promised that Warangal would be developed on par with Istanbul, the capital of Turkey.

Rao also took potshots at BJP state president Bandi Sanjay for saying that he would carry out surgical strikes in Hyderabad. "Do you know what an actual surgical strike is? There

are rockets in it. It will go under you and make you explode as well," he ridiculed. He said that the TRS and the BJP are one and the same, both parties will support each other in Parliament.

"KCR changed his mind after promising he would make a Dalit as the CM of Telangana. But Sonia Gandhi kept her word and made Bhatti Vikramarka, a Dalit, as the CLP leader," he said.

MAYOR ACCUSED OF THREATENING A PERSON

Hyderabad: Mayor of Hyderabad Gadwal R. Vijayalakshmi was accused of threatening a person on Friday.

Greater Hyderabad SC Cell president C. Ramchander alleged that Vijayalakshmi threatened him over phone on a nala encroachment issue. He asked TRS working president K.T. Rama Rao for protection as he was allegedly facing threat from the city mayor.

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IN BRIEF

RAPE SURVIVOR
SET ABLAZE IN
RAJASTHAN

Jaipur, Mar 5: A 33-year-old rape survivor was set afire in Rajasthan's Hanumangarh district, police said on Friday.

The woman has been admitted to a hospital in Bikaner with serious burn injuries, Golupura Station House Officer (SHO) Omprakash said, adding that Pradeep Vishnoi, who was accused by the woman of raping her in 2018, has been detained for questioning. The incident occurred in the early hours of Thursday.

The victim, who has a daughter, was living with her maternal grandmother following a dispute with her husband, the police said.

A man entered their house premises in the early hours of Thursday, sprinkled kerosene on the floor, knocked on the door and called the woman by her name. As she opened the door, the man dropped a burning stick on the floor, resulting in serious injuries to her, the SHO said.

He said the victim's maternal grandmother has accused Vishnoi of committing the crime and the latter has been detained for questioning.

BRIDE DIES OF
HEART ATTACK
DURING BIDAAI

**AKSHAYA AKUMAR SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 5**

Marriage celebrations turned into mourning in Odisha's Sonepur district on Friday morning as a newlywed bride collapsed and died after suffering a massive heart attack during the 'bidaai' ceremony.

The bride Guptaeswari Sahoo (Rosy), daughter of Murali Sahoo and Menaka of Julunda village, was declared dead by the doctors at the Dunguripalli Community Health Centre before admission.

Rosy tied the knot with Bisikesan Pradhan of Tentulu village in a simple ceremony at the bride's parental house on Thursday evening.

On Friday morning when the family members were preparing for the 'bidaai' (bride leaving father's house for in-law's place) ceremony, Rosy who was crying inconsolably, suddenly fainted and collapsed on the ground.

Family members and relatives of the newlywed couple present at the spot tried to wake up Guptaeswari by sprinkling water on her face. However, she did not gain consciousness. Subsequently, the bride was rushed to the Dunguripalli CHC in a vehicle but the doctors declared her brought dead. The doctors later confirmed that Rosy had died due to cardiac failure.

OVER 16,000 NEW
COVID CASES
REGISTERED

**DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5**

India has registered a cumulative figure of more than 1.9 crore Covid-19 vaccination doses so far and on Friday alone 10.34 lakh vaccine doses were administered.

Out of this, 8.25 lakh beneficiaries were given the first dose while 2.09 lakh health-care and frontline workers received the second dose of the vaccines.

Six states, Maharashtra, Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi, have reported high daily new cases in the last 24 hours, with 84.44% of the new cases coming from these. India on Friday had 16,838 fresh cases and 113 new deaths.

SUPREME | ORDER

**PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5**

A day after emphasizing on the need to screen the programmes telecast on OTT (Over-The-Top) platforms, the Supreme Court on Friday made light of the recent regulations brought by the government to deal with the OTT and social media platforms, saying that they have "no teeth" but only guidelines and no mechanism to ensure no "objectionable contents" are screened online.

Having chided the government for bringing toothless

regulation to deal with social media and OTT platforms, the top court however, in a breather, granted protection from arrest to OTT platform Amazon Prime India head Aparna Purohit. "We direct that the petitioner (Aparna Purohit) shall not be arrested in FIR No. 14/2021 subject to her co-operation with the investigation. She shall appear before the Investigating Officer as and when required," the court ordered.

Purohit had approached the top court for anticipatory bail in connection with

the FIRs registered against her over the controversial 9-part web series Tandav that was released on the internet in January.

Earlier her plea for anticipatory bail was rejected by Allahabad High Court.

A bench comprising Justice Ashok Bhushan and Justice R Subhash Reddy, which had sought the regulations framed on February 25, for its perusal, said, "We went through the Technology intermediary guidelines. But there is no teeth. No power of prosecution. These are just guidelines. No mechanism to

control it. Without legislation you cannot control it."

Taking a dim view of the effectiveness of the regulations brought to regulate social media and OTT platforms, the court asked the government to consider bringing some law that regulate the platforms.

Noting that one of the issues that have cropped up before the court was that of "control and regulation of platform on which web-series are released", the court in its order today said that the perusal of Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines



Tamil Nadu Congress Committee president K.S. Alagiri (L), party's election campaign management observer M. Veerappa Moily and AICC in-charge of Tamil Nadu Dinesh Gundu Rao, during the executive committee meeting, at Sathyamurthy Bhavan in Chennai on Friday.

- PTI

DMK-CPI deal done,
other allies wait

Coalition partners to be announced at a grand meeting

**G BABU JAYAKUMAR &
D SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 5**

The CPI signed a pact to contest in six constituencies for the April 6 State Assembly elections even as the DMK's tough bargaining continued on Friday with the other allies who are keeping their fingers crossed while remaining out of the negotiating table.

Hopes were expressed that all the allies will come around by Saturday as the coalition partners would be announced at a grand public meeting that the DMK is holding near Tiruchy on March 7, when functionaries at all levels would congregate to devise the strategy for the elections, but indications are there that the Congress was not happy with the low number of seats offered to them.

Even the MDMK and the CPM would be considering the proposals of the DMK only after holding meetings with their functionaries and cadre

on Saturday. The series of meeting at the TNCC headquarters remained inconclusive with a tug of war between two groups.

One group in the Congress did not mind the party making a compromise and settling down for a smaller number of seats, while the other group took a belligerent stand, saying that self-respect and honour were more important than that winning a few Assembly seats in the elections.

The disenchanted cadre wanted their party to go it alone rather than accept the crumbs thrown at them by the DMK, though they were conscious of the results if the party went alone.

However, TNCC president K S Alagiri and also MDMK general secretary Vaiko put up a brave front saying that the coalition was intact and that the hitches would be ironed out, though many Congress members felt short-changed by the offer of

BJP ANNOUNCES TO CONTEST 92
OUT OF 126 SEATS IN ASSAM

**MANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, MAR. 6**

The Bharatiya Janata Party on Friday announced that it will contest the ensuing assembly polls in alliance with Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), and United People's Party (Liberal).

The BJP will contest a total of 92 seats out of 126 seats. AGP will contest from 26 constituencies, UPPL will contest from eight constituencies, and one seat has gone to Rabha Joutho

the DMK.

Soon after signing the pact with the DMK, CPI State secretary R Mutharasan told the media that ideology was more important for his party than the number of seats and hence they agreed to contest in six constituencies.

Mancha but they would be fielding their candidate on BJP's party symbol.

Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal will contest the assembly election from Majauli seat, the BJP said while releasing a list of candidates for two phases of the three-phase election.

Assam health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, a key BJP strategist for the north-east, will contest from Jalukbari, a seat that he currently holds.

As of now, the DMK has allotted two seats to the Manithaneya Makkal Katchi, three to the IUML, six to the VCK and another six to the CPI.

The Kongu Makkal Katchi, the CPM and the Congress are yet to finalise the alliance.

Swapna's 'revelations'
put Kerala CM in dock

**GILVESTER ASSARY | DC
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
MAR. 5**

The statement filed by Customs Preventive Commissionerate in Kerala High Court disclosing that gold smuggling accused Swapna Suresh has given a confidential statement alleging chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan's involvement in dollar smuggling, has triggered a political storm in the poll bound state.

Sumit Kumar, Commissioner of Customs, informed the court that in the statements recorded under section 164 CrPC and 108 of the Customs Act, Swapna revealed about the involvement of chief minister, speaker of Kerala and three ministers. She alleged that

● **THE PRIME** accused in gold smuggling case revealed Mr Vijayan's close connections with the previous Consul General of UAE and the 'illegal' monetary transactions.

smuggling of foreign currency was done at the instance of Mr Vijayan and Assembly Speaker P Sreeramakrishnan with the help of the UAE Consulate.

Swapna also revealed Mr Vijayan's close connections with the previous Consul General of UAE and the 'illegal' monetary transactions, Kumar added.

The statement was filed in response to a petition filed by the DG Prisons Kerala, against certain remarks in the order of the Additional CJM (Economic

Offences) Court's on providing security to Swapna who is lodged in Women's Prison, Thiruvananthapuram. The observation in the order will affect the credibility and bonafide of the jail department, argued the state.

The Customs officer said Swapna's statement exposed highly illegal, improper and immoral activities by those occupying high offices. The customs was prepared to produce the copies of the statements before the court in a sealed cover. The statement said Swapna's apprehensions regarding her safety in jail were totally justified.

"They being high profile politicians and holding high positions in the government are capable of hitting back by all means," it added.

'Owner' of car in
Ambani case found
dead in Thane

**SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, MARCH 5**

Amid the demand of the opposition BJP to hand over the investigation into the case of explosives planted near Mukesh Ambani's house Antilia on February 25 to National Investigation Agency (NIA), the Maha Vikas Aghadi government on Friday handed over the enquiry to the state Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS).

Meanwhile, Mansukh Hiren, whose car was found outside Mukesh Ambani's residence in Mumbai, was found dead at Retibunder creek in Thane district. He was missing since Thursday and his kin had registered a missing complaint.

An official of Thane police informed "The body of one Mansukh Hiren whose car was found outside Mukesh Ambani's residence (with gelatin inside it), died by suicide by jumping into Kalwa creek. Accidental Death Report (ADR) registered."

News of his death came within hours after BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis demanded that Hiren be provided police protection. Later, the state home minister informed in the legislative Assembly that Hiren was not the actual owner of the car. "Car's owner was Sam Muten who had given it to Mansukh

Hiren for maintenance of its interior. Hiren had kept the car in his custody when Sam didn't pay for it," he said.

