

'Constitutional values are tested in the courts'

In front of a huge gathering, including judges and lawyers, Justice S. Muralidhar recounted the pivotal moments in his 14-year stint on the Delhi High Court Bench

Justice S. Muralidhar was transferred from the Delhi High Court to the Punjab and Haryana High Court in a midnight notification following two crucial orders related to the Delhi riots.

Excerpts from his farewell speech delivered in the Delhi High Court building on March 5:

The Chief Justice, my colleagues, and all present here. I had first written out a speech thanking those who made it possible for me to be where I am. That ran into six typed pages. Some of them are here, some elsewhere. They include Amma, my sister and my niece, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, cousins and numerous other relatives and friends and above all, Usha, all of whom have been incredibly close and supportive.

To each of them I wish to say I am deeply grateful for the various ways they have enriched my life and helped me navigate it. Among those who are not with us and whose lasting influence in my life I gratefully acknowledge are my father Srinivasan, my uncle Viswanaathan, my mother-in-law Indira Rama-nathan. In May 1987, Mr. G. Ramaswamy (GR), who was then the ASG of India in the Supreme Court took me on as his junior and I moved from Chennai to Delhi. The two-year stint with him was an incredible period of learning. His razor-sharp mind, ready wit and humour, remarkable advocacy skills and solid grounding in the basics of all branches of law helped me learn about the law and the Court.

I am eternally grateful for that and, not a day passes without re-

calling him.

Professor Lotika Sarkar, whom we all called Ma'am. Usha and I were fortunate that Ma'am spent the last four years of her life with us. She was the epitome of an ethical life and continues to be a huge inspiration.

Shortly before the lunch recess on February 17, 2020, the Chief Justice of India's letter dated February 14, 2020, communicating the transfer proposal was delivered to me in my chamber.

In the early hours of that day, our pet Labrador Sakhi, literally a companion to the entire family who gave unconditional warmth and joy for over 11 years, breathed her last.

The reason Sakhi came into our lives was Ma'am. Sakhi remained till the last a strong sage-like and pure presence. I can confidently claim to be very close to many of the judges here on the dais. There are judges in the audience and elsewhere in Delhi and India who have helped me in various ways in traversing the difficult path of judgeship. It is only paucity of time that prevents me from naming them. I am grateful to each of them.

Every Judge of this Court has a mini establishment of over a dozen persons without whom no work can get done. The back up support is by over 1,200 employees of this Court. If I have been able to function effectively as a Judge of this Court, it is because of these people.

Over the years, I have realised that it is not enough for lawyers and judges to speak about constitutional values. It is essential to imbibe them. The constitutional values of equality, non-discrimination, dignity, prohibition of untouchability, inclusivity,

and plurality have to be practiced continuously at both a personal and professional level.

Some random thoughts: The act of judging takes place in a space that is both mediative and meditative. The former is in acknowledgement of the primary function of judging: dispute resolution. The latter, i.e., the meditative space in constitutional court adjudication has, at least for me, two guiding principles. The Gandhian talisman of the weakest person and Ambedkar's adoption of Grotte's constitutional morality. If in this meditative judicial space, I allow my judicial instinct to be so guided, the result, I believe, would answer the constitutional vision of justice. In this vision, Courts are not merely places where law is practised and produced. They are also spaces where the constitutional values are tested.

I don't subscribe to the view that Judges perform a divine function. To me, jettisoning the prefix Lordship and even 'Hon'ble' is not a fetish. It is an

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Justice S. Muralidhar takes oath as Punjab and Haryana High Court Judge, in Chandigarh on March 6. ■ PTI

acknowledgment of how mortal, temporal, and, if I may venture to add, fallible we are.

There is a distinction between neutrality and impartiality. They are not antithetical. Impartiality is non-compromisable for a judge. It is an essential attribute. On neutrality, the Constitution, in my view, requires the judge at all levels to be able to discern the weak from the strong litigant in terms of their capacities to access justice and lean on the side of the vulnerable in order to attempt to achieve equality of arms.

Not an easy task

Judging is, without question, not an easy task. It involves a daily onslaught of negative emotions brought to the court by anxious, and often frustrated, litigants seeking justice.

It is possible that many of the physical ailments of judges are on account of having to with-

stand the negative energies. Maintaining equanimity and calm through the day, case after case, is indeed a big challenge. Judging can be enlightening. It demands that you delve deep into the minds and lives of people across a wide cross-section of society, sometimes very different from your own. It can also be deeply humbling. Someone asked me not long ago, after nearly 14 years on the Bench, "things must be much clearer, in black and white?" I found I could not agree. The colour that the judge of many years best identifies with is Grey. I am often asked, "are judges under pressure?" My answer to that is: Not unless they acknowledge it.

How different is the Court since I joined the Bench 14 years ago? The Bench strength has not particularly increased. It crossed 40 briefly on one or two occasions. We'll be down to 33 in a few days. Pendency has inevi-

tably increased. The buildings have expanded. Paperless Courts are an integral feature. No paper caselists. A state-of-the-art Block C where with the curtains lifted justice can be 'seen' to be done. A younger, vibrant and more diverse Bar. And an exciting variety of work which makes demands on the judges' mental agility. Work-wise, more attention is needed on scientific management of caseloads, of space, of litigant friendly procedures, and creative approaches to court architecture. There is much scope for enhancing transparency, accountability and access to justice. So too in the area of legal education and training.

What keeps me going as a judge? Those moments when I can bring to an end a two or three-decade old case, get an 80-year-old pensioner relief, long overdue retiral benefits to the legal representatives of a deceased bus conductor or wrongly dismissed CRPF jawan, reverse a wrong conviction or a wrong acquittal. The cry for justice is loud in every roster and in every court. What I felt every day as a Judge, and still feel, is that it never seems enough.

The most moving moment as a Judge was in this very Court sitting where I am today when on July 2, 2009, Chief Justice A. P. Shah and I delivered our judgment in Naz Foundation.

Even as we held that consensual same sex between adults in private was not a crime, the relief that swept through the courtroom amongst those waiting to hear the verdict was palpable. Many broke down right here in front of us. At that moment, we knew that something irreversible had happened.

Now about my transfer and what exactly happened on February 26, 2020. There has been some confusion about what transpired, and I thought it should be cleared. What the five-member collegium sends to the Central Government is a recommendation that a Judge of a High Court should be transferred to another High Court. The Judge concerned is not at this stage under orders of transfer. That happens only when the recommen-

dation of the collegium fructifies into a notification.

In my case, the collegium's decision was communicated to me by the CJI on February 17 by a letter which sought my response. I acknowledged receipt of the letter. I was then asked to clarify what I meant. As I saw it, if I was going to be transferred from the Delhi High Court any way, I was fine with moving to the Punjab and Haryana High Court. I therefore clarified to the CJI that I did not object to the proposal. An explanation for my transfer reached the press via Maneesh Chhibber's article in *The Print* on February 20 quoting "sources in the Supreme Court collegium", confirming what had been indicated to me a couple of days earlier.

February, 26, 2020, was perhaps the longest working day of my life as a Judge of this Court. It began at 12.30 a.m. with a sitting at my residence with Justice Bhambhani, under the orders of Justice Sistani, to deal with a PIL filed by Rahul Roy seeking safe passage for ambulances carrying the injured riot victims.

When I received a call at my residence from the lawyer for the petitioner, I first called Justice Sistani to ask what should be done, knowing that the Chief Justice was on leave.

Justice Sistani explained that he too was officially on leave the whole of February 26 and that I should take up the matter. This fact is stated in the order passed by the Bench after the hearing. Later that day, upon urgent mentioning, as the de facto CJ's Bench, Justice Tawant Singh and I took up another fresh PIL on the CJ's Board seeking registration of FIRs for hate speeches. After the orders passed on that day, the above two PILs remained on the CJ's Board.

The notification issued close to midnight of February 26 did two things. First, it transferred me to the Punjab and Haryana High Court. Second, it appointed me to a position from where I can never be transferred, or removed and in which I shall always be proud to remain. A former Judge of arguably the best High Court in the country. The High Court of Delhi.

DELHI POLICE
SHANTI SEVA NYAYA

International Women's Day

BETTER

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AIR QUALITY OF DELHI-NCR

City	Index	Category
Delhi	67	Good
Ghaziabad	58	Good
Noida	53	Good
Gurugram	74	Moderate
Faridabad	68	Moderate
Greater Noida	44	Moderate

Legend: Good (0-50), Satisfactory (51-100), Moderate (101-200), Poor (201-300), Very Poor (301-400), Severe (>400)

Air Quality Index at 4 p.m. yesterday (Average of past 24 hours) | Source: CPCB

COVID-19: licences of 5 medical stores cancelled

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA GHAZIABAD

The licences of five medical stores here have been cancelled after they were found to be selling hand sanitizers and face masks at inflated rates in the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic scare, officials said.

The drug department conducted raids on a number of retail and wholesale medical stores in the district following several complaints of black marketing of precautionary equipment.

District Magistrate Ajay Shankar Pandey said the Additional City Magistrate went to the stores and bought masks and sanitizers when he found that the store owners charged exorbitant prices of these two items and refused to provide bills for the purchase.

DELHI TODAY

Music: Hindustani classical vocal recital by Sawani Shende from Pune at C.D. Deshmukh Auditorium, India International Centre (IIC), 6:15 p.m.

Exhibition: "Yui Samadhan", a solo painting exhibition by Prasantha Appadaveetil at Convention Centre Foyer, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Exhibition: "Dhola", a solo exhibition of paintings and photographs by Mira Paintal at Delhi 'o' Delhi Foyer, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Exhibition: An exhibition of sculptures by Lalit Singh at Triveni Kalra Sangam, 205, Tansen Marg, 11 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Exhibition: A painting exhibition of Contemporary Golden Krishna by Krishan Kanhai on display at Nandjeet Khemka art Gallery Natya Tarangini Pushpa Vihar, Sector -6, Saket, 11 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Drawing: A painting exhibition of Contemp-

People shop for water guns at Sadar Bazar. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Sadar Bazar shop owners left high and dry this Holi

The market sees low footfall due to COVID-19 scare

AISHWARYA TRIPATHI
NEW DELHI

With Holi celebrations set to begin in the Capital, the shopkeepers in Sadar Bazar have taken a double hit because of derailed shipments from China and declining customer footfall due to the COVID-19 scare.

The local vendors as well as traders at this hub where *pichkari*s and water balloons are sold are in a fix after supply from Chinese factories has been stopped in mid-January.

Samjuddin, a shopkeeper, said that the last packet of balloons he could procure was in January. He said, "I have got these *pichkari*s from a factory in Gurugram at a very high rate and the customers are refusing to buy these at such prices."

"We got the last stock two months ago and now we have no goods left. It will be worse if the situation does not improve in near future," said Amrit Pal Singh, a toy store owner.

Drawing a comparison, he said that plastic toys

made in China are popular among customers owing to their finishing which toys made in our country lack.

The shopkeepers also said that after the outbreak of COVID-19, people were refraining from visiting crowded areas as a preventive measure. "The shops used to attract a lot of customers in this season, but the fear of the disease among people

has changed the situation this time," said Devesh Khurana of Shan Tradings.

Inflated wholesale prices of goods in India and stuck payments of shipments have posed a threat to several shopkeepers. Mr. Singh said people will be forced to switch businesses which are not dependent on imports from China, if there the situation does not improve.



A hawker wears a mask while selling Holi colours at Chandni Chowk in Delhi. ■ PTI

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Any little help means a lot to us, say riot victims at relief camp

Displaced persons provided folding beds a day after heavy rain floods camp

SHINJINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI

Following heavy rain, which lashed the city for two days, folding beds have been provided to the victims of the Delhi riots who have sought refuge at the Idgah relief camp in Mustafabad.

Not having to spend another night on drenched mattresses is a welcome change, said many of the people who were displaced by violence in north-east Delhi in the last week of February.

"The first night was really bad. All the blankets and mattresses got wet due to heavy rain. It felt like our shelter was snatched for the second time in a week. However, now we have been provided with the folding beds," said 35-year-old Aleena, a resident of Shiv Vihar.

After the camp was flooded, the Delhi government sent the folding beds on Friday night.

Stating that "any little help" at this point is beneficial to them, Aleena added: "We have been completely



Riot-hit families at Idgah relief camp in Mustafabad.

