THE ASIAN AGE

NATION 4

Afghanistan foreign minister says violence against Sikhs and Hindus not persecution



WORLD 6

Israel voters take fourth shot at deciding fate of Benjamin Netanyahu

DELHI AGE 16

2 of Ajay Devgn's directors join those in Bollywood to test positive for Covid-19



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German Chancellor Angela Merkel pulls off a mask during a press conference in the Chancellor's Office following consultations between the federal and state governments in Berlin on Tuesday. Germany extended its lockdown measures by another month and imposed several new restrictions in an effort to drive down the rate of coronavirus infections. -AP

Bill on Delhi L-G's sweeping powers will be in RS today

New Delhi: The Rajya Sabha will take up on Wednesday a bill which seeks to make it clear that the "government" in Delhi means the "lieutenant-governor", as the House witnessed repeated brief adjournments during the day following uproar by opposition parties which termed the proposed legislation "unconstitutional". The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021, which was passed by the Lok Sabha on Monday, also makes it mandatory for the Delhi government to take the opinion of the L-G before any executive action. - PTI

AAP MLA Somnath's

2-yr jail term upheld

New Delhi: A Delhi court on Tuesday upheld an order sentencing AAP MLA Somnath Bharti to two years in jail for assaulting an AIIMS security staff in a case registered in 2016. the order, he was immediately taken into custody. Full report on Page 2

Bihar House ruckus

on armed police bill

Patna: The Opposition RJD on Tuesday created a ruckus in the state Assembly over the Bihar Special Armed Police Bill, 2021. The police as well as the marshals had to forcibly evict the agitating MLAs and in this many were badly injured. Full report on Page 4

COUNTERPOINT



Congrats! You are selected for best actor award for your performance during polls!

NEATHER



Max: 31°C Min: 17°C **RH:** 39% Rain: Nil

Forecast: Mostly sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana Tithi: Phalguna Shuddha Dasami till 10.19 am **Star:** Pushyami till 11.06 pm Varjyam: 6.48 am to 8.26 am Durmuhurtam: 11.58 am to 12.46 pm Rahukalam: Noon to 1.30 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.34 PM SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.20 AM **MOONRISE TOMORROW 1.57 PM**

MOONSET TODAY 3.21 AM

All above 45 can get vaccine from April 1

Govt expands inoculations as cases surge; Delhi bans Holi celebrations in public places

VINEETA PANDEY

With a major surge in the daily Covid-19 cases in India, the Centre on Tuesday decided to open up the vaccination drive for all persons above the age of 45 years from April 1, irrespective of their comorbidities. This will be the third phase of the vaccination drive against Covid-19. Till now only health and frontline work-

Chhattisgarh: 5

jawans killed,

12 injured in

RABINDRA NATH

BHOPAL, MARCH 23

CHOUDHURY

Narayanpur. Maoists

Maoist ambush

Five jawans were on Tuesday killed and 12 others injured when the mini-bus in which they

were traveling was

blown up by Maoists in

Chhattisgarh's south Bastar district of

three command initiat-

ed improvised explosive

devices (IED) targeting

the bus carrying jawans

of district reserve group

(DRG) when it was pass-

ing through a bridge over a culvert in Kodenar region, leading

to the tragedy, Ashok Juneja, director general of police (DGP) (anti-

The mini-bus fell off

While three jawans,

including the driver of

the police bus, died on

the spot, two others suc-

cumbed to their injuries

At least 12 jawans were

injured, three of them

grievously, in the inci-

dent. They were airlifted

to Raipur for treatment

when their condition

This was the biggest

Maoist attack on securi-

ty forces in Bastar this

year so far.

More on Page 3

the bridge with the impact of the explosions,

Naxal operation)

Chhattisgarh, said.

he added.

in the hospital.

deteriorated.

triggered

those above 45 but with comorbidities were allowed to take the vaccines. Till Tuesday, 4.85 crore people have been vaccinated across the country. Information and broad-

casting minister Prakash Javadekar, announcing this, said that people above 45 will no longer be required to carry a doctor's certificate and they can simply go and take the vac-cine shot. "We request that

all eligible persons should immediately register and get vaccinated," he said. In a letter to all chief secretaries, Union health sec-Rajesh Bhushan asked them to widely pub-

licise this decision so that more people can take advantage of it. The decision comes in the wake of the sudden spurt in daily fresh cases in several parts of the country. On Tuesday, 40,715 new cases and 199 deaths were

sharp rise in daily cases, with 1,101 reported today. The Delhi and Punjab chief ministers urged the Centre to open up vaccinations for all people.

recorded. Maharashtra

had 28,699 new cases, of which 3,512 were in Mumbai and 5,722 in Pune.

Delhi, is also witnessing a

national capital,

The home ministry has, meanwhile, issued fresh guidelines for effective control of Covid-19 and

asked states to rapidly increase RT-PCR testing to at least 70 per cent. The states are free to impose restrictions at the local level but there must be no hinderance on inter-state and intra-state movement of persons and goods, including for cross land border trade under treaties with neighbouring countries, and no separate permission or per-

mit will be required for **Turn to Page 4**

■ 'Didi runs 115 scams, didn't fulfil even 82 of her 282 promises in 2016'

'Bhatija & Co' looted ₹10K cr, will go jail after we win: Shah TMC to seek

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, MARCH 23

Going all out against West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's MP nephew Abhishek Banerjee with large-scale corruption charges, Union home minister Amit Shah on Tuesday accused "Bhatija & Čompany" of amassing Central funds to the tune of ₹10,000 crores, which were disbursed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for relief and rehabilitation to the state after it was devastated by Cyclone Amphan last

year. Mr Shah made it clear that the entity would be sent to jail by a special investigation team (SIT), mentioned in the BJP's manifesto, following a probe once the saffron



Union home minister Amit Shah during an election rally at Midnapore town in West Midnapore on Tuesday. -PTI

party forms its first government in the state if it wins the Assembly election. In a blistering attack on the Trinamul boss, he ridiculed her for running "115 scams" in comparison to "115 schemes" run by Mr Modi, while mocking her for failing to fulfil

even 82 of her 282 promis-

es made in the previous

The Union home minister told a BJP rally at Gosaba in South 24 Parganas: "Modiji has been sending a lot of funds here. Cyclone Amphan hit the state. Modiji released ₹10,000 crores. Did you ■ Turn to Page 4 disbarring of straying MP **AGE CORRESPONDENT** KOLKATA, MARCH 23

To stop further defections

by its MPs, the TMC will urge Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to disqualify Contai MP Sisir Adhikari under the anti-defection law for his switch to the BJP at Union home minis-

ter Amit Shah's rally in East Midnapore recently. Sources said TMC Lok Sabha leader Sudip Bandopadhyay will submit a petition to the Speaker for Mr Adhikari's disqualification from Parliament on Wednesday

Cong-CPM tieup with ISF is advantage BJP

Truck with hardline party is leading to discomfort within Cong, Left parties and TMC

SANJAY BASAK NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

All is not well within the Left and the Congress. Cracks have surfaced within the parties over their controversial alliance with the radical outfit, Indian Secular Front

While the rupture is somewhat visible in the Congress with its leader, Anand Sharma, questioning the party's alliance with the ISF led by Abbas Siddique, a controversial and radical cleric of the shrine of Furfura Sharif, in the Left, some of its constituents have been

seething and hinted of a "churn in the Left Front" after the Bengal elections. There's going to be a lot of churning in various political outfits after elec-

tions," a CPI leader said. Asked whether there would be "churning" within the Left, he said, The tie-up with the ISF was decided and sealed by the big brother of the Left, the CPI(M).

The Left constituents were now finding it somewhat "difficult" to "defend and explain" the alliance. They feel that the alliance with the hard-line ISF has Turn to Page 4 ■ Delhi's 'balancing' due to TN polls?

India abstains, but Lanka gets iolt in UN vote

KUMARASWAMI with agency inputs MARCH 23

In a major setback to Sri Lanka, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva on Tuesday adopted a resolution titled "Promotion of Reconciliation Accountability and Human Rights in Sri Lanka" against the counry's human rights record, with 22 out of 47 countries backing the resolution and 11 opposing it, with 14 countries, including India, abstain-Asserting its support to both "the Tamils of Sri Lanka for equality, justice, dignity and peace" and also "ensuring the unity, stability and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka", India said "these two goals are mutually supportive and Sri Lanka's progress is best assured by simultaneously addressing both objectives", while urging "the Government of Sri Lanka to carry forward the

THE CONTINUING proximity of the Rajapaksa brothers (Prez Gotabaya and PM Mahinda) to China could have also been another key factor in New Delhi's decision

process of reconciliation, address the aspirations of the Tamil community and continue to engage constructively with the international community to ensure that the fundamental freedoms and human rights of all its citizens are fully protected".

Striking a balance in its explanation of vote statement, India "supported the call by the interna-tional community for the Government of Sri Lanka to fulfil its commitments on the devolution of political authority... in accordance with the 13th amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution", while at the same time making it clear that the 'the work of the (UN's) Office of the High Commissioner, Human

Turn to Page 4

Waze was key conspirator in Mansukh's murder: ATS

SHAHAB ANSARI MUMBAI, MARCH 23

The Maharashtra ATS has claimed that suspended assistant police inspector Sachin Waze was the prime conspirator in Mansukh Hiren's murder and the agency is likely to seek his custody for interrogation. The NIA, meanwhile, has claimed that Mr Waze used a fake AAD-HAR card to book a room in a 5-star hotel in South Mumbai a day before the Scorpio car, which was later parked near Mukesh Ambani's

residence with explosives, was reported to be missing. He was seen carrying five bags in CCTV footage of the

ATS chief Jaijeet Singh on Tuesday said that the day after registering the FIR in connection with Hiren's death, in which his wife stated that she suspected the involvement of Mr Waze, Mr Waze said that he didn't have any relation with Hiren. However, the subsequent investigation revealed that Mr Waze's statement was a lie.

■ More on Page 4

PF threshold limit raised to ₹5L for tax-free interest

LS passes Finance Bill, FM gives relief to foreign e-commerce firms

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs

minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday raised the limit for tax exemption on interest earned on provident fund contribution by employees to ₹5 lakh per annum in specified cases as against ₹2.5 lakh proposed in the Budget. However, the minister in her reply to discussion on Finance Bill 2021 in the Lok Sabha said the concession would be available to employees only in cases where his or her employer does not make any contribution to the

retirement fund. The amended Finance Bill, which gives some relief to a specific class of regular employees and overseas e-commerce companies, was passed in Lok Sabha on Tuesday. Sitharaman had introduced the amendments related to these aspects.

Replying to the debate, she said the Budget pro-

posal taxing interest income on contributions more than ₹2.5 lakh per annum would affect less than 1 per cent of the total number of EPF subscribers. But there were also cases where EPF contributions were as

high as ₹5 crore, she said. "This ₹2.5 lakh (limit) is covering majority of 92-93 per cent of the people who are depositing and for whom assured interest is tax free under this scheme. So the limits have been kept keeping in mind that small and medium taxpayers are not impacted by the step," she said. Ms Sitharaman, while

replying to the day-long debate on the Finance Bill in the Lower House, "Through the amendment I am moving today I intend to clarify that equalisation levy is not applicable on consideration for goods which are owned by Indian residents.

In March 2020, the government had adopted a 2

Turn to Page 4

Cop among 10 people killed in US shooting

Boulder (Colorado), March 23: A shooting at a Colorado supermarket killed 10 people Monday, including a police officer who was the first to respond to the scene, authorities said. The police on Tuesday identified a 21-yearold man as the suspect behind the shooting.

This was the seventh mass killing this year in the US, following the March 16 shooting that left eight dead at three massage businesses. — AP More on Page 6

India hammer England to take 1-0 lead



Prasidh Krishna reacts during the first ODI between India and England in Pune on Tuesday. India outplayed world champions England by 66 runs to take a

1-0 lead in the three-match series. Prasidh made an impressive debut with his figures of 4/54 in 8.1 overs, the best by a debutant. **Report on Page 8** -AP

Oxford probes 'cyber bullying' of Indian student

ADITI KHANNA LONDON, MARCH 23

The University of Oxford on Tuesday said a probe is underway and that it investigates thoroughly every complaint related to harassment or equality, following allegations of cyber bullying surround-ing Rashmi Samant, the first Indian woman to be elected President of the Oxford Student Union (SU) who was forced to resign amidst controversy

over some of her past

SOME BRITISH Hindu groups have also raised concerns around comments made online by a university staffer from the history faculty with the local police

social media posts. Some British Hindu groups have also raised concerns around comments made online by a university staffer from the history faculty with the local Thames Valley police, urging an investigation into a possible hate The police force confirmed that it has received

a report of an alleged hate

The comments under scrutiny, posted with an image of Samant's family on Instagram by Dr Abhijit Sarkar, made references to their Hindu faith and also categorised their home state of

incident.

Karnataka as a "bastion of Islamophobic forces" 'An investigation into these online comments is ongoing and we must allow time for this formal process to be followed. In cases such as these, student support is provided through their college and department," an Oxford University spokesperson said.

"The university is fully committed to creating an environment where people of all backgrounds, including our Hindu students and staff, can feel welcome, valued and respected," the university

14 militants given death for attempt to kill Hasina in 2000

Dhaka, March Fourteen Islamist militants were on Tuesday given death sentence by a Bangladeshi court in Dhaka for attempting to kill Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2000. Judge Abu Zafar Md

namruzzaman of Dhaka's speedy trial tri-Kamruzzaman bunal-1 pronounced the verdict as nine of them were brought to the court from jail to face the trial in person.

The rest five convicts

are on the run. They

were tried in absentia and defended by stateappointed lawyers. The verdict will be executed by a firing

squad to set an example, unless the law barred it," the judge said. Otherwise, the con-

victs could be hanged in line with the prevailing following practice, mandatory review of the death sentences by the high court division of the Supreme Court under the Bangladesh law, the judge said. Under the Bangladesh

law, the death sentences would require to be endorsed by the high court following an automatic death reference

hearing.

More on Page 6











SHORT TAKES

3 illegal call centres busted, 37 held for

duping foreigners New Delhi: The Delhi Police busted three illegal call centres and arrested 37 people for allegedly duping foreign nationals of amount equivalent to crores of rupees, officials said on Tuesday. One of the call centres was being operated from Bindapur while the other two were functioning at West Delhi's Janakpuri area. The accused ran multiple fake processes from their call centres including Social Security

Number scam, Apple Tech Support scam and Amazon Tech Support scam wherein they extorted money from people on various pretexts, they said. The police said the accused pretended to be officials of either US Drug Enforcement or they posed as officials of Apple Technical Support or **Amazon Technical Support**

and sent voice recordings to extort money from their potential targets. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Cyber Cell) Anyesh Roy said, "On the basis of secret information that large-scale cybercrime was being committed from Bindapur and Janakpuri, a raid was conducted on the premises and it was found that different accused were running illegal

call centres in Bindapur and Janakpuri." Two separate cases were registered against the call centres and a total of 37 people, including managers, supervisors and operators, were arrested, out of which 9 were working at the Bindapur

centre and 28 at the Janakpuri centres, he said. A total of 56 desktops and 41 phones have been seized from the three locations, he added. "As disclosed by the accused, they have conned thousands of foreigners of over Rs 10 crore through the Bindapur call centre. Money was extorted from them in

the name of their Social Security Number wherein the accused contacted foreign nationals based in the US and other countries impersonating various law enforcement agencies and other government agencies," the officer said. They would tell them that their bank accounts and other assets were being frozen as their details were found at a crime scene and there were bank accounts running in their names using which illegal transactions were made to drug cartels in Mexico and Colombia. The wold also threaten the targets with

DU teachers to continue strike

immediate arrest, he said.

AGE CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

The Delhi University Teachers' Association on Tuesday held a protest at the vice chancellor's office, demanding withdrawal of the 'Pattern of Assistance' document and revocation of the appointment of senior administrative officers to 12 Delhi government-funded colleges of the varsity. The teachers' union also announced to continue the university shut down, which began on March 11, until their demands are met. It had earlier alleged that through the 'Pattern of Assistance' docu-

ment issued by the Directorate of Higher Education, the city government was attempting to "find ways of disaffiliating them from Delhi University". "The Pattern of Assistance document refers to these 12 colleges as '100 per cent funded Delhi government sponsored colleges affiliated

to the University of Delhi'. This is absolutely wrong as these are constituent colleges of the university," the Delhi University Teachers Association (DUTA) had said in a statement on March 18. **DUTA** also raised demands to revoke an order from the Finance Department that gives senior administrative officers additional charge of the 12 colleges fully funded

by the Delhi government. "The University of Delhi has no such provisions and the Office of the Principal is more than adequate and capable of handling the administrative functioning in each of these 12 colleges," it said. The teachers' body alleged that the Delhi government is

attempting to take the "12 colleges out of Delhi University and run them on self-financing mode to escape government funding". It also asked for assurance that there will be no delay in the release of grant-in-aid in the future.