Mr Fadnavis demanded NIA investigation into the case of explosives planted near Reliance Industries chairman's house. However, state home minister Anil Deshmukh rejected the demand saying the state police are competent to investigate it and subsequently in evening, he informed the state Assembly that Maharashtra ATS has been entrusted the responsibility to investigate the case.

Speaking with the reporters on Friday, Mr Deshmukh said that the government has decided to hand over the investigation to the ATS in connection with the case of explosives planted in scorio near Mukesh Ambani's house Antilia on February 25.

Earlier in the afternoon, Mr. Fadnavis expressed his suspicion over API Sachin Vaze's role in the Antilia bomb scare case and therefore, he demanded the probe into it by the NIA. He also raised a question over the several co-incidences pertaining to the presence of Mr Vaze at several places in connection with this case.

He said, "Mr Vaze was the first police officer to reach the spot even before local police. Mr. Vaze also spotted the threat letter."

Mirwaiz Umar not allowed
to offer prayers in Srinagar

**YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, MARCH 5**

Angry crowds on Friday held protests at and outside Srinagar's Jama Masjid after the police prevented chief Muslim cleric and separatist leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq from relocating to the historic place of worship to offer prayers and deliver a sermon.

The authorities had on Wednesday announced that the Mirwaiz is no longer in house detention following which the cleric-cum-politician said he would be addressing the Friday congregation at the Grand Mosque, for the first time in 19 months during which he remained under house arrest.

His party activists and supporters had decorated the passage to the mosque and nearby streets by erecting arches and placing emerald fabric crisscross.

The Mirwaiz who heads a faction of Kashmiri separatist parties' amalgam All Parties Hurriyat Conference was among hundreds of politicians, human rights activists, civil society and trade union leaders and lawyers placed under house arrest or jailed by the authorities ahead of or soon after

Jammu and Kashmir was stripped of its special constitutional status and split up into two union territories on August 5, 2019. Most of them have been set free since.

The police used 'mild force' including firing pellet shotgun to disperse a slogan chanting crowd in the outer compound of the Grand Mosque. Though the police said no one was injured, the local sources said that a woman was hit in the action.

The witnesses said that a police officer caught a press photographer by his collar and a policeman hit another with the gun butt on the back, triggering a protest by media persons covering the incidents.

Kashmir Press Club condemned the "assault" on Shafat Farooq and Saqib Majeed, while discharging their professional duties.

It urged the police authorities to "sensitize" their ranks or "it would be assumed that such intimidation, harassment and assaults are meant to stop journalists from doing their duties".

The Mirwaiz later told this correspondent over the phone that police officials visited him late Thursday evening to say he continued

FLIGHT TEST OF
SFDR TECHNOLOGY
SUCCESSFUL

**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC
BALASORE, MARCH 5**

India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on Friday successfully carried out a flight demonstration based on Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) technology from Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur off the coast of Odisha.

The SFDR was fired at around 10.30 am.

"All the subsystems, including the booster motor and nozzle-less motor, performed as expected. During the test, many new technologies were proven, including Solid Fuel based Ducted Ramjet technology," an official release of DRDO said.

Successful demonstration of Solid Fuel based Ducted Ramjet technology has provided DRDO with a technological advantage which will enable it to develop long range air-to-air missiles. At present, such technology is available only with a handful of countries in the world.

During the test, air launch scenario was simulated using a booster motor. Subsequently, the nozzle-less booster accelerated it to the required Mach number for Ramjet operation.

The performance of the missile was monitored using the data captured by Electro Optical, Radar and Telemetry instruments deployed by ITR and confirmed successful demonstration of the mission objectives. Defence minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the scientists of DRDO, Indian Air Force and the Industry on the successful flight test of SFDR.

ED summons Mehbooba
Mufti for questioning

**YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, MARCH 5**

Former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister and president of People's Democratic Party (PDP), Mehbooba Mufti, has been summoned by Enforcement Directorate (ED) to its headquarters in Delhi for questioning in connection with an alleged money laundering case.

While reacting to it, Ms. Mufti tweeted, "Government of India's tactics to intimidate and browbeat political opponents to make them toe their line has become tediously predictable. They don't want us to raise questions about its punitive actions and policies. Such short sighted scheming won't work".

The ED has asked the former chief minister to present herself before its officials on March 15.

The case in connection

with which she would be questioned was filed by the ED under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) some time ago, reports said.

Earlier this year, J&K police's Criminal Investigation Kashmir (CIK) wing had arrested PDP youth leader Waheed Ur Rehman Parra in connection with an alleged politicians-militants nexus and terror funding case.

This was soon after a special court of National Investigation Agency (NIA) at Jammu had granted him bail in the case which is being probed by it and also ED separately.

The NIA had arrested Mr. Parra on November 25 last year for his alleged "close links" with Kashmiri lawyer Irfan Shafi Mir, who was arrested by the police along with Hizb-ul-Mujahideen commander Syed Naveed Mushtaq alias Naveed Babu, another militant Asif Ahmed Rather

and tainted J&K police officer Davinder Singh in January 2020.

The NIA and J&K police have claimed that Mir had during his interrogation claimed Mr. Parra sought his support during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections for his party candidate Ms. Mufti.

Meanwhile National Conference president and three time chief minister Farooq has challenged the ED's order attaching his six properties worth ₹11.86 crore including his residential houses in twin capitals of Srinagar and Jammu in connection with a probe into alleged scam in Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA) in the high court.

Mr. Abdullah has in his plea said that the properties were either ancestral or acquired before the alleged offence took place and were therefore not involved in any illegal or criminal activity.

SHORT TAKES

TURKEY BLAMES WEATHER FOR CHOPPER CRASH

Istanbul: Turkey's defence minister on Friday blamed bad weather for a military helicopter crash that killed 10 soldiers and a senior commander in the country's restive south-east.

Lieutenant General Osman Erbas, who headed the army's 8th Corps based in the eastern Elazig province, was among those killed in Thursday's accident. The crash was the deadliest since 13 soldiers died in the southeastern Sirnak province near Turkey's border with Syria and Iraq in 2017.

"Based on initial information and witnesses' statements, we determined that the accident occurred due to suddenly changing adverse weather conditions," the Anadolu state news agency quoted Defence Minister Hulusi Akara as saying. Akara and Interior Minister Suleyman Soyulu took teams of senior military figures to the crash site in the southeastern Bitlis province on Thursday.

Defence officials said a formal investigation into the incident had been launched.

The European Union and the United States immediately offered their condolences to the NATO ally. A Turkish diplomatic source said NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also expressed his support in a telephone call with Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.

ISRAEL BOOSTS PLANS FOR IRAN ATTACK

Tel Aviv: Israel's defense minister said his country is upgrading contingency plans to strike Iranian targets if Tehran shows signs of nuclear escalation, the latest sign of rising tensions between the two archenemies.

Benny Gantz told the American cable network *Fox News* that Israel is still working on its plans, but that "we have them in our hands of course." His comments came as President Joe Biden considers re-joining a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers to limit Iran's nuclear program, with some changes to tougher curbs on Tehran's activities. Former President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the atomic accord in 2018 and imposed a so-called campaign of maximum pressure, including sanctions, on Tehran.

Since then, Iran has stepped up uranium enrichment. The U.N. atomic watchdog agency said earlier this week that Iran nearly tripled its stockpile of enriched uranium since November in violation of its deal with world powers. Iran and the Biden administration are deadlocked over how to revive the deal, with Tehran demanding an immediate lifting of sanctions and the U.S. calling on Iran to first return to full compliance with the restrictions of the nuclear agreement.

CHINA HIKES DEFENCE BUDGET TO \$209 BILLION

Beijing: China on Friday hiked its defence budget for the first time to more than \$200 billion, over three times higher than that of India, maintaining a single-digit growth for the sixth consecutive year with a 6.8 per cent increase in 2021.

The hike in defence spending was announced by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on the opening day of the National People's Congress, China's Parliament, amidst a military standoff with India in eastern Ladakh and growing political and military tensions with the United States. This year's planned defence spending will be about 1.35 trillion yuan (about \$209 billion), state-run *Xinhua* news agency reported, adding that the annual defence budget maintains a single-digit growth for a sixth consecutive year.

China's defence budget is about one quarter of the US figure, which is \$740.5 billion for the 2021 fiscal year, it said. Friday's increase is over three times higher than India's defence budget of about \$65.7 billion (including pensions). Last year, China allocated 1.268 trillion yuan (about \$196.44 billion), according to the state-run *Global Times*.

In his 35-page work report outlining China's achievements in 2020 and tasks for 2021, premier Li described last year as a "major success" for the armed forces without mentioning China moving over 60,000 well-armed troops who were mobilised for annual exercises.

Pope's historic Iraq trip



An Iraqi girl in a traditional dress offers Pope Francis a bouquet of flowers at Baghdad airport upon his arrival on Friday. Pope Francis is honouring the victims of one of Iraq's most brutal massacres of Christians by Islamic militants by saying their deaths are a reminder that violence is incompatible with religious teaching. — AFP

China claims veto over HK lawmakers

Beijing, March. 5: China moved on Friday to grant itself veto powers over selecting Hong Kong's lawmakers, part of a campaign to eliminate dissent and ensure a "patriotic" government in the city following huge democracy rallies in 2019.

Legislation to allow China's communist rulers to vet all election candidates in Hong Kong was tabled at the opening of the nation's rubber-stamp parliament in Beijing.

It came a day after dozens of democracy campaigners in the financial hub — including former lawmakers — were jailed under a security law that was passed during last year's parliamentary ses-

● **THE INTRODUCTION of the vetting legislation — expected to be approved next week — was quickly interpreted as one of the final nails in the coffin of Hong Kong's democracy movement.**

sion. The new legislation includes a "qualification vetting system" that will promote "orderly political participation", parliamentary spokesman Wang Chen told reporters.

China had committed to giving Hong Kong a degree of autonomy when it reverted from British colonial rule in 1997.

But it began moving quickly to dismantle the financial hub's democrat-

ic pillars in response to huge and sometimes violent democracy rallies that paralysed the city throughout 2019.

The introduction of the vetting legislation — expected to be approved next week — was quickly interpreted as one of the final nails in the coffin of Hong Kong's democracy movement. "If the measures are passed, as I'm sure they will be, then the voice of the opposition will be effectively silenced," said Willie Lam, China analyst at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

"This will effectively wipe out any remaining opposition." The measure had been widely expected with Beijing officials stat-

ing in the lead-up that only "staunch patriots" — those loyal to the Communist Party — should be involved in governing Hong Kong.