■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

stripped off all our belongings. Staying in camps is definitely not the most convenient thing. The beds are also literally attached to each other and there is not much space for movement. But at least we have food and a cover over our heads. We are not really in a state to complain right now. Any little help means a lot to us."

The Delhi government, in a statement released on Saturday, said: "The sudden rain in Delhi over the last two days caused some flooding at Mustafabad relief camp, but the government ensured speedy removal of

water from the camp and also provided 800 beds. All the basic facilities have been arranged in the camp and people are satisfied."

'Spent night outside'

While scores of volunteers, senior government officials and legal aid services swarmed the camp on Saturday, 28-year-old Fatima, sat with her two kids – aged six-month-old and five-year-old – at a distance from the main tents and claimed that she had not been given an accommodation.

"I have spent two nights out in the rain with my two

kids and my mother-in-law. Our blankets got completely drenched and it was only later that one of the volunteers came and gave us a new one. Somehow, I wrapped my two kids in it. When I went inside, the other ladies said the tents were already occupied and we could not stay there," she said, while vowing to never return to her house in Shiv Vihar.

"My husband was brutally beaten by a mob and we were locked in the house for two days. I am only thankful that my kids were saved. I do not want to go back to that place," she added.

ALEENA, A RIOT VICTIM

Tiwari meets riot victims in Shiv Vihar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

BJP Delhi unit president Manoj Tiwari on Saturday visited the violence-affected areas of Shiv Vihar here.

The party said that the North-East Delhi MP met the family members of Vinod and Naresh Saini in Brahmputra who were killed during the recent riots in Delhi.

"The way in which schools, shops and houses were burnt down shows that it was a conspiracy. I assure the people that an impartial investigation will be done by the agencies concerned and appeal to you to cooperate with them. Whoever is held guilty will not be spared," Mr. Tiwari said.

In ashes



A riot victim stands inside her burnt house in Karawal Nagar on Saturday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

'Tahir paying the price for being Muslim'

It is possible that he will be held responsible for Delhi riots, says Amanatullah

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Suspended AAP councillor Tahir Hussain, who has been arrested for his alleged role in the recent riots in north-east Delhi, is "being punished for being a Muslim", AAP Okhla legislator Amanatullah Khan alleged here on Saturday.

The Nehru Vihar councilor, who was suspended from AAP after allegations of his involvement in the violence which ripped across the Chand Bagh area, where he stays, in addition to the alleged murder of Intelligence Bureau IB staffer Ankit Sharma, could also be accused of

instigating the whole episode, Mr. Khan alleged further.

"Today Tahir Hussain is paying the price only for being a Muslim. Perhaps the biggest crime in Hindustan today is being a Muslim. It is possible that it is proved in the immediate future that Tahir Hussain is behind the violence in Delhi [sic.]," Mr. Khan tweeted on Saturday evening triggering a backlash from the BJP.

East Delhi MP Gautam Gambhir took the opportunity to question AAP "intensions".

"You have set out to conduct Sundar Kand recitals...but de-

Police to send Hussain's pistol to lab next week

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police will send the pistol of suspended AAP councillor Tahir Hussain, arrested in connection with the violence in north-east Delhi, to the forensic science laboratory next week, officials said on Saturday. The laboratory will check whether the pistol was used for firing during the violence.

livered a deliberate plot...@arvindkejriwal Tahir is accused of being behind the 400 wounds inflicted on Ankit Sharma who was a de-

fender of the nation! And your legislators are using religion to divide the country...the real question is about AAP's intentions [sic.]" Mr. Gambhir alleged in a tweet.

Former Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly and Rohini MLA Vijender Gupta accused the AAP of practising appeasement politics.

"Kudos to AAP's politics of appeasement. My question to @arvindkejriwal is whether he is in agreement with his legislator...will you tell him [Mr. Khan] what Tahir is actually paying for? [sic.]" tweeted Mr. Gupta.

Court extends Shahrukh's police custody by 3 days

He had pointed a gun at a policeman

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A court here on Saturday allowed the police three more days' custodial interrogation of Shahrukh Pathan, who allegedly pointed a gun at a head constable during the recent communal violence in north-east Delhi.

Duty Magistrate Vijay Shri Rathore extended Pathan's police custody after he was produced before the judge at the end of his four-day remand period amidst high security late in the evening, a lawyer associated with the case said.

head constable Deepak Dahiya during the riots went viral on social media, was arrested on Tuesday from Uttar Pradesh's Shamli district.

The police have registered a case against him under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Arms Act. His four-day police custody ended on Saturday, officials said.

Kaleem, 28, was wanted by the Narcotics Cell of the Delhi Police in an old 235-kg cannabis smuggling case, they said.

Non-bailable warrant

"A non-bailable warrant for the arrest of Kaleem was issued by a court in Meerut. The accused was held from Kairana," Shamli police

said.

Kaleem told the police that Pathan, who was on the run after the riots in Delhi, had come to him for help, official sources said.

"Kaleem said Pathan had come to his home in Kairana on the intervening night of February 27 and 28 for help, saying his car had broken down and his mobile phone had also stopped working," the sources said.

Kaleem has claimed that he did not know what Pathan had done and why he was on the run but had helped him get a bus to Patna the next morning, they said.

The two men have known each other for one-and-a-half years, sources said.

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Man arrested for murder of sweet shop staff

Charred body of Dilbar Singh Negi was found in godown of shop on February 26

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

A 27-year-old man was arrested for his alleged involvement in the murder of a sweet shop worker during communal riots on February 24, the police said on Saturday.

The police said that the accused, identified as Mohammed Shahnawaz, a resident of Shiv Vihar, has been arrested for the murder of Dilbar Singh Negi whose charred, mutilated body was found in the shop's godown two days later on February 26.

The arrest was made by the team of Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime Branch) Rajesh Deo on Friday.

The police claimed that on February 24, a riot had



The burnt sweet shop godown at Shiv Vihar on Saturday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

taken place near Shiv Vihar three-way junction in which "accused Shahnawaz and several other persons threw stones and torched several shops". Further, the police claimed that the accused entered a bookstore and a sweet shop godown in Chaman Park and "torched both the places along with other rioters".

A case under Section 147, 148, 149, 302, 201, 436, and 427 of the Indian Penal Code was registered at Gokul Puri police station and investigation was started.

During the probe, the police said, "Eyewitnesses had identified accused Shahnawaz as the main aggressor who was leading the mob on February 24".

Accused Shahnawaz used to run a cigarette and paan shop right opposite the sweet shop's godown for the last few years. Negi, from Uttaranchal's Pauri, used to work as a waiter in the sweet shop.

Negi's fellow mates said that around 2 p.m. on February 24, the victim had gone for lunch and the violence began around 3 p.m. after which Negi and two of his colleagues got stuck on the second floor of the godown. Right above the second floor was the terrace where scores of rioters had gathered and were throwing stones.

On February 26, the owners of the sweet shop went to the godown and found his charred body on the second floor.

Videos don't show it, but we saw him hurling stones'

Sweet shop owner's kin blame Shahnawaz; eyewitnesses say he was an aggressor

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

Mohammed Shahnawaz, who has been arrested for his alleged involvement in the murder of Dilbar Singh Negi, an employee of a sweet shop in Shiv Vihar, has been running a cigarette and paan stall close to the sweet shop for the past few years.

"Bad elements of the area gather here and while away their time. Sometimes, they created nuisance which no one liked," said a shopkeeper who did not wish to be identified. Many others The Hindu spoke to also shared the same sentiment.

Talking about the day violence broke out, a member of the family who owns the sweet shop – Anil Sweet Corner – on condition of anonymity, said that he himself shot videos when rioters were throwing stones.

Though he claimed he saw Shahnawaz also hurling stones, he said was not able to capture it on video.

'Trapped for 45 minutes'
"Around 3 p.m., Muslims started throwing stones and eventually Hindus retaliated. My other family members and I who were at the shop managed to go to one of our

shops on the street and went to the terrace. We were trapped there for about 45 minutes. I took multiple videos and photographs," he said while showing them. In the videos, rioters wearing masks and holding sticks were seen throwing stones.

"When I started taking videos, Shahnawaz hid himself," alleged the 25-year-old.

The police also said that during investigation, eyewitnesses had found him as the 'main aggressor'. There was no mention of video evidence in the police statement.

The men said that they started looking and asking for Negi late evening on February 24 but did not think he could have been killed.

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THE HINDU

India's National Newspaper

Three arrested for Chand Bagh rioting

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Three persons have been arrested in connection with rioting at Chand Bagh, the police said on Saturday. One of the three accused is being probed for his involvement in helping murder accused Tahir Hussain, they added.

A senior police officer

said that the accused have been identified as Tarik Rizvi, Liaqat and Riyasat. Tariq is Hussain's manager and his involvement is being probed for providing shelter to Hussain, the police said, adding that the other two accused have been arrested for riot-

ing in Chand Bagh.

Recordings have surfaced in which Hussain can be heard calling the police informing them that rioters had taken over his terrace and were throwing stones.

Delhi Police spokesperson said all angles are being investigated.

Court grants bail to Shaheen Bagh shooter

Police opposed the bail application

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has granted bail to Kapil Baisala, arrested for firing in the air in south-east Delhi's Shaheen Bagh where a protest against the new citizenship law has been going on.

The court granted bail to Mr. Baisala on Friday after hearing arguments from his lawyers as well as the police.

"On considering the totality of facts and circumstances, the accused, Kapil Baisala, is admitted to bail on furnishing bail bond in a sum of ₹25,000 with one surety in the like amount," Additional Sessions Judge Gulshan Kumar said. Mr. Baisala's counsel submitted to the court that his client has deep

roots in society and there was no possibility of his absconding from the law. The application added that Baisala had clean antecedents and he had never been involved in any other case in the past.

"It is further submitted that the applicant has the responsibility of his wife and minor child. It is further submitted that no purpose will be served by keeping the accused in judicial custody," the application said.

The police opposed the bail plea, stating that the allegations against Mr. Baisala were very serious.

On February 1, Mr. Baisala fired two rounds in the air at Shaheen Bagh, where an anti-CAA protest was underway, the police said.

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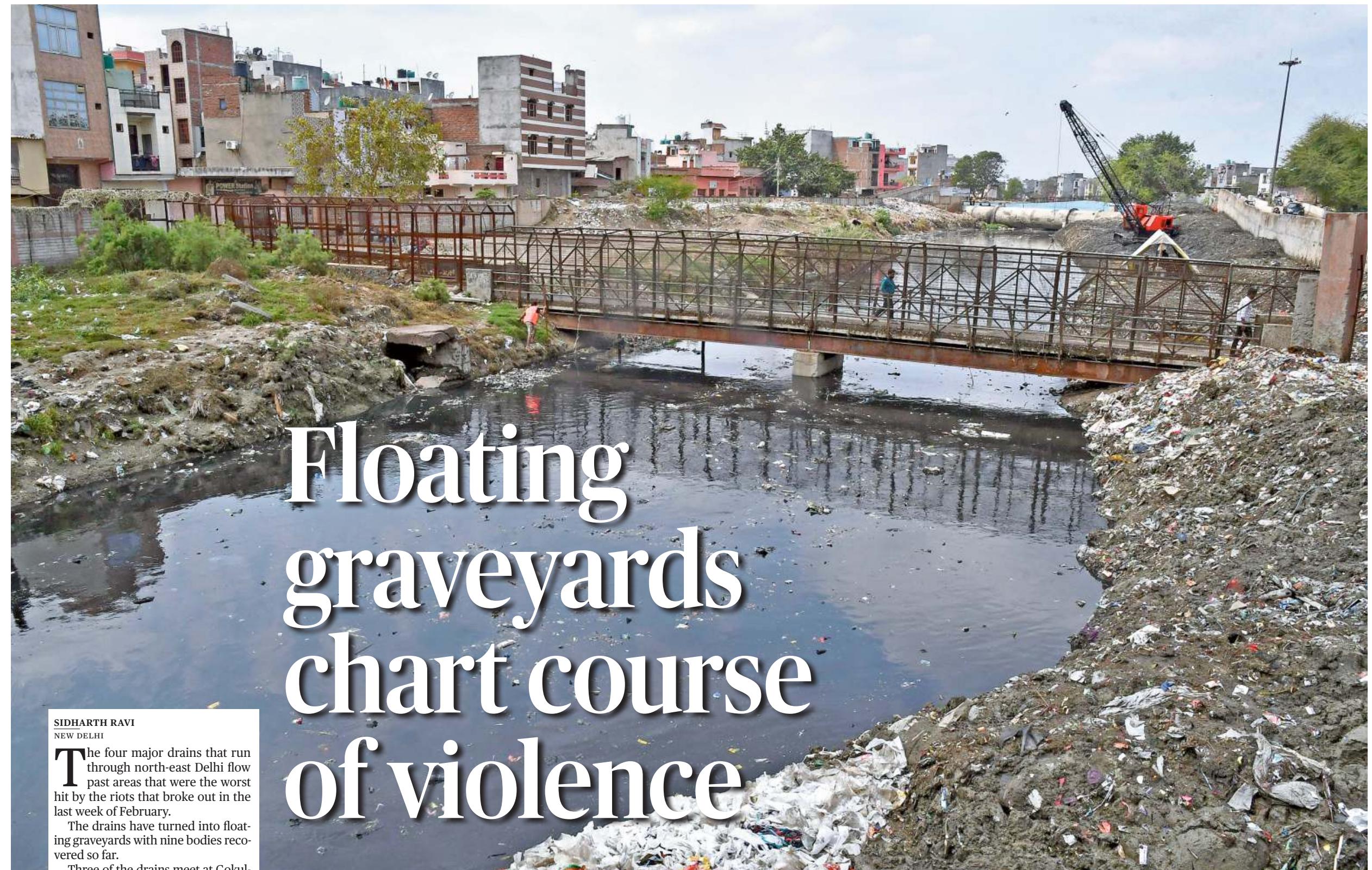
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Floating graveyards chart course of violence

