

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI FRIDAY 2 APRIL 2021



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Return of Raina will boost batting of spin-reliant Chennai Super Kings



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Actress Vaani Kapoor keen on sharing her healthy and nutritious lifestyle with people

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WINDOWS



Bollywood actress Tamanna Bhatia spotted at Bandra in Mumbai on Thursday. — PTI

Actor Kirron Kher under treatment for blood cancer

New Delhi: Celebrities on Thursday wished actor-politician Kirron Kher a speedy recovery after her husband veteran actor Anupam Kher issued a statement about her health. Taking to Instagram and Twitter, he said that she is undergoing treatment after being diagnosed with blood cancer and reassured well-wishers that she is “well on her way to recovery”. Anupam said that Kirron has ‘always been a fighter’ and thanked everyone for their love and wishes. “She’s always been a fighter and takes things head on. She’s all heart and that’s why she has so many people that love her.”



Kirron Kher

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Ambani case: NIA raids Mumbai club

Mumbai: The NIA conducted searches at a hotel in south Mumbai on Thursday in connection with its probe into the case of an explosives-laden SUV found near industrialist Mukesh Ambani’s residence and the murder of businessman Mansukh Hiren. The NIA has claimed to have found out that the Telegram messages from Jaish-e-Hind claiming responsibility was also a part of Sachin Waze’s cover up plan.

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COUNTERPOINT



How about conferring this award on him at a mega election rally?

WEATHER

Max: 33°C
Min: 14°C
RH: 13%
Rain: 0%

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalguna Bahula Panchami till 8.17 am; Phalguna Bahula Shasti till 5.58 am (Saturday)
Star: Jyeshtha till 3.44 am (Saturday)
Variyam: 8.32 pm to 10.03 pm
Durmuhurtam: 8.40 am to 9.28 am; 12.44 pm to 1.33 pm
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon
SUNSET TODAY 6.39 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.09 AM

WEST BENGAL POLLS

■ 80% voting in 2nd phase despite violence, allegations of booth capturing

Clashes & drama at Nandigram; Didi, stranded at booth, dials gov

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
with agency inputs
KOLKATA, APRIL 1

Despite prohibitory orders issued under Section 144 of the CrPC, massive presence of Centre-ordered paramilitary forces and aerial surveillance by the Election Commission, Nandigram — the hot seat in West Bengal Assembly elections where chief minister Mamata Banerjee is taking on her protegee-turned-adversary Suwendu Adhikari — reeled under violence on Thursday, leaving Ms Banerjee stranded at a polling booth for over two hours.

Ms Banerjee had to be rescued by Central paramilitary forces after she was confined at a polling booth in Nandigram amid an extremely tense face-off between BJP and Trinamool Congress supporters. From the spot, she dialled Governor Jagdeep Dhankar, telling him the situation was a failure of the Election Commission. “Anything might happen at any moment... There is total breakdown of law and order,” wheelchair-bound Ms Banerjee said, adding that she feared for her life. She was escorted out by the security forces, who managed to bring the situation under control after long-drawn negotiations with the villagers. Soon after, the governor tweeted, “Issues flagged @MamataOfficial a while ago on phone have been imparted (sic) to the concerned”.

Despite this Nandigram recorded voter turnout of over 81 per cent till 5 pm. Though sporadic incidents of violence and allegations of vote fraud marked the second phase of West Bengal Assembly polls, a large voter turnout of more than 80 per cent was recorded. Bankura recorded the highest turnout at 82.92 per cent, followed by Purba Medinipur at 81.23, South 24 Parganas at 79.65 per cent, Paschim Medinipur at 78 per cent.

The Election Commission has sought a report from the East Midnapore district administration on Ms Banerjee’s presence at the booth for a long time and her allegations of electoral malpractices.

Violence erupted across the high-profile constituency as the polling got underway in the morning. At Satengabari, TMC activists pelted stones on the convoy of Ms Banerjee’s nemesis, Suwendu Adhikari of the BJP, and shouted “Go Back”. Bombs were hurled at Sonachura and Kalicharanpur. In Bhetukiya a BJP worker, Uday Dube (48), was found hanging in his residence. His party accused the TMC of driving him to commit suicide.

Allegations also surfaced against the BJP of not allowing TMC agents at voting booths, rigging and booth capturing at many

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TMC supremo and party candidate from Nandigram constituency Mamata Banerjee talks to police officers inside a polling station after tension prevails between TMC and BJP party supporters at Nandigram in East Medinipur district of West Bengal on Thursday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

‘Contesting from 2nd seat?': PM Modi takes a jab at Didi

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, APRIL 1

Even as polling was underway in Nandigram on Thursday, the BJP’s star campaigner, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Thursday said at a poll rally in West Bengal that chief minister Mamata Banerjee had made a “big mistake” by contesting from Nandigram and asked whether she is contemplating fighting from another constituency.

“Didi, is there any truth in the rumour that you are going to file nomination from another constituency? First, you went there (Nandigram), and the people gave you an answer. If you go somewhere else, the people of Bengal are ready,” PM Modi said while addressing a rally in Uluberia, which will vote in the third phase on April 6.

Reacting to his potshots, the TMC tweeted, “Didi is winning Nandigram. The

question of her fighting from another seat doesn’t arise. @narendramodiJI, retract from your efforts to mislead people before they see your lies with the end of nomination in WB. Look for a safer seat in 2024, as you will be challenged in Varanasi.”

Instead of contesting from her home seat, Bhowanipore in south Kolkata, Ms Banerjee is fighting elections in Nandigram where she is

■ Turn to Page 4

U-turn: Pak Cabinet refuses trade with India, raises J&K

Qureshi links trade resumption to Article 370 restoration

Islamabad, April 1: In a volte-face, Pakistan’s Cabinet on Thursday rejected the proposal of a high-powered committee to import cotton and sugar from India, with foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi asserting that there can be no normalisation of ties until New Delhi reverses its decision to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir.

The somersault came a day after the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) under newly appointed finance minister Hammad Azhar on Wednesday decided to buy the two key items from India, lifting a nearly two-

► The somersault came a day after the Economic Coordination Committee under finance minister Hammad Azhar decided to buy the two key items from India, lifting a nearly two-year long ban on their import from the neighbouring country

year long ban on their import from the neighbouring country.

Mr Qureshi said the issue of import of cotton and sugar from India was discussed during the Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan. “An impression is being created that relations with India have

become normal and trade has been restored...,” Qureshi said in a video message. “On this impression, the Prime Minister and the Cabinet had a consensus opinion that until India reviewed the unilateral actions of Aug 5, 2019, it would not be possible to normalise ties with India.”

Talking to reporters after the Cabinet meeting, minister for science and technology Fawad Chaudhry said that the Cabinet discussed the issue of ties and trade with India and decided that things cannot progress until India revokes its August 5, 2019

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Militants attack BJP activist’s Srinagar home, guard killed

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, APRIL 1

A policeman was killed when a group of separatist militants targeted the home of a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) activist with automatic weapons in Nowgam area on the peripheries of Jammu and Kashmir’s summer capital Srinagar on Thursday. The BJP activist Anwar Khan was not present at his residence at that time.

The police claimed that one of the assailants was wearing a burka and that they decamped with the service rifle of sentry Rameez Raja after shooting him. The critically wounded policeman was rushed to the hospital where he succumbed soon thereafter, the police said.

Inspector General of Police (Kashmir range) Vijay Kumar said, “I visited the place of occurrence. There was one sentry, a J&K policeman on guard duty, and two more policemen were in the guard room. It is clearly seen in CCTV footage that a burka-clad terrorist came and in a woman’s voice asked the sentry to open the door.

“But the moment the sentry opened the door two more terrorists came and opened indiscriminate fire using automatic weapons.” He said a fourth militant also arrived at the scene quickly and snatched the service rifle from the injured cop.

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Rajinikanth to be honoured with Dadasaheb Phalke

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN
CHENNAI, APRIL 1

Superstar Rajinikanth was on Thursday conferred with the 51st Dadasaheb Phalke award. Minister of information and broadcasting Prakash Javadekar took to social media to share the news.

“Happy to announce #Dadasaheb Phalke award for 2020 to one of the greatest actors in history of Indian cinema, Rajinikanthji. His contribution as actor, producer and screenwriter has been iconic,” he tweeted.

The jury team this year for the prestigious award included ace playback singer Asha Bhosle, direc-



Rajinikanth

tor-producer Subhash Ghai, Malayalam superstar Mohanlal, music composer and singer Shankar Mahadevan and actor-politician Biswajit Chatterjee.

Presented annually at the National Film Award ceremony, the Dadasaheb Phalke Award recognises “outstanding contribution to the growth and development of Indian cinema”. Rajinikanth is the 12th south Indian to be conferred with this award. Legends like Dr Rajkumar, Sivaji Ganesan, Akkineni Nageshwar Rao, K. Balachander and K. Vishwanath are some of the recipients of the Phalke award.

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Indian techies set to benefit as Trump era H-1B visa ban ends

Washington, April 1: US President Joe Biden on Thursday let the ban on foreign workers visa, in particular H-1B, lapse as the notification issued by his predecessor Donald Trump expired, a move which is likely to benefit thousands of Indian IT professionals.

Amidst a national lockdown and the Covid-19 crisis, Mr Trump in June last year issued a proclamation that suspended entry to the US of applicants for several temporary or non-immigrant visa categories, including H-1B, arguing that these visas presented a risk to the US labour market during the economic recovery.

On December 31, Mr Trump extended the order



► BIDEN DID not issue a fresh proclamation for the ban on H-1B visas to continue after March 31. He had promised to lift the suspension on H-1B visas, saying Trump’s immigration policies were cruel.

to March 31, 2021, noting that an extension was warranted as the pandemic continued to disrupt American’s lives, and high levels of unemployment and job loss were still presenting serious economic challenges to workers across the US.

Mr Biden did not issue a fresh proclamation for the ban on H-1B visas to continue after March 31.

He had promised to lift the suspension on H-1B visas, saying Mr Trump’s immigration policies were cruel. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

The expiry of the Trump’s proclamation would now result in the issuing of H-1B visas by American diplomatic missions overseas that would result in US companies bringing in talented technology professionals inside the country. — PTI



Pro-democracy lawmaker Martin Lee, left, and Albert Ho, right, arrive at a court in Hong Kong on Thursday. Seven of leading pro-democracy advocates, including media tycoon Jimmy Lai and an 82-year-old veteran of the movement, were convicted on Thursday for organizing and participating in a march during massive anti-government protests in 2019 that triggered a crackdown on dissent.

— AP

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SHORT TAKES

East Delhi civic body fined ₹40L

New Delhi: The Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) on Thursday imposed a fine of ₹40 lakh on the East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC), saying its "carelessness" was the major reason behind the fire at Ghazipur landfill site four days ago. A section of the landfill site had caught fire on Sunday evening, worsening pollution levels in the area. A DPCC team later inspected the landfill site managed by the EDMC and submitted a report. It stated that the civic body had not made any arrangements to prevent such incidents at the site, environment minister Gopal Rai said. He said the civic agency's carelessness was the major reason behind the fire, which "extensively contributed to air pollution" in the area. The DPCC noted that fires have been reported from Ghazipur landfill in the past too, which indicates lack of measures taken and vigilance observed by the EDMC to prevent such incidents. — *PTI*

Man shot at over old enmity, 3 held

New Delhi: Three people were apprehended after two of them opened fire at a man in Seelampur area and injured him over some old enmity, police said on Thursday. The victim, Kallu, was admitted to a hospital on Wednesday night after Shawez and Sahil fired at him, they said. An investigation was launched after police were informed about it, a senior officer said. During the probe, police apprehended Shawez, Sahil and another person, identified as Aman, he said. Shawez was found to be previously involved in a case of attempt to murder, the officer said, adding that a courtroom-made pistol and a semi-automatic pistol were found in their possession. It was learnt that Shawez and Kallu had an old dispute and both have criminal background, the police said.

Man kills self after killing wife, 2 sons

New Delhi: A 31-year-old contractual bus driver of the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) allegedly hanged himself after killing his wife and two sons at their residence in Naharpur village of north Rohini area, police said on Thursday. Dheeraj Yadav was found hanging from a ceiling fan, and the bodies of his wife, Aarti (28), and sons, Hiten (6) and Atharav (3), bore stab injuries, they said. The police said Yadav has left behind a suicide note, and an investigation is underway to ascertain the motive behind the killings. The couple and their two children lived in a joint family. They resided on the second floor of the house, while his parents lived on the ground floor and his elder brother and his family lived on the first floor. According to the police, Yadav's father, Maha Singh, spotted his body hanging from the ceiling fan through a window on Thursday morning and informed them.

AAP PREPARES ACTION PLAN ON DRUG ABUSE

SUNIL THAPLIYAL
NEW DELHI, APRIL 1

The AAP government has prepared an action plan for the development of an integrated multi-purpose system to combat substance and drug abuse in Delhi. The project is known as 'Suryoday', which will focus on preventive education, awareness generation, identification, counselling, treatment and rehabilitation of drug dependent persons, and training and capacity building of service providers through collaborative efforts of the Central and state and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). To run this project successfully in the city, a high level meeting of concerned departments was held on Thursday. To facilitate research, training and documentation. To support any other activities in this context, the proposed cost of project Preventive Activities - Schools/Community 3 crore Rehabilitation centers 1 crore Pilot: Sultan Puri Project 0.20, Multimedia Campaign 3 crore. Minister has approved the scheme on February 3.

Delhi sees this year's biggest Covid jump

City records 2,790 fresh cases in 24 hours

'Schools to remain closed for all classes till further orders'

New Delhi, April 1: Delhi recorded 2,790 fresh coronavirus cases on Thursday, the highest daily count this year while nine more people died due to the coronavirus infection, taking the death toll to 11,036, according to the city health department.

The positivity rate also mounted to 3.57 per cent amid a massive surge in cases in the span of the last few weeks.

Delhi had reported 1,819 coronavirus cases on Wednesday with a positivity rate of 2.71 per cent, while 11 more people succumbed to the infection.

The number of cumulative cases on Thursday stood at 6,65,220. Over 6.43 lakh patients have recovered from the virus.

The city had recorded 992 cases on Tuesday, 1,904 cases on Monday and 1,881 cases on Sunday.

It had reported 1,558 cases on Saturday, 1,534 cases on Friday, 1,515 cases last Thursday, 1,254 cases a day before that and 1,101 cases last Tuesday, when it had crossed the 1,000-mark for the first time since December 24.

On December 8, last year, the city had recorded 3,188 cases and 2,706 on December 6.

According to the latest bulletin, nine more people died due to the disease, taking the toll to 11,036, it said.

The number of active cases rose to 10,498 from 8,838 a day before.

A total of 78,073 tests, including 47,026 RT-PCR tests and 31,047 rapid antigen tests, were conducted

New Delhi, April 1: The Delhi government on Thursday announced that students of any class should not be called to schools physically in the new academic session till further orders.

The Directorate of Education (DoE) also told schools that teaching and learning activities may commence from April 1 for students through digital mode for academic session 2021-22.