But the proposed rules drew swift condemnation from the European Union, which warned that it may expand existing sanctions on exports to China if the situation worsens.

"The EU calls on the authorities in Beijing to carefully consider the political and economic implications of any decision to reform the electoral system of Hong Kong that would undermine fundamental freedoms, political pluralism and democratic principles," an EU spokesperson said. — AFP

One shot dead in Myanmar

Yangon, March 5: A protester was shot dead in Myanmar on Friday, in the latest round of blood-letting at anti-coup demonstrations as the UN Security Council prepared to meet on the escalating crisis.

Despite an increasingly brutal crackdown by the military authorities that has seen more than 50 people killed, protesters took to the streets again in towns around the country to denounce the February 1 coup.

The violence has brought condemnation from around the world, with the UN rights chief

demanding the junta "stop murdering and jailing protesters", and the Security Council is set to discuss the crisis later Friday.

But despite the mounting international pressure, the generals have shown no signs of heeding calls for restraint.

In Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest city, hundreds of engineers took to the streets crying "Free our leader" in reference to ousted State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, detained by the military since the first night of the coup. A 26-year-old man helping at barriers set up

in the city to slow security forces died after being shot in the neck, medical officials said.

The killing follows the deadliest day of the crackdown so far on Wednesday, when the UN said at least 38 people were killed as graphic images showed security forces firing into crowds and bloodied bodies dragged away.

There were also protests Friday in the central town of Bago and the San Chaung district of the commercial capital Yangon — a hotspot for rallies — where groups of demonstrators sang a song of defiance. — AFP

Huge quake sparks Pacific-wide tsunami alert

Wellington, March 5: Tens of thousands of coastal residents in New Zealand, New Caledonia and Vanuatu fled for higher ground on Friday as a cluster of powerful earthquakes sparked a Pacific-wide tsunami alert.

Warning sirens sounded across Noumea as authorities ordered evacuations amid fears that waves of up three metres (10 feet) were headed towards the French territory.

"People must leave beach areas and stop all water activities, and should not pick their children up at schools to avoid creating traffic jams," emergency services spokesman Alexandre Rosignol told public radio.

In New Zealand, communities along stretches of the North Island were warned to flee as tsunami alert sirens wailed after an 8.1-magnitude quake, which followed earlier tremors in the same region measuring 7.4 and 7.3. "Do not stay at home," the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) said.

"People near the coast... must move immediately to the nearest high ground, out of all tsunami evacuation zones, or as far inland as possible." The largest of the quakes struck around 1,000 kilometres (640 miles) off the New Zealand coast at 8:28 am (1928 Thursday GMT), the US Geological Survey said.



A man looks out onto a beach following a tsunami warning in Orewa, north of Auckland, on Friday. — AFP

It was preceded by two seismic jolts that were also enormously powerful, in an unusually strong cluster even for the Pacific

Prez Biden pats Indo-Americans

Appoints over 55, says they are taking over US

Washington, March 5: Indian-Americans are "taking over the country", US President Joe Biden said on Thursday, referring to the large number of "incredible" professionals from the community holding key positions in his administration.

In less than 50 days of his presidency, Biden has appointed at least 55 Indian-Americans to key leadership positions in his administration ranging from his speech writer to the Nasa, to almost every wing of the government.

"Indian of descent Americans are taking over the country: you Dr Swati Mohan; my Vice President (Kamala Harris); my speech writer, Vinay (Reddy). I tell you what. But thank you. You guys are incredible," President Biden said during a virtual interaction with scientists at Nasa who were involved in the historic landing of Perseverance rover on Mars on February 18.

Indian-American scientist Swati Mohan leads the guidance, navigation, and control operations of Nasa's Mars 2020 mission.

Biden, who was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States on January 20, has created history by appointing at least 55 Indian-Americans to key positions in his administration.

This does not include Vice President Harris,

which is an elected position, and Neera Tanden, who a day earlier withdrew her nomination from the position of Director of White House Office of Management and Budget.

Nearly half of them are women and a sizable number of them are working in the White House. So far, the Obama-Biden administration (2009-2017) has the distinction of appointing the largest number of Indian-Americans in any administration, the previous Donald Trump administration was not lagging far behind as it appointed the first ever Indian-American with a cabinet rank and inside the National Security Council.

The Biden administration has for the first time appointed such a large number of Indian-Americans in the first 50 days of his administration. This past week, Dr. Vivek Murthy testified before a Senate Committee for US Surgeon General and Vanita Gupta is all set to appear for her confirmation hearing for Associate Attorney General Department of Justice.

"It is impressive to see how many Indian-Americans were ready to go into public service. There have been so many additions since we launched our Government Leaders list last month on Presidents' Day. I am so proud to see our community is going from

strength to strength!," eminent Indian-American philanthropist and Indiaspora founder M. Rangaswami said.

While the community is disappointed that Tanden had to withdraw her nomination because of stiff opposition from the Republicans, Indian-American women have reached a new height in the Biden administration. Biden sought to speak with Swati Mohan, Guidance and Controls Operations Lead, Mars 2020. She is not a political appointee though.

Indian-American women appointed by Biden include Uzra Zeya, Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, State Department; Mala Adiga: Policy Director to Dr Jill Biden; Aisha Shah: Partnership Manager, White House Office of Digital Strategy; Sameera Fazili, Deputy Director, US National Economic Council (NEC); Sumona Guha: Senior Director for South Asia at the National Security Council, White House; and Sabrina Singh: Deputy Press Secretary, Vice President White House.

Shanthi Kalathil has been appointed as Coordinator for Democracy and Human Rights, National Security Council, White House; Garima Verma has been named as Digital Director of the Office of the First Lady and others. — PTI

Spain's king seeks to steady crown

Madrid, March 5: Families are frequently a source of embarrassment, but the recent troubles caused by Spanish King Felipe VI's relatives belong to an entirely different realm.

From expedited Covid vaccinations to tax offences and shady financial dealings by family members, Felipe has found himself in a royal mess sabotaging his efforts to clean up the image of Spain's scandal-tainted monarchy.

It has in some ways left him tilting at windmills. Earlier controversies led to him cutting off his own father's allowance, among other steps, but now more may be on the way as he seeks to balance family concerns

with understandable outrage in Spain.

Last week his father, former king Juan Carlos, announced he had settled debt of nearly 4.4 million euros (\$5.3 million) with the Spanish tax office due on the value of previously undeclared private jet flights paid by a foundation based in Liechtenstein.

It was the second such tax settlement in less than three months for Juan Carlos, who went into self-exile in the United Arab Emirates in August as questions mounted over the origins of his fortune.

The former king is the target of three separate probes into his financial dealings.

— AFP

US RECORDS FEWER COVID CASES IN FIVE MONTHS

Washington, March 5: The United States recorded fewer than 40,000 new daily cases of Covid-19 for the first time in five months on Thursday, a piece of promising news as countries across the globe struggle to hold off another infection surge before inoculations become widespread.

With frustration over restrictions having long weighed on populations worldwide, leaders were seeking to balance demands for easing rules while not unleashing another explosion in cases.

In the United States, the world's hardest-hit country, the number of daily cases peaked at nearly 3,00,000 in early January following the Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's holidays.

With cases declining and vaccines rolling out, several US states have begun jettisoning mask-wearing rules — much to the chagrin of President Joe Biden, who called the move "Neanderthal thinking." While his administration says its promise to vaccinate 100 million people in its first 100 days is ahead of schedule, Europe is facing heavy criticism over delays in its inoculation campaign.

The EU drug watchdog said Thursday it had started a "rolling review" of the Sputnik V shot, meaning Russian Coronavirus vaccines could soon be doled out across Europe. — AFP

FILM | FEST

Germany's Maren Eggert wins first 'Gender Neutral' award for her role in 'I'm Your Man'

'Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn' takes the Golden Bear

SUPARNA SHARMA | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

Berlinale, or the Berlin International Film Festival, is considered the most political of Europe's Big 3 (Cannes, Venice and Berlin), and on Friday it again burnished its

reputation by handing over the festival's top award, the Golden Bear, to Romanian writer-director Radu Jude's film, *Bad Luck Banging or Loony*

Porn. The film, which opens with a naughty, kinky pornographic scene, is a dark, funny, disturbing autopsy of a nation that is living in haughty denial of its past while embracing prejudice and bigotry with smug sanctimony.

Celebrating the film's "rare and essential quality of a lasting art work," the six-member jury said in a statement that *Loony Porn* "captures on screen the very content and essence, the mind and body, the values and the raw flesh of



A movie still from *I'm Your Man*.

our present moment in time. Of this very moment of human existence." The Silver Bear for Best

Director went to Dénes Nagy for the Hungarian World War II drama, *Natural Light*. Calling it

"appalling and beautifully shot", the jury said the film was "a portrait of war in which the observant gaze of the director reminds us again of the need to choose between passivity and taking individual responsibility."

German actor Maren Eggert won the first ever gender-neutral Silver Bear Best Performance award (replacing best actor and actress prizes) for her leading role in Maria Schrader's *I'm Your Man*. In the film Eggert plays Alma, a scientist at the

famous Pergamon Museum in Berlin. To get a research fund, she accepts an offer to participate in a bizarre experiment. For three weeks Alma has to live with a rather handsome humanoid robot, Tom (Dan Stevens), who is programmed as her perfect life partner.

If she has a shot at a successful, happy relationship, she is told that it is with Tom, a sum total of Alma-specific algorithms. He can romance, do the dishes, and will always be available for exhilarating

sex. Shot in beautiful Berlin, *I'm Your Man* is about the pursuit of happiness and explores how far humans will go to find love.

Every year the Golden and Silver Bears are handed out at a glitzy ceremony at the 1,600-seater Berlinale Palast theatre. But for this year's 71st edition of the festival, which was truncated and online-only, the trophies will be presented in person, in June, when organisers hope to invite stars for red carpet events and screen films for the public.

DECCAN Chronicle

6 MARCH 2021

To draw votes, Khattar's quota sacrifices growth

The move by the Haryana government to force the private sector to reserve 75 per cent jobs in their establishment for the people of the state is a regressive move. It also appears to be unconstitutional since our Constitution does not discriminate on the ground of place of birth. The decision of the Manohar Lal Khattar government announced last Tuesday is, in fact, shot through with political cynicism.