SIDHARTH RAVI
NEW DELHI

The four major drains that run through north-east Delhi flow past areas that were the worst hit by the riots that broke out in the last week of February.

The drains have turned into floating graveyards with nine bodies recovered so far.

Three of the drains meet at Gokulpuri, where earth-moving machines and cranes have been removing black muck from the drain.

They have mostly dredged up remains of gutted vehicles. The area saw heavy stone pelting, and several shops were burned during the violence that killed over 50 people.

Afroz Malik and his brother – whose house was burned down during the riots – were at the site examining the burned vehicles in an attempt to spot the remains of their motorbike. "The insurance company will not reimburse us unless we find the chassis number," said Afroz as his brother sifted through the mangled remains of a bike that was recently removed from the drain.

Scores of such vehicles lie along the drain. Many of them are surrounded by ragpickers trying to find reusable material.

While these drains are typically cleaned prior to monsoon, an official of the Flood and Irrigation Department said that efforts had been intensified to dredge the drains to recover any more bodies.

On March 1, at least two bodies were recovered from the drain flowing from Khajoori Khas to this area,

The four major drains in north-east Delhi flow past areas that saw some of the most horrific violence during the recent riots

where garbage is removed from the water at a filtration facility and then sent through pipelines to a sewage treatment plant. "It was the day after the rains [February 29]," said Alok, a shop owner in the area.

"When it rains, parts of the drain that are clogged become free and start moving," he explained.

A total of five bodies were recovered from the drains after rain lashed the city – about a week after the riots began. The bodies were decomposed and were in an unrecognisable state, said employees of RML Hospital mortuary.

One of the bodies was identified as that of 20-year-old Aftab. "His body was burned. He had no hair on his head and his fingers were hanging by shreds of skin... his stomach was also bloated," said his brother Mohammad Qadir.

The two bodies found in Gokulpuri were reportedly spotted stuck near the bund created right before the fil-

tration plant. "The whole area was blocked off by the police, everyone was asked to remain indoors... the police were standing on the banks of the drain to block off the view," said Alok.

"There is no way to tell where the bodies came from, whether it was Mustafabad, Khajoori Khas or Brijpuri," said Ajau Kumar, a mechanic.

The drain flows from Khajoori Khas to Gokulpuri, and parts of

Chand Bagh, where the body of Intelligence Bureau staffer Ankit Sharma was found. It also flows past Arun Modern School, which was burned down by a mob.

Hafiz* [who is he?] said that it was unlikely that any bodies had been dumped in the network of smaller drains inside the colonies. "There is too much garbage. The water barely

moves. The bodies that have been found would have been dumped in the big drain directly," he added.

Apart from the drain that flows from Karawal Nagar to Shiv Vihar (the worst-hit area during the riots), a third drain flows from Shiv Vihar towards Gokulpuri. "There is a kachha road that goes past this drain. That is where most of the bodies were dumped," said Nadeem*, a resident of Mustafabad.

"In the middle of the night, when no one was seeing, the bodies were cut up and dumped," he said, adding: "They [rioters] must have thrown them in because if they were left lying around on the streets it would have led to more riots."

The fourth drain travels from the Uttar Pradesh to Gokulpuri where the three drains meet, and flows beside the metro line towards Seelampur and beyond. Along its course lie Kardam Puri, Maujpur, Babarpur and Jaffrabad, where violence had initially erupted.

(*name changed)

(Top) A drain near Bhagirathi Vihar in Gokulpuri from where two bodies have been recovered; mangled remains of vehicles that were recovered from the drain.

■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR



C Nine bodies have been recovered from the drains so far... the drains are typically cleaned prior to monsoon, but authorities have intensified efforts to dredge the drains to recover any more bodies

Gangster wanted for 7 murders held

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A 28-year-old notorious gangster, who was involved in seven murder cases and was carrying a total reward of ₹75,000, was on Friday arrested near Mehrauli-Gurgaon Road here, the police said on Saturday.

DCP (Special Cell) Pramod Singh Kushwah said the accused has been identified as Vicky, a resident of Ghaziabad and a member of the Rohit Chaudhary gang of south Delhi. Vicky had been absconding for a year, said Mr. Kushwah.

He carried a reward of ₹25,000 announced by Delhi Police and ₹50,000 by U.P. Police.

Vicky was wanted in more than 15 criminal cases. In May 2019, he and his accomplices killed one Prince Chaudhary, a rival gang member, near Saket Mall here. In July last, he shot dead one Vinod, a resident of Bagpat in U.P., the police said.

Yes Bank customers scramble to withdraw cash

Most ATMs run dry; customers end up withdrawing money through cheques



Customers stand in a queue to withdraw money from a Yes Bank ATM at Krishna Nagar in New Delhi on Saturday. ■PTI

Moratorium period

As the RBI has superseded the board of the private sector lender on a precarious financial condition and appointed a former SBI executive as its administrator, customers cannot withdraw more than ₹50,000 under the moratorium period till April 3, 2020.

Several customers at a bank branch in central Delhi said they faced no problem while withdrawing the sum of ₹50,000 through cheques. "Internet banking, credit cards are not working. I withdrew money through cheque," said Lalit Kumar, a Yes Bank customer at Gole Market branch here.

At an ATM in Ghaziabad, Yes Bank customers queued

up to withdraw money only to find out there was no cash. A Delhi-based customer said he was able to withdraw only ₹3,000-4000 from an ATM, adding he withdrew the remaining amount through cheque.

However, a display at the post office at Parliament Street read: "No Yes Bank cheques will be cleared until further clarity on the situation."

Besides, people also complained that Yes Bank-facilitated meal cards are not working.

Payment facilitator for small businesses Instamojo's CEO & co-founder Sampad Swain said the company will be temporarily withholding payouts to merchants having Yes Bank accounts until further clarity on the situation.

'Centre brought Yes Bank to brink of bankruptcy'

Huge loans given to crony capitalists: AAP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Saturday blamed the Centre for bringing Yes Bank to the "brink of bankruptcy" and alleged that lifelong savings of millions of people disappeared just because crony capitalists were given huge loans over the last five years.

The party claimed that credit given out by Yes Bank grew nearly five times from 2014, when the BJP came to power at the Centre, to 2019.

"Today, millions of people face the risk of losing their lifelong savings. The biggest reason behind this is that Yes Bank gave loans worth crores of rupees to many big crony capitalists in the last five years and today they are not ready to return the money," AAP MLA and senior leader Raghav Chadha told reporters.

Mr. Chadha alleged that the money of Yes Bank's

Hurt by partner's taunt, youth steals bikes

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Taunted by his girlfriend on Valentine's Day for not having a bike, a 20-year-old youth decided to own not one but several bikes and allegedly started stealing, the police said on Saturday, adding that he has been arrested for the thefts.

DCP (Dwarka) Anto Alphonse said Lalit Kumar, a resident of Bhagwati Vihar, and his friend Saheed (22), a Bindapuri resident, were arrested. The police also recovered four motorcycles and five scooters from their possession.

"The two were arrested around 6.30 p.m. on Friday from near a fish market in Matiyala when they were found riding a bike without a number plate," said Mr. Alphonse. During interrogation, Kumar revealed that hurt by his girlfriend's taunt, he decided to steal bikes with Saheed.

Shivpal hints at deal with SP for U.P. polls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

FIROZABAD (U.P.)
Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party (Lohia) chief Shivpal Singh Yadav has hinted of an "understanding" between his party and the Samajwadi Party, headed by his estranged nephew Akhilesh Yadav, for the 2022 Uttar Pradesh polls.

During his visit to Firozabad to meet former SP legislator Azim Bhai at the district jail on Friday, Mr. Shivpal said there was no dispute within the family. "There can be an understanding with the Samajwadi Party about seats for the 2022 State polls. The election symbol will however be ours, which is a key."

Panchayat elections next month, says Pilot

57 newly formed panchayats, panchayat samitis go to polls

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

After the delimitation of panchayat bodies, elections to the 57 newly formed village panchayats and panchayat samitis in Rajasthan will be held next month. Elections to over 4,300 panchayats in the State were held in three phases in January this year.

Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot, who holds the Rural Development and Panchayati Raj portfolio, said in the State Assembly recently that the election would strengthen democratic tradition.

tions at the grassroots, while the new model of rural development would bring prosperity to villages.

Replies to the debate on budgetary demands for his department, Mr. Pilot said each revenue village would get the allocation for four works for development of pasture land, water harvesting structure, crematorium or graveyard, and playground.

Grants of ₹759.28 cr.
This approach would ensure all-round development of rural areas, he said.

The House passed the demand for grants of ₹759.28 crore to the department by voice vote.

Mr. Pilot said Rajasthan had occupied first position in the execution of works under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, providing daily wages as a right to the people in villages.

He said the State government had started work on formulation of master plans for rural areas on the lines of cities, keeping in view the requirements during the next 30 years.

Saying it with flowers



Artists dressed as Lord Krishna and Radha playing Holi during the Phag Mahotsava at Govinddevji Temple in Jaipur on Saturday. ■ ROHIT JAIN PARAS

Haryana to survey illegal commercial establishments

Minister orders officials to submit survey, action taken report by March 13

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

CHANDIGARH

Haryana Urban Local Bodies Minister Anil Vij on Saturday ordered a survey of unauthorised commercial establishments across the State and directed officials to seal those found violating safety norms.

Mr. Vij said the survey will be carried out in establishments like marriage palaces,

banquet halls, paying guest accommodations, lodges and private residential hostels.

"If any establishment is found violating safety norms and other rules and regulations, they will be closed immediately or sealed," Mr. Vij was quoted in an official release here.

Mr. Vij, who is also the State Home minister, said it has come to the notice of the

government that various unauthorised commercial establishments are operating within the limits of municipal corporation, municipal council and municipality.

Flouting safety norms
"These establishments are flouting the safety norms and putting the valuable lives of citizens at risk by violating various rules/regula-

tions and thereby causing loss of revenue to the municipal corporation, municipal council and municipality. Therefore, for the purpose of ensuring public safety, the directions for conducting a survey was given," he said.

The officers have been directed to submit the survey and the action taken report by March 13.

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FRONTLINE
EVERY FORTNIGHT

Assess crop damage due to hailstorm, U.P. Minister tells officers

Govt. committed to compensate farmers'



Farmers in Agra sorting potatoes, harvested early to avoid damage due to unseasonal rains. ■ FILE PHOTO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Agriculture Minister Surya Pratap Shahi on Saturday directed officials to undertake a survey to ascertain the extent of losses in crops due to the recent hailstorm in the State.

