



SAUDI ARABIA MAKES COVID-19 SHOT MANDATORY

RIYADH, 3 MAR
 The Saudi Arabia government has decided to make it mandatory for Hajj pilgrims to take anti-coronavirus vaccine. According to Saudi health ministry officials, taking COVID-19 vaccine has been made compulsory for those arriving in the country to perform the Hajj this year. People who don't comply to the rule will not be allowed to perform Hajj. "The Covid-19 vaccine is mandatory for those willing to come to the Hajj and will be one of the main conditions (for receiving a permit to come)," stated the Saudi newspaper Okaz report. The decision is believed to be taken to ensure Hajj is performed in a safe manner from a public health perspective. Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca is the fifth and final pillar of Islam. Saudi had in 2020 annulled the annual pilgrimage due to the pandemic. Later it allowed a limited number of pilgrims to perform the Hajj. —PTI



GOLD, SILVER PRICES FALL

NEW DELHI, 3 MAR
 Gold prices on Wednesday fell by Rs 208 to Rs 44,768 per 10 gm in the national capital, in line with bleak trend in the international market, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had closed at Rs 44,976 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. Silver, on the other hand, rose by Rs 602 to Rs 68,194 per kg as compared with the previous close of Rs 67,592 per kg. HDFC Securities Senior Analyst (Commodities) Tapan Patel, "Spot prices for 24 karat gold in Delhi fell by Rs 208 in line with decline in global gold prices and rupee appreciation." "The rupee was trading around 45 paise stronger against the dollar during the day, he added. In the international market, gold was trading lower at USD 1,730 an ounce and silver was also marginally down at USD 26.68 an ounce. —PTI

Jarkiholi resigns from State cabinet

BJP top brass cracks the whip to avoid embarrassment



BENGALURU, 3 MAR

Political architect of the BJP government in Karnataka in 2019, Ramesh L Jarkiholi resigned from the cabinet on Wednesday owning moral responsibility for a video CD in which he is allegedly seen with an young, unidentified woman, who has accused him of seeking sexual favours for a government job offer.

A defiant Jarkiholi, who refused to step down from the minister's post saying he had been framed in the CD, relented following instructions from the central BJP leadership.

BJP's general secretary in charge of Karnataka, Arun Singh, held discussions with BJP top brass including J P Nadda and B L Santhosh, who were reportedly firm that Jarkiholi has to step down to avoid embarrassment to the party, which is preoccupied with assembly elections across the country with Karnataka also going for bypolls shortly. The Congress had upped its antenna and was gearing up to make it an issue when the state budget session commences on Thursday. The CD went viral on Tuesday night, where

Jarkiholi is seen in a conversation with an unidentified woman in a room. A social activist Dinesh Kalahalli claimed he was authorised by the woman's family to file a police complaint of alleged sexual harassment by Jarkiholi, who is said to have promised to get her a job in Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Limited. The veracity of the CD could not be established by Salar News. An embarrassed Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa, who is already under pressure from his own party-men regarding power

CD ISSUE

sharing and on caste reservations, declined to comment. After holding two rounds of talks with Jarkiholi's brother, Balachandra Jarkiholi, who is also a BJP MLA, the CM is said to have asked him to put in the papers.

Jarkiholi had played a key role in engineering the defections of 17 Congress-JD(S) MLAs in 2019, which helped Yediyurappa to topple the Kumaraswamy government and assume power. He was a key figure in the Yediyurappa government and was in the forefront of demanding a hike in the reservation quota for the Valmiki (Scheduled tribe) community he represents.

Earlier cases of CDs: In 2016, a senior minister in Siddaramaiah's cabinet had to resign after a CD of him with a woman, who had come to seek a job emerged. In 2012, three BJP MLAs were caught watching porn scenes on their mobiles during the assembly session in Belagavi. —Salar News



Prez gets first dose of COVID vaccine

NEW DELHI, 3 MAR

President Ram Nath Kovind was administered the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine at an army hospital on Tuesday and urged all eligible citizens to get vaccinated.

