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2018	98	154	154	
2017	105.34	154	154	
2016	116	152	152	
2015	107.34	168	168	
2014	205 (Incl. CSAT Marks)	162 (GS) + 140 (CSAT)	162 (GS) + 140 (CSAT)	

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Modi govt. in denial of slowdown: Manmohan

NEW DELHI
Former PM Manmohan Singh on Wednesday said the Narendra Modi government was in denial of the economic slowdown and its target of making India a \$5 trillion economy by 2024-25 was "wishful thinking". He was speaking at the release of a book authored by former Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia.

NORTH ▶ PAGE 5

Arvind Kejriwal calls on Union Home Minister

NEW DELHI
Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal called on Union Home Minister Amit Shah at his residence here on Wednesday and discussed various development issues pertaining to Delhi, the State government said in a statement. Various issues and matters concerning the people of Delhi were discussed. Mr. Kejriwal said at a press conference later.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

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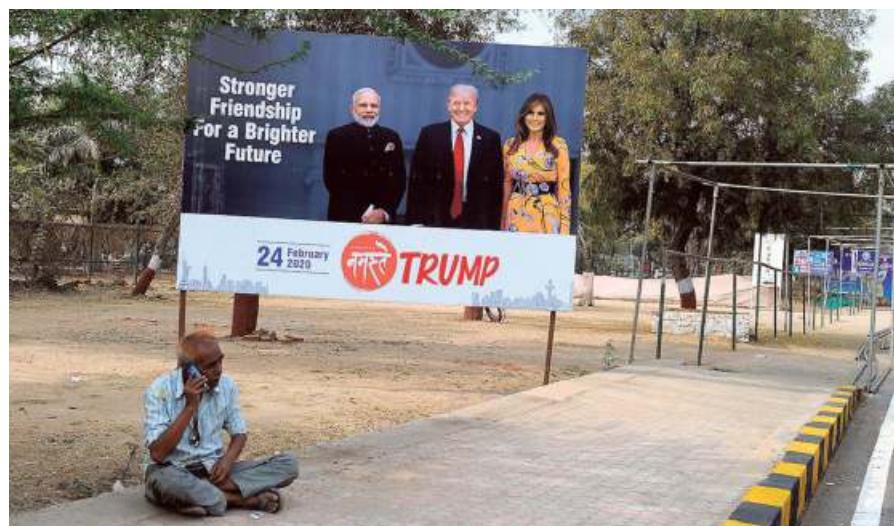
Here to find a solution: mediators

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court-appointed interlocutors, Sanjay Hegde and Sadhana Ramachandran, on Wednesday made their first direct contact with the women protesters of Shaheen Bagh, who have been on a sit-in against the CAA-NRC-NPR regime since December 16.

"This was our first interaction with the women and *dadi*s (grandmothers)

Trade agreement with U.S. only delayed & not stuck, says govt.

It points to grand scale of Trump-Modi Motera rally as 'key deliverable' of visit



Welcome sign: A hoarding featuring U.S. President Donald Trump, wife Melania and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Ahmedabad on Wednesday. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

SUHASINI HAIDAR
SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON DC
An Indo-U.S. trade deal has been delayed but is not "stuck", the government said on Wednesday, hours after President Donald Trump confirmed that negotiations will not be completed in time for his visit next week.

However, government sources said expectations on trade would not overshadow the larger context of the visit, which will be a massive roadshow for Mr. Trump and his wife Melania from the Ahmedabad airport to Motera as well as a joint rally with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the stadium (billed as the world's biggest cricket stadium), the "key deliverable" of the visit.

"From the moment of their arrival at the airport, [Mr. and Mrs. Trump] will be treated to a display of famed Indian hospitality and India's Unity in Diversity," Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla told reporters.

'Big deal later'
Speaking in Washington DC, Mr. Trump spoke in a similar vein. "We can have a trade deal with India but I am saving the big deal for later on. We're doing a very big trade deal with India...we'll have

it. I don't know if it'll be done before the elections but we'll have a very big deal with India," he told reporters on Tuesday.

The comments come days after U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer cancelled a trip to India – as reported in *The Hindu* – to finalise a mini-trade deal that the two countries were hoping to finalise during the visit.

"We're not treated very well by India but I happen to like Prime Minister Modi a lot. And he told me we'll have seven million people

between the airport and the event. And the stadium, I understand, is sort of semi-under-construction but it's going to be the largest stadium in the world. So it's going to be very exciting," Mr. Trump said.

Performing arts

"The route of their travel to the stadium is expected to have tens of thousands of ordinary citizens as well as artistes showcasing the performing arts from different States and Union Territories," Mr. Shringla said, adding that Mr. Trump's motor-

cade would pass through an "India roadshow" along the way, with 28 stages representing various parts of the country on display.

The figures represent a considerable contrast to the U.S. President's repeated reference to crowds of "7 million" that he expects will come out to greet him but the government feels that rather than the figure being taken literally, the "spirit" of the grandness of the event is important.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12

MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGE 12

of Shaheen Bagh, apart from other citizens. We heard their grievances and concerns. They want us to come again as we could not speak to all of them. They have expressed their pain and sorrow," Ms. Ramachandran told reporters after a nearly two-hour interaction with the protesters.

Initiating a conversation with the protesters, Mr. Hegde said, "We are here to listen to all and speak to you all."

Ms. Ramachandran, while explaining the court order to the protesters, said: "It is your right to protest but like us, there are other citizens also who use the roads, like shopkeepers and doctors. Do we want to take away the rights of others? So the Supreme Court has sent us. We want to find a solution along with you all."

WOMEN STAND THEIR GROUND ▶ PAGE 2

Muralidhar among 3 HC judges to be transferred

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Collegium has recommended the transfer of Justice S. Muralidhar, who is third in the order of seniority in the Delhi High Court, along with two other transfer recommendations of judges.

The Collegium, led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde, has recommended that Justice Muralidhar be shifted to the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

The Collegium's resolution, dated February 12, was uploaded on the court website on Wednesday. Two other HC judges have also been recommended for transfer.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12
BAR ASSOCIATION CONDEMNS JUDGE'S TRANSFER ▶ PAGE 4

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'No one was killed by police bullets in anti-CAA protests'

U.P. CM says 'rioters were killed by the bullets of rioters'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT LUCKNOW

Not a single person was killed by police bullets during the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act on December 19 and 20, 2019, and those who died were killed by the "bullets of rioters", Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said in the Assembly on Wednesday. At least 23 people died in the violence during the protests, most of them of bullet injuries.

"Agar koi marne ke liye aa hi raha hai toh woh zinda kahan se jaega? If someone is coming with an intention to die, how can he remain alive?" Mr. Adityanath said.

"Upadravi upadraviyo ki golliyon se hi mare hai [the rioters died from the bullets fired by other rioters]," he claimed.

The police and the State administration "should be praised" for the work done by them during the protests as there was no riot reported in the aftermath, he said.

While Mr. Adityanath claimed that not a single death occurred due to police firing, the district police in Bijnor had in December admitted that a youth, Suleiman, died after a constable fired at him in self-defence.

Mr. Adityanath accused the Congress and the Samaj-



If someone is coming with an intention to die, how can he remain alive?

The police and the State administration should be praised for the work done by them during the protests as there was no riot reported in the aftermath

YOGI ADITYANATH, Uttar Pradesh CM

wadi Party (SP) of supporting and sympathising with the outfits that participated in the protests. These outfits "do not believe" in the Constitution and they received "terror funding", he alleged.

He singled out the Popular Front of India and accused it of terror funding.

The Chief Minister said he would support any protest if it was done in a democratic manner and even provide it security. However, if in the garb of democracy, anyone "tears the Constitution to shreds", attacked innocent persons, dishonoured women or participated in arson, "then we will explain it to them in the language they understand".

The police and the State administration "should be praised" for the work done by them during the protests as there was no riot reported in the aftermath, he said.

Mr. Adityanath evoked the 1990 firing on Ram Janmabhoomi activists or *kar sevaks* to target the Opposition, especially the SP, which was in power then, for questioning his government on the action taken against alleged vandals

during the anti-CAA protests. "Those who ordered firing on *Ram bhakts* and tried to pollute the esteem of Ayodhya are today seeking answers from us," he said.

The Supreme Court, which ruled in favour of building a Ram temple at the disputed site, had put a stamp of approval on the claim of "Ram bhakts". "The *Ram bhakts* who were demanding a Ram mandir were right. And those who fired at them were wrong," he said. Mocking former CM Mulayam Singh Yadav for his famous comments that even a *parinda* (bird) would be able to breach the security in Ayodhya in 1990, Mr. Adityanath said: "There was not a *parinda* but lakhs of *Ram bhakts*. But U.P. proved on November 9, 2019 that even a *parinda* cannot move its wings under law and order."

AMU STUDENTS CONDEMN STATEMENT ▶ PAGE 5

Ram temple trust elects chairman

NISTULA HEBBAR NEW DELHI

The Ram Janmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra Trust, set up to oversee the construction of the Ram temple in

Ayodhya, held its first meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday, and elected Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas's Mahant Nritya Gopal Das as chairman and Champat Rai, de-

scribed as a social activist and also associated with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, as general secretary.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12

SHUBHRA RANJAN

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IN BRIEF

Jamia violence: police serve notices on 10

NEW DELHI
Delhi Police on Wednesday served notices on 10 Jamia Millia Islamia students asking them to appear for questioning in connection with the December 15 violence during an anti-CAA protest. PTI

Air quality of Delhi-NCR		
Delhi 272	Gurugram 186	
Ghaziabad 323	Faridabad 272	
Noida 277	Greater Noida 296	
Good 0-50	Satisfactory 51-100	Moderate 101-200
Poor 201-300	Very poor 301-400	Severe >401
AIR QUALITY INDEX AT 4 P.M. YESTERDAY (AVERAGE OF PAST 24 HOURS) [SOURCE: CPCB]		

DELHI TODAY

Exhibition: "Homage... A tribute to Mother Nature", a solo show of photography by Juma Datta at Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Exhibition: "Spiritual Journey", a solo painting exhibition by Sanjoi Majumder at Convention Centre Foyer, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Exhibition: "Aarambh", a group show of sculptures and paintings at Altarash Art Gallery, 147, DLF South Court, Saket, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Exhibition: "Known Unknown", an exhibition of contemporary artists curated by Amitava Das at Shridharani Gallery, Triveni Kala Sangam, 205, Tansen Marg, 11 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Exhibition: "Deceptive Rhapsody", a group show displaying exquisite and recent artworks of leading and emerging contemporary artists at SAU Art Gallery, Satya Marg, Chankypuri, 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Exhibition: "Memory's Cut: Its Deep Embrace", a solo exhibition by multidisciplinary artist Remen Chopra W. Van Der Gucht at The Gujral Foundation, 24 Jor Bagh, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. (Mail your listings for this column at cityeditor@thehindu.co.in)

Women stand their ground on not vacating protest site

Protesters at Shaheen Bagh interact with two interlocutors

SHINJINI GHOSH

NEW DELHI

Women protesters at Shaheen Bagh on Wednesday interacted with two Supreme Court-appointed interlocutors while they stood their ground on not vacating the protest site until the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) was revoked by the Centre.

In a nearly two-hour-long interaction between advocates Sanjay Hegde, Sadhana Ramachandran and the protesters, several women, including students, the Shaheen Bagh dadis, voiced their concerns and reservations against the CAA, NPR and the NRC.

Bilkhis Banu, one of the Shaheen Bagh dadis, while addressing the interlocutors said: "We will not move an inch till the law is revoked. When we voted for you [Centre] we were not gadars [traitors] but now suddenly we are. Don't forget that we [citizens] managed to send the British away as well. Only a part of the road has been blocked by us while the police have blocked the rest of it. Why is that not being opened?"

Fatima, a student, told the interlocutors: "Is inconvenience being cause only to people who are stuck in traffic? What about us – the women, children and elderly



Protesters at Shaheen Bagh on Wednesday. ■ BIBEK CHETTRI

People have the right to travel on roads but when it's about saving democracy and the Constitution, it is important to come out on the streets

FATIMA
A student

protesters who have continued to sit on this road braving the rains and winters? Now you want us to move from here as well. Where do we raise our voices then?"

"If we move from here we will be letting down the previous generations which have fought for us and the future generations will have to prove that they are citizens of this country. Yes, people have the right to travel on

roads but when it's about saving democracy and the Constitution, it is important to come out on the streets," said Ms. Fatima.

Prakash Devi, a resident of Karol Bagh, said, "We are saying this again. The road will be emptied in 30 minutes of the law being revoked by the government."

Before the interlocutors reached the protest site, announcements were made that when a team met the two advocates near the barricades they were told that the protesters would not be addressed in the presence of media, an appeal which was also made later. Even as protesters in unison demanded talks to be held before the media, later they were asked to leave.

IIMC interacts with students on fee hike

Students are on indefinite hunger strike demanding course fee be made 'affordable'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The management of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), Delhi, on Wednesday met students who are on an indefinite hunger strike demanding that the institute make course fees for PG Diploma courses "affordable" for students.

The students have alleged that the institute has been increasing its course fee by 10% every year since 2010.

The students, on the second day of their strike, said that IIMC had agreed to form a committee to look into the matter but alleged that the institute was not serious as an earlier committee formed to look into the fee structure had not submitted any report



The IIMC management appealed to the students to withdraw their strike. ■ JAIDEEP DEO BHANJ

and had not consulted the students. The students also demanded that suspension against eleven students for protesting against the fee hike issue earlier be revoked.

Responding to the students, IIMC on Wednesday

said that in the light of the "indefinite hunger strike" since Tuesday, the management has been holding a series of meetings with class representatives, members of the students' grievance committee and finally a general

meeting with all students in the institute.

"While it has been explained to all students that the fee for the current academic year will stay as per the present rates, except for those eligible for 25% free ship, the last date for paying fees is being extended to March 31 from March 2 by when it is expected that the committee to look into the fees structure in its entirety will finalise its report/recommendations," the administration said. It added that the report of the committee will be sent to the government after fulfilling all procedural formalities.

IIMC also appealed to the students to withdraw their indefinite hunger strike.

Railways to run tourist train from March 28

People can go on a 16-night-17-day tour

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Indian Railways will begin commercial run of its Ramayana-themed special tourist train, Shri Ramayana Express, from March 28.

The train will commence its journey from Delhi on March 28, and tourists can board the train from Delhi Safdarjung, Ghaziabad, Moradabad, Bareilly and Lucknow.

In a 16-night-17-day tour, people will be visiting the places associated with Lord Ram, including Ram Janambhoomi and Hanuman Garhi at Ayodhya; Bharat Mandir at Nandigram; Sita Mata Mandir at Sitamarhi in Bihar; Janakpur in Nepal; Tulsii Manas Mandir and Sankat Mochan Mandir at Varanasi; Sita Samahit Sthal at Sita Marhi in U.P.; Triveni Sangam, Hanuman Mandir and Bharadwaj Ashram at Prayag; Shringi Rishi Mandir at Shringerpur; Ramghat and Sati Anusuya Mandir at Chitrakoot; Panchvati at Nasik; Anjanadi Hill and Hanuman Jamn Sthal at Hampi and Jyotirlinga Shiva Mandir at Rameshwaram.

Tourists will be offered pure vegetarian meals, accommodation and wash and change facilities in dharmashalas or hotels. In addition, considering that the train will begin operations

during the Navratras festival, food served to the travellers will be cooked without onion and garlic. "Fasting food will also be available for the tourists that will include sabudana khichdi, fruits, curd, potato chat etc.," the Railways said.

Sleeper class package has been priced at ₹16,065 per person, while AC class package is priced at ₹26,775 per person.

The train, which will be run by the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), will have ten coaches – five sleeper class non-AC coaches and five AC three-tier coaches. The bookings for the train will be on a first-come, first-serve basis, the statement said.

A similar tourism train on this circuit was introduced last year with only sleeper class coaches which was a huge success... [hence] IRCTC has decided to launch this unique product with some AC three-tier coaches as well," it added.

Srilanka tour
An option of add-on tour to Srilanka is also available with limited 40 seats, that will allow tourists to visit places related to Ramayana in Srilanka. This will cost additional ₹37,800 per person.

Govt. seeks IIT-Bombay's help to build smog tower

20-metre tower with air purifiers proposed

NIKHIL M BABU

NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has written two letters this month to IIT-Bombay seeking assistance in building a 'smog tower' in Connaught Place to control air pollution etc.," the Railways said.

After being asked by the Supreme Court to check the feasibility of the tower in November, a High-Level Committee (HLC), comprising experts and government officials, had submitted in December a proposal for a 20-metre 'smog tower' fitted with air purifiers to clean the air.

On January 13, it was approved by the top court and the court gave the Delhi government three months to install the tower in Connaught Place.

On the same day, the court also ordered a 'smog tower' to be installed in Anand Vihar by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

"Would request you to impress upon Centre for Science and Environmental Engineering of IIT-Bombay to assist Government of NCT of Delhi for setting up the Smog Tower using the same formulation as has been done for the CPCB," a letter dated February 7 from Special Secretary of Environment Department,

Arun Mishra, to Director of IIT-Bombay read.

Later, a reminder was sent to IIT-Bombay on Tuesday requesting the institute to respond that would help the Delhi comply with the Supreme Court order and fight air pollution.

"Basically, we want to sign an MoU with IIT-Bombay for construction of the smog tower. They would be responsible for the complete work and we will monitor it," a senior Delhi government official told *The Hindu*.

In the proposal submitted to the Supreme Court in December, the committee had said that 65% reduction in pollution could be achieved on an average up to 700 metres from the tower. The tower is also expected to influence air quality of more than 1 km in the downwind direction.

However, the committee had also said that smog towers, as per the current knowledge and experience, might not provide a "viable solution" to improve air quality on a "large scale". Officials said that since there was a localised effect, they still wanted to try it.

The tower is expected to cost around ₹12-15 crore, but the Delhi government is yet to receive a concrete proposal from IIT-Bombay.

Modi makes surprise visit to 'Hunar Haat' at Rajpath
He had 'kulhad' tea with Minister Naqvi

CPWD seeks environmental nod to cut 194 trees

Its application mentions no court cases, though pleas against land use change are in HC

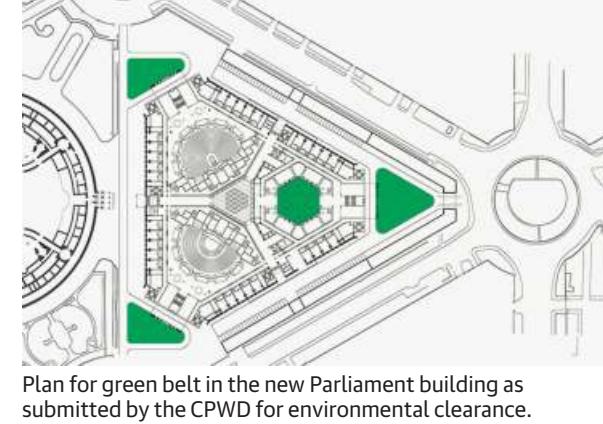
DAMINI NATH

NEW DELHI

The Central Public Works Department (CPWD) has sought environmental clearance to build a new Parliament building, which it estimates will cost ₹776 crore and take 12,700 workers 260 days to construct, and lead to the cutting down of 194 trees, according to the application filed with the Union Environment Ministry.

As part of the Centre's proposed revamp of the Rajpath or Central Vista, the CPWD applied for environmental clearance for the construction of a triangular Parliament building next to the existing heritage structure on February 12. It wrote: "Government of India plans to renovate the existing Parliament building and construct a new Parliament building adjoining the existing Parliament."

The benefit of the project would be "social", according



Plan for green belt in the new Parliament building as submitted by the CPWD for environmental clearance.

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

to the CPWD, which justified it, saying: "A larger Parliament building for the nation is needed for better functioning of the legislature. The project will also provide short-term and long-term employment opportunities."

The CPWD has sought permission to increase the built-up area on the 8-acre plot from 44,940 square metres to 1,04,740 square metres. The

application says the total project cost would be ₹776 crore, of which ₹2.2 crore will be allocated for environment management, and a total of 8,60,738 tonnes of raw material or fuel would be needed. The application gives zero as the value of air, water, soil and noise pollution at the site. However, whether these studies are required or if the project will be exempted

from an environment impact assessment will be decided by the environment impact assessment authority.

The CPWD said the project would lead to the generation of 438 kilolitre/day of waste water, which it said would all be reused. A total of 4.75 tonnes of municipal solid waste was projected to be generated and sent to sanitary landfills.

While the application proposes cutting down of 194 trees and clearing of "other vegetation growing" on the plot, it says 250 new trees would be planted. The application says there are no court cases pending against the project and/or the land. However, two petitions have been filed in the Delhi High Court against the Delhi Development Authority's proposed land use change of several plots, including for the new Parliament.

(With inputs from Jacob Koshy)

Taking cue from Shaheen Bagh



Women sitting on dharna against the CAA at Hazrat Nizamuddin in the city on Wednesday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Students to meet DCW in Gargi College case

Panel had sought principal's reply by Feb. 25

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

The students of Gargi College will meet the Delhi Commission for Women on Saturday to get a status update in the commission's probe into the alleged molestation incident at the all-women college during a cultural festival, al, according to the panel.

The women's panel had issued a notice to the college principal over the incident and asked her to reply by February 25.

Student representatives will meet the panel on Saturday to get a status update on the panel's probe into the matter.

The students had boycotted classes after the incident. Now, they are holding hour-long boycotts since some students have their examinations in April.

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Delhi Police writes to govt. on JNU sedition case

AAP MLA's
discharge in
2010 case
upheld

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A sessions court on Wednesday upheld the discharge of Aam Aadmi Party MLA Amanatullah Khan in a child labour rescue case of 2010.

Mr. Khan was earlier cleared of all charges by the court of an Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate in May 2018.

The magisterial court had also reprimanded the police for slow probe into the rescue of 15 child labourers from *zari* units in south Delhi's Batla House, in a joint operation with a non-government organisation, stating that the time taken by them proved to be fatal to the case of prosecution.

The police had registered a first information report on November 1, 2010. Mr. Khan was accused of obstructing the rescue operation.

In 2016, they filed the chargesheet that was described as "choreographed" by the magisterial court.

The court had said the limitation period for filing the chargesheet was three years, but it was submitted after five years, barring the cognisance of alleged offences.

CM meets his Ministers to discuss '10 guarantees'

Prepare road map to fulfil promises in Guarantee Card'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday held a high-level meeting with all Cabinet Ministers, Secretaries and Heads of Departments to discuss the 10 "guarantees" made by him during the recently concluded Assembly elections here.

This was followed by the first Cabinet meeting of the Aam Aadmi Party-led Delhi government's second tenure.

Mr. Kejriwal, the Delhi government said in a statement, directed all HoDs to prepare a detailed road map to fulfil the promises in the 'Guarantee Card' within one week and provide an estimate for the budget required to implement the same.

"The new government has already started its processes following the oath ceremony without wasting much time. We have started working towards the development of Delhi, and I hope that we will work at a much faster pace than we had during our last tenure," Mr. Kejriwal told reporters at a press conference.

"...I have been consistently asked why I did not take charge of any department. I did not take charge of anyth-



Arvind Kejriwal

ing except the Delhi Jal Board during my last tenure. It is much easier to monitor the functioning of all the departments than handling any one. I believe it is the responsibility of the Chief Minister to overlook the performance of all the Ministers and the operations of their departments," he said further.

Mr. Kejriwal, the government said, also made clear in the meeting that all free schemes implemented during his previous tenure would continue for the next five years. These include free electricity up to 200 units, free water up to 20,000 litre, free ride for women on buses and a free pilgrimage scheme for senior citizens.

Mr. Kejriwal said the respective heads or the Secretaries of departments such as Education, Health, Security, Water, Electricity, Transport, Environment, had been instructed to formulate a plan for the smooth functioning of their departments.

"The plan will contain the timeline as well as the budget or monetary requirements for the fulfilment of the guarantees concerning their departments. The plan will also have set milestones of the execution of work, to assess the fulfilment of plans in the stipulated timelines," he said.

"Separate meetings will be held a week later with each of these departments every week where they will hold presentations notifying their requirements. The budget allocation on these 'guarantees' will be announced during the announcement of the budget for this financial year in the Delhi Assembly," he said further.

The Delhi Cabinet, Mr. Kejriwal added, had decided that the first Delhi Assembly session would be a three-day one and be held between February 24 and 26. The Chief Minister also issued an assurance related to 24-hour safe and clean tap water in the next five years.

Kejriwal meets Shah

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal called on Union Home Minister Amit Shah at his residence here on Wednesday and discussed various development issues pertaining to Delhi, the State government said in a statement.

Addressing a press conference on Wednesday at the Delhi Secretariat, Mr. Kejriwal said, "I met with the honourable Home Minister Amit Shah ji today. It was a fruitful meeting in a cordial atmosphere. Various issues and matters concerning the people of Delhi were discussed. We mutually agreed on working together for the development of Delhi."

The Central and State government, he said further, would work together on various matters, including security of women to avoid any differences in approach, as there is a major division of power and responsibilities when it comes to the functioning of departments in Delhi.

"We have agreed that both the governments will work together on all matters concerning Delhi, including significant issues such as women's security," he said. When asked whether they discussed about the anti-CAA protest at Shaheen Bagh, Mr. Kejriwal replied in the negative.