In a statement issued here by the State government, Mr. Shahi said, "The department officials must ensure that a survey is conducted to ascertain the extent of loss in terms of crops by the farmers in the State caused by hailstorm and rain. The State government is committed to compensate the losses caused to the farmers."

Instructions have also been given to insurance companies to ascertain the extent of loss, and pay for the damages caused to farmers.

Toll-free number

Mr. Shahi also said that farmers can register their losses with a toll-free number 180012090909. Rashtriya Kisan Manch president Shekhar Dixit said, "Hailstorm and rain has damaged 70% of the

crops. We have already written a letter to the Chief Minister drawing his attention towards the problems faced by the farmers. In 2015, during the SP regime, hailstorm had taken place in some parts of the State. The money, which was meant for the farmers, never reached them. The State government should act in time, else it would be too late for the farmers."

Farmers frustrated

State Congress convenor (media department) Lalan Kumar said, "The farmers are feeling frustrated with the BJP regime, as their problems are yet to be redressed. The BJP government has done nothing concrete for the farmers, and seems to be only interested in branding itself. The farmers are feeling devastated."

Mr. Lalan added, "U.P. Congress chief Ajay Kumar Lallu visited villages to get a first hand idea of the damage caused to the crops. The farmers have made up their mind, and in the next Assembly elections, they will teach a lesson to the BJP."

12 killed in SUV-tractor collision in Bihar

Deceased were returning home for Holi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUZAFFARPUR (BIHAR)

The impact of the collision left the car mangled, killing seven of its occupants on the spot and four others succumbed to injuries while they were being rushed to a hospital. A person seated on the tractor was also killed, while three occupants of the SUV are undergoing treatment at a hospital and their condition is stated to be critical, he said.

The accident occurred on National Highway-28 in Kantia area, 80 km north of Patna, when the speeding vehicle carrying 14 people rammed the brick-laden tractor, being driven on the wrong side, District Magistrate Chandrashekhar Singh said.

The car's occupants, who hailed from a village in Hathauri area, were returning to their homes for Holi from Buxar where they had been working as daily wage earners, Mr. Singh said.

The national highway was blocked for a few hours as large crowd had gathered at the spot. Movement of vehicles was restored after police arrived with quick response team personnel and got the road cleared, the District Magistrate said.

An ex gratia of ₹4 lakh will be paid to the families of the deceased as per the government policy, he added.

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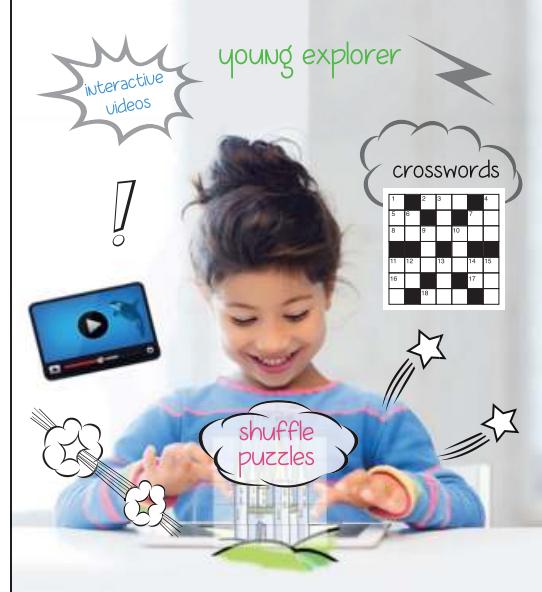
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IN BRIEF

**Gundu Rao meets Rahul Gandhi, seeks KPCC reijig**

BENGALURU
With the Congress high command continuing to maintain silence on revamping the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee, the incumbent president Dinesh Gundu Rao called on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and urged him to appoint new KPCC president.

Kerala Congress factions merge 'unconditionally'

KOCHI
A faction of Kerala Congress (Jacob), led by its chairman for 27 years Johny Nelloor, merged 'unconditionally' with the Kerala Congress (Mani) faction led by P.J. Joseph here on Saturday. Mr. Joseph said Kerala was ripe for a major public action against the LDF government policies.

I too have no birth certificate, says KCR

Telangana CM raises issue of documentation for NPR, CAA; says House will pass a resolution

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

HYDERABAD
Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao on Saturday told the State Assembly that he did not have a birth certificate.

"When I myself don't have a birth certificate, how can I produce the certificate of my father?" asked Mr. Rao, apparently referring to the new format of the National Population Register (NPR), which is set to be rolled out from April 1.

"It is causing concern to me also. I was born in my house in the village. There were no hospitals then. The village elder used to write a *Janma Nama* which carried no official seal," said 66-year-old Mr. Rao.

Kerala reports case of bird flu

All birds in vicinity of infected area to be culled

STAFF REPORTER
KOZHIKODE**Alert sounded:** A farmer inspecting a chicken coop at Vengeri in Kozhikode district on Saturday. ■ K. RAGESH

All birds within 1 km radius of the bird flu infected areas in Kothiyathur grama panchayat and Vengeri in the Kozhikode Corporation limits will be culled in the coming days. This follows confirmation of the avian influenza in Kerala after a gap of four years.

The Animal Husbandry Department said in a release on Saturday that precautionary steps had been taken and the infection was unlikely to spread among humans. Samples of chicken from a farm at Kothiyathur were sent to the National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases, Bhopal, after a large number of birds were found dead in a short span. The presence of bird flu was confirmed on Friday.

Bird flu or avian influenza is the infection of birds by H5/H7 strains of avian influenza Type A viruses that occur naturally among wild aquatic birds around the globe. They can affect domestic poultry and animal species, said experts.

Infected birds can spread the virus through their saliva, nasal secretions and faec-

es. Birds get infected when they are exposed to the virus after they are shed by those infected, or through surfaces that are contaminated.

Under surveillance

M.K. Prasad, Director, Animal Husbandry, said areas within 1 km radius of the spots from where the infection had been reported

would be kept under surveillance. A list of birds within another 9 km radius had been collected, and those areas too would be under observation. Right now, the infection was likely to affect only birds, he said.

The Department has set up a 24-hour control room to contain the outbreak (phone number 04952762050).

A rapid response team was set up to coordinate the response in Kozhikode district. It would be led by K. Sindhu, District Animal Husbandry Officer, and V. Sunil Kumar, Additional Director, Animal Husbandry, would be in charge of the containment works.

Personal protection kits would be made available across the State and another 5,000 kits would be urgently sought.

District Collector S. Sambasiva Rao on Saturday held a meeting and members of the rapid response team were trained.

Telangana Health Minister speaks to COVID-19 patient

He also meets people admitted to isolation ward

STAFF REPORTER
HYDERABAD**Eatala Rajender**

does not come to the hospital, he or she has to be isolated at home for 14 days. Staff has to check on them everyday.

Entry restricted

Entry to the seventh floor where the ward is located is restricted only to suspects, apart from medical personnel.

Officials were directed to ensure that the lift dedicated for the COVID-19 patients and the ward has to be disinfected every two hours.

He said COVID-19 suspects in the hospital would be provided with WiFi as people holding jobs too are admitted there.

Air India cancels flight as Kuwait slaps travel ban

STAFF REPORTER
MALAPPURAM

Air India cancelled its budget Express flight from Calicut International Airport at Karipur to Kuwait on Saturday following a week-long travel ban imposed by the Kuwait government in view of the COVID-19 scare.

Air India officials said that all their Kuwait flights would be cancelled until further orders. India was one of the seven countries from which passengers were banned by Kuwait.

Earlier, Mr. Owaisi voiced concern over the Delhi violence and called for all secular parties and people to come together to counter those attacking the Constitution. He alleged that by pushing the country towards this issue, the rulers want to divert attention from real problems like poverty, unemployment and falling GDP.

ment were sent back home by Air India officials. Several of them were in shock as they faced visa expiry threat if they could not return to Kuwait within a few days.

When Air India alerted some of its passengers about the cancellation, many others could not be contacted.

Initial confusion and uncertainties soon gave way for patience as the airline and airport officials convinced the passengers at the airport.

Ethihad Airways too returned its passengers who were to go to Kuwait via Abu Dhabi.

Last week, Saudi Arabia had imposed a ban on Umra pilgrims from all countries across the world causing panic among thousands of passengers from Kerala.

Chinese ship allowed to berth in Vizag

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM

The Visakhapatnam Port allowed merchant vessel Fortune Herod to unload its cargo on Saturday after screening Chinese and Myanmar crew for COVID-19.

The vessel with a crew of 17 Chinese nationals and five Myanmarese nationals had arrived from China on Friday, but was kept waiting at the anchorage as a precautionary measure.

The vessel was berthed after the port health officer boarded it, examined the 22 crew and found that all of them were medically fit.



the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is that it goes against the very fabric of the Constitution, which promises to treat all citizens equally irrespective of their religion, caste and creed.

"No civilised society will accept a law which keeps out people of one particular religion," he said.

Mr. Rao said the House will thoroughly debate the issue and pass a resolution to send a strong message to the entire country as the issue relates to the country's future, its Constitution and its stature in the world.

Stating that the issue had stirred the nation, Mr. Rao said 45-50 people had been killed in the national capital. "This is not a small issue.

The current debate in the country is very important. It is about the national social fabric of the country, the country's future, its image at the international level and repercussions for future generations," he said.

Mr. Rao's intervention came when All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) leader Akbaruddin Owaisi raised the issue while speaking on the motion of thanks to the Governor's address.

Mr. Rao said the Business Advisory Committee of the Assembly had already decided to debate the issue and pass a resolution. He asked Mr. Owaisi and others to participate in the debate and express their opinion.

"We opposed it (CAA) in Parliament. The issue will be discussed in the Assembly and resolution will be passed. Five or six other State Assemblies have also passed the resolutions. Will Centre agree to it or is a different issue," he said.

Speaker Pocharam S. Reddy said separate time was allotted to discuss the CAA.

Earlier, Mr. Owaisi voiced concern over the Delhi violence and called for all secular parties and people to come together to counter those attacking the Constitution.

He alleged that by pushing the country towards this issue, the rulers want to divert attention from real problems like poverty, unemployment and falling GDP.

Himachal Pradesh Jal Shakti Vibhaag**NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER**

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The Managing Director, JMHIDPCL, Namkum, Ranchi hereby invites separate Technical and Commercial Bids (Two Envelope System) through e-tender from eligible manufacturers for RATE CONTRACT FOR MEDICINES.

The Blank tender documents with detailed conditions can be downloaded through web site <http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in> and should be submitted through e-procurement system only. The eligible bidders willing to participate must be registered in e-Procurement portal.

SL. No. Particulars Details

1	Name of Work	RATE CONTRACT FOR MEDICINES
2	Time of Completion	Within 60 days after issue of work order
3	Date of Publication of Tender on website	07.03.2020
4	Pre-Bid Meeting Date/Time	17.03.2020 at 3.00 PM
5	Date / time for submission of bids	28.03.2020 at 6.00 PM
6	Date of Technical Bid opening	30.03.2020 at 3.00 PM
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9	Contact no. of procurement person	7004871564, 9771500075
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3	Date of Publication of Tender on website	07.03.2020
4	Pre-Bid Meeting Date/Time	17.03.2020 at 3.00 PM
5	Date / time for submission of bids	28.03.2020 at 6.00 PM
6	Date of Technical Bid opening	30.03.2020 at 3.00 PM
7	Application fee (Non-refundable)	5000.00 (Five thousand only)
8	EMD	2,00,000
9	Contact no. of procurement person	7004871564, 9771500075
10	Helpline number of e-procurement cell	7004871564

Note: The above dates may change due to declaration of holidays

JMHIDPCL Ranchi reserves the right to amend or withdraw any of the terms and conditions contained in the Tender Document including quantity/amount of items to be supplied or to reject any or all tenders without giving any notice or assigning any reason. The decision of the Managing Director, JMHIDPCL, Namkum, Ranchi in this regard shall be final.

Detailed tender document can be seen and applied through website <http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in> only, hard copies of Technical bid & Price bid will not be entertained except original Tender fee & EMD.