Let all Indians above 18 get Covid vaccine, Delhi govt tells Centre

New Delhi, March 23: Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain on Tuesday said the Delhi government has urged the Centre to allow everyone aged above 18 to take the Covid-19 vaccine as such a step will set an example for the entire world. 'The Centre has allowed

vaccination for everyone aged above 45 from April 1. We have demanded that vaccines be given to every-one aged above 18. It will set an example for the entire world to defeat coronavirus," he tweeted. Jain on Tuesday also

said that Covid-19 is a recurring infection and people need to learn to live with it. Delhi was witnessing around 200 cases daily some days ago. The number has again risen to 800-900, Jain said at an event on the Delhi Assembly premises where he felicitated 'corona warriors' from the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital and GTB Hospital. 'Coronavirus is a recur-

ring infection. The minute we feel the situation is getting better, there is a sudden surge. We need to be aware, but also need to learn to live with it," he



People wait for their turn to get inoculated with the Covid-19 vaccine at a vaccination centre in New Delhi on Tuesday.

said. "Just like the other diseases, we will have to learn how to protect ourselves. If we continue to take precautions like washing our hands, wearing a mask, a lot of other diseases too can be kept at bay," he said.

Delhi reported over 888 coronavirus cases on Monday, while seven people succumbed to the disease, the highest since February 4, the Health National Capital Territory

Department said. There were 823 cases on Sunday. 813 on Saturday, 716 on Friday, 607 on Thursday, 536 on Wednesday and 425 on Tuesday, according to official data.
Jain thanked all doctors,

nurses, paramedics and staff for their contribution in combating the COVID-19 pandemic. Reacting to the passage of the Government of

of Delhi Amendment (GNCTD) Bill, 2021, he said, 'The British rule is being implemented again." "In the British Era too, there was a parliament and elections were conducted. MPs were elected, but decision-making powers were not in their hands. It was the Viceroy who took all the decisions. The same thing is being brought today," he

Court upholds 2-yr jail for Somnath Bharti

AAP MLA had assaulted a security staff in AIIMS in 2016

SANJAY KAW

A Delhi court on Tuesday upheld an order sentenc-ing AAP MLA Somnath Bharti to two years in jail for assaulting the AIIMS security staff in a case registered in 2016. After the pronouncement of the order, he was immediate-

ly taken into custody.

A lawyer by profession,
Bharati was also the law minister in the 49-day Kejriwal government in 2013. In a tweet, he said: "It was March 23 when people in power duly aided by Indian politicians hanged Shahide-cians hanged Shahide-azam Bhagat Singh Ji, Rajguru Ji and Sukhdev Ji, and today again, I failed to get justice from sessions court and being sent to Jail for my struggle for rights of people in a false case. Inquilab zind-

A magisterial court had in January sentenced Bharati to two years in jail. Special Judge Vikas Dhull partly dismissed Bharti's appeal and con-victed him for the offences



under sections 147 (rioting) read with 149 (unlawful assembly) of IPC and under section 3 (mischief causing damage to public property) Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act.

The special court, however, set aside his conviction under sections 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 353 (assault or use of criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty) read with section 149 of IPC. In January, Bharti was granted bail to enable him to file an appeal before the high court against his conviction in the case and

jail term. The prosecution case

was that on September 9, 2016, Bharti, along with nearly 300 others, brought down the fence of a boundary wall at the Delhi-AIIMS with a JCB operator. The case was operator. The case was lodged on the basis of a complaint from R S Rawat, Chief Security Officer, AIIMS. Bharti had told the court that police officials and other with passed based dependent. nesses had deposed against him in order to falsely implicate him in

the case.

Last week, a Delhi court had closed a defamation case against Bharti filed by a woman journalist in 2018. It was after he apolo-

gised to the complainant. In 2019, the Delhi High Court had cleared Bharti of charges of domestic violence against him. Justice Chander Shekhar had allowed Bharti's plea to clear the criminal case after noting that he and his wife Lipika Mitra were living happily together.The court also said that the woman has no objection if Bharti was cleared of the charges.

Over 1,100 Covid cases in Delhi in 24 hrs, highest in over 3 months

New Delhi, March 23: Delhi reported 1,101 Covid-19 cases on Tuesday, highest in over three months, while four people succumbed to the virus, the health department said.

It is the first time since December 24 that the city has recorded more than The new 1,101 cases are

the highest since December 19 when 1,139 cases were recorded, according to official data. The active cases rose to 4,411 from 3,934 a day ago. The positivity remained over 1 per cent for the fourth consecutive day, the health bulletin

new infections pushed the tally to The containment zones 6,49,973, while 6.34 lakh rose to 871 from 805 on

AGE CORRESPONDENT

The bodies of a 45-year-

old woman and her

found on a railway track

in north Delhi's Narela

area on Tuesday morn-

ing, police said, suspect-

ing it to be a suicide

The deceased have been

identified as Beena and

Krishan (35), both residents of Panama Udhan

The station master had

informed police around 9

am on Tuesday that a

man and a woman were

lying dead on the railway

track leading towards

Sonipat, a senior police

Narela, they said.

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

brother-in-law

case.

patients have recovered from the virus.

There were 888 cases on Monday, 823 on Sunday, 813 on Saturday, 716 on Friday, 607 on Thursday, and 536 on Wednesday, according to official data.

Four people died due to the disease, taking the number of fatalities to

A total of 84,237 tests, including 52,099 RT-PCR tests, were conducted a day ago, as the positivity rate stood at 1.31 per cent, the bulletin said.

It was 1.32 per cent on Monday and 1.03 per cent on Sunday. The number of people under home isolation rose to 2,316 from 2,067 a day ago.

The bodies were recov-

ered and apparently it

seems to be a case of sui-

cide, the officer said.

Police are inquiring the

family members who

could be contacted after

mobile phones of the

deceased were found at

the spot. No suicide note was found, the officer

Beena was a mother of

three. She worked as a

maid at a private diag-

nostic lab in Narela. Her

husband was an MCD

employee who died

around two years ago,

Krishan is survived by

his wife and three children. He worked as a

housekeeper at TPDDL

Rohini, they added.

police said.

Monday, it said.

The number of cases in Delhi on January 1 had stood at over 6.25 lakh and the total fatalities were 10,557.

The number of daily cases had started to come down in February. On February 26, the

month's highest daily count of 256 cases was recorded. However, the daily cases have begun to rise again in March and it has been

steadily increasing over the past few days. Health experts and doctors have attributed this "sudden rise" in cases to people turning complacent, not following Covidand "assuming all is well

at gunpoint

AGE CORRESPONDENT

Delhi Police has arrest-

ed a 24-year-old man for

allegedly robbing a per-

son at gunpoint in south-

west Delhi's Kishangarh

area. The accused has

been identified as Mohit,

According to Ingit Pratap Singh, the Deputy Commissioner

Southwest district, on

Monday around 8 pm,

police were patrolling

and saw at Aruna Asaf

Ali Road near Sanjay

Van, gate number 1 that

a person was chasing a

man towards Sanjay

"The patrolling team

Police (DCP),

a resident of Mehrauli.

NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

People purchase colour items ahead of Holi festival in New Delhi on Tuesday. Amid a

rise in coronavirus cases, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority on Tuesday ordered that there will be no public celebrations in the national capital during upcoming festivals such Holi and Navaratri. Chief secretary Vijay Dev directed authorities to ensure strict compliance of the order.

Finalise national health policy for Woman, brother-in-law 24-year-old rare diseases before Mar. 31: HC arrested for found dead on rail track AGE CORRESPONDENT

robbing man

The Delhi high court on Tuesday asked the Centre to finalise and notify the National Health Policy for Rare Diseases by March 31 and directed it to set up a National Consortium for Research, Development Therapeutics (NCRDT) for such ail-

ments. It also asked the government to consider increasing the budget for rare diseases for the upcoming financial year 2021-22 and said the policy should deal with giving financial incentives for manufacturing drugs and contributing towards treatment of rare diseases.

Justice Prathiba M. Singh, in an interim order on a batch of petitions concerning children suffering from rare diseases, said that as part of the policy, besides the NCRDT, a committee at AIIMS as well as a fund be set up for such ailments.

It said the consortium should consist of the

Council of Scientific and Industrial (CSIR), Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI), and other related ministries and departments and look after research, development of indige-

nous treatment, manufac-

turing of drugs, and inclusion of persons in clinical

National Health Policy for Rare Diseases, 2020, shall be finalised and notified by the govern-ment of India on or before March 31, the high court directed. The high court said the rare diseases committee shall be set up at All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) for examination of applications and recommend the treatment and funding

The court said when the application will be received by AIIMS, a decision has to be taken by the committee within two weeks and in case an application is received

of rare illnesses

department of biotechnol- through other institutions ogy, Indian Council of notified under the policy, Medical Research (ICMR), the decision on treatment and funding has to be taken by the panel within four weeks.

It directed that the

entire unspent budget allocated for rare diseases for the past three years shall be immediately moved into the rare diseases fund, which shall be managed, supervised, and utilised by nodal agency

The digital platform created under the policy for receiving crowd funding shall be linked to the fund and those individuals and companies wishing to contribute shall make direct contributions into it.

The high court had earlier constituted an expert committee to assess and find solutions on various aspects, including how to immediately provide treatment and therapy options to patients suffering from rare diseases including Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD) and Hunter syn-Dystrophy drome.

SDMC proposed **34% hike in property tax, claims AAP**

False allegation: BJP AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

The AAP claimed on Tuesday that the BJP-ruled South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) has brought a proposal to hike the property tax by 34 per cent, a claim denied by the saffron party.

Addressing a press conference, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) spokesperson Saurabh Bhardwaj said, "The BJP-ruled MCD waived six months' licence fee for outdoor advertisement contractors and it is now making up for the loss from residents".

"The BJP-ruled SDMC has brought a proposal to hike the property tax by 34 per cent. The Kejriwal govern-ment reduced circle rates by 20 while the BJP-ruled MCD increases property taxes by 34 per cent," he

Mr Bhardwaj said the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has 'massively" increased the prices of diesel, petrol and LPG in the last several days and claimed that the AAP govt has not hiked any tax in the last seven

years.
Hitting back, Delhi
BJP spokesperson
Shankar Praveen Kapoor said it seems "in his malafide anxiety to level charges against MCDs, AAP leader Bhardwaj does not even cross-check facts before speaking".

allegation is totally false as the SDMC Standing Committee has already long back rejected the proposal Commissioner to raise House Tax," he said in a statement.

43-yr-old shot dead in west **Delhi by 2 unidentified men**

AGE CORRESPONDENT **NEW DELHI, MARCH 23**

A 43-year-old man was shot dead allegedly by two unidentified persons in west Delhi's Jaffarpur Kalan area.

The deceased has been identified as Mukesh alias Fauzi, a resident of JP Kalan.

According to Santosh Kumar Meena, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Dwarka district, on Monday around 5.30 pm, Mukesh was singing along with his friends in the field of one Rajender near Firni Road, Jaffarpur Kalan where two unknown persons came on a black motorcycle and asked

them about one Rakesh. "Rakesh was not with them. Meanwhile, the person, who was inquiring about Rakesh, opened fire from a country-made pistol on Mukesh. He shot Mukesh around three to four bullets and fled away on their bike," said the

THE DECEASED has been identified as Mukesh alias Fauzi, a resident of JP Kalan. The police inspected the crime scene and recorded the statement of the eyewitness. The postmortem of the body has been conducted and investigation is in underway to nab the accused persons, the DCP said.

Kalan, made a PCR call. The nephew of Mukesh took him to the nearest

"A case under relevant sections has been registered. Police have inspected the crime scene and recorded the statement of the evewitness. The postmortem of the body has been conducted and investigation is in underway to nab the accused

"Later, Ishwar Singh (60), a resident of JP hospital where he was declared dead," said the DCP.

persons, the DCP said.

also started chasing him and apprehended the person who was later identified as Mohit. During investigation, it was revealed that Mohit, along with his two associates, robbed the victim, who works as manager in a private company in Kisangarh, of ₹1.75 lakh at gunpoint," said the DCP. "The victim was on his

way to his owner's house to deliver Rs 1,75,500. When he reached near Sanjay Van, gate number 1, the accused persons hit his bike by their motorcycle. When the victim fell on the road they started beating him and looted the bag at gunpoint," said the DCP. "While they were try-

ing to escape, police nabbed Mohit after a brief chase, while his other associates managed to flee on motorcycle. Police recovered the looted bag containing Rs 1,75,500 from his posses sion, the DCP said.

Further investigation is underway to nab the remaining accused persons, police said.



A vendor rests at a meat shop in Gurugram as Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) passed an order to close all meat shops on Tuesday.

Assam: BJP vows

corrected NRC,

more women aid

Promises 2 lakh government jobs

MANOJ ANAND

Bharatiya Janata Party national president J. P.

Nadda, on Tuesday, released the manifesto, or

the "Sankalp Patra" as

they called it, for the

ensuing Assembly polls in Assam, promising to increase the amount of

Orunodoi Scheme, a cash

transfer scheme for women, from ₹830 to

₹3,000 besides two lakh government jobs, and

correct National Register

of Citizens (NRC) to pro-

It is significant that Orunodoi Scheme, launched months before

the polls, is proving to be

a game changer for BJP

in the ensuing Assembly

polls. In every constituency, over 15,000 women have started getting ₹830

per month. The BJP has

promised to extend this scheme, which is extremely popular among

women in Assam, to 30

On the Citizenship

Amendment Act (CAA), Mr Nadda said that it has

to eliminate losses to

lives, livelihoods, and

property due to annual

The BJP said that it will

and spirit."

lakh deserving families.

tect Assam from influx.

on Tuesday,

SHORT TAKES

V-P, PM pay tributes to socialist icon Lohia

New Delhi: Vice-president M. Venkaiah Naidu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday paid tributes to freedom fighter and socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia on his birth anniversary, and hailed him for giving a new direction to the country with his progressive ideas. Lohia was born on this day in 1910. "My respectful tributes to

the great socialist leader, distinguished freedom fighter and nationalist Shri Ram Manohar Lohia Ji on his birth anniversary today. He was a visionary thinker and a prolific writer," Mr Naidu said in a tweet. Mr Lohia will always be remembered for his progressive ideas, the vice pres-

ident said. Paying homage to Lohia, PM Modi said in a tweet in Hindi, "Tributes to the great freedom fighter and socialist thinker Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia on his birth anniversary." — PTI

3 IPS officer retire prematurely in UP

Lucknow: Three IPS officers have been prematurely retired in Uttar Pradesh, including the one who has been at loggerheads with the state government. An officer of the 1992 batch. Inspector General Amitabh Thakur, on Tuesday dis-

closed his retirement on Twitter, attaching a copy of the orders issued by the Union government. He was currently posted as the Joint Director (Civil Defence). Two other officers - a 2002batch DIG and an SP of the

2005 batch — have also been prematurely retired, UP Chief Secretary (Home) Awanish Kumar Awasthi said Both were promoted to the IPS from the Provincial Police Service. - PTI

Punjab's ex-mantri

Khurana dies at 90

Chandigarh: Punjab's former Irrigation and Revenue Minister Gurnam Singh Abul Khurana died on Tuesday following a brief illness. He was 90. Chief minister Amarinder Singh expressed grief over Khurana's demise, describing him as a gentleman politician and leader of masses with the qualities of head and heart, who worked tirelessly for the welfare of downtrodden and overall development of Malwa region of Punjab. The chief minister, in a statement, said Khurana would be remembered by one and all in the Malwa belt for his strong connection with the local people at the grassroot

IMD launches portal

to aid climate change

New Delhi: The mean temperatures have shown a steep rise across all seasons since 1996 over India with the sharpest trend recorded in the pre-monsoon season, shows India meteorological department's latest offering—Climate Data Service Portal (CDSP). The data highlights the impact of climate change on India's mean temperature trends. The portal, launched on Tuesday on World Meteorological Day, has real time visualisation of meteorological data from across the country; climatological tables; visualisation of historical meteorological data including of monsoon rainfall pattern; mean temperature rise; and frequency of

cyclones etc. According to IMD, CDSP will help researchers and the government in climate change studies; planning and mitigation strategies; and offer early

K'taka colleges to run offline classes

Bengaluru: Regular offline classes for college students would continue in Karnataka and semester examinations held as per the time table of universities, deputy chief minister C.N. Ashwath Narayan

said on Tuesday. After chairing a meeting to assess the Covid situation in view of recent spurt in fresh cases in the state, Narayan, who holds the higher education portfolio, said it was decided offline classes will continue with strict implementation of

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Covid. "We discussed the possible impact of the second wave of Covid on the academic activities. The same would be communicated to chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa," he said in a statement, without elaborat-

TMC wants defected Sisir disqualified

Sources say Sudip Bandopadhyay is expected to submit petition to Speaker for Adhikari's disqualification

AGE CORRESPONDENT KOLKATA, MARCH 23

In a bid to stop further defection by its parliamentarians, West Bengal's ruling Trinamul Congress is going to seek Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to disqualify its three-time MP of Contai Sisir Adhikari under the anti-defection law for his switchover to the BJP at Union home minister Amit Shah's rally at Egra in East Midnapore two days ago.