'Take proactive steps to trace missing children'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday said proactive steps should be taken by the Delhi

police to trace missing children.

The court directed that district anti-human trafficking units shall henceforth func-

tion as nodal agencies for all cases of missing children and they shall work in close coordination with the local police, providing expert assistance.

TO ADVERTISE PLEASE CONTACT

Mr. N SELVA KUMAR
PH: 9820350726
selvakumar.n@thehindu.co.in

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manoj.kushwaha@thehindu.co.in

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...Yes, We Build the future

New DPCC chief selection process begins

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The process of selecting the new president of the Delhi Congress began with AICC interim in-charge Shakti Singh taking feedback from senior leaders of the city unit during meetings on Wednesday.

Sources said that Mr. Goel held separate meetings with several senior Delhi Congress leaders, including working presidents Haroon Yusuf and Rajesh Lilotia, Tarvinder Singh Marwah and Jitender Kochar.

The post of Delhi Congress president is lying vacant as Subash Chopra stepped down, after the party suffered a humiliating defeat in the recent Assembly polls. P.C. Chacko, who was Delhi Congress AICC in-charge, also resigned.

"Mr. Goel enquired about the party's massive defeat in the Assembly elections and also the ways and means to resurrect the party," said a party leader.

Mr. Goel will hold meetings for some more days and submit a report to the party high command, a Congress leader said.

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IN BRIEF

Driver killed after truck turns turtle

NEW DELHI
A truck driver was killed when his tractor turned turtle on National Highway 24 in east Delhi's Kalyanpuri in the early hours of Wednesday. The victim has been identified as Mushroof (34), a resident of Ghazipur. Police said that a case has been registered and CCTV footage is being obtained to ascertain whether he had been hit by another vehicle or lost control of the truck.

Chawla case: no word given to U.K. on probe, says Ministry

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI
The Home Ministry informed the Delhi High Court on Wednesday that it never gave any assurance to the U.K. authorities that no further investigation would be carried out in the case related to Sanjeev Chawla, who was extradited from Britain last week.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said for a fair trial, the alleged bookie and key accused in one of cricket's biggest match-fixing scandals that involved former South African captain Hansie Cronje, has to be confronted with the evidence gathered against him to "unearth the conspiracy and identify the other persons involved".

After hearing the arguments of the MHA counsel and Chawla, the court reserved the order on Chawla's plea challenging his 12-day custodial remand and said the decision would be pronounced on Thursday.

A trial court had on February 13 sent Chawla to 12-day custodial interrogation by the Delhi police.

Additional Solicitor General Sanjay Jain, appearing for the MHA, submitted that Chawla would remain in the Tihar and his questioning would be done there itself.

STF set up to study minimum age of girls entering motherhood: Centre

HC gives time to govt. to submit response on plea seeking uniform marriage age

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI
The Centre has informed the Delhi High Court on Wednesday that a Special Task Force has been formed to study the issue of minimum age of girls entering motherhood.

The Centre's submissions were made during the hearing of a petition seeking equality in legal age of marriage for men and women.

A Bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice C. Hari Shankar was informed about Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's recent speech while presenting the Budget in Parliament where she discussed the issue of age of girls entering motherhood.

Ms. Sitharaman had said: "Women's age of marriage



was increased from fifteen years to eighteen years in 1978, by amending erstwhile Sharda Act of 1929. As India progresses further, opportunities open up for women to pursue higher education and careers."

"There are imperatives of lowering maternal mortality rate [MMR] as well as im-

provement of nutrition levels. Entire issue about age of a girl entering motherhood needs to be seen in this light. I propose to appoint a task force that will present its recommendations in six months' time," she had said.

Taking note of the submission, the High Court granted more time to the Centre to submit its response to the petition by BJP leader and advocate Ashwini Upadhyay.

The petition has claimed that the difference in minimum age of marriage for men and women was based on patriarchal stereotypes and has no scientific backing.

The plea has contended that limit of 18 years for a woman to get married amounts

to "blatant discrimination" when men in India are permitted to wed at the age of 21.

Mr. Upadhyay argued that more than 125 countries in the world have a uniform age of marriage for men and women. Noting this fact, the National Human Rights Commission, pursuant to the National Conference on Child Marriage held in New Delhi in August 2018, recommended that India follow suit and bring uniformity in the minimum age limits, he said.

He contended that to protect women's fundamental rights, it is imperative that the minimum age of marriage be equalised and fixed at 21 years.

Loud and clear



Members of Peoples Union for Democratic Rights protesting against death penalty for gang rape and murder, at Jantar Mantar on Wednesday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Police foil murder plan, arrest criminal from Dwarka

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI
A 34-year-old criminal, who was allegedly out to kill another, was arrested in Dwarka, police said on Wednesday. The accused wanted to build his clout in the area and hence planned to eliminate his rival, they said.

DCP (Dwarka) Anto Alphonse said that the accused, Jitender alias Bittoo, is a resident of Bindapur.

Police said that on Monday, they received a tip-off that Jitender was roaming near Rajapuri in Dwarka after which a trap was laid and he was apprehended. A load-

ed countrymade pistol was recovered from his possession, they said.

During interrogation, Jitender confessed that he was on his way to murder one Pawan Gupta because of personal enmity, but the arrest spoiled his plan. On further investigation, it was found

that a few months ago, Pawan and Jitender got into an argument during which the former abused the latter. "Jitender's friends taunted him for being abused and he took it as a challenge to build his clout in the area. He decided to eliminate Pawan by shooting him," Mr. Alphonse said.

Police said that a case under Section 25 of Arms Act was registered against him and he was arrested.

Jitender used to rent lights to vegetable vendors in the area but later got into bad company. He was first arrested in 2007 in a firing incident, police said.

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Timings

DELHI
THURSDAY, FEB. 20
RISE 06:56 SET 18:15
RISE 04:43 SET 15:17
FRIDAY, FEB. 21
RISE 06:55 SET 18:15
RISE 05:31 SET 16:13
SATURDAY, FEB. 22
RISE 06:54 SET 18:16
RISE 06:14 SET 17:09

Delhi Weather

max min

Delhi City 26 08

Safdarjang 26 08

Palam 27 09

Delhi Palarm Today

28°C A rise in morning

temperature is expected. Day

will be partly cloudy sky. South

easterly light to moderate

winds are expected.

Delhi Palarm Tomorrow

26°C Few spells of rain with

gusty winds are expected.

Drop in day temperature with

mainly cloudy sky is likely.

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THE HINDU

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Central govt. cuts its share in flagship crop insurance scheme

Enrolment in two schemes has been made voluntary for all farmers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Centre has almost halved its contribution to its own flagship crop insurance schemes, slashing its share of the premium subsidy from the current 50% to just 25% in irrigated areas and 30% for unirrigated areas from the kharif season of 2020.

The Union Cabinet approved the revamp of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) and the Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme at its meeting on Wednesday.

In another significant step, enrolment in the two schemes has also been made voluntary for all farmers, including those with existing crop loans. When the PMFBY was launched in 2016, it was made mandatory for all farmers with crop loans to enrol for insurance cover under



Changes made after consultations with States, says Minister.

the scheme.

Announcing the decision after the Cabinet meeting, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar said that 58% of farmers enrolled in the schemes are loanees who will no longer have to compulsorily take insurance cover. "The numbers [of enrolled farmers] may go down in the first year, but it will pick up again after that," he said, adding that the Centre

would launch an awareness campaign to encourage farmers to voluntarily sign up for crop insurance policies. Coverage under the scheme is now 30% of cropped area, according to government data.

Flak for PMFBY

PMFBY has come in from flak from a wide variety of stakeholders. Farmers groups and opposition politicians have claimed that private insu-

rance companies have made windfall gains on the scheme. Several major insurers, including ICICI Lombard and Tata AIG, have opted out of the scheme in 2019-20, reportedly due to losses because of high claims ratios. Several States, including Punjab and West Bengal, have refused to participate in the scheme as well.

The Centre has made changes to the scheme based on consultations with States and inputs from all stakeholders, said Mr. Tomar.

Farmers pay a fixed share of the premium: 2% of the sum insured for kharif crops, 1.5% for rabi crops and 5% for cash crops. Currently, the Centre and State split the balance of the premium equally. However, the revamp now reduces the burden on the Centre and increases the share of States.

Modi government in denial of slowdown: Manmohan

'A \$5 trillion economy by 2024-25 is wishful thinking'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Wednesday said the Narendra Modi government was in denial of the economic slowdown and its target of making India a \$5 trillion economy by 2024-25 was "wishful thinking".

He was speaking at the release of *Backstage: The Story behind India's High Growth Years*, authored by former Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia.

Dr. Singh also spoke about the challenges to the opening up of the economy during the 1991 crisis, and acknowledged the crucial role played by Mr. Ahluwalia and P. Chidambaram, who was then Commerce Minister.

"We have today a government that does not acknowledge that there is such a word as slowdown. I think



Old hands: Manmohan Singh with Montek Singh Ahluwalia, left, at a book launch. ■ PTI

this is not good for our country because if you don't recognise the problems that you face, you are not likely to find credible answers to take corrective action," he said.

"Montek has pointed out that contrary to what the ruling group may say today, a \$5 trillion economy by 2024-25 is wishful thinking," he said.

Dr. Singh recalled the challenges he had faced during the 1991 economic crisis

as the Finance Minister in the Cabinet of Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. Not only was the dominant opinion against reforms but the business community formed the "Bombay Club" to resist liberalisation.

He faced stiff opposition from several quarters to his decision to devalue the rupee. Among them was former President R. Venkataraman.

Operation clean



Earthmovers remove debris from the Yamuna bed ahead of U.S. President Donald Trump's visit, in Agra on Wednesday. ■ PTI

SC directs Rajasthan govt. to stop illegal sand mining at once

Court seeks action-taken report within four weeks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday took strong note of rampant illegal sand mining in Rajasthan and directed the State government, its Collectors and SPs to take immediate steps to stop it.

Seeking an action taken report from the State government within four weeks, the Bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde said illegal sand mining is likely to damage the environment irreparably.

The Bench, which also comprised Justices B.R. Gavai and Surya Kant, also directed the apex court ap-



CM Ashok Gehlot

bled faced by sand traders, transporters and other stakeholders and it will have the authority to summon any person including government officials with the purpose of holding the probe.

CEC report

The Bench said the CEC will submit its report within six weeks.

The apex court was hearing a batch of petitions relating to sand mining in Rajasthan.

The apex court in 2017 had ordered stopping of illegal sand mining in Rajasthan.

The Bench said the CEC would also consider the pro-

Ex-DIG, 4 others get 8 years in jail

Convicted for abetting a family of four to end their lives

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

AMRITSAR

A former DIG and four others were sentenced to eight-year imprisonment by a local court in a 2004 case in which a family of five ended their lives, blaming the accused for the extreme step.

A serving DSP of the Punjab Police was also sentenced to four years in jail.

The court of Additional District Sessions Judge Sandeep Singh Bajwa also slapped fine ranging from ₹10,000 to ₹20,000 on them.

Former DIG Kultar Singh, DSP Hardev Singh, Parminder Kaur, Palwinder Singh, Mohinder Singh and Sabreen Kaur were convicted in the case on Monday.

Kultar Singh was posted as

the Amritsar Senior Superintendent of Police while DSP Hardev Singh held the charge of an Inspector in 2004 when the incident happened.

Hardip Singh, along with his wife, mother and two children, had taken some poisonous substance on October 31, 2004.

Note on the walls

Before taking the extreme step, the entire family had written a note on the walls of a room of their house.

They also sent copies of the note to their friends and some known people by post.

The family had directly blamed Kultar Singh for the extreme step.

The Amritsar police had registered a case in 2004

when public pressure mounted but the accused were not arrested then.

In 2009, Punjab Human Rights Organisation activist Sarabjit Singh Verka took up the matter before a local court and sought justice for the victims while alleging that the local police was not probing the case properly.

The court issued non-bailable warrants in September 2011 against Kultar Singh and Hardev Singh under Sections 306 (abetment to end live), 420 (fraud), 467 and 468 (forcery) of the IPC.

Suicide prevention helpline: Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health,

Telephone: 011-4076 9002, Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-7.30 p.m.

Punjab Assembly session likely to be stormy

Opposition to take up power tariff issue

VIKAS VASUDEVA

CHANDIGARH

The budget session of Punjab Assembly, beginning February 20, is expected to start on stormy note as the Opposition parties have geared up to corner the ruling Congress government on the issues of power tariff hike, farmers' plight and stray cattle menace.

The principal Opposition - the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) - have both planned to forcefully raise the issue of hike in electricity tariff among other public interest issues during the session.

"Congress promised to give electricity at ₹5 per unit, but the rate today is between ₹9 to ₹10 per unit. It's the most expensive in the country. The Chief Minister's remark about renegotiating power purchase agreements with private players is nothing more than a political statement.

"We will bring a calling attention motion on misgovernance," former Minister and Akali Dal leader Bikram Singh Majithia told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Majithia, who along with other party leaders met Punjab Assembly Speaker K.P. Rana on Wednesday, said they have demanded a 15-day budget session to discuss issues.

"The Congress government should not run away from the debate. The Opposition should be given appropriate time during the budget session to take up



CM Amarinder Singh

people's issues," Mr. Majithia said.

"People want to know where are the jobs. Not only this, they want to know why unemployment allowance of ₹2,500 per month is still not being given. Discussions are needed on illegal mining, liquor smuggling besides farmers' distress and loan waiver," he said.

'Promise not honoured'

Accusing the Congress government of not fulfilling its election promise of scrapping or reviewing the power purchase agreements with private thermal power plants, AAP MLA Aman Arora said instead of securing interests of the people, the State government has chosen to protect the interests of the private companies.

Mr. Arora said the Amarinder regime followed the dotted lines drawn by previous SAD-BJP dispensation, resulting in steep electricity tariff hike.

He said keeping in view the growing menace of stray cattle in the State, the party will move a motion during the session to effectively deal with it.

Central team assesses damage to crops in locust-hit Rajasthan

Three-member panel interacted with a large number of farmers and asked about their efforts to deal with the situation

MOHAMMED IQBAL

JAIPUR

An Inter-Ministerial Central Team, visiting the locust-affected areas in Rajasthan, has taken stock of damage caused by insects to the crops in Jodhpur and Bikaner divisions and met the farmers, elected representatives and government officials after getting divided into three groups.

The team members inspected the damaged wheat, gram, castor, tamarind, cumin and isabgol crops in Jaisalmer, Barmer, Jalore and Jodhpur districts on Tuesday and Wednesday. Crops in an area measuring 3.71 lakh hect-



Members of the Central team inspecting damaged crops at a village in Jodhpur division on Wednesday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

tares have been destroyed in the biggest-ever locust attack which started in the Thar desert in May 2019.

The tropical grasshoppers emerged in January 2019 from Sudan and Eritrea on Africa's Red Sea Coast and

travelled through Saudi Arabia and Iran to enter Pakistan, where they invaded the cotton-producing belt of Sindh province. The swarms of locusts then entered the Thar desert, damaging the crops in western Rajasthan and northern Gujarat.

The State government has sought an assistance of ₹200 crore from the Centre to deal with the locust menace and compensate the farmers for their losses. A special crop assessment survey was earlier undertaken in some of the affected areas and ex-gratia assistance distributed to the farmers.

The Union Agriculture Mi-

nistry's Locust Warning Organisation (LWO), headquartered in Jodhpur, has launched efforts on a war footing to control locusts. Teams carrying equipment were rushed to the villages during the last few months to spray high-intensity malathion insecticide to prevent the spread of locusts to other areas.

The Central team comprised Atish Chandra, Joint Secretary, Union Ministry of Agriculture; J.P. Singh from the Directorate of Plan Protection, Quarantine & Storage; Anil Dhillon from the Food Corporation of India; Manash Choudhary from NI-

TI Ayog's Agriculture Division and Dayanand Sawant from the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying & Fisheries.

Farmers' demand

The team members interacted with a large number of farmers and asked about their efforts to deal with the locust attack. While analysing extensive damage caused to the rabi crops, the team took note of the farmers' demand for enhancement of compensation in view of the cost of sowing of the crops having exceeded the relief

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JU students' union polls peaceful

Elections held after a gap of three years; results today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA

The students' union elections in the Jadavpur University, held after a gap of three years, passed off peacefully on Wednesday, with the RSS-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad and the CPI (M)-backed Students' Federation of India claiming they received a good response from the students.

A university official said no untoward incident was reported in the elections in both Arts and Engineering faculties, that began at 10 a.m. and ended at 7 p.m.

Vice-Chancellor Surajn Das, in a statement, thanked all sections of the university for the smooth conduct of the elections.

SFI's Jadavpur University

Students at Jadavpur University in Kolkata on Wednesday. ■ RAJEEV BHATT

unit leader Ushashi Pal said a large number of students voted enthusiastically. "We were cautious of not falling into the ABVP's trap and asked our activists and supporters to be careful so that the election process was not disrupted," Mr. Pal said. The results will be declared on Thursday.

candidates for the first time in the polls of JU, known as a hotbed of the Left-wing politics. "We were careful so that the SFI or other Left unions could not instigate any trouble," ABVP's JU unit leader Shyamasree Karmakar said. The results will be declared on Thursday.

'Odisha not taking advantage of Central schemes'

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government is not proactive in taking advantage of Central government schemes," said Mr. Madhav attacking the Naveen Patnaik-government at a press conference here.

"The Odisha government does not submit proposals for new projects and also lags behind in spending sanctioned funds. It is the responsibility of State governments to make full utilization of Central funds. The government should wake up

from deep slumber and come forward to take advantage of Central government schemes," said Mr. Madhav attacking the Naveen Patnaik-government at a press conference here.

He termed the Union Budget growth oriented. The Budget had given priority to development of critical sectors such as agriculture, water resources and infrastructure and upliftment of youth, women and socially and economically backward classes, Mr. Madhav said, adding that it would help the country come out of the economic slowdown.

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No.F.6 (3)/TREDA/NCES/2020/3

Government takes steps to end single-use plastic by May 1

Civic bodies told to give incentives to establishments for not using plastic

TANVI DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

In another step towards curbing use of single-use plastic in the State from May 1, the Environment department and the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board have asked municipal corporations across the State to give incentives to establishments, prepare squads similar to Mumbai's to confiscate plastic, and hold review meetings every month.

The Maharashtra government had in March 2018 issued a notification banning the manufacture, sale and use of single-use plastic bags. It also banned an array of plastic products including cutlery, straws and containers. The ban imposes a penalty between ₹5,000 and ₹25,000 for those violating the rules.

The government had given people time till June 23 to dispose of their banned items, following which municipal corporations started drives to confiscate banned plastic and the MPCB conducted drives to ensure manufacturing units were shut down. However, after about a year, the drive lost momentum and single-use plastic is now freely available in the market. The ban was the brainchild of Sena leader Aaditya Thackeray, and was implemented by the then Environment Minister Ramdas Kadam.

After becoming Environment Minister himself, Mr. Thackeray conducted a review of the ban in January,



Following initial success after the State government banned use of single-use plastic in March 2018, the drive lost momentum. ■ FILE PHOTO

and spoke to various stakeholders regarding hurdles faced in its implementation. He also held a meeting via video conference on February 5 with municipal commissioners, district collectors and divisional commissioners. He has now asked the civic bodies in the State to submit plans on how they will become single-use plastic free.

Besides, MPCB is also encouraging municipal corporations to set up team of inspectors along the lines of BMC's blue squads for confiscating banned plastic. District collectors are supposed to hold monthly review of the implementation of the ban. A State-wide meeting will be held in March and the department will kick off its awareness campaign. Students will be involved in the drive and various competitions will be held at school, college level to sensitise them.

Anil Diggikar, principal se-

cretary, Environment Department, said, "Corporations can individually decide how to motivate all establishments. The department will do State-wide publicity while the local bodies will be responsible for the execution."

Officers attributed the slowdown in the implementation of the ban to the two elections in 2019.

The other challenge for the department will be preventing import of single use plastic from other States.

"If you look at the larger impact, single use plastic has reduced by 50-60% in the State. But it is possible that it comes from other States. We are looking at ways to prevent that. By May 1, we hope to put an end to that also," said an MPCB official.

Meanwhile, environmentalist Afroz Shah said, "Im-

plementation of the notification is fine but there are two stages of plastic – pre-litter and post-litter. Pre-litter means counselling the consumer about avoiding a lifestyle that stresses on large-scale plastic consumption, especially multi-layered plastic. It is the responsibility of both producers and consumers to avoid products that use non-recyclable plastic. If citizens can achieve that level of lifestyle changes, it could take care of a large part of the problem. We cannot say at this stage if people can or cannot do this, it depends on factors. Even post-litter, which means when plastic hits the streets, is important."

Mr. Athawale said.

The RPI chief had earlier this week hailed Mr. Thackeray for reportedly agreeing to hand over Bhima-Koregaon/Elgaar Parishad files to the National Investigation Agency (NIA). The difference of opinion on this issue between the three alliance parties – Shiv Sena, Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party – has caused a deep rift that cannot be repaired any longer, Mr. Athawale claimed.

A former coalition partner of the Shiv Sena, the Union Minister said the Centre has the authority to push the NIA to take over inquiry into the cases. However, NCP chief Sharad Pawar and Com-

Shivaji's birthplace to get ₹23 cr. for conservation, says Ajit

CM attends 390th birth anniversary of warrior king

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

The Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government will allot ₹23 crore for the preservation and development of Shivneri Fort, the birthplace of Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji, said Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and senior Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Ajit Pawar on Wednesday.

Speaking at Shivneri Fort in Pune's Junnar tehsil on the occasion of Chhatrapati Shivaji's 390th birth anniversary, Mr. Ajit Pawar said: "At present, three departments, namely the Forest, the Archaeology and the Public Works Department (PWD), are in urgent need of funds amounting to ₹23 crore for the conservation works of Shivneri Fort."

Mr. Pawar, who is also the Guardian Minister of Pune district, informed that he would clear the fund amount at a meeting on Wednesday evening itself.

"When Uddhav Thackeray assumed office as Chief



Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray visiting Shivneri Fort, the birthplace of Maratha warrior king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, on his birth anniversary, in Pune on Wednesday. ■ PTI

Minister, his first decision following the swearing-in was to allot ₹20 crore for the preservation of Raigad Fort [Shivaji's capital]. The objective of our government is to preserve historical forts by maintaining a heritage touch so as to keep it as it was during Chhatrapati Shivaji's times," said the Deputy Chief Minister.

Earlier, Mr. Thackeray, along with Mr. Pawar and other Cabinet Ministers including Chhagan Bhujbal and local legislators, were present at the birth anniversary celebrations of the legendary Maratha warrior king, who is said to be born here in 1630 C.E.

Mr. Thackeray witnessed a number of events, including the 'cradle ceremony', while reviewing the progress of the development works at the fort.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said that there was a palpable sense among the public of Maharashtra that "a true people's government has come to power in the State over the Elgaar Parishad probe.

He further said that Mr. Pawar (and the NCP) ought to have allied with the Sena much earlier for the benefit of the State.

"Ajit dada and me [the Sena] simply remained apart all these years when we ought to have united much earlier. However, now that we are together, I promise the people of the State that we [the MVA coalition of Sena-Congress-NCP] will not rest until we have developed Maharashtra," Mr. Thackeray said.

Likewise, in a veiled jibe at the BJP government, Mr. Pawar said: "Today is unique as there is a visible feeling that a true government of the people has come to power in Maharashtra... This is the first time I am witnessing such enthusiasm, especially from the youth on the occasion of 'Shiv Jayanti'".

He also refuted suggestions of differences of opinion between the Sena, the NCP and the Congress over the Elgaar Parishad probe.

Hail the king



Joyous celebration: An acrobat demonstrates her skills at a rally to mark the 390th birth anniversary of Maratha warrior Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in Nagpur on Wednesday. ■ S.SUDARSHAN

Floating casinos should not be shifted from Mandovi: minister

Lobo springs a surprise by taking stand different from the govt's; says more off-shore casinos should be set up

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PANAJI

Goa Ports Minister Michael Lobo has said the off-shore casinos should not be shifted out of Mandovi river, and suggested that more such vessels be introduced in other rivers of the State.

The Minister's comment comes in stark contrast to the stand adopted by the BJP-led State government, which has assured to relocate off-shore casinos from the Mandovi after opposition from locals.

Mr. Lobo, who is also a BJP MLA, justified his statement claiming that the casino industry helps Goa's economy and generates employment.

"I still remember our former chief minister Manohar Parrikar saying that

MVA govt. could fall over Elgaar, Bhima Koregaon: Athawale

RPI chief says it is not appropriate to argue publicly

SHARAD VYAS
MUMBAI

Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Athawale said on Wednesday that the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government could fall any time over differences on the handling of the Bhima-Koregaon and Elgaar Parishad cases.

The Republican Party of India (RPI) chief said Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray should reconsider his decision to join the MVA and shake hands with the BJP-RPI coalition he was part of earlier.

The other challenge for the department will be preventing import of single use plastic from other States.

"If you look at the larger impact, single use plastic has reduced by 50-60% in the State. But it is possible that it comes from other States. We are looking at ways to prevent that. By May 1, we hope to put an end to that also," said an MPCB official.

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Mr. Athawale said.

The RPI chief had earlier this week hailed Mr. Thackeray for reportedly agreeing to hand over Bhima-Koregaon/Elgaar Parishad files to the National Investigation Agency (NIA). The difference of opinion on this issue between the three alliance parties – Shiv Sena, Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party – has caused a deep rift that cannot be repaired any longer, Mr. Athawale claimed.