"It is clarified that students of any class should not be called physically in school for the academic session 2021-22 till further orders. However, teaching learning activities may be commenced from 11 April 2021 for the students through digital modes for the new academic session," the DoE said in an official order.

The directive by DoE comes following a surge in coronavirus cases in

the national capital.

Schools in Delhi closed in March last year ahead of a nationwide lockdown to contain spread of novel coronavirus. While several states partially reopened schools in October, the Delhi government allowed schools to reopen for students in classes 9 to 12 for practical works and remedial lessons, from January 18 and February 5.

"It is reiterated that the students of classes 9 to 12 (session 2020-21) may be called to school only for providing the academic guidance and support to the students for mid term exams, pre-board exams/annual exams/ board examinations, practical exams, project work, internal assessment following the Standard Operating Procedure for Covid safety and with the consent of the parents," the DoE added. — *PTI*



People wait for their turn to receive the Covid vaccination at a hospital in New Delhi on Thursday. — *PTI*

CM to hold urgent meeting with health minister, officials today

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 1

In the wake of the rising number of Covid-19 cases in Delhi, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has been closely monitoring the situation. Expressing grave concern over the matter, he has decided to hold an urgent meeting on Friday from 4.00 pm onwards. Health minister Satyendar Jain along with his department officials will be a part of the meeting.

Owing to the surge in the number of cases, Mr Kejriwal will deliberate on preparing an action plan to fight the pandemic, including issues like containment zones, vaccination drive, and maintaining availability of hospital beds. The departmental officials have also been instructed to prepare and present an action plan to tackle the pandemic.

Mr Kejriwal is keeping a close eye on the situation of Delhi and is ensuring a daily review by receiving regular updates from the officials. In furtherance to the orders given by the CM, the health department has increased its vigilance measures and has taken a number of monumental steps to combat Covid-19.

After the orders given by Mr Kejriwal, beds in 33 private hospitals have been increased by 25 per cent for ICU and 25 per cent for normal ward beds respectively. These 33 hospitals possessed 1,705 beds until March 30, 2021, and post the aforementioned order they have now been increased upto 2,547.

The Covid designated beds for normal wards have had a plus of 842 and the ICU beds, which were 608 until March 30, have been increased by 230 more beds. Hence, the total number of Covid designated ICU beds are now 838 in these 33 private hospitals.

3rd phase of vaccination for all above 45 begins

New Delhi, April 1: The third phase of the Covid vaccination drive, which will span 65 lakh people aged above 45 in the national capital, began on Thursday.

The inoculation drive is taking place at a time when coronavirus cases have again mounted in the last few weeks.

In the first phase, starting January 16, over 3.6 lakh beneficiaries comprising healthcare workers and frontline workers, were vaccinated in Delhi.

Jabs were given to persons aged 60 and above, and those in 45-59 age bracket with comorbidities in the second phase.

"In the third phase, people aged 45 and above as on January 1, 2022, are eligible for vaccination, irrespective of their comorbidity status," a senior government officer earlier said.

The vaccination centres, both at government and private facilities, will operate from 9 am to 9 pm.

Only registered beneficiaries can be given vaccine shots between 9 am and 3 pm. The unregistered ones can take the jabs from 3 pm to 9 pm. They just need to carry their Aadhaar card or any other valid identity proof, an official said. — *PTI*

Recovering well after bypass surgery: Prez

New Delhi, April 1: President Ram Nath Kovind on Thursday said he is recovering well after his bypass surgery and thanked doctors and caregivers.

The president said he was touched by messages from citizens and leaders from across the country and abroad wishing him speedy recovery.

"It's difficult to express in words my



Ram Nath Kovind

gratitude to you all," Mr Kovind said.

Mr Kovind, 75, had on Tuesday underwent a cardiac bypass surgery at the All India Institute

of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here. "I've been recovering well after the bypass surgery, thanks to the amazing dedication of the doctors and caregivers. I'm touched by

messages, from citizens and leaders from India and abroad, wishing me speedy recovery. It's difficult to express in words my gratitude to you all," the Rashtrapati Bhavan tweeted.

Mr Kovind had undergone a health check-up at the Army Hospital (R&R) here following chest discomfort Friday morning. — *PTI*

Kejri unhappy with delays in Clean Yamuna project: Govt

New Delhi, April 1: Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday expressed unhappiness over "delays in timelines" of the Clean Yamuna project after reviewing it, according to a statement of the Delhi government.

He also instructed Delhi Jal Board (DJB) officials to have a detailed plan ready by next week when another meeting would be convened, during which "every project is scrutinised as per the revised timelines".

"The Clean Yamuna project is one of the most ambitious projects of the Delhi government. We must ensure that there is no laxity at any phase of the project. We should work towards expediting the Yamuna



Arvind Kejriwal

cleaning process, every sub-project should be completed within the stipulated time-frame," Mr Kejriwal told the officials.

During the course of the meeting that was also attended by Delhi water minister Satyendar Jain, the chief minister also took stock of the Sewage Treatment Plants (STP) project.

The DJB officials re-

resented a detailed plan to clean four majors drain — Najafgarh, supplementary, Shahdara, and Barapullah.

According to the government statement, out of the four drains, the work on interception of two major drains - supplementary and Shahdara — is almost complete.

"The untreated water from the supplementary drain will be completely tapped and treated by December 2021. The untreated water from the Shahdara drain will be completely tapped in the next few months. The remaining two major drains - Najafgarh and Barapulla - will be completed within the stipulated deadline," the statement noted. — *PTI*

Fire engulfs 40 shops in Rani Bagh

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 1

A fire broke out at a shop and spread to 39 others in the Sabzi Mandi area of Rani Bagh in northwest Delhi on Thursday, Delhi Fire Service officials said.

No injuries have been reported yet, they said.

A call about the fire was received around 11 am after which nine fire tenders were rushed to the spot, a senior fire official said.

A short circuit is suspected to be the cause behind the blaze, he said, adding that the fire has been doused and cooling process is underway.

Delhi-Meerut Expressway open for public, cuts travel time to 45 min

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 1

The much-awaited Delhi-Meerut Expressway (DME), pegged as a smart highway, was opened for public on Thursday after the completion of its remaining stretches.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in May 2018 had inaugurated the first phase of the ₹8,346-crore 9-km stretch of 14-lane highway.

"Delhi Meerut Expressway has now been completed and opened to traffic. We have fulfilled our promise of reducing travel time between Delhi - Meerut from 2.5 hours to 45 minutes," road transport, highways minister

Nitin Gadkari said after the smart highway was opened for people.

He said Delhi Meerut Expressway Package-II that comprises six Lane Expressway and eight Lane NH- from Delhi/UP Gate to Dasna and Package IV (6 Lane Expressway from Dasna to Meerut via Greenfield) has been successfully completed and opened for the public.

In order to decongest Delhi-NCR and with the continuous increase in high-speed traffic along with problems of traffic jams and rising levels of pollution, the project of Delhi Meerut Expressway has been constructed at a cost of ₹8,346 crore in the state of Uttar Pradesh and

Delhi.

The widening works of the DME Package - I was completed in May 2018 and was dedicated to the nation by the Prime Minister.

The widening works of DME Package-III were completed on September 30, 2019, and was inaugurated by Mr Gadkari.

"The total length of the project is 82 Km which includes 60 km length of Expressway and 22 Km length of National highways. A total of 24 Minor and Major bridges, 10 flyovers, 3 ROBs, 95 Underpasses, 15 Subways and 12 Foot Over Bridges have been constructed in this project," ministry of road transport and highways said.

Virtual school of global standards in Delhi soon

New Delhi, April 1: The Delhi government on Thursday constituted a six-member committee comprising school principals, teachers and IT officials to study the best global practices in virtual schooling and submit a blueprint for the national capital's virtual school, officials said.

Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia presided over a meeting to outline the scope of the Delhi Model Virtual School, a first-of-its-kind school that would strive to provide education to students remotely through personalised teaching-learning, effective assessments and the use of cutting edge technology, they said.

The Delhi government had proposed to establish the virtual school in its 2021-22 Budget.

According to the officials, existing models of virtual schools in the US and New Zealand were discussed in the meeting.

Mr Sisodia constituted a six-member committee comprising school principals, teachers, and IT officials that will study the best global practices in virtual school-



Manish Sisodia

ing and submit a blueprint for Delhi's virtual school within a week, they said.

"Delhi's virtual school will be like any other regular school. It will have a school ID and dedicated staff. Students will get admitted and will be given unique IDs. This school will have students, teachers, regular teaching-learning activities, assessments and all other education-related facilities. The school will operate with the principle of 'anywhere living, anytime learning, anytime testing'," Mr Sisodia said at the meeting.

"The school will cater to a wide cross-section of students, including students interested in studying from home, sportspersons and artists who need to devote adequate time towards honing their skills, school dropouts and other youths who would want to complete their education," he said. — *PTI*

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE		
Invitation of Tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement System)		
1	Name of work with its location	Hiring of vehicle for mobility of supervision, staff, T&P in the Dy.CEIL/TKJ unit. (2 Nos MUV period (2MUVx24 months) for the unit of SSE/BR/MSSB & SSE/BR/SPL/SSB.
2	Approx. cost of work.	Rs. 20,70,703/-
3	Completion period of the work	(24) Twenty Four Months
4	Date & time for submission of tender & opening of tender	Upto 15.00 hrs on 26.04.2021 Opening of tender after 15.00 hrs on same day
5	Website particulars where complete details of Tender can be seen & downloaded	Above tender available on IREPS site i.e www.ireps.gov.in
Tender Notice No. 32-W-Hire/1-MT/MUV/DLI Date: 01.04.2021		761/21
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE		

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED	
See Section U/S 82 Cr. P.C.	
Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused Pramod, S/o Ganga Saran, R/o H.No. D-209, Kh No. 7623, Harijan Basti, VPO, Bawana, Delhi has Committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 557/2014 U/S 420 IPC, P.S. Bawana, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said Pramod cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said Pramod has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused Pramod of FIR No. 557/2014 U/S 420 IPC, P.S. Bawana, Delhi is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before 04.06.2021 .	
By Order Sh. Vaibhav Mehta, Ld. Metropolitan Magistrate, Room No. 114, First Floor, Rohini Courts, Delhi	
DP/901/ON/2021(Court Matter)	

SHORT TAKES

BJP candidate's car vandalised, 3 held

Keshpur, West Bengal: BJP candidate from Keshpur Assembly constituency Tanmay Ghosh's vehicle was on Thursday vandalised allegedly by supporters of the Trinamul Congress, the police said. Three persons have been arrested in connection with the incident, they said. An unidentified group of people attacked Mr Ghosh's vehicle with bricks and bamboo sticks, and also vandalised cars of media personnel, a police officer said. A team of Central forces have reached the spot, an Election Commission official said. The EC has also sought a report from the administration. A TMC worker identified as Uttam Dolui was stabbed to death late last night in Keshpur area in Paschim Medinipur district, hours before polling started in the area. — PTI

Women can travel for free in Punjab

Chandigarh: Punjab chief minister Aminder Singh on Thursday launched a free travel facility for women in government buses within the state, and said this fulfils another promise made by his party in its poll manifesto. The Punjab Cabinet on Wednesday gave its approval for the scheme. "With this, we have fulfilled another poll manifesto promise," the chief minister said after the launch, and claimed that a record 85 per cent of promises have been implemented by his government. He said the state government was now moving towards realising 100 per cent of the commitments made before the Assembly elections. While everyone only talks about women empowerment, the Punjab government has taken several concrete measures to achieve the same, the chief minister said. — PTI

Raj launches health insurance scheme

Jaipur: Rajasthan on Thursday began the registration for an insurance scheme under which each family in the state can claim up to ₹5 lakh every year for medical expenses. The state began the registration for Chiranjeevi Health Insurance Scheme, announced by CM Ashok Gehlot in the state budget 2021-22. Rajasthan has become the first state in the country, where each family will get health insurance of ₹5 lakh each year. People can get registered and be assured of cashless treatment, Mr Gehlot claimed in a tweet. He said the registrations for the government's cashless treatment for all have begun in the state from Thursday. It is one of our biggest health care schemes, he said. — PTI

MORE BATTALIONS BEING RUSHED TO MYANMAR BORDER

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 1

Additional battalions of ITBP, SSB and Assam Rifle are being rushed to the India-Myanmar border as some refugees from Myanmar have been trying to enter India in wake of Army action against protesters there. Although Myanmar residents are not being allowed, but the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) will discuss the issue in its meeting next week, sources said. Security and intelligence agencies are closely monitoring the situation all along the India-Myanmar border as there is considerable tension in Myanmar as Army has launched a massive offensive against protesters in their country. This has forced people to flee from Myanmar and a lot of them have been trying to enter India. But so far, the border guarding forces have managed to stop any illegal entry into India. India shares almost a 1,500-km-long border with Myanmar. Following the tense situation in Myanmar, it has been decided that additional Central paramilitary forces be rushed to the Myanmar border. Sources said so far it has been decided that illegal migrants will not be allowed into India. However, as a humanitarian gesture Indian security forces have been providing food and medical aid to some residents of villages in Myanmar which are close to the border.

Polling not disrupted at Nandigram's booth 7: EC

New Delhi, April 1: The Election Commission (EC) cited the report of its general observer in West Bengal on Thursday to say voting was not disrupted at any moment at polling station number 7 in Nandigram, from where chief minister Mamata Banerjee is contesting. In a statement, the commission said, "Many sections of media have been covering the incident of alleged gherao of chief minister of West Bengal and crowding at polling station No. 7 at 210 Nandigram AC (Assembly constituency) today that inter alia resulted in disruption of poll process."

It said general observer Hemen Das, an IAS officer, and police observer Ashutosh Roy (IPS) were asked to go to the spot immediately.

The panel said the general observer's report was received at 4.06 pm. The statement quoted the report: "Polling at PS No. 7 (Boyal Moktab Primary School) is going on smoothly. CM, who is also a contesting candidate, has left the place at about 3.35 pm after staying here for nearly one and half hour. It may kindly be noted that polling was not disrupted at any moment. Till now, 702 votes, out of 943, have been polled. It is 74 per cent."

The observer said nearly 3,000 people were there when he and the police observer reached the polling station. "All have left now," he said in his report.

The EC statement also said a separate handwritten complaint was received from the CM via the chief electoral officer. The same has been forwarded to special general observer Ajay Nayak and special police observer Vivek Dubey. — PTI

Candidate from Cong ally joins BJP in Assam

AGE CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI, APRIL 1

Amidst the charges of intimidating Opposition by ruling BJP minister in the name of NIA probe, a candidate from Bodoland Peoples' Front (BPF), a partner of the Opposition Congress-led grand alliance, switched sides and joined the ruling BJP late on Wednesday night.

With less than a week to go for the third and final phase of the Assembly polls, Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in a midnight social media post announced, "Official candidate of BPF and so called Congress-led alliance from Tamulpur LAC (legislative Assembly constituency) Ram Das Basumatary met me a short while ago. He has expressed his desire to join BJP and retire from the election."