According to sources, TMC leader in Lok Sabha Sudip Bandopadhyay is expected to submit a petition to Speaker Om Birla for Mr Adhikari's disqualification from the Parliament on Wednesday when his son and another party MP, Dibyendu Adhikari, is also set to defect to the BJP following the footsteps of his father

"divisive politics" that led to the Partition of the

country in 1947 and "hav-

ing the same mindset"

now as evident from its

alliance with the AIUDF to

fight the coming state polls

Addressing a series of election rallies in Barak

valley of poll-bound Assam, Adityanath, also

the Uttar Pradesh chief minister asserted, the country was "forced" to be

divided in 1947 because of

the Congress' pursuit of

"I can see a lot of Bengali-speaking people here in the rally. In their

pursuit of power, the

Congress, due to its divi-

sive policy, made your

ancestors experience Partition in 1947 when

(present-day) Bangladesh

and Pakistan were a part

of India," claimed Mr Adityanath.

Noting that leaders like

Netaji Subhash Chandra

Bose had warned the

Congress of the dangers of

such a divisive policy before 1945, Adityanath

said, "Congress is not a party to correct itself and

so resolved to let India be

1905. Congress did in 1947 by joining hands with the

English (British). How

your ancestors suffered

due to this divisive policy,

you can see even today in Bangladesh, the way Hindus are persecuted,

their homes set ablaze and

their temples destroyed,"

Slamming the grand old party, the saffron party leader said, "The Congress

still has the same mindset

that divided the country in

1947, imposed article 370 in

1952, instigated Bodoland

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO

BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 23

Finally, Sundari, the

Royal Bengal tigress brought to Odisha's

Satkoisa forest from

Kanha Tiger Reserve in

Madhya Pradesh was on

Tuesday evening taken back in a special vehicle

This was informed by

Angul Regional chief

conservator of forest (RCCF) Pradeep Raj Karata. The senior for-

est official further said

'Sundari' could not be

put in a cage from its

enclosure in Raiguda forest under Satkosia

sanctuary despite sever-

al attempts. Following

this, the team decided to

"After a tranquilising

tranquilise the tigress.

to the Ghorela forest.

Tigress 'Sundari'

returns to her

home state, MP

"What the British could not achieve through the Partition of Bengal in

partitioned."

he allaged.

in Assam.



■ West Bengal's ruling TMC is going to seek Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to disqualify its three-time MP of Contai Sisir Adhikari under the anti-defection law for his switchover to the BJP at Union home minister Amit Shah's rally at Egra in East Midnapore two days ago

brothers, Suvendu and Soumendu. This is the second time chief minister Mamata Banerjee's party is making the appeal for disqualification of its MP in the last three months. It earlier sought the removal of Burdwan (East) MP Sunil Mondal from the Parliament in January

Lumding/Hojai (Assam),

March 23: Appealing not

to do politics over illegal

will not allow Rajnath

enter Assam at any cost.

Addressing an election

rally here, he said the BJP

government has started

electronic surveillance across the Indo-Bangla

border in Assam to stop

"We will not allow Bangladeshi infiltrators

to enter Assam at any

cost... We will not allow

politics to play over ille-

gal immigration prob-

He said BJP has govern-

ments in Assam and

Bengal this time and then

the infiltration problem

from Bangladesh through these three states will be

movement in Assam. With

that mindset it made poll alliance with AIUDF to

once again create instabil-

ity in the state through

Mr Adityanath also took

a swipe at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi accusing

him of remembering Assam only during elec-

any Congress leader remember Assam during

floods or the pandemic?

Such leaders should be for-

gotten. Congress has no development agenda," he

shot was given to the

tigress, she took 15 min-

utes to lose conscious-

ness. The forest person-

nel then brought her

into a cage. Adequate amounts of food have

been kept in the cage as

well. She is weighing 160 kg," informed Dr Kishore Sahu, a veteri-

narian who was part of

a six-member team from

The six-member team

Reserve Forest along

with a special vehicle reached Satkosia forest

on March 21 to take back

'Sundari.' In June 2018,

'Sundari' was brought to

Satkosia sanctuary from

Madhya Pradesh under

the country's first inter-

state first interstate relo-

Kanha Tiger

Madhya Pradesh.

from

"Did Rahul Gandhi or

illegal migration"

lem." Mr Singh said.

Tripura, while it come to power in West

neighbouring country.

Tuesday said the BJP

immigration,

minister Rajnath Singh

government, if voted to power,

Bangladeshi

infiltrators to

after his defection to BJP in the presence of Mr Shah at his rally on December 19 last year.

The TMC's fresh move also relates to Mr Dibyendu Adhikari, the remaining heavyweight of the influential political family in Midnapore, who is likely to join the BJP at Prime Minister Narendra

Modi's mega campaign rally, on Wednesday, at Contai in East Midnapore in support of his party's candidate Mr Suvendu Adhikari at Nandigram against the TMC supremo. The first-time Tamluk

MP, who was a TMC MLA earlier, said, "I have received an invitation to attend the PM's rally. There is a possibility of me attending it.'

He had met the top leadership of the BJP last week after he was present at the launch of three bigticket Central industrial projects by Mr Modi at Haldia on February 7.

If Mr Dibyendu Adhikari makes the switch, he would also become the third Lok Sabha MP to leave the TMC for the saffron party ahead of the Assembly

election in the state. Adhikari joined the saf-

fron camp in the presence of Union home minister Amit Shah by chanting slogans of 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' during an election rally in West Bengal on

Sunday.
The MP has followed in the footsteps of his two Suvendu Soumendu, who joined the BJP earlier.

The patriarch of the Adhikari family — which wields considerable influence in Bengal's Purba Medinipur district — said that he was forced to switch camp, as the leaders of the ruling party left him with no other option.

Earlier, too, Sisir Adhikari had accused the ruling party of "humiliating" him and son Suvendu, who is locked in a fierce battle with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in the district's Nandigram constituency

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

■ It is significant that Orunodoi Scheme, launched months before the polls, is proving to be a game changer for BJP in the ensuing Assembly polls. In every constituency, over 15,000 women have started getting ₹830 per month.

places of worship of tribal communities from illegal encroachments.

It further said that it is committed to providing quality education under 'Mission Shishu Unnayan.' It said that free cycles will be given to girls after Class 8. The party said that free education will be imparted to every child under 'Mission Bala Unnayan' in the state government-

run institutions. The party also promised that 10 lakh youth entrepreneurs will be created hrough the Swami Vivekananda Youth Employment Yojana (SVAYEY).

been passed by the Parliament and will be implemented in "letter The BJP also promised to continue the distribu-The BJP said that it will tion of land pattas to the launch the multi-pronged indigenous landless. 'Mission Brahmaputra'

Union agriculture min-ister Narendra Singh Tomar, Assam chief min-Sonowal, and state minister Himanta Biswa form a task force to recover lands of Satras and at the event in Guwahati.

Cong pursuing politics that led to Partition: Yogi 'Netaji warned them of dangers of such policy' Udarbond/ Silchar/ Borkhola, March 23: Senior BJP leader Yogi **No Bangladeshi** will enter Assam Tuesday Adityanath accused the oppositon in BJP rule: Singh Congress of indulging in

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during an election campaign rally ahead of Assembly polls in Kottayam district on Tuesday.

C'garh: 5 jawans killed, 12 injured in Maoist strike

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY

BHOPAL, MARCH 23

Five jawans were on Tuesday killed and 12 others injured when the mini-bus in which they were travelling was blown up by Maoists Chhattisgarh's so in south district of ur. Bastar Narayanpur.

Maoists triggered 3 command initiated improvised explosive device (IED) explosions targeting the bus carrying jawans of district reserve group



5 jawans were killed, 12 others injured when the minibus was blown up by Maoists in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar district of Narayanpur on Tuesday.

ing through a bridge over of police (DGP) (antia culvert in Kodenar Naxal operation) of region, leading to the Chhattisgarh Ashok

bridge under the impact of the explosions, he added. While 3 jawans including the driver of the police bus died on the spot, 2 others succumbed to their injuries in the

The mini-bus fell off the

At least 12 jawans were injured, 3 of them grievously in the incident.

All the 12 injured jawans were admitted to the district hospital in Narayanpur. Three of them were later airlifted to Raipur for treatment when their condition dete-

biggest Maoist attack on security forces in Bastar in the current year so far.

The bus was carrying around 44 DRG jawans, Narayanpur district superintendent of police Mohit Garg said.
The incident took place

at around 4.15 in the after-

The jawans were returning to their base camp in district headquarters of Narayanpur in the illfated bus after carrying out counterinsurgency operations in the region when the incident took

Odisha House seeks 'Ahimsa' in Preamble of India Constitution

AGE CORRESPONDDENT **BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 23**

The Odisha Legislative Assembly of Odisha on Tuesday adopted unanimous resolution calling for incorporation of word "Ahimsa" (non-violence) in the Preamble of the Indian

Constitution. With the entire Odisha celebrating the centennial anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's first visit to the state on Tuesday, the Assembly passed the historic resolution as a "fitting trib-ute" to the Father of the Nation.

State tourism and cul-ture minister Jyoti Prakash Panigrahi had introduced the resolu-

Odisha government and outfits crossing party lines have been urging for the inclusion of non-violence, which is the Mahatma's most propounded doctrine, in the constitution.

A special discussion tabled in the Assembly on this occasion. Chief Minister

Odisha House okays 15% edu quota

AGE CORRESPONDENT BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 23

The Odisha Assembly on Tuesday unanimously passed a resolution making provision of 15 per cent reservation for government school students in state-run engineering and medical colleges.

The proposal in this regard was moved by chief minister Naveen Patnaik when the House was holding a special discussion, commemorating 100 years of Mahatma Gandhi's visit to the state.

Naveen Patnaik while addressing the House during the discussion said Odisha was where Mahatma's heart was. Gandhiji had visited Odisha on eight different occasions and toured several places across the state.

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE Supply & fixing of jumper cable support link assembly (Stainless Steel) for LHBAC coaches. Tender No. 30-Elect-3TR-Chg-2020-21 Approx cost of the work in (Rs.) Rs. 12,94,020/ Cost of tender form Rs. 0.00/-Address of the Office Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/Chg/Northern Railway, New Delhi Earnest Money Rs. 0.00/-Period of completion of work 04 Months Last date & time of submission of tender | 16.04,2021 up to 15.00 hrs And opening of tender 16.04.2021 at 15.01 hrs Website & notice board www.ireps.gov.in & Sr. DEE/Chg/DLI

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विद्युत दर जार हिमायल प्रदेश संस्कार द्वारा संवासंका विद्युत युक्त दर इस प्रकार से है.					
विवरण	यूनिट/महीना	स्वीकृत टैरिफ (रु./kWh)	प्रदेश सरकार द्वारा दी जा रही सबसिडी (रु./kWh)	सबसिडी के बाद प्रभावी टैरिफ (रु./kWh)	
लाईफ लाईन उपभोक्ता (हर वर्ग के उपभोक्ता)	0-60	3.30	2.30	1.00	
1 स्लैब	0-125	3.95	2.40	1.55	
2 स्लैब	0-125	3.95	2.10	1.85	
	126-300	4.85	0.90	3.95	
3 स्लैब	0-125	3.95	2.10	1.85	
	126-300	4.85	0.90	3.95	
	300 से ऊपर	5.45	0.45	5.00	
	प्रीपेड उपभोक्ता	4.85	0.90	3.95	
कृषि तथा सम्बद्ध गतिविधियाँ आपूर्ति वर्ग					
(क) सिंगल पार्ट टै	रिफ (< = 20 kVA)	3.70	3.20	0.50	

उपभोक्ता शिकायत निवारण फोरम (CGRF) कुसुम्पटी शिमला-9 दूरभाष : 0177-2626483

विद्युत् आपूर्ति संबन्धी

विद्युत् लोकपाल (Electricity Ombudsman)





SHORT TAKES **MAHARASHTRA: ED SEIZES ASSETS OF RECRUITMENT FIRM**

AGE CORRESPONDENT **NEW DELHI, MARCH 23**

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has provisionally attached the properties, worth several crores, of a Mumbai-based global recruitment firm and its promoters in a money laundering case linked to the alleged cheating of 900 Kuwait-bound nurses. In a statement issued by the central probe agency here on Tuesday, the ED said, "A provisional order for attaching a duplex flat in Mumbai's JVPD scheme area, a plot of land in Kerala and a Mercedes Benz car apart from ₹4.55 crore in cash of P.J. Mathew and others, has been issued". The agency has attached assets worth ₹ 7.51 crore belonging to Mathew, the proprietor of the Mumbai-based global recruitment firm Mathew International, and some peo-ple linked to him, including **Celine Mathew and Thomas** Mathew, said the ED. The action has been taken under the provisions of the Prevention of Money

against Mathew and Mohammed Naina Prabhu, the promoter of Mumbaibased firm Munavvara Associates. Mathew was also under the scanner of the Income Tax Department which had seized ₹4.55 crore cash from his premises in April-May 2015.

Laundering Act (PMLA). The

PMLA case was filed after studying a CBI FIR registered

MP: 13 KILLED IN AUTO-RICKSHAW & BUS COLLISION

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY

Thirteen persons including 12 women were on Tuesday killed when the auto-rickshaw in which they were travelling had a head-on-collision with a speeding bus in Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh. The incident took place at Old Chawni in Gwalior at around 5.30 in the morning. police said. While 8 women and the driver of the autorickshaw died on the spot, 4 others succumbed to their injuries in the hospital. Gwalior district superintendent of police Amit Sanghi said. The 12 women who were cooks in an anganwadi Centre in Stone Park area under Old Chawni were returning home in Gwalior after work, police said. They were supposed to travel in 2 auto-rickshaws. But, they were forced to travel in one auto-rickshaw when the other one developed snag. police said. The bus was travelling from Gwalior to

INTEL: BIKE RALLIES COULD USED TO INFLUENCE VOTERS

AGE CORRESPONDENT **NEW DELHI, MARCH 23**

Central intelligence and security agencies had even specific inputs to Election Commission that "bike rallies" in Bengal could be used to "intimidate voters and residents" ahead of the polling day. Following these inputs only the poll panel have stopped such bike rallies 72 hour before polling. Intelligence sources said they had specific information that in some parts of West Bengal "some political parties" were using these bike rally to threaten the voters. This, officials added, had to be stopped at any cost due to which after detailed discussion it was decided that though bike rally can be held by political parties but these will have to be stopped three days before polling. Election Commission has been taking regular updates from intelligence and security agencies along with the home ministry on the law and order situation prevailing in Bengal. With barely three-days left for the first phase of polling in Bengal security deployment is now at an all time high.

Shah...

■ Continued from Page 1

get anything out of it? Where did it go? Bhatija & Company

amassed it. You do not need to

worry. The new BJP government will form a SIT and put all

those who looted each and

every pie of the funds sent by

Modiji behind bars. All scams,

be it on Cyclone Amphan or

Bulbul or Aila, will be probed

SC notice to govt for claim on wrong conviction

PARMOD KUMAR **NEW DELHI, MARCH 23**

The Supreme Court on Tuesday sought response from the Centre on plea seeking compensation to one Vishnu Tiwari for 20 years in jail on the wrong conviction on the charges of rape and under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989.

A Bench headed by Justice Uday Umesh Lalit and also comprising Justice Indira Banerjee and Justice K.M. Joseph felt that the issue brought up before the court by two BJP leaders Kapil Mishra and Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay is serious .

Upadhyay gas sought framing of guidelines for compensation to the victims of the wrongful pros-ecution. Mishra also sought framing of guidelines, with a mechanism to take strict action and prosecution of the complainants making false allegations.