A former coalition partner of the Shiv Sena, the Union Minister said the Centre has the authority to push the NIA to take over inquiry into the cases. However, NCP chief Sharad Pawar and Com-

At present the State contingency fund has a limit of ₹150 crore, which will be temporarily increased to ₹10,000 crore.

The government has decided to implement the scheme from February 22.

Meanwhile, Forest Minister Sanjay Rathod said a probe has been ordered into allegations of misappropriation of funds in the plantation drive of the previous Bharatiya Janata Party government, which claimed it planted 33 crore saplings across the State. "There were major irregularities in the scheme," said a Minister after the issue was discussed at the Cabinet meeting.

The BJP reacted by saying, "If they wish to probe our plantation drive, they should appoint a retired justice," said former forest minister and BJP leader Sudhir Mungantiwar.

Two Shiv Sena leaders may face the heat

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

One MLA and one MP, who have been recently awarded a Cabinet rank by the Maha Vikas Aghadi government, may find it difficult to continue their tenure as the Opposition is likely to raise the issue of office of profit in the budget session of the Legislature.

Jogeshwari MLA Ravindra Waikar and South Mumbai MP Arvind Sawant, both from the Shiv Sena, may face the heat. If sources are to be believed, knowing the danger, the government has asked them to ensure their resignations are already kept ready.

Mr. Waikar was appointed as the minister for the CM office while Mr. Sawant was named as the coordinator of the committee of three MPs in Delhi, which will be formed to give the State projects a push.



Ramdas Athawale

appropriate to argue publicly. Public opposition by NCP and Congress over decision to give NIA inquiry of these cases, is not correct. If such disputes continue, it will be difficult for Uddhav Thackeray to run the government," he said.

Fellow programme

Meanwhile, former Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis,

has in a letter to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, said the State government's decision

to scrap the Chief Minister's Fellowship Programme has sent a wrong message to

the youth. He said Mr. Thackeray must reconstitute the fellowship under which dozens of qualified students were offered internship to work in the CMO on a monthly stipend. But the fellowship was discontinued by the MVA government.

Cabinet dips into contingency fund

Orders probe into plantation drive by previous govt.

SHARAD VYAS
MUMBAI

The State Cabinet on Wednesday approved a grant of ₹10,000 crore as contingency fund for the implementation of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule Farmer Loan Waiver Scheme.

The ordinance will be issued by the Governor in consultation with the legislature and law and judiciary department, senior officials said.

Legislative Council to have 22 vacancies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

As many as 22 seats in the Legislative Council will be falling vacant during April-July this year and elections to these will present an interesting scenario against the backdrop of the changed political equations in the State.

The opposition BJP currently dominates the 78-member Upper House.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, who is currently not a member of either of the two Houses, is likely to take the Council route to become a member of the State legislature.

While the tenure of the eight members from the MLA quota ends on April 24, that of the 10 appointees from the Governor's quota will expire on June 6 and June 15. The four MLCs from the teachers and graduates constituencies will retire on July 19.

Currently, the BJP has 22 MLCs, followed by NCP (15), Congress (13), and Shiv Sena (13).



Lifeline: Every casino, the Ports Minister said, employs over 400 people, and they also help the State treasury. ■ FILE PHOTO

levied by departments like Excise, Food and Drugs Administration and others," he said.

Six off-shore casinos are currently operating from the Mandovi river in Panaji.

The minister said every vessel has been employing over 400 people.

"It is generating employment for Indians. We need to understand that this industry cannot be just stopped overnight," he said.

"I would say that more casinos should be introduced in other places like the Chapora river (in North Goa) and the Zuari river (in South Goa)," Mr. Lobo said.

He, however, noted that MLAs representing constituencies around those riv-

ers have opposed the introduction of casinos, "as people are objecting to it".

"Introducing casinos in these rivers will help revive the economy of the State. Casinos will come up in these rivers in the years to come. People will realise it is part of the industry. If you want to grow the industry, then you will have to allow it," Mr. Lobo said.

He also said that he was not in favour of the plan to shift casinos from the Mandovi river to the upcoming international airport at Mopa in North Goa district.

"Mopa can be a different set up all together, we can have a live gaming zone there. But in my opinion, the casinos should continue in the Mandovi river," he added.

the State is not dependent on the money collected (as taxes) from casinos. But I am saying opposite to it," Mr. Lobo told reporters at Mapusa town near here.

He claimed the casino industry is "helping the

State treasury".

"We get revenue from the casinos after charging fee for annual renewal of their licence. In addition, we also get revenue in the form of GST from them. Every year the renewal fees is

रोजाना सुबह कोई न्यूज पेपर. पीडीएफ में डाउनलोड
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GUJRATI

Sandesh

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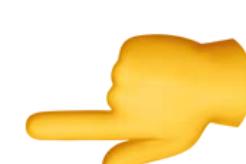
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IN BRIEF



Opposition councillors 'assault' Kannur Mayor

Kannur Mayor Suma Balakrishnan was on Wednesday allegedly assaulted by Opposition councillors at the Corporation office, following which she was admitted to the intensive care unit of the district government hospital. The Opposition members were demanding that the issues raised by the pro-LDF employees, who were on a protest outside the Corporation for some days, be discussed first.

23-year-old accused of killing 18-month-old son

Saranya, the 23-year-old woman accused of killing her 18-month-old son Viany, was taken to the crime scene here on Wednesday for collection of evidence. Locals, who had gathered there, turned aggressive on seeing the accused. The police had a difficult time managing them. Saranya, who confessed to the crime, said she took the child out on February 17 and threw him on the sea wall. She said she killed the child to live with her paramour, who was a close friend of her husband.

SSLC preparatory exam paper leaked again

BENGALURU The question paper of the preparatory examination for Class 10 students in Karnataka was leaked for the second day in a row on Wednesday. The question paper of the second language English paper was allegedly made available on social messaging platforms two hours before the examination was to begin. On Tuesday, the mathematics paper was shared on social media just as the examination began. The final board exams are scheduled to begin on March 27.

Aadhaar notice triggers NRC fears

Unique Identification Authority of India unable to deliver notices to 52 persons, says official

SYED MOHAMMED
HYDERABAD

Mohd Sattar Khan, the recipient of the notice from Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) directing him to prove his Indian citizenship, is living in fear. He is unwilling to talk, but after much prodding, he agrees to speak for a couple of minutes.

"I do whatever work I get. I drive an auto, and now I do videography," he says in a trembling voice. He confirms that his father worked in Hyderabad Allwyn Limited, once a public sector company. He is encouraged to speak by Muzaaffar Ullah Khan, a lawyer who is providing him legal aid, but

words fail the recipient of the notice. Two others, one also from Talabkatta, and another from Santos Nagar, who have received similar notices are afraid to speak. They refuse to reveal their names.

The UIDAI reacted to media reports and stated that 127 persons 'fraudulently' obtained Aadhaar cards. R.S. Gopalan, Deputy Director General, UIDAI in an email stated that the authorities were unable to send 52 notices to individuals as the addresses of recipients could not be found.

The UIDAI's notice, directing Mr. Khan to prove his citizenship, has given rise to widespread concerns within

the Muslims community. Some voice apprehensions that the UIDAI's notice bears striking similarity to a National Register of Citizen-like exercise.

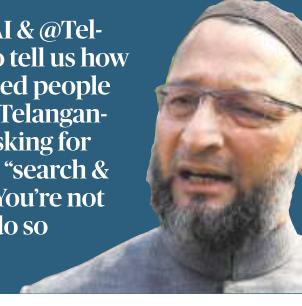
"For a long time, I have been gathering documents of my father who died last year. These include property documents, government em-

ployment documents and other related paperwork. I thought these could come handy for me and my siblings and their children if NRC happens in Hyderabad. But UIDAI asking that man to prove citizenship has rattled me. There is so much confusion now," says Saleem Ahmed (name changed), a

businessman and resident of Jubilee Hills.

Hours after Mr. Khan's case was reported, All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen President Asaduddin Owaisi claimed that UIDAI did not adhere to due procedure and abused its powers. He sought to know which police officer provided UIDAI the names of 127 persons and on what grounds.

"Request @UIDAI & @TelanganaPolice to tell us how many of those 127 listed people are Muslim & Dalit @TelanganaPolice please stop asking for Aadhaar during your 'search & cordon' operations. You're not legally permitted to do so," he tweeted.



ASADUDDIN OWIASI,
AIMIM CHIEF

Bail granted to Kannada poet and editor

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOPPAL/BENGALURU

Poet Siraj Bisaralli and editor Rajabaxi H.V., who were booked and taken into custody in connection with the recitation of a poem that criticised the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), were granted bail by the principal civil and JMFC Court at Gangavathi in Koppal district of Karnataka on Wednesday.

Mr. Bisaralli, a Koppal-based poet and journalist, was booked for reciting the poem at the State-sponsored Aneugundi Utsav on January 9.

Mr. Rajabaxi, editor of news portal kannadanet.com, was held for sharing the poem at the State Minister's office.

Terming the violence in Mangaluru during an anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) protest, which resulted in the death of two persons in police firing, a "larger conspiracy", Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Wednesday said that support to organisations behind the violence had "international ramifications" and that threat calls for Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa had come to the Home Minister's office.

"It is not restricted to one State. It is felt in Uttar Pradesh and Kerala, among others. Kerala Chief Minister has aired his concern already. If we support them [conspirators], everyone has to

pay the price tomorrow," Mr. Bommai told the Legislative Assembly.

"They are getting finances from outside and we have information on this," he said, without referring to any specific organisation. "Action will be taken against or-

ganisations that are supporting rioters," he said.

Legal action

Earlier, Opposition leaders urged the government to take legal action against organisations such as PFI and SDPI if they were found to be violating laws.

"I have received threat calls from abroad. Threats were made to the Chief Minister on my phone. Our legislators and Members of Parliament have also received threat calls after the incident. Calls have been traced to Saudi Arabia and Dubai. The qazi of Kasaragod, who successfully prevented a protest by convincing a organisation, also received threatening calls," Mr. Bommai said.

"They are getting finances from outside and we have information on this," he said, without referring to any specific organisation. "Action will be taken against or-

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Political action

Earlier, Opposition leaders urged the government to take legal action against organisations such as PFI and SDPI if they were found to be violating laws.

"A total of 1,300 mobile phone numbers registered in Kerala were found to be active in the riot area. Of them, 373 people have been issued notice asking them the reasons for their presence," Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai said.

Stating that the government was not vindictive, he said, "Some may have come for business purposes. If their answers satisfy us, we will let them go."

Mr. Mehta took strong ex-

Mangaluru anti-CAA protest: Home Minister sees 'larger conspiracy'

'Threat calls for the Chief Minister had come on my phone'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai speaking in the Legislative Assembly.

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Bandipur: Kerala opposes alternative route

In SC, the State says the ban on night traffic is not on the basis of any study

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Kerala government has opposed in the Supreme Court an alternative route proposed by Karnataka to bypass the night-time traffic ban on the National Highway 212 through the Bandipur National Park.

In an affidavit, Kerala submitted that the alternative route goes through the Nagarhole Tiger Reserve in Karnataka and Tholpetty wildlife sanctuary in Kerala "where wild animals are wandering freely in heavy numbers and it will take more time for the land acquisition for developing the route." Further, clearance from the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is mandatory.

The Kerala government indicated that it would be better to open NH 212 (presently NH 766) for night time travel.

"The present NH is being used from time immemorial," the State said.

"The ban on night traffic through NH 212 issued by the District Magistrate was with-



A file photo of traffic at Bandipur. ■ M.A. SRIRAM

out any study or preparation.

Mudumalai, Bandipur Tiger Reserves and Wayanad Wildlife sanctuary make one contiguous tiger territory and tigers move freely within this area. It is illogical and inappropriate to impose enhanced level of restriction only in one part of this tiger territory to protect tigers. It will not yield the desired result," Kerala argued in the

Supreme Court.

Moreover, the State contended that the ban on night traffic on NH 212 from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. is not on the basis of any study or sound scientific findings.

Arterial road

On the other hand, the highway is the arterial road connecting the metro city of Kozhikode and Wayanad

with Mysuru and Bengaluru. The State dismissed the argument raised in the apex court that "by now the wildlife has adapted itself to the night-time restriction on traffic." It said the argument owes itself more to a reluctance withdraw the ban.

The NH 212 connects not only major cities like Bengaluru and Cochin but also smaller ones like Vythiri, Chundl, Kalpetta, Muttill, Meenangadi, Sultan Bathery, Gundelpett, Begur and Nanjangud towns. It is a vital economic link and the easiest route between the two States, Kerala argued.

For uniform curbs

If at all any restrictions of vehicular movement is to be done in wildlife areas, it should be done uniformly across the country under the relevant laws such as the Wildlife Protection Act and not under the Motor Vehicles Act. Otherwise it amounts to colourable exercise of power. There is no provision under the MV Act to protect wildlife," the State argued.

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IN BRIEF



Six bureaucrats granted bail in INX Media case

A special court granted bail to six public servants, including Sindhushree Khullar (in photo), who have been arraigned by the CBI in the INX Media case. The bail was given on personal surety of ₹2 lakh each, with a condition that they would not leave the country without permission.

Two channels face breach of privilege charge

CHENNAI
Tamil Nadu Assembly Speaker P. Dhnapal on Wednesday referred to the House Privileges Committee a charge of breach of privilege levelled against Tamil TV channels — News 18 Tamil Nadu and Puthiya Thalaivaru — by Electricity and Prohibition Minister P. Thangamani.

Serum Institute hopes to offer COVID-19 vaccine

MUMBAI
In six months, Serum Institute of India, Pune, may begin the human trials for a vaccine for COVID-19. Presently in the pre-clinical tests phase, SII's vaccine candidate has been developed using a laboratory-made synthetic virus. Adar Poonawalla, CEO, said the vaccine is likely to be ready by early 2022.

CBI arrests two ITPO officials for graft

NEW DELHI
The CBI has arrested two officials of the India Trade Promotion Organisation for allegedly demanding bribe to allot a stall at the "Aahar Fair 2020." According to a complaint, Akshay Singh, a deputy manager with the ITPO, demanded ₹1.25 lakh as bribe. Singh and his manager were arrested.

Boy uploads exam paper on TikTok, held

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MALDA/KOLKATA

A 16-year-old student was held in West Bengal's Malda district for allegedly making a TikTok video of the English question paper for the Class 10 state board exams and sharing it on social media, police said.

The incident happened in Baidyanathpur High School in Ratua police station area of the district.

He will be produced before the district Juvenile Justice Board on Thursday, they said.

Court pulls up CBI in Asthana probe

The agency did not conduct a lie detector or psychological test on its former Special Director

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A special court on Wednesday pulled up the CBI for not conducting a lie detector or psychological test on its former Special Director Rakesh Asthana in an alleged bribery case.

The court, which earlier in the day asked the CBI to submit the case diary for examination, also enquired about the previous investigating officer, Ajay Kumar Bassi.

The CBI submitted that Mr. Bassi had been transferred to Port Blair, but he was currently in Delhi. He was taken off the case after then agency chief, Alok Kumar Verma, was shunted out. Mr. Verma was stripped of his powers days after the case was registered, amid al-



In the dock: The court also asked if Rakesh Asthana was confronted with the other accused. ■ PTI

legations and counter allegations between him and Mr. Asthana.

The court also asked if Mr. Asthana was confronted with the other accused, whether his mobile phones and laptops were examined;

and if there was any evidence to disprove the complainant's statement recorded under Section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

The CBI submitted that the lie detector test on some accused and witnesses had

indicated that they were deceptive.

The next date of hearing has been fixed for February 28, and Mr. Bassi has been asked to present to assist in the scrutiny of the case diary.

'Why such indulgence'
The court also observed that advocate Sunil Mittal, a co-accused in the case, "seems like a fictional character emerging from *Mission Impossible* and *James Bond* movies. Why showing so much indulgence to him?"

On Mr. Mittal's son-in-law Somesh Prasad, who is another accused, the court asked, "Why are you showing so much indulgence to someone who isn't cooperating and didn't even share his phone?"

The court is yet to take cognisance of the charge sheet filed by the CBI, giving a clean chit to Mr. Asthana and Deputy Superintendent of Police Devender Kumar, who was earlier arrested in the case.

The chargesheet names Manoj Prasad as the accused. He was also arrested by the CBI. At the last hearing, the court reprimanded the agency, wondering why an accused, Mr. Prasad's brother Somesh Prasad, having a bigger role, was roaming free and it arrested its own official. The case was registered in October 2018, on a complaint from Hyderabad-based businessman Sana Sathish Babu against Mr. Asthana, Mr. Kumar, and the Prasad brothers.

(With inputs from PTD)

Swachh Bharat Mission second phase gets nod

Key focus is to end open defecation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Centre will begin implementing the second phase of its Swachh Bharat mission in rural areas from April, focusing on solid and liquid waste management and the sustainability of the abolition of open defecation.

The Union Budget for 2020-21 had allocated ₹9,994 crore for the first year of the mission's Phase-II.

The scheme will be implemented by the States, with a fund sharing pattern of 60:40 between the Centre and the States.

In the northeastern and Himalayan states, the central share will be 90%.

Thousands protest against CAA across T.N.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Thousands took to the streets across Tamil Nadu on Wednesday, demanding that the State Assembly pass a resolution against implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA).

In Chennai, protesters gathered for a march to the Secretariat, in defiance of a Madras High Court order. However, they stopped on Wallajah Road near Chepauk stadium and erected a make-shift stage for speakers. Hundreds of police personnel were deployed. Drones and CCTV cameras were used to monitor the protest.

Passenger tries to open aircraft door, offloaded

He wanted 2 persons taken on board

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

IndiGo's Delhi-Jeddah flight was forced to turn back just before takeoff after a passenger attempted to open one of the doors, according to a DGCA official.

The incident happened on Tuesday when the flight was taxiing for take-off. The passenger tried to open the door demanding that two of his co-passengers denied boarding for not possessing the boarding pass be allowed on the plane, according to the official.

"The captain of the flight decided to return to bay and offload the passenger and his accomplice for their un-

ruly behaviour," according to the source.

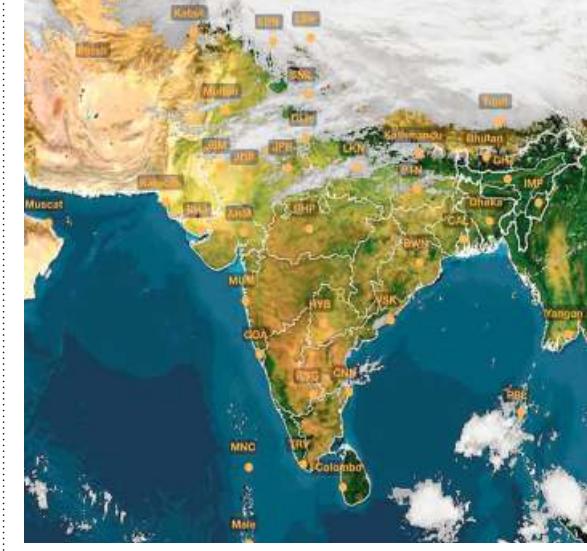
"A group of 110 passengers of the connecting flight from Srinagar were travelling on this flight. Two of them were offloaded at the boarding gate as they had lost their boarding pass," he said.

A Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) official, however, said the two passengers had failed to show up at the boarding gate on time. Thereafter, three more women passengers accompanying these men were allowed to deboard.

An anti-sabotage drill was also performed before allowing the flight to take off.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

Forecast for Thursday: Dense fog likely in isolated parts over Sub-Himalayan West Bengal & Sikkim. Thunderstorms accompanied with hail likely over Uttarakhand. Thunderstorms likely over Himachal Pradesh, West U.P., Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	... -	30...	15...	Kozhikode	... -	35...	23...
Ahmedabad	... -	16...	12...	Kurnool	... -	36...	12...
Aizawl	... -	20...	10...	Lucknow	... -	28...	10...
Allahabad	... -	30...	10...	Madur...	... -	34...	20...
Bengaluru	... -	31...	17...	Mangalur...	... -	35...	19...
Bhopal	... -	32...	13...	Mumbai	... -	34...	20...
Bhubaneswar	... -	33...	14...	Mysuru	... -	31...	16...
Chandigarh	... -	23...	10...	New Delhi	... -	26...	8...
Chennai	... -	32...	20...	Patna	... -	27...	11...
Coimbatore	... -	31...	20...	Port Blair	... -	31...	24...
Dehradun	... -	24...	9...	Puducherry	... -	31...	21...
Gangtok	... -	15...	6...	Pune	... -	34...	18...
Goa	... -	33...	21...	Raipur	... -	32...	15...
Guwahati	7...	24...	6...	Ranchi	... -	29...	9...
Hubballi	... -	34...	19...	Shillong	... -	16...	7...
Hyderabad	... -	32...	16...	Shimla	... -	16...	7...
Imphal	... -	25...	7...	Srinagar	... -	11...	0...
Jaipur	... -	30...	12...	Thiruvananthapuram	... -	34...	21...
Kochi	... -	33...	24...	Tiruchi	... -	34...	19...
Kohima	... -	18...	8...	Vijayawada	... -	32...	22...
Kolkata	... -	29...	17...	Visakhapatnam	... -	30...	23...

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

Yesterday

CITIES	SO NO.	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	101	.80	.20	.237	.200
Bengaluru	14	.31	.60	.67	.87
Chennai	.06	.28	.29	.89	-
Delhi	.37	.79	.54	.352	.360
Hyderabad	-	113	105	.143	.128
Kolkata	.29	.77	.25	.292	.266
Lucknow	.12	.88	.40	.302	-
Mumbai	.19	.88	.36	.247	.312
Pune	.81	.27	.84	.103	.107
Visakhapatnam	.09	.47	.44	.75	.89

In observation made at 4.00 p.m. Siliguri, West Bengal, recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 42, indicating a severe level of pollution. In contrast, Mahara, Madhya Pradesh recorded a healthy AQI score of 47.

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor □ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Use biodegradable grow bags, nurseries told

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Plastic grow bags used to plant saplings in nurseries will no longer be allowed in government afforestation projects.

The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC), an apex body that decides on permitting the felling of trees in forests for industrial activities, recommended that "...State governments/Union Territory administrations should ensure that the cost model prepared for CA/Penal CA shall incorporate the cost of alternative biodegradable bags in place of po-

District judge postings only via promotion

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday held that subordinate judicial officers cannot apply or compete for direct appointment as district judge even if they have previous experience of seven years as an advocate. The only way to become a District Judge is via promotion in accordance with the rules under Article 234 and proviso to Article 309, a Bench led by Justice Arun Mishra declared in an 83-page judgment.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ROCK MECHANICS

(An Autonomous Research Institute under Ministry of Mines, Govt of India)

Eshwar Nagar, Banashankari 2nd Stage, Bengaluru-560 070

Karnataka, India Ph: 080-26934400, 26934402-14

Fax: 080-26934401, email: dto@nirm.in, Web: www.nirm.in

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RESEARCH PROGRAMME ON ROCK MECHANICS

National Institute of Rock Mechanics (NIRM)



Secrecy hurts

Opacity in the time of an outbreak is sure to kill more people

From quick sequencing of the whole genome of the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 that causes COVID-19 – after alerting WHO in December 2019 about a cluster of pneumonia cases of unknown cause – to quickly developing viral diagnostic tests, China has done much to address the epidemic. As on Wednesday, mainland China had 74,185 cases and 2,004 deaths. Add to this the speed at which two new hospitals with 2,600 beds were built. Also, the many facilities that became temporary hospitals in the face of growing cases is testimony to China's ability to pull off the unimaginable in containing the epidemic. Whether the decision to shut down huge cities to halt the viral spread may have actually helped is debatable, but it is important to note that China has done a lot after the initial delay in reporting the disease. However, China, given its capabilities, could have contained the spread with very little effort and resources had it been transparent and acted on time. Apparently, China did not apply the lessons it learnt from the SARS outbreak despite strident global criticism. Downplaying and being secretive about public health issues, particularly novel virus outbreaks, as it found out during SARS, and then now, can be very counterproductive. This is in contrast to the way Kerala handled the Nipah virus outbreaks in 2018-19. Transparency and timely action helped the State contain the outbreaks within days, with few cases, deaths in 2018.

There is an eerie similarity between China's SARS outbreak response in 2002-03 and the current epidemic. If, during SARS, it initially withheld information and delayed by three months reporting it to WHO, in the case of COVID-19 it systematically downplayed its scale for nearly six weeks after pneumonia cases of unknown cause were first seen on December 8, 2019. Shockingly, even as it reported the case cluster to WHO on December 31, and the wet market, thought to be the outbreak hotspot, was closed on January 1, people were kept in the dark. In fact, eight doctors who sounded an early alarm were detained for "spreading rumours". Ironically, even as about 900 patients presented with symptoms each day by late December, as a daily reported, official numbers stayed the same. In fact, after initially reporting 44 cases to WHO, the numbers were reduced to 41 on January 11 and continued to remain the same till January 16, when the city and province's annual political congress ended. Even on January 16, WHO was informed of only "limited" human spread, thus putting more people at infection risk. The cases reported began rising slowly since January 17 to reach 121 on January 19 when a community dinner was held in Wuhan. It took a Chinese epidemiologist's revelation the next day about the outbreak's severity for Wuhan to start acting decisively. The lesson is that in the event of an outbreak, secrecy is a killer and transparency the saviour.