Earlier on Thursday, the Congress claimed that its Mahajot candidate from Tamulpur constituency is missing and it asked the ruling BJP to answer about his whereabouts.

Bomb scare: Raids at Mumbai club

NIA finds important documents pertaining to SIM cards used by Waze

SHAHAB ANSARI MUMBAI, APRIL 1

The NIA conducted searches at a hotel in south Mumbai on Thursday in connection with its probe into the case of an explosives-laden SUV found near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence and the murder of businessman Mansukh Hiren. The NIA has claimed to have found out that the Telegram messages from Jaish-ul-Hind claiming responsibility was also a part of Sachin Waze's cover up plan.

An officer of the level of NIA superintendent of police led the raid follow-



Security personnel keep vigil as villagers raise slogans against West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, waiting inside a polling station, at Boyal in Nandigram on Thursday during the second phase of the West Bengal Assembly elections. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

Raja barred from campaigning over comments against TN CM

EC pulls up DMK leader, also warns him not to 'lower dignity of women'

New Delhi, April 1: The Election Commission on Thursday banned DMK leader A Raja from campaigning for 48 hours after finding him guilty of violating the model code of conduct by making alleged derogatory remarks against Tamil Nadu chief minister K. Palaniswami.

In its order, the poll panel reprimanded Mr Raja and removed his name from the list of DMK's "star campaigners" and debarred him from campaigning for 48 hours "with immediate effect".

"The commission also advises you to be watchful and not to make intemperate, indecent, derogatory, obscene remarks and lower the dignity of women in future during election campaign," the order read.

The order did not specify the exact time the ban



A. Raja

would end, but if the communication was received by Mr Raja on Thursday afternoon, he cannot campaign till the afternoon of April 3.

There have been instances where the EC has mentioned the exact time when the ban would end.

The 48-hour ban means that Mr Raja would not be able to address any public meetings, rallies or even give media interviews until April 3. If a leader is a "star campaigner", his

campaigning expenditure are borne by the party and not by the candidate himself.

The Assembly polls will be held in TN on April 6 in a single phase for which campaigning would end in the evening of April 4.

According to the order, Mr Raja had submitted an interim reply on March 31, denying the allegations and had asked for a copy of full text of his "alleged abusive speech", copy of the complaint made by AIADMK and had requested for an opportunity to give a detailed reply.

He had sought personal hearing with his advocate.

Noting that his reply was not satisfactory, the EC said that asking for more details and time to represent was "an attempt to buy time which the EC cannot afford to give in the midst of elections". — PTI

Shah lashes out at DMK over its leader's remarks

Thirukoyilur (TN), April 1: Union home minister Amit Shah on Thursday hit out at the DMK over its leader A. Raja's alleged vulgar remarks against Tamil Nadu CM K. Palaniswami's mother, saying it showed the party had no regard for women.

The "mothers and sisters" of the state should teach a "lesson" to the DMK in the April 6 Assembly polls by defeating it, he said.

Addressing a rally, Mr Shah canvassed votes for NDA candidates, even as he charged the DMK with aiming to romp home in the polls by "hook or crook". — PTI

Modi targets Cong's grand alliance of 'maha jhoot'

AGE CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI, APRIL 1

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday came down heavily on opposition Congress and said that the ongoing Assam Assembly election has become a "battle" between the Congress-AIUDF grand alliance of "maha jhoot" (great lie) and National Democratic Alliance of "maha vikas" (great development).

Addressing a public rally in Kokrajhar, which is scheduled to go for polling in the third and final phase of polling on April 6, Mr Modi said, "Football is very popular among youth here. In terms of football people have yet again shown a Red Card to Congress and its Mahajot. People of Assam have trust in the NDA for the development, peace, security of the state. This is an election between the maha jhoot of Mahajot (Congress-AIUDF grand alliance) and 'maha vikas' of the double engine government."

Asserting that the BJP is set for a grand victory in Phase-I polls, the PM said that the NDA government is working for welfare of Assam with the mantra of 'sabka saath sabka vikas sabka vishwas'. "People of Assam have given blessings to NDA in 1st phase of polling. In the 1st phase, Assam has put a stamp on grand victory of NDA," he said.

Referring to the BJP government's developmental initiatives in the state, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Medical college is being set up in Kokrajhar at a rapid pace. A package of ₹1,500 crore has also been provided for development."

Militants target BJP activist in J&K, cop killed

YUSUF JAMEEL SRINAGAR, APRIL 1

A policeman was killed when a group of separatist militants targeted the home of a BJP activist with automatic weapons in Nowgam area on the peripheries of Jammu and Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar on Thursday. The BJP activist Anwar Khan was not present at his residence, however.

The police claimed that one of the assailants was wearing a burka and that they decamped with the service rifle of sentry Rameez Raja after shooting him down.

The critically wounded policeman was rushed to the hospital, where he succumbed soon thereafter, the police said.

Inspector general of police (Kashmir range) Vijay Kumar said, "I visited the place of occurrence. There was one sentry, a J&K policeman on guard duty, and two more policemen were in the guard room. It is clearly seen in the CCTV footage that a burka-clad terrorist came and in woman's voice asked the sentry to open the door. But the moment the sentry opened the door two more terrorists came and

THE POLICE claimed that one of the assailants was wearing a burka and that they decamped with the service rifle of sentry after shooting him down

opened indiscriminate fire using automatic weapons."

He said a fourth militant also arrived at the scene quickly and snatched the service rifle from the injured cop.

The IGP claimed that two of the militants involved in the attack have been identified as residents of Srinagar associated with proscribed Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT). "One of them is Khurshid from Chanapora, who is a categorised terrorist, and the other is Obaid Shafi Dar. Both of them were among the six city youth who joined terrorists' ranks last year. Two others involved in this attack are yet to be identified. But we will very soon pinpoint and neutralise them." (sic)

Meanwhile, the police have arrested 20 persons, mostly youth, on charges of being involved in disrupting a music concert at Srinagar's famed Badamwaer or almond garden on Sunday.

Jawan begins 43K km Kashmir to Kanyakumari run to enter Guinness

AGE CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, APRIL 1

An Army corporal on Thursday began a walk from Kashmir to Kanyakumari with a resolve to set a Guinness World Record.

Naik N.A. Velu P of the Army's 60 Para Field Hospital who was sent off from the headquarters of the Chinari or 15 Corps

headquarters here by his colleagues on the journey covering a distance of approximately 4,300 km within fifty days is an "ultra-marathoner who is attempting a Guinness book of world record, defence spokesman Lt. Col. Ennon Musavi said.

Naik Velu would be running 70-100 km every day and would pass through major towns and cities.

SEARCH FOR MISSING



DEEPAK

General public is hereby informed that a boy (depicted in the photo), **Name:** Deepak S/o Jitender R/o H. No. 24, Balika Chowk, Aya Nagar, New Delhi has been missing since 17.02.2021 from his house. In this regard a case vide FIR No. 76/21 u/s 363 IPC dated 17.02.2021 has been registered at Police Station Fatehpur Beri, New Delhi. His physical description is as under:-

Age : 15 Years, **Height:** 5' (Approx.), **Complexion :** Fair, **Face:** Round, **Built:** Thin, **Wearing :** Black colour T-shirt and blue colour jeans. Any person having any information/Clue about this missing boy, may inform SHO, Fatehpur Beri, New Delhi at E-mail Id — cic@cbi.gov.in or Website: <http://cbi.nic.in> **SHO** **P.S. Fatehpur Beri, New Delhi** **South Distt., Delhi** **Ph. No. 011-26659511, 8076824544** **DP/447/SD/2021**

SEARCH FOR MISSING



RUKHSAR

General public is hereby informed that a girl (depicted in the photo), **Name:** Rukhsar D/o Alisher R/o H. No. 97, Gali No. 1, Moonga Nagar, Delhi has been missing since 09.03.2021 from her house. In this regard a case vide DD No. 57-A dated 11.03.2021 has been lodged at Police Station Dayal Pur, Delhi. Her physical description is as under:-

Age : About 23 Years, **Height:** 5'3", **Complexion :** Wheatish, **Face:** Long, **Built:** Normal, **Wearing :** Pink colour payjama-kurta and hawai chappal in feet. Any person having any information/Clue about this missing girl, may inform SHO, Dayal Pur, Delhi, at E-mail Id — cic@cbi.gov.in or Website: <http://cbi.nic.in> **SHO** **P.S. Dayal Pur, Delhi** **North-East Distt., Delhi** **Ph. No. 011- 22800215, 22800216** **DP/670/NE/2021**

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED GIRL

General Public is hereby informed that one girl (depicted in the photo) **namely Soni D/o Vijay Sahu R/o H. No. 851, Block-11, Lal Flat, Sec-3, DSIIDC Bawana, Delhi Aged-16-17 Years** has been reported missing/kidnapped since 28.02.2021 at 04:00 PM from her residence vide FIR No.114/2021 Dated 05.03.2021 u/s 363 IPC registered at Police Station Bawana, Delhi. Her physical description is as under:-



Soni

Complexion: Fair, **Height:** 5', **Face:** Long, **Built:** Thin, **Clothing:** Red coloured salwar, Red & white coloured suit, and Black coloured slipper in feet. Any person having any information/Clue about this missing/kidnapped girl, may inform SHO, Bawana, Delhi at E-mail : cic@cbi.gov.in or website : <http://cbi.nic.in> **Sd/-** **Tele No. : 011-24368638 or 24368641** **SHO, Bawana, Delhi** **FAX No. : 011-24368639** **Tel. : 011-27752534** **DP/896/ON/2021** **Mob. : 7065036321**

From Shivaji Rao Gaekwad to Rajinikanth: The rise of a superstar

All-time cult superstar

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN
CHENNAI, APRIL 1

Born in a Marathi family as Shivaji Rao Gaekwad, the doyen of Tamil cinema, K. Balachander, discovered him and introduced him in his 1975 national award-winning film Apoorva Raagangal. It was on a Holi day the legendary film-maker rechristened him as Rajinikanth and the rest is history.

Though Rajini started his career as a baddie and continued doing films with shades of grey, it was his ultimate negative character 'Parattai' in ace director Bharathiraja's debut film 16 Vayadhinile, which made him an instant hit. His inimitable style combined with the punch line 'Edhu Eppidi Irukku' was admired by all.

Veteran film-maker S.P. Muthuraman's Bhuvana Oru Kelvikuri, in which Rajini portrayed a positive character, changed his image overnight. His yet another milestone film with SPM was Arilirundhu Arubadhu Varai, a blockbuster in which Rajini was projected as an emotional person and his histrionics were portrayed without any antics. Together, the duo made 25 movies and some of the memorable films include Netrikkan, Murattu Kaalai (first time Rajini in a full-fledged rural action role), Naan Mahan Alla, Nallavanu Nallavan etc.

Prolific film-maker Thanu, who identified the star in him, gave the 'Superstar' title to Rajini when he released Bhairavi in 1978. Much later in 2016, Thanu made Kabali with Rajini where the latter played an aged gangster.

Mullum Malarum with ace Mahendran was a major breakthrough for Rajinikanth, whose performance as 'Kali' received unanimous



praise, and is widely considered as the best performance in his career and also won him special award in state awards.

Rajinikanth did only a single yet significant film Thalapathy with Mani Ratnam. The movie emerged as a crucial film in his career, apart from being a commercial hit.

Baasha directed by Suresh Krishna and released in 1995 went on to become a cult classic, which made Rajini 'Baasha' of all times. Rajini played an auto driver with a deadly past. The Superstar became an overnight rage among auto drivers of Tamil Nadu.

Commercial director K.S. Ravikumar teamed

up with Rajini for Muthu, which was a huge box office hit and was the first film to be dubbed into Japanese as Mutu - Odoru Maharaja. The film went on to create a huge fan base and market for Rajinikanth in Japan. The success of Muthu in Japan led American news magazine Newsweek to comment that Rajinikanth had superseded Leonardo Di Caprio as Japan's trendiest heartthrob.

Shankar, known for his grandeur and extravaganza, collaborated with Rajinikanth for Sivaji. The blockbuster became the first Tamil movie to be listed as one of the top 10 best films of the UK and South Africa. Rajini, who was reportedly paid a

whopping Rs 20 crore salary for Sivaji, is said to be the second highest paid actor in all of Asia.

Enthiran, yet another film with Shankar, was the first sci-fi for him which was released in 2010 and touted to be the most expensive Indian film to be made then (Rs150 crore) and highest grossing Tamil film of its time. Rajini commanded a remuneration of Rs 45 crore for his dual roles of a robot (a negative one) and a scientist.

Chandramukhi, a comedy-horror film directed by P. Vasu, was a comeback film for Rajinikanth after his self-imposed sabbatical following the fiasco of his writing and production venture Baba. It was Rajini's third all-time blockbuster and completed a 700-day run at the box office. About 20 million tickets were reportedly sold worldwide.

His last film was Darbar, which was released in 2020.

Rajinikanth has a cult fan following with 55,000 fan clubs registered around the world in 2017 and few thousand unofficial ones. The first fan club was started in Madurai by one of his ardent fans called Muthumani 45 years ago and the actor got in touch with him and gave him financial assistance when the former was hospitalised recently.

The actor, who is 71 and arguably one of south India's biggest stars till today, sparks extreme fan mania before every film's release - from erecting massive cutouts and doing pal abhishekam to them, offering special prayers and celebrating it as a special festival.

The iconic star has acted in more than 160 films in all south languages as well as Hindi and in an American cinema with a supporting role in the mystery adventure film titled Bloodstone in 1988.

No politics, please

Chennai, April 1: When he thundered in 1996 that "even God cannot save" Tamil Nadu if the then Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa won a successive term in elections, many saw it as Rajinikanth's prelude to the political entry of the uncrowned king of Tamil cinema known for his sureshot hits.

For, cinema to politics transition was nothing new in Tamil Nadu as former chief ministers, C.N. Annadurai, M. Karunanidhi, M.G. Ramachandran and Jayalalithaa had successful cinema stints before blending with politics to lead the state.

But ever since it was a guessing game, occasional punch dialogues in films, an assertive statement in 2017 and a 2020 marked with flip-flops which culminated with the actor finally saying a big no to politics, citing his frail health.

His roar of "now or never" in politics last year ended with a whimper in the same when he finally said he would not take the political plunge owing to his frail health.

This, after a 2017 assertion that he would launch a political party and fight from all 234 assembly seats in the 2021 elections in Tamil Nadu which enthused his diehard fans who had been awaiting an announcement that their "Thalaiva" who beat up evil men on screen black and blue was now ready to clean up the "system" with his political avatar. However, their joy was to be short-lived when in March 2020, he announced in a press conference that he never desired to be chief minister and that he would enter politics when he saw an upsurge among the people yearning for a change ushering in clean politics, prompting intense debates of "will he or won't he." However, within months, he seemed to have a change of heart and categorically announced floating a party in January 2021.