Sd/- Managing Director, JMHIDPCL

PR 226583 Health Med Edu and Family Welfare (19-20)D

IN BRIEF



'Nirbhaya convicts are mocking justice system'

NEW DELHI
Union Minister Smriti Irani said on Saturday she was "enraged" that the death-row convicts in the Nirbhaya gang-rape case were making a "mockery of justice". "We need to go a step forward, especially with regard to the conviction rates," she said at a conference. PTI

Bank official absconding after stealing ₹36 lakh

AGARTALA
The assistant manager of an Indian Bank branch in Agartala, Marc Debbarma, has gone absconding after allegedly siphoning off ₹36 lakh, said the police. The fraud was detected in a recent internal audit. Police said they opened a case after branch manager Prasenjit Sutradhar lodged a complaint against Debbarma.

Spectator killed in jallikattu in Tamil Nadu

TIRUCHI
A spectator, Chinnadurai, 32, was gored to death by a bull at a jallikattu held at Annavasal in Pudukkottai district in Tamil Nadu.

Twenty-five others, including 12 bull tamers, sustained injuries. Ten of the injured have been admitted to hospitals, while others were treated as outpatients. As many as 1,062 bulls were released during the jallikattu.

Two directors of apparel firms held for tax fraud

NEW DELHI
The Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGII) on Saturday said it has registered a case against Aastha Apparel Pvt. Ltd. and others for fraudulently claiming refunds on export of goods of over ₹61 crore. The DGII said two directors of the exporting companies were arrested on Saturday. PTI

Assam sanitises route taken by U.S. tourist

The COVID-19-infected American had gone on a seven-day cruise on Brahmaputra river

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Assam on Saturday went on a sanitising and quarantining overdrive along the route taken by a U.S. tourist with his partner during his tour of the State before leaving for Bhutan, where he tested positive for COVID-19 on March 5.

The tourist had begun his India tour on February 21 and had gone on a seven-day cruise on the Brahmaputra river on the MV *Mahabahu River Cruise* ship. He stayed at a five-star hotel in Guwahati and a resort in eastern Assam's Jorhat town beyond the Kaziranga National Park.

Hotel floor vacated

An entire floor of the hotel where the U.S. couple had stayed was vacated and sanitised and health officials col-

Health scare: A medic using a thermal screening device on a passenger of MV *Mahabahu River Cruise* in Jorhat on Saturday. ■ PTI

lected a list of all the employees who served the duo for screening. "We are trying to track everyone they came in contact with," said Addl. DGP Harmeet Singh. A team also screened the crew and

the passengers of the cruise ship that the couple and two others had booked.

Meanwhile, authorities of the Kaziranga National Park postponed the Kaziranga Utsav, scheduled from March

12-15, as many foreign tourists were expected to attend it. The Meghalaya government, too, scaled down the Meghalaya Age Festival scheduled from March 7-15 in view of the advisory issued

by the Centre. The Assam government advised the people not to panic and that measures are being taken to keep the virus at bay.

"There hasn't been a single positive case among the 112 people we have kept under surveillance so far," Assam's junior Health Minister Pijush Hazarika said.

CISF personnel identified

The Guwahati airport authorities have put five Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnel under observation after the news of the tourist was conveyed, the airport's director Ramesh Kumar said.

"We have identified five CISF personnel who may have come in contact with the infected tourist. They are being kept under observation," said Mr. Kumar.

Airline offers free rebooking of tickets

Rules revised amid travel disruptions

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

With widespread travel disruption sparked off by the global spread of the COVID-19, IndiGo Airlines on Saturday announced that it will allow all domestic and international passengers to rebook their flights for free, becoming the first Indian carrier to do so.

The relief is for existing bookings as well as any fresh bookings made for travel from March 12 to March 31, IndiGo said in a press statement.

"We understand that some passengers are concerned about committing to travel, given the current co-

ronavirus issue. To make their travel hassle-free, we are waiving our normal change fees on all travel during the next two weeks and for all new bookings made in that period," said Chief Commercial Officer of IndiGo, William Boulter.

A Vistara spokesperson said that the airline was allowing free cancellation and change of date for domestic and international flights on a case-by-case basis.

Other Indian carriers – Air India, GoAir and AirAsia India – allow free cancellation only for flights cancelled by them, such as those to Shanghai and Hong Kong.

Visva Bharati postpones Vasanta Utsav

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Visva Bharati has decided to postpone Vasanta Utsav (Celebration of Spring), a century-long tradition at the university that was set up by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore.

The authorities said they received a letter from Ministry of Human Resource Development, which has advised universities not to have large gatherings on the campus. Sushovan Banerjee, the President's nominee to the University's executive council, said the decision was in the interest of students to ensure that the spread of the virus was contained.

Odisha govt. decides to conduct daily reviews

State takes a slew of preventive steps

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

Though Odisha has not reported any COVID-19 case so far, the State government has announced a review of the emerging situation by the Chief Secretary and Collectors on a daily basis.

The government has restricted foreign travel by all Ministers and relaxed biométric attendance system in government offices. Floors, tables, desks, door handles and bars at educational institutions will be disinfected daily. Seats, handles and bars of all public transport vehicles will be sanitised every day.

"The government is keep-

ing a close watch on the emerging situation. People need not panic," said Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik after taking stock of the situation.

According to the Chief Minister's Office, the government will make emergency procurement of N95 masks and personal protective equipment for health care personnel.

"Buffer stocks of essential drugs and surgical equipments should be maintained to meet the requirements for nine months. All hospitals, including those in the private sector, must be asked to set up isolation facilities," it said.

Mining firms in Odisha yet to pay fines to the tune of ₹6,000 cr.

RTI plea has revealed losses of ₹60,000 crore to the State



Major violation: The Supreme Court had ordered the companies to pay penalties of over ₹21,000 crore. ■ FILE PHOTO

loss of ₹60,000 crore to the State exchequer for a number of violations made by mining companies," said Pradip Pradhan, an activist who had obtained the information under RTI.

Mr. Pradhan said although the Supreme Court had ordered the companies to pay penalty of over ₹21,000 crore, defaulters were yet to deposit more than ₹6,000 crore.

As on January 31, Sarada Mines Private Limited had not paid penalty to the tune of ₹1,938 crore, while Mid-east Integrated Steel was to pay ₹924 crore, he said.

Among some big names which were yet to comply with the Supreme Court's order are BPME Limited (₹636 crore), B.K. Mohanty (₹384 crore), Mala Roy and others (₹224 crore) and S. Pradhan (₹123 crore).

Mumbai man steals power for dogs, fined ₹7 lakh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
THANE

A Navi Mumbai resident paid ₹7 lakh as payment and penalty for stealing 34,465 units of electricity to keep his home air-conditioners running 24/7 for the comfort of his pedigree dogs.

The man, whose name was not revealed by the State-run Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Limited, has several foreign breeds of dogs as pets, officials said. "We zeroed in on him after receiving a tip-off about power theft," said an official, adding: "We took action under Section 135 (electricity theft) of the Electricity Act, 2003. He paid ₹7 lakh as payment and penalty for stealing 34,465 units of power."

BRUHAT BENGALURU MAHANAGARA PALIKE

Office of the Executive Engineer(Project-East), Nethaji Subhash Chandra Bose, Building, 21st Floor, (PUB), Mahatma Gandhi Road, Bangalore-01

TN.No: EE(P-E)/TEND/17/2019-20 Date:06.03.2020

INVITATION FOR SHORT TERM TENDERS (IFT)
(Through GOK e-Procurement Portal only)

Two Cover Tender (Standard Tender Document-KW4-3 & KW-4)

The Executive Engineer, Project East, BBMP, Bangalore on behalf of the Commissioner, BBMP, from eligible tenderers for the following construction of works.

SL No.	Name of Work	Approx. Amount put to tender (Rs. In Lakhs)	EMD (Rs. In Lakhs)
1	Construction of Badminton Court in HRBR 2nd Block at Ward No.29, Kacharkanhalli.	120.00	2.00
2	Providing Grill work under the Hennur Main flyover (Phase-II) at Ward No.29 Kacharkanhalli.	80.00	1.60

Calender of Events: (1) Tender documents may be downloaded from the e-procurement portal of Government of Karnataka from 12.03.2020 onwards (2) Pre-bid meeting is on 16.03.2020 at 15.00 office of the Chief Engineer (Project-East). (3) Tenders must be submitted online through e-procurement portal on or before 20.03.2020 upto 4.00 P.M. (4) Opening of Technical Bid is on 23.03.2020 at 04.30 PM.

Further details may be obtained from the above office during office hours on working days or from website <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in>

Sd/- Executive Engineer, Project East

Pay Development Charges-Help To Develop Bengaluru

Not just computers, even your cars are not safe from hackers

Study reveals how criminals manipulate key-fobs with ease



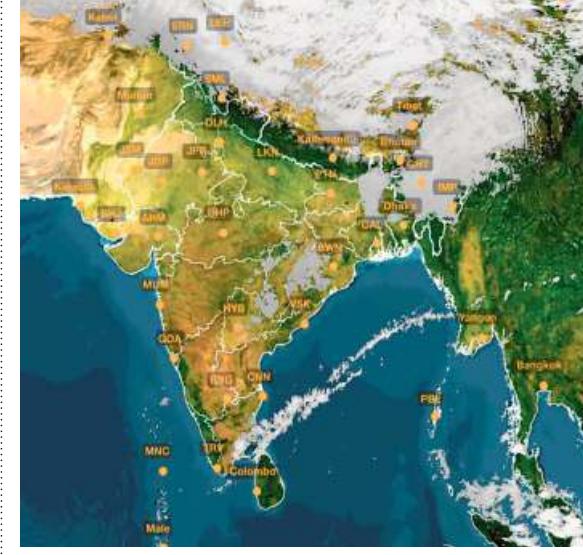
which exploits the vulnerability in the immobiliser system and downloads its secret code to the hacker's device. Using this information, the hacker can clone the target's key-fob, use it to unlock the car and drive away, without raising any alarm whatsoever. The only challenge that remains after hacking the key-fob is to override the ignition, but car thieves had surpassed that hurdle way back when they invented hot-wiring.

The car models named in the report include Auris, Camry, Corolla, FJ Cruiser, Fortuner, Hiace, Highlander, Hilux, Land Cruiser, RAV4, Urban Cruiser and Yaris by Toyota and I-10, I-20, Veloster, IX20 and I-40 by Hyundai.

According to the research report, all a hacker has to do is use a Radio Frequency Identification device within close range of a key-fob.

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 Sunday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning very likely at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, coastal Andhra Pradesh and Yanam.

CITIES **RAIN** **MAX** **MIN** **CITIES** **RAIN** **MAX** **MIN**

Agartala	—	24.0	18.0	Kozhikode	—	36.0	26.0
Ahmedabad	—	32.0	14.0	Kurnool	—	35.0	24.0
Aizawl	—	23.0	13.0	Lucknow	—	26.0	14.0
Allahabad	—	30.0	17.0	Madurai	—	37.0	25.0
Bengaluru	—	31.0	19.0	Mangaluru	—	35.0	23.0
Bhopal	—	31.0	13.0	Mumbai	—	30.0	21.0
Bhubaneswar	—	32.0	18.0	Mysuru	—	33.0	21.0
Chandigarh	25.2	16.0	12.0	New Delhi	19.7	21.0	13.0
Chennai	—	33.0	25.0	Patna	—	27.0	19.0
Coimbatore	—	36.0	25.0	Port Blair	—	32.0	26.0
Dehradun	—	20.0	14.0	Puducherry	—	32.0	27.0
Gangtok	—	13.0	8.0	Pune	—	33.0	16.0
Goa	—	32.0	22.0	Raipur	3.2	31.0	20.0
Guwahati	—	26.0	14.0	Ranchi	—	30.0	16.0
Hubballi	—	32.0	17.0	Shillong	10.4	19.0	8.0
Hyderabad	—	34.0	22.0	Shimla	1.8	8.0	1.0
Imphal	3.8	26.0	12.0	Srinagar	0.8	10.0	3.0
Jaipur	3.0	26.0	12.0	Thiruvananthapuram	—	33.0	25.0
Kochi	—	33.0	26.0	Tiruchi	—	36.0	26.0
Kohima	—	27.0	16.0	Vijayawada	—	32.0	24.0
Kolkata	34.4	28.0	21.0	Visakhapatnam	—	31.0	26.0

(Rainfall in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing Yesterday

CITIES	SO₂</th

FROM PAGE ONE

COVID-19 cases jump to 34 in India

"These samples are being tested at the laboratory in AIIMS. Also, six scientists from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) have been stationed in Iran. Equipment and reagents, worth approximately ₹10 crore have been dispatched to enable them to set up a lab," the Ministry added.