The ongoing farmers' agitation, which has had a special impact in some northern regions, including Haryana, has left the Khattar government reeling and the so-called "sons-of-the-soil" policy seems a desperate bid to recover some lost ground. Needless to say, it militates against the very thought of "Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat" which Prime Minister Narendra Modi injects into his speeches on a frequent basis.

The Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act 2020 requires companies and other private entities — including trusts and societies — that have more than 10 employees to reserve three-fourths of all jobs where salaries will be below Rs 50,000/- per month for residents of the state or domiciles of Haryana. This is far from being a welfare move as it does not even pretend to efface iniquity. But even if it did so, it will be open to questioning. The basic reason is that such a step impinges on the right of individuals or a group of individuals to choose their business and profession in an open society.

Needless to say, it militates against the very thought of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat' which Prime Minister Narendra Modi injects into his speeches on a frequent basis

If the government forces companies to take steps that may impact employee productivity, then it forces companies to be less than competitive. That goes against the grain of capitalist development. The idea of positive discrimination in a sociologically iniquitous context is for the state to promote through education and employment policies by enlarging opportunity following on appropriate investments, and not to be thrust down the gullet of private players. Obliging the non-government sector to enter the realm of states is a step in the wrong direction as it undermines the legitimacy of the state.

If all states were to follow suit, the mobility of labour and the freedom of Indians to compete anywhere in the country in search of work will be comprehensively stymied as one state will become like another country to other states, requiring work permits and visas. The people of Haryana, too, will be barred from working in other states. The dangerous principle on which such moves rest will also make a mockery of all-India services since India will cease to be common territory for the purpose of employment. If the idea is extended to the field of education, and other sectors, then we may conceivably be looking at the vivisection of India.

Andhra Pradesh has mandated 75 per cent reservation for locals and Karnataka seems to be contemplating quotas for locals in blue collar jobs. The AP Bill has been challenged in the High Court. It is time for the constitutionality of the matter to be settled by the Supreme Court. Caste and class are bad enough to divide society and the country. Motivated moves to catch votes by insecure political parties are something we can do without.

Spectrum auction a failure?

The department of telecommunications (DoT) has recently completed yet another auction of radio spectrum or airwaves that raked in ₹77,800 crore. The government dubbed the auction successful claiming that it had raised more money than it had expected on account of uncertainties created by the Covid pandemic and the general financial situation of the telecom sector. However, as always there are varied opinions about spectrum pricing.

Citing the phenomenally higher base price of ₹3,92,000 crore that the government set for the auction, some experts claim that the spectrum auction is a failure as it managed to fetch merely one-fifth of its reserve price. Out of 2,308.8 megahertz airwaves that were on offer, just a little more than one-third — 855.6 MHz — was purchased. The bidders have once again shunned more efficient 700 MHz, which could have helped them to address network issues, because of its prohibitive reserve price.

Ever since the 2010 3G spectrum auction that fetched a fantastic amount for the government because of the shortage of airwaves and bullish outlook of telecom companies, the government has been fixated only on the ways to milk the telecom sector. Precisely this attitude has got several telecom companies shut down and made others sit on mountains of debt.

Though there has been a rapid adoption of 4G networks in India, around 45 per cent of Indian mobile customers continue to use 2G networks. It is high time that the government rationalises the reserve price of airwaves for the auction or finds out another mechanism unfettered by the controversies created by the 2G spectrum sale during the UPA regime. The government should have a relook at the national telecom policy guided by the interests of the country's development, and the financial health of the telecom sector and its lenders.

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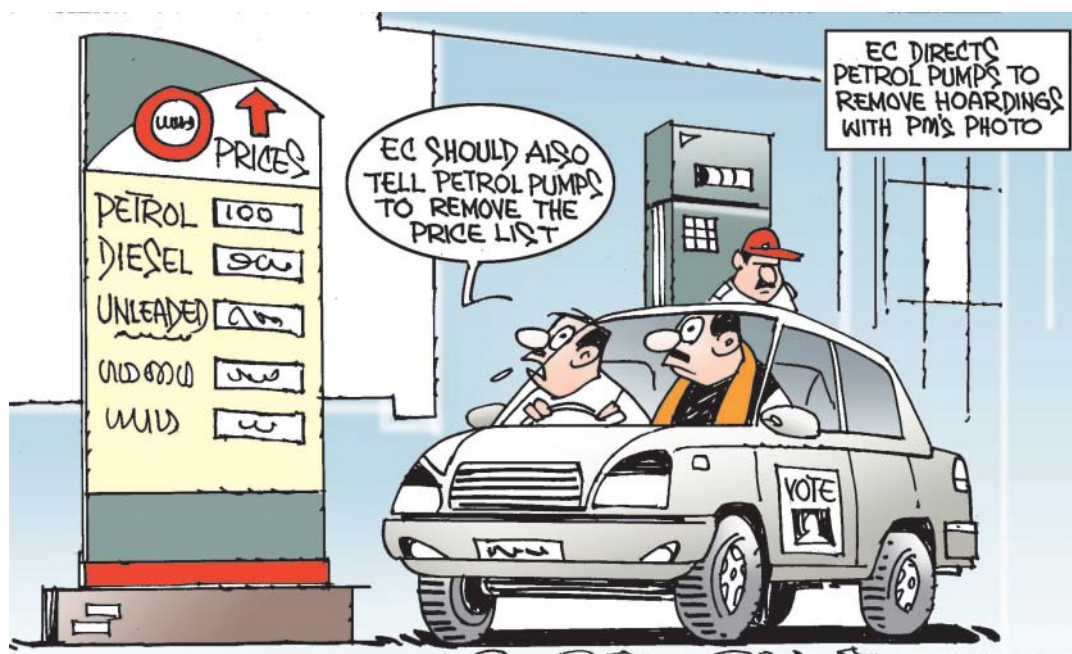
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Subhani



I've vaxxed... Have you? 'Jab' as a status symbol

Shobhaa De



Everyone, but everyone, has been "vaxxing" eloquent since March 1. The "Jab" has become the biggest status symbol of the season. If you have taken the shot before anybody else in your circle — your *bhav* goes up instantly! The moment you roll up your sleeve and flash a victory smile for the camera, you feel that you have arrived! You start working the cellphone and messaging all the groups you are on, to brag that you've done it! Score! Sure enough, half a dozen others will text back in a flash — "Oh ... we got ours earlier!" Game on!

Our beloved leader — *arrey baba*, why are you acting thick and asking, "Which one?" ... There is only one beloved leader in our vast country, get it? Anyway, we were most impressed to note Prime Minister Narendra Modi had opted for the "Made in India" vaccine (Covaxin, indigenously developed by Bharat Biotech). It established his "Atma Nirbhar" convictions and sent out a powerful message to the watching world. Good move. Well played! Besides, by opting for the Dr Krishna Ella-led Covaxin, the PM boosted the image and confidence of the makers and became the ninth world leader to get the jab, which was administered at New Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences by nurse P. Niveda from Pudukkottai. Adar Poonawalla, the dynamic CEO of the Serum Institute of India (the makers of Covishield, the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine)

was quick to congratulate the Prime Minister, in a generously worded tweet which was widely appreciated by the pharma industry. Soon after, Adar's fetching and gorgeous wife Natasha (who could give many movie stars a run for their money), posted a yummy picture of herself getting "vaxxed". She was, as always, impeccably dressed for the important occasion, in pristine white.

A close friend came back from a public hospital after the deed was done. She was in a euphoric state, as she recounted the super-efficient procedure at Mumbai's Sion Hospital, which was handling the huge number of vaccination seekers very briskly. I asked her for the historic "vaxxie" (selfie while taking the vaccine), and she sheepishly confessed that she didn't click one! I was surprised, given her vast following on Instagram — no pic of a bared arm! *Hai!* Wasted photo-op! Look at how aggressively some veteran cricketers and other semi-famous folks have been publicising their jabs! The only thing missing in the pics is a winner's cup. Or a medal. People are so focused on beating everyone else to the shot, we have happily forgotten minor irritations like petrol prices zooming to a hundred bucks a litre. Or key Assembly elections that are taking place in five states/UTs, with all eyes on West Bengal, where, for the moment, Mamata Didi seems to be having an edge — despite her crazy stunts and tantrums. The sight of her being carried down the street astride a

two-wheeler was almost as hilarious as the sight of Rahul Gandhi jumping into the sea for a quick swim with Kerala fisherfolk! Both performed stunts for the cameras — but Rahul looked cuter — sorry Didi! The things that politicians do! Now if only someone could persuade Priyanka Gandhi Vadra to take the plunge into shark-infested waters, voters would instantly perk up and take more interest in the outcome of the state elections.

We are waiting for the Sonia Jab. Unless, of course, she has already taken it, *chhup chaap se!* Given the severe style of her saree blouses, with fitted, elbow-touching sleeves, we are curious to know how exactly the jab will be administered, when and where. This whole jab thingie has developed an independent life of its own, with people obsessing over their own vaccination schedule and even more so about which stranger will get it next and be in the news for beating rivals to it. Such a silly race of one upmanship, na? But soooooo entertaining!

Meanwhile, Bollywood is all a-flutter dealing with the income tax raids on handpicked filmwallahs. Don't be silly! They are not being targeted for speaking up on the farmers' protests and other national issues even if 90 per cent of Indians have a problem with the same issues! Bollywood is not being targeted or har-

assed, okay? That is just an assumption. Didn't you read what the good minister had to say about the raids? He assured everybody that these were routine raids on movie people who had been on the radar of the agencies for months. Tax evasion is a serious concern! They must be investigated and punished in case they have failed in their duty to pay up — that's called cheating the exchequer. Naughty! Prakash Javadekar, the information and broadcasting minister, thundered: "This is too much! Probe agencies undertake investigations based on credible information and the matter later goes to the courts as well."

Egg-actly! Anurag Kashyap and Taapsee Pannu should rest assured that they are not being victimised for their political views, theek hai? 20 crore *ka* tax evasion is no joke! As for the much bigger economic offenders who may have evaded 200 crores in taxes and have not been subjected to raids — do keep up the good work of being loyal spokespeople. The cutlery tray in India never falls short of *chamchas*, that's for sure. Besides, raids on movie people receive the sort of publicity for our agencies that most marketing gurus would compute at millions of rupees worth of prime-time coverage. Why not maximise the publicity value of the great work done by these wonderful people by thoroughly probing the tax returns of the Anurag-Taapsee type of people? Which type? Don't act dumb, *yaar*. Meaning, high-profile, well-known showbiz names. Of course, there are many others on the list — but *aaram se!* No hurry. This is just the trailer, *bhai*. *Picture abhi baaki hai*.