With the spirited fans once again rallying behind the veteran, Rajinikanth made another U-turn in December, when he said he will not enter politics in view of his frail health, putting an end to his long-nurtured plans and describing his then hospitalisation as a God's warning. —PTI

Coronavirus vaccination drive on all days of April

India reports over 72,000 new cases, 459 deaths

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 1

India launched Covid-19 vaccination for all people aged 45 years and above from Thursday, which reported this year's highest single day rise of 72,330 new infections in a span of 24 hours, taking the nationwide tally of cases to 1,22,21,665.

Seeking to exponentially expand the countrywide anti-coronavirus inoculation drive, the Centre has decided to keep all public and private sector Covid-19 vaccination centres (CVCs) operational throughout April, including on gazetted holidays.

The Union health ministry has written to all states and union territories on Thursday and asked them to make necessary arrangements for this to optimally utilise all vaccination centres across the public and private sectors to ensure a rapid increase in the pace and coverage of COVID inoculation.

"This decision is in line with the graded and proactive approach employed by the government of India along with the states and union territories for Covid-19 vaccination," the health ministry said.

More than 6.5 crore vaccine doses have been administered across the country so far to frontline workers, healthcare workers, those above 60 and for people aged above 45 with specified co-morbid conditions.

The countrywide vaccination drive was rolled out on January 16 with healthcare workers (HCWs) getting inoculated and the vaccination of frontline workers (FLWs) started from February 2.

The next phase of Covid-19 vaccination commenced from March 1 for those over 60 years of age and for people aged 45 and above with specified co-morbid conditions.

The ministry said so far vaccine doses have been

NEW COVID VARIANT FOUND IN C'GARH, SAYS MINISTER

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, APRIL 1

New variant of coronavirus, named N-440, has been found in Chhattisgarh indicating mutation of virus in the state, Chhattisgarh health minister T S Singhdeo said on Thursday.

According to him, the Centre has sent a report to the Chhattisgarh government recently confirming that the new variant of coronavirus was found in five samples from the state. However, doctors say a study was yet to be done as to how the new variant of the virus would exactly affect our immune system.

But, it has been found

administered to 82,60,293 HCWs (first dose), 52,50,704 HCWs (second dose), 91,74,171 FLWs (first dose) and 39,45,796 FLWs (second dose).

Besides, 3,05,12,070 and 1,20,346 beneficiaries more than 60 years old have been administered the first and second dose respectively, while 78,36,667 and 17,849 individuals aged 45 to 69 with specific co-morbidities have taken the first and second dose respectively so far, according to the ministry.

According to the health ministry, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Punjab, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh continue to show a steep rise in the Covid daily new cases accounting for 84.61 per cent of the new cases reported in a span of 24 hours.

Maharashtra has reported the highest daily new cases at 39,544. It is followed by Chhattisgarh with 4,563 while Karnataka reported 4,225 new cases.

that the mutant was capable of weakening the immune system.

Mr Singhdeo said no coronavirus variants of Britain, South Africa and Brazil were so far detected in Chhattisgarh.

All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), Raipur, gathers samples in Chhattisgarh and sends them to the National Centre for Disease Control for tests.

The first coronavirus case in Chhattisgarh was reported in Raipur on March 18, 2020. As on Thursday, Chhattisgarh has reported 3,49,187 positive cases and 4170 deaths.

The state reported 4,563 fresh coronavirus positive cases and 28 deaths in the last 24 hours.

Maha minister rules out fresh lockdown

Mumbai, April 1: Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope on Thursday ruled out the possibility of imposing lockdown in the state from April 2. However, people should brace themselves for stricter restrictions, he said.

"No decision has been taken to enforce lockdown, which will be the last option before the state government. But the talks are certainly moving in that direction, as the government needs to be ready for any eventuality," Mr Tope said.

"If the Covid cases increase, we have no option but to impose the lockdown. Several countries have done the same. Though, there will be no lockdown from April 2, stringent measures will be implemented to ensure that pandemic norms are followed," he added. Maharashtra has seen a huge rise in coronavirus cases in the last fortnight.

Clashes & drama at Nandigram

■ Continued from Page 1

polling centres. Ms Banerjee, who was keeping a tab on the polling from her temporary address at Reyapara in Nandigram, came out in the afternoon. She visited booth (No. 7) at Boyal Moktab Primary School at around 1.15 pm after getting complaints from her party of booth capturing and rampant rigging by the BJP in the absence of Central paramilitary forces.

The TMC chief was taunted by BJP workers with "Jai Shree Ram" slogan and her party workers, shouting "Khela Hobe", clashed with them.

Sitting in her wheelchair inside the booth, a helpless CM was seen calling up Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar to complain as the fight between BJP and TMC workers escalated despite prohibitory orders. Stones were hurled and abuses traded, prompting the administration to rush a police contingent to the spot.

Later, IPS officer Nandendra Nath Tripathi, who was deputed by the EC in Nandigram, rushed with Election Commission officials to the CM and spoke with her.

In 2015, Mr Tripathi was sent on compulsory leave by Ms Banerjee for slapping a famous sweet shop owner during Municipal polls in Kolkata. At around 3.15 pm, Central forces and state police personnel escorted Ms Banerjee out of the booth.

"Eighty per cent votes here were rigged. Cheating was done in polling here. I lodged 63 complaints to the Election Commission. Why are the goons of the BJP from other states like Uttar Pradesh allowed here? I have never seen such an EC. I urge it to act impartially. I am not blaming the Central forces because Union home minister Amit Shah is giving orders to BSF, CRPF and others," Ms Banerjee said.

"I am not worried about Nandigram because I am winning here. The people love me and cast their votes for me. I am worried about democracy. Even today Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed two rallies in the state while the polling was underway. This is a violation of the EC's Model Code of Conduct," she added.

Confident about his victory, Mr Adhikari said, "The CM, as a candidate who is bounded by electoral Do's and Don'ts, cannot stay inside a booth for such two hours. She directly influenced the voters." The TMC boss claimed she would win a majority of the 60 seats that had gone to polls in the first and second phase.

Indian HIV cure takes big step forward

Researchers develop nanozymes that can block HIV reactivation

Bengaluru, April 1: Researchers at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) here have developed artificial enzymes that they said can successfully block reactivation and replication of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in the host's immune cells.

Made from vanadium pentoxide nanosheets, these "nanozymes" work by mimicking a natural enzyme called glutathione peroxidase that helps reduce oxidative stress levels in the host's cells, which is required to keep the virus in check, an IISc statement said.

The study, published in "EMBO Molecular Medicine", was led by Amit Singh, associate professor and Wellcome Trust-DBT India Alliance senior fellow at the depart-

ment of microbiology & cell biology and Centre for Infectious Diseases Research, and Govindasamy Mughesh, professor at the department of inorganic and physical chemistry.

"The advantage is that the nanozymes are stable inside biological systems and do not mediate any unwanted reactions inside the cells," Mughesh said. "They are also quite easy to prepare in the lab."

There is currently no way to eliminate HIV from a patient's body completely, according to the statement. Anti-HIV drugs are only successful in suppressing the virus; they fail at eradicating HIV from infected cells. The virus hides inside the host's immune cells in a "latent" state and stably maintains its reservoir.

■ 'NANOZYMES' WORK by mimicking a natural enzyme called glutathione peroxidase that helps reduce oxidative stress levels in the host's cells, which is required to keep the virus in check

When the levels of toxic molecules such as hydrogen peroxide increase in the host's cells, leading to a state of increased oxidative stress, the virus gets "reactivated" - it emerges from hiding and begins replicating again, it said.

A few years ago, Amit Singh's team developed a biosensor to measure oxidative stress levels in HIV-infected immune cells in real-time, it was stated. "We found that to come out of latency and reactivate, HIV needs very little

oxidative stress," he said.

One way to prevent reactivation is to keep the oxidative stress constantly low, which would "lock" the virus in a permanent state of latency.

Enzymes such as glutathione peroxidase are essential for this process; they convert toxic hydrogen peroxide to water and oxygen. However, inducing the host cells to produce more quantities of these enzymes could disrupt the tightly regulated cellular redox machinery.

Around the same time, Mughesh's group published a study showing that nanowires made of vanadium pentoxide can efficiently mimic the activity of glutathione peroxidase. Singh's lab, therefore, decided to collaborate with them. —PTI

‘Was an oversight’

■ Continued from Page 1

depositors, the Centre had slashed interest rates on post office deposits, public provident fund and others by up to 1.1 per cent or 110 basis points.

As far as the implications of small savings schemes to the common man are concerned, the most popular fixed income products like Public Provident Fund (PPF) was to fetch a rate of 6.4 per cent, down from 7.1 per cent earlier. Similarly, National Savings Certificate (NSC) was to yield 5.9 per cent, down from 6.8 per cent earlier, while rates on the girl child savings scheme Sukanya Samridhi Yojana would fall to 6.9 per cent from 7.6 per cent earlier. One-year time deposit rates had seen the steepest cut of 110 basis points to 4.4 per cent from 5.5 per cent.

Interest rates for small savings schemes are notified on a quarterly basis. However, Wednesday's decision to cut interest rate by up to 1.1 per cent across various small savings schemes, including the NSC and PPF, came a day before the second phase of polling in West Bengal, including the political hotbed Nandigram, from where West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee is contesting.

PM Modi takes a jab at Didi

■ Continued from Page 1

pitted against her former aide Suwendu Adhikari who switched over to the BJP before polls.

Addressing a BJP rally at Joynagar in South 24 Parganas, Mr Modi attacked Ms Banerjee's latest Bengali poll slogan: "Thanda thanda, Cool cool, Ebar Trinamul".

Calling the ruling Trinamul Congress a "shool" (thorn) and causing pain to the people of West Bengal, Mr Modi said, "I now find Didi, who often threatens and abuses, saying 'Cool, Cool' even after TMC unleashed atrocities on women," and added, "Trinamul cool nahi, Bangal ke logon ke liye shool hai, shool. Bangal ko asahaniya pira denewala shool hai Trinamul. Bangal ko rak-taranjit karnewala shool hai Trinamul. Bangal ke saath anyak karnewala shool hai Trinamul (Trinamul is not cool. It is nothing but a thorn for the people of Bengal. It is a thorn which inflicts unbearable pain to Bengal, leaves Bengal bleeding and metes out injustice to Bengal). You have to give accounts of killings of brothers and sisters of Bengal. Bloodbath will not happen further."

Referring to the ongoing polls in the state, Mr Modi claimed the huge turnout of voters would help the BJP surpass its target of 200 seats out of 294 to come to power for the first time in the state.

"BJP will cross the tally of 200 seats



Prime Minister Narendra Modi gestures during an election campaign rally at Joynagar in South 24 Parganas district on Thursday. — PTI

this time here. Its flying start in the first phase of polls clearly says that the voice of the people has the blessings of God. During the second phase today, people are reaching the polling booths in large numbers. BJP and its wave is everywhere," he said.

Replying to Ms Banerjee's controversial comments on him over his recent Bangladesh tour, the PM asked her whether he was not entitled to visit Hindu temples in the neighbouring country.

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 1

A couple hailing from Odisha's Nabarangpur on Thursday alleged that their six-month-old infant son suffering from pneumonia died after he was administered an injection which was prescribed by the doctor after 'Google search' exercise at Dabugam health centre.

The local medical officer, however, rubbished the allegation and said the proper injection was given to the infant. According to reports, Prasant Bisoyee of Badaolama village in Nabarangpur district on Thursday morning took his critically ill son to the Dabugam health centre

■ THE DOCTOR rubbished the allegation that he wrote prescription after searching the medicine on Google. The child was admitted to the hospital in a critical condition, he said

after his condition deteriorated. The doctor who attended the infant wrote the prescription after searching the medicine on Google, he said.

"The doctor advised that my son needed a life-saving injection. He prescribed the injection not from his memory but after doing a Google search. Soon after the baby was administered the injection, he closed eyes and died," Bisoyee added.

"The doctor didn't bother to refer us to the

Umerkote hospital in time where we could have availed better treatment," he alleged.

On the other hand, the medical officer at the health centre rubbished the allegation of 'Google search' medication.

"There was no medical negligence. The child suffered from severe pneumonia and was admitted to the hospital in a critical condition. Appropriate medicines were used. But, he was in the last stage," said Subhasis Sahoo, the medical officer at Dabugam.

"They took the patient to Umerkote, but returned mid-way after his condition deteriorated. When they reached here the patient had become very critical," Sahoo claimed.

Pak Cabinet refuses trade

■ Continued from Page 1

"We want to cooperate with India but the first condition is that it should go back to pre August 5, 2019 position in Kashmir," he said.

Finance minister Azhar's announcement on Wednesday to import cotton and sugar from India had raised hopes of a partial revival of bilateral trade relations, which were suspended after the August 5, 2019 decision of New Delhi to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir.

India is the world's biggest producer of cotton and the second biggest sugar manufacturer.

Azhar's decision became doubtful since afternoon but officials kept mum and finally the first confirmation came from Minister for Human Rights Shireen Mazari, who is known for her hawkish stand on Kashmir.

"Today Cabinet stated clearly NO trade with India," Mazari tweeted soon after the Cabinet meeting.

Mazari said that Prime

■ FINANCE MINISTER Azhar's announcement on Wednesday to import cotton and sugar from India had raised hopes of a partial revival of bilateral trade relations

Minister Khan, who chaired the first Cabinet meeting after testing Covid-19 positive on March 20, "made (it) clear (that) there can be no normalisation of relations with India until they reverse their actions viz Kashmir of August 5, 2019.

Ahead of the Cabinet meeting, Mazari had said that all ECC decisions have to be approved by Cabinet and only then can they be seen as "approved" by the government.

"Just for the record - All ECC decisions have to be approved by Cabinet & only then they can be seen as "approved by govt"! So today in Cabinet there will be discussion on ECC decisions incl trade with India & then govt decision will be taken! Media should be aware of this atleast!" Mazari had tweeted. In May 2020, Pakistan

had lifted the ban on import of medicines and raw material of essential drugs from India amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ties between India and Pakistan nose-dived after a terror attack on the Pathankot Air Force base in 2016 by terror groups based in Pakistan. Subsequent attacks, including one on an Indian Army camp in Uri, further deteriorated the relationship.

The ties strained further after India's war planes pounded a Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorist training camp deep inside Pakistan on February 26, 2019 in response to the Pulwama terror attack in 2019 in which 40 CRPF jawans were killed.

India's move to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019 angered Pakistan, which downgraded diplomatic ties with India and expelled the Indian High Commissioner in Islamabad. Pakistan also snapped all air and land links with India and suspended trade and railway services. —PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

2 APRIL 2021

Small savings U-turn: Bad economics, bizarre optics

It is a bizarre moment for policy. Since Assembly elections are on in many states, evidently the fear of electoral backlash has forced an about turn by the Centre in something like 12 hours flat. On Wednesday night, the government announced substantial cuts in interest rates for small savings, meaning instruments such as PPF, post office savings, bank fixed deposits, Kisan Vikas Patras, and Senior Citizen Savings Scheme which ordinary people use to save their lifelong earnings. On Friday morning, the announcement was reversed in a tweet by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Small savings, or common people's savings, are critical. They constitute as much as 60 per cent of all savings in the economy. The savings rate in the country was already touching a 15-year low, with household savings (small savings) declining steadily on account of shrinking interest rates, especially since early 2020. If the savings rate is low, investments will be inadequate. As a result of low investment funds available within the country, India has had to take recourse to external borrowings. So, that's how important small savings are.