Cases of suspected cases of COVID-19 have also been reported from Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab. The J&K government on Saturday closed primary schools in six districts till March 31, as two persons were put in "isolation wards" in a Jammu hospital following novel coronavirus-like symptoms. "Both the patients are high viral load cases but are stable," said officials. The local administrations in other districts of the UT directed school authorities to avoid morning assemblies. All biometric attendance in J&K has been suspended.

Punjab Health Minister Balbir Singh Sidhu said the samples of two persons, who had returned from Italy to Punjab, have been sent for further testing.

In Tamil Nadu, of the 60 samples lifted from passengers, 56 have tested negative and one positive. Results of three more are awaited. Fifty-two samples were sent to the King Institute of Preventive Medicine in Guindy, and four to the National Institute of Virology in Pune.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held another review meeting on the coronavirus situation and asked the Health Ministry to immediately identify sufficient locations for quarantine and also for critical care in case the disease spread.

Mr. Modi has also asked people to avoid handshakes and greet each other with the traditional *namaste* (palms together). He also instructed authorities to plan for early testing and evacuation of Indians from Iran.

During the review meeting, Department of Pharma informed that they have availability of sufficient stocks of medicines, Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients and other consumables," the Health Ministry noted.

Govt. lifts ban on two Malayalam channels

He further said Prime Minister Narendra Modi, too, had expressed concern about the ban. However, the Minister while saying, "I will definitely go into the details and take essential steps if there is any wrongdoing," added, "But let me also tell you that everybody should accept that there has to be responsible freedom."

The channels were suspended for 48 hours beginning 7.30 p.m. on Friday. In the event, the ban on Asia News was lifted at 1.30 a.m. while the ban on Media One was lifted at 9.30 a.m. on Saturday.

No apology: channels

Asianet News channel denied that they issued any unconditional apology for lifting of the ban. Asianet News Editor M.G. Radhakrishnan said the management of the channel contacted the I&B Ministry on Friday night itself. "We didn't issue any apology. In fact, the Minister has clarified it, that he found it [the ban] out and that it happened without his knowledge. And he has reaffirmed his commitment to freedom of press. So it's very clear; they have realised their mistake and the withdrew the ban order," Mr. Radhakrishnan told *The Hindu*.

Media One Editor-in-chief C.L. Thomas said his chan-

nel had not reached out to the government. "We were proceeding for legal action. Today we got the information that the ban has been revoked, so we did not go ahead with the legal proceedings. We did not contact anyone in the Ministry; the government suo motu lifted the ban," he said.

According to sources in the Ministry, since the charges against both the channels were identical, once the ban on Asianet was withdrawn, the ban on Media One couldn't continue. The Ministry's order against Media One also had factual errors.

The reporter who has been cited in the ban orders, Hassanul Banna, is actually employed with *Madhyamam*, a daily which is a sister concern of Media One.

Opposition slams gag

Opposition parties severely criticised the gag order.

"By banning Asianet and Media One, the government is saying that it's a crime to ask questions and report on the mayhem in Delhi. We are confident that better sense prevailed overnight on account of widespread condemnation of such a temperate act of the government. Hopefully they will not repeat such obnoxious act," Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said.

Media One Editor-in-chief C.L. Thomas said his chan-

Poll panel unveils road map for revamp

Among the recommendations being considered is replacing all the forms for various voter services, including registration of new voter and change of address, with one single form.

"Multiple numbers of forms create confusion and affect the efficiency in the process. It is now proposed to have a unified and simplified form for all services to voters," the ECI said.

Another recommendation was to start online registration facilities at the school or college-level for all prospective voters at 17 years of age, so they can be enrolled in the electoral roll as soon as they become eligible at 18.

The ECI also recommended four cut-off dates in a year to enrol as a voter. Currently, January 1 is the qualifying date so those who turn 18 after that date are not eligible to vote the whole year. The ECI has proposed January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1 as the qualifying dates.

Though not specifying the method, one of the recommendations was to look at the "possibility and feasibility of different voting methods". *The Hindu* had reported on February 16 that the IIT-Madras was working on a prototype for an Aadhaar-linked remote voting system for the ECI.

In its letter inviting suggestions, the ECI said: "The Commission has already implemented one-way online transfer of postal ballots for service and implemented the same for the whole country in 2019. It has been seen that approximately 30% of electors are not able to participate in elections for various reasons... .

Commission is exploring the possibility and feasibility of different voting methods which remains secure and safe to ease and improve the electoral participation."

Another recommendation was to impose a "silence period of 48 hours" before polling on social media and print media.

CMYK

Kapoor quizzed for second day

ED officials questioned Yes Bank founder over links, massive loans to DHFL



Anxious wait: Yes Bank depositors standing in a queue to withdraw money in Mumbai on Saturday. ■ VIJAY BATE

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Enforcement Directorate on Saturday questioned Yes Bank founder Rana Kapoor for the second day in connection with the bank's loans to the troubled Dewan Housing Finance Ltd. (DHFL). Searches were also conducted at the residences of his three daughters.

The ED had questioned Mr. Kapoor on Friday at his Worli residence over the bank's association with DHFL. "The need for further questioning was felt as there were a lot of unanswered questions and some new facts have also come to light, The ED first came under the scanner after it came to light that it had granted two loans collectively amounting to ₹3,750 crore. One was given to DHFL and another to an entity called RKW Developers, which was at the time headed by Kapil Wadhawan, a promoter of DHFL. Mr. Wadhawan was arrested by

which need to be verified. We also need to corroborate our findings with documentary evidence, and hence accounts details of Mr. Kapoor, his wife and his daughters are being scrutinised," an ED officer said.

Under the scanner

The bank first came under the scanner after it came to light that it had granted two loans collectively amounting to ₹3,750 crore. One was given to DHFL and another to an entity called RKW Developers, which was at the time headed by Kapil Wadhawan, a promoter of DHFL. Mr. Wadhawan was arrested by

the ED in January. Sources said some information had come to light indicating that kickbacks worth ₹600 crore were paid to Mr. Kapoor, and that this money was credited to the accounts of his family members. The money trail was now being further verified by the ED.

The ED has been investigating alleged financial malpractices by DHFL and several other parties connected to it. In 2019, it found that the Uttar Pradesh Electricity Board had invested ₹2,361.2 crore from its employees' provident fund with DHFL, and the money was lost.

Yes Bank customers can use other bank ATMs

MUMBAI

Yes Bank has said that its customers can now withdraw cash from the ATMs of other banks. They were unable to do so after a moratorium was imposed on the bank on Thursday because withdrawal limits were not recalibrated.

"Did no one in the RBI and the government read the balance sheet of the bank at the end of every year? Why did nothing change after the CEO was replaced and a new CEO appointed in January 2019?"

He questioned the fact that the financial health of the bank didn't improve even after a former Deputy Governor of the RBI was ap-

pointed to the Board of the bank in May 2019.

The alarm bells should have rung when the bank reported its first-ever quarterly loss in the January-March quarter of 2019.

"The Yes Bank fiasco is only part of the mismanagement of financial institutions under the watch of the BJP government," Mr. Chidambaram said.

Under the resolution plan, the SBI has proposed to invest ₹2,450 crore to pick up a 49% stake in the restructured capital of the bank at not less than ₹10 a share.

"This is bizarre when the net worth of the bank is perhaps zero," Mr. Chidambaram said.

The depositors' interests should be completely protected, he said adding that he believed the SBI did not volunteer to rescue Yes Bank. "Just like LIC did [with IDBI Bank], SBI is also doing a command performance," Mr. Chidambaram said.

M.P. exam paper calls PoK 'Azad Kashmir'

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath has ordered an inquiry into a question in the social science paper of the State Board Class 10 examination that referred to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) as "Azad Kashmir". Two officials have been suspended.

"It seems like a case of State terror to name and shame people without proper evidence. It has come after a stay order was passed by the honourable High Court when Mohammed Faiyan of Kanpur approached against a similar recovery notice issued by ADM, Kanpur. I hope all such orders would be eventually set aside," added Mr. Zaidi.

61 protesters identified

Official sources said 61 protesters were identified through CCTV footage and slapped with recovery notices.

The stay order came on the same day when the Lucknow administration pasted photos and recovery notices of those who allegedly vandalised public property during the anti-CAA protests in public places in the city on December 19.

95 MPs didn't attend panel meetings: Venkaiah

Many leading names figure in the list

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI



M. Venkaiah Naidu

and the AIADMK three, besides 80 from other parties and Independents.

According to sources, 57% of the Trinamool MPs, 36% of the BJP, 15% of the Congress and 50% of other parties did not attend even a single meeting during the consideration of the demands for grants of 20 Ministries during the recess.

The Samajwadi Party MPs from both Houses had full attendance, while none of the three members of the AIADMK, who are on the committees of Home Affairs and Human Resource Development, attended a single meeting.

The BJP has 109 MPs on these eight committees, the Congress 33, the Trinamool 14, the Samajwadi Party four

Allahabad HC stays recovery order against CAA protesters

'Rules under which notice issued challenged before SC'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GAZIABAD

The Allahabad High Court has stayed a Bijnor ADM order directing the administration to recover ₹2.22 lakh from four persons accused of damaging public property in clashes during anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act protests on December 20, 2019.

"We are of the view that the rules under which the impugned notice has been issued is under challenge before the apex court," a Division Bench of Justices Manoj Mishra and Deepak Verma said on Friday.

"Therefore, the ends of justice demand that the effect and operation of the impugned notice is put in abeyance till the issue is determined by the apex court," the order said.

The Bench was referring to the writ petition filed by advocate Parvaiz Arif Titu, which is being heard by the Supreme Court. Mr. Titu's petition described such not-

ices as "arbitrary" and asked for an independent judicial inquiry into the incidents.

The order has come after Javed Afata, former municipal corporation chairman, Bijnor, moved the High Court along with Parvez Afata, Shahdad Ali and Zeeshan Baig against the recovery orders issued by ADM Avadesh Mishra.

Issuing a notice to the State government, the Bench listed the case for April 20.

No power

Senior advocate V.M. Zaidi, who is representing the four accused, said he argued that the ADM (Finance) had no power to issue such recovery notices.

"The Supreme Court guidelines [in *Destruction of Public and Private Properties versus State of A.P. (2009)* and *Kodangallur Film Society versus Union of India (2018)*] say that in such cases a serving or retired High Court or district judge

is to be appointed as Claims Commissioner by the High Court," Mr. Zaidi told *The Hindu*.

"It seems like a case of State terror to name and shame people without proper evidence. It has come after a stay order was passed by the honourable High Court when Mohammed Faiyan of Kanpur approached against a similar recovery notice issued by ADM, Kanpur. I hope all such orders would be eventually set aside," added Mr. Zaidi.

The stay order came on the same day when the Lucknow administration pasted photos and recovery notices of those who allegedly vandalised public property during the anti-CAA protests in public places in the city on December 19.

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Free entry for women into monuments

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Women visiting any of the ticketed monuments maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) will not be charged entry fee on Sunday, International Women's Day, the Union Ministry of Culture said on Saturday.

Monuments, including the Taj Mahal in Agra and Tipu Palace in Bengaluru, will be free for all women visitors, whether they are domestic or foreign.

Culture Minister Prahil Singh Patel said the decision was taken in keeping with India's tradition of "giving respect to women".

Mr. Patel said that in addition to this "small tribute" from the Ministry, the ASI was working to make its monuments safe and secure for women visitors.

Women achievers to win accolades

Some will also get an opportunity to handle the PM's Twitter account

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will interact with 'Nari Shakti' (woman power) awardees and his Twitter account will be handled by women achievers to mark International Women's Day on Sunday, the Prime Minister's Office has said.

The interaction will take place after President Ram Nath Kovind gives away the awards at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

"Prime Minister's Twitter account would be handled by women achievers tomorrow on the occasion of International Women's Day," the statement said on Saturday. The 'Nari Shakti' awards are given annually to individuals, groups and institutions in recognition of



Women power: Lady cadets celebrating after the passing-out parade at the Officers Training Academy in Chennai on Saturday. ■ B. VELANKANNI RAJ

their exceptional work towards the cause of women's empowerment, especially for the vulnerable and marginalised.