Anyway, we were most impressed to note Prime Minister Narendra Modi had opted for the 'Made in India' vaccine'. It established his 'Atma Nirbhar' convictions and sent out a powerful message to the watching world

Readers can send feedback to www.shobhaade.blogspot.com

LETTERS

ILLEGAL BUILDINGS

The High Court's decision will help new property buyers take a cautious decision (*HC blames field staff for illegal buildings, March 5*). Regularising illegal plots and structures will only legitimise violations. The LRS and BRS have to be done away with. Punishing errant officials is a dire need. Additionally, the GHMC has to come out a new town planning policy.

N.R. Raghuram
Hyderabad

BJP SHOULD HELP

The projects and schemes taken up by the TRS government are pending to complete due to lack of funds. Why not the state BJP leaders use their good offices and get the funds released (*Where's the Kazi's coach factory, KTR asks BJP, DC, March 5*). Otherwise, the state BJP leaders should stop their false criticism of the TRS government.

Syed Amjad Ali
Hyderabad

ANIMAL HEROES

DC needs to be appreciated for hailing all those unknown animals which were instrumental in developing the Covid vaccines. (*Lab animals true heroes of Covid vaccine battle, March 5*). A poem of the famous Sumathi Satakam says it is not a big thing to help the one who has helped you, but it is a great virtue to help the one who harmed you. These lab animals, which were deliberately injected with the virus, deserve to be remembered when we take the jab.

S. Nageswara Rao
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Heavy casualties in East Pak

DACCA, (EAST PAKISTAN) MARCH 6

An East Pakistan political leader said here that reports of thousands of casualties were pouring in from different parts of East Pakistan in the current political crisis.

Meanwhile, President Yahya Khan in a move aimed at ending political chaos in Pakistan announced today the National assembly will on March 25 to draft a new Constitution.

Farukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"If reality is a reflection. Don't smash the mirror in a rage If reality is just a fiction, Don't rip up the offending page If reality is a nightmare, Ride the white horse into the dawn If reality is a game of chess Face the fact — Oh sacrificial pawn!"

— From *Bachchoo's Bickerings*

Of 'patriotism' & 'nationalism': It may be time to do a rethink

Some decades ago, Norman Tebbit, a former pilot turned politician (just like our own Rajiv Gandhi?) and a minister in Margaret Thatcher's government, devised what became known as the "Tebbit test". It wasn't put to any practical or political use but was at the time accepted as a measure of British patriotism applied to its ethnic population.

The test was an observation of who was cheering which team when the MCC, or now England, were playing a game of cricket against the West Indies, Pakistan, India or Bangladesh. If you were of Pakistani ancestry living in Bradford or Huddersfield, even if you, and perhaps even your parents, had been born and brought up in Britain,

would you cheer for the Pakistani XI or for the British team?

The Tebbit test was never passed into law — unlike the strictures that today's home secretary, Priti "Clueless" Patel, has introduced about measuring earning capacity and only admitting those in the upper brackets, banning those whose potential earnings would classify them as "hoi polloi" (I am sure Clueless doesn't use the Latin term). Tebbit's test was simply a conduit for antagonism.

I confess that I pass and fail the Tebbit test regularly. In the recent series of Test matches between India and England, I was all for Joe Root's team in the first Test, when "we" were winning, and then switched allegiance in the second and third, with patriotic support for Virat Kohli's team and achievement. No, gentle reader, in democratic Britain, this admission can't lead to Clueless sending M15 to knock at my door at dawn.

The Tebbit test is basically moronic. Cricket isn't war, it's just a game and those blue-blooded British who place a bet on India winning the latest Test have used their judgment of bowling and batting, rather than

betrayed their country by making money through its defeats.

And yet the idea of patriotism, in the wake of the assault by American "patriots" on their own legislature, and in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, can perhaps do with some examination, or at least discussion. The arguments for so doing are, forgive me, not rocket science — though I've found dealing with rockets quite easy to master when I light them placed in empty wine bottles and turn them away from gathered family and friends each Diwali.

Were the neo-Nazis who attacked the Capitol in Washington really "patriots"? Other columnists have been examining the word, perhaps for the same reasons that I feel impelled to. I publicly admit, gentle reader, to being a regular subscriber to a right-wing British magazine called *The Spectator*. Its columnists and editorials are always vitriolic against something they call "the left" — a label they affix to anything that the writers disagree with. Some of their columnists, with one token exception, are apologists for disastrous Brexit; many of them for Donald Trump when he was in power and some plainly eccentric. One of

their columnists, who in recent issues has been an ardent opponent of the UK government's "lockdown", is called Lionel Shriver. I believe that she is a novelist of sorts and won a prize for a book called something like

"I'm sorry, memory fails —" We must ask Johnny why he killed his classmates". Her arguments against lockdown said she was in possession of research which showed that lockdowns didn't work. I would have written a letter to the magazine pointing out that they didn't work because idiots didn't obey the lockdown and gathered together at every opportunity and spread the wretched disease. They wouldn't have printed it.

I've picked on this particular columnist and this particular foolishness because last week Ms Shriver quotes Webster's dictionary to contend that patriotism and nationalism used to be interchangeable until, surprise, surprise, the villainous, shadowy left "hived off" the definition of patriotism to distinguish it from nationalism. "Patriots" can advocate open borders. While 'nationalists' are selfish bigots who throw children in cages. Putting a neo-Nazi stink on the word 'nationalists' also puts a stink on the desire

for more effective border control." Ms Shriver, an American immigrant herself, wants to use dodgy semantics to slam the door behind her. *Hypocrite lecteur, ma semblable, ma sœur!*

Perhaps Ms Shriver has never read George Orwell and ought to. Here's his definition of 'nationalist': "The nationalist does not go on the principle of simply ganging up with the strongest side. Nationalism is power hunger tempered by self-deception. Every nationalist is capable of the most flagrant dishonesty, but he is also unshakably certain of being in the right."

Ms Shriver should also note that the patriots who attacked the Capitol were neo-Nazis, some of them wearing printed T-shirts saying 6MNE — "Six million not enough"! They were there in support of Mr Trump who was, like her, an ardent advocate of "effective border control".

In any democratic country today, patriotism ought to mean love for and loyalty to a country that defines itself, as did the exemplary founders of Independent India, as one with cast-iron guarantees of freedom of speech and social and political equality for all.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50405.32	-0.87
Nifty 50	14938.10	-0.95
S&P 500*	3,766.64	-0.05
Dollar (₹)	73.02	-0.24
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.00	0.44
Euro (₹)	87.00	0.71
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	43,887.522	1.18
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.79	3.07
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.232	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.608	0.058

* As of 8:30 PM IST

IT sector sales up 5.2% in Q3: RBI data

The IT sector remained in positive terrain throughout the pandemic period and the sector's sales rose by 5.2 per cent YoY in the December 2020-21 quarter, according to RBI data, drawn from quarterly results of 2,692 listed non-government non-financial (NGNF) companies. Sales of 1,685 manufacturing firms expanded by 7.4 per cent YoY in the December quarter after contracting in the preceding six quarters.

Blackstone in talks for minority stake in Sify



Blackstone Group Inc is in exclusive talks to acquire a minority stake in India's Sify Technologies Ltd, Bloomberg reported citing sources. The communications infrastructure firm has sought a valuation of around \$1 billion to \$1.2 billion for the transaction. Sify, led by chairman Raju Vegesna and CEO Kamal Nath, owns data centres and India's largest multiprotocol label switching, or MPLS, network.

SBI Payments offers contactless transactions

SBI Payments and the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) have joined hands to launch RuPay SoftPoS that will enable merchants to make contactless transactions of up to Rs 5,000 through their smart phones. The solution has the capability to transform NFC (near field communication) enabled smartphones into merchant Point-of-Sale (PoS) terminals for retailers, a joint release said.

Laurus dips 4% after promoters sell 1.3% holding

Shares of Laurus Labs Ltd fell over 4 per cent after two promoters offloaded the company's shares. On the BSE, the scrip ended at Rs 351.3, down 4.63 per cent. In a regulatory filing on Thursday, Laurus Labs said Dr Satyanarayana Chava, founder promoter, CEO & ED, sold 52 lakh equity shares worth Rs 191.67 crore and Mrs Nagarani Chava, one of the promoters, sold shares worth Rs 66.04 crore.



■ Metal cheaper by ₹1,200/gm from Aug: high Customers wait for gold to bottom out

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 5

With the gold price having fallen Rs 12,000 per 10 gm from their record-high levels in August, the bullion channel is stocking up physical gold for customers who are waiting for some stability in prices to make purchases. India had seen gold jewellery demand falling to a multi-year low of 315 tonnes in 2020. The first three quarters of the calendar year was a wash-out in terms of gold demand. However, the pent-up demand is likely to trigger buying with the supportive movement in prices. Gold prices have dropped to Rs 44,280 per 10 gm in the Multi Commodity Exchange from the highs of Rs 56,590 in August—losing more than Rs 12,000 per 10 gm. The correction has led to some improvement in demand, but not yet at the customer level. The gold channels have been stocking up the yellow metal expecting the demand to rise once the wedding season starts and vaccination picks up. This has been evident from the gold import figures. Gold imports had risen 72 per cent in volume terms and 154 per cent in value terms in January. As per the latest trade figures, gold imports are up 124 per cent in value terms in February as well. “Gold imports in 2020 had fallen substantially as the channel was blocked



due to the lockdown. In the past few months there has been some re-stocking happening within the channel for replenishment purposes,” said Ashish Pethe, chairman of the All-India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council. Further, the channel had stayed away from replenishment of stocks at higher price levels. According to Pethe, investment demand is still robust while jewellery demand is yet to pick up. Investment demand had in fact started picking up in the fourth quarter of 2020 when the consumption was up by 8 per cent compared to Q4 2019. According to Amit Bhandari, founder of Tezbid.com, for investors the recent downturn in prices offers a good entry point, preferably with a long holding period. “Inflation is expected to be higher going forward and gold offers a good hedge against rising prices—the speculation

on bitcoin is a good example of the kind of froth/asset bubbles building up in financial markets. Some allocation to gold is prudent,” said Bhandari. However, jewellery buyers are still waiting for the right time. “Jewellery customers are still in a wait-and-watch mode and are looking for stability in prices. Once prices stabilise, demand will pick up. Further, festivals like Gudi Padwa and Akshaya Tritiya are coming up and the wedding season too will start soon. This year, we might see more number of weddings happening. Hence the demand is expected to recover to 2019 levels,” said Pethe. “The buoyancy in the market is tangible. People are waiting and watching with the intent to buy. The duty cut and gold price fall are favourable factors for buying,” said Somasundaram P.R., managing director, World Gold Council India.