The ordinary people, rather than the better off citizens, were being asked to shoulder the burden of government borrowings which for the financial year 2021-22 is slated to be ₹12.06 trillion

The core inflation rate in India was six per cent in January. The proposed cuts in interest rate for small savings would have brought the real value of most of these savings into negative territory. So, why was the finance minister unmindful of the daily needs of ordinary Indians when it is well known that millions of people depend on the interest earnings from their savings to meet their everyday needs?

This is not just bad poll-time optics, hurting the lower end of society is deplorable political economy. During the year-long pandemic, and for three years before that (as a consequence of demonetisation), it is the poor, the middle classes, and small and medium businesses that really suffered in terms of job losses and output losses. They have struggled to survive. In contrast, the richest Indians — especially big industry — have made handsome gains. And yet, the government's policy on interest rates, which is done quarterly, singled out small savings for punishment.

A probable reason is that the government may have calculated that if the interest rates are pushed down, it can borrow on better terms to meet its needs. Which means the ordinary people, rather than the better off citizens, were being asked to shoulder the burden of government borrowings which for the financial year 2021-22 is slated to be 12.06 trillion rupees. In effect, the section of the population which is already teetering on the brink was expected to surrender more to finance the government's plans, as compared to the big boys.

The plan was jettisoned overnight, but even at the prevailing rates of interest for small savings, the ordinary householder is eking out a hard living. Is the present finance minister responsible for the poor woman's misery, or is it that the policy set responsible for accelerating poverty pre-dates her assuming charge of finance? Policymaking is highly centralised in the present set-up. Whether it is finance or foreign affairs or defence, or matters concerning home, agriculture or industry, it is widely thought that decisions are made on high. That is where answers ought to be sought for the goof-up. On account of elections, the panic button was pressed at the last minute. But what happens in the next quarter will be keenly watched.

K'taka: 'Lotus' probe welcome

The Karnataka high court has allowed an inquiry into the "Operation Lotus" controversy that surfaced before the Janata Dal-Congress government of H.D. Kumaraswamy was brought down in July 2019 through defections. This is a setback for the BJP as well as its Karnataka chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa who was charged with engineering the collapse of the government through various inducements, including an offer of money reportedly made in a telephone call with the son of a JD(S) legislator.

The judge John Michael D'Cunha, known to take a tough stand on corruption in politics as evidenced in his sensational 2014 ruling to convict J. Jayalalithaa of graft and fine her ₹100 crore, has based his judgment on the allegations and the contents of the complaint being so serious as to not allow a court to empower itself to quash the complaint and FIR. It is a different matter that the agencies that will be tasked with running the probe would be controlled by the powers that be. The highest degree of morality would be sustained only if Mr Yediyurappa were to step down for the pendency of the probe but such ideals have been thrown by the way-side long ago in Indian politics.

In a sensational audio clip that became public at the time, a conversation between Mr Yediyurappa and Sharanagouda Patil, son of JD(S) MLA Naganagouda Patil, had revealed an offer of ₹10 crore as well as a ministerial berth if he could get his father to switch sides. Mr Yediyurappa had, of course, dismissed it as a conspiracy hatched by the then chief minister to entrap him.

Facile explanations should cut no ice with probe agencies provided they run a thorough investigation to get to the bottom of the affair and establish that compelling offers had indeed been made for legislators to switch loyalties. The fact that a probe has been ordered itself brings into focus the widely held view that the ruling party at the Centre had been playing toppling games through which non-BJP governments were targeted and brought down, as in Madhya Pradesh and Puducherry, but proved unsuccessful in Rajasthan.

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Subhani



BJP has a different take... On history, science, cows!



Karan Thapar

As I See It

My office keeps a track of some of the outlandish things said by leaders of the BJP. I am not sure how it started, and I doubt if we follow other parties equally assiduously. But the BJP collection, if I can use that term, is quite a hoard. It includes the offensive and the ludicrous, it ranges from the Prime Minister to the least known MLA, and it covers subjects as varied as religion, mythology, history, couture, cuisine, practically everything to do with cows and, of course, sex. On a slow day it can be quite fun to browse.

Well, that's what I did over the recent holidays and I noticed a few intriguing patterns. Perhaps the most striking is that the BJP has a very poor grasp of history. For instance, Tirath Singh Rawat, the new chief minister of Uttarakhand, believes "America enslaved India for 200 years". His counterpart in Tripura, Biplab Kumar Deb, is convinced that Rabindranath Tagore returned his Nobel Prize to protest against the British. But what really surprised me is the number of times the Prime Minister is confused by the past.

Alexander's army, he once said, conquered the entire world but was defeated by the Biharis. On another occasion he relocated Taxila to somewhere not far from Patna. On a third, he said when he thinks of the Gupta dynasty, he remembers Chandragupta. Of course, at the time he was wooing the voters of Bihar so perhaps this was intended as flattery.

But what do you make of this? In 2018 he claimed Kabir, Guru Nanak and Baba Gorakhnath "sat

together and discussed spirituality". It's an interesting idea but as impossible as the claim Jesus and Muhammad had a fireside chat or as inaccurate as the belief Buddha and Zarathustra were buddies.

However, my favourite is a bloomer about the man many consider the Prime Minister's party's revered founder. This is what Mr Modi told a gathering in Gujarat in 2013: "Syama Prasad Mookerjee was not a revolutionary. He died in 1930 in London." I would call that a three-in-one. Mookerjee was not a revolutionary. He was a member of Jawaharlal Nehru's first Cabinet. Before that he was president of the Hindu Mahasabha. Earlier, he was a lawyer and academic. He didn't die in 1930 but 1953. It wasn't in London but in a jail in Jammu and Kashmir. And, of course, he founded the Bharatiya Jan Sangh.

A second theme in the file is the BJP's questioning of science alongside its conviction that most modern achievements actually occurred centuries or even millennia earlier. When he was junior minister for human resources development — which, incidentally, includes education — Satyapal Singh said Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution was "scientifically wrong". Since no one had seen "an ape turning into a man", he said, that was proof dear Charles had got things mixed up. Our textbooks, he concluded, need to be changed.

And not surprisingly, long is the list of BJP leaders who believe some of the greatest modern achievements actually existed in the times of the Mahabharata. Tripura's Biplab Deb claims the Internet and satellite communications were known to the Kauravas

and Pandavas. Bengal's Jagdeep Dhankhar insists that Arjun's arrows had nuclear power. UP's Dinesh Sharma maintains journalism started to cover the battle at Kurukshetra. Not just that, there were live telecasts too. And he adds: "Your Google has started now but our Google started long time back".

Much the same sort of claim is made about genetic science, plastic surgery and test-tube babies. In 2014, in a speech at the inauguration of the Reliance Hospital in Mumbai, the Prime Minister said the fact Karan was born from Kunti's ear is proof that genetic science was known at the time. He added the fact Ganesh has an elephant head is proof there were plastic surgeons in those days. No doubt inspired by his leader, Dinesh Sharma has more recently proclaimed Sita was a test-tube baby!

Less surprising but also far more frequent is evidence of the BJP's incredible faith in the Indian cow and its many products. Suman Haripriya, a member of the Assam Assembly, believes "gau-mutra" and "gobar" can cure coronavirus. Sadhvi Pragma believes it's already cured her cancer. Meanwhile, for those who have blood pressure problems, she strongly recommends a good rub of a cow's back.

If, however, wealth rather than health is your concern Dilip Ghosh, the BJP's Bengal chief, insists that cow's milk contains gold. "There's a *nari* (blood vessel) that helps pro-

duce gold with the help of sunlight", he has declared. So rather than drink a glass of the stuff, you ought to sift it.

Michael Lobo, a BJP minister in Goa, says that cows in Calangute have recently changed their character and now "only eat non-vegetarian food". I wonder if earlier they were fond of beef? Uttarakhand's former chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat had once proclaimed that cows exhale oxygen. So what do they breathe?

Our file reflects these days BJP leaders have become specialists in haute couture. They've taken to advising women what to wear. Tirath Singh Rawat has firmly ruled out ripped jeans. He doesn't approve of bare knees. "If this kind of woman goes out in society to meet people and solve their problems, what kind of message are we giving to society and to our kids?", he asks. So clearly, he's not in favour of a plunging décolletage.

Dilip Ghosh, his colleague in Bengal, who perhaps hopes to replace Mamata Banerjee as chief minister, is more avant-garde. He's suggested Ms Banerjee should wear Bermudas. "If she has to keep her leg out then why wear a sari", he asks. "She could wear a pair of Bermudas instead. So that it can be seen clearly".

Of course, the thickest part of the file is what BJP leaders have to say about Muslims, their religion Islam and the fact that they would be better off in Pakistan. Termites feature in this part fairly substantially. So does the size of their families. But there's nothing imaginative or fanciful about this portion. Just offensive and horribly wrong.

Now I don't know how other parties compare with the BJP. My office hasn't kept a track of their statements. My producer, Arvind Kumar, tells me this is something he intends to do. But will it be as much fun? Or is this one respect in which the BJP is truly special?

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

FRIENDSHIP SEASON

Pakistan's decision to import cotton and sugar from India marks another thaw in Indo-Pak relations. The move comes close on the heels of the Line of Control ceasefire announced by both countries in February. Cultural and sports exchange should follow, and what's better than watching the hockey and cricket stars from both sides locking horns in the arena.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

JOKE ON MIDDLE CLASS

THE ANNOUNCEMENT of reduction of the interest paid by the government on small savings and its subsequent withdrawal makes it seem like a bad April Fool joke on the beleaguered middle class. Perhaps the finance minister suddenly remembered that such a move would adversely affect her party's chances of victory in the Assembly elections being held in some states. The "oversight" explanation of the FM is thus far from convincing. The rates will hold till the next quarter. Once the elections are over, reduction in interest rates must be expected.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

ACT AGAINST MISOGYNY

INDIA HAS dropped from 112 to 140 rank among the 156 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap 2021. It is the third worst performer in South Asia. Gender inequities and their sociological causes impact India's sex ratio, women's health over their lifetimes, their educational attainment and economic conditions, although the Constitution of India grants men and women equal rights. We need to create awareness and take firm action against injustices, such as by complaining to police if we witness any sex determination test and so on.

Anshita Rochwani
Ujjain

REPENT FOR CHRIST

GOOD FRIDAY is a day of mourning and repentance for all Christians throughout the world. Prayer services are held in all churches in the afternoon. Most churches serve a bitter drink prepared from leaves, vinegar and other ingredients. This drink is given to everyone to taste after the service as a sign of remembrance of the one Jesus Christ was forced to drink by the Jews before they nailed him to the cross because they found his teachings too hard to follow.

Jubel D'Cruz
Mumbai

Vincenzo de Luca



Linking Italian, Indian cultures, past & present, in Covid times

This year marks a very special one as we celebrate the Festival of Italian Culture in India which is held in parallel with the Indian Cultural Festival in Italy. The initiative was promoted at the last bilateral digital summit held on November 6, 2020 between the two Prime Ministers and it was also acknowledged by the President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella, as one of the pillars of the bilateral cooperation between Italy and India. In his message to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the occasion of Republic Day, Mr Mattarella said: "The Festival of Italian Culture in India and Indian Culture in Italy will take place in 2021. These events will facilitate the reciprocal comprehension and the closeness among our people."

We inaugurated the festival in January and had the honour to host the minister of external affairs, S. Jaishankar, for the first in-person event since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The festival is a unique opportunity to further strengthen the historical cultural relations between the two countries

and to share the new dynamics of exchanges between the protagonists of the Italian and Indian culture and creative industries.

The cultural exchanges between the two countries date back to ancient history. Not only can ties between European and Indian cultures be traced back to 700 BC, there are also testimonies of linguistic influences in the sixteenth century. In the last century, Giuseppe Tucci and Luigi Tassinari contributed to the knowledge of Indian culture and artistic tradition in Italy by collecting scientific studies and artistic testimonies still preserved in Italy. Thanks to these experiences, Italy boasts the most important tradition of Indology studies in the world outside India. In the last 50 years, exchanges in the cinematic field have flourished with the production of docu-films by Pierpaolo Pasolini and Roberto Rossellini and awards at the Venice Film Festival to Satyajit Ray and Mira Nair. We recently hosted the screening of Rossellini's and Pasolini's masterpieces during a three-night open-air "Notti Stellate, Italian Cinema under the Sky",

where unedited images from their travels throughout India in the late 1950s and 1960s are a testament of life in those days.

Cultural ties between Italy and India are not only rooted in the past, but they are very much driven by innovation, creativity and contemporary cultural contamination.

To celebrate the Festival of Italian Culture in India, together with the Embassy of India in Rome, we crafted a rich agenda of events in various fields — cinema, music, literature, visual arts, fashion and design. This year Italy celebrates the 700th anniversary of the death of the most important figure of the Italian culture — the father of Italian language and its most famous poet, Dante Alighieri. We are commemorating him in many of our cultural activities — from theatre to literature, exhibitions and musical performances. In February, I moderated a panel with two eminent professors from Rome and Trento University in which we analysed the figure of Dante Alighieri and how contemporary Italy's masterpiece *The Divine Comedy* is today.

We are also working on a very special project on Italian Indology and Sanskrit studies. Together with the University of Rome La Sapienza, we are putting together a collection of publications by the most prominent Italian Indologists. The project is composed of four volumes — the first one will be a collection on Italian studies on Indian History, Economy, Society; the second volume focuses on culture and literature; the third is the English translation of the biography of Giuseppe Tucci; the fourth will be entirely dedicated to Indian contemporary art.

Our events are a constant dialogue between innovation and tradition. We are focusing on our traditions but also on our dynamic and contemporary cultural drive. We are also attaching great importance in forging partnerships with our Indian counterparts and are thus working on strengthening cooperation among museums, developing projects on the protection of our cultural heritage, enhancing collaboration among artists, musicians and our creative industries.

Promoting culture in the midst of a

pandemic is not easy. As with all the cultural institutions around the world, we also had to reinvent ourselves taking full advantage of the digital tools we familiarised with, without giving up on the possibility of nurturing our Indian friends with limited outdoor events carried out in full observation of health safety protocols. It is thanks to the digital tools that we have been able to connect Italy and India even more. The availability of digital performances through the channels of the Embassy of Italy in New Delhi, the consulates in Mumbai and Kolkata and the Italian Cultural Institutes of New Delhi and Mumbai, along with the innovative platforms launched by the Italian foreign ministry have been quite successful. The promotion of arts, music, culture knows no limits.

Numerous more events still lie ahead, and I am sure the "Festival of Italian Culture in India" will further consolidate the relations between Italy and India, two culture super-powers.