Mr. Modi had on Tuesday said he would be handing over his accounts on various

social media platforms to women who inspire.

He tweeted, "This Women's Day (March 8), I will give away my social media accounts to women whose life & work inspire us. This will help them ignite motiva-

tion in millions."

The Prime Minister has accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

The Twitter handle of the Prime Minister's Office has 32 million followers.

Child climate activist rejects PM's initiative

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Manipur's Licypriya Kangjupi, arguably the world's youngest climate activist at eight, has turned down the Prime Minister's #SheInspiresUs initiative for women to take over their social media accounts.

"Dear @narendramodi Ji, please don't celebrate me if you are not going to listen [to] my voice. Thank you for selecting me amongst the inspiring women of the country under your initiative #SheInspiresUs.

After thinking many times, I decided to turn down this honour," Ms. Kangjupi tweeted from her handle in response to her selection announced from the Twitter handle of MyGovIndia.

Advisory council formed to aid Rajasthan CM

Members include noted economist Ashok Gulati

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JAIPUR

The Rajasthan government has formed an advisory council to aid and advise State Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on ways and means to tackle challenges of economic growth and development of the state, an official release said on Saturday.



Ashok Gehlot. ■ FILE PHOTO

international Chief Secretary (Finance) and the Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister as its ex-officio members.

Other members of the council include economists Rathin Roy and Ashok Gulati, businessmen Anil Agrawal and Laxmi Niwas Mittal, former banker Naina Lal Kidwai and actress Nandita Das.

With a provision to hold at least one meeting every six months, the council will also review various economic policies related issues of the State. The council will also have a separate working group whose members will be nominated by the Chief Minister, the statement said.

The council will have the State Chief Secretary, Addi-

Workplace safety still an issue: survey

'36% of respondents — women in media — have experienced sexual harassment'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Over 70% of respondents who had approached an internal committee to report sexual harassment at the workplace were not completely satisfied with the outcome, said a survey report released on Saturday by the Network of Women in Media, India (NWMI), and Gender at Work.

The survey found that 36% of all respondents reported having experienced sexual harassment at the workplaces. Of the respondents who experienced such harassment at work, 53% did not report it.

A small percentage made a report to the internal committee (IC) of their media houses. But 70% of those who made a complaint were not completely satisfied with the outcome, the report found. Among the women



Many hesitate to report sexual harassment. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

who said that their organisation did not have a mechanism to deal with sexual harassment, 47% had faced sexual harassment.

Kinds of harassment
In the report titled 'Creating safe workplaces: prevention and redressal of sexual harassment in media houses in India', the two organisations found that in terms of the kinds of harassment experienced by the respondents,

the most common were sexist comments, unwelcome sexual jokes, embarrassing gestures or body language, attempts to establish unwanted romantic and/or sexual relationships, and pestering for dates.

The promise of rewards for compliance, accompanied by threats of mistreatment following a refusal to engage in sexual behaviour, were also reported. In addition, unwanted touching, fondling, sexual assault and rape were documented.

The online survey conducted to assess whether and how effectively media houses across India responded to the issue of sexual harassment at the workplace found that a large percentage of respondents had never attended a training workshop on sexual harassment, as required by the law.

"The results of the survey

underscore the need to step up awareness raising and other preventive measures to bring about a change in the work culture in media houses," said Laxmi Murthy, one of the authors.

Looking within'
"While calling out sexual harassment in other spheres, as they should, the media industry must also look within and set its own house in order," said Ayush Aggarwal, another author.

The survey had 456 participants, including journalists, journalism educators, trainers and researchers. Most respondents were based in metropolitan centres such as Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Pune.

More than 70% were full-time employees and about 11% were freelancers, the report stated.

I saw god in you, woman tells Modi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi turned emotional on Saturday when a woman beneficiary of his government's generic medicine programme told him "I have seen god in you".

Dehradun-resident Deepa Shah, who suffered paralysis in 2011, was interacting with the Prime Minister through video-conference on the occasion of Jan Aushadhi Diwas.

"I have not seen god, but I have seen god in you," she said, tears rolling down her eyes.

Mr. Modi was visibly emotional as the woman repeated her remark.

"But on hearing your voice I have become better," she told Mr. Modi while profusely thanking the Prime Minister for his efforts to reduce the cost of medicines.

An emotional Prime Minister paused for a moment before telling her that it was her courage that had won over her disease and that she must carry on with the spirit.

Victoria Memorial Hall to display rare miniature of Rani Padmini

Selection made from the museum's Indian art collection

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

The Victoria Memorial Hall (VMH) will display a unique Rajput miniature painting of Rani Padmini (Padmavati) of Chittor to mark International Women's Day.

Jayanta Sengupta, secretary and curator of the VMH, said the unique painting by an unknown artiste is being displayed for the first time in the museum's galleries. "The painting was purchased by the VMH on October 3, 1913, from Ganeshi Lal and Sons, art traders. It is just out of our reserves. It will be on display in the Prince Hall on the southern side of the museum from next week," he said.

The painting shows the queen trying on a turban and surrounded by women. The miniature measures 33.7 cm X 27 cm. "In our collections, we have certain other iconic paintings like the Bharat Mata by Abanindranath Tagore and that of an Indian woman dancing with an English gentleman by Gaganendranath Tagore



Celebrating womanhood: The unique painting by an unknown artiste is being displayed for the first time. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

from the Bengal school of art that celebrate womanhood. But this miniature is also unique," he said.

The curator said the museum made a choice from its Indian art collection for Women's Day.

"Usually the VMH is

known for the collection of its Western paintings like Daubigny and Zoffany. But not many people know that we have a good collection of Indian art, including hundreds of miniatures, which we will be slowly bringing to display," Mr. Sengupta said.

Assam Speaker to discuss budget 'leak' with leaders

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
GUWAHATI

Assam Assembly Speaker Hitendra Nath Goswami on Saturday said he will discuss with the State government and the Opposition the issue of the budget being uploaded on an official website hours before its tabling in the House.

"I will discuss the issue with the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Law and Justice Minister and the Leader of the Opposition," he said.

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Denial of starvation deaths sparks anger

Jharkhand Food Minister Rameshwar Oraon says State government 'runs in continuity'

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha-Congress government, headed by Hemant Soren, has denied any starvation death in the State under BJP rule in the past five years.

The denial triggered a strong reaction from right-to-food activists and prompted questions about the coalition's charge – in the run-up to the 2019 Assembly election – that irregularities in the public distribution system had resulted in such deaths.

Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) MLA Vinod Singh recently asked in the Assembly whether or not there were more than 12 deaths due to hunger and malnutrition in the past five



Rameshwar Oraon, right, seen here with CM Hemant Soren, has said the government will not open a fresh probe. ■ PTI

years. The response by Food and Public Distribution Minister Rameshwar Oraon on March 5 was "negative" or "not true".

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Oraon, who also holds the Finance portfolio, said a State government "runs in

continuity, and this is the report of the previous government, and how can this government say people died of starvation".

He said, "We were in Opposition then (when the alleged deaths occurred) and the then government had

cancelled 11 lakhs ration cards. Our people would go to the homes of these people and raise the issue of these deaths." In none of the cases, he said, doctors had certified that the deaths were due to hunger or starvation.

In its election manifesto, the JMM had referred to starvation deaths. "Even today, Jharkhand is in the news across the world for its starvation deaths," it had said.

Mr. Oraon said the government would not open a fresh probe into the deaths. "If such an incident happens, we will not try to hush it up as the previous government did. We are working to ensure that none is suffering from hunger." In this year's Budget, he said, it was proposed to give rations to addi-

tional 10 lakh people, with an allocation of ₹187 crore.

However, right-to-food activists, who played a key role in highlighting the irregularities in the Public Distribution System under the BJP, said the government's denial of starvation deaths was "very unfortunate".

"If a government runs in continuity, as claimed by the Minister, will they own up the irregularities committed by the previous government? By not acknowledging the issue, how will address it," asked Siraj Dutta, an activist.

He alleged that the Budget presented by the JMM-Congress government did not address hunger and under-nutrition, including the exclusion caused by the Aadhaar-based system.

COVID-19, CAA put a pause on high-level visits

PM's visit to Dhaka under way despite concerns over security

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Planning for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Dhaka on March 17 is under way without any changes, said officials, despite concerns over security after several Islamist groups threatened major protests over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the Delhi violence.

"If a government runs in continuity, as claimed by the Minister, will they own up the irregularities committed by the previous government? By not acknowledging the issue, how will address it," asked Siraj Dutta, an activist.



Venting their anger: A rally being taken out in Dhaka on February 28 against the violence in India. ■ AFP

Jaishankar to meet Chinese and Russian counterparts

ATUL ANEJA
NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S.

Jaishankar will visit Sochi

later this month for talks

with his Chinese and

Russian counterparts, Wang

Yi and Sergey Lavrov,

respectively, which could

range from the situation in

Afghanistan to the danger to

international security posed

by the collapse of the

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

The three diplomats are expected to hold parleys on March 22 and 23 under the Russia India China (RIC) banner, highly placed sources told *The Hindu*.

"The trio is expected to brainstorm and seek convergence on a Eurasian perspective on global events," the sources said.

Parliament Speaker's last week, ostensibly upset over the CAA, which names Bangladesh among the three countries from where persecuted minorities will be granted fast-track citizenship. Also in March, four other high-level incoming visits

expected to be scheduled were put off, including those of leaders from Bhutan, Kazakhstan and Chile.

Officials said no other vi-

sits had been scheduled now

until a trip to Moscow on

May 9 to attend the Victory

Day anniversary celebra-

tions there.

The troubles have cast a

shadow over some incoming

visits. Since December, Ban-

gladesh has cancelled four

Minister-level visits, includ-

ing that of the Foreign and

Deputy Foreign Ministers,

the Home Minister and the

in the near future.

Roy speaks up on plight of non-tribals

Hundreds bid a tearful farewell to DMK leader

Party general secretary Anbazhagan's funeral procession was led by M.K. Stalin

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Hundreds of people and leaders from various political parties gave a tearful farewell to former minister and DMK General Secretary K. Anbazhagan on Saturday.

Party cadre in Chennai were found queuing up to have a glimpse of the DMK leader at his residence in Aspiran Garden, Kilpauk. Leaders of various political parties paid floral tributes to the leader.

In the afternoon, veteran actor and Makkal Needhi Maiyam founder Kamal Haasan, actor turned politician K. Subramanian, Congress MLA Vijayadharan, PMK leader G.K. Mani and leaders of educational institutions paid tributes to the leader.

At 4.15 p.m., the funeral procession began with DMK party leader M.K. Stalin leading it. Apart from Mr. Stalin, visitors.



People paying their respects to the mortal remains of Anbazhagan in Chennai on Saturday.

S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam and Minister D. Jayakumar visited the house and paid homage to his mortal remains on Saturday afternoon.

At 4.15 p.m., the funeral procession began with DMK party leader M.K. Stalin leading it. Apart from Mr. Stalin, and paid homage to the leader.

Hundreds of people holding party flags walked one and half kilometres to the

Velankadu crematorium of Chennai Corporation.

The procession crossed a number of residential neighbourhoods as locals paid tributes in each locality. It reached Velankadu crematorium at 5.15 p.m. Shops and business establishments were closed on New Avadi road when the procession crossed the stretch.

SC, ST student enrolment in Ph.D. programmes remains low in IITs

Only 9.1% SCs and 2.1% STs among those admitted at the doctoral level, data show

PON VASANTH B.A.
CHENNAI

Enrolment of students from marginalised communities, mainly the Scheduled Castes (SC) and the Scheduled Tribes (ST), was abysmally low in Ph.D. programmes in the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) from 2015 to 2019, data presented in the Rajya Sabha on Friday showed.

Of the 25,007 Ph.D. scholars admitted in the 23 IITs over the five-year period, only 9.1% were from the SC communities and 2.1% from the STs. This is lower than the 15% seats reserved for the former and 7.5% for the latter.

Those from the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) made up 23.2%, which is also lower than the reservation-mandated 27%. Nearly two-thirds of the admissions (65.6%) went to general category students.

Questions from MPs
The data was submitted by the Human Resource Development Ministry in response to a question raised by Elamaram Karim and K. Somprasad, Communist Party of India (Marxist) MPs from Kerala.