Both the petitioners sought guidelines to pay adequate compensation to the victims of the wrongful prosecution by implementing the recommendations of the 277th Law Commission report on the miscarriage of justice. Their petitions also wanted a mechanism for speedy disposal of the cases under the special Acts in a time-bound manner.

"The law is being misused and abused by filing fake and malicious complaints and no action is taken against the culprits in the absence of an effecstatutory/legal scheme for providing mandatory compensatory relief," Mishra said in his petition.



Farmers take out a march to commemorate the martyrdom day of freedom fighters Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev during their ongoing agitation against new farm laws in Amritsar on Tuesday.

■ 'Wants to have friendly relations with all countries including India'

Pak envoy seeks dialogue with India

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI

With a sudden perceptible improvement in Indo-Pak ties in the past one month following implementation of the ceasefire on the LoC by both sides, Pakistan Charge d' Affairs (CdA) in New Delhi Aftab Hasan Khan said on Tuesday that his country "wants to have friendly relations with all countries including India" and that to achieve peace between the two south Asian neighbours both countries shall resolve all outstanding issues ... through dialogue" including the Kashmir issue. Speaking on the occasion of his country's National Day, the Pakistani CdA further stated that "for the larger inter-

est of the region, peace within South Asia is inevitable". The remarks in a statement issued by the Pakistan High Commission (PHC) which are being seen as soft and conciliatory in tone are being viewed by observers as significant and yet another sign of the new thaw in bilateral ties.

In another sign of the thaw between India and Pakistan at top levels, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had last week wished speedy recovery for his Pakistani counterpart Imran Khan who is down with Covid. This came about a month after India and Pakistan agreed to a "strict observance" of the ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC). Just recently, the visit of the Pakistani Equestrian National Tent

SPEAKING ON the occasion of his country's National Day, the Pakistani CdA further stated that 'for the larger interest of the region, peace within South Asia is inevitable'.

Pegging Team to India to "participate in the World Cup Qualifiers of Equestrian Tent Pegging Championship 2021 from March 16-18" took place and generated a lot of buzz.

The PHC statement issued on the occasion of Pakistan's National Day also said, "Pakistan's flag was raised by Charge d' Affairs Aftab Hasan Khan, at an elegant and impressive flag-hoisting ceremony held on the Chancery's lawns. ... Press Attache, Khawaja Maaz Tariq, read out the messages of the President and the Prime Minister of Islamic Republic of Pakistan."

Ties between the two nuclear-armed neighbours had been extremely rocky for the past five years but events in the past one month indicate that the two nations have finally turned a corner in bilateral ties. The first indication of this had however come in early February this year when Pakistan's powerful Army chief Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa announced that "it is time" for his country to "extend the hand of peace in all directions" and had called on both countries to resolve the Kashmir issue in a "peaceful and dignified

ATS: Waze key figure behind Hiran's murder

Agency is likely to seek Waze's custody for further interrogation

SHAHAB ANSARI

The Maharashtra ATS has claimed that its investigation has revealed that suspended API Sachin Waze was prime conspirator in Mansukh Hiren murder and the agency is likely to seek his custody for interrogation in this case. Meanwhile the NIA has claimed that Waze used a fake AADHAR card to book a room in a 5-star hotel in South Mumbai a day before the Scorpio car, which was later parked near Mukesh Ambani's residence with explosives, was reported to be missing. He was seen carrying five bags in CCTV footage of the hotel.

ATS chief Jaijeet Singh on Tuesday revealed that very next day of registering the FIR in connection with the death of Mansukh Hiren, in which his wife Vimla has stated that she suspect involvement of API Sachin Waze in her husband's death, the probe officers had recorded Waze's statement in which he had refuted the claim that the Scorpio was in his use. He had also said that he didn't have any relation with Hiren and denied any role in Hiren's death, the ATS chief informed. However, the subsequent investigation revealed that Waze's statement was a lie.

According to ATS chief Singh, the probe revealed that at the instance of Waze the SIM card used in the crime was procured by bookie Ramesh



Sachin Waze

Ramniklal Gaur from Gujarat. The said SIM card was bought in the name of a Gujarat-based company. It has also come to light that Gaur had given this SIM card to Waze's aide, former police constable Vinayak Shinde. Shinde was sentenced to imprisonment for life in connection with the fake encounter of Ramnarayan Gupta alias Lakhan Bhaiya. But in 2020, he was released on parole due to Covid pan-demic. After coming out of jail, Shinde got in touch with Waze and

started working for him. The ATS has claimed that they have procured evidence showing their involvement in Hiren's murder. The ATS so far has recovered 14 SIM cards from the accused persons. But it has been revealed that the mobile phones that were used in the crime have been

With the help of inputs received from interrogation of accused and suspected persons an ATS team on Tuesday returned from Union Territory Deu Daman with a seized Volvo car and suspect.

PF threshold...

■ Continued from Page 1

per cent digital services tax, which applies only to non-resident companies

with annual revenues in

excess of approximately

₹2 crore, and it covers

online sales of goods and

services to persons in India. The tax had come

into effect on April 1,

2020. Ms Sitharaman said

that the Centre favours

digital transactions and

is not trying to under-

mine it. Yet, she added

that the aforementioned

tax is something which

has been imposed to give

a level playing field to

Indian businesses who

pay tax in India and for-

eign e-commerce compa-

nies who do business in

India but don't pay any

Hindus, Sikhs not facing persecution in Afghan: Haneef

VINEETA PANDEY NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

Afghan Foreign minister Haneef Atmar on Tuesday said that the vioagainst the Hindu and Sikh in Afghanistan cannot be termed as persecution against the minorities but should be seen as general violence against the common citizens. He said Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan are proud citizens of the country and it is the responsibility of the Afghanistan government

The violence against Afghans unfortunately did not spare our minori ties either. So it is not a kind of persecution against specific minorities per se. It is the general violence against the entire nation and unfortunately this part of the population has been disproportionately affected. They are citizens of



them. It has been like that for centuries Haneet and will be Atmar like that. It is the responsi-

bility of not just the Afghan government but the Afghan people too to protect their federal the Afghan brothers," FM said during a media interaction in New Delhi Talking about India's

role in peace talk with the Taliban, Mr Atmar said India has legitimate interests in the peace and security of Afghanistan and his government is keen that India plays a bigger role at the forums discussing the peace

However, Afghanistan has left it for India to decide its role in the country's development and its approach towards the Taliban.

'No penal interest on deferred loans'

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said that there would be no charging of compound interest/penal interest/interest on interest on any loan during six month Covid moratorium period from March 01 to August 31, 2020, as government had itself allowed the deferring of EMIs on the

The waiver of interest on interest or penal interest would be applicable to all

the quantum of loan amount. This is broadengovernment in October last year granting waiver of compound interest or penal interest for the moratorium period for the loan amounts upto ₹2 crores. A bench comprising Justice Ashok Bhushan, Justice R. Subhash Reddy and Justice M.R.Shah however, declined the plea for the extension of loan payment moratorium period or sec-

by us through the SIT."

here." he said.

Mr Shah, in remarks aimed at

the Hindu migrants' votebank

in the district, touched on the

BJP's key eectoral promise.

"We will implement the

Citizenship Amendment Act

and give citizenship to the

refugees after coming to power

Mr Shah added: "For the poor,

the PM has undertaken 115

yojanas, or schemes. But Didi

started 115 scams. The money

tor wise restructuring of the loans, of the poor is looted by those who take cut money. The BJP government will bring an end to it." Training his guns on Ms Banerjee over her false promises, Mr Shah drew attention to the sops for the Sundarbans

delta in the BJP manifesto. He claimed: "Didi announced 282 promises but could not meet even 82 of them. In 2016 she talked of building a multiple integrated fisheries zone. Till date, no one knows where it is.'

Ruckus in Bihar House over police bill

Police and marshals called to evict the agitating MLAs from Assmebly

NAYEAR AZAD PATNA, MARCH 23

The Opposition RJD on Tuesday created a ruckus in the state Assembly over the Bihar special armed police bill, 2021. The situation occurred

when MLAs of the RJD Opposition party trying to stop were Assembly Speaker Vijay Kumar Sinha from stepping out of his chamber. This prompted the police as well as the marshals to forcibly evict the agitating MLAs and in this many were badly injured including women mem-

 \blacksquare Continued from Page 1

The new guidelines will be

effective from April 1 to

April 30. In a letter to the

chief secretaries, Union

home secretary Ajay Bhalla asked states/UTs to take all

measures to promote Covid-

19 appropriate behaviour

among the public, especial-

ly in crowded places and

during festivals while sav-

ing there was a general lax-

the Uttar Pradesh govern-

ment has issued guidelines

saying that no procession

such movements.

The police bill 2021 that aims to give more power to the police force was introduced by the state government led by Nitish Kumar. After the bill was presented in the House the Opposition party MLAs created a ruckus and gathered in the well of

the house. marshals later rushed to stop the agitating members from getting into a scuffle with the members of the treasury

Later while talking to reporters the injured MLA Satyendra Kumar

can be carried out without prior permission and that

people above the age of 60,

children below 10 years and

people with comorbidities

should not be at large pub-

lic gatherings. The Delhi government too has banned

Holi celebrations in public

places while random test-

ing at bus and railway sta-

Delhi health minister

"The Centre has allowed

vaccination for everyone

aged above 45 from April 1.

tions have been ordered.

THE POLICE bill 2021 that aims to give more power to the police force was introduced by the state government led by Nitish Kumar. After the bill was presented in the House the Opposition party MLAs created a ruckus and gathered in the well of the house.

said that "the police was called in to crush our voices. This is the murder of democracy. We are with the people of Bihar and state government wants to bring the police bill which is draconian in nature. We will not allow

We have demanded that vaccines be given to every-

one aged above 18. It will set

an example for the entire world to defeat Covid-19,"

Punjab CM Amarinder Singh said 81 per cent of the 401 samples sent by the

state government for

genome sequencing have

tested positive for the UK variant of Covid-19. He

urged the Centre to widen

mission. Punjab had 2,274

Mr Jain said.

the state government to make Bihar a police Earlier on Tuesday, the

police resorted to lathi charge on agitating RJD workers while they were taking out a protest march on the streets of Patna against unemploynent, rising crime grapn inflation and several other issues including the special armed police bill, 2021.

Leader of the opposition Tejashwi Yadav and his brother Tej Pratap along with several others were later detained by the

on Tuesday. However, min-

ister of state for health

Ashwini Choubey said in

the Rajya Sabha on

Tuesday that no new strain

of Covid-19 has been detect-

ed in Maharashtra, Kerala

and Punjab. In a written

reply, the minister said

after the detection of vari-

ants of Sars-CoV-2 in Britain, South Africa and

these variants, and so far 795 cases of the mutant

virus have been detected.

income tax here. Lanka...

■ Continued from Page 1 Rights (OHCHR), should be in conformity with mandate given by the relevant resolutions of the UN General Assembly". The 13th amendment in Sri Lanka stands for devolution of power to the provinces there. India has been a supporter of the "reconciliation process" in the island nation between the majority Sinhalas and

the minority Tamils.

New Delhi's vote is being seen as an exer-cise of political balance and one key factor could be the upcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly polls since some political parties there had already made it an issue. The continuing proximity of the Rajapaksa brothers (President Gotabaya and Prime Minister Mahinda) to China could have also been another factor in New Delhi's decision.

The UNHRC resolution called upon "the (Sri Lankan) government to ensure prompt thorough and impartial investigation, if warranted, prosecution of all alleged crimes relating to human rights violations and serious violations of international human rights law". The resolution was tabled by a core group on Sri Lanka consisting of the United Kingdom, Canada. Malawi, Germany, Montenegro, and North Macedonia at the 46th Session of the UNHRC in Geneva.

Satyendar Jain said the Brazil, the Indian governity in the observance of the vaccination net to cover government had ment has put in a surveil-Covid-19 appropriate behavlance mechanism for interurged the Centre to allow all those younger than 60, as iour by people now. Ahead of the Holi festival, everyone aged above 18 to the mutant virus has been national travellers and in found to be infecting younger people more, to break the chain of transtake the Covid-19 vaccine. the community to detect

All above 45 can get vaccine from April 1

Cong-CPM tieup with ISF is advantage BJP ing the relief given by the

the loans irrespective of

■ Continued from Page 1 "dented" the "secular credentials" of the Marxists and Communists. Some diehard Left supporters were also "embarrassed" over this controversial tie-up.

Incidentally, the Left, led by CPI(M), had always steered clear of any hardline outfit. In the mid-60s the CPI(M) had joined hands with the Muslim League. Years later the parties parted ways following the difference over Muslim Personal Law in general.

The "opportunistic" alliance with ISF could actually make things somewhat easier for the BJP in the battle for Bengal. A simple electoral arithmetic shows that TMC Mamata Banerjee always managed to get the lion's share of both Hindu and Muslim votes to stay at the top of

the pyramid.

Of the nearly 30 per cent Muslims in the state, a little over 20 per cent of the vote share used to go into Mamata Banerjee's kitty. Similarly, she also bagged over 20 per cent of the Hindu votes. This combination of about 45 per cent vote share assured her seat

at the top.
With ISF coming into the picture, the possibility of a dent in the Muslim vote share looms large. About 22 per cent of Muslims live in Kolkata and nearly 67 per cent are in Murshidabad district. The second-largest Muslim population is in North Dinajpur which is 52 per cent and 51 per cent in

are in Malda. In the 2016 Assembly polls, TMC was ahead in virtually all the Muslimdominated constituencies.

But in the last couple of years, the Bengali Hindus including the OBCs have shown signs of gravitating towards the BJP. From 16.8 per cent in 2014,

the BJP's vote share during 2019 Lok Sabha polls had jumped to 40.3 per cent. Despite coming down by 12 seats. Ms Baneriee managed to get 43.3 of the vote share mainly because she got a majority of the Muslim votes. Therefore a minor swing of five per cent or less could make things tricky for Ms Banerjee.

What also damaged Ms Banerjee in the 2019 elections was the transfer of CPI(M) votes to the BJP. It was indicated that for the Left, particularly the CPI(M), "Mamata is a bigger enemy than the BJP." The CPI(M) has not been able to reconcile to the fact

that it was Ms Banerjee who single handedly ousted them from the state. "CPI(M) has not been able to get over that and it wants to see the end of Mamata at any cost," the Communist leader said. CPI(M) general secretary

Sitaram Yechury went on record saying that the 'TMC has to be defeated to stop the communal bandwagon of the RSS-BJP in Bengal." The CPI(M) mouthpiece, Ganashakti, continues which breathe fire against Banerjee had Mamata claimed that a tie-up with the TMC would have been "suicidal." There's also an apprehension that if the CPI(M) felt that Ms Banerjee could return to power yet again it "just might transfer its votes to

the BJP.



THE ASIAN AGE

24 MARCH 2021

Optics key, Uddhav must act fast to kill racket stink

t is no exaggeration to say that the political situation in Maharashtra has turned fragile following on allegations levelled by a DGP rank IPS officer, Param Bir Singh, who was removed from the post of commissioner of Mumbai Police by the state government last week.

The allegations are grave. After being displaced from the post of CP, Mr Singh told chief minister Uddhav Thackeray in a letter that home minister Anil Deshmukh had ordered junior officers, including assistant sub-inspector Sachin Vaze who has been suspended for his suspected role in an explosives-laden SUV near the residence of business magnate Mukesh Ambani, to collect ₹100 crore per month, obviously sanctioning extortion.

The former CP followed up his letter with a petition in the Supreme Court on Monday, seeking a CBI inquiry in this matter and in an alleged transfer-posting racket run by Mr Deshmukh.

It is up to the apex court to consider the reliability of Mr Singh as a complainant,

Circumstances now do not permit him to withhold comment and action — for long, else he will be at risk of completely losing the initiative in

not least because he had been removed for not being exercising sufficient control of the police force and, by implication, letting API Vaze run amok. It may also need to be considered why the former CP had kept quiet over the alleged criminality of the home minister for over a year. Did he stand to gain through prolonged silence? At the same time, delayed disclosure — provided allegations in question are not ungrounded — cannot justify inaction.

NCP leader Sharad Pawar, widely thought to hold the whip hand in politically shepherding the a wobbly situation Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) coalition government, at a Delhi press conference on Monday, strongly defended Mr Deshmukh, who is from the his party. Mr Pawar appeared to stout-

ly refute the factual basis of Mr Singh's allegation against Mr Deshmukh. But this supposition has been emasculated by Mr Deshmukh himself. In the public mind, now, serious doubts are apt to have arisen about the integrity of the state government although Mr Thackeray did appear to be gaining in popularity and stature since he took office in November 2019. The CM has kept mum on the Vaze-Singh-Deshmukh matter, allowing Mr Pawar to call the shots. Circumstances now do not permit him to withhold comment — and action — for long, else he will be at risk of completely losing the initiative in a wobbly situation.