The writer is the Italian ambassador to India

SHORT TAKES

PAK COURT
LIFTS BAN
ON TIKTOK

Peshawar, April 1: A Pakistani court on Thursday lifted its ban on popular Chinese video-sharing app TikTok and ordered the country's telecommunication authority to make sure that "immoral content" is not uploaded on it.

The Peshawar High Court on March 11 had ordered a ban on the TikTok over alleged "obscene content", the second time in less than six months. The court on Thursday lifted the ban.

LONDON COP IN
NEO-NAZI GROUP
CONVICTED

London, April 1: A London jury has found a rookie police officer guilty of belonging to a banned neo-Nazi organisation, the first time a British police officer has been convicted of membership of an outlawed far-right group.

After 32 hours of deliberation, the jury at the city's Old Bailey court found Benjamin Hannam, 22, guilty Thursday of being a member of the extremist group National Action.

US SAYS ISRAEL
'OCCUPIES'
WEST BANK

Washington, April 1: US President Joe Biden's administration said Wednesday that Israel's control of the West Bank is indeed "occupation," clarifying its stance after the release of a report that seemed to downplay the term, adopting language used by Donald Trump's government.

The State Department's annual report on human rights "does use the term 'occupation' in the context of the current status of the West Bank," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters.

"This has been the longstanding position of previous administrations of both parties over the course of many decades," he said. But under the staunchly pro-Israel Trump, the annual human rights report renamed the section on "Israel and the Occupied Territories" as "Israel, West Bank and Gaza."

PAKISTAN,
LANKA CONDUCT
JOINT EXERCISE

Colombo, April 1: The militaries of Sri Lanka and Pakistan have conducted a 15-day joint exercise aimed at enhancing bilateral defence relations and sharing the rich experience of two armies against terrorism. Titled the Ex-Shake Hands, the exercise was conducted in Saliyapura in North Central Province of Sri Lanka.

The exercise had the participation of six officers and 35 other ranks from the Pakistan Army and four officers and 40 other ranks from the Sri Lanka Army, the Pakistan High Commission here said in a release. It was aimed at enhancing the bilateral defence relations and mutually share the rich experience of two armies against terrorism, it said.

Speaking on the occasion, General Shavendra Silva, Sri Lanka's Army chief, said that Pakistan has to-date remained a true friend of Sri Lanka during all her critical endeavours and always stood with Sri Lanka.

NEPAL TO HOLD
POPULATION
CENSUS

Kathmandu, April 1: Nepal's statistical agency is preparing to conduct the national population census from May 9 despite the Coronavirus pandemic. The Central Bureau of Statistics, a government-owned body under the National Planning Commission, has already concluded training for facilitators, supervisors and surveyors for the purpose and is mobilising around 55,000 volunteers and surveyors for the census that takes place every 10 years.

The agency is spending Rs. 4 billion to conduct the census this time. The ongoing Corona pandemic is not going to affect the national census, said a senior officer at the CBS. "Even if there is a lockdown, the census wouldn't be affected much since only one surveyor would reach a family and the interview can be conducted outside the home in an open space by maintaining social distancing," Hem Raj Regmi, Deputy Director-General of the CBS told *The Rising Nepal*.

US court lets Rana file reply

Hearing of Tahawwur, declared fugitive by India, is scheduled April 12

Washington, April 1: A US court has acceded to the request of Pakistani-origin Canadian businessman Tahawwur Rana, who is sought for his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack, to file an additional reply against his extradition to India.

The in-person extradition hearing of 59-year-old Rana, who has been declared a fugitive by India, is scheduled for April 12.

The United States has supported India's request for his extradition to India. US District Court Judge in Los Angeles Jac-

queline Chooljian, in his brief order on Wednesday, said: Rana shall file a sur-reply of no more than 20 pages by not later than April 5.

The government may, but is not required to file any surrebuttal to the sur-reply, which may not exceed 20 pages, by not later than April 12, the judge said. In a separate order, the judge asked both Rana and the government representatives to confer and submit a status report within a week regarding the scheduling of the in-person extradition hearing,

which is currently set for April 22.

Under the existing law, hearings in cases of extradition under treaty stipulation or convention shall be held on land, publicly, and in a room or office easily accessible to the public, the judge said.

However, an in-person hearing is not currently authorised due to the pandemic, the federal judge said. Nor is it clear to the Court on the current record, that Mr. Rana may waive an in-person extradition hearing and consent to proceed by video/telepho-

nic conference, even if he wished to do so, the judge said. As such, the judge ordered the two parties to confer and file a status report within a week.

Last week Rana, who is being sought in connection with his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack, approached the court that it wanted to file an additional reply in opposition to the motion of the US government that supported his extradition to India. The US government quickly reached out to the court arguing that there was no need for Rana to file

an additional motion.

On Wednesday, the court ruled in favour of Rana.

Rana, a childhood friend of David Coleman Headley, was re-arrested on June 10 in Los Angeles on an extradition request by India for his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks in which 166 people, including six Americans, were killed.

Pakistani-American Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorist Headley was involved in plotting the 2008 Mumbai terror attack. He was made an approver in the case.

—PTI

WHO blasts Europe's vaccine rollout

France latest to impose new restrictions to combat soaring virus infections

Copenhagen, April 1: The WHO on Thursday slammed Europe's "unacceptably slow" vaccine rollout and warned of a "worrying" surge in cases, as France became the latest country to impose new restrictions to combat soaring Coronavirus infections. In a sign of the devastation the virus is still causing while the world races to roll out vaccines, Brazil reported the country's death toll had spiralled last month. Officials said more than 66,000 people had died of Covid-19 in Brazil in March — more than twice as many fatalities as the country's second-deadliest month of the pandemic, July 2020.

"Never in Brazilian history have we seen a single event kill so many people" in one month, said doctor Miguel Nicolelis, former pandemic response coordinator for Brazil's impoverished northeast.

With the southern hemisphere winter approaching and the virus spreading fast, Brazil is facing "a perfect storm", he said.

The surge in Brazil has overwhelmed hospitals and forced doctors to make agonising decisions over whom to give life-saving care — prioritising those most likely to survive. The virus has killed more than 2.8 million people worldwide since it emerged in Wuhan in late 2019. And though the world is looking to vaccines to end the upheaval the virus has brought, rollouts are off to a sputtering start in many countries, notably in Europe. "Vaccines present our best way out of this pandemic... however, the rollout of these vaccines is unacceptably slow," the World Health Organisation's director for Europe Hans Kluge said. "We must speed up the process by ramping up manufacturing, reducing barriers to administering vaccines, and using every single vial we have in stock," he added.

—AFP



A closed street cafe is seen in Eisenstadt, Austria, on Thursday, amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The Austrian capital Vienna and two neighbouring regions entered a temporary lockdown over the Easter holiday, to ease pressure on intensive care units as Coronavirus cases surge.

—AFP

Osaka, 2 other
areas put under
semi-emergency

Tokyo, April 1: Japan designated Osaka and two other areas for new virus control steps on Thursday as infections there rise less than four months before the Tokyo Olympics. Osaka, neighbouring Hyogo and Miyagi in the north have had sharp increases in daily cases since early March, soon after Japan scaled down its partial and non-binding state of emergency that began in January.

Japan lifted the state of emergency in the Tokyo area on March 21, fully ending the measures aimed at slowing the Coronavirus and relieving pressure on medical systems treating Covid-19 patients. Experts have raised concerns about Osaka's rapid spike — with many cases linked to new variants of the virus from Britain — and the burden on health care.

—AP

Italy extends
Covid-19 curbs
through April

Rome, April 1: Coronavirus restrictions in most of Italy that closed restaurants, shops and museums through Easter will be extended through April, the government said on Wednesday.

But "an easing of measures" could be decided if the trend of the epidemic and the vaccination rollout warrant it, according to the decree approved late Wednesday by the government of Prime Minister Mario Draghi.

Under the new decree, schools for lower grades will remain open, and it makes vaccines for healthcare workers compulsory.

Anyone refusing to be vaccinated can be reassigned, where possible, in roles that will be away from the public.

If not, their pay will be suspended.

—AFP

Lockdown once
again in Ontario
from tomorrow

Montreal, April 1: Canada's most populous province is expected to return to lockdown after a sharp rise in Covid-19 infections, local media reported Wednesday.

Premier Doug Ford is set to announce that Ontario — home to 14 million people, more than a third of the country's population — will return to lockdown for 28 days from Saturday, TV channels CBC and CTV reported.

The province has reported 2,000 new cases daily for a week, double the daily infections seen in the beginning of March.

The number of patients in intensive care also rose to 421 on Wednesday, equaling the peak reached in January, according to Radio-Canada. Essential services will remain open with capacity limited to 50 percent.

—AFP

UN envoy warns of Myanmar civil war

United Nations, April 1: The UN envoy on Myanmar implored the Security Council to take action in the Asian nation's escalating crisis, warning of the risk of civil war and an imminent "bloodbath" as the junta violently represses pro-democracy protests. More than 520 people have died in daily demonstrations since the military overthrew elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, halting Myanmar's decade-old experiment in democracy.

"I appeal to this Council to consider all available

tools to take collective action and do what is right, what the people of Myanmar deserve and prevent a multi-dimensional catastrophe," special envoy Christine Schraner Burgener told the closed-door session, according to remarks obtained by AFP.

She said she remained open for dialogue with the junta but added: "If we wait only for when they are ready to talk, the ground situation will only worsen. A bloodbath is imminent." Barbara Woodward, the UN envoy from Britain, which requested the

meeting, told reporters the Security Council was "united in its condemnation" and was discussing "a range of measures at our disposal." But China, considered Myanmar's main ally, ruled out sanctions.

"One-sided pressure and calling for sanctions or other coercive measures will only aggravate tensions and confrontation and further complicate the situation, which is by no means constructive," China's ambassador, Zhang Jun, told the meeting.

The session came after Suu Kyi's legal team earli-

er Wednesday said the ousted leader appeared to be in good health despite two months of detention.

Suu Kyi, 75, has not been seen in public since she was deposed but a member of her legal team, Min Min Soe, was summoned to a police station in the capital Naypyidaw for a video meeting with her.

Suu Kyi is facing a raft of criminal charges, and conviction could see her barred from office for life.

The coup and the junta's subsequent actions have triggered international condemnation. Britain ca-

lled for the emergency meeting after the military dramatically ramped up its use of lethal force against protesters.

Myanmar's military Saturday launched the first air strikes in Karen state in 20 years after a rebel group seized a military base — raising fears of a return to armed conflict.

"The military's cruelty is too severe and many (armed ethnic fighters) are taking clear stances of opposition, increasing the possibility of civil war at an unprecedented scale," Burgener said.

—AFP

Biden allows
Trump era H1-B
rules to expire

Washington, April 1: US President Joe Biden on Thursday let the ban on foreign workers visa, in particular H1-B, lapse as the notification issued by his predecessor Donald Trump expired, a move which is likely to benefit thousands of Indian IT professionals.

Amidst a national lockdown and the Covid-19 crisis, Trump in June last year issued a proclamation that suspended entry to the US of applicants for several temporary or non-immigrant visa categories, including H1-B, arguing that these visas presented a risk to the US labour market during the economic recovery.

On December 31, Trump extended the order to March 31, 2021, noting that an extension was warranted as the pandemic continued to disrupt America's lives, and high levels of unemployment and job loss were still presenting serious economic challenges to workers across the United States. Biden did not issue a fresh proclamation for the ban on H1-B visas to continue after March 31.

He had promised to lift the suspension on H1-B visas, saying Trump's immigration policies were

cruel. The H1-B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

The expiry of the Trump's proclamation would now result in the issuing of H1-B visas by American diplomatic missions overseas that would result in US companies bringing in talented technology professionals inside the country.

No new proclamation was issued by Biden till Wednesday mid-night, resulting in the automatic end to the ban on issuing of fresh H1-B visas.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the White House will not renew a ban on H1-B and other work-based visas imposed last year in response to the Covid-19 pandemic that is set to expire on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, a Republican Senator from Missouri on Wednesday urged Biden to issue a fresh proclamation to continue with the H1-B visa ban.

—PTI

Navalny health
raises concern

Moscow, April 1: Supporters of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny are raising deep concerns about his decision to launch a hunger strike, saying they fear more damage to his already-fragile health.

Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most prominent opponent, announced the hunger strike on Wednesday to demand proper medical treatment in prison. The 44-year-old is serving two-and-a-half years on old fraud charges in a penal colony east of Moscow. He was arrested when he returned to Russia in January from Germany, where he had spent months recovering

from poisoning he blames on the Kremlin.

Navalny says he is suffering in prison from severe back pain and numbness in his legs and has only been given painkillers.

His allies said his announcement of a hunger strike is no idle threat and they do not expect he will back down.

"Navalny has always taken such a step as a hunger strike extremely seriously," Ruslan Shaveddinov, a spokesman for him, said. "We are very concerned about his condition and that's why we are demanding immediate access to doctors."

—AFP

FOUR KILLED IN
SHOOTING AT
CALIF. BUILDING

Orange (California), April 1: A shooting at a Southern California office building on Wednesday killed four people, including a child, and injured a fifth person before police shot the suspect. Shots were being fired as officers arrived at a two-story office building on Lincoln Avenue in Orange, southeast of Los Angeles, at about 5:30 p.m., Lt. Jennifer Amat said.

"An officer-involved shooting occurred" and the suspect was taken to a hospital, Amat said, but she didn't know his condition. The shooting was on the second floor of the building, she said. Media reports said bodies could be seen on the building's second-floor walkway and in a courtyard. She had no details about the confrontation, what may have sparked the attack or why a child may have been at the building.

—AP

HK ACTIVISTS
CONVICTED
OVER '19 RALLY

Hong Kong, April 1: Nine veteran Hong Kong activists face jail after they were convicted Thursday for their roles in organising one of the biggest democracy protests to engulf the city in 2019. The defendants included some of Hong Kong's most prominent pro-democracy campaigners, many of whom are non-violence advocates who have spent decades campaigning in vain for universal suffrage.

They are the latest group of democracy figures to be prosecuted as China oversees a sweeping crackdown on dissent following seven straight months of democracy protests in the financial hub. Among them are Martin Lee, an 82-year-old barrister who was once chosen by Beijing to help write Hong Kong's mini-constitution, and Margaret Ng, a 73-year-old barrister and former opposition lawmaker. Media tycoon Jimmy Lai, currently in custody after his arrest under Beijing's new national security law, was among those convicted.

Leung Kwok-hung, an opposition politician known by his sobriquet "Long Hair" who has also been detained on national security charges, was also sent down.

Others are leading members of the Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF), the coalition that organised a series of huge rallies throughout 2019.

Some struck a defiant tone outside court on Thursday morning ahead of the verdict, holding banners that read "protest political suppression".

—AFP

COLD CASE

Criminal plundered ship carrying Muslim pilgrims home to India from Mecca

Coins may solve murderous 1600s pirate mystery

Warwick (Rhode Island), April 1: A handful of coins unearthed from a pick-your-own-fruit orchard in rural Rhode Island and other random corners of New England may help solve one of the planet's oldest cold cases.