IndiGrid to acquire NER II from Sterlite Power for ₹4,625 crore

New Delhi, March 5: Investment trust IndiGrid on Friday inked an agreement to acquire 100 per cent equity stake in NER II Transmission from Sterlite Power for about ₹4,625 crore. The completion of acquisition would depend upon receipt of unitholders' consent, regulatory and other relevant approvals, it said. “India Grid Trust (IndiGrid) signed share purchase agreement on March 5, 2021 for acquisition of 100 per cent shareholding and economic interest, in one or more tranches, in NER II Transmission Ltd from Sterlite Grid 4 Ltd,” a company statement said. Sterlite Grid is a wholly owned subsidiary of Sterlite Power Transmission Ltd, one of the sponsors of IndiGrid. The acquisition would boost IndiGrid's asset under management by 34 per cent to over Rs 20,000 crore (\$2.8 billion). NER-II is part of Interstate Transmission Scheme network, and was awarded on a build, own, operate, maintain (BOOM) basis with a contractual period of 35 years. The project has 11 elements including two substations of 1,260 MVA capacity and four transmission lines over 830 circuit kilometers. The asset runs across Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura. —PTI

PLI could raise production by \$520 bn in 5 years: PM

New Delhi, March 5: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme, which is aimed at boosting domestic manufacturing and exports, is expected to increase the country's production by \$520 billion in the next five years.

Addressing a webinar on the PLI scheme, organised by the Department of Industry and International Trade and Niti Aayog, through video conference, Modi said the government is continuously carrying out reforms to boost domestic manufacturing. In this year's budget, about Rs 2 lakh crore was earmarked for the PLI scheme for the next five years and “there is an expectation that the scheme would result in increasing the production by about \$520 billion in the next five years”, he said. He added that there is also an expectation that the current workforce in the sectors which will avail of the PLI scheme



Narendra Modi

benefits will be doubled and job creation will also increase. “The Prime Minister said the government is working to reduce compliance burden, further improve ease of doing business and cut down logistics costs for the industry. “An average of 5 per cent of production is given as incentive. This means that PLI schemes will lead to production worth \$520 billion in India in the next five years,” he said. Modi said that over the past six-seven years, several successful efforts have been made to encourage ‘Make in India’ at different levels.

He stressed on the need to take a big leap, as well as increase the speed and scale to boost manufacturing as it would increase employment generation in the country. The Prime Minister said the government is working at every level to promote the industry through measures like ease of doing business, reducing the compliance burden, creating multi-modal infrastructure to reduce logistics costs, and constructing district-level export hubs. “Our effort is to reduce over 6,000 compliance burden (for industry),” he said. The government, he said, believes that its interference in everything creates more problems than solutions and “therefore, self-regulation, self-attesting, self-certification are being emphasised”. “We have to attract cutting-edge technology and maximum investment in the sectors related to our core competency,” he added. —PTI

MTAR Tech subscribed 200 times

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 5

Hyderabad-based MTAR Technologies' Rs 596-crore initial public offering received huge response from all categories of investors, especially high net worth investors (650 times) on the last day of bidding and the issue got subscribed over 200 times. MTAR Tech's public issue was priced at Rs 574 to Rs 575 per share of Rs

10 face value. As per stock exchange data, updated around 5 pm, the IPO was subscribed 200.79 times. High network individuals or non-institutional investors bid for shares in large numbers on the final day of bidding, leading to the shares reserved for HNIs getting subscribed 650.79 times. The qualified institutional investors' portion also got big a response at

164.99 times subscription. Retail individual bidders applied for 28.4 times the shares on offer, said sources working close to the merchant bankers. The public issue received over 29.17 lakh applications. MTAR Technologies raised Rs 178.92 crore from 15 anchor investors a day prior to its issue opening on Wednesday at the upper price band of Rs 575 per share.

Fuel tax cut a joint call of Centre & states: FM

New Delhi, March 5: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday acknowledged that consumers have a case for petrol and diesel prices to be brought down but said a reduction in taxes should be a joint call of the central and state governments.

As much as 60 per cent of the retail price of petrol—which has shot above the Rs 100-mark in some places in Rajasthan, MP and Maharashtra—is made up of central and state taxes. Taxes make up about 56 per cent of the record high diesel rates. Sitharaman, who had increased central excise duty on petrol and diesel by a record margin last year to mop up gains arising from two-decade low international oil prices, remained non-committal on taking the first step to cut central taxes to give relief to consumers. For consumers, “there is enough case to say that prices should be down, it's a burden,” she said while interacting with

Appeal against Cairn award likely

New Delhi, March 5: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday indicated the government's intent to appeal against an arbitration panel asking India to return \$1.4 billion to UK's Cairn Energy Plc, saying it is her “duty” to appeal in cases where the nation's sovereign authority to tax is questioned. —PTI

journalists at IWPC. While the burden on the consumers is “understood”, the pricing is a vexatious issue, she said. “That's where I use the word ‘dharamsankat,’” she said. “It is a question which I would like states and the Centre to talk about because it's not just the Centre which has duties on petroleum products, it also has the states charging.” —PTI

Indonesia plans battery production in public sector

ARYS ADITYA & CLAIRE JIAO MARCH 5

Indonesia laid down its plans to have a complete battery production line onshore, with a state-owned holding firm to be set up by June. The country has drafted an “end-to-end development” plan that would see four state firms supplying nickel ore, processing nickel sulfate and cobalt sulfate, and then producing cathodes and batteries, Agus Tjahjajana, who heads the task force on electric-vehicle development, said in a Thursday seminar. Resource-rich Indonesia, home to a quarter of the world's nickel reserves, has set its sights on moving up the supply chain to become a global hub for battery-making. The surge in demand for batteries, used to power everything from mobile phones to electric vehicles, has become a tailwind for Southeast Asia's largest economy as it seeks a way out of a recession. “Indonesia will hold everything from upstream to downstream involving nickel and electric batteries in the battery holding company,” Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises spokesperson Arya Simulingga said. “We have to proceed quickly.” Miner PT Aneka Tambang will focus on nickel ore, while PT Indonesia Asahan Aluminium, known as Inalum, and energy holding company PT Pertamina will oversee the production of battery and cell components. Pertamina and power producer PT Perusahaan Listrik Negara will look after electricity supply and infrastructure. Each of the state firms will hold a 25 per cent stake in the Indonesian Battery Industry holding firm, which will be set up by June. The potential projects include a 195 GW/hour factory with capacity to produce 150,000 tonnes of nickel ore a year, he said. —Bloomberg

About 580,000 frequent fliers' data breached: SIA

GURDIP SINGH SINGAPORE, MARCH 5

Around 580,000 privilege fliers, KrisFlyer and PPS members, have been affected by a data breach, Singapore Airlines (SIA) has said. The data breach involves the passenger service system servers of SITA, an air

transport infotech company, according to a Channel News Asia report. “While SIA is not a customer of the SITA PSS, this breach of the SITA PSS server has affected some KrisFlyer and PPS members,” the national carrier said on Thursday. SIA added that this data breach specifically does

not involve KrisFlyer and PPS member passwords, credit card information and other customer data such as itineraries, reservations, ticketing, passport numbers and email addresses. Such information is not shared with other Star Alliance member airlines for this data transfer, the

airline said. “The information involved is limited to the membership number and tier status and, in some cases, membership name, as this is the full extent of the frequent flyer data that Singapore Airlines shares with other Star Alliance member airlines,” said SIA. —PTI

NIPPON STEEL TO SHUT 20% CAPACITY BY 2025

MASUMI SUGA MARCH 5

Japan's oldest and largest steelmaker is cutting capacity as it contends with shrinking domestic demand and pivots operations to help meet the nation's ambitious target of net-zero emissions by 2050. Nippon Steel Corporation will shut one of its largest domestic blast furnaces near Tokyo as well as production lines to trim its steelmaking capacity, according to a statement on Friday. That along with previously announced measures will cut its capacity by 20 per cent by March 2025. The company



also aims to lower carbon dioxide emissions from its operations 30 per cent by 2030 from 2013 levels, it added. President Eiichi Hashimoto is pushing through structural reforms to fend off challenges from faster growing foreign rivals—

particularly top producer China. Competition is now spreading to the development of fossil fuel-free steel manufacturing after governments in Europe, China and Japan pledged net-zero emissions in the coming decades. Innovations for decarbonisation, including the development of hydrogen reduction steel production, will require research and development costs of about 500 billion yen (\$4.6 billion) and as much as 5 trillion yen in investment in facilities, the company said, which could double the cost of steel over the next 30 years. —Bloomberg

OMRON EYES SMALLER SOUTHERN MARKETS

FC BUREAU HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

Omron Healthcare India, a global major in digital blood pressure monitoring products, on Friday said it plans to expand its sales network to smaller cities in south India, such as Warangal, Gulbarga and Raichur; among others. Speaking to reporters here, Masanori Matsubara, MD, Omron Healthcare India, said the firm is planning to consolidate its market share in the home-care segment. South India contributes nearly 30 per cent of Omron's sales which it plans to increase to 40 per cent in FY22.

Skoda gives glimpse of Kushaq interiors

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, MARCH 5

Skoda, the Czech car manufacturer, which is all set for the world premiere of its new SUV Kushaq on March 18 and will go on sales in India thereafter, has released the first set of the Kushaq's interior. The Skoda Kushaq will take on popular SUVs such as Hyundai Creta, Kia Seltos, MG Hector and Tata Harrier. The new SUV, likely to be priced in the Rs 10 lakh to Rs 17 lakh bracket, is the first of four models specially adapted for India by Skoda Auto from the Skoda and Volkswagen brands as part of the India 2.0 product campaign of its turnaround strategy. The second model will be



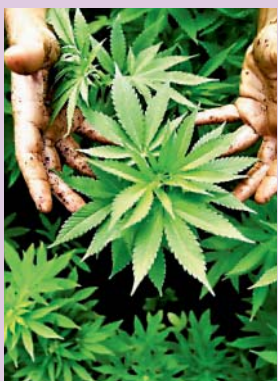
Volkswagen Taigun. The technical development is being carried out at Skoda Auto's Technology Centre in Pune. The Kushaq will come with a layered dashboard that gets a thin chrome bar to separate the top from the bottom. This chrome bar spans the length of the dash and connects the large, chrome-lined vents at each end.