At the risk of annoying NCP, the first logical step is to oblige Mr Deshmukh to step away from the position of home minister and simultaneously set in train a probe conducted by a retired Supreme Court or high court judge. Even if it is true, as many suspect, that the BJP, which has no love lost for Mr Thackeray and his party Shiv Sena, may have manipulated events behind the scene to trigger the current denouement, with a view to playing politics to return to power in Maharashtra, the CM is obliged to discharge his *raj dharma* not only politically but by being technically and constitutionally correct.

Wins for merit, politics

ontroversies, politics and criticism of the incumbent government for using the National Film Awards to reward its darlings are now par for the course. Almost every year, as soon as the long list of awards is announced, congratulatory messages and carping begin a parallel race. Questions are raised about the relevance of the awards, faults are pointed out in the selection of the jury, processes and choices. And yet, National Film Awards remain the most prestigious and respected. Were it left to the devices of Mumbai's film-magazine backed awards, it would seem that India only churns out melodramas that prance around five songs. The National Film Awards are the only truly "national" awards that celebrate

cinema and artists from across the country. Given Indians' obsession with films and movies' power to influence, it is naive to think that the government of the day won't use the national awards to its benefit. And the 67th National Awards, announced on Tuesday for films released in 2019, is

Kangana Ranaut, the BJP's most vocal flag-bearer on social media, has received her fourth national award for her performance in two films — Manikarnika and Panga. Ms Ranaut is a very talented actress, but this would be her third national award since 2014. In these six years there have been other, much better perfor-

mances, but they have only been on the screen. This year's list also includes several films that neatly align with the BJP's ideology, like the best direction award for Sanjay Puran Singh Chauhan's Bahattar Hoorein (72 Virgins), and Holy Rights, Farha Khatun's film on Triple Talaq bagging the award for the best film on social issues.

It would be churlish to cast aspersions on the merit of these films based simply on the fact that deal with issues that are currently palatable because also included this year's list are two sublime performances. ny actors portraving chara very relevant to our times. Manoj Bajpayee and Dhanush have both won the best actor award — the former for his performance in and as Bhonsle (Marathi), and Dhanush for his role in Vetrimmaaran's Tamil film, Asuran. Bajpayee plays an ageing police constable who fights the rise of communalism in his chawl and Dhanush plays a dalit villager who fights off upper caste landlords to save his family. In these bleak times, that's reason enough for celebration.

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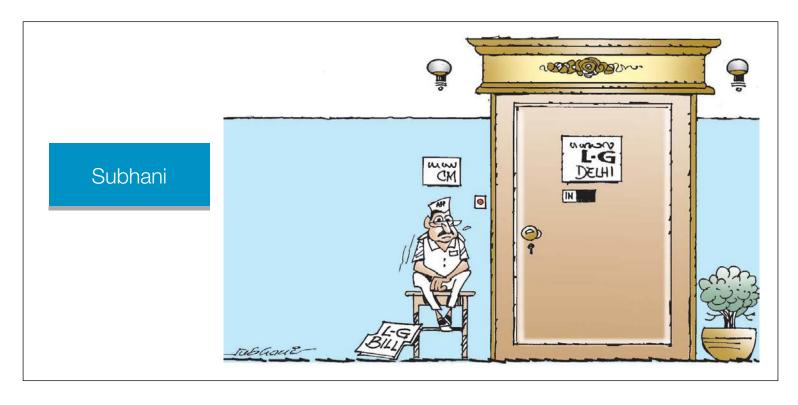
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India should not fall for China's charm offensive



Abhijit Bhattacharyya

s gullible India once again falling for the Dragon's charm offensive? After the betrayal and battering this country and its valiant forces faced at the hands of the People's Liberation Army in Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso, Depsang and Gogra/Hot Springs last summer, and at the Doklam tri-junction earlier, why do we forget this humiliation and treachery when, for good reasons of its own, the adversary puts on its benign mask and pretend to place all animosities on the backburner. How else does one deal with the words of Wang Yi, China's foreign minister, who also holds the weightier post of state councillor. as he appeared to reach out to New Delhi earlier this month: "China and India are friends. Should end suspicion." "Should not undercut each other." "Boundary dispute not the whole story", as the "rights and wrongs of the Line of Actual Control conflict clear", and "let's resolve

Too good to be true? It's all beautifully crafted, carefully scripted and tries to bypass the real issues to paint India as the villain, with the aggressor playing the victim card! The press, of course, laps it all up, and forgets to play its real roleto ask the tough questions? Of WHY China is doing this, and at the present juncture. Instead, there are headlines like: "Dragon turns dove, talks peace, partnership with India".

It is a truism — but worth repeating now — that peoples and nations which forget their own history are condemned to repeat it. Have we forgotten that when Chairman Mao's People's Republic was born in October 1949, India, which had attained independence just two ears earlier, was one of the first major countries outside the Communist bloc to extend the hand of friendship to the new revolutionary nation? And how did Mao and his cohorts respond to Jawaharlal Nehru's overture for peace and partnership across the Himalayas? By invading Tibet in 1950, driving out the Dalai Lama into exile in 1959 and then, just three years later, trying to invade India in 1962. For Nehru, who actually believed in the concept of "Hindi Chini bhai bhai", it was a shock and a betraval from which he never recovered, but what excuse do we have today for forgetting the lessons of history? Is that what Wang hopes for, that Nehru's successors in Delhi will similarly be taken in by Beijing acting nice?

But why criticise Wang

alone? Is he the only one

showing India in poor light? Aren't Indians themselves busy pulling down their country in the face of the Communist Party of China's ferocious aggression? It's because China's ers are inside India; along with Delhi's powerful business and trade elite. So even if India's Prime Minister ceaselessly impresses upon the nation to pursue the goal of "Atma Nirbhar Bharat", top Indian corporates are singing a different tune. Said one corporate leader: "We like to believe we are global company... and must continue to trade with China. Because if we conduct our business by excluding such a large country ... and market ... we will be poorer for the loss of that experience".

This unabashed dependence on China, and by extension of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC), is all pervasive, and extends to the nation's largest corporations, whose motto clearly seems: "Company first; country later". This, of course, is

true for most large companies worldwide. No wonder several countries, from the United States to Australia. and to China, are now busy trying to rein in mega corporates who have become too big for their boots and feel emboldened to challenge the State with impunity!

But some business deals have more serious implications than others. It was recently reported in the Indian media that "Bharti Airtel has awarded a telecom infrastructure expansion contract worth ₹300 crores to China's Huawei". What is disturbing is that Airtel's national long-distance network — which will carry inter-circle and international traffic, as well as Internet traffic and that from main landing stations — will now be run by Huawei, which has connec-

tions to the CPC. Is this a Greek tragedy? At a time when the PLA soldiers are forcibly entering Indian territory and killing Indian soldiers, a CPC-run Chinese company will earn crores in the guise of managing sensitive, secret, critical communications deep inside India. Is this the kind of unequal war we want to

engage in? That's a basic contradiction in India today. The PM is pushing for self-reliance, chos appear to have another agenda.

Sadly, the matter doesn't end there. The entire world knows about China's global cyberattacks, with India being a priority target due to the CPC's deep penetration in Delhi. So, when reports emerge of a "Red Echo over India", there's

dug so deep within India that they have learnt to take in their stride the occasional outbursts by Delhi, with some minor glitches like a few anti-dumping duties or the ban

on a few Chinese

apps...

The Chinese have

deafening silence. It's akin to acceptance of the Dragon's malice: with Chinese malware on the rampage, targeting India's power grid utilities. The Chinese have dug so deep within India that they

have learnt to take in their stride the occasional outbursts by Delhi, with some minor glitches like a few anti-dumping duties or the ban on a few Chinese apps — which are really too insignificant for the CPC to worry about. For they know that Indians have a weakness for all things Chinese — from consumers to corporate bosses — just as in the nineteenth century the Middle Kingdom was addicted to Indian produce. Today, in a bewildering role reversal, Indians seem totally addicted to Chinese cars, comput-

ers, cellphones, toys and

At the same time, the rising anti-Chinese sentiments among some sections are giving birth to tions are giving birth to new forces and alliances like the "Quad". Has Delhi suddenly become the pivot for both the success and failure of China's geostrategic goals in 2021? As Xi Jinping's CPC looks ahead to celebrating its centenary on July 1, 2021, this year is critical to establishing the success of "Xi's its capitalist derland. Beijing thus suddenly feels the need to mend fences, but can Delhi take advantage of such overtures, and for once act in its own self-interest?

Post-script: As 'Quad" raises the heat, the Dragon is at it again, trying to blackmail soft target Delhi. A new dam on the Brahmaputra will control the waters flowing into India, and no Indian will get a Chinese visa without "Made in China" Covid-19 iab. Can India reciprocate, using the same formula to deny Indian visas to aspiring Chinese without an India-made jab? How long can India take this Chinese blackmail, humiliation and battering?

The writer is an alumnus of the National Defence College. The views expressed are personal.

WILD KARNATAKA

It is heartening that south Indian cinema distinguished itself at the 67th National Film Awards, with over 15 films from the region bagging accolades. Malayalam cinema hogged the limelight grabbing seven prizes with Tamil (six), Telugu (three) and Kannada (one) finishing in that order. Wild Karnataka, a documentary, deservedly won the Best **Exploration Film award** in the non-feature category. Kangana Ranaut, Manoj Bajpayee and Dhanush crowned themselves with glory, winning the prize for best actress and actors. Kudos!

> N.J. Ravi Chander Bengaluru

SUPERSPREADERS

THERE IS NO let-up in Covid 19 cases even after one year. The daily case count is increasing day by day with almost 47,000 cases reported on Monday. In view of this, the Kumbh Mela at Uttarakhand and Holi in Uttar Pradesh may turn out to be superspreader events. It has been observed that during the past two ing masks and are not observing the Covid-19 protocol. We need to sacrifice this year's celebrations for the sake of public safety.

D.B. Madan

SAY YES TO NOTA

A PIL HAS recently been filed in the Supreme Court requesting it to issue instructions to the government to consider the relevance of the Nota option in EVMs. If the votes polled under this option is greater than those of the winning candidate, then the poll be cancelled and fresh election conducted. The court has sought the responses of the Centre and the Election Commission on the matter. We rest our hopes in their good sense. The voters' verdict should be honoured.

Yashpal Ralhan Jalandhar

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

Maleeha



US peace plan for Afghanistan to face critical challenge ahead

he Biden administration has launched its first diplomatic initiative to accelerate the Afghan peace process even as it continues its review of Afghan policy. This is reflected in a leaked letter from secretary of state Antony Blinken to President Ashraf Ghani that sets out its proposed plan. It is also evident from the discussion draft of a peace agreement shared by the US with Afghan parties and the regional diplomacy now underway by special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad.

These moves signal three things — a renewal of US commitment to withdraw from Afghanistan, its desire to do so after securing a peace settlement among the warring Afghan parties and the willingness to use pressure to quickly achieve this. This raises sever-al questions. Is the Biden administration overreaching with an ambitious plan that it wants to accomplish in a limited timeframe? In deciding to mount pressure on the parties does the US have the leverage to get them to agree? Is the proposed "new, inclusive" interim government an achievable goal as bitter foes will have to share power? With Washington having drafted a peace agreement, albeit for discussion, will Afghan parties take owner-ship of this?

The Biden team is vigorously engag-

ing Kabul, the Taliban and other Afghan leaders in discussions over the peace plan and the May 1 deadline for US withdrawal with the proviso that final decisions will emerge once the review concludes. President Joe Biden has said that meeting the May 1 deadline will be tough but it won't be extended by "a lot longer". Meanwhile, the Taliban have warned against any delay in this deadline and of an unspecified "reaction" if this happens.

The US diplomatic initiative according to the leaked letter — has four elements. One, a meeting to be convened by the UN of representatives of Russia, the US, Pakistan, Iran and India to forge regional consensus to support the peace plan. Two, a draft peace agreement to expedite negotiations on a settlement and ceasefire. A key proposal is to set up a transitional government once agreement is reached. Three, Turkey to host a meeting between the two sides to seal a peace deal. And four, a 90-day reduction in violence to avert a spring offensive by the Taliban. This plan is punctuated by the US warning that it is considering full withdrawal of forces by May 1 but not ruling out other options.

By clearly communicating that a political settlement is a priority — not just the military withdrawal, as it was for president Trump — a prudent path

seems to have been outlined especially as diplomatic parleys underway will shape the conclusions of the US review. Regional consensus to back a peace

deal is clearly necessary. This is also a way for Washington to ensure that Iran is included in the diplomatic process. No timeframe has been set for this. But the UN will have to deftly play the role expected of it. Moscow, while welcoming the transitional government idea, has not said anything on the US plan and is embarked on its own regional diplomacy including a peace conference hosted last week on Afghanistan. The Pakistan-India dynamic also has to be kept in view; Islamabad has already conveyed its misgivings over India's inclusion in the proposed conference to US officials

With two new processes now envisaged in addition to that in Doha it would be important not to allow the intra-Afghan negotiations in Doha to be diluted or complicated by the proposed new ones. They should facilitate the Doha process and not replace it. The principal diplomatic effort should remain in the Doha talks.

Washington is clearly in a hurry. Trying to force the pace of the peace process reflects US frustration with the stalled intra-Afghan talks. It also shows impatience with President Ghani's obstructive tactics, evident from the

tough tone of Blinken's letter. The tight timeframe in which the US wants a settlement done and dusted aims to compel the two sides to negotiate seriously. Even so the expectation for negotiations to yield an expeditious outcome runs up against an ineluctable reality that the tough compromises needed for an agreement are unlikely to emerge quickly just because Washington has set a deadline. The US can intensify pressure on both sides but that doesn't mean it has enough leverage over them to reach a speedy settlement. A senior Afghan official recently told PBS that the US has adopted a "fast food" approach, forcing everybody to consume something that is "too quick to

There is also the question of whether in order to expedite the process Washington has overprescribed the elements of an agreement — drafting one itself rather than letting it emerge from negotiations. This lays it open to being viewed as an "imposed" solution. While the US says it is not seeking to dictate terms and its peace agreement is a discussion draft it is yet to be determined whether Afghan parties see it

the same way.

The idea of a transitional government, vehemently opposed by Ghani, makes sense before a more permanent government can be installed following adoption of a new constitution and elections. But can the two sides and other Afghan leaders show the accommodation needed for a workable power-sharing arrangement? In an initial response a Taliban spokesman asserted that interim governments have proven ineffective in the past but the Taliban have vet to take a firm position.

Pakistan's interest lies in the success of intra-Afghan talks that can produce a negotiated end to the war and a lasting settlement before the full with-drawal of US forces. That is what Islamabad means by its repeated calls for a "responsible withdrawal". It does not want its neighbour to descend into political chaos or a civil war, and sees an inclusive post-settlement govern-ment in Kabul as the best way to ensure peace and stability. It seeks assurances that Afghan territory will not be used against Pakistan. US officials have also been told that Islamabad stands ready to do what it can to help the peace process. It is however up to the Afghan parties to seize the moment as the US plan starts to unfold and faces critical tests in the

> The writer is a former Pakistani ambassador to the United States and the UN

By arrangement with Dawn







SHORT TAKES

CONVERSION: U.S. MAN DETAINED IN YGANDA

Kampala, March 23: Ugandan police said an American man has been detained over alleged involvement in "subversive activities" against the govern-

Police said the man identified as Guy Smith was arrested in a remote town and is being detained at a police facility in Kampala. The statement gave no more details, and it was not immediately possible to get a comment from the US Embassy. Ugandan authorities accuse foreigners of meddling in the country's affairs, charges that have raised tensions between President Yoweri Museveni and the country's development partners.

VOLCANIC ASH: GUATEMALA CITY AIRPORT SHUT

Guatemala City, March 23:A shift in wind blew ash from an eruption at the Pacaya volcano over Guatemala City on Tuesday, and authorities closed the airport as ash coated planes and planes parked at the terminal. The 8,373-foot (2,552 metre) volcano, just 30 miles (50 km) south of Guatemala's capital, has been active since early February. Civil Aviation Director Francis Argueta did not say how long the closure would last.

Tourists frequently hike up to visit Pacaya's peak, but those trips have been temporarily cancelled.

Pacaya has a clear view of the nearby Volcano of Fire, which erupted in 2018, emitting a fast-moving avalanche of super-heated muck that killed at least 110 people and left about 200 missing.