Infinite crisis

Afghanistan is no closer to peace after the declaration of Ashraf Ghani as the President

The Afghan Independent Election Commission's much-delayed announcement that President Ashraf Ghani is the winner of the September 28 Presidential election is expected to deepen the political crisis in the war-torn country. That it took almost five months to declare the official results – he secured a narrow victory with 50.64% of votes against his main opponent Abdullah Abdullah's 39.52% – itself points to the seriousness of the crisis. Mr. Abdullah has called the results fraudulent and vowed to form a parallel government. If he does so, it would undermine the already feeble Afghan administration whose writ does not stretch beyond the main urban centres. For the Afghan voter, this is a *déjà vu* moment. Five years ago, Mr. Ghani was declared winner of the election but Mr. Abdullah refused to accept the result. The then U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, brokered a power-sharing agreement, which allowed Mr. Ghani to take over the presidency and made Mr. Abdullah the government Chief Executive. And throughout the five years, they were at odds with each other, while the Taliban steadily expanded across the country's hinterlands and stepped up attacks on its city centres. Unsurprisingly, only less than a fourth of registered voters turned up in September, raising questions about faith in the whole exercise.

Worse, the infighting comes at a time when the U.S. is near a Taliban agreement. Initial reports suggest that U.S. President Trump has given the go-ahead to its signing if the insurgents reduce violence for a seven-day test period. The deal would see the U.S.'s Afghan troop pull-back, winding down America's longest war and leaving the Taliban and the Afghan government to start direct talks for a final settlement. The problem, however, is that even with an American troops presence, the Afghan government had never been able to take control of the security situation. The U.S. excluded the government from its direct talks with the Taliban as the insurgents do not see the government as Afghanistan's legitimate rulers. U.S. withdrawal would invariably weaken the government, aiding the Taliban even before the talks start. The disputed poll results and chronic political infighting would weaken the administration further. How will the government defend the Constitution or any of the post-Taliban achievements if it is going to negotiate with a resurgent Taliban from a position of such weakness? All involved parties in the conflict seem to be missing the big picture. The U.S. just wants to get out of a lost war. Mr. Ghani wants to retain his presidency. Mr. Abdullah may want to make sure there is power sharing with the Opposition. What is lost in these narrow, self-interest-driven moves is the collective quest for defeating the extremists and rebuilding Afghanistan.

The missing piece in India's defence jigsaw puzzle

The country needs a clearly articulated white paper on its defence needs which sets out its strategic concerns



M.K. NARAYANAN

Undoubtedly, we are living through a moment of decisive change and turbulence. This geopolitical period is perhaps the most troubled since the final decades of the 20th century. Hence, there exists a vital need to adopt right strategic choices. According to 2018 data, India occupies the fourth place in military expenditure across the world, behind the U.S., China, and Saudi Arabia. This does not mean that India has no further need to increase its stock of state-of-the-art weapons. What is needed, nevertheless, is sober reflection and a cost-benefit analysis, to ensure that the amounts expended are in tune with our strategic requirements.

Defence deals in the pipeline
This is an opportune moment to undertake such a cost-benefit analysis. The first lot of Rafale fighter jets are expected shortly. The final deal on the 200 Kamov Ka-226 light utility helicopters from Russia is in advanced stages and expected to be signed soon. In October 2018, India and Russia had signed a \$5.4-billion mega deal for the S-400 Triumph Air Defence System. Under contemplation today are yet another set of high-value U.S. defence deals, including additional purchases of P-8I Maritime Reconnaissance Aircraft and Apache Attack Helicopters. According to estimates, the total worth of defence equipment purchased from the U.S. alone since 2007 is in the region of \$17-billion.

On the eve of U.S. President Donald Trump's visit to India, a further spurt in defence purchases is anticipated. Speculation is rife that India and the U.S. would sign

a deal for the National Advanced Surface to Air Missile System (NASAMS-II), intended as part of a multi-layered missile shield to protect Delhi. The U.S. side is also hoping for two more mega defence deals, worth \$3.5-billion to be signed for 24 MH-60 Romeo Multi Mission Helicopters for the Navy and an additional six AH-64E Apache Attack Helicopters for the Army. (India's Cabinet Committee on Security, on Wednesday, cleared the MH-60 helicopter deal.)

Given India's rising global profile, and with two major adversaries on its borders, India needs to be fully prepared. What is lacking in the defence jigsaw puzzle, however, is a well considered and clearly articulated white paper on India's defence needs, that sets out its strategic concerns, how it is positioning itself to meet these challenges, and the putative costs of meeting the country's defence needs.

Pakistan, China threats

Several nations undertake such exercises. In India, exercises of this kind are sometimes undertaken, but they suffer from a lack of clarity and are restricted in scope. They contain vague references to the threat posed by China and Pakistan, but there is clearly more to India's defence needs than exercises in military hagiography. What is required is a well formulated defence white paper, putting the different threats and dangers the nation faces in perspective, alongside steps taken to meet these challenges.

In the case of Pakistan, the threat motif is, no doubt, obvious. India's political and defence establishment are on record that India can easily defeat Pakistan, even if a "weaker" Pakistan possesses "nuclear teeth". Yet, while this makes for excellent copy, a great deal of effort is called for to explain to the public, the true nature of the threat posed by Pakistan, and why India is so confident of



FIL PHOTO/AP
beating back the Pakistani challenge.

Meeting the military, strategic and economic challenge from China is an entirely different matter. China is not Pakistan, and while China and Pakistan may have established an axis to keep India in check, explaining the nature of the threat posed by China to India is a complex task that needs to be undertaken with care and caution.

Understanding Beijing

To begin with, there are many experts who express doubts as to whether China intends today to pursue its 19th Century agenda, or revert to its belief in 'Tian Xia'.

Undoubtedly under China's President Xi Jinping, China aims to be a great power and an assertive one at that. India's defence planners should, however, carefully assess whether there are degrees of "assertiveness" in China's behavioural patterns. There is little doubt that regarding its claim to areas falling within the 'nine-dash lines' (the first island chain), China is unwilling to make compromises. Whether this applies to other regions of Asia and the Indo-Pacific, calls for an in-depth study. It would be premature for India without undertaking such an analysis, to adhere to a common perception that China is intent on enforcing a Sino-centric world order in which India and other countries would necessarily have to play a secondary role.

If after undertaking such an "analysis", it appears that China does not pose a direct threat to India's existence, notwithstanding the fact that India is its main rival

in Asia, then India's political, strategic and military planners need to come up with a different set of alternatives. In recent years, unfortunately, much of India's strategic thinking regarding China's aggressive behaviour has been coloured by that of the U.S. and the West, though it is a proven fact that China has not used lethal military force abroad since the 1980s.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) does convey an impression that China seeks to put itself at the centre of the world. The speed with which many of the steps to progress the BRI are being taken, again conveys an impression that China is intent on shrinking the physical and psychological distance between Europe and East Asia. This does not, however, necessarily mean that China is preparing to confront individual countries in Asia, such as India, which do not subscribe to the BRI.

A defence white paper would provide a more definitive answer to such issues. A detailed exercise to assess whether China is indeed a threat, rather than a challenge, to India should prove invaluable. It is possible that a detailed study may indicate that China understands that there are limits to its strength and capabilities. Several instances of late, have shown the frailties in China's policies – Hong Kong, Taiwan, and even Xinjiang are instances that indicate that China has its own Achilles heel. Consequently, China may not be ready, for quite some time at least, to seek a direct confrontation with India.

A closer look at Beijing's policies, undertaken as part of a defence white paper, may also indicate that rather than a "conflict-prone" role, China is more intent on an "influence-peddling" one. This is important from India's point of view. Already there is one school of thought that believes that Beijing is better at converting its economic heft into strategic influence, rather than employing force beyond certain

prescribed areas.

If this view is espoused by a defence white paper then, despite the vexed border dispute between India and China, the two countries could try and arrive at a subliminal understanding about respective spheres of influence. Today, one of India's major concerns is that China is attempting to intrude into its sphere of influence in South Asia, and the first and second concentric circles of India's interest areas, such as Afghanistan and parts of West Asia. The defence white paper might well provide a strategic paradigm, in which India and China agree to peacefully co-exist in many areas, leaving aside conflict zones of critical importance to either, thus ensuring a more durable peace between them.

One other outcome that the defence white paper could attempt is: whether China views geo-economics as the primary arena of competition today. China has invested heavily in artificial intelligence, robotics and bio-technology, and perhaps, India needs to recognise that rather than blacklisting Chinese technology Tech firms, (which could prove counter-productive) there exist avenues for cooperation, paving the way for better state-to-state relations.

A focus on domestic politics

A final word. The defence white paper needs to underscore that a country's domestic politics are an important pointer to a stable foreign policy. There could be different schools of thoughts within a nation, but equilibrium needs to be maintained if it is not to adversely impact a nation's foreign policy imperatives. An impression that the country is facing internal strains could encourage an adversary, to exploit our weaknesses. This is a critical point that the defence white paper needs to lay stress on.

M.K. Narayanan is a former National Security Adviser and a former Governor of West Bengal

A Trump India visit, in campaign mode

With a trade deal unlikely, New Delhi must calibrate the costs and benefits of the U.S. President's political tour



HARSH V. PANT &
KASHISH PARPIANI

During U.S. President Donald Trump's maiden visit to India on February 24-25, the U.S. and India were initially expected to sign a limited trade deal. Over the past three years, U.S.-India trade tensions have been escalating despite America's trade deficit with India beginning to narrow and it being less than a tenth of the U.S.'s trade deficit with China.

As trade negotiations stalled, the Trump administration levied steel and aluminium tariffs on India, revoked India's benefits under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) programme, briefly contemplated limiting H-1B visas quota for Indians to 15% due to divergences on e-commerce policy, and raised the possibility of a Section 301 investigation into India's tariff/non-tariff barriers to coerce India to eliminate practices that impede U.S. exports.

Defence package

India has reportedly finalised a defence package worth \$3.5-billion for 24 MH-60R Seahawk maritime multi-role helicopters and six AH-64E Apache attack helicopters. In exchange, the expectation for India was the restoration of benefits under the GSP programme – under which, Indian exports

worth \$5.7-billion to the U.S. enjoyed duty-free status (2017).

However, a day after Mr. Trump's visit dates were announced, the United States Trade Representative (USTR) released a formal notice on eliminating a host of countries from its methodology for countervailing duty (CVD) investigations. India was removed from the list of developing countries that "are exempt from investigations into whether they harm American industry with unfairly subsidised exports". With this move, the U.S. essentially closed the door on reinstating India's benefits under the GSP, a preferential arrangement meant only for developing countries.

The timing of this move suggests Mr. Trump's motivations pertaining to India's visage have little to do with tempering bilateral frictions. Instead, political motivations seem to be writ large. New Delhi will have to carefully calibrate the costs and benefits of Mr. Trump's move.

'America first'

Earlier this month, the U.S. Senate voted to acquit Trump on two articles of impeachment – abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. It was an expected outcome, as polarisation in American politics has accentuated with the U.S. Congress being divided into two partisan strongholds – the Democrats in charge of the House of Representatives and Republicans in the Senate. However, given the fact that the impeachment proceedings prolonged well into an election year, the American

electorate has not heard the last of it just yet. Mr. Trump was alleged to have sought a *quid pro quo* over U.S. military aid to Ukraine, in exchange for Ukraine's assistance in acquiring dirt on former U.S. Vice-President and now Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden.

In the upcoming elections, the allegation is expected to feature prominently in the Democrats' attempt to deride the Trump administration's values-benefit, transactional conduct of U.S. foreign policy. Concurrently, Mr. Trump has begun to hail his Senate acquittal as a matter of total exoneration. Moreover, in discrediting Democrats' criticism on Mr. Trump's conduct of American international relations in general, his re-election campaign is sure to outline the supposed gains of the "America First" world view.

It is here that a potential trade deal with "tariff king" India would be listed among other renewed partial/complete trade deals such as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA); renegotiated trade terms with South Korea, and Japan; and the "Phase One" deal with China, as instances of vindication. For instance, just days before the Democrats' caucus in Iowa, Mr. Trump held a rally in Des Moines, Iowa. Citing his renewed trade deals and the Demo-

crats' opposition to his approach of exacting them, Mr. Trump said, "We're going to win the great state of Iowa and it's going to be a historic landslide." He added, "And if we don't win, your farms are going to hell."

'Namaste, Trump'

Moreover, with the India visit, the U.S. President has expressed his exhilaration over "millions and millions of people" that are expected to attend the "Namaste, Trump" event in Ahmedabad. With its pomp and ceremony, it is expected to be the Indian iteration of the "Howdy, Modi!" rally held late last year in Houston. Evidently, the same was an attempt to court the 270,000-strong Indian American community in the emerging battleground state of Texas. Similarly, the rally in Gujarat also holds relevance in terms of Mr. Trump's political arithmetic for 2020. In visiting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home turf, one can see the American President's attempt to mobilise the Indian American community by showcasing his proximity to Mr. Modi's India.

Mr. Trump's political motivations notwithstanding, it would be prudent for India to not let the visit reflect as a partisan endorsement for his re-election. In recent years, American political polarisation has begun to erode the once-iron clad bipartisan consensus on U.S. foreign policy. In case of Congressional bipartisanship on India, that schism has emerged also due to the apparent partisan fervour of the "Howdy, Modi!" rally and

House Democrats' rising apprehensions on the communications lockdown in Kashmir.

Challenges for India could worsen in the coming years. If re-elected, Mr. Trump will possibly double-down on his will to seek renewed trade deals. At which point, remainder issues under U.S.-India trade ties could witness heightened tensions. Or, Congressional Democrats' apprehensions may assume heightened vigour. Even in their worst-case scenario in 2020 of not winning back the White House, they are expected to, at the very least, chip away at the Republicans' already slim majority in the Senate.

Moreover, working towards reinstating a certain sense of Indian neutrality on American polarisation would also make sense from the standpoint of the Senate entering an era of minimal majorities. The Republicans' slim majority of 53-47, has opened the door to defections by legislators who do not always identify with the Trump agenda or do not mind crossing the aisle on initiatives that constrain Mr. Trump's foreign policy decision-making.

Thus, with Mr. Trump's visit, New Delhi must ensure its projection as a net gain for the bilateral relationship at-large – and not merely an extension of the U.S. President's re-election campaign.

Harsh V. Pant is Director, Studies at Observer Research Foundation (ORF), New Delhi and Professor of International Relations at King's College London. Kashish Parpiani is Research Fellow at ORF, Mumbai



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

No entry

The recent actions of the government as far as diplomacy and foreign policy are concerned, suggest that it suffers from a low-esteem syndrome (Editorial, "Visa power", February 19). Disproportionate and amateurish reactions further buttress the view in the world's eyes that something is amiss. Rather than making intolerance its Achilles heel, the government needs to display more statesmanship and magnanimity towards dissenters. It needs to learn

to take criticism in its stride or else a likely bracketing with countries such as Saudi Arabia and North Korea may not be far away.

DEEPAK SINGHAL,
Chennai

Kashmir beckons
The number of initiatives being taken by the administration in Kashmir to improve the economy as well as to generate employment cannot be dismissed. But unending communication curbs since August 5 as far as the common man is concerned has slowed down growth. It

is not surprising that such moves have only attracted criticism from other countries. Without a shadow of a doubt, tourism revenue has gone down substantially.

There is an inertness in the Valley especially as educational institutions and routine day-to-day life is far from normal. Unless systems are restored, efforts to attract investors will not even be tepid (Inside pages, "J&K woos investors with ample land", February 19).

R. SRIDHARAN,
Chennai

Vanishing birds

The findings of the study, 'The State of India's Birds 2020', should push us into protecting our pristine ecology. Growing urbanisation and the resultant concrete jungles have enormously impacted the avian population today. We should also cultivate bird feeding activity as a hobby. The concept of urban forestry needs to be promoted with adequate concerns for bird shelters and their feeding. Students need to be sensitised.

G. RAMASUBRAMANYAM,
Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

In Kerala, wetlands and indigenous flora are bird habitats. Quails, spotted doves, weaver birds and munias were abundant in villages till some years ago; wetland water hens and lapwings were also ubiquitous. Today, as 'development' destroys indigenous flora and wetlands, these birds are disappearing. Even after two

A mandate from the youthful multitudes

The youth and women of Delhi, not the leaders, set the tone for a resounding rejection of Hindutva



G.R. GOPINATH

The people have spoken in the Delhi election. So has Home Minister Amit Shah. He admitted earlier this month that provocative slogans by a few of his Cabinet colleagues and party members during the campaign may have contributed to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s loss. But he also wondered aloud in the same breath, "Who knows why the people of Delhi voted the way they did?" Was this an expression of genuine remorse or a show of disappointment?

Arvind Kejriwal won handsomely. But the victory of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and, more pertinently, the defeat of the BJP has a message that goes much beyond the results. The election was clearly a clash of two ideologies and a contest for two visions of India. One is about fashioning India into a 'Hindu' nation in the image of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) – the ideological fount of BJP – an image that is distinct from the idea and ethos of India and philosophy of Hinduism as enunciated in the Upanishads and Gita and interpreted by the likes of Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda and many eminent philosophers of the East and the West. It is a zealous, jingoistic and parochial interpretation of Hinduism called 'Hindutva' where nationalism and patriotism are equated to a subscription of the ironclad ideology that the BJP espouses. The other vision is composed of a universal spirit, a philosophy that embraces all creation. And the latter won.

Focus on livelihood issues
It is true that Mr. Kejriwal never openly drew a sword and invited Mr. Shah and Prime Minister Narendra Modi to a direct duel on the two ideologies but spoke mostly of issues pertaining to education, school, water, electricity and governance and delivery. And, in the end, the mandate was unambiguous – voters of Delhi soundly rejected Hindutva forces this time. While Mr. Shah and



A first time voter after casting vote in the Delhi Assembly election in Old Delhi on February 8. ■ PTI

his party invoked their own version of Ram and equated those with a differing, nobler idea of Ram to Pakistan sympathisers, Mr. Kejriwal paid obeisance to Hanuman but without any collateral demands of loyalty. The BJP turned this election into a Hindu-Muslim, nationalism-anti-nationalism referendum instead of a governance and developmental contest. And the party's chosen, proprietary 'god' clearly failed it.

In stark contrast to the BJP's interpretation of Hinduism stands Mahatma Gandhi, a devout and proud Hindu and, at the same time, an embodiment of love for all his fellow beings. Embracing Hinduism for the Mahatma was never in conflict with subscribing to elements of Islamic or Christian schools of thought.

True, Mr. Kejriwal is no Gandhi. He is erratic and often abrasive and perennially in a confrontation mode. He has been criticised by intellectuals and secularists for not visiting Shaheen Bagh, Jawaharlal Nehru University or Jamia Millia Islamia and for dodging questions on the issues of anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act protests and police violence in the capital. During the campaign and later, Mr. Kejriwal remained astute and canny. Not crossing swords with Mr. Modi or Mr. Shah was a poll strategy for him. He won by controlling the narrative and, instead of playing into the hands of Mr. Shah, deftly navigating the minefield the BJP was trying to draw him into, and harping on the AAP's record on good governance

and issues of livelihood. And it was the BJP which side-stepped these burning issues – the 'Modi mantra' that in fact catapulted the BJP to power in 2014.

What influenced the voters

Yet, there is a larger pan-India message from this election. It is no longer the politicians who are steering the discourse and narrative on matters of serious import to the country. It is not the BJP that is in command now, though it succeeded through polarisation in the 2019 general elections; it is not Mr. Kejriwal either, though his victory brought relief and gave some insight into where the majority community stood on communal issues and what mattered to them; and it is certainly not the Congress Party, which is rudderless; or the regional chieftains, none of whom has a pan-India appeal or presence. It is not the courts or the intellectuals in command. It is the youth across the country and, of late, the women leading the fight against communal, divisive and hate politics, who are influencing the voters today. These agitators, with their stoic courage and resilience, are demanding justice and freedom to dissent and lighting up the torch of democracy. In a role reversal, they are inspiring the celebrities, intellectuals, and leaders of civil society and breathing hope and optimism where darkness and despair reigned before.

It is remarkable and laudable that these people have risen spontaneously in one voice. It seems as though uncannily and collectively, they have understood that the Opposition is incapable of speaking up for them. They have realised that they need to stand up for themselves against the arrogance, venality and might of the state that is threatening their very future and tearing up the marvellous and cohesive social fabric that held India together. There was a Gandhi, a Bose, a Patel, a Nehru against the British; a J.P. Narayan to take on the dictatorship of Indira Gandhi; an Anna against the UPA's corruption and crony politics but this time around, there is no one leader leading the movement. It is as though the sea has risen.

The people of this country are now under the spell of the youth – these are intrepid young men and women from every social strata and religious and caste denomination; these are the silent women whose silent protests are more eloquent than all the fiery speeches. It is these people who have left an impression on the voters and made an impact on their voting choices. This is the answer to Mr. Shah's bewildered remark at the recent summit: "Who knows why the people of Delhi voted the way they did?"

If the politicians care to listen to the message people have sent through the mandate in the Delhi election, it is this: Don't use religion for votes. Focus on governance. Create jobs. Improve standards of living of people. There are enough laws and provisions in the Constitution to deal with any kind of threats to the country. The many institutions and arms of the government, both at the State and Centre, can take care of the various, serious problems facing the country, including citizenship issues. Do not interfere with and influence the institutions. Don't demand allegiance to the ruling party. The people's allegiance is to the rule of law. Their fealty is to the Constitution.

The youth and women have risen and given hope for the country. If the politicians don't heed their warning and meet their demands they will surely rein the leaders in. Their gods, then, may not be enough to hoist them to power.

Captain G.R. Gopinath is a founder of Air Deccan and former member of the Aam Aadmi Party

By agreeing to Partition, Congress kept India united

Else, India would have been a fragmented entity

MOHAMMED AYOOB

It has become a fashion these days to blame the Congress for Partition. Certain sections of the right, who in fact became the prime beneficiaries of Partition, are the leading proponents of this thesis. Had Partition not taken place, the demographic exigencies of undivided India, with a Muslim population of 25%-30%; and five, and possibly six, Muslim majority provinces, among them Bengal and Punjab would have rendered the parties espousing Hindutva permanently irrelevant. But this is a topic for another time. If the Congress leadership, especially Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, had not accepted the division of the country, it could well have led to the dismemberment of India as we know it today. The reasons are as follows.

What was on offer as an alternative to Partition was the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946. This plan not only envisaged a loose federal structure with a very weak centre, it could be called a 'crypto-Pakistan plus'. It not only grouped provinces on the basis of religious majorities, it left the issue of the princely states' future as a matter of discussion between the princes and the weak centre that it envisioned. The central authority would have then had a very weak hand to play against the wily princely rulers, both Hindu and Muslim, who would have joined hands with each other and with the Muslim League in defence of their common interest to further weaken the centre.

Cabinet Mission Plan

Moreover, documentary evidence, especially the resolution of the Muslim League Council in June 1946 that accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan, proves that the Muslim League's acceptance was premised on the belief that the Plan was a stepping stone towards the ultimate formation of Pakistan, which to quote the resolution was its "unalterable objective". The League inferred this from the Cabinet Mission Plan's provision that said that "any Province by majority vote of its Legislative Assembly could call

for a reconsideration of the terms of the Constitution after an initial period of ten years and at ten-yearly intervals thereafter." Hence the Plan did not rule out the dissolution of the Union if provinces made a demand.

Furthermore, the working of the interim government formed in September 1946 made it clear that the Muslim League was bent on thwarting its smooth functioning. It was the feeling that the interim government was like a chariot being pulled in two different directions that convinced Patel that Partition was the only way to save India from becoming a totally dysfunctional state. In his own famous words, "In order to keep India united it must be divided." It was Patel who convinced Nehru that Partition was better than an eternally fragmented India.

Nehru, whose opposition to Partition was based on his unstinted commitment to secularism, which refused to encounter the idea of India being divided on communal lines, finally realised that his vision of a modern and strong Indian state could not be achieved with the Muslim League, in power in Bengal and Punjab, thwarting it at every step. With Patel and Nehru convinced of the necessity for Partition, the rest of the Congress Working Committee, except Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, who voted against it, and Maulana Azad, who abstained, accepted the plan.

Historical evidence based on impartial scholarship demonstrates that had the Congress Party not accepted the Partition plan, India today would have been a weak state and a divided polity barely able to keep itself together and constantly teetering on the brink of collapse. The Congress did a favour to the country by accepting its division in order to save it from collapse or dismemberment. This is a historically verifiable fact that cannot be refuted by partisan propaganda.