The villain in this tale: A murderous English pirate who became the world's most-wanted criminal after plundering a ship carrying Muslim pilgrims home to India from Mecca, then eluded capture by posing as a slave trader.

"It's a new history of a nearly perfect crime," said Jim Bailey, an amateur historian and metal detectorist who found the first intact 17th-century Arabian coin in a meadow in Middletown. That ancient pocket change — the oldest ever found in North America — could explain how pirate Capt. Henry Every vanished into the wind. On Sept. 7, 1695, the pirate ship Fancy, commanded by Every, ambushed and captured the Ganj-i-Sawai, a royal vessel

owned by Indian emperor Aurangzeb, then one of the world's most powerful men.

Aboard were not only the worshippers returning from their pilgrimage, but

tens of millions of dollars' worth of gold and silver. What followed was one of the most lucrative and heinous robberies of all time.

Historical accounts say his band tortured and killed the men aboard the Indian ship and raped the women before escaping to the Bahamas, a haven for pirates.

put a large bounty on their heads. "If you Google first worldwide manhunt," it comes up as Every," Bailey said. "Everybody was looking for these guys."

Until now, historians only knew that Every eventually sailed to Ireland in 1696, where the trail went cold. But Bailey says the coins he and others have found are evidence the notorious pirate first made his way to the American colonies, where he and his crew used the plunder for day-to-day expenses while

on the run.

The first coin surfaced in 2014 at Sweet Berry Farm in Middletown, a spot that had piqued Bailey's curiosity two years earlier after he found old colonial coins, an 18th-century shoe buckle and some musket balls. Waving a metal detector over the soil, he got a signal, dug down and hit literal paydirt: A darkened, dime-sized silver coin he initially assumed was either Spanish or money minted by the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

—AP

quick
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,029.83	1.05
Nifty 50	14,867.40	1.20
S&P 500*	4,009.89	0.93
Dollar (₹)	73.11	0.01
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.03	-0.26
Euro (₹)	85.99	-0.25
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,701.881	1.97
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.00	2.01
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.177	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.679	-0.067

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Pak reverses
decision to
resume trade

Pakistan's cabinet, the final authority on resuming trade with India, reversed a decision by a government economic committee on Wednesday to import cotton and sugar from the neighbouring country. The cabinet, headed by PM Imran Khan, linked the resumption of trade with the restoration of autonomy to Kashmir. The decision to start imports was criticised by analysts and opposition parties as a compromise on Kashmir.

Wipro to acquire
Oz's Ampion
for \$117 million

Wipro said it will acquire Ampion, an Australia-based provider of cyber security, DevOps and quality engineering services for \$117 million (about Rs 857 crore). The acquisition of Ampion is an important step for Wipro in this direction, and strengthens the commitment towards clients and stakeholders in Australia and New Zealand, Wipro said. The acquisition is expected to close in the June quarter.

Mastercard to put
\$100mn in Airtel
Africa's money biz

Airtel Africa on Thursday announced that Mastercard would invest \$100 million (about Rs 733 crore) in its wholly owned subsidiary Airtel Mobile Commerce BV (AMC). Mastercard would hold a minority stake in AMC on completion of the deal, with Airtel Africa continuing to hold the majority stake, an Airtel statement said. Sources said Mastercard would get about 3.75 per cent stake in the firm.

NSE reduces mkt
lot size for Nifty
50 derivatives

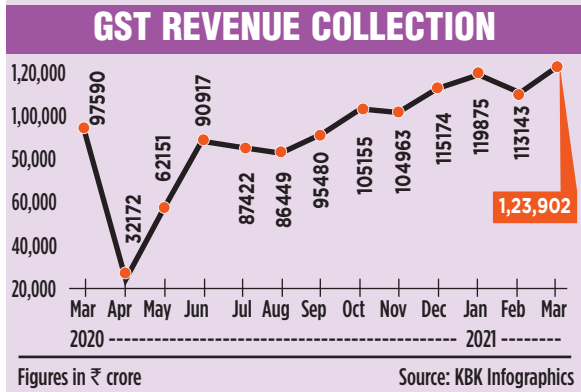
The NSE has slashed the market lot size for derivative contracts on Nifty 50, a move that will reduce the burden of excessive upfront margins for retail traders. The lot size has been reduced to 50 from the existing 75. The cut will reduce the margin requirements for futures trading by one-third, stockbroking firm Fyers CEO Tejas Khoday said. Currently, traders need about Rs 1,73,000 to trade one lot, he said.

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■ Collection tops ₹1 L cr for 6th month in a row
GST mop-up hits record
₹1.23 lakh crore in MarchFC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, APRIL 1

In line with the trend of constant recovery in GST revenues over the past five months, the gross goods and services tax (GST) revenue collected in March 2021 stood at a record high of over Rs 1.23 lakh crore. The total revenues earned for the month are 27 per cent higher than the GST collected in the same month last year, according to finance ministry data released on Thursday.

"The gross GST revenue collected in the month of March 2021 is at a record of Rs 1,23,902 crore, of which CGST is Rs 22,973 crore, SGST is Rs 29,329 crore, IGST is Rs 62,842 crore



(including Rs 31,097 crore collected on import of goods) and Cess is Rs 8,757 crore (including Rs 935 crore collected on import of goods)," the ministry said.

The GST collections for March this year is the six consecutive month of revenue crossing Rs 1-lakh crore mark. The finance ministry said that a steep increasing trend over this

period is a clear indicator of a rapid economic recovery post-pandemic.

"The revenues from import of goods was at 70 per cent higher and the revenues from domestic transaction (including import of services) are 17 per cent higher than the revenues from these sources during the same month last year. The GST revenue witnessed growth rate of (-) 41 per cent, (-) 8 per cent, 8 per cent and 14 per cent in the first, second, third and fourth quarters of this financial year; respectively, as compared to the same period last year," it said.

The Centre has settled Rs 21,879 crore to CGST and Rs 17,230 crore to SGST.

Car sales rebound in March

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, APRIL 1

Most carmakers in the country—such as Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai, Tata Motors, Kia Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, Toyota Kirloskar Motors, Renault, Ford Motor, Honda Cars, MG Motor and Nissan Motor—on Thursday reported substantial year-on-year sales growth in March 2021 in comparison to the unusually low sales in March 2020 because of the lockdown.

These 11 of the 14 carmakers in India who control 99 per cent of India's domestic car market

clocked a 126 per cent jump in March sales to 3,15,946 units, up from 1,39,761 cars sold in March 2020 when the lockdown had begun to hit production.

Car sales have been improving in the last few months and March showed a substantial year-on-year growth.

Maruti Suzuki, which sells one car out of two bought in India, reported 91.76 per cent sales growth to 1,46,203 units last month compared to 76,240 units sold in March 2020.

Hyundai, the South Korean carmaker, clocked a 100 per cent rise in domestic sales during

March to 52,600 units as against 26,300 units sold in the same month last year.

Tata Motors, India's third biggest carmaker, recorded a 422 per cent increase at 29,654 units as compared to 5,676 units sold in March last year. This is the highest-ever sales in a month for the company in nine years. A total of 705 Nexon EVs were sold in March.

Korean brand Kia Motors logged a 123 per cent growth in volumes to 19,100 units against 8,583 units.

Sales at Mahindra & Mahindra, the SUV specialist, climbed 394 per cent to 16,700 units during the month against 3,383 units

sold in March last year.

Similarly, Toyota Kirloskar Motors posted a 114 per cent sales increase to 15,001 units as against 7,023 units, clocking the best monthly sales for it since 2013.

Sales at French car brand Renault also jumped 278 per cent at 12,356 units last month against 3,269 units sold in February last year.

Ford Motor India clocked 7,746 units sales in March, a growth of 120 per cent from 3,519 units.

Sales at Honda Cars India was up 92 per cent at 7,103 units versus 3,697 units. Its production in March was impacted due to a shortage of semiconductors.

Exports jump 58% to \$34 bn

FC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, APRIL 1

Exports increased by 58.23 per cent to \$34 billion in March on the back of healthy growth in key sectors like engineering, gems and jewellery and pharmaceuticals, provisional data from the commerce ministry showed.

Exports during April-March 2020-21, however, decreased by 7.4 per cent to



\$290.18 billion compared with \$313.36 billion in 2019-20. Imports during 2020-21 contracted by 18 per cent to \$388.92 billion compared with \$474.71 billion during 2019-20.

In March 2020, the

exports stood at \$21.49 billion, which was a decline of about 34 per cent over March 2019 due to the global slowdown.

"India's merchandise exports in March 2021 were \$34.0 billion as compared to \$21.49 billion in March 2020, an increase of 58.23 per cent," the ministry said in a statement.

It said that the "first time ever in a month", the exports crossed \$34 billion.

Salary income of Gulf
workers tax exempt: FM

New Delhi, April 1: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said salary income earned by non-resident Indians in the Gulf countries would continue to be exempt from tax in India.

Quoting a tweet of TMC MP Mahua Moitra, Sitharaman clarified that the Finance Act 2021 has not brought in any new or additional tax on Indian workers in Saudi/UAE/Oman/Qatar.

Earlier in the day, Moitra had tweeted a picture of an amendment in Finance Bill, 2021, saying the complicated words in the amendment is in reality a Special Gulf workers tax.

"FM going back on her words. Hardworking Indian workers in Saudi/UAE/Oman/Qatar to be taxed EXTRA," Moitra tweeted.

Sitharaman said the said amendment in the Finance Act, 2021, has

merely incorporated general definition of the term "liable to tax" in the Income Tax Act to provide clarity.

This amendment has not altered the taxability of salary income earned by non-resident Indian citizens in the Gulf countries. Their salary income earned in the Gulf countries would continue to be exempt in India, the Office of Finance Minister tweeted. —PTI

NIIF INVESTS ₹2,100 CR
IN MANIPAL HOSPITALSFC BUREAU
CHENNAI, APRIL 1

The National Investment and Infrastructure Fund, an investment platform anchored by the Government of India, has invested Rs 2,100 crore in Bengaluru-based Manipal Hospitals. The investment through the NIIF Strategic Opportunities Fund is NIIF's first funding in the Indian healthcare sector.

Manipal operates 15 hospitals and the key focus is on tertiary and quaternary care. Last year, Manipal had acquired 100 per cent stake in Columbia Asia Hospitals for Rs 1,800 crore.

Demand for healthcare has been growing and this has been further accentuated in the backdrop of the pandemic.

TAFE'S MALLIKA
SRINIVASAN TO
SELECT PUBLIC
SECTOR HONCHOS

Mallika Srinivasan

New Delhi, April 1: Mallika Srinivasan, chairman and managing director of Tractors and Farm Equipment (TAFE) Limited, has been appointed as the chairperson of the Public Enterprises Selection Board (PESB), an order issued by the personnel ministry on Thursday said.

This is the first time a private sector specialist has been appointed as the head of the PESB, responsible for appointment of top management posts in the Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs), officials said.

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved the appointment of Srinivasan as the chairperson of PESB for a period of three years from the date of assumption of charge, or until the attainment of the age of 65 years, it said.

Sailesh, a 1985-batch IAS officer, has been appointed as member, PESB. He is at present secretary, Department of Public Enterprises.

The PESB shall consist of one chairperson and three full-time members. M. K. Gupta and Rear Admiral Shekhar Mital (ret'd) are its two serving members. —PTI

PE/VC funding
soars 85% in Q4SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, APRIL 1

Private equity (PE) and venture capital (VC) investments in the March quarter was up 85 per cent against the pre-lockdown quarter of last year.

PE and VC firms invested over \$11.86 billion across 188 deals in the first three months of 2021—an increase of about 85 per cent compared to the same period in 2020, as per the data of Venture Intelligence. The pre-pandemic quarter of January-March 2020 had recorded PE/VC investments of \$6.5 billion across 238 deals.

The value of investments in the March quarter was also 58 per cent higher compared to the previous December quarter, which saw \$7.5 billion being invested across 231 deals. However, deal volumes were down by 21 per cent against the March quarter of last year and 19 per cent compared to the December quarter.

In the past few quarters, investments into Reliance Group entities have been pushing the aggregate funding to new

highs. In the June quarter, total investments had touched \$13.95 billion and in the September quarter it stood at \$11.87 billion. However in the March quarter, there were no investments into the group.

Piramal Enterprises winning the bankruptcy bid for Dewan Housing Finance for \$5.2 billion was the largest deal in the quarter. Some of the tech unicorns like Zomato and Byjus attracted \$500 million and \$460 million, respectively, in the quarter.

"The high level of fund flows during the latest quarter, coming as they did without any investments into Reliance Industries Group companies, is very encouraging. It would be interesting to see how the investment figures in the coming quarters match up against the high bar set by RIL Group deals which had dominated the last three quarters of 2020," said Arun Natarajan, founder of Venture Intelligence.

Exits too were active in the March quarter, as there were eight successful domestic IPOs of PE-VC backed companies.

Brokerage revenues may
see muted growth this yrRAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, APRIL 1

After record-high active client additions and average daily turnover in a pandemic-marred fiscal, brokerages may see positive revenue growth in fiscal 2022 too, but the growth will be muted due to the market turning volatile and new margin regulations put in place by the regulator, said rating agency Crisil.

According to estimates made by the agency, broking revenue grew by around 65 to 70 per cent in FY21 against around 7 per cent in FY20, but market volatility and phased implementation of new margin regulations may act as a drag on their incremental volume growth, resulting in marginal revenue growth in financial year 2021-22.

"The slowdown has already begun with broking revenue de-growth of around 1 to 8 per cent in the third quarter of fiscal 2021 on a sequential basis," said Crisil. "This indicates that client additions are not translating into higher broking revenue of late," it said.

"With equity markets turning volatile since January 2021 and revised regulations with higher margin requirements kicking in, sustainability of trading volumes in fiscal 2022 may be a challenge, thereby impacting revenue," Krishnan Sitaraman, senior director, Crisil Ratings, said.

In the first nine months of fiscal 2021, brokerage houses across industry added around 52 lakh clients – as much as they did during the preceding four years, cumulatively. This took the active client base to 1.6 crore as of December 2020. Continued buoyancy in equities and new client additions also led to average daily turnover (ADTO) hitting decadal highs.

"Ample time availability during the lockdown/pandemic; broad-based high returns in equities since March 2020, user-friendly trading platforms (including on mobile) and schemes with very low brokerage; relatively low interest yield on savings and deposits led to influx of retail investors into equity markets during the last fiscal," Crisil said.

US MFG SECTOR
INDEX RACES
TO 37-YEAR
HIGH IN MARCHLUCIA MUTIKANI
APRIL 1

A measure of US manufacturing activity soared to its highest level in more than 37 years in March, driven by strong growth in new orders, the clearest sign yet that a much anticipated economic boom was probably underway.

The Institute for Supply Management (ISM) said on Thursday its index of national factory activity jumped to a reading of 64.7 last month from 60.8 in February. That was the highest level since December 1983.