OZ EAST COAST RAIN TO EASE; FLOODING ON

Sydney, March 23: Heavy rainfall was forecast to ease across Australia's east coast but floodwaters will linger for days across New South Wales state where 15,000 people were nervously waiting on Tuesday for potential orders to evacuate. Some 18,000 residents of Australia's most populous state have fled their homes since last week, with warnings the cleanup could stretch into April. New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian on Tuesday said several weather fronts continued to effect large swaths of the state.

Some parts of the state had recorded two-thirds of their annual rainfall in less than a week. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the rain emergency was expected to ease by late Wednesday.

FRANCE CALLS **CHINESE ENVOY OVER COMMENTS**

Paris, March 23:France's foreign ministry said it has sum-moned China's ambassador over "unacceptable" comments in recent days that included alleged insults and threats towards lawmakers and a researcher.

Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian tweeted on Monday that "comments of China's Embassy and actions against elected officials, researchers and European diplom-

ats are unacceptable. French authorities will "firmly reiterate the message" will when meeting with Chinese Ambassador Lu Shaye, he

The Chinese Embassy in France called a Paris-based researcher, Antoine Bondaz, "a thug" on Twitter on Friday.

NIGER VILLAGE ATTACKS: 137 **GUNNED DOWN**

Niamey (Niger), March 23: Gunmen aboard motorcycles have attacked a series of villages near Niger's troubled border with Mali, leaving at least 137 people dead in the deadliest violence to strike the African country in recent memory, the government has announced.

The latest village massacres come amid a dangerous escalation in attacks following the election of Niger's new president, Mohamed Bazoum, sev-

eral weeks ago. Government spokesman Abdourahmane Zakaria confirmed on Monday the latest killings took place on Sunday, the same day Niger's Constitutional Court officially declared Ba-February's election.

Modi to Imran: 'India desires cordial relations'

Islamabad, March 23: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has told Prime Minister Imran Khan in a Pakistan Day message that his country desires cordial relations with the Pakistani people, it emerged on Tuesday, according to a report by

message, dated March 22, was conveyed to Prime Minister Imran by Indian High Commission in Islamabad through the Pakistan foreign office, the Dawn Imran and the Pakistani

reported. In his letter, Mr Modi extended greetings to the occasion of Pakistan Day, which is being celebrated across the country today.

neighbouring country, India desires cordial relations with the people of Pakistan," Mr Modi wrote. "For this, an environment of trust, devoid of terror and hostility, is imperative."

The Indian Ppremier also conveyed wishes to

people for dealing with the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic, terming it a "difficult time for humanity"

accept.

Excellency, the assurances of my highest considerathe message concluded. The development comes days after Prime Minister

Imran said India would have to make the first move to normalise ties with Pakistan.

would have to take the



"We are trying, but India first step and unless it

ahead," the Premier said while inaugurating the edition the Islamabad Security

Dialogue. The perpetually tense relations between the two countries, which have fought three wars, besides engaging in several episodes of limited con-flict, suffered a break-down after India illegally annexed occupied Jammu and Kashmir on August 5,

However, the two coun-

last month by announcing the resumption of ceasefire at the Line of Control (LoC) after a 'hotline contact' between the directors general of military operations of the two countries. Many believe that agreement was made possible through a backchannel, although Pakistani offi-

cials strongly deny it. No violation has since then been reported at the LoC and importantly there has been a visible reduction in rhetoric from

Certify Rana

extradition, US

In his speech at the Islamabad Prime Minister Imran said the Kashmir issue was the lone irritant standing in the way of better relations between Pakistan and India.

While addressing the same event, Army Chief Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa too stressed the need to resolve the Kashmir dispute through peaceful means, saying: "We feel it is time to bury the past and move forward. — Agencies

Israelis vote to seal Bibi fate

Fourth poll in two years as Netanyahu's corruption charge trial continues

Jerusalem, March 23: Israelis returned to polling stations early Tuesday for an unprecedented fourth time in two years in what is being largely seen as a referendum on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's continuance at the helm of affairs amid his ongoing trial on corruption charges as well as his handling of the pandemic.

The elections were called barely seven months after the last government was formed after the Likud and Blue and White party failed to agree on a budget by a December 23 deadline. The two parties had fought each other bitterly in the three ultimately inconclusive elections throughout 2019 and 2020 but agreed in May 2020 to form a nower-sharing government with a rotating premiership between PM Netanyahu and Blue and White leader Benny Gantz. The unity government collapsed in December.

As per the election commission, 6,578,084 Israelis are eligible to vote for any of the 38 parties running in the elections in 13,685 polling stations across the country, including 750 special polling stations for the sick and quarantined due to COVID-19.

Exit polls will be broad-cast by the leading chan-nels Tuesday night but the final results will be out only on March 31 after the votes from special polling stations, of soldiers, emis-

14 ULTRAS

KILL BID

in 2000.

Kamruzzaman

GIVEN DEATH

FOR B'DESH PM

Dhaka, March 23: Fourt-

een Islamist militants

were on Tuesday given

death sentence by a Ban-

gladeshi court here for

attempting to kill Prime

Minister Sheikh Hasina

Judge Abu Zafar Md

Dhaka's Speedy Trial tri-

bunal-1 pronounced the

verdict as nine of them were brought to the court from jail to face

The rest five convicts

are on the run. They

were tried in absentia

and defended by state-

executed by a firing

squad to set an example,

unless the law barred

it," the judge said. Otherwise, the convicts

could be hanged in line

with the prevailing prac-

tice, following mandato-

ry review of the death sentences by the High

Court Division of the

Supreme Court under

the Bangladesh law, the

judge said. Under the

Bangladesh law, the death sentences would

require to be endorsed

by the High Court fol-

lowing an automatic death reference hearing.

The convicts are allowed

to file an appeal as well.

For the five convicts

who are at large, the

judge ordered the ver-

dict to be executed after

their arrest or surrender. All the convicts are

operatives of outlawed

Harkatul Jihad Bangladesh (HuJI-B).

HuJI-B's chief Mufti

Abdul Hannan, who was found to be the master-

mind of the plot, too was

indicted in the case but

his name was dropped

from the trial as he was executed in 2017 in

another case involving

attempted assassination

of the then Bangladeshi-

origin British High

Commissioner.

The verdict will be

the trial in person.

appointed lawyers.



Yesh Atid party leader Yair Lapid and his wife Lihi vote for Israel's parliamentary election at a polling station in Tel

saries and prisoners are also properly tallied by Thursday or Friday.

Buoyed by a successful vaccination drive, one of the fastest in the world per capita, Netanyahu, 71, has put it at the forefront of his campaign claiming that under his leadership Israel has become the first country in the world to beat the Covid-19 pandemic. He vet again faces a together a coalition post-elections with some determined "friends turn foes" looking to end his longrun. The PM has made Israel's handling of the pandemic, especially its robust vaccine drive, personal by regular appearances in nationally televised addresses towards the beginning of the pandemic and later obsessively nego-

tough challenge of putting tiating vaccine deals with pharmaceutical companies. Israel has reported 828,764 Coronavirus cases so far with 6,109 deaths.

Netanyahu's early recognition of the perils of the pandemic has been hailed by several international leaders, and also political analysts who appreciated his political acumen in identifying an opportuni-ty in a crisis while most of

the world failed to grasp the intensity of the prob-

Netanyahu hailed the country's "green" Covid-19 vaccination passports recently, saying Israel was "coming to life". and his latest campaign slogan. bringing Israeli society 'back to life", may be his best chance at keeping his political career alive.

US: AstraZeneca 'used' dated info in vax trial

Washington, March 23: Results from a US trial of AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine may have included "outdated information" and that could mean the company provided an incomplete view of efficacv data. American federal health officials said early

AstraZeneca said in a statement that the data it released Monday included cases up to Feb. 17, as the study rules specified, and that it was continuing to analyse cases that have occurred since then. The company said that a prethat has continued to roll in was consistent with what it had already reported.

It promised an update within 48 hours. AstraZeneca reported Monday that its Covid-19 vaccine provided strong protection among adults of all ages in a long-anticipated US study, a finding that some experts hoped would help rebuild public confidence in the shot around the world and move it a step closer to clearance in

the US. In the study of more

liminary analysis of data than 30,000 people, the company reported that the vaccine was found to be 79 per cent effective at preventing symptomatic cases of Covid-19 — inclu-

ding in older adults. There were no severe illnesses or hospitalisations among vaccinated volunteers, compared with five such cases in participants who received dummy shots — a small number, but consistent with findings from Britain and other countries that the vaccine projects using the worst of the disease. -AP

LANKA, CHINA INK \$1.5 BN CURRENCY **EXCHANGE DEAL**

Colombo, March 23: Sri

Lanka will exchange currency with China under a 10 billion yuan (about \$1.5 billion) agreement aimed at promoting trade and investment between the two countries, the island nation's central bank said on Monday. So-called currency swaps allow central banks to ensure banks in their countries can borrow ready cash in any of the currencies

involved. China remains Sri Lanka's largest source of imports.

Xi, Kim reaffirm traditional alliance

ers of China and North Korea are reaffirming their traditional alliance following contentious talks between top diplomats from Washington and Beijing and diplomatic isolation and economic problems in the North that have left it ever-more dependent on the Chinese.

The North's official Korean Central News

er Kim Jong Un called for eration" with China in the face of challenges posed by "hostile forces" while exchanging messages with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

According to KCNA and China's Xinhua news agency, Xi in his own message to Kim described bilateral relations as a North Korea with badly

countries and vowed to make unspecified contributions to the peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. *KCNA* said Xi also expressed a commitment to "provide the peoples of the two countries with better life."

Some analysts saw this as an indication that China would soon provide

other aid that had been significantly reduced amid the pandemic border closures. Xinhua said the leaders' messages were exchanged during a meeting between Chinese senior diplomat Song Tao and North Korean Ambassador to China Ri Ryong Nam during a meeting in Beijing on Monday.

admin to court Monday. Rana, a child-

Washington, March 23: The Biden administration has urged a federal court to certify India's request to extradite Pakistani-origin Canadian businessman Tahawwur Rana, who is sought for his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack Assistant US Attorney John J. Lulejian, in his

submission before a federal US court in Los Angeles, said Rana, 59, meets all the criteria to be extradited to India for his trial in the Mumbai terror attack. On February 4, Rana's attorney had Rana's attorney had opposed his extradition. US District Court Judge in Los Angeles Jacqueline Chooljian has

scheduled the extradition hearing for April 22. "The United States respectfully requests that following the April 22, 2021, extradition hearing, the Court certify India's request for Rana's extra-

dition for the Secretary of

State's surrender deci-

sion," Lulejian said in his

court submission on

hood friend of David Coleman Headley, was rearrested on June 10 in Los Angeles on an extradition request by India for his involvement in the Mumbai attack in which 166

people were killed.

He has been declared a fugitive by India. "Fugitive Tahawwur Hussain Rana is wanted in India to stand trial for offences related to his role in the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India, that resulted in the death of 166 people, injury of 239 people, and damage to property in excess of \$1.5 billion," Lulejian said.
As per the India-US

Extradition Treaty, the Indian government has requested the formal extradition of Rana, and the United States has initiated this extradition proceeding. Lulejian said the criteria warranting certification of extradition are satisfied in this case. These are: the court has both personal and subject matter jurisdic-

10 shot dead in **US supermarket**

wno was the first to respond to the scene, authorities said. Police arrested a suspect, but didn't reveal his name or any details about the shooting at an evening news conference where Boulder police Chief Maris Herold fought back tears.

Investigators had just begun sorting through evidence and witness interviews and didn't have details on a motive for the shooting at the King Soopers store in Boulder, which is about 25 miles northwest of Denver and home the University of Colorado, said Boulder County District Attorney Michael Dougherty. "This is a tragedy and a nightmare for Boulder Cou-

nty," Dougherty said. These were people going about their day, doing their shopping. I promise the victims and the people of the state of Colorado that we will secure justice." The attack was the seventh mass killing this year in the US, following the March 16 shooting that left eight people dead at three Atlanta-area massage businesses, according to a database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University.

It follows a lull in mass

Boulder (Colorado), Ma- killings during the panderch 23: A shooting at a mic in 2020, which had Colorado supermarket the smallest number of killed 10 people Monday, such attacks in more than including a police officer a decade, according to the database wnich tracks mass killings defined as four or more dead, not including the shooter.

The slain officer was identified as Eric Talley, 51, who had been with Boulder police since 2010, Herold said. He went to the store after a call about shots fired and someone carrying a rifle, she said. "He was by all accounts

one of the outstanding officers of the Boulder Police Department, and his life was cut too short. Dougherty said of Talley. Identities of the other victims were not disclosed as police were still notifying family members. Matthew Kirsch, the acting US attorney for Colorado, pledged that "the full weight of federal law enforcement" will support the investigation. He said investigators from the Alcohol, Bureau of Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives were at the crime scene, along with FBI agents. Officers had escorted a shirtless man with blood running down his leg out of the store in handcuffs but authorities would not say if he was the suspect. They did say the suspect was receiving medical care and was the only person injured who

US Labour Department invites comments from public on migrant workers WAGE | WISE

18-month delay in H-1B visa pay calculation

Washington, March 23: The Biden Administration has proposed an 18-month delay in the effective date of a final rule on calculating the prevailing wages of certain immigrants and non-immigrant workers, including those on the

popular H-1B visas. The proposed delay will provide the Department of Labour with sufficient time to consider the rule's legal and policy issues thoroughly and issue an

Information and gather public comments on the sources and methods for determining prevailing wage levels, an official release said following the announcement on Monday. This proposed rule follows an initial 60-day delay announced earlier this month.

The department based that action on a January 20, 2021, White House memo, the media release

upcoming Request for said. 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. The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

Department Labour in its federal notification published earlier this month said that it is

considering whether to propose a further delay of the final rule's effective date and accompanying implementation periods.

The Department proposed to delay is in accordance with the Presidential directive as expressed in the memorandum of January 20, 2021, from the Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff, entitled Regulatory Freeze Pend-

ing Review. The Department invited

written comments from the public for 15 days on the proposed delay of effective date. All comments had to be received by February 16, 2021.

Published in January 2021, the final rule affects employers seeking to employ foreign workers on a permanent or temporary basis through certain immigrant visas or through H-1B, H-1B1 and E-3 non-immigrant visas, the Department of Labour

While the E3 visa is one for which only citizens of Australia are eligible, the H-1B1 visa is for the people from Singapore and Chile. The proposed delay will

also give agency officials sufficient time to compute and validate prevailing wage data covering specific occupations and geographic areas, complete necessary system modifications and conduct public outreach.

WEDNESDAY | 24 MARCH 2021 | NEW DELHI



INDICATO	%	
Sensex	50,051.44	0.56
Nifty 50	14,814.80	0.53
S&P 500*	3,944.91	0.11
Dollar (₹)	72.42	-0.05
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.78	0.49
Euro (₹)	86.15	0.001
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,374▲116	0.26
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	62.14	-3.84
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.144	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.654	-0.028
* As of 8:30 PM IST		

NCLAT closes proceedings against Jyoti

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal has shut the insolvency proceedings initiated against motor and generator manufacturing company Jvoti Ltd after settlement of claims raised by financial creditors. A two-member bench, including acting chairperson Justice B. Lal Bhat, allowed the company's plea after observing that it has already paid Rs 16.5 crore as per the compromise

Cipla board okays another 5-year term for Vohra



Pharma major Cipla said its board has approved the re-appointment of Umang Vohra as the managing director and global CEO of the company for a further period of five years, wih effect from. April 1, 2021. Vohra had joined Cipla in 2015 and has been its MD & global CEO since Sept. 1, 2016. After gaining degrees in engineering, marketing and finance, Vohra PepsiCo and Dr Reddy's Lab.

Hero MotoCorp to increase prices from April

Hero MotoCorp said it will make an upward revision in the ex-showroom prices of its motorcycles and scooters, with effect from April 1 to partially offset the impact of higher commodity costs. "The price hike has been necessitated to partially offset the impact of increased commodity costs, Hero MotoCorp said in a BSE filing. The price increase across the range of two-wheelers will be up to Rs 2,500, it added.

Glenmark gets \$40 mn as IFC **Covid credit-line**

International Finance Corporation said Glenmark Pharmaceuticals has become the first Indian drugmaker to get a \$40-million (about Rs 290 crore) credit-line from its \$8-billion fast-track Covid-19 facility. The loan to Glenmark will help the drug firm increase the availability of affordable, quality medicines in the country as well in other countries, including treatment for the pandemic.