According to tweets on his official handle, the president, 75, was accompanied by his daughter when the vaccine dose was administered to him at the army's Research and Referral Hospital here.

The President thanked all doctors, nurses, health workers and administrators who are successfully implementing the largest vaccination drive in history and urged all eligible citizens to get vaccinated. Earlier in the day, Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant was administered the vaccine at a Primary Health Centre in Sanquelim. —PTI

Covid-19 vaccine available 24x7: Harsh Vardhan

NEW DELHI, 3 MAR

The government has lifted the time restriction on receiving Covid-19 vaccine jabs so as to increase the pace of immunisation, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Wednesday.

People can now get vaccinated round-the-clock according to their convenience, he said in a tweet, adding that Prime Minister Narendra Modi values the health as well as the time of the citizens of the country.

"The government has lifted the time restriction to increase the speed of vaccination. People can now get vaccinated 24x7 according to their convenience. Prime Minister Narendra Modi understands the value of health as well as the time of citizens," Vardhan tweeted in Hindi.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan told a press conference on Tuesday that the timeline of vaccinating the beneficiaries from 9 am to 5 pm has been done away with and it is up to the hospitals to decide whether they want to continue administering the vaccines even after



that. "Co-WIN 2.0 does not provide 9 am-5 pm vaccination sessions. It has done away with that timeline. If a hospital has the capacity, the system permits it to do vaccination even after 5 pm in consultation with the state government. This has been briefed both to the state governments as well as the private and government hospitals," he said.

The second dose of the vaccine against Covid-19 started being administered from February 13 for those who have completed 28 days since the receipt of the first dose. The vaccination of frontline workers (FLWs) started on February 2.

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

China using cyber forces to threaten India: Rahul



AHMEDABAD, 3 MAR

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said that China had mobilised its conventional and cyber forces to threaten India and warned that the government's "cowardice" would have tragic consequences in the future. He cited a news report that claimed that night satellite images show Chinese build-up in the Depsang region near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh.

"China mobilised its conventional and cyber forces to threaten India. Government of India (GOI) buckled. Mark my words, our land in Depsang is gone and DBO (Daulet Beg Oldie) is vulnerable. Government of India's (GOI's) cowardice will lead to tragic consequences in the future," he said on Twitter. A border standoff between the Indian and Chinese armies has been on in Eastern Ladakh since May last year after a violent

clash in the Pangong Tso Lake area, and both sides had gradually enhanced their deployment by rushing in tens of thousands of soldiers as well as heavy weaponry. Last month, the armies of the two countries concluded the withdrawal of troops and weapons from the north and south banks of Pangong Tso. Rahul Gandhi has been repeatedly criticising the government's handling of the issue. —PTI

Ahead of TN Assembly elections, Sasikala announces retirement

CHENNAI, 3 MAR

In a dramatic development just a month ahead of the Tamil Nadu Assembly Elections 2021, VK Sasikala, a close confidante of late Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa, on Wednesday night announced retirement from active politics. She issued a statement on her quitting politics and said that she will step aside from politics and pray that the Amma government is established in Tamil Nadu. The polls to Tamil Nadu assembly will be held on April 6 in a single phase.



TTV Dhinakaran led Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam either in the party or in the alliance led by it for the elections. AIADMK senior leader and Fisheries Minister D Jayakumar, when asked if the BJP recommended bringing Sasikala to the

alliance led by his party and if there was any pressure on his party over it, he said, "no one can force us." "The BJP has never interfered in the AIADMK's internal affairs and a big rumour was doing the rounds as if the saffron party was pressuring his

party on the matter," he said. There is no scope '100 per cent' for Sasikala or AMMK joining the AIADMK or the alliance and this is the stand of the party, he asserted. Party's ideology and electoral alliances were two different things and the AIADMK's stand is to keep Sasikala and AMMK at bay, he said. After four years, former AIADMK leader VK Sasikala returned to Tamil Nadu on Monday to a grand welcome by supporters, with her arrival leaving the ruling party in jitters ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections. Sasikala, who left from Bengaluru in the morning, was greeted by large number of people at several places en route with firecrackers, garlands, showers of petals and drumbeats. —PTI



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