A reading above 50 indicates expansion in manufacturing, which accounts for 11.9 per cent of the US economy. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the index rising to 61.3 in March. The year-long pandemic has boosted demand for goods.

Economic growth is expected take off this year, juiced up by the White House's massive \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package and the reopening of nonessential businesses as more Americans are vaccinated against the coronavirus.

The relief package passed last month is sending additional \$1,400 checks to qualified households and extending the government safety net for the unemployed through September 6. Households have also accumulated about \$19 trillion in excess savings, which are expected to fuel pent-up demand.

President Joe Biden on Wednesday unveiled a plan to spend roughly \$2 trillion on infrastructure like roads and bridges over 10 years. —Reuters

Suez Canal crisis: Egypt may
seek \$1 bn in compensation

seek compensation from. "This is the right of the country," Rabie said, adding that the incident hurt Egypt's reputation. "This country should get its due."

The 400-metre-long Ever Given ship ran aground on March 23 in the southern part of the canal and was freed on Monday.

Taiwan's Evergreen Marine Corp, the vessel's

charterer, said on Thursday it's not responsible for delays of any cargo it was transporting. Evergreen's agreements with clients don't guarantee arrival time of cargoes, said president Eric Hsieh, in the company's first briefing since the blockage.

The ship and its cargo, which Rabie said were worth \$3.5 billion, is currently in the Great Bitter Lake, roughly halfway along the canal.

Rabie said they could be held in Egypt if the matter of compensation went to court. Such a scenario is unlikely, he said, because Egypt has a long relationship with the ship owner. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Female lifter fails
dope test, axed

New Delhi: A woman weightlifter, who was part of the ongoing national camp at the National Institute of Sports in Patiala, has been provisionally suspended after testing positive for banned substance. The weightlifter, a national record holder and who has participated in several international tournaments including the Commonwealth Championship where she won gold, was set to be a part of the Indian team for the Asian Championship to be held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan from April 16 to 25.

"Yes, she has failed a dope test.

The report came about 10-15 days back," a source in the Indian Weightlifting Federation (IWLF) confirmed. Taking a break from the national camp, the weightlifter went home in October last year when national coach Vijay Sharma and star lifter Mirabai Chanu had travelled to the United States.

After she returned to the camp, her sample was collected by the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) in November last. The weightlifter had allegedly consumed a supplement that contained the prohibited substance. — PTI

Ex-Olympian guilty
of drug smuggling

Brisbane: Former two-time Olympic silver medalist canoeist Nathan Baggeley and his younger brother have been found guilty of plotting to smuggle 200 million Australian dollars (\$150 million) worth of cocaine into Australia. The 45-year-old Baggeley and his 39-year-old brother Dru were charged with attempting to import 650 kilograms (1,430 pounds) of cocaine in 2018.

After about eight hours of deliberating, a Brisbane Supreme Court jury found both men guilty on Thursday.

Nathan Baggeley won two canoeing silver medals at the 2004 Athens Olympics and also was a three-time world champion. But his career was tarnished with drug scandals testing positive for banned steroids in 2005 and also being jailed with Dru Baggeley 10 years later for his role in a drug manufacturing syndicate.

The Baggeley brothers will be sentenced on a date yet to be decided by the court. — AP

Investigators mum
over Woods crash

Los Angeles: Police in Los Angeles said Wednesday investigators have identified the cause of the crash which left Tiger Woods seriously injured last month but did not release further details, citing concerns about the golf star's privacy. Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva said the probe into the one-vehicle accident on February 23, which left Woods with a shattered right leg, was now complete.

However, Villanueva said no information about the cause of the accident would be released unless Woods waived his right to privacy. "A cause has been determined, the investigation has concluded," Villanueva said. "However, we have reached out to Tiger Woods and his personnel.

"There's some privacy issues on releasing information on the investigation, and we're going to ask them if they waive the privacy. Then we'll be able to do a full release on all the information regarding the accident," he further added. — AFP

Osaka Guv wants
to nix torch relay

Tokyo: The governor of Osaka prefecture said on Thursday that he wants to cancel the torch relay legs going through Osaka later this month, less than four months before the opening of the Tokyo Olympics. Governor Hirofumi Yoshimura said the prefecture is coming under new Covid-19 control measures because of rising case numbers. He said that will mean people being asked to stay home except for essential outings. "I think the torch relay through the middle of Osaka should be canceled," he said. The Olympic torch is scheduled to go through the Osaka area on April 13 and 14. Tokyo organisers were contacted but did not immediately reply. Experts have raised concerns about Osaka's rapid spike and the burden on its medical infrastructure. — AP

Live on TV

CRICKET

South Africa vs Pakistan: First ODI from 1.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

LIONS ON PROWL

After last year's low, there is lot to gain for CSK

Chennai, April 1: The return of Suresh Raina could boost the batting department but spin-reliant Chennai Super Kings will have to adapt to conditions which may assist pacers as they seek to improve upon their nightmarish show of last season.

Three-time champions CSK had a flop show last season, avoiding the wooden spoon thanks to a few victories at the back-end of the league phase as they failed to make the play-offs for the first time in the tournament's history. CSK have oodles of experience, which will stand them in good stead in crucial situations. The inspirational leadership of Dhoni is another advantage for the team. The return of Raina will strengthen the batting unit which faltered far too often in last year's IPL in the UAE.

A batting line-up of Raina, along with Faf du Plessis, Dhoni, Ambati Rayudu, Ravindra Jadeja, Sam Curran, new recruit Moeen Ali and fast improving Ruturaj Gaikwad could prove a handful for rival bowling attacks and big scores could set the platform for the bowlers to do their job.

With the likes of Lungi Ngidi, Shardul Thakur, Curran, Deepak Chahar in the line-up, CSK have a decent bowling unit. A team comprising ageing stars proved CSK's undoing last season and they have stuck pretty much to the core squad. In the fast-paced world of T20s, senior stars could prove to be a handicap. — PTI



CSK skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Suresh Rains (left) share light moment in this photo.

— Twitter

Hazlewood pulls out of IPL

Melbourne, April 1: Australia and Chennai Super Kings fast bowler Josh Hazlewood has pulled out of the upcoming edition of the Indian Premier League to take a small break from cricket and keep himself fresh for the Ashes and the T20 World Cup later this year.

Hazlewood was to depart with other Australia's IPL-bound players and join CSK but decided to skip the cash-rich league,

which will start on April 9 and go on till May 30, and spend time at home for the next two months.

"It's been a long 10 months in bubbles and quarantine at different times, so I decided to have a rest from cricket and spend some time at home and in Australia in the next two months," Hazlewood was quoted as saying by *cricket.com.au*.

"We've got a big winter ahead. The West Indies is

going to be a long tour, with Bangladesh (T20 tour) potentially thrown on the end of that. Then potentially the T20 World Cup leading into the Ashes, so it's a big 12 months.

"As it always is with Australia, and I want to give myself the best chance to be mentally and physically ready for that," he added.

He follows Josh Philippe (RCB) and Mitchell Marsh

(SRH) in withdrawing from the IPL, while some other Australians may consider opting out also, according to the report.

Hazlewood has been under restrictions from July last year before leaving for England with Australia's limited-overs team where he was in strict bio-secure lockdown before heading to the UAE for the IPL where again safety protocols were tight. — PTI

IPL WILL BE A
HUGE BENEFIT
TO US: STOKES

Mumbai, April 1: The increased participation of English players in the IPL, where there is constant pressure to perform, will benefit them during the T20 World Cup to be held in India later this year, reckons star all-rounder Ben Stokes.

This year, there are 14 England cricketers contracted to play IPL, Eoin Morgan, Jos Buttler, Stokes, Johnny Bairstow, Moeen Ali, Sam Curran, Tom Curran, Sam Billings, Liam Livingstone and Dawid Malan.

"Yes — the percentage of English players in the IPL has probably grown in the last five or so years," Stokes told *Sky Sports*.

"Not only is that great for the individual but it is also great for the players involved in the England set-up; it gives them experience in the most high-profile competition in the world but not only that — you are under constant pressure to perform," he added.

"You've got billions of people watching you and you've got the pressure of the franchise on you.

"Being constantly exposed to that is a huge benefit to us as a team, especially with the T20 World Cup coming up at the end of the year in India; it's a great chance for the English guys to get more experience in these conditions," Stokes said. — PTI

GRITTY NISSANKA, RAIN
HOLD UP WI IN 2ND TEST

North Sound (Antigua and Barbuda), April 1: Pathum Nissanka kept the West Indies at bay, with Sri Lanka limping to the close at 250 for eight in reply to the home side's first-innings total of 354 on a rain-affected third day of the second and final Test in Antigua on Wednesday. Bursting with confidence following a debut hundred in the first Test at the same venue just a week earlier, the Nissanka defied the Caribbean pacers in compiling an unbeaten 49.

It gave visitors some hope of continuing to whittle away at what is potentially a critical first-innings lead for the West Indies going into day four.

Nissanka's determination for almost three hours, in which he faced 119 deliveries and stroked four boundaries, could yet prove beneficial for Sri Lanka should the other overnight batsman, Lasith Embuldeniya, and last man Vishwa Fernando replicate the resistance shown by the Windies lower order in their first innings. — AFP

Brief scores (Day 3, stumps): West Indies 354 vs Sri Lanka 250/8 in 103.1 overs (Chandimal 44, P. Nissanka 49 batting; J. Holder 2/39, A. Joseph 2/64).

Germans beaten
in Cup qualifier

Paris, April 1: Germany suffered a stunning 2-1 home loss to North Macedonia in World Cup qualifying on Wednesday, while defending champions France edged Bosnia and Herzegovina 1-0 and England beat a Poland side missing the injured Robert Lewandowski.

Napoli midfielder Eljif Elmas secured a famous victory for North Macedonia in Duisburg, scoring five minutes from time to give his country a second win from three Group 'J' matches.

Veteran striker Goran Pandev, 37, put the visitors in front just before half-time but Ilkay Gundogan levelled from the spot after Leroy Sane was fouled in the area. Timo Werner missed a glorious chance after coming off the bench, and Elmas condemned the four-time world champions to a first defeat in qualifying for the global showpiece since 2001 when he steered in a cut-back from Arijan Ademi.

GRIEZMANN STARS
FOR FRANCE

Antoine Griezmann scored the only goal of the game in Sarajevo as France recorded a second away win in four days over Bosnia following their 2-0 success in Kazakhstan at the weekend.

After being held 1-1 at home by Ukraine in their opening game on the road to the 2022 finals in Qatar, France are now in a strong position at the top of

● **North Macedonia stunned four-time World Cup winners Germany 2-1, their first defeat in a World Cup qualifying match for 20 years.**

Group 'D'.

Harry Maguire struck a late winner for England as the 2018 World Cup semi-finalists overcame Poland 2-1 at Wembley. Harry Kane put England ahead with a first-half penalty after a foul on Raheem Sterling, but a mistake by John Stones allowed Poland to level through Jakub Moder.

WINS FOR SPAIN
AND ITALY

Goals from Dani Olmo, Ferran Torres and second-half substitute Gerard Moreno lifted Spain to a 3-1 victory over Kosovo and top of Group 'B'.

However the qualifier in Seville was overshadowed by a pre-match diplomatic dispute, stemming from the description of Kosovo as a "territory" by the Spanish Football Federation when it published Spain's group fixtures.

Stefano Sensi scored just after his introduction as a half-time substitute to help Italy, who failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup, register a third successive win in Group 'C'. Italy defeated Lithuania 2-0 in Vilnius with Ciro Immobile adding a stoppage-time penalty for the Azzurri. — AFP



North Macedonia's Goran Pandev (right) is congratulated by his teammates after scoring his side's first goal against Germany during their World Cup 2022 qualifying match in Duisburg, Germany, on Wednesday. — AP

THE RESULTS

North Macedonia (Pandev 45+2, Elmas 85)	2	Italy (Stefano Sensi 48, Ciro Immobile 90+4-pen)	2
Germany (Gundogan 63-pen)	1	Lithuania	0
England (Kane 19-pen, Maguire 85)	2	France (Griezmann 60)	1
Poland (Moder 58)	1	Bosnia and Herzegovina	0
Spain (Olmo 34, Torres 36, Moreno 75)	3	Georgia (Khvicha Kvaratskhelia 78)	1
Kosovo (Halimi 70)	1	Greece (Kakabadze 76-og)	1

Naomi crumbles
to Sakkarri power

Miami, April 1: Top-seeded Daniil Medvedev crashed out of the Miami Open Wednesday on a day of upsets that also saw Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka ousted from the quarterfinals.

Seventh-seeded Spaniard Roberto Bautista Agut beat Medvedev 6-4, 6-2, for his third win in as many meetings with the Russian who was runner-up to Novak Djokovic at the Australian Open and ascended to No. 2 in the world with his victory at Marseille in March.

Women's world No. 2 Naomi Osaka — seeded second behind Ashleigh Barty in the prestigious ATP Masters and WTA hardcourt tournament — had bowed out hours earlier, the Japanese star's 23-

match winning streak coming to a crashing halt with a 6-0, 6-4 loss to Greece's Maria Sakkari.

Bautista booked a semi-final showdown with 19-year-old Italian Jannick Sinner, the world No. 31 who beat Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik 7-6 (7/5), 6-4.

Sakkari will face eighth-seeded Canadian Bianca Andreescu for a place in the women's final.

Andreescu, ranked ninth in the world, clawed out a 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 victory over tenacious 58th-ranked Spaniard Sara Sorribes Tormo.

Osaka acknowledged that the rankings race may have affected her against Greece's 25th-ranked Maria Sakkari. — AFP

Kiwis down Bangla by 65
runs to sweep T20 series

Auckland, April 1: New Zealand beat Bangladesh by 65 runs in a rain-shortened third Twenty20 International in Auckland on Friday to claim a series clean sweep.

With their innings reduced to 10 overs due to bad weather, Bangladesh were all out for 76 with three balls to spare, well short of the 142 target set by New Zealand.

The Black Caps made 141 for four after losing the toss and being asked to bat, with Finn Allen hitting 71 from 29 balls. Spinner Todd Astle was

the standout bowler, taking seven wickets for 13 runs in his two over spell. Captain Tim Southee said it was satisfying for the New Zealanders to notch their seventh home series win of the season on all formats.

Bangladesh captain Liton Das said mistakes cost his side, including a series of dropped catches that allowed Allen to run away with the match.

New Zealand made a blistering start, with Martin Gupthill smashing three sixes in the first two overs.

Allen was also finding the boundary but rode his luck with two dropped catches as the Black Caps raced to 69 without loss after five overs.

Gupthill smashed 16 off the first three balls from Mahedi Hasan but the spinner had his revenge when the batsman was caught on 44 trying to clear the rope. — AFP

Brief scores: New Zealand 141/4 in 10 overs (F. Allen 71, M. Gupthill 44) bt Bangladesh 76 in 9.3 overs (M. Naim 19; T. Astle 4/13, Tim Southee 3/15).