Mohammed Ayoob is University Distinguished Professor Emeritus of International Relations, Michigan State University



DATA POINT

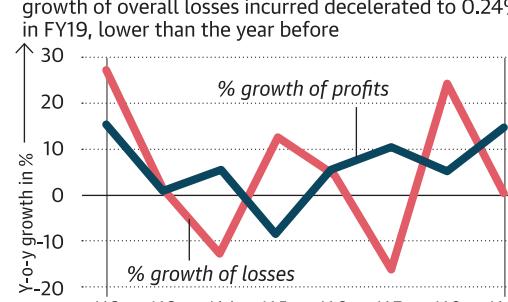
A good year for central firms

Financial year 2019 was relatively a better period for Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) in terms of profits. The share of firms which made profits increased in FY19 along with a sharp acceleration in the profit growth. However the downward spiral of consistent loss-makers such as BSNL and Air India continued. In the graphs, only profit/loss before exceptional or extraordinary items and taxes is considered. By Sravya C and Vignesh R

Profit-loss share of firms | Close to 71.5% of the CPSEs made profits in FY19. The share of such firms has improved in the recent years after dropping to over 66% in FY15. Graph shows the share of profit/loss-making CPSEs



Profit-loss growth rates | The year-on-year growth of overall profits by CPSEs accelerated to 14.61% in FY19, highest in the last six years. On the other hand, the growth of overall losses incurred decelerated to 0.24% in FY19, lower than the year before



Best and the worst | The Oil and Natural Gas Corporation was the best CPSE in terms of profit earned in FY19, whereas the BSNL was the worst in terms of losses incurred. Table shows top five profit-making and loss-making companies in FY19

Top 5	Profit (in ₹ Lakhs)	Bottom 5	Profit (in ₹ Lakhs)
ONGC	39,95,403	BSNL	-14,90,424
Indian Oil	25,12,692	Air India	-8,47,480
Power Grid Corporation	11,74,092	MTNL	-3,39,020
Coal India	10,56,242	Orissa Mineral Development	-63,914
Bharat Petroleum	10,43,962	Rashtriya Ispat Nigam	-53,229

Consistently poor	Year	BSNL	MTNL	Air India
BSNL's losses have surged in FY19 to more than ₹140 billion, a record unmatched in its history. Its losses in previous years pale in comparison. Air India's quantum of loss surged in FY19 after posing moderate losses in the years before.	FY 19	-149	-34	-85
	FY 18	-87	-30	-53
	FY 17	-48	-29	-41
	FY 16	-38	-28	-38
	FY 15	-88	-28	-59
	FY 14	-71	-33	-73
	FY 13	-80	-53	-64
	FY 12	-88	-41	-87
	FY 11	-66	-28	-73
	FY 10	-17	-34	-32
	FY 09	19	3	-55

Turning ships into museums

Decommissioned naval vessels can be given a makeover



STHANU R. NAIR

In the Union Budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a set of initiatives to enhance India's potential as a tourism and cultural destination. Among the proposals, the decision to set up a maritime museum at Lothal in Gujarat was especially noteworthy. However, when it comes to augmenting the country's maritime tourism potential by preserving retired naval vessels as museums, India's record has been weak.

Here, two decisions taken last year have implications for the idea of a maritime museum. First, the Tamil Nadu government in July decided to drop the project to preserve the decommissioned submarine INS Vaghi as a museum. Second, it was decided that the INS Viraat would be scrapped. Not long ago, in 2014, India's first aircraft carrier, the INS Vikrant, had met with a similar fate.

Creating employment
It makes tremendous economic sense to preserve decommissioned naval vessels, rather than scrapping them. In general, museums make an important contribution to the economy in many ways, for instance, by promoting tourism, creating jobs, contributing to government revenues and aiding the development of local communities.

A 2018 study titled 'Museums as Economic Engines' revealed that in the U.S., museums contribute \$50 billion every year to the Gross Domestic Product, provide jobs to 7,26,200 people and generate \$12 billion per year in tax revenue. Every \$100 of output generated in the museum sector generates an additional \$220 of output in other areas of the U.S. economy. Another study titled 'The Economic Impact of Museums in England' estimated that the direct economic impact of the museum sector in England was £2.64 billion in income, £1.45 billion in output and 38,165 in jobs.

A major challenge facing India is the need to generate adequate employment opportunities for the abundant youth population. Estimates show that in terms of employment elasticity, defined as the percentage change in employment for a one percentage point change in economic growth, services is an employment-intensive sector. Therefore, the focus should be on promoting services industries where employment potential is high. Tourism and allied industries fit into this requirement as they have proved to be top job-generating sectors across the world.

Captain G.R. Gopinath is a founder of Air Deccan and former member of the Aam Aadmi Party

Excellent museums often turn out to be a fine tourist attraction that draws in visitors, both local and overseas. They also act as places of historical value, preserving a country's heritage for future generations and offering knowledge to the public about the nation's history and culture. Military and maritime museums bring some added benefits – they can be used to honour military heroes, make the general public aware of the hardships faced by defence personnel and, also, inspire the younger generation to join the armed forces.

Partnering with private sector

When viewed from these angles, repurposing decommissioned submarines and aircraft carriers into museums makes economic and social sense. There are 60 such submarine-turned-museums in the U.S.; 11 in the U.K.; 10 in Russia and Germany and five in France. Similarly, many countries have preserved their retired naval warships as museums, with the U.S. again topping the list. India has been preserving only one naval vessel, the INS Kursura, as a submarine museum in Visakhapatnam.

A significant, and genuine, concern about naval vessel museums is the cost involved in their maintenance. They require both public and private funding and need to generate sufficient revenue. Private sector involvement in building cultural institutions has worked very well in advanced nations. There is no reason why, in today's India, this should not be possible.

Either through a nudge or a directive, the government can ensure that corporates allot a portion of their Corporate Social Responsibility spending towards conservation of heritage and culture.

That said, a mere display of retired naval vessels will not attract the desired number of visitors. For this, warship museums need to

FROM PAGE ONE

Trade deal with U.S. delayed, not stuck: govt.

On trade, the government conceded that talks between Mr. Lighthizer and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal had not been able to conclude even a "mini-deal" yet but held out the hope that Mr. Lightizer might still travel as part of Mr. Trump's delegation, and also held out the possibility that talks on a free trade agreement (FTA) will soon begin. Among other senior officials who may travel are Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, and adviser and son-in-law to the President Jared Kushner.

The 36-hour visit to India will begin on Monday when Air Force One touches down

in Ahmedabad and the Presidential couple will then fly to Agra to see the Taj at sunset, before flying into Delhi. On Tuesday, Mr. Trump will hold talks with Mr. Modi.

"This will be President Trump's fifth meeting with Prime Minister Modi in eight months [after Osaka, Biarritz, Houston, New York] – reflecting the renewed intensity of high-level bilateral engagement since the NDA government returned to power," Mr. Shringla who, as former Ambassador to the U.S., was responsible for organising those meetings, said. He called the relationship with the U.S. one of India's "most consequential relationships."

Here to find a solution, mediators tell protesters

The top court on Monday upheld the fundamental rights of women, children and others protesting at Shaheen Bagh, but expressed concern over blocking public areas like roads while voicing dissent.

"Democracy works on different views...you want to protest, no problem. Our limited concern is whether you could protest without blocking roads and entering public areas...with every right there comes a responsibility too," the court said while appointing the interlocutors to convey its apprehension over the road blockade and a suggestion to shift the protest site.

Several women, including college students, homemakers and the Shaheen Bagh dadas, put forth their reservations before the interlocutors. Some stated that the

current site would be vacated "within 30 minutes of the law being revoked", while others asked what the "guarantee was that the government will initiate a discussion" if the protesters moved to an alternate site.

Zainab, 19, told the interlocutors, "We are not celebrating anything here that we will keep shifting sites. Look at the kind of language that has been used by Ministers. Why are we being vilified like this? Initiation of a dialogue should come from the government's side. Is this a game that the Home Minister is playing with us? First he says he is ready to meet all and then we get stopped. We are going through mental trauma."

In response, Ms. Rama-chandran said, "A country that has daughters like you can never face any threat."

Ram Temple trust elects chairman

The meeting also decided that Nripendra Mishra, former Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will head a committee to take decisions regarding the actual construction of the temple.

A State Bank of India account will be opened at the Ayodhya branch of the bank in the trust's name. Swami Govind Dev Giriji Maharaj will be the treasurer of the trust. Signatures of Swami Govind Dev Giriji Maharaj, Mr. Rai or Dr. Anil Mishra (two of three) will suffice to operate the account.

Delhi-based chartered accountancy firm V. Shankar Aiyar and Company will be the accountants for the trust. Earlier in the day, it was notified that senior Uttar Pradesh bureaucrat Awanish Awasthi and Ayodhya District Magistrate Anuj Jha would be the State's representatives in the trust. Gyanesh Kumar of the Home Ministry was present at the meeting.

Senior advocate K. Parasaran, Swami Vishwapa-sana Teertha, Swami Vasudeva

vanandji Saraswati, Yugpurush Swami Parmanjali Maharaj and Kameshwar Chaupal, members of the trust, were present at the first meeting, along with those named above.

While no date has been announced for temple construction to begin, sources told *The Hindu* that a date in April is being favoured. According to a statement issued by the trust, the meeting began with a vote of thanks "to all Saints and Ram Bhakts from 1528 onwards" who strove for the temple. The resolution also expressed thanks to the Narendra Modi government as well as the Uttar Pradesh government for its "constructive role" over the issue and repaid full faith in the constitutional institutions and law courts of the country.

While the initial announcement of the trust did not include its current chairperson and general secretary, they were added later with the trust being empowered to do so. No date for the next meeting has been officially announced.

Collegium recommends transfer of 3 HC judges

Bombay High Court's Justice Ranjit V. More has been approved for transfer to the Meghalaya High Court, while the Collegium has recommended that Justice Ravinder Vijaykumar Malimath of the Karnataka High Court be moved to the Uttarakhand High Court.

In January, the Supreme Court had stayed a decision by a Bombay High Court Bench, led by Justice More, to allow the shifting of HDIL promoters Rakesh Wadhwani and Sarang Wadhwani – accused in the multi-crore Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank scam case – from Arthur Road Jail to their Bandra East residence.

Judges recommended for transfer can request the Collegium to reconsider its decision.

likely functioned for at least some time as the acting Chief Justice of the High Court.

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Judges recommended for transfer can request the Collegium to reconsider its decision.

Centre to form new law panel

Commission has been tasked with the review of existing legislation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday gave its approval to set up the 22nd Law Commission.

The Law Commission advises the government on complex legal issues. The term of the previous law panel ended last August.

The Law Ministry will now notify the new panel, which will have a three-year term.

Apart from a full-time chairperson, the commission will have four full-time members, including a member-secretary.

The Law and Legislative Secretaries in the Law Ministry will be ex-officio members of the commission.

"It will also have not more than five part-time members," an official statement said.

A retired Supreme Court judge or Chief Justice of a High Court will head the commission.

"The Law Commission shall, on a reference made to



Due process: Prakash Javadekar, flanked by Narendra Singh Tomar and Smriti Irani, announcing the Cabinet's approval for a new Law Commission in New Delhi on Wednesday. ■PTI

it by the Central Government or *suo motu*, undertake research in law and review of existing laws in India for making reforms and enacting new legislation. It shall also undertake studies and research for bringing reforms in the justice delivery systems for elimination of delay in procedures, speedy disposal of cases, reduction in cost of litigation, etc.," the statement said.

Originally formed in 1955, the commission is reconstituted every three years and

so far, 277 reports have been submitted to the government.

Working papers

The previous Law Commission, under Justice B.S. Chauhan (retd.), had submitted reports and working papers on key issues such as simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies and a uniform civil code.

While it supported simultaneous elections, the commission had said the time for a common code was not ripe. In 2015, a proposal was mooted to make the law panel into a permanent body either through an Act of Parliament or an executive order (resolution of the Union Cabinet).

The move was shelved after the Prime Minister's Office preferred the existing system to continue. In 2010, the then UPA government had prepared a draft Cabinet note to give statutory status to the commission but the idea did not take off.

Empowered group to fix tech woes

Dual-use applications will be studied

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet has approved the setting up of an empowered technology group to help address issues such as "sub-optimal industrial development".

Among the key issues the 12-member panel headed by the Principal Scientific Adviser will address is "dual-use technologies not being optimally commercialised", the government said in a note. Dual-use technologies have civilian and military applications.

The group, whose members' names have not been disclosed, is expected to develop in-house expertise in aspects of policy and use of emerging technologies, and ensure sustainability of technology being developed at public sector organisations.

The government said the group would also work to ensure that India had an up-

dated map of technology and technology products available and being developed; develop an "indigenisation road map" for selected key technologies; encourage Union Ministries and departments and State governments to develop in-house expertise in policy; and use aspects of emerging technologies.

Union Minister Prakash Javadekar said at a press briefing that the decision to set up such a group was based on recommendations of a committee led by the Principal Scientific Adviser.

Ashutosh Sharma, Secretary, Department of Science and Technology, who confirmed that he is in the group, said the move would be useful to coordinate research. "Say I have a technology and would like to find what other organisations could benefit from it... this mechanism is welcome," he said.

BJP MLA in U.P. named in rape case

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

A BJP MLA in Uttar Pradesh and six others were booked on the charge of rape, the police in Bhadohi district said on Wednesday.

The First Information Report was filed at the Bhadohi police station against MLA Ravindra Nath Tripathi, his nephews and other relatives.

Superintendent of Police Ram Badan Singh said a woman had alleged that in 2017, the MLA and his six accomplices kept her at a hotel for a month and repeatedly raped her. She also said she was forced to undergo an abortion.

ART Bill proposes national registry of clinics

Board will formulate minimum standards for labs and lay down code of conduct for personnel

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the Assisted Reproductive Technology Regulation Bill, 2020 to monitor medical procedures used to assist people to achieve pregnancy.

The Bill provides for a national Board which will lay down a code of conduct to be observed by those operating clinics.

It will also formulate minimum standards for laboratory and diagnostic equipment and practices to be followed by human resources employed by clinics and banks. The States and Union Territories will also have to form

State Boards and State authorities within three months of the notification of the proposed legislation.

Under the proposed law, a national registry and registration authority will maintain a database to assist the national Board to perform its functions, according to a statement issued by the Health and Family Welfare Ministry.

Strict punishment
The Bill also proposes stringent punishment for those who practise sex selection, indulge in sale of human embryos or gametes and those who operate rackets.

"India has one of the high-

Regulating ART



Illustration of in vitro fertilisation

- It proposes stringent punishment for those who attempt to control the offspring's sex, sell embryos or gametes
- As of Feb. 20, there are 517 ART clinics under the National Registry of ART clinics and banks in India, according to the ICMR

est growths in the number ART centres and ART cycles performed every year. India has become one of the major

centres of this global fertility industry, with reproductive medical tourism becoming a significant activity. This has

also introduced a plethora of legal, ethical and social issues; yet, there is no standardisation of protocols and reporting is still very inadequate," the Ministry added.

Confidentiality clause

"The Bill will also ensure confidentiality of intending couples and protect the rights of the child," Union Minister Smriti Irani said at a media conference on Wednesday. She also said that in the Surrogacy Regulation Bill 2020, the government was looking to restrict the maximum age of surrogates from "above the marriageable age" to 50 years.

Scrap CVC appointment: Congress

Alleging that the process was vitiated, party demands fresh selection

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday demanded the scrapping of the appointment of Sanjay Kothari as the Chief Vigilance Commissioner (CVC), saying the entire process was vitiated and demanding a fresh selection process.

At a media conference at the party headquarters, senior leader Manish Tewari said that both "procedure and propriety were completely thrown away at the level of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister."

How can an applicant be a member of the Search Committee? It is bizarre that you are a judge in your own case... Procedure and propriety was completely thrown away at the level of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister.

MANISH TEWARI,
CONGRESS SPOKESPERSON



be a member of the search committee? It is bizarre that you are a judge in your own case," Mr. Tewari said.

At Monday's meeting of the high-power committee presided by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, when Congress leader in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury had raised this issue, Mr. Modi is learnt to have instructed officials to follow norms.

Referring to such news re-

ports, Mr. Tewari said, "What does the Prime Minister do? He pulls out a paper from his pocket and chooses someone who was not even an applicant."

Mr. Tewari said the process now had not only been vitiated but described it as "illegal and unconstitutional". "Even a peon in the government is not selected this way," he said.

"What does the govern-

ment want to hide that the CVC has to be their person," he asked.

"We, therefore, demand that the process of appointment be scrapped in its entirety and a fresh process is undertaken."

Asked if the Congress is going to legally challenge the appointment, Mr. Tewari said the matter was serious and sensitive and "all options are open".

Mr. Tewari also referred to a purported statement made by U.S. President Donald Trump ahead of his India visit.

"I saw a video clip where President Trump was saying India has not treated them [U.S.] well. I think it's an insult to our country and hope that the Ministry of External Affairs will respond," he said.

SC keen on listening to Gadkari on e-mobility

CJI later settles for an affidavit

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde on Wednesday orally expressed the Supreme Court's keenness to have Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari attend a hearing and explain his plans to induct vehicles running on clean fuels such as electricity and hydrogen.

However, Additional Solicitor-General A.N.S. Nadkarni said a Minister's presence in the court would give rise to political speculation.

The exchange happened during the hearing of a petition filed by the Centre for Public Interest Litigation, represented by advocate Prashant Bhushan, for timely implementation of the Electric Vehicle Policy (EVP) and the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles (FAME) scheme.

Chief Justice Bobde clarified that the court's invitation to the Minister should not be misinterpreted as a summons, order or indictment. It was merely because the court wanted to have a holistic picture about the policy to shift to electric vehicles, and the Minister would be the best person to give it.

"Your Minister has been making many statements about the introduction of CNG [compressed natural gas], electric vehicles, etc. Officers may be responsible but they may not have the whole picture..." he told Mr. Nadkarni.

The court assuaged the government side, saying "in case you are worried about the political angle, we are not doing this at thehest of the petitioner or Mr. Bhushan. He is not going to argue with the Minister. We



Nitin Gadkari has been pushing for the use of electric vehicles.

want to make it very clear that we are not summoning him."

Comprehensive affidavit

Mr. Nadkarni said the government would first like to file a comprehensive affidavit on its projects.

Later, the CJI indicated that if the Minister could not add anything useful, then he could instruct whoever was responsible to assist the court. He sought the affidavit in four weeks.

"There are cases concerning the bursting of firecrackers during Deepavali, which comes only once a year. But vehicular pollution is an everyday phenomenon. It is a persistent problem and source of pollution. Nobody is talking of this most polluting thing," he said.

If vehicular pollution was resolved, it would substantially reduce the impact of other forms of toxicity in the

Copter deal okayed ahead of Trump trip

\$2.4 billion agreement to buy 24 MH-60Rs is one among the various defence deals

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

Days before U.S. President Donald Trump's visit to India, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, met on Wednesday and cleared the procurement of 24 MH-60R multi-role helicopters for the Navy worth around \$2.4 billion.

While other defence deals are expected to be announced, they are in various stages of procurement.

The MH-60R helicopter deal has been approved by the CCS, a defence source said, adding it was ready to be signed after crossing hurdles. The deal is expected to be announced during Mr.



Timely buy: MH-60R will help to partially ease the Navy's shortage of helicopters. ■ AFP

Trump's visit will help to partially ease the Navy's shortage of helicopters on its front-line warships.

MH-60R was earlier selected through a competitive process for 16 helicopters,

with an option for eight more. But the deal fell through owing to pricing issues and other developments. Thereafter, the tender was cancelled. A fresh tender for 24 MH-60R hel-

icopters was floated later and processed through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) route of the U.S. government.

Another deal close to conclusion is of six additional AH-64E Apache attack helicopters for the Army. They will cost around \$930 million. The Apaches from Boeing are being sourced through the direct commercial sale and the Foreign Military Sales route from the U.S. side.

Also under discussion is the sale of Large Aircraft Infrared Counter Measure (LAIRCM), a missile defence system for large aircraft (such as those used by VIPs). A missile defence system,

Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS), which was approved last week by the U.S. State Department and which is now with the U.S. Congress for its consideration for up to 30 days, is also in the works. That potential sale, which could be valued up to \$1.867 billion, is likely to be taken up during U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper's visit to India, which will likely happen in March.

It is understood that Mr. Trump will push for U.S. solutions to fighter jet competitions of the Indian Army and Navy during his trip.

(With inputs from Sriram Lakshman in Washington, DC)

U.S. Congressmen concerned over Kashmir

Ami Bera and George Holding discuss contentious issues with the Indian government

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Days before President Donald Trump's visit to India, two senior U.S. Congressmen have expressed their concerns to the government over the situation in Kashmir and protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

Representative Ami Bera, who is the Chairman of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee on Asia-Pacific, and Representative George Holding, who is a co-chair of the India Caucus in the House, were part of a bipartisan delegation visiting the region, and said they had discussed both contentious issues with the Indian government, and the U.S.'s plans for Afghanistan and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific.

"It is our desire and inter-



Ami Bera, left, and George Holding



est to see a resolution [to the Kashmir issue] and a return to normalcy. We did convey that [to the government] and I expressed my concerns over the continued detention of political prisoners in Kashmir," Mr. Bera, who belongs to the Democratic Party, told a small group of journalists during their visit to Delhi.

Mr. Holding, a Republican Congressman, said he shared Mr. Bera's assessment

and concerns, but added that he was "heartened" by the description given by government officials of the economic redevelopment plans for Jammu and Kashmir.

The statements by the Congressmen are significant not just because they were made on the eve of Mr. Trump's visit to India, but because they were made after they had been briefed by the U.S. embassy officials on

the situation in Jammu and Kashmir after the amendments to Article 370 last August.

Last month, U.S. Ambassador Kenneth Juster had been part of a delegation of envoys that were taken to Srinagar and Jammu to assess the levels of "normalcy" on the ground. The Congressmen said they also would like to take a Congressional delegation to J&K at the earliest.

Normalcy steps
However, a government source said that during their meetings with the government, the two congressmen had acknowledged that the situation in J&K was very different from last year, and had been told about various initiatives to restore normalcy in the Union Territory. On

Tuesday, the Ministry of External Affairs tweeted that Mr. Bera and Mr. Holding had met Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla and "discussed strengthening ties & regional developments," but didn't give any further details.

Speaking to journalists, Mr. Bera said they had also spoken about the protests against the CAA and the "pushback against it". "It was important to speak to senior Indian officials to get their assessment of the reasons for the decision. As an Indian-American, my pride comes from India's founding as a secular democracy," Mr. Bera said, adding that as the largest democracy and the oldest democracy, India and the U.S. shared the understanding that "protecting minorities is important".

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Police open probe into Geelani videos

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

The J&K police have initiated an inquiry to find out who smuggled two videos of the ailing 90-year-old Hurriyat chairman Syed Ali Geelani, in which he made his "last wish", from his Srinagar house and managed to send them across the border.

The police have detained Mr. Geelani's cook and a helper to question them on who video-graphed it and how the videos managed to bypass the CRPF-J&K police scrutiny at the gates. The separatist leader has been under house arrest since 2010. Only a close relative is allowed to see him.

The videos forced the authorities to install more CCTV cameras in and around his residence in Srinagar's Hyderpora.

Three Hizbul militants killed in Tral gunfight

'Commander' was among those shot dead

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

Three militants of the Hizbul Mujahideen were killed in a gunfight at Sherabad in Tral, Pulwama, on Wednesday.

Mr. Singh said security agencies would continue enhanced vigil in the run-up to U.S. President Donald Trump's visit to India.

He said Pakistan was continuing its attempts to misguide the youth. "Pakistan continues to use VPNs [virtual private networks], and even terrorists killed in the Nagrota operation used a VPN to send across pictures from the encounter site," he said.

Mr. Singh said a Pakistan drone flew for 11 to 12 minutes over Border Security Force (BSF) pickets along the International Border in Jammu on Tuesday. "It was fired at and returned," he said.

Mr. Singh said 23 mil-

tants had been killed this year. Nearly 40 overground workers (those who offer support to the militants) were arrested.

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Russia, Turkey spar over Syria operation

Erdogan threatens to attack advancing Syrian troops; Kremlin warns against the 'worst scenario'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ISTANBUL

Turkey and Russia exchanged warnings on Wednesday after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened an "imminent" operation in Syria to end the regime's brutal assault on the last rebel enclave.

Syrian aid workers called urgently for a ceasefire and international help for nearly a million people fleeing the regime onslaught in the country's northwestern Idlib province – the biggest wave of displaced civilians in the nine-year conflict.

Turkey, supporter of some rebel groups in Idlib, has been pushing for a renewed ceasefire in talks with Russia, which backs the Syrian regime. Ankara is eager to prevent another flood of refugees into its territory adding to the 3.7 million Syrians it already hosts.

The Syrian NGO Alliance said displaced people are "escaping in search of safety only to die from extreme weather conditions and lack of available resources".

"We have hundreds and thousands of people who are fleeing... not just from bom-



Flare-up: A family fleeing the town of Tarmanin in Syria's Idlib province towards the northern border with Turkey with their belongings on Wednesday. ■ AFP

bardments but from lack of insulation, from the weather, a lack of heating. It feels like doomsday," Razan Saffour, of the Syrian Expatriate Medical Association, said. The group said a total of \$36 million was needed for basic food, water and shelter.

No desired result

Mr. Erdogan said talks with Moscow over the past fortnight had so far failed to achieve "the desired result" and warned that Turkey would launch an offensive in

to Syria unless Damascus pulled its forces back by the end of the month.

"An operation in Idlib is imminent... We are counting down, we are making our final warnings," Mr. Erdogan said in a televised speech.

He called for Syrian forces to retreat behind Turkey's military posts in Idlib, which were set up under a 2018 deal with Russia designed to hold off a regime advance.

The Kremlin quickly responded to Erdogan's threat, warning that any operation

against Syrian forces would be "the worst scenario".

With Turkey moving large numbers of reinforcements into Idlib in recent weeks, Defence Minister Hulusi Akar emphasised that it was "out of the question for us to withdraw from our observation posts".