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■Waiver of 'interest on interest' applicable to all

SC refuses to extend loan moratorium beyond Aug.

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MARCH 23

The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to extend the six months' loan moratorium period offered by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) beyond August 31. The apex court also said that the waiver of complete interest is not possible as it affects depositors

However, the apex court ruled that all borrowers will be eligible for waiver of 'interest on interest' (compound interest) with respect to EMIs which were not paid by them after availing of the loan moratorium scheme extended by the RBI during March 1 to August 31 in view of the pandemic. And whatever the amount is recovered by lenders by way of interest on interest/compound

erest/penal interest for the period during the moratorium, the same shall be refunded and to be adjusted in the next instalment of the loan account.

The court effectively set aside the direction of the central government and the RBI to restrict waiver of interest on interest to certain categories of borrowers who had taken loans of less than Rs 2

"There is no justification shown to restrict the relief of not charging interest on interest with respect to the loans up to Rs 2 crore only and that too restricted to the aforesaid categories. What are the basis to restrict it to Rs 2 crore are **PRAYERS THAT WERE REJECTED**

- ▶ Total waiver of interest during the moratorium period
- To extend the period of moratorium
- To extend the period for invocation of resolution mechanism
- Sector-wise reliefs provided by RBI
- Further reliefs over and above the packages already offered

NPAs FELL TO ₹5.7 L CR: MINISTER

New Delhi, March 23: Non-performing assets of banks declined to Rs lakh crore in December 2020 and the recovered amount stood at Rs 2.74 lakh crore following a slew of measures taken by the government, minister of state for finance Anurag Singh Thakur told the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday.

not forthcoming. There-

fore, as such, there is no

rational to restrict such

relief with respect to loans

up to Rs 2 crore only," the

The court, therefore, partly allowed the petitions which had chal-

lenged the decision of the

Centre and RBI to restrict

waiver of interest on inter-

est to those borrowers who

had availed of loans of less

The SC also lifted the

temporary freeze on let-ting banks classify

ting banks classify accounts as non-perform-

than Rs 2 crore.

court said.

During question hour, he also said the IBC has helped in the recovery of NPA. "There has been a reduction in gross NPAs. The NPAs—which stood at Rs 8.96 lakh crore in 2018—have reduced to Rs 5.70 lakh crore in December 2020. Recovery of Rs 2.74 lakh crore was also made," he said.

ing assets (NPAs) after the moratorium has ended. This according to rating agency Icra Ltd would result in bad loans rising by Rs 1.3 lakh crore for banks and an outgo of Rs 7,000-Rs 7,500 crore as

Also noteworthy was that the SC said no direction could be issued to the gov-ernment or the RBI to announce any particular financial package or relief, and held that it will, there-

reimbursement of interest

on interest to those with

loans outstanding during

the moratorium period.

in exercising judicial review over matters of economic and fiscal policies.

The judgment was delivered by a bench of Justices Bhushan, Subhash Reddy and M.R. Shah in a batch of petitions filed by companies, individuals and business associations challenging the decision of the Centre and RBI to charge interest during the moratorium period and restrict waiver of interest on interest to eight categories of borrowers who had taken loans of less than Rs 2 crore.

Anil Gupta, vice president–financial sector ratings, Icra said, "As per Icra's estimates, on a proforma basis, the GNPA of the banks stood at Rs. 8.7 lakh crore or 8.3 per cent of advances as against the reported GNPA of Rs 7.4 lakh crore (7.1 per cent) as on December 31, 2020. Also, on a proforma basis, the Net NPA for the banks stood at Rs. 2.7 lakh crore or 2.7 per cent of advances as against the reported NNPA for all banks of Rs 1.7 lakh crore (1.7 per cent) as on December 31, 2020. Hence in absence of stand-still by Hon'ble supreme court, the Gross NPAs for the banks would have been higher by Rs 1.3 lakh crore (1.2 per cent) and Net NPAs would have been higher by Rs one lakh crore (1 per

"As per our estimates, the compounded interest for six month of moratorium across all lenders is estimated at Rs 13,500-14,000 crore."

Govt raises PF tax floor to ₹5 lakh

New Delhi, March 23: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday raised the limit for tax exemption on interest earned on provident fund contribution by employees to Rs 5 lakh per annum in specified cases against Rs 2.5 lakh proposed in the Budget.

However, the minister in her reply to discussion on Finance Bill 2021 in the Lok Sabha, said the concession would be available to employees only in cases where his or her employer does not make any contribution to the retirement fund. The Finance Bill was

later passed by the Lower House with 127 amendments by voice vote.

With the passage of the Finance Bill, which contains tax proposals for the next fiscal, the Lok Sabha has completed the budgetary exercise for 2021-22. The Bill is to be taken up by the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

Replying to the debate, she said the proposal for taxing interest income on contributions of more than Rs 2.5 lakh would affect less than 1 per cent of the total number of EPF subscribers.

"I intend to raise this limit to Rs 5 lakh only in those cases, where there is no contribution by the employer in that fund. 'So, most often, it is

employee contribution and employer's contribution, but there are contributions which are only employee and no employer contribution is made, in such cases that amount is raised to Rs 5 lakh." she said.

Petrol issue can be taken up at GST Council meet: FM

Amidst an outcry over the high taxes on motor fuel, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said she would be "glad" to discuss the suggestion of bringing petrol and diesel under the ambit of the Goods and Services Tax at the next meeting of the GST Council.

State levies and central excise duty account for more than half of the selling prices of petrol and diesel.

For instance, taxes make up for 60 per cent of the present retail price of petrol of Rs 91.17 a litre in Delhi. Excise duty constitutes 36 per cent of the

retail price. Over 53 per cent of the retail selling price of Rs 81.47 a litre for diesel in Delhi is made up of taxes. As much as 39 per cent of the retail price comprises

central excise. Replying to the debate on Finance Bill 2021 in the Lok Sabha, Sitharaman said both the centre as well as state governments levy taxes on petrol and diesel. However, the Centre shares its collection on the fuel with states.

"I would honestly think based on today's discussion, many of the states would be watching this. In the next GST Council (meeting), if that discussion comes up, I'll be glad to have it on the agenda and discuss it. I have no issues. Let the states come and discuss it. The call has to be taken there (at the Council)," the minister

The GST Council, headed



Nirmala Sitharaman

by the union finance minister and comprising state finance ministers, is the highest decision making body regarding GST.

Earlier in the day, members from the Opposition benches said high prices of diesel, petrol and LPG were hurting the common man across the country and asked the government to reduce their rates.

Petrol and diesel prices are hovering at historic highs following a relentless increase in rates over the past nine months. There have been calls by Opposition parties as well as sections of society to reduce excise duty to ease

consumer pain. Supriya Sule (NCP) said excise component in the prices of petrol is close to Rs 38 per litre while state value-added tax (VAT) is about Rs 19 per litre in Delhi. The government should consider slashing this high excise duty, she said. She urged the government to bring down prices of petrol, diesel and LPG

Ritesh Pandey (BSP) and Nama Nageswara Rao (TRS) too raised the issue of high prices of petrol

Gangavaram Port goes to Adani for ₹3,600 crore

New Delhi, March 23: Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ on Tuesday said it will acquire controlling interest in Gangavaram Port Ltd (GPL) from D.V.S. Raju and family for Rs 3,604 crore, taking its stake in GPL to 89.6 per

cent.
GPL is located next to the Vizag Port. APSEZ, India's largest

private ports and logistics company and the flagship transportation arm of the diversified Adani Group, is acquiring the 58.1 per cent stake held by D.V.S. Raju and family in GPL, the company said in a statement. The acquisition is valued at Rs 3,604 crore, it

said. APSEZ had announced acquisition of Warburg Pincus' 31.5 per cent stake in GPL on March 3, 2021, and together with this acquisition. APSEZ would have 89.6 per cent Ports play a major role in shaping the future. Through APSEZ'S 89.6 cent stake Gangavaram port, the Adani Group will greatly expand its pan-India cargo presence. As India's largest private sector port developer and operator, we will accelerate India's and Andhra Pradesh's industrialisation, Adani Group chairman Gautam Adani said

It is the second largest non-major port in Andhra Pradesh with a 64 MT capacity established under concession from Government of Andhra Pradesh (GoAP) that extends till 2059.

It is an all-weather deen water, multipurpose port capable of handling fully laden super cape size vessels of up to 2,00,000 DWT, the statement said.

Currently, GPL oper ates 9 berths and has free hold land of 1,800 acres.

DIGITAL MAPPING OF INDIA TO BE **OVER BY 2024**

SANGEETHA G

The digital mapping initiative by the Survey of India is expected to cover the entire country by 2024. The departmental budget for this in FY21 is Rs 449 crore.

The project by the Survey of India, with support from the Department of Science and Technology (DST) had started in 2019. The entire country will be covered mostly with high resolution satellite imagery and some areas with UAV/drones as per the request of state governments for large-scale mapping. SoI will be covering 31.67 lakh sq km of area, minister of science of technology Harsh Vardhan told the Rajya Sabha.

The high resolution satellite imagery work involves five stages. The fifth round of Final Topography National Data Base has been completed in around 2,324 sq

The departmental budget for FY21 is Rs 449 crore. Further, funds have been receives from some extra departmental projects.

JLR starts electric journey with ₹1.06 cr I-Pace SUV

With the launch of the Jaguar I-Pace SUV on Tuesday, Jaguar Land Rover, Tata Motors-owned British luxury carmaker, has now entered the electric vehicle, or EV, market in India. With a price tag of Rs 1.06 crore for the base S trim, going up to Rs 1.12 crore at pan-India showroom for the top-end HSE trim, the Jaguar I-Pace will compete against the likes of Mercedes-Benz EQC and the upcoming Porsche Tavcan and Audi e-tron in India. Rohit Suri, president & managing director at Jaguar Land Rover India spoke with Michael Gonsalves on the company's electric plans and challenges in the Indian market.

How significant is the launch of Jaguar I-Pace in

India? Jaguar I-Pace is the first all-electric SUV that we've launched in India and it marks the beginning of our electrification journey. With our electrified products we look forward to playing a significant role in India's electrification drive into the future. Is the Indian market is



ready for electric-vehicles? The Indian market is surely warming up to the prospects of electric vehicles. Amongst our customers, there is a growing concern around pollution in cities and overall environment sustainability, which is triggering the demand for EVs. Government policy push is acting as a catalyst to drive this demand even further. The 21st century luxury customer is also keen to adopt the latest in technology and EVs are absolutely at the top of the pyramid

What charging solutions have you provided with the Jaguar I-Pace? To charge the I-Pace, cus-

in this aspect.

tomers may either use a home charging cable that is provided as standard with the vehicle or use a 7.4 kW AC wall mounted charger that is also provided as standard. The installation of this charger a the customer's house will be done by Tata Power, and will be coordinated via Jaguar Retailers.

> What about battery warranty and services?

To ensure complete peace of mind, Jaguar I-Pace is provided with complimentary five-year service package, five years roadside assistance package, eight years or 160000 km battery warranty and a 7.4 kW AČ wall mounted charger.

What are your plans for FY22?

In line with the growth in the economy, we expect the luxury car market to witness a strong double-digit growth and we will strive to grow faster. Post the successful launch of Land Rover Defender in FY21. we are looking to further fortify our position in the market with 10 strong product actions planned in FY22.

GOVT CHALLENGES CAIRN ARBITRATION AWARD IN HAGUE



New Delhi, March 23: India is believed to have challenged in a court in The Hague an arbitration tribunal verdict that overturned its demand for Rs 10.247 crore in back taxes from Cairn Energy Plcthe second time in three months that it has refused to accept an international award against retrospective tax.

The appeal was filed on Monday, a source with knowledge of the matter

The finance ministry spokesperson did not respond to an e-mail sent for comments.

The appeal against a three-member tribunal at the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague invalidating India's Rs 10,247-crore tax claim on Cairn Energy and ordering the government to return the value of shares it had sold, dividends seized and tax refunds withheld, comes weeks before UK prime minister Boris Johnson's visit to

The British prime minister is widely expected to broach the topic of India honouring international arbitration awards during his April 26 visit, another source said.

In December, the government had challenged in a Singapore court an international arbitration tribunal verdict that overturned its demand for Rs 22,100 crore in back taxes

from Vodafone Group Plc. Since the seat of Vodafone arbitration was Singapore, an appeal was filed in a court in that country. In the case of Cairn, the seat was The Hague and so an appeal has been filed in a court

The tribunal's 582-page detailed verdict asked India to return \$1.2 billion-plus interest and cost

in the Netherlands, the

first source said.

GOVT GARNERS ₹30,369 CR AS **PSU DIVIDEND**

New Delhi, March 23: The government has collected Rs 30,369 crore as dividend from Central Public Sector Enterprises so far in the current fiscal, according to a senior official.

In the revised budget estimate, the government significantly lowered the dividend receipt from the CPSEs to Rs 34,717.25 crore from Rs 65,746.96 crore estimated earlier for this financial year.

"Dividend receipts of GoI (Government of India) from CPSEs stand at about Rs 30,369 crore in the current financial year (as of 22.3.2021)," Dipam secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey

said in a tweet. Dipam also said that it received multiple applications for BEML.

Olectra deploys 50 e-buses in Goa

FC BUREAU HYDERABAD, MARCH 23

Olectra Greentech, a leading electric bus manufacturer, has deployed 50 electric buses for public transport in Goa.

chief minister Goa Pramod Sawant on Tuesday flagged off the "Make in India" buses in Tiswadi. The zero-emission, noiseless buses will be operated by the state road transport undertaking, Kadamba Transport Corporation.

According to a release. the company has deployed more than 320 electric buses in various states and has got orders for making another 1,225 elec-

tric buses. The electric buses have features like Monocoque chassis and 48-seat capacity. It has electronically controlled air suspension



at front and rear, disc brakes with ABS at the front and back to ensure a comfortable and safe ride for the passengers.

The buses are equipped with CCTV cameras, emergency button, USB sockets for mobile charging, GPS tracking, among

other features. Olectra electric buses have covered more than four crore kilometres on Indian roads and have reduced CO2 emissions of

around 37,000 tonnes and

saved burning of 13.5 million litres of diesel. Announcing the deploy ment of the buses, K.V. Pradeep, group director, MEIL (Olectra Greentech), said, "Olectra is proud and thankful to

Kadamba for giving the opportunity to operate its world-class electric buses in Goa. Our buses would now contribute to preserving the rich ecology of Goa. Olectra is committed to its efforts to reduce pollution levels through an efficient electric public transport system. We are sure that, like other states, our 50 electric buses will be successful in the Goa state. Our electric buses have already proved their reliability and efficiency as they have been successfully ďeployed in Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, Hyderabad, Surat, Silvassa, Dehradun and Kerala."

States, UTs borrow ₹7.78 L cr from mkt

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 23

With 15 states raising a total of Rs 17,783 crore through auction of government securities on Tuesday, the market borrowings of all states and union territories have touched Rs 7.78 lakh crore this fiscal, 28 per cent higher than last year. Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh. Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand and West Bengal were the main states that participated in the auction of governsecurities on Tuesday. The borrowing cost witnessed a sharp

decline and fell to the low-

est level since the end of

August 2020. The weighted average cost of borrowing for the states was 6.21 per cent.

With this, 28 states and two union territories have so far cumulatively raised Rs 7.78 lakh crore via market borrowings in the current fiscal and this is 28 per cent more than the borrowings in the corresponding period of 2019-20 at Rs. 6.07 lakh crore, as per the data from Care Ratings.