MEDICAL | MARIJUANA New revenue source opens for households Thai families allowed to grow cannabis

PRIM CHUWIRUCH MARCH 5

Thai households can now grow six pots of cannabis each to supplement their income, the nation's health minister said, as the first country in the region to legalise medical marijuana further eased rules to promote the crop's commercial use. Families may form communities to grow marijuana and supply the crop to public hospitals and state facilities, or use them to make food and cosmetic products as a fresh revenue source, Thailand's deputy premier and health minister Anutin Charnvirakul said in a statement on Friday. “Marijuana and hemp

are both economic crops and it provides a new option for locals to generate revenue,” Anutin said at a marijuana educational expo at Buriram, 400 kilometres northeast of Bangkok. “We are trying to ease restrictions to allow the public easier access to the plant, but please cooperate and use it correctly.” While Thailand became the first country in Southeast Asia to legalise medical marijuana in 2018, its use for recreational purpose is still banned. Any flowers and seeds yielded from the crop grown at homes must be sent to state medical facilities as they remain in the country's criminal code due to their high levels of psychoac-



tive compounds, the minister said. The rest of the marijuana, including leaves, branches and fibre as well as hemp plants have been decriminalised and allowed to be used in food and cosmetic products

since December last year. Anutin became a minister in 2019 after an election in which the centrepiece of his political party's campaign was marijuana legalisation. Though some restrictions remain, allowing households to grow marijuana is another step to unshackle the industry and is similar to Sri Lanka which allows limited growth of the plant by state-licensed growers and only for medical purposes. The Philippines is considering allowing use of the plant for epilepsy treatment, but marijuana in most other nations in Southeast Asia remains forbidden and in some, punishable with death sentences. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Sindhu in semis as Indians sink

Basel: Olympic silver medallist P. V. Sindhu advanced to the semifinals of the Swiss Open Super 300 tournament with a straight-game win over Thai Busanan Ongbamrungphan. World champion Sindhu took a minute less than an hour to see off a fighting Busanan, seeded fifth, 21-16, 23-21 to set up a clash with fourth seed Denmark's Mia Blichfeldt. However, it was a bad day in office for other Indians in fray as none of them could reach the last four. Olympic hopeful B Sai Praneeth, who reached the final in the last edition, lost 14-21, 17-21 to Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia in 45 minutes.

Ajay Jayaram's campaign ended after a 9-21, 6-21 loss to eighth seeded Thai Kunlavut Vitidsarn in another last eight men's singles match.

Earlier, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponnappa fought hard before going down 17-21, 21-16, 8-21 to fifth seeds Tan Kian Meng and Lai Pei Jing of Malaysia in quarterfinals of mixed doubles. — PTI

Hyd sides for throw, handball

Hyderabad: Following are the Hyderabad district throwball sub-junior and handball women's teams for the inter-district tournaments to be held from Saturday:

THROWBALL

Boys: Balaji (captain), Manideep, Harshith Varma, Vishnu, Karthik, Shaik Abbas, Omkar, Siddarth, Rahul, Tarun Teja, Mayank, Prashanth, Harshith, Akshith, Satwik Reddy, Pranay. **Coach:** Siddeshwar Reddy. **Manager:** Kiran Chary.

Girls: Harika (captain), Sai Shruthi, Jahnvi, Annaya, Amuktha, Sneha Reddy, Shailu, Shobha Rani, Vidya, Snigdha, Mahima Rani, Lakshmi. **Coach:** Suchetana. **Manager:** G Raju.

HANDBALL

Rishika (captain), M. S. Gayatri, Aishwarya, Hemalatha, Nanditha, Likhitha, Haritha, Divya Rani, Tanisha, Priya Darshini, Ashwini, Siddi Patil, Uma Rajender, Haindavi, Madhavi, Srihitha Reddy. **Coach-cum-manager:** Siva Kumar.

PANTHER ATTACK

Pant's splendid ton puts England under the pump

Ahmedabad, March 5: Rishabh Pant changed his game-plan and in turn India's fortunes with a magnificent century, helping the side snatch control from England's grip to finish the second day at a robust 294 for 7 in the final Test here on Friday.

England dominated the first two sessions and India looked in all sorts of trouble before Pant (101 off 118 balls) suddenly decided to catch the opposition by the scruff of their necks, effortlessly changing gears in company of Washington Sundar (60, 117 balls, 8x4).

The duo added 113 runs in 26 overs but more importantly, landed an exquisite 'left-hook' on England's hopes of turning party-poopers, having already conceded a first innings lead of 89 runs.

At stumps, Washington was still at the crease with Axar Patel (11).

For someone, who has always been panned for his lack of game awareness, it was Pant 2.0 at play where he defended when it was necessary but unlocked his brutal attacking instincts when required.

The first 50 came off 82 balls and the next off 33 balls with Washington being the ideal foil, holding one end well en route to his half century.

Just like playing a single spinner in the third Test was a blunder, England paid the price for playing a bowler short as their main four got tired during the final session.

Pant deposited Dom Bess into the 'cow corner' of the stands against the turn, to complete his third Test hundred, first at home, having missed at least five in recent years.

When he finally got out, Root's frustrated expression was a dead giveaway that the match was now out of hand for England. — PTI



India's Rishabh Pant celebrates his century against England during the second day of the fourth Test at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Friday. — PTI

NUMBERS GAME

KOHLI'S SECOND DUCK:

● England's right-arm fast-medium bowler, Ben Stokes dismissed Virat Kohli for duck in India's first innings on the second day of the fourth and final Test match at Ahmedabad on Friday.

● It was second duck in the series for Indian skipper Virat Kohli. The first one was in the first innings of the second Test match at Chennai. It was second time when Virat Kohli received two ducks in a series. The first occasion when Indian skipper received two ducks in a series was also against England in the five Test series in England in 2014.

● Virat Kohli also equalled Mahendra Singh Dhoni's record of most ducks as Indian skipper by getting eighth duck in 98 innings of 50 Tests. Mahendra Singh Dhoni received same number of ducks in 96 innings of 60 Tests as skipper.

● The 113-run stand between Rishabh Pant/Washington Sundar was the ninth seventh wicket century stand for India against England. Syed Kirmani and Ravi Shastri's 235-run stand is the best for seventh wicket for India against England in Tests.

● Rishabh Pant made his maiden century at home in eighth innings of sixth Test match by making 101 off 118 with 13 fours and two sixes. It was his third century in 33 innings of 20 Test matches.

● Rishabh Pant also became the third Indian wicket-keeper to score three or more hundreds in Tests. Mahendra Singh Dhoni holds the record of scoring the highest number of hundreds as wicket-keeper. He scored six hundreds in 144 innings of 90 Tests.

● Wridhiman Saha made three hundreds in 50 innings of 37 Tests.

— S. PERVEZ KAISER

SCORECARD

England 1st Innings: 205

India 1st Innings (Overnight 24/7): R. Sharma lbw b Stokes 49, C. Pujara lbw b Leach 17, V. Kohli c Foakes b Stokes 0, A. Rahane c Stokes b Anderson 27, R. Pant c Root b Anderson 101, R. Ashwin c Pope A Leach 13, W. Sundar (batting) 60, A. Patel (batting) 11, Extras (B-8, LB-5, NB-3) 16. **Total (for 7 wickets in 94 overs) 294.**

FOW: 1-0, 2-40, 3-41, 4-80, 5-121, 6-146, 7-259.

Bowling: Anderson 20-11-40-3, Stokes 22-6-73-2, Leach 23-5-66-2, Bess 15-1-56-0, Root 14-1-46-0.

Preetesh cracks triple ton in one-day league

Kotes, Venkatesh, Azizuddin, Mahesh, Karthik, Om, Nagaraju shine

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

Preetesh Rawani cracked a triple century in the Hyderabad Cricket Association's one-day league while S. Kotes took six wickets in the two-day grade to emerge top performers on Friday.

Preetesh slammed 366 which contained 40 fours and 24 sixes to propel Roshanara to 608 for 9 in 50 overs against Starlets, for whom Karthik took 6 for 115. Starlets were all out for 258 in 46 overs, thanks to Om Prakash's 5 for 24.

In another one-day match, Nagaraju's 107 powered Gunrock to a four-wicket win over Ranga Reddy.

In the two-day games, Kotes bowled Cheerful Chums to a big win over Rakesh XI with fine figures of 6 for 20 in nine overs.

Shanti XI's Venkatesh Sheshadharan (5/26), CCOB's Syed Azizuddin (5/66) and Adilabad District's Mahesh (125 n.o) were the other performers in the two-day session.

Brief scores:

TWO-DAY LEAGUE

■ Cheerful Chums 260 in 73 overs bt Rakesh XI 70 in 30.3 overs (**Kotes 6/20 — 9-1-20-6**). **Points:** Cheerful Chums 5, Rakesh XI 0.
■ Shanti XI 357 in 89 overs bt Hyderabad Panthers 80 in 39.1 overs (**Venkatesh Sheshadharan 5/26**, Venkat Chandra 3/27). **Points:** Shanti 5, Panthers 0.
■ CCOB 339 in 66.4 overs bt Ours



Preetesh Rawani



Venkatesh



Syed Azizuddin

238 in 70.1 overs (V. Gowtham 55, K. R. Dhanush 53, D. Manish 37, Abdul Khaliq Khan 3/37. **Syed Azizuddin 5/66 — 17-1-2-66-5**). **Points:** CCOB 5, Ours 0.

■ Elegant 258 in 51.1 overs lost to Adilabad District 264/4 in 42.1 overs (**Mahesh 125 n.o — 126b, 21x4, 3x6**, Srinivas 87). **Points:** Adilabad District 5, Elegant 0.

■ Team Speed 236 in 67.3 overs vs Nizamabad District 193/7 in 46.4 overs (Y. Murali Krishna 55 n.o, Rohit Kumar 31, D. Manish Goud 5/55). **Points:** Speed 2, Nizamabad 2.

■ PKMCC 242/9 in 90 overs lost to Venus Cybertech 246/7 in 59.2 overs (Rishit Reddy 57, M. S. Karthik 45, Chaitanya Charan 35, K. Naveen 52, B. Sujana Kumar 3/41, T. Sourabh 3/56). **Points:** Venus Cybertech 5, PKMCC 0.