Earlier this week the UN said the displaced were mainly women and children and warned that babies were dying of cold because aid camps are full.

The Syrian NGOs called

for the warring parties to allow safe access for humanitarian groups and for a "complete ceasefire and end to human rights violations".

Violence continues

The regime offensive has killed more than 400 civilians since it began in December, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

"The violence in northwest Syria is indiscriminate. Health facilities, schools, residential areas, mosques and markets have been hit," the UN head of humanitarian affairs and emergency relief, Mark Lowcock, said earlier this week.

Moscow has repeatedly vetoed Security Council resolutions.

The head of the World Health Organization said Tuesday that out of nearly 550 health facilities in northwest Syria, only about half were operational.

Syrian troops have reconquered swathes of Idlib and retaken the key M5 highway connecting the country's four largest cities as well as the entire surroundings of Aleppo city for the first time since 2012.

Passengers disembark cruise ship after 2-week quarantine

China reported 1,749 new cases, the lowest since Jan. 29

REUTERS
TOKYO/BEIJING

Hundreds of people began disembarking a cruise ship in Japan on Wednesday after being held on board for more than two weeks under quarantine, as criticism mounted of Japan's handling of the COVID-19 outbreak outside China.



Free at last: A passenger surrounded by mediapersons after she disembarked from Diamond Princess on Wednesday. ■ AP

Asian shares and U.S. stock futures rise. Outside China,

eight people have died from the disease. Two Iranians died in the holy Shi'ite city of Qom on Wednesday.

More will leave

From Wednesday, passengers who tested negative and showed no symptoms were free to leave. Around 500

were expected to disembark on Wednesday.

In China itself, the death toll from the SARS-CoV-2 climbed above 2,000, but

the tally of newly reported cases fell for a second day to the lowest since January, offering hope and helping

may still be kept on board.

Meanwhile, China's National Health Commission reported 1,749 new confirmed cases, the lowest tally since January 29. Hubai – the epicentre of the outbreak – reported the lowest number of new infections since February 11, while outside of Hubai there were just 56 new cases, down from a peak of 890 on Feb. 3.

The latest figures bring the total number of cases in China to more than 74,000 and the death toll to 2,004, three-quarters of which have occurred in Wuhan.

(With PTI inputs)

Won't honour UN pledge on war probe: Mahinda

Sri Lanka to withdraw from co-sponsorship of resolution 30/1

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa on Wednesday said that his government will withdraw from co-sponsoring a UN Human Rights Council resolution on accountability for war crimes.

His statement came days after the U.S. imposed travel

restrictions on Army chief Lt. Gen. Shavendra Silva and his immediate family members over alleged gross violations of human rights during the final phase of the island nation's Civil War in 2009.

"Our government has decided to withdraw from the process of co-sponsorship in relation to resolution 30/1," Mr. Rajapaksa said in a state-

ment. The resolution 30/1 on promotion on reconciliation in Sri Lanka was co-sponsored in 2015 by the then Sri Lankan government.

The resolution also called for an independent investigation with foreign judges and prosecutors to probe war crimes allegation.

Mr. Rajapaksa accused his predecessor of betraying the island's security forces by co-sponsoring the resolution.

"It is because of the histor-

ic betrayal that other countries are able to name members of our armed forces as violators of human rights," said Mr. Rajapaksa, who was president and commander-in-chief when Sri Lanka launched the offensive to crush the LTTE in 2009.

The 2015 resolution was based on the UNHRC report, which had accused the Lankan troops of violating human rights, Mr. Rajapaksa's statement said.

Sri Lanka's ruling and op-

position parties have strongly opposed the U.S. move to impose the travel ban on Lt. Gen. Silva, saying America's decision was based on independently unverified information.

Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena last week said that Lt. Gen. Silva was only conducting a war against a designated terrorist group which was the LTTE.

Lt. Gen. Silva was appointed as the Sri Lankan Army Commander last year.

WSJ reporters expelled from China over 'racist' headline

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BEIJING

China on Wednesday ordered three reporters from American newspaper the *Wall Street Journal* to leave the country over what Beijing deemed a racist headline – in one of the harshest moves against foreign media in years.

The expulsion came as Beijing also slammed Wash-

ington's decision to tighten rules on Chinese state media organisations in the U.S..

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said the *Journal* op-ed – titled 'China is the Real Sick Man of Asia' – had a "racially discriminatory" and "sensational" headline.

The *Journal* reported that deputy bureau chief Josh Chin and reporter Chao

Deng, both U.S. nationals, as well as reporter Philip Wen, an Australian, had been ordered to leave the country in five days.

The three journalists are in the WSJ's news section.

The op-ed, written by Bard College professor Walter Russell Mead, criticised the Chinese government's initial response to the CO-VID-19 outbreak.

Sanders surges to double digit lead: poll

He got 32% support against Biden's 16%

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WASHINGTON

Bernie Sanders has surged to a double-digit lead over his rivals in the race for the Democratic presidential nomination, a new poll published on Wednesday has found.

As the self-described democratic socialist rose, moderate former Vice-President Joe Biden slumped by a whopping 16 point since January's last take of the *Washington Post-ABC-News* poll.

The Post said Mr. Sanders – at 32% support, up from 23 last month – is climbing on the strength of strong performances in the Iowa caucuses and the New

Hampshire primary. Mr. Biden stood at 16% support in this survey of voter preference.

Third place in the poll went to former New York mayor Mike Bloomberg at 14%, followed by progressive Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren at 12%.

Pete Buttigieg is in single digits nationally despite narrowly winning in Iowa and finishing a close second in New Hampshire.

The poll was released on the same day of a Democratic debate, in which Mr. Bloomberg, a New York billionaire accused of buying prominence with staggering ad spends, will face off with his rivals for the first time.

Trump offered to pardon Assange if he denied Russia link to e-mail leak

WikiLeaks published emails that hurt Hillary's campaign in 2016

REUTERS

LONDON

U.S. President Donald Trump offered to pardon WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange if he said that Russia had nothing to do with WikiLeaks' publication of Democratic Party emails in 2016, a London court heard on Wednesday.

Mr. Assange appeared by video link from prison as lawyers discussed the management of his hearing next week to decide whether he should be extradited to the U.S.

At Westminster Magistrates' Court, Mr. Assange's barrister, Edward Fitzgerald, referred to a witness

statement by former U.S. Republican congressman Dana Rohrabacher, who had visited Mr. Assange in 2017, saying that he had been sent by the President to offer a pardon. The pardon would come on the condition that



Julian Assange

Mr. Assange complied with the U.S. by saying that the Russians were not involved in the email leak, which hurt Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign in 2016, Mr. Rohrabacher's statement said.

Mr. Assange, 48, who spent seven years holed up in Ecuador's embassy before he was dragged out last April, is wanted in the U.S. to face 18 counts, including conspiring to hack government computers and violating an espionage law. He could spend decades behind bars if convicted there.

At Wednesday's hearing, Mr. Assange spoke only to confirm his name and date of birth.

Pak. court nullifies minor Hindu girl's marriage

She claimed the wedding was not forced

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

KARACHI

In probably the first of its kind judgment, a Pakistani court has nullified the marriage of a minor Hindu girl, who was converted to Islam and married off to a Muslim man in the country's Sindh province.

The judge, citing evidence and documents, ruled that the girl was underage and was not fit for marriage under section 3 and 4 of the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act.

He directed Larkana's police officials to take action against all those involved in conducting, facilitating and abetting the child marriage.

Heavy security was witnessed in and around the court for the hearing to quell any unrest.

Hindus form the biggest minority community in Pakistan.

claimed that she embraced Islam at a shrine after which she married Solangi out of her own free will.

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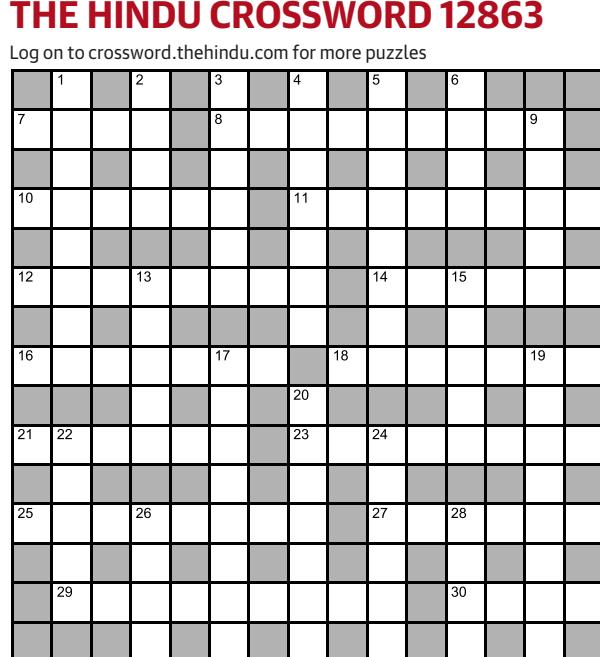
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THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12863

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



ACROSS

- 7 Bends arms and ribbon loops for ships' prows? Fiddlesticks! (4)
- 8 Notwithstanding changing spot in fire, abandons a bit of roast (2,5,2)
- 10 Pakistan's intelligence agency follows donkey to St. Francis' place (6)
- 11 Poet composing sonnet about The Big Apple (8)
- 12 Chessmen jump at uncle's place (8)
- 14 See inside carcass – it's gory (6)
- 16 Law for including Chandigarh, say, in Punjab, for example (7)
- 18 Thousand dollars per annum for ancestor (7)
- 21 Mountain where you can see a gunner with one who has deserted (6)
- 23 Small human resources plane crashed into shell fragments (8)
- 25 State: Doctor madly ran (8)
- 27 Signed off a pattern? (6)
- 29 Tulsa's bot produces partial sums (9)
- 30 Queen arm-twisted Yankee (4)

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DOWN

- 1 Uninterrupted repair of cantonments in absence of soldiers (8)
- 2 Liquor available in Hastinapur (4)
- 3 Complete language, but no name (6)
- 4 Atom with same number but different mass is nothing to an endless drinker (7)
- 5 Ore found in hotel in California with saloon (8)
- 6 Decline destroying expensive new yacht initially (4)
- 9 American car driven round first of Junagadh's inlet (5)
- 13 Stenographer's piece of money, right? (5)
- 15 Make a clean breast of personal state (3,2)
- 17 Four-footed creature to depart wildly (8)
- 19 Customers at 12 having one penny and account books (8)
- 20 Secondhand automobile America cared about (4,3)
- 22 Hits around circle and walks about (5)
- 24 Without opening hardish sort of vegetable (6)
- 26 Boys maybe uncouth persons (4)
- 28 Amount to nothing in Japanese wrestling (4)

SUDOKU

8	1					3		

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MARKET WATCH

	PRICE	CHANGE
Sensex	41,323	1.05
Gold	42,339	1.10
Brent oil	58.54	3.70

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	371.30	4.70
Asian Paints	1884.90	21.25
Axis Bank	741.05	7.40
Bajaj Auto	3090.90	8.40
Bajaj Finserv	9758.65	229.15
Bajaj Finance	4878.05	120.05
Bharti Airtel	543.40	-4.85
BPLC	475.55	4.80
Britannia Ind	3082.25	15.80
Cipla	447.50	11.50
Coal India	177.75	5.90
Dr Reddys Lab	3278.15	26.80
Eicher Motors	18875.20	114.85
GAIL (India)	119.85	0.40
Gasim Ind	757.15	33.25
HCL Tech	605.75	-1.30
HDFC	2377.25	58.45
HDFC Bank	1227.20	13.95
Hero MotoCorp	2251.60	-1.05
Hindalco	188.10	3.75
Hind Unilever	2292.15	57.75
ICICI Bank	544.80	3.60
IndusInd Bank	1142.15	1.45
Bharti Infralet	2250.20	15.10
Infosys	800.45	2.80
Indian Oil Corp	114.20	1.55
ITC	206.70	2.85
JSW Steel	280.85	-3.95
Kotak Bank	1701.10	10.10
L&T	1281.40	-4.95
M&M	526.40	3.20
Maruti Suzuki	6756.60	-24.50
Nestle India Ltd.	16785.05	381.20
NTPC	1112.05	2.45
ONGC	101.70	2.40
PowerGrid Corp	187.50	2.50
Reliance Ind	1503.80	36.40
State Bank	320.35	2.80
Sun Pharma	403.55	-5.10
Tata Motors	158.05	-3.55
Tata Steel	433.20	1.80
TCS	2196.35	-19.40
Tech Mahindra	840.90	2.10
Titan	1329.60	18.60
UltraTech Cement	4473.10	-2.60
UPL	585.20	0.00
Vedanta	142.65	2.10
Wipro	247.60	3.55
YES Bank	35.30	0.25
Zee Entertainment	252.25	6.65

BULLION RATES CHENNAI

February 19 rates in rupees with previous rates in parentheses

Retail Silver (1g) 51.8... (50.6)

22 ct gold (1 g) 3965... (3926)

IN BRIEF

First 5G handset in India likely to cost ₹50,000

KOLKATA

The first 5G handset in India from Chinese smartphone maker, Realme, is likely to be priced around ₹50,000 apiece, a company official said. "Realme 5G handset will be powered with 865 snapdragon chipset and available at around ₹50,000," the official, who did not wish to be identified, said. PTI

Shares surge as virus fears fade

Domestic investors buy close to ₹600 crore, FPIs net sell ₹191 crore in equities

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

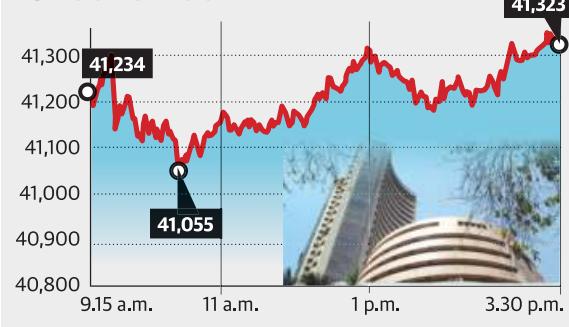
Indian benchmarks snapped a four-day losing streak on Wednesday as a decline in new COVID-19 cases in China along with expectations of action by the Indian government to limit the impact of the outbreak revived investor interest in equities.

The 30-share Sensex gained 428.62 points, or 1.05%, to close at 41,323. It closed just a tad lower than the day's high of 41,357.16.

The rally was visible in many side counters as well with more than 1,500 stocks gaining ground as against around 1,000 stocks that ended in the red.

Within the Sensex pack, 22 stocks gained ground with Reliance Industries, HDFC, HDFC Bank, HUL, Bajaj Finance and ICICI Bank contri-

Cheer street



buting the maximum to the day's gains.

Meanwhile, the broader Nifty settled the day at 12,125.90, gaining 133.40 points, or 1.1%.

Policy stimulus

"A decline in the number of new COVID-19 cases in China and mounting expectations for more policy stimulus

boosted global stock markets on Wednesday," said Deepak Jasani, head, retail research, HDFC Securities.

"Positive sentiment (in India) were also created after the Finance Minister said the government would unveil measures to limit the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak," he added.

Finance Minister Nirmala

Birla, Mittal meet FM as AGR pressure mounts

'Govt. should ensure sustainability'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

told *The Hindu* that the two telecom chiefs met the Finance Minister separately.

Mr. Mittal, who also met Telecom Secretary Anshu Prakash on Wednesday, said, "The telecom sector has been under stress for three-and-a-half years. This industry is vital to the nation's digital agenda and for many other industries that ride on it... employment, government taxes... The only thing that the government now really needs to focus on is how to ensure sustainability of the sector."

On AGR dues, he said the Supreme Court was dealing with the matter and the company was responding to it.

A senior government official aware of the meeting

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The COVID-19 outbreak in China will be considered a 'force majeure' situation, which refers to extraordinary events and circumstances beyond human control, the Finance Ministry said on Wednesday.

The move provides some relief to companies with central government contracts forced to default on contract obligations due to delays in input shipments from China.

The declaration of a 'force majeure' situation was one of the major demands of industry representatives who met Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to discuss the

fallout of the epidemic on Tuesday.

Senior government officials met on Wednesday afternoon to discuss their demands and the response measures needed to deal with supply chain disruptions.

The Expenditure Department has now issued an office memorandum to the Secretaries of all Central government Ministries and departments in this regard.

"A doubt has arisen if the disruption of the supply chains due to coronavirus in China or any other country will be covered in the Force Majeure clause. In this regard, it is clarified that it

KMB gets nod for promoter stake cut

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Sitharaman had met industry representatives and assured that the government would take steps to manage the impact of COVID-19 on the domestic industry.

Elsewhere in Asia, the benchmark equity indices of Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan and Indonesia, among others, all gained ground on Wednesday.

Back in India, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs)

were net sellers at about ₹191 crore while their domestic counterparts bought shares worth almost ₹600 crore.

The pace of foreign investment in Indian shares have slowed a bit in the recent past with the current month flows, till date, pegged at a little under ₹9,500 crore.

The previous month saw such investors put in a little over ₹1,200 crore.

There is no compulsion for the bank to reduce promoter stake to 15%, as previously envisaged.

The decision was approved by the board of the capital markets regulator on Monday.

"Onus of bona fide pledge

created from margin account of a stock broker will now lie with the depository

following the SEBI amendment," Makarand Joshi, partner, MMJC and Associates, a corporate compliance firm, said.

"In the past, pledge from the margin account was directly routed by the stock broker using the power of attorney route, without the active consent or approval of the beneficiary holder of shares. Now consent of beneficial owner will be necessary," he added.

This assumes significance as the recent past has seen few instances of brokers pledging client securities to raise funds from banks and non-banking finance companies (NBFCs). More importantly, this was done without the clients being aware that their securities were being misused in such a manner.

The most high-profile

SEBI redefines 'pledge' to protect client securities

Tweaks rules to include 're-pledge'



matter in the recent past was of Karvy Stock Broking in which the Hyderabad-based firm raised funds from entities such as Bajaj Finance, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank and IndusInd Bank by pledging client securities.

Further, according to the lenders – as stated in an order by the Securities Appellate Tribunal – Karvy Stock Broking had even given an undertaking that the securities that were being pledged were its own and that they did not belong to clients.

Misuse will come down'

"Instances where a client's funds/securities were diverted or misutilised by brokers toward margin or settlement obligations, will now lie with the depository following the SEBI amendment," Makarand Joshi, partner, MMJC and Associates, a corporate compliance firm, said.

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The latest SEBI move comes close on the heels of the regulator developing an in-house system to track the movement of client securities that are collected as collateral by the brokers.

Neuberg close to acquiring labs in Mumbai

Company to invest ₹100 crore in the

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

test the waters. Going forward, we would like to use digital as a platform," said Ms. Chunduru.

Though the bank plans to set aside ₹100 crore to ₹200 crore for this purpose, it wants to run this scheme on a pilot basis at least for six months. It is also planning to forge tie-ups with venture capitalists or private equity firms to understand the industry better.

"We are not taking part in the equity portion. It would be fully debt. It is based on the working model of Silicon Valley Bank and we will be the first bank in the country to help a start-up," she said.

Padmaja Chunduru

last few months. Allahabad Bank is set to merge with Indian Bank on March 31.

"The merger gives birth to a new legal entity. With the new identity comes new ideas from new team members and we would like to

DoT notice an event risk for 3 firms: Fitch

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Gopal Srinivasan, chairman and managing director of TVS Capital Funds, welcomed the idea and said that there were three types of start-ups – emerging, emerging and speculative.

"Some of the start-ups might go for debt route from the second round itself and others might stretch it by diluting their equity. Lending, based on track record, might not be a good option, since most of these firms keep raising funds at regular intervals," he said.

"If the scheme is successful, then we will place it under a different vertical," Ms. Chunduru said.

Fitch is not taking immediate rating action on the companies as the Supreme Court of India allowed the companies to withdraw their clarification applications on February 14 and resolve their dispute with the DoT outside the court.

"We expect the three companies to eventually resolve the dispute. A speedy solution is important to prevent disrupting the companies' investment plans and damaging their performance," said Fitch in a statement.

Pure EV has a manufacturing facility in Hyderabad to make 1,500 EVs per month and this would be doubled in the next two months.

CK Motors Pvt. Ltd. is putting up a new plant in Coimbatore to make electric vehicles (EVs) for commercial use, said a top official.

CK Motors, which has a manufacturing tie-up with Pure EV, a start-up incubated in IIT Hyderabad, is planning to commence operations at Coimbatore in the next two months.

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Trotting to a new DAWN



In a bid to re-energise the industry, Indian stud farm owners, led by Ameeta Mehra, are pushing to race their horses abroad

VANGMAYI PARAKALA

At the ongoing Asian Racing Conference 2020 in Cape Town today, there will be a meeting with a special focus on India. Albeit on the sidelines, and on the eve of a larger panels titled "Promoting the international movement of horses" and "Major developments and current strategies in the Asian region", securing this meeting at the 38th edition has been a win for the Indian horse-breeding and racing community.

Spearheading this effort is Ameeta Mehra, owner of Usha Stud Farms near Gurugram. Mehra, who took over the farm in her early 30s following her parents' untimely death in a tragic accident in 2001, has kept the enterprise's successes going. According to the Stud Book Authority of India, in the year

2013-2014, Usha Stud Farm topped the country in terms of prize money that the horses from her farm raked in. The horses have registered 27 wins across multiple races across India, in barely the first two months of 2020 alone.

Despite these figures, the industry has been seeing a slow decline for close to two decades now – and it is this push to sell and race horses from Indian farms in the international market, that can be a positive solution.

Towards recovery

For years, horse breeding and racing has been seen as an elite pursuit with windfall gains. However, various industry-wide issues, coupled with no designated government department to take up their concerns, had affected it adversely.

The formation of a Minis-

try of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry, and Dairying in 2019 (separate from being just a department under the larger Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare), gave some sense of relief to stud farm owners in that they had a dedicated place to where they could address their problems.

But, Mehra notes, the effect of the new Goods and Services Tax, which was announced two years before this only compounded their problems.

"As an industry, we hadn't been too proactive in tackling problems, but when the new GST regime came into effect in 2017, horse racing was given a body blow," she says.

She chalks this up to the 28% charge that was levied on the total revenue collected by race clubs. The tax regime wasn't entirely off the

mark, says Mehra, but had been "misapplied" – the tax should have been levied on the commission earned on a club's earnings, she stresses, instead of being charged on the total revenue.

However, there is a glimmer of hope: the recent Union Budget gave a tax break to importing of racehorses for the year 2020-21. The customs duty, which earlier stood as high as 30% is now at zero.

"This has given a fillip to the breeding industry," Mehra says, distinguishing it from the racing industry. Imported horses after all, are not allowed to participate in races in India.

Capitalising on all these developments therefore, the idea to have India-bred horses participate in races abroad – "especially the ones in Korea, Macau, Singapore, Mauritius, Bahrain, Keeper and Registrar of the

and Saudi Arabia – might offer some monetary reprieve to the industry at large.

Pushing the agenda

Accompanying Mehra to the meeting that will happen on February 20th, are veterinarians, the heads of leading race clubs in India, including Dr. Surender Reddy of the Hyderabad Race Club. Dr. Praveen Malik, the Animal Husbandry Commissioner has also confirmed his participation via video conference.

Getting all heads together too has been a steady process. Earlier in December in the lead up to the Conference, Mehra brought together various prominent leaders of the horse breeding and racing industry, ranging from Dr. C. V. Nirajan, Chairman of the Veterinary Commission; Satish Iyer, Keeper and Registrar of the

Indian Stud Book; Dr. Hasnayn Mirza, a veterinarian specialising in horses, as well as representatives from prominent stud farms like Poonawalla, Kunigal, Muktshwar, and Sohna. This was organised in order to get everyone to participate and put their weight behind their common end-goal, which was to find ways to race their horses abroad.

The result of the December meeting is a compiled dossier detailing the best health practices of Indian stud farms. This was made based on a report by the World Organisation for Animal Health's *Guidelines on the Establishment, Management, and Self-Declaration to the OIE of an Equine Disease Free Zone*.

Govt involvement

In the same December meeting, representatives from the Department of Animal Husbandry also agreed to send a written letter to the European Union, showing the government's interest in supporting stud farm owners to send their horses abroad.

"I was told that [the various countries] probably want to listen to the Government's side, about how we plan the export of thoroughbreds to the European Union. For example, [it's required that] the horses [inhabit] specific physical zones [Equine Disease Free Zone] that are free from some diseases [like glanders]," notes Dr. Malik.

He adds that he will make a case for their readiness for "whatever is possible in terms of health, surveillance, and tracking".

The result of these efforts, will be put to test on the Thursday evening in Cape Town. Until then, it is notable that after decades of heading towards a lull, stud farms, even those that were earlier excessively competitive against one another, are coming together to forge a new future for themselves.

PLACES

TK's teppanyaki @ 25

As the iconic restaurant at Hyatt celebrates a milestone, a look at one of the restaurant's favourite recipes



TK's Oriental Grill at the Hyatt Regency in Delhi is marking its 25th anniversary. The restaurant is remembered by old-timers as one of the first places in the capital to introduce teppanyaki grills – the abbreviation, TK stands for Teppanyaki Kitchen. To mark this milestone year, they have refreshed their menu entirely and introduced a celebratory special edition sake from Genrei Gassan Shuzo Brewery in Japan, made with no added alcohol and sugar or preservatives.