The states have collectively utilised 94 per cent of the scheduled market borrowings of Rs 8.24 lakh crore as per the indicative calendar for 2020-21. In 2019-20, the states had raised Rs 6.35

SHORT TAKES **Bottas eyes better**

show this season

Paris: After finishing even further behind his Mercedes teammate Lewis Hamilton last season, Valtteri Bottas took stock. If he ever wants to really challenge for the Formula One championship, he realized, he needs a stronger mindset. "I've realized that a lot of that is the mental side of things, Bottas said. "I'm trying to be mentally at my best, trying to

ing every single Grand Prix weekend, (finding) more of the 'flow' state' When Nico Rosberg wrestled the F1 title from his then-teammate Hamilton after an intense battle in 2016, he put much of his success down to mental strength. Bottas has not mounted a serious challenge in the same way. Bottas started the past two seasons brightly with

find the right way of approach-

Espargaro ready for Honda debut

victories, only for his challenges

imposed his superiority. — AP

to quickly fade as Hamilton

Doha: The 2021 MotoGP World Championship is about to commence, Pol Espargaro is excited for his first race on the RC213V after a strong test as Stefan Bradl lines up alongside him. Sunday will see the lights go out on the Grand Prix of Qatar and begin another thrilling MotoGP World Championship season. After a difficult 2020, the Repsol Honda Team enter the new season with rejuvenated determination and desire to return to the front. This will be the first of two races at the 5.4kilometre-long Losail International Circuit, Round Two coming the following

week. A productive test has Espargaro and his side of the garage feeling positive ahead of the first race but has set no expectations for the weekend, wanting to focus on continuing to deepen his understanding of

Ziatan returns to

Sweden squad

Stockholm: An unusually reserved and humble Zlatan Ibrahimovic had to hold back the tears on Monday as he arrived in Sweden ahead of his return this week to the Swedish national squad after nearly five

vears away. Veteran striker Ibrahimovic showed a more sensitive side to his usually brash public persona when he was asked about what his two teenage sons, Maximilian and Vincent,

comeback. "It's not a good question you're asking. I had Vincent here, who actually cried when left him. But it's OK, it's OK," he said

thought of his international

with tears in his eves. Sweden's most successful player, the AC Milan forward retired from international football with 116 caps and 62 goals for his national team. - AFP

Marseille fans

jailed for violence

Marseille: Four people were handed jail terms on Monday and two were cleared on charges stemming from violent incidents outside Ligue 1 football club Marseille's training centre in January. The leaders of two hardcore Marseille fan groups, a secre-

tary who helped the organisation and a fan carrying fireworks, were handed custodial sentences of up to a year in iail. In France a defendant would normally avoid actually going to jail if sentenced to less than two years. The six defendants

were being prosecuted for "participation in a group formed to plan violence"

Live on TV

World Cup: 50m Rifle 3P Men Final from 9.30 am; 25m Pistol Women Final from 11.15 am; 50m Rifle 3P Women Final from 3.30 pm on Sony Six, HD

FOOTBALL

European Qualifiers for 2022 World Cup: Turkey vs The Netherlands from 10.30 pm; Portugal vs Azerbaijan from 1.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2; France vs Ukraine from 1.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Six; Belgium vs Wales from 1.15 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 1

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EXTRAODINAIRE

Rookies Krishna, Krunal shine as India begin ODI series with a bang

Pune, March 23: Debutants Krunal Pandya Prasidh Krishna made the big stage their own to give an all-round India a convincing 66-run victory over world cham-pions England in the first ODI of the three-match series here on Tuesday.

After under-fire opener Shikhar Dhawan deliv-ered with a solid 98, Krunal (58 not out off 31) smashed the fastest fifty by a debutant to fire India to 317 for five following England's decision to

At 135 for no loss in the 15th over, with Jason Roy (46 off 35) and Jonny Bairstow (94 off 55) going strong, England seemed to be running away with the chase before Krishna and Shardul Thakur (3/37) shared seven wickets between them to script a winning comeback. The

25-year-old Krishna's figures were the best by an Indian debutant as England's innings ended at 251 in 42.1 overs.

Considering the nature of the surface, it was a commendable effort from the Indian bowlers, who carried on from the T20 series to defend gettable targets with remarkable

Krishna, who leaked 37 runs in his first three overs, came back strongly and troubled the batsmen with his ability to generate extra bounce.

Thakur once again provided the breakthroughs when the team needed and senior pro Bhuvneshwar Kumar too chipped in with a couple of wickets towards the end.

England had the game in the bag but were guilty of throwing it away, failing to build on the flier of a start given Bairstow and

Earlier, Dhawan and Virat Kohli (56 off 60) shared 105 runs for the second wicket before Krunal (58 not out off 31) and K L Rahul (62 not out off 43) sent England on a leather hunt with their unbeaten 112-run stand off

March

Raieshwari

World number one T20I

Verma blasted 60 runs off

30 balls after left-arm

Gayakwad's fine bowling

display to power India to

a consolation nine-wicket

win over South Africa in

the third and final match

Gayakwad picked up three wickets for just

nine runs to help India restrict South Africa Women to 112 for 7 and

then Verma and captain

Smriti Mandhana (48 not

out off 28 balls) shared 96

runs for the opening

wicket to canter to an

easy win with nine overs

Shafali hit seven fours

and five sixes during his

blistering knock while

Mandhana had nine

boundaries in his unbeat-

SHARJEEL HAPPY

Karachi, March 23: Pakistan

opener Sharjeel Khan said

Tuesday he was delighted

with the welcome he had

been given since being

recalled to the national

lengthy ban for spot-fixing.

squad after completing a

The 31-year-old was banned

in 2017 for five years — with

half the sentence suspended

— for his part in rigging Pakistan Super League (PSL) matches in the United

Pakistan, gambling on crick-

et is widespread with pun-

ters betting on specific out-

comes during the game —

such as the number of no-

balls or wides bowled in a

This gives individual play-

ers the opportunity to "spot-fix" — influencing the lucra-

tive betting market without,

supposedly, affecting the overall outcome of the

-AFP

illegal

Arab Emirates.

particular over.

Although

TO BE BACK IN

PAK COLOURS

here on Tuesday.

Lucknow,

spinner

to spare.

en innings.



past 300. Dhawan hammered 11 fours and two sixes in his 106-ball knock while Krunal plundered seven fours and two maximums in his entertaining

Rahul also got welcome runs after a lean run in the T20 series.

Put into bat here, Rohit Sharma (28 off 42) and Dhawan shared 64 runs for the opening wicket.

Dhawan hammered two successive fours, a square-cut and drive, in the sev-

India women end series on high

SHAFALI REGAINS TOP

Dubai, March 23: Big-hitting teenage Indian batter

Shafali Verma rose a rung to reclaim the top spot in

the ICC women's T20 rankings, riding on her fine

performances in the ongoing series against South

The 17-year-old, who grabbed the top position for

the first time after helping her side reach the knockout phase of the T20 World Cup last year in

Australia, has leapfrogged Australia's Beth

The Indian team, however, has conceded a deci-

sive 0-2 lead to the visitors in the three-match

series. South Africa opener Lizelle Lee is another

one to gain in the rankings even though the big-hit-

ting opener lost her top spot in the ODI rankings

within a week of replacing England's Tammy Beaumont, the ICC said in a statement. — PTI

Mooney with scores of 23 and 47.

r in t20 rankings

enth over, while Rohit struck two successive boundaries in the ninth

Dhawan, who lost his place in the playing eleven or T20s after a wretched run of form, got a 'life' when he hooked over fine-leg to get his fourth boundary.

India were placed at 64/0 after 15 overs. However, Rohit soon perished, getting an outside edge to wicket-keeper Jos Buttler

Skipper Kohli joined Dhawan and the two ral-

India's Shikhar

Dhawan en route

lied the innings. Kohli got his first boundary, a cover drive, on the 17th ball and was in his elements as he relied on drives and pulls.

Dhawan brought up his

fifty with a maximum, a slog-sweep, off 68 balls, in the 24th over, and then changed gears.

He got another life after Moeen Ali dropped a sitter at deep-mid-wicket off Adil Rashid. — PTI

by Snabnim Ismaii. Sne

smashed three more sixes

in the next three overs,

including two off Nadine

severe punishment from

Shafali as she produced a

wide array of shots dur-

ing her audacious hitting

Nondumiso Shangase

ended the young Indian

opener's knock by having

her caught by Ismail in

the deep in the ninth over. But by then, the match

was as good as over in

Mandhana showed her

class by producing the

India's favour.

de Klerk's second over. The South Africa bowlers came in for

SCORECARD

India: Rohit Sharma c Jos

Buttler b Stokes 28, Shikhar Dhawan c Morgan b Stokes 98, Virat Kohli c Moeen b Mark Wood 56, Shreyas lyer c (sub) Livingstone b Mark Wood 6, K.L. Rahul (not out) 62, Hardik Pandya c Bairstow b Stokes 1, Krunal Pandya (not out) 58. Extras (lb-3, w-5) 8. **Total (for 5 wkts,** in 50 Overs) 317. **FoW:** 64-1, 169-2, 187-3, 197-4, 205-5.

Bowler: Mark Wood 10-1-75-2, Sam Curran 10-1-48-0, Tom Curran 10-0-63-0, Ben Stokes 8-1-34-3, Adil Rashid 9-0-66-0, Moeen Ali 3-0-28-0.

England: Jason Roy c sub (SA Yadav) b Prasidh Krishna 46, Jonny Bairstow c Kuldeep Yadav b Thakur 94, Ben Stokes c sub (Shubman Gill) b Prasidh Krishna 1, Eoin Morgan (c) c Rahul b Thakur 22, Jos Buttler Ibw Kohli b Prasidh Krishna 18, Moeen Ali c Rahul b Kumar 30, Sam Curran c sub (Shubman Gill) b K. Pandya 12, Tom Curran c Kumar b Prasidh Krishna 11, Adil Rashid c Rahul b Kumar O, Mark Wood (not out) 2. Extras (lb 3, w 10) 13. Total (all out in 42.1 overs) 251.

FoW: 1-135, 2-137, 3-169, 4-175, 5-176, 6-217, 7-237, 8-239, 9-241, 10-251.

Bowling: Bhuvneshwar Kumar 9-0-30-2, Prasidh Krishna 8.1-1-54-4, Shardul Thakur 6-0-37-3, Krunal Pandya 10-0-59-1, Kuldeep Yadav 9-0-68-0.

After under-fire opener Shikhar **Dhawan delivered** with a solid 98, Krunal Pandya (58 not out off 31 balls) smashed the fastest fifty by a debutant to fire India to a strong 317 for five following England's decision to field after winning toss.

SECOND ODI

BANGLADESH BLUNDERS GIFT NZ SERIES WIN

Christchurch Zealand), March 23: New Zealand secured a series clinching five-wicket win in the second one-day international against Bangladesh on Tuesday after a string of fielding dashed

tourists' hopes of victory. Black Caps skipper Tom Latham scored an unbeaten 110 after being dropped

twice with New Zealand Christchurch's Hagley Oval. New Zealand batsman Jimmy Neesham was also

given a life, with the

errors

Bangladesh's good work in making 271 for six after losing the toss and being put into bat. Bangladesh Tamim Iqbal was left frustrated after seeing his

side come close to a maiden victory on New Zealand soil. 'We should have won this game. We created

chances but we just could-n't hold on to those dropped catches," he said. "We hardly ever win games but in this kind of situation we have to make

thing 100 percent. I'm disappointed." Tamim top-scored for the tourists with 78 and Mohammad Mithun contributed an unbeaten 73

sure that we do every-

off 57 balls. Latham's 110 came off 108 balls and was his fifth ODI century, while Devon Conway's 72 hanchor the innings. 72 helped

The Black Caps reached the target after 48.2 overs, finishing on 275 for five to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match

ODI series. — AFP

Brief scores: Bangladesh 271/6 in 50 overs (lqbal 78, Mithun 73 n.o., Santner 2/51) lost to New Zealand 275/5 in 48.2 overs (Latham 110 n.o., Conway 72, Mahedi 2/42).



India's Angad Veer Singh Bajwa (left) and Ganemat Sekhon pose with their gold medals in the skeet mixed team event at the World Cup in New Delhi on Tuesday.

India's gold rush continues at WC

New Delhi, March 23: The gold rush continued for Indian shooters at the ISSF World Cup here as Ganemat Sekhon and Angad Vir Singh Bajwa claimed the skeet mixed team top honours on the fifth competition day here

on Tuesday.
The 20-year-old Ganemat and 25-year-old Angad, who had topped the qualification with a score of 141, produced another good show to beat the Kazakh pair of Olga Panarina and Alexandr Yechshenko 33-29 in the gold medal showdown. It was the only final

lined up for the day.
With this, table-topper
India's gold haul at the
ongoing event went up to
seven. The hosts have also won four silvers and as many bronze medals for a total of 15 medals so far in the tournament.

Another Indian pair of Parinaaz Dhaliwal and Mairaj Ahmad Khan, however, missed the bronze medal by a whisker at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range on Tuesday. Qatar's Reem

Sharshani and Rashid Hamad claimed the bronze medal with a score of 32 against the Indian team's 31. The duo had produced a perfect score in the final four shots even as 19-yearold Dhaliwal crumbled under pressure and missed a shot to miss out on a third place finish.

In the gold medal match, the 25-year-old Angad, world no.62, looked in fine form as he produced a

Ganemat and **Angad produced** another good show to beat the Kazakh pair of Olga Panarina and Alexandr Yechshenko 33-29 in the gold medal showdown. It was the only final lined up for the day.

near-perfect show, missing just one out of his 20 shots even as Ganemat stumbled six times.

It was a nail-biting showdown as India and Kazakhstan were level at 16-16 after the first set of 20 targets.

Ganemat got her together in the second half, producing perfect next four shots and even though Angad missed one, Olga and Alexander both missed two each to give India a 23-20 lead.

In the final four shots, Angad once again produced a confident performance and even though Ganemat missed her last shot, it didn't matter as the

Kazakhs were guilty of missing three.

It was the Ganemat's third medal in the ongoing tournament, having claimed a silver along with Parinaaz Dhaliwal, Karttiki Singh Shaktawat in the women's skeet final on Monday.

Indian men won the skeet team event, while the women settled for silver.

— PTI



Los Angeles Clippers guard Luke Kennard (right) shoots as Atlanta Hawks centre Clint Capela defends during an NBA basketball game in Los Angeles on Monday.

'Perfect' Kennard clips flying Hawks

Los Angeles, March 23: to bring a little boost to the Luke Kennard conjured a perfect shooting display that's what we did. perfect shooting display and Terance Mann added 21 from the bench as the Los Angeles Clippers overturned a 22-point deficit to end the Atlanta Hawks eight-game winning streak

on Monday. Kennard went eight-fromeight and made four threepointers to take the Clippers — who had trailed 88-66 with four minutes remaining in the third quarter — to a 119-110 win

at the Staples Center. Kennard's 20-point haul came from just over 18 second-half minutes as coach Ty Lue sent on the bench in a desperate bid to turn

ing towards a blowout vic-Mann was another vital contributor from the bench, hauling down 10

the tide with Atlanta romp-

rebounds in addition to his 21 points.

"Ît's heart - that was all heart," Kennard said afterwards. "Just staying ready. Guys have been staying ready throughout this

entire year. We just needed

"That was a hard-fought win. We showed a lot of heart and guts.' Atlanta, chasing a ninth

straight win, had exploded for 34 points in the second quarter to open up a 63-48 lead at half-time. They retained

healthy lead until the arrival of the Clippers bench swung momentum in the closing stages of the third period and final quarter, with the home side end-

ing on a 53-22 run. Kawhi Leonard led the Clippers scoring with 25 points, seven rebounds and

five assists. Trae Young topped the Hawks scorers with 28 points while John Collins added 23.

Elsewhere Monday, Donovan Mitchell scored 30 points and Rudy Gobert grabbed a sixth consecutive double-double as the Utah Jazz tightened their grip on the Western Conference standings with a 120-95 road win over the

Chicago Bulls.

final flourish, taking India to 114/1 in 11 overs. **Brief Scores: South Africa** 112/7 in 20 overs (Sune Luus SA Women clinched the the 17-year old Shafali went on a rampage from 28: Raieshwari Gavakwad 3/9) lost to India 114/1 in 11 the word go by picking up overs (Shafali Verma 60, 18 runs (3 fours and a six) Smriti Mandhana 48 not out). off the first over bowled

three-match T20I series 2-1, having won the first Chasing 113 for victory,

Africa at home.

Cornwall blasts WI back into contention

North Sound (Antigua and Barbuda), March 23: Rahkeem Cornwall blasted a maiden Test half-century and domi-nated an eighth-wicket partnership of 90 with Joshua da Silva to lift the West Indies to 268 for eight in their first innings, a lead of 99 runs, at the close of the second day of the first Test at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in

Antigua on Monday. Outstanding seam bowling by Suranga Lakmal, who claimed his fourth five-wicket innings haul in 64 Tests, had restricted the home side to 171 for seven just after tea in reply to the tourists' modest firstday effort of 169. However the burly Cornwall, selected pri-



West Indies' Rahkeem Cornwall celebrates his half century against Sri Lanka in North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda, on Monday. marily for his off-spin strokes upon the arrival

bowling but also wellknown for his powerful hitting in the domestic game, joined wicketkeeper-batsman Silva in first resisting the best efforts of the Sri Lankan bowlers before opening into an array of expansive

of the second new ball. His unbeaten 60 has come of 79 balls with two sixes and nine fours embellishing an entertaining innings. — AFPBrief scores: Sri Lanka 169 in 69.4 overs vs West Indies 268/8 in 101 overs

(Cornwall 61, Lakmal 5/47).