■ Crown 220 in 65.2 overs lost to HBCC 222/5 in 44 overs (Vara Prasad 73, Yash Dubey 40 n.o). **Points:** HBCC 5, Crown 0.

■ Shalimar 317 in 62.5 overs bt Hucc 302 in 83.4 overs (Prudhvi Naik 30, Sree Madhav 56, Pranav Chandra 50). **Points:** Shalimar 5, Hucc 0.

■ Brothers XI 167 in 60.3 overs (Likith 30, Ajay 51, Ershad Pasha 3/32, Shyam Reddy 4/30) lost to Vijay CC 168/4 in 25 overs (B. Shiva 74 n.o, Badal 62). **Points:** Vijay CC 5, Brothers XI 0.

■ Adams XI 362 in 54.4 overs bt Bharat 277 in 61.4 overs (B. Bhargav 77, Aditya Varma 40, Suraj Rao 31 n.o, M. Balaji 3/3, Khaled Khan 4/72). **Points:** Adams 5, Bharat 0.

■ Hyderabad Cricket Academy 277 in 70.5 overs bt SK Blues 152 in 32 overs (Mohd Afzal Ali 38, Siddharth Rao 35, Zaheer Abbas 4/33, G. Gunavith 4/59). **Points:** Academy 5, Blues 0.

■ Secunderabad Gymkhana 525/7 in 90 overs bt Mayura 61 in 30.5 overs (Vignesh 3/7). **Points:** Gymkhana 5, Mayura 0.

■ Warangal District 281 in 69.4 overs bt Vijaypuri Willowmen 197 in 75.5 overs (Aashlesh Vaman 54, N. Pavan Reddy 4/20). **Points:** Warangal 5, Willowmen 0.

ONE-DAY LEAGUE

■ Roshanara 608/9 in 50 overs (Deepak Tak 80, **Preetesh Rawani 366 — 40x4, 24x6**, **Karthik 6/115**) bt Starlets CC 258 in 46 overs (Venkat 49, Praneeth 54, Shashank 41, Lokesh 3/54, **Om Prakash 5/24**).

■ Ranga Reddy 247/9 in 50 overs (Nimal Reddy 94, Neeraj 33, Arijit 3/37, Aryan Reddy 4/27) lost to Gunrock 252/6 in 36.2 overs (Shubham Sahu 30, **Nagaraju 107**, Utkarsh 3/61).

■ Team Kun 160 in 47.3 overs (Navaneeth Reddy 30, Sai Charan 3/28, Raj Suryansh 3/34) lost to LNCC 161/5 in 23.2 overs (Gopi 38, Pranav 58 n.o, Palash 3/43).

■ Consult CC 199 in 34 overs (Abhinav 37, Vamsi 3/7) lost to Safilguda 120/1 in 23.2 overs (Lokesh 71 n.o, Ayush 39).

■ Satya CC 104 in 39.5 overs (Nanda 39, Pavan Sai 3/10) lost to Golconda 105/5 in 19.4 overs (Chatrapathi 40).

AUSSIES PACK OFF KIWIS TO FORCE DECIDER

Wellington, March 5: Australia crushed New Zealand by 50 runs in a low-scoring fourth Twenty20 international in Wellington Friday to level the series at 2-2.

The result sets up a winner-takes-all blockbuster in the final match on Sunday, with Australia in red-hot form after struggling early in the series.

Australia scored 156 for 6 in 20 overs after winning the toss. In reply, New Zealand were all out for 106.

Captain Aaron Finch anchored the tourists' innings with a gritty 79, making him Australia's most prolific T20 international run scorer on 2,310, ahead of David Warner's 2,265.

Brief scores: Australia 156/6 in 20 overs (Finch 79; I. Sodhi 3/32) **bt New Zealand 106** in 18.5 overs (K. Jamieson 30; K. Richardson 3/19).

Mushtaq makes it to snooker semis

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 5

Mushtaq Hussain, Himanshu Jain, Brandon Marcel and Syed Ahmed reached the semifinals with contrasting wins in the senior snooker category at the Telangana State Ranking Snooker & Billiards Championship being played at the Telangana Cue Sports Association premises at Khajaguda on Friday.

Mushtaq was the most dominant of them all, blanking Bharath Reddy 4-0 in the quarterfinals. The scoreline read 64-39, 60-47, 73-48, 76[61]-0; Himanshu Jain bt MD Nazeeruddin 4-1 (35-63, 101[96]-5, 66-24, 75[70]-8, 66-53); Brandon Marcel bt Ajay Bushan 4-3 (50-26, 43-44, 45-54, 69[68]-11, 70-24, 30-57, 72[50]-39); Syed Ahmed bt P Arvind Goud 4-3 (46-56, 47-71, 65-46, 76-32, 52-43, 6-70, 57-46).

THE RESULTS

■ **Senior Snooker quarterfinals:** Mushtaq Hussain bt Bharath Reddy 4-0 (64[53]-39, 60-47, 73-48, 76[61]-0); Himanshu Jain bt MD Nazeeruddin 4-1 (35-63, 101[96]-5, 66-24, 75[70]-8, 66-53); Brandon Marcel bt Ajay Bushan 4-3 (50-26, 43-44, 45-54, 69[68]-11, 70-24, 30-57, 72[50]-39); Syed Ahmed bt P Arvind Goud 4-3 (46-56, 47-71, 65-46, 76-32, 52-43, 6-70, 57-46).

Himanshu was next best. He beat Mohammed Nazeeruddin 4-1, recording the highest breaks, of 96 and 70 in the second and

fourth frames. Brandon got 68 on way to taking the fourth frame 69-11 as he came out a winner with a 35-63, 110-5, 66-24, 75-8, 66-53 verdict.

Brandon and Ahmed scored identical 4-3 wins. Brandon beat Ajay Bushan 50-26, 43-44, 45-54, 69-11, 70-24, 30-57, 72-39 while Ahmed got past P Arvind Goud 46-56, 47-71, 65-46, 76-32, 52-43, 6-70, 57-46.

National athletics coach found dead

Patiala, March 5: India's middle and long distance coach Nikolai Snesarev of Belarus was on Friday found dead in his hostel room at the National Institute of Sports here, the Athletics Federation of India said.

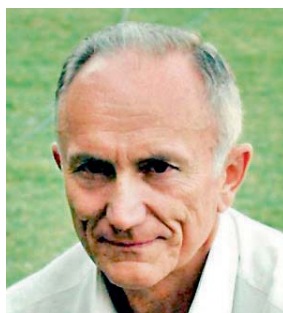
The dead body of the 72-year-old Snesarev, who returned to India after a gap of two years to be at the helm till the end of September, has been sent to a government hospital for post mortem.

"He had come to NIS for the Indian Grand Prix 3 (from his Bengaluru base) held today. But when he did not turn up for the meet, the coaches checked for him in the evening and his room was found locked from inside," AFI President Adille Sumariwalla said.

"When the door was broken, he was found lying on his bed. The Sports Authority of India doctor at the NIS declared him dead and the ED (team) of the SAI has referred the body to the government hospital for post mortem.

"We don't know the cause of death. We will know it later after post mortem."

Snesarev was coaching 3000m steeplechaser Avinash Sable, who has qualified for the Olympics, and other middle and long-distance runners in their bid to qualify for the Tokyo



Nikolai Snesarev

He had come to NIS for the Indian Grand Prix 3 (from his Bengaluru base) held today. But when he did not turn up for the meet, the coaches checked for him in the evening and his room was found locked from inside. When the door was broken, he was found lying on his bed.

— ADILLE SUMARIWALLA
Athletics Federation of India president

Games. He had quit as Indian athletics' long and middle distance coach in February 2019 after Sable opted to leave him and train under Army coach Amrith Kumar. His contract then was till the end of the Olympics, postponed by a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. — PTI

Neeraj sets natl javelin record

Patiala, March 5: Olympic-bound star javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra smashed his own national record with a throw of 88.07m, which is also the best of the year so far, in a sensational return to action during the third Indian Grand Prix meet here on Friday.

Competing for the first time in more than a year after the Covid-19 pandemic wiped out the whole of 2020 calendar, Chopra hurled the spear to a distance of 88.07m in his fifth attempt to obliterate his earlier national record of 88.06m, sealed during the gold-winning effort at the 2018 Asian Games.

The 24-year-old Chopra opened the competition

with an effort of 83.03m before having two foul throws. After a fourth throw of 83.36m, Chopra sent the javelin to 88.07m amid loud cheers from a sizeable audience at the NIS Patiala. His final throw was 82.24m.

"I was prepared and today it was windy. I used my favourite javelin which helped me. Pandemic did affect training and preparation but we managed to hold on," Chopra said, adding, "On the world level I would need to perform even better as current standard is quite high."

Chopra qualified for the upcoming Tokyo Olympics in January last year in an event in South Africa. — PTI

LIVERPOOL CRASH TO YET ANOTHER HOME DEFEAT

London, March 5: Mason Mount fired Chelsea into fourth place in the Premier League as the midfielder's superb strike clinched a 1-0 win against troubled Liverpool, while Everton boosted their top four bid with a 1-0 victory at West Brom on Thursday.

Mount's first half goal was enough to see off lacklustre Liverpool and extended Chelsea's impressive renaissance under new boss Thomas Tuchel.

Chelsea are unbeaten in 10 games in all competitions since Tuchel replaced the sacked Frank Lampard in January.

The Blues sit one point clear of fifth placed Everton, who have a game in hand on the west Londoners.

While Chelsea are on the up, injury-hit Liverpool crashed to a fifth successive home defeat for the first time in their illustrious history, leaving the spluttering champions without a win at Anfield since before Christmas.

Reds are languishing in seventh place, four points behind Chelsea after losing five of their last six league matches. — AFP

Live on TV

BADMINTON

Swiss Open: Semifinals from 3.30 pm on Star Sports 2 HD, 3

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Second Semifinal, 1st leg — North East United vs Mohun Bagan from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, HD

Italian League: Juventus vs Lazio from 1.15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

JUC

Fight Night: Jan Blachowicz vs Israel Adesanya and other bouts from 8.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2

Laxmi, Chandan are champs

Hyderabad: Laxmi Siri Dandu and Chandan Shivraj won the girls and boys titles respectively in the Under-16 AITA Championship series played at Sania Mirza Tennis Academy in Murtuzaguda.

In Friday's finals, sixth seeded Laxmi defeated M. Manognya 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 while Chandan Shivraj, also a sixth seed, saw off G. Chaitra Reddy in straight sets at 6-2, 6-2.

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