There are two dishes that have remained on their menu consistently since 1994. Of these, one is their Minced Chicken Salad and the Yellow Prawn Curry. TK's shares the recipe for the former.

Minced Chicken Salad

Ingredients: Chicken mince 100gm, chopped lemon grass 2 teaspoons, chopped red chilli 2 teaspoons, ginger-garlic 4 teaspoons, diamond cut spring onion 4 teaspoons, chilli garlic sauce 2 teaspoons, shiitake mushroom 2 teaspoon, chopped ginger 1 teaspoon, coriander, bean sprout 2 teaspoons, soy 2 teaspoon, a few kaffir lime leaves, oil 4 teaspoon

Method: Heat oil in a heavy bottom kadhai. Add lemon grass and chopped ginger, and cook until brown. Add in the chopped chilli, and cook for about a minute. Add the ginger-garlic paste and cook till it browns. Add the chicken mince to this. Cook on high flame, while tossing continuously. Then, add chilli garlic, soy, salt, and the shiitake mushroom. Remove from heat, and add bean sprouts. Toss. In a serving bowl, garnish with a coriander sprig, fried red chilli, kaffir lime julienne.

For their 50% off every Tuesday through this silver jubilee year, call 4760 0553 or make reservations online at Hyattrestaurants.com

(Not-so) French



L'Opéra, a French patisserie with outlets across Delhi and Gurugram, has just opened its first-ever café-restaurant at Civil Lines. Nestled in the same neighbourhood as the Metcalfe House, L'Opéra too is located in a heritage building very close to the Civil Lines metro station. The outlet is spread across two floors and has a full-fledged menu, with soups and large plates, pizzas, pastas, burgers and beverages.

At 13, Sham Nath Marg, Railway Colony; open daily from 9 a.m. until midnight; for more LoperaIndia.com and 8448854732

Contact us at delhimetro@thehindu.co.in

5 EVENTS WORTH YOUR WHILE



PERFORMANCE

Kathak recital
This evening, Kathak dancer Shivani Varma, a disciple of Guru Shovana Narayan will perform Champaans se Gandhi, a Kathak presentation that is woven together with some of Mahatma Gandhi's favourite hymns. The production is a narrative centred on the core beliefs of the Mahatma, which he propagated.

VENUE: Stein Auditorium, India Habitat Centre

TIME: 7 p.m.



EXHIBITION

Mixed media
Noted artist and curator Amrita Prakash is holding a group painting and sculpture show titled Colour Spectra-4. It is an exhibition of large perspectives and different perceptions, representing a diversity in art. In this show, artists from different parts of the country will be showcasing their various styles.

VENUE: Lokayan Art Gallery, Hauz Khas Village

TIME: 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.



BREAKFAST

New menu
Cafe Tesu, an artisanal cafe and food court, has introduced a new breakfast menu. Curated by their kitchen chefs, the menu has a choice of dishes like Crispy Warm Nutella or Banoffee Waffles, Fluffy Double Choco Chip, American Granola Pancakes, Fresh Fruit Granola Parfait, French Toast made with Custard Batter.

VENUE: 4, Sri Aurobindo Marg, Adchini

TIME: 8 a.m. onwards



WORKSHOP

Project for theatre artists
The Embassy of Mexico in India is conducting Essays on Anonymity, a workshop for theatre performers, visual arts practitioners and enthusiasts by Toztli Abril de Dios. The workshop will explore the diversity of games that arise from correspondences between bodies, objects, materials, and the living and the inert.

VENUE: Instituto Cervantes, 48, Hanuman Road

TIME: 3 p.m. - 6 p.m.



RETAIL

Spring collection
Dastkar celebrates the coming of spring by hosting its Basant Bazaar, featuring a mix of crafts, culture, and cuisine. On till 24th February, over 120 stalls in the bazaar are showcasing their spring collections, through crafts ranging from naturally dyed fabrics and a variety of home decor products.

VENUE: Nature Bazaar, Andheria Modh

TIME: 11 a.m. - 7.30 p.m.

World without end

New rules for Schengen visas now allow you to apply months ahead. Here's how you can plan your trip



Making it easy Starting this month, travellers can apply for a Schengen visa six months in advance • GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

PRIYADARSHINI PAITANDY

Waiting for a visa to arrive can sometimes suck the joy out of a holiday. Especially when it is a little too close to the date of departure. While most Schengen countries had a three-month submission period for its applicants, now, starting February 2, 2020, travellers can apply for a visa six months in advance. Which means you can start booking those spectacular accommodations for a better price in advance rather than having to nervously wait and watch the prices shoot up.

At a recent conference organised by VFS Global, Pranav Sinha, regional head, West and South India, Maldives and Sri Lanka, VFS Global, highlighted the organisation's journey, since its inception in Mumbai in 2001. World over, it works with 64 client governments, and operates out of 150 countries, with 3,425 application centres. "The first client government was the US," he says. The first Schen-

gen governments on board were France and Italy. The recent additions to the organisation's India portfolio include visa services for Nigeria, Lithuania, Belarus, Bulgaria and Poland.

"Currently, VFS is present in 17 Indian cities. We are starting in Coimbatore in March with visas for Germany," adds Sinha. In addition, VFS offices around the country are signing up with other governments. For example, in Bhopal, it will soon start handling applications for Polish visas.

"VFS helps ease the queue outside embassies," says Sinha, adding, "We manage administrative and non-judgemental tasks related to visa, passport and consular, identity and citizen

Visa At Your Doorstep is a service where the official comes home to collect documents and conduct the biometrics

services." Other than services such as the premium lounge, VFS also offers Visa At Your Doorstep, a service where the official comes home to collect documents and conduct the biometrics. This is for people travelling to countries such as Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Italy, France, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Germany, and the UK. Of course, these come at a higher price and it differs from country to country.

During peak holiday seasons, there are facilities such as VFS Prime Time that allows customers to apply in the off-peak evening hours for an extra charge. These services are available in Chennai for Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia and the UK visa customers, besides Saturday appointments for Canada and France visa customers.



No land's man

How Kurdish artiste Mico Kendes and 150 musicians from around the globe put Udaipur on the world music map

DEEPA ALEXANDER

A cover of coots is paddling furiously near Doodh Talai on Lake Pichola. Mist hangs heavily on the waters and boats glide past. The palaces of Jag Niwas and Jag Mandir, built between the 16th and 18th centuries, appear like ghostly galleons in the distance. A weak winter sun stripes the jetty with diffused light as we board the boat to Ambrai Ghat on the far side of the lake. There's a nip in the air and the quiet thrum of the engine sets off a flock of pigeons that wheels over the City Palace and settles into its looming minarets.

As we approach the ghat, colonised by a huge peepul tree in whose shade resides a Durga figurine astride a tiger, men dip themselves in the icy waters and offer salutations to the sun. The day stirs at Udaipur to the sound of Mico Kendes' bouzouki, a lute.

At the ghat, the Syria-born, Switzerland-based Kurdish musician sings of lost lands and lost loves. He is one of many musicians from around the globe in the Mewari city for the fifth edition of the Vedanta Udaipur World Music Festival. Conceptualised by SeHer with 'We are the world: Unity in Diversity' as its focus, the festival has sounds from the breezy West coast of Africa, the sands of Rajasthan, the Iberian peninsula, rock music from mountainous Switzer-

land, Karelian music from Ukraine and multi-lingual voices from indie bands across the country.

Take your pick

The three venues – Ambrai Ghat in the mornings, Fateh Sagar Paal in the afternoons and Gandhi Ground in the evenings – echo the vast culture of the music, while showcasing a city that sits on the cusp of the medieval and the modern.

The mural of Shiva at Ambrai Ghat seems to watch the audience with half-closed eyes as they listen to Kendes sing a repertoire sunk in Sufism and mysticism. Strips of *leheriya* panels rise and fall with the breeze, marigolds scent the air, waves lap around the stone jetty of one of the city's favourite hangout spots for the selfie-enthusiast, as

Kendes passes over the political, the need for an identity and state for the Kurdish people, and instead sings of the country of his heart, a land he can never travel to, the citizen he can never claim to be. And yet his music is universal in theme, redundant of emotions that speak of unity in diversity.

In the afternoon, at the Fateh Sagar Paal that is framed by the lake constructed by Maharana Fateh Singh in the 1680s – its islands have a public park and an observatory – the Udaipur Jail University band, comprising convicted inmates belts out Sufi numbers with deep passion. I take Ankur Tewari and the Ghatal Family's song 'Sabse Peeche Hum Khade' quite literally and walk to the last row of chairs. It is peppered with police personnel humming

Sound waves A view of City Palace from Pichola lake; (below) a performance at Fateh Sagar Paal • GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

along to Tewari's whistling, as the Aravalli mountains ring the lake turn pink and then a sentinel grey. In the latticed balconies that garland Fateh Sagar, couples slow-dance as the sun sets. Gandhi Ground sees a clash of civilisations as Bollywood's Nikhita Gandhi meets Habib Koite's Malian music, French jazz meets Thaikkudam Bridge's guttural roar and peppy When Chai Met Toast is served with Mame Khan's haunting Manganiyar tunes.

It is the wee hours of the morning, as dinner ends at the Sunset Terrace, the al fresco restaurant in the City Palace complex. The palace is surreal in the moonlight, a very different place from daytime, when the imposing grandeur of its structure that houses the famous Silver and Crystal galleries lords over the cityscape. Portuguese fado singer Sara Correia's melancholic voice floats over its ramparts and settles on molten-silver Lake Pichola below – Udaipur's own sound-and-light show for world music.

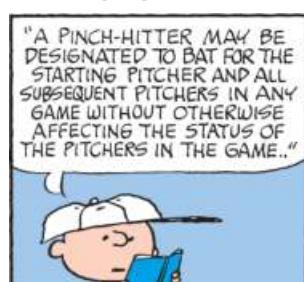
The writer was in Udaipur at the invitation of SeHer



POOCH CAFE



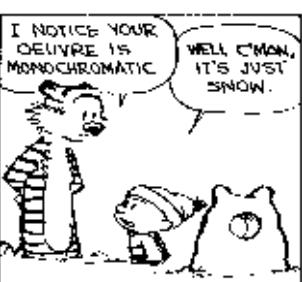
PEANUTS



HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



CALVIN AND HOBBES



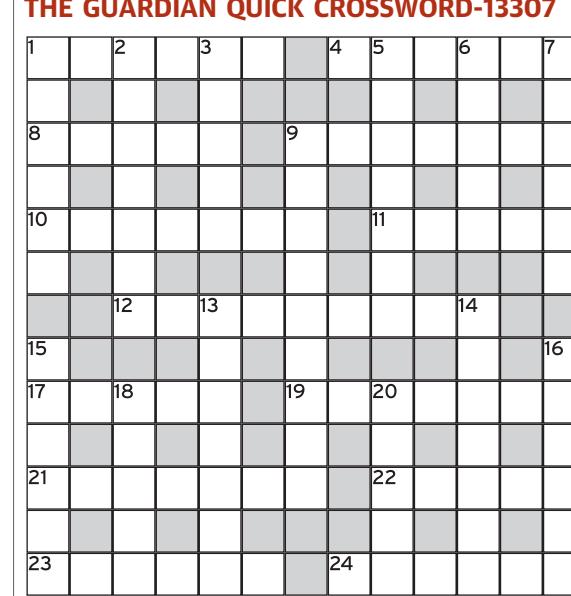
TIGER



GRAFFITI



THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13307



To play the Guardian Quick Crossword, The Hindu Cryptic crossword, Sudoku & other puzzles online, scan the QR code.

5 Last in the line (7)

6 Where the umbilical cord was once attached (5)

7 Screenplay (6)

9 Abridged (9)

13 Run cafe (anag) – very hot place (7)

14 Itinerant (7)

15 South American cloak (6)

16 Settled by common consent (6)

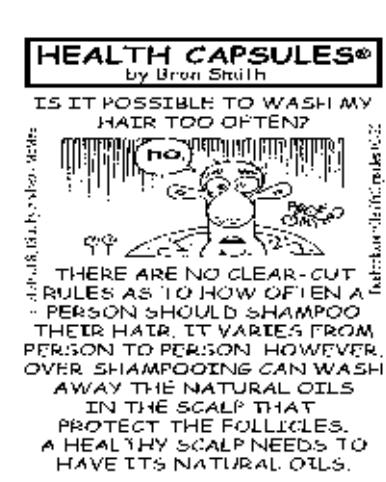
18 Goggle-box (2,3)

20 Large and unwieldy (5)

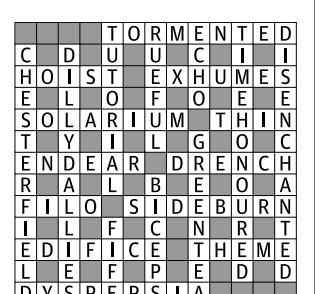
The solution will appear on February 21, 2020.

Solution No. 13306

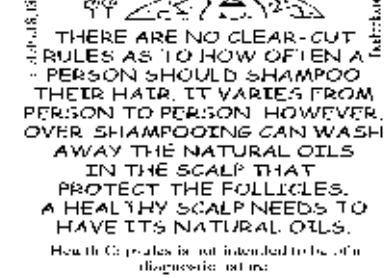
WUMO



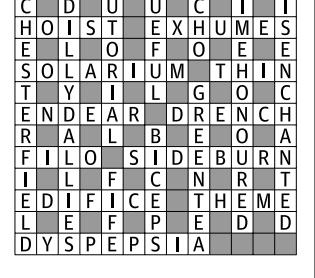
- Across**
- 1 Appear (6)
 - 4 Court game (6)
 - 8 Ardent male lover (5)
 - 9 Human corpse (7)
 - 10 Having a soft spot for (5,2)
 - 11 Eurasian primrose with yellow flowers (5)
 - 12 Turned aside (9)
 - 17 Fish eater of the weasel family (5)
 - 19 Brother or sister (7)
 - 21 Sweet sauce of eggs and milk (7)
 - 22 Coffee served with hot milk (5)
 - 23 Vent (6)
 - 24 Of mixed ancestry (6)
- Down**
- 1 Go off (6)
 - 2 Praise formally (7)
 - 3 Defy (orders etc) (5)



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



- Across**
- 1 Appear (6)
 - 4 Court game (6)
 - 8 Ardent male lover (5)
 - 9 Human corpse (7)
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A test of skill and character for Kohli & Co.

The India captain is confident that his batsmen would be upto the task

INDIA IN NZ

S. DINAKAR
WELLINGTON

Virat Kohli and his men face a searching examination of skill and character as the first Test, beginning on Friday, approaches.

There is grass on this Basin Reserve surface and the New Zealand pacemen will be relentless in their quest for scalps.

However, Neil Wagner, that battering ram, who hustles batsmen with well-directed short-pitched bowling, could miss the first Test since he is awaiting the birth of his child. Matt Henry has been called in as a cover for Wagner.

Kohli was confident that his batsmen would be upto the task. The Indian skipper was also gung-ho about his own pace pack where Ishant Sharma appears to have put fitness troubles behind.

The Indian captain said, "He looked pretty similar to how he was bowling before the ankle injury and was hitting good areas. Really good to see him bowling with pace. He has the experience too."

Tactically flexible

The Indian team, Kohli said, would be tactically flexible. "We are going to look to adapt to what's in front of us rather than having a set template."

Playing in New Zealand had its own challenges but Kohli said his team would focus on its own strengths. "We have to show more patience than our opposition. If the opposition plays the waiting game, we are gonna play the waiting game. If they counter-attack, we have the opportunities to take wickets and score runs [and] vice-versa."

There is bound to be pressure on the not-too-experienced opening pair of Mayank Agarwal and Prithvi Shaw against the moving ball on the greenish track here.

Kohli felt the fairly experienced Mayank understood



The prize: Kane Williamson and Virat Kohli will vie for sole possession of this trophy after the two-Test series, beginning on Friday. ■ TWITTER/BLACKCAPS

Kohli to play all formats for three years

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

WELLINGTON

How long can Virat Kohli continue playing all three formats considering India's hectic schedule right through the year?

The India skipper answered, "I think it's been

eight or nine years that I have been playing almost 300 days a year with the travelling and practice sessions. And the intensity is right up there all the time. So it does take a lot out of you." He added, "It's not that easy. Then being

captain and having intensity in practice sessions and discussing the game, so it does take a toll on you. So I am not in that space at the moment. So period breaks for me seem to work pretty okay." Kohli said, "At a time

when the body doesn't respond as well, maybe when I am 34 or 35, you might have a different conversation. But for the next two-three years, I have no issues at all. Can keep going on with the same intensity."

his game in red-ball cricket and the disciplined mode of batting.

Prithvi, he revealed, had been given the freedom to play his own game. "He is a talented player and we want him to follow his instincts. Look, these guys have no baggage of having failed overseas in the past. A bunch of new guys can play the kind of fearless cricket that can give the whole team confidence."

Role of the wind

The wind blowing across the Basin Reserve would play a massive role in the outcome,

said Kohli. "We have to decide who bowls into the wind, who bowls with it. If the breeze is blowing across the stadium, then who is more effective bowling the in-swingers or the out-swingers."

The wind would impact the batsmen too, Kohli said, "The ball might not travel in the air a lot more when you are hitting against the wind. So you need to be prepared to run a lot more. It's something we learnt the last time."

Kohli elaborated, "And if you have a light bat, then you are in trouble. You need to

be firm with your stance and where your bat is, because it can really swing around. I experienced it the last time"

Intense and fit guys

On the New Zealand team, Kohli said, "They are intense and very, very fit guys and they can keep going all day and test your patience, really skilled with what they do as both bowlers and batsmen and are obviously brilliant fielders. So they don't give you a lot within the game to sort of bank on or pounce on. They could bounce back from the 0-3 reverse in Australia."

Talking about the Test championship, Kohli noted, "The Test Championship, as an ICC tournament, should be right up there. All the other tournaments, for me, start under that."

"This is going to be the biggest of them all. And every team wants to make it to the final at Lord's."

Even in these conditions, Kohli spoke about the advantages of having a world-class spinner in the attack.

India was close to finalising the eleven, he said. From what one gathered, R. Ashwin and Rishabh Pant are likely to play.

Australia targets fifth title at Women's T20 WC

The home team opens the 10-team tournament against India on Friday



Ready to get going: India's Veda Krishnamurthy and Harmanpreet Kaur and Australia's Ellyse Perry and Annabel Sutherland are geared up for the opener. ■ GETTY IMAGES

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
SYDNEY

Mighty Australia goes into its home Twenty20 World Cup this week as overwhelming favourite as it looks to cement its superiority in women's cricket and draw a world-record crowd in the process.

Meg Lanning's defending champion, and four-time winner, was rarely tested through the second half of 2019 when it whitewashed an injury-ravaged West Indies and a developing Sri Lanka team in the short format.

Giving a glimmer of hope to its rivals, it surprisingly slumped to defeat against India and England this month, before rallying to win the warm-up tri-series.

"To be put under pressure like this heading into a World Cup is extremely good prep-

aration," Lanning insisted. Despite the recent losses, Australia is widely expected to contest the March 8 final at the MCG. Along with Lanning, Australia boasts wicketkeeper-batswoman Alyssa Healy, all-rounder Ellyse Perry and bowling sensation Jess Jonassen, all among the world's best.

Australia has been dominant since the World Cup was introduced 11 years ago, winning four of the six tournaments so far and crushing England by eight wickets in the 2018 final in the West Indies.

The only other teams to lift the trophy are England on home soil in 2009 and

the West Indies in 2016.

Lanning's side open the 10-team tournament here on Friday against an Indian side which includes teen batting sensation Shafali Verma.

Australia and India are 2-2 across their last four meetings and Indian skipper Harmanpreet Kaur said her side had improved markedly since the last World Cup, when it lost to England in the semi-finals.

"If I look back two years, India's 50-over side was doing well and our T20 was struggling. But in the past two years, we have transformed as a T20 team and are very positive going to Australia," she wrote in a column. "All of the teams have strengths – but so do we. Our strength is spin," she added, with the dangerous Radha Radav and Poonam Radav in the ranks.

The Norwegian, 19, stabbed in from close range after a quick-fire passing move in the 69th minute.

He then thundered in an unstoppable shot for his second goal in the 77th, two minutes after Neymar had levelled for PSG.

Haaland has reached 10 goals in seven games in Europe's elite competition this season, including eight for Salzburg in the group stage, faster than anyone.

He is only the second teenager to net 10 Champions League goals, after Kylian Mbappe, and is the first teenager to score 10 in a single campaign in the competition.

The results: Atletico Madrid 1 (Niguez 4) bt Liverpool 0; Borussia Dortmund 2 (Haaland 69, 77) bt PSG 1 (Neymar 75).

Sania-Caroline pair bows out

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

DUBAI

Zeng Saisai and Barbora Krejcikova breezed past Sania Mirza and Caroline Garcia combination 6-4, 6-2 in the women's doubles pre-quarterfinal match at the WTA Dubai Championships on Wednesday.

In the singles quarterfinals Karolina Pliskova and Garbine Muguruza re-established order among seeds.

While No.2 Czech Pliskova strolled in barely an hour to a 6-1, 6-2 defeat of qualifier Kristina Mladenovic, it took No. 9 Muguruza almost two-and-a-half hours to get past Russian Veronika Kudermetova 7-5, 4-6, 6-4.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MADRID

Champions League holder Liverpool will need to summon another famous European comeback at Anfield next month after it was beaten 1-0 away to Atletico Madrid in their last-16 first leg on Tuesday.

Spain midfielder Saul Niguez struck the only goal of the game in the fourth minute by bundling into the net from close range following a substitution by Klopp.

Liverpool missed a series of chances to equalise in the second half, with Mohamed Salah and captain Jordan Henderson coming closest to scoring.

Atletico's Wanda Metropolitano stadium was the

scene of Liverpool's 2-0 triumph over Tottenham Hotspur in last year's final but it faced a very different type of atmosphere this time around.

But on Tuesday Atletico produced a vintage defensive display, sitting deep and barely giving Liverpool any space for its attacking trident of Salah, Roberto Firmino and Sadio Mane to work their usual magic.

Mane was fortunate not to be sent off late in the first half after clashing with Sime Vrsaljko while on a yellow card and he was swiftly substituted by Klopp.

Meanwhile, Borussia

Dortmund teenager Erling Haaland scored twice in eight minutes to lead his team to a 2-1 victory over Paris St. Germain.



On a roll: Erling Braut Haaland is the quickest to react and stab home Borussia Dortmund's opener past PSG custodian Keylor Navas. ■ REUTERS

Taylor on verge of a special ton

Will become the first to play 100 matches in each format

TRIBUTE

S. DINAKAR

WELLINGTON

He's a modern batsman with bat speed and whiplash hits who can also play the delicate strokes. Ross Taylor can wait for the ball to land, turn it off the surface and essay the late-cut.

Of course, some of his horizontal bat shots can be fierce too. Not many batsmen have put the slogan sweep to such devastating effect as Taylor has done.

Touch of class

From 2007, when he made his Test debut against South Africa in Johannesburg, Taylor has been with this New Zealand side through the seasons, often making his mark with a touch of class.

How wonderful it would be then that this Wellington-born charmer would be playing his 100th Test, in front of his family, friends and fans, when he steps on the field against India on Friday at the Basin Reserve, his home ground.

He is versatile, across formats. Taylor, in fact, is on the verge of becoming the first batsman to play 100 matches in Tests, ODIs and Twenty20 Internationals. He has played 231 ODIs and 100 T20Is. "It's satisfying. People now-a-days give up on a format to focus on the others," he said.

Natural strokemaker

He has indeed been a natural strokemaker, galloping on his skills when the going is good, conjuring moments of magic. And he has shown the heart to survive periods of struggle. His appetite for runs hasn't diminished a tad. "I am still as hungry as ever to score runs. After my first series, I wouldn't have been putting much money on myself to be playing 100 Tests, that's for sure."

Passion, not job

Cricket, for Taylor, was a passion and not a job. "I guess it's a proud milestone, more so in Tests. I love playing cricket, first and foremost. It's not a job, it's so-



True servant: Ross Taylor has long been carrying the hopes of New Zealand cricket. ■ TWITTER.COM/BLACKCAPS

I am still as hungry

mething you love doing," he said. Asked about the key to defeating India, the 35-year-old Taylor said, "They are the world's best side and leading the World Championship. To win Test matches, you got to be good in all three facets."

High highs, low lows

On his remarkable journey, Taylor said, "I have had some pretty high highs and some pretty low lows. Been able to deal with it the whole way through your career. I wouldn't put one thing that outweighs anything, just the whole journey. Failures along the way shapes you as a person."

Looking at the forthcoming Test, Taylor pointed out that the Indian attack was not about Jasprit Bumrah alone. He said the pitch at the Basin looked the same every time but played differently each time. He looked at the series against India as a sort of redemption after the debacle against Australia.

He's still full of beans. Ask Taylor and he will tell you that life begins at 100!

	Mat	Inns	Runs	HS	Ave	SR	100s	50s	Ct
Tests	99	175	7174	290	46.28	60.05	19	33	145
ODIs	231	215	8570	181*	48.69	83.47	21	51	138
T20Is	100	92	1909	63	26.51	122.68	0	7	46

Saina advances

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

BARCELONA

Saina Nehwal advanced to the women's singles pre-quarterfinals of the \$170,000 Barcelona Spain Masters with a 21-16, 21-14 win over Germany's Yvonne Li here on Wednesday.

The results: Men: Singles: K. Srikanth bt Subhankar Dey 23-21, 21-18; Ajay Jayaram bt Christo Popov (Fra) 21-14, 21-12; Daren Liew (Mal) bt H.S. Prannoy 21-18, 21-15; Ygor Coelho (Bra) bt P. Kashyap 9-21, 21-18, 14-12 (retd); Sameer Verma bt Lucas Claerbot (Fra) 21-12, 21-9.

Women: Singles: Saina Nehwal bt Yvonne Li (Ger) 21-16, 21-14.

Mixed doubles: Praanav Jerry Chopra & Sikki N Reddy bt Mathias Christiansen & Alexandra Boje (Den) 10-21, 21-16, 21-17.

TV PICKS

Ranji Trophy: Star Sports 3 & SS Select 1 HD, 9.30 a.m.
ISL: Star Sports 2 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.
Europa League: Sony Ten 1, 2, 3, 6 & ESPN (SD & HD), 11.30 p.m.
New Zealand v India: 1st Test, Star Sports 1 (SD & HD), 4 a.m. (Friday).

RANJI QUARTERS

- Gujarat v Goa, Valsad
 - Bengal v Odisha, Cuttack
 - Karnataka v J&K, Jammu
 - Saurashtra v Andhra, Ongole
- All matches start at 9.30 a.m.

Raghav excels in Sona-Sphiro's narrow win

NEW DELHI: Raghav Rao scored two goals, including the match-winner in the sudden death sixth chukker, to guide Sona-Sphiro to a 7-6 victory over Garcha Hotels in a league match of the Suan Northern India 16-goal polo championship at the Jaipur Polo ground here on Wednesday.

The results (league): Jindal Panther 4-1/2 (Simran Shergill 3, handicap 1-1/2) bt Golden Globe Hotels 3 (Chris Mackenzie 3); Sona-Sphiro 7 (Raghav Rao 2, Gerardo Mazzini 2, Siddhant Sharma 2, Dhruvpal Godara) bt Garcha Hotels 6 (Manuel Llorente 4, Satinder Garcha, Angad Kalaan).

Army Championship: RVC 9 (Anant Rajpurohit 4, Ramvir Singh 3, Vijay Singh 2) bt Artillery 5 (Karamat Ali 2, RK Gautam, handicap 2); Cavalry 'A' 3 (Vishal Chauhan, Aman Singh, Mritunjay Singh) bt ASC O.

Bopanna advances

SPORTS BUREAU
MARSEILLE

Rohan Bopanna and Canada's Denis Shapovalov beat Simone Bolelli and Jannik Sinner of Italy 6-7(6), 6-3, [10-6] in the doubles first round of the €79,670 ATP tennis tournament here.

Other results:

€ 46,600 Challenger, Koblenz, Germany: **Singles (second round):** Sasi Kumar Mukund bt Lucas Miedler (Aut) 7-6(1), 6-4.

\$15,000 ITF, Monastir: **Men: Singles (first round):** Manish Sureshkumar bt Louis Tessa (Fra) 6-2, 7-6(5).

Churchill moves to third

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MARGAO

Churchill notched up a 2-1 victory over Real Kashmir FC and rose to third in the I-League on Wednesday.

Willis Deon Plaza (11th minute) opened the scoring before Lalkhawpuimawia (20th) added the second with a stunning strike. Robin Singh (82nd) reduced the margin.

Goa swamps Jamshedpur

Becomes first Indian club to play in AFC Champions League group stage

ISL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JAMSHEDPUR

FC Goa on Wednesday became the first team from the country to qualify for the group stage of the AFC Champions League, the continent's top-tier club competition, after beating Jamshedpur FC 5-0 in an Indian Super League match here.

Ferran Corominas (11th), Hugo Boumous (70th and 90th), Jackichand Singh

Bengal keen to continue the good run

Resurgent Odisha determined to give the visitors a run for their money

RANJI TROPHY

Y.B. SARANGI
TANIGI

Hardened by a gruelling pre-season under the guidance of an old-school teacher Arun Lal, Bengal has displayed some miraculous performances in Ranji Trophy group matches and hopes to continue its good run in the quarterfinal clash against Odisha, starting at the DRIEMS ground here on Thursday.

The Bengal story, which includes six debutants, rests on its self-belief and team work. The team has found several match-winners with the bat and the ball.

If Abhishek Raman stepped forward early in the season, Manoj Tiwary lived up to his reputation in crucial situations. The experienced Anustup Majumder chipped in with important knocks, while the big-hearted Shahbaz Ahmed performed with the bat and the ball.

Lesser-known pacers like Mukesh Kumar and Akash Deep bowled with responsibility. Ishan Porel, despite his limited availability, deli-



Good hand: Bengal has found several match-winners with the bat and the ball and someone like Mukesh Kumar has bowled with responsibility. ■ FILE PHOTO: RAJEEV BHATT

vered his best and is ready to serve his state again.

Arun Lal, who scorned 'mollycoddling' and 'load management,' could see Bengal's transformation and expected better things in future. "We have the best bowling side in the country," He

said, unperturbed by the uncertainty over Akash Deep.

For this match, he believed that his team – which last reached the quarters in 2017-18 – has the wherewithal to blunt Odisha's challenge on a green and hard track.

Bengal will pray for im-

pressive shows from its captain Abhimanyu Easwaran and top-order batsman Sudip Chatterjee.

Dreaming big

For Odisha, which previously played the quarterfinals in 2016-17, this season has been

a leap of faith too. Coach Rashmi Ranjan Parida, who played for five states and lifted the Ranji Trophy with the Rajasthan team, convinced his players to dream big and got a good response.

"I told the boys that they don't belong to Group-C. We have to stick to our strength, play fearless cricket and treat this one as another match," said Parida, who witnessed the side earn four seven-pointers – including three here – in the season.

The biggest positive for Odisha – which has capable seamers like Basant Mohanty, Suryakant Pradhan and Debabrata Pradhan – has been its resurgence in batting. Batsmen like Shantanu Mishra, Debasish Samantray, Anurag Sarangi, Govinda Poddar and captain Subhasish Senapati have gathered runs and confidence.

Even though one of its main weapons, speedster Rajesh Mohanty, was ruled out due to injury, Parida believed that others could do the job well enough.

The underdog tag may suit Odisha, which is determined to give Bengal run for its money.

Karnataka favourite, but would do well to be wary

Hungry J&K will be no pushover

SHREEDUTTA CHIDANANDA
JAMMU

The erstwhile Prince of Wales College is an unusual setting for a Ranji Trophy quarterfinal. By the Geology block, students sip tea on benches, lost in conversation. Over in the 115-year-old main block, with its glorious arcades, young boys sprint to class. On the front lawns, students lie on the grass, poring over their books in the shade of tall pine trees. In a far corner of the 65-acre campus, past the hostel block and the library, Karnataka and Jammu & Kashmir will battle each other from Thursday for a place in the semifinals of the country's premier domestic tournament.

As the two teams trained at the Gandhi Memorial Science College – as it is now known – on match-eve, there was no escaping the presence of security forces. "Too close for comfort," said Karun Nair, as armed police casually stood around the nets. Karun Nair's men, though, will still be favourites. This is a strong, well-rounded side, and any concerns over form were swatted aside last week as Karnataka booked its spot in the last-eight in emphatic fashion.

Manish Pandey's arrival is a boost. It remains to be seen who makes way for Pandey. Pavan Deshpande would seem the likely candidate but Shreyas Gopal has been poor this season. The all-rounder could sit out if the team management feels Deshpande's off-breaks are reliable.

Karnataka has its full pace



All smiles: J&K captain Parvez Rasool and his Karnataka counterpart Karun Nair strike a happy pose on the eve of their quarterfinal tie. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

'Our boys are mentally strong'

SHREEDUTTA CHIDANANDA
JAMMU

Ashiq Hussain Bukhari tells a story from August, soon after the state of Jammu and Kashmir had gone into virtual lockdown. With no other means of reaching his players, Bukhari, CEO of the JKCA and a former DIG, sent word to police stations in the districts. They were to reach out to certain Ranji Trophy probables in their towns, and ask them to assemble in Jammu, from where the group was to fly out to Baroda for a pre-season camp. As a patrol vehicle reached one player's house, he got out and ran, afraid that he was going to be detained. He returned only after the police had explained the situation to

his father.

"It was a difficult time because phones were blocked," says the J&K captain Parvez Rasool. "I didn't even know if my neighbour was there. In that situation, what do you do? Credit should go to CEO saab."

That J & K recovered from that painful interruption to pre-season and has now gone on to reach the quarterfinals of the Ranji Trophy says much about the team's mental strength. During the team's training camp in Baroda, mentor Irfan Pathan and coach Milap Mewada made it a point to talk to their Kashmir-based players every day.

"We were worried for them because they could not reach their families.

But they were fine," says Mewada.

"This is a chance to create history," says Rasool. "I was telling our players that this game can prove to be a turning point in their career."

That Jammu is hosting a game of this magnitude could prove to be hugely significant for cricket in the state. "You can see how much passion for cricket exists," says Rasool, still the only cricketer from the state to have played for India. "There is no infrastructure in Kashmir but you go to any alley there, you will see that they are playing only cricket. All these external things do not affect us. Our boys are mentally very strong."

bowling attack of Prasidh Krishna, Ronit More and Abhimanyu Mithun available, with the left-arm pace of Prajeet Jain an added option. J & K, though, will be no pushover.

Parvez Rasool's men finished on top of Group C with six outright wins, advancing to the quarterfinals for only the second time in their state's history.

This is a young team: six of the 11 that featured in the previous game, against Haryana, had played fewer than 10 First Class matches.

The 18-year-old middle-order batsman Abdul Samad is an exciting prospect: he is the team's top-scorer this season, with 547 runs at a strike rate of 116. He has smashed 35 sixes so far this season.

With Irfan Pathan's mentorship and the administrative changes that have taken place over the last year or so, J & K has found a renewed zest. Karnataka will do well to be wary.

Clarifying that this was no merger of the two bodies that govern professional golf, Thapar said, "Since the PGTI

Given limited resources, Delhi did well: Bhaskar

Frontline bowlers' poor returns cited as one reason for failure

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

After being a credible finalist, Delhi failed to reach the Ranji Trophy quarterfinals for a second season in succession. The reasons for this slide were not hard to seek. The infamy of the Delhi and District Cricket Association (DDCA) is just one of them.

With Virat Kohli and Rishabh Pant on National duty, Delhi had the services of Shikhar Dhawan for just one match while speedsters Ishant Sharma and Navdeep Saini were available for two.

Add to this, injuries suffered by bowlers like Pradeep Sangwan, Vikas Tokas, Pawan Suyal and Vikas Mishra meant Delhi played its league by fielding a second string team.

Even though one of its main weapons, speedster Rajesh Mohanty, was ruled out due to injury, Parida believed that others could do the job well enough.

The underdog tag may suit Odisha, which is determined to give Bengal run for its money.

last-eight was not beyond us."

A look at Delhi's bowling performances throws up only one name – Simarjeet Singh. The hard-working seamer took 31 wickets from seven matches. Ishant (11) and all-rounder Kunwar Bidhu (10) were next best.

"For a team to do well, at least three of your bowlers have to account for 20-25 wickets each. Unfortunately that was not the case," says Bhaskar.

Delhi's batting suffered owing to the inconsistency of the top-order. Nitish Rana and skipper Dhruv Shorey, the batting mainstay, had their moments but could not finish with a flourish.

Lack of faith

Another key factor was the lack of faith shown by the Delhi selectors in some of the players. Kunal Chanda, fellow comeback-man Kulwant Khejriwal, Lalit Yadav, Vikas Mishra and Subodh Bhati were among those dropped for different reasons. This, in turn, led to a sense of insecurity in the unit.

Looking forward, Bhaskar says, "There are a number of talented players, both at under-23 and senior level. If Delhi teams can travel to play in tournaments, say in the southern part of the country or even play abroad, this move could help the youngsters a great deal. With more self-belief to go with their immense potential, Delhi stands to gain a lot more."

PGTI, WGAI sign pact

GOLF

RAKESH RAO
GURGAON

In a move that has potential to help professional golf in the country for both genders, more prize-money tournaments for women and events that could attract quality players from around the world. We are looking at the novelty of the mixed field (where both men and women professionals get to play), attracting new sponsors. Also,

a single body that deals with professional golf makes it easier for the Government and other stakeholders, too."

Kavita said, "this partnership with PGTI is sure to help make the sport attractive for more girls to turn professional."

DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Karnataka Govt. Secretariat, MS Building, Bengaluru,

No.: ED 496 UNE 2017

Date : 19-02-2020

- Invitation for application for the post of Vice Chancellor (VC) for the Karnataka State Dr. Gangubai Hanagal Music and Performing Arts University, Mysuru.**
- As per Section (12) of the Karnataka State Dr. Gangubai Hanagal Music and Performing Arts University Act 2009, fresh applications are invited from Professors / Academicians with the following eligibility criteria for the post of Vice-Chancellor for the Karnataka State Dr. Gangubai Hanagal Music and Performing Arts University, Mysuru.
 - Should be sincere, upright, should uphold ethical values, should be committed to the institution and should possess utmost administrative academic and research abilities.
 - Should have served as Professors in Universities for a minimum 10 years or should have experience in similar positions in renowned research institutes/education administrations organization.
 - Should be renowned scholar in music and performing arts.
 - Those interested in submitting the applications for the post of Vice-Chancellor of Karnataka State Dr. Gangubai Hanagal Music and Performing Arts University shall submit details in triplicate, regarding their academics, research, academic and administrative experience, achievements and other details in the prescribed formats specified by UGC and sent the same to Additional Chief Secretary Department of Higher Education, 6th Floor, Gate No. 2, MS Building, Dr. Ambedkar Veedhi, Bangalore-560001, within 15 days of publication of this notification.
 - Application format can be had from the official website of Karnataka State Dr. Gangubai Hanagal Music and Performing Arts University, Mysuru.
 - In support of unblemished career and undoubted integrity, the applicant who is retired from service, should file a self attested certificate to the effect that no departmental/criminal enquiry is instituted / pending against him or no enquiry is culminated in penalties. Whereas, in case of applicant in service, he should file a certificate of his employer in this regard.
 - Applications shall be submitted within 15 days of publication of this advertisement. Application received after the prescribed time limit shall not be entertained and Department of Higher Education is not responsible for postal or other delays.
 - The candidature of those that indulge in inappropriate influencing through unethical means shall be annulled.
 - The applicants shall be submit fresh application. The earlier application will not be considered if already submitted for the post of Vice Chancellor of Karnataka State Dr. Gangubai Hanagal Music and Performing Arts University, Mysuru.
 - Applications not as per specified formats shall be rejected.

Sd/-
Additional Chief Secretary to Government
Education Department (Higher Education)

DIPR/DDU/Four Winds/2019-20

ISL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JAMSHEDPUR

FC Goa on Wednesday became the first team from the country to qualify for the group stage of the AFC Champions League, the continent's top-tier club competition, after beating Jamshedpur FC 5-0 in an Indian Super League match here.

Ferran Corominas (11th), Hugo Boumous (70th and 90th), Jackichand Singh

Good day for Sowjanya

SPORTS BUREAU
JODHPUR

National champion Sowjanya Bavissetti had a good day as she beat fifth seed Valeria Strakhova of Ukraine 6-3, 6-4 in the first round of the \$25,000 ITF women's tennis tournament in Ratanada, on Wednesday.

The results: Singles (first round): Ankita Raina bt Bojana Marinkovic (Srb) 7-

India claims three more bronze

Aditya, Ashu and Hardeep among the medal winners

ASIAN WRESTLING

UTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

Having won his first two bouts comfortably, Aditya Kundu was favourite to become India's second Greco-Roman finalist at the senior Asian wrestling championship here on Wednesday. That did not happen but a semifinal setback was not enough to keep him away from the podium, adding to the host's medal tally with a bronze in the 72kg.

The 23-year-old civil inspector from Chandigarh finished off his Japanese opponent Naoh Kusaka in double-quick time, wrapping up an 8-0 win by technical superiority in under two minutes.

"Winning a medal in this manner in my first Asian Championship feels great. It adds to the confidence level," Kundu told *The Hindu*.

Shift in style

Like most Indian wrestlers, Kundu is a late convert to Greco-Roman but unlike others who make the shift due to their inability to break through in Freestyle, Kundu's was more out of compulsion.

"I have golds and bronze at the University Games in Freestyle but a knee injury around a few years back meant I was unable to put too much strength in my legs and decided to shift to Greco-Roman. A gold at the Commonwealth Championship in 2017 convinced me I could do well and today's win proves it was the right move," he added.



In control: Ashu overpowered Syria's Abdwlkarim Mohammad Alhasan to give the local fans a lot to cheer about on Wednesday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

the points, my plan worked perfectly," he said.

Trained by his father Ranbir Singh at Gulzar Akhada in Zirakpur, Kundu is now hoping to drop down to 67kg and get a chance at the Olympic qualifiers - 72kg is not an Olympic category. For that, however, he would have to contend with another youngster who won a 67kg bronze here - Ashu.

Confidence pays off

At 19 and in his first senior tournament, Ashu bettered Syrian Abdwlkarim Mohammad Alhasan 8-1. The native of Panchi Jatan village in So-

nipat was confident of winning, having learnt from his semifinal defeat.

"I was in too much hurry in the previous bout. This time I knew I had to defend myself well. Wrestlers at the senior level are more intelligent and you have to plan accordingly. It's been a learning experience," he added.

Hardeep completed the host's medal tally for the second day with bronze in the 97kg as India finished the Greco-Roman competition with four bronze and one gold to be placed fifth on the table. Iran topped with five gold, one silver and three

bronze.

The results (Greco-Roman):

60kg: 1. Kenichiro Fumita (Jpn), 2. Zholaman Sharshenbekov (Kg), 3. Islamjon Bakhramov (Uzb) & Mehdi Seifollah Mohsen Nejad (Iri).

67kg: 1. Hansu Ryu (Kor), 2. Mahmud Bakhshiloev (Uzb), 3. Ashu (Ind) & Hosseini Nasrullah Assadi Kolmati (Iri).

72kg: 1. Amin Yavar Kaviyaninejad (Iri), 2. Ibragim Magomedov (Kaz), 3. Aditya Kundu (Ind) & Ruslan Tsarev (Kg).

82kg: 1. Mahdi Asgar Ebrahimi (Iri), 2. Junhyeong Choi (Kor), 3. Jalgasbay Berdimuratov (Uzb).

97kg: 1. Mohammadali Abdollah Saravi (Iri), 2. Seyeol Lee (Kor), 3. Muhammadali Shamisdinov (Uzb) & Hardeep (Ind).

Football – India to host 2022 AFC Women's Asian Cup

Championship to be expanded from eight to 12 teams

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KUALA LUMPUR

India will host the 2022 AFC Women's Asian Cup. India was awarded the tournament by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC)'s Women's Committee here on Tuesday.

It was felt that India, which will also host the FIFA Women's U-17 World Cup later this year, was best placed among the three bidders – Chinese Taipei and Uzbekistan were the other competing candidates – to maximise the promotion of the women's game.

The venues proposed by

India – D.Y. Patil Stadium, Trans Stadia Arena and Fa-torda Stadium – are also being used in the FIFA tournaments, the AFC said.

Best opportunities

AFC's Women's Committee chairperson Mahfuzia Akhter Kiron said: "India offers the best opportunities to build the event commercially as well as increasing the value and India is also committed to developing the women's game and while all three were strong bids, India stands out."

The committee decided that the expanded AFC Wo-

men's Asian Cup – from eight to 12 teams – will be played in three groups of four teams with a minimum of 25 matches with eight teams qualifying for the newly introduced quarterfinals.

The committee agreed that the minimum length of the competition would be 17 days and that the administration would be mandated to organise the relevant play-off matches depending on the AFC slots at the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup.

The tournament dates are likely to be in late October and early November 2022.

Shiva Keshavan, the first Indian representative to compete in luge at the Winter Olympics, is aiming to build an academy to nurture talented youngsters and is in talks with a couple of State governments.

"My idea is to have a residential complex with all the multi-sports facilities and since (it will be) in the mountains, we will have access to the ski area, ice hockey," Keshavan told reporters here. "It can be built over time. So, I'm speaking to a couple of State governments to give land or get some sponsors."

The sport is getting bigger: Catherine

Says the Women's T20 World Cup will be a game changer

VIJAY LOKAPALLY
NEW DELHI

As a coach with the Ultimate Pace Foundation, Catherine Dalton has made quite a few trips to India, holding camps at Bangalore, Pune, Hyderabad and Delhi. One of the few bio-mechanics expert to be associated with fast bowlers, she expects the forthcoming ICC Women's T20 World Cup to be the game changer for women's cricket.

"There is high expectations as far as quality is concerned. The buzz can be felt worldwide," she told *The Hindu* from London. "It's going up. The game is getting bigger. With the World Cup coming up we are going to see some fantastic cricket. It's exciting time for women's cricket. There is place for women's cricket which has increasingly become competitive."

Catherine has had very pleasant experience of coaching in India. "I have never experienced any resistance as a woman coach. When I went to India I wasn't sure how I would be received by the players. The players warmed to me very quickly



Guiding force: Catherine Dalton says working with Deepak Chahar has helped both of them. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

because they could see they could learn something from me. I was fortunate to have a good understanding of the game, particularly of the bio-mechanics of the fast bowling."

Like many in India, Catherine also picked up the game watching her father and brothers play. "When I was younger I used to be taken to our local cricket club where my brother played lots of cricket. I decided to join and fell in love with the game. I was nine years old at that time. I just got hooked to cricket. I also played tennis and a huge amount of football. I just wanted to bowl

fast because I wanted to do things quickly," said Catherine, who also played football for West Ham Club.

"When I was 17, at a cricket camp, I decided to give cricket a full go. That was the turning point I switched from football to cricket."

The biggest highlight for Catherine was working with Deepak Chahar when she was invited by the Rajasthan Cricket Association a few years ago to do a specific fast bowling camp. "I learnt a lot from him and hopefully passed on some of my knowledge to him as well," said Catherine, named Middlesex Player Of The Year in 2013.

Bengaluru FC loses to Maziya S&RC

AFC CUP

SPORTS BUREAU
MALE (MALDIVES)

Bengaluru FC suffered a 2-1 defeat away to Maziya S&RC in the first leg of the AFC Cup playoff round at the Maldives National Football Stadium here on Wednesday.

Cornelius Stewart scored with ten minutes left to give Maziya the advantage ahead of the return leg in Bengaluru next Wednesday.

After a goalless first period, Ibrahim Mahudhee opened the scoring for Maziya

just after the hour mark, firing home from distance.

Substitute Deshorn Brown earned a penalty for BFC minutes later which Nili Perdomo converted to even matters.

But Stewart's strike meant that BFC had to be satisfied with just the away goal.

The club will play ATK in the ISL on Saturday before Maziya come calling for the second leg.

The result: Maziya S&RC (Ibrahim Mahudhee 64, Cornelius Stewart 80) bt Bengaluru FC 1 (Nili Perdomo 71).

Amandeep Drall in the van

GOLF

SPORTS REPORTER
BENGALURU

Amandeep Drall, with three birdies in the last eight holes, secured the lead at the end of the first day of the fourth leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour at the Bangalore Golf Club here on Wednesday.

Two-over after the first eight holes, Amandeep found birdies on 11th, 15th and the 16th to finish at one-under 69. It was the only under-par score of the day. Vani Kapoor was two-un-

der through the first eight holes but dropped shots on ninth, 11th and 16th to finish at 71, two shots behind the leader.

Local amateur Asmita Sathish had no birdies but dropped shots on second, fourth and 16th for a card of 73. Neha Tripathi (74) is fourth while Gurssimar Badwal and Anousha Tripathi occupied the fifth spot together. Pranavi Urs, winner of last two events on the Hero WPGT, had a rough start with one birdie on the third and then had eight bogeys in the remaining 15 holes.

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20 February
Uma Sharma (Awardee)-Kathak
Jatin Goswami (Awardee)-Sattriya
Meera Das-Odissi Group

21 February
Pujita Krishna-Vilasini Natyam
Krishan Mohan Mishra-Kathak
Lata Singh Munshi-Bharatnatyam Group

22 February
Shobana Chandrakumar Pillai-Bharatnatyam
Suprava Mishra -Odissi Group
Ananda Shankar Jayant-Bharatnatyam Group

23 February
Y. Asha Kumari-Odissi
Kshitija Barve-Bharatnatyam
Ragini Makkhar-Kathak Group

24 February
N. Srikanth & Aswathy Srikanth-Bharatnatyam Duet
Nair Sisters Veena-Dhanya-Mohiniyattam Duet
Narthaki Nataraj-Bharatnatyam

25 February
Bhadra Sinha & Gayathri Sharma-Bharatnatyam Duet
Richa Joshi & Deepak Gangani-Kathak Duet
Mohika Saxena-Bharatnatyam
Vyonesh Shukla-Nritya Natika

26 February
Srividya Angara Sinha-Kuchipudi
Enakshi Sinha & Pavitra Krishna Bhat-Odissi & Bharatnatyam Duet
Sinam Basu Singh-Manipuri Group
Amita Khare-Kathak Group

You are cordially invited
ENTRY FREE

Department of Culture, Government of Madhya Pradesh
kalaacademymp@gmail.com, www.khajurahodancefestival.com

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