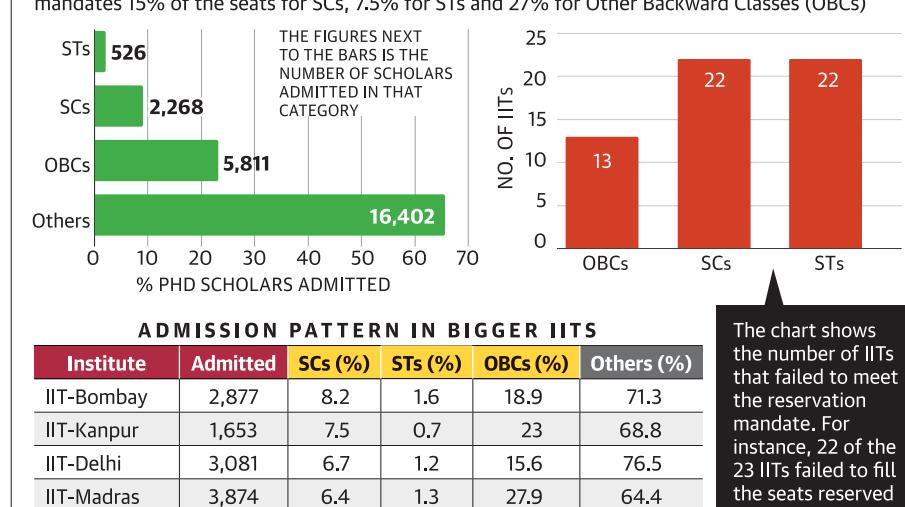
Though the total enrolment in Ph.D. programmes went up by 20% during the period, this increase did not result in a corresponding rise in the number of students from the two communities.

While the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Admission) Act, 2006 seems to have helped those from the OBCs marginally, the enrolment from the Scheduled communities remained low.

This is shown by the fact that among the 23 IITs, 10 had at least 27% Ph.D. scholars from the OBCs as man-

Matter of inclusion

Of the 25,007 Ph.D. scholars admitted in all 23 IITs in the last five years, only 9.1% were from the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and 2.1% were from Scheduled Tribes (STs). The reservation policy mandates 15% of the seats for SCs, 7.5% for STs and 27% for Other Backward Classes (OBCs)



ADMISSION PATTERN IN BIGGER IITs

Institute	Admitted	SCs (%)	STs (%)	OBCs (%)	Others (%)
IIT-Bombay	2,877	8.2	1.6	18.9	71.3
IIT-Kanpur	1,653	7.5	0.7	23	68.8
IIT-Delhi	3,081	6.7	1.2	15.6	76.5
IIT-Madras	3,874	6.4	1.3	27.9	64.4
IIT-Kharagpur	3,057	12.7	2.2	20.2	64.9

dated by the Act. In contrast, only the IIT-Dhanbad (Indian School of Mines) in Jharkhand had the minimum 15% from SC communities and the IIT-Bhilai in Chhattisgarh met 7.5% reservation for STs.

The IIT-Guwahati came closer with 6.9% of its Ph.D. scholars from the STs. These three IITs are located in places with large populations of marginalised communities.

Established IITs worse
Nearly 60% of all Ph.D. admissions happened in the five bigger and older IITs – Madras, Bombay, Delhi, Kanpur and Kharagpur. However, these were also the institutes with some of the lowest enrolments from the Scheduled communities.

For instance, of the 1,653 scholars admitted in IIT-Kanpur, only 11 (0.6%) were from the ST communities. With the highest of 3,874 admissions, the IIT-Madras contributed to more than one-fourth (26%) of admissions in all IITs. However, it

also had the least representation from the SC communities (6.4%) among the five. The IIT-Madras was the only one among these five IITs to meet the minimum 27% reservation for the OBCs.

Mr. Somaprasad, who is also the vice-president of Dalit Shoshan Mukti Manch, said that institutions such as the IITs and the IIMs hid behind their claim that they did not get enough number of applicants.

"However, it is not true. I have requested for some more data. I will raise it in Parliament appropriately," he said.

Siddharth Joshi, a Ph.D. from the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, who has co-authored a paper on lack of diversity among the faculty in the IIMs, said the claim of a lack of applicants had been proven to be a flimsy excuse. "The onus is on the institutes to ensure at least the reserved number of seats get filled," he said.

The lack of diversity among the faculty, he said,

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Over 1,00,000 infected by COVID-19

Chinese exports fell by 17.2% in the first two months of the year because of the virus epidemic

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING

The number of cases from COVID-19 topped 1,00,000 worldwide as official data on Saturday showed a significant hit to Chinese exports after the deadly outbreak brought much of the country to a halt.

The World Health Organization (WHO) called the spread of the virus "deeply concerning" as a wave of countries reported their first cases of the disease – which has now killed more than 3,500 people and infected more than 1,00,000 across 94 nations and territories.

In China, where the outbreak began in December, the virus has wreaked havoc on the world's second-largest economy, shutting down businesses and disrupting global supply chains. The negative impact was shown in official data on Saturday, with China's exports plunging 17.2% in the first two months of the year.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has urged "that all countries make containment their highest priority." Colombia, Costa Rica and Malta have announced their first cases.

2 deaths in Florida

Florida confirmed Friday two deaths from the virus – the first U.S. fatalities outside the west coast States of Washington and California – taking the country's death toll to 16. The number of infections in South Korea breached 7,000 on Saturday – the highest in the world outside China.

Two apartment blocks in Daegu – the fourth-largest city and the epicentre of its outbreak – have been quarantined after dozens of residents tested positive.

The number of cases re-



Stocking up: A Chinese woman picking up a shipment outside her apartment block on Saturday in Beijing. ■ GETTY IMAGES

corded in France rose to 716 with 11 deaths. Italy, meanwhile, began recruiting retired doctors on Saturday as part of urgent efforts to bolster the healthcare system with 20,000 additional staff.

In China, the number of new cases reported on Saturday nationwide was the lowest in weeks. The Chinese government has hinted it may soon lift the quarantine imposed on Hubei province – the locked-down epicentre where some 56 million people have been effectively housebound since late January. For the second consecutive day, there were no new cases reported in Hubei outside Wuhan, the province's capital. But the number of infections beyond the epicentre rose for the third straight day, fuelling fears about cases being brought into the country from overseas. There have now been 60 imported cases.

Many local authorities are imposing two-week quarantines on anyone who has travelled to virus-affected provinces or countries. The capital Tehran remains the

Iranian lawmaker dead, country's toll rises to 145

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TEHRAN

The death toll from COVID-19 in Iran continued to rise on Saturday with 21 more people killed, including a politician who became the eighth official to succumb to the disease. Health Ministry spokesman Kianoosh Jahanpour announced 1,076 additional cases had been confirmed in the past 24 hours, bringing the overall tolls to 145 dead and 5,823 infected.

"More than 16,000 people are currently hospitalised as suspect cases," Mr. Jahanpour said during a news conference. He added that 1,669 people who were sick with the COVID-19 illness have recovered.

Iran is battling one of the world's deadliest outbreaks of the disease outside China, where it originated. The

worst-hit province, with 1,539 confirmed cases.

On Saturday, a newly elected conservative MP for the city was the second Iranian lawmaker killed by the virus, state news agency IRNA reported. Fatemeh Rahbar, 55, served as MP from 2004 to 2016 and was among the top candidates in Tehran for the conservatives, who overwhelmingly won February's general election. Iran has closed schools and universities until early April, as well as suspended major cultural and sporting events and reduced working hours across the country to slow the contagion, which has spread to all of its 31 provinces.

More than 300 of the new cases reported on Saturday were in Mazandaran province, a popular tourist destination north of Tehran on the Caspian sea.

Iran is battling one of the world's deadliest outbreaks of the disease outside China, where it originated. The

capital Tehran remains the

Quarantine facility collapses

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING

Around 70 people were trapped after the collapse of a hotel used as a COVID-19 quarantine facility in eastern China on Saturday evening. At least 38 people have so far been rescued from the rubble of the 80-room Xinjia hotel in coastal Quanzhou, said the local government. The hotel's facade appeared to have crumbled into the ground, exposing the building's steel frame.

Facebook closes London offices

REUTERS
LONDON

Facebook said on Friday that it is closing its London offices until Monday after a visiting employee from Singapore was diagnosed with COVID-19.

Facebook also advised employees based in the affected area of its Singapore office to work from home until March 13.

Pope not to address crowds

REUTERS
VATICAN CITY

Pope Francis has cancelled his regular appearances in public to avoid crowds gathering to see him and will stream them on the Internet from inside the Vatican because of the COVID-19 outbreak in Italy. The Vatican said that on Sunday the pontiff will not address crowds from a window overlooking St. Peter's Square.

Saudi detains three royals over alleged 'coup' plot against MBS

Former Crown Prince among those picked up at a camp

REUTERS
RIYADH

Saudi Arabia has detained three senior Saudi Princes including Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz, the younger brother of King Salman, and Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, the King's nephew, for allegedly planning a coup, sources with knowledge of the matter said.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, King Salman's son and de facto ruler of the country, the world's top oil exporter and a key U.S. ally, has moved to consolidate power since ousting Mohammed bin Nayef as heir to the throne in a 2017 palace coup.

Later that year, he arrested several royals and other prominent Saudis, holding them for months at Riyadh's Ritz-Carlton hotel in an anti-corruption campaign that caused shockwaves at home and abroad.

Five sources told Reuters that Prince Ahmed and Mohammed bin Nayef were detained in the latest operation. Three of the sources,



In happier times: Saudi King Salman, right, Mohammed bin Nayef, centre, and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, left, in a 2016 photo. ■ AFP

including a regional source, said Mohammed bin Nayef and his half-brother, Nawaf, were picked up at a private desert camp on Friday. Two sources said Prince Ahmed was taken from his home.

Foreign powers' Crown Prince Mohammed, also referred to as MBS, "accused them of conducting contacts with foreign powers, including the Americans and others, to carry out a coup d'état," the regional source said.

"With these arrests, MBS consolidated his full grip on power. The source indicated that no rivals remain to challenge his

succession to the throne.

Another source said the Princes were accused of "treason". A third source said they had been discussing a coup with the support of powerful tribes but had not reached advanced stages. The Saudi government media office did not respond to a request for comment on the detentions, first reported by *The Wall Street Journal*.

It was unclear where the Princes are being held. "They (Princes) have to be treated with dignity," the source said, referring to their stature within the family.

Kabul victims describe carnage

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL

Kabul was reeling on Saturday after Islamic State jihadists killed 32 people and wounded dozens more, with injured survivors describing scenes of terror as gunmen opened fire in the deadliest attack to hit Afghanistan since a U.S.-Taliban deal.

The attack at a crowded gathering in the capital has raised questions about Afghanistan's abysmal security situation and uncertain future following the February

agreement to pull foreign forces from the country within 14 months.

Lying in a hospital bed in a run-down Kabul neighbourhood, Basira, 15, said she had attended Friday's annual commemoration ceremony for Abdul Ali Mazari – a politician from the Hazara ethnic group – for the first time, accompanied by her father and younger sister.

Zamin Ali, who suffered a bullet wound, said hundreds of people had assembled to watch the ceremony, when

the attackers began raining down gunfire. The Islamic State (IS) had claimed an attack on the same ceremony last year, which killed 11, and the group has in the past targeted Hazaras who are predominantly Shia Muslim.

Survivors expressed anger against the government for failing to improve security, with injured teenager Ms. Basira saying: "The political elites fled with their convoys and poor and innocent people were martyred and wounded".

Lebanon set for debt default

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PESHAWAR

After a ban of 23 years, women worshippers can now pray at Peshawar's famous Sunehri Masjid, a move welcomed by women's groups, according to a media report.

Around 20 women offered prayers on Friday after the mosque administration announced the move, the *Dawn News* reported.

Separate hall
Provisions have been made for women to offer Friday prayers in the hall on the upper floor of the mosque, read a banner put up by the mosque administration. Women would also be allowed for Id prayers.

The mosque's Naib Imam Muhammad Ismail said till 1996 women were allowed to

Women worshippers allowed into Pak. mosque

Sunehri Masjid, located in Peshawar, was out of bounds to them for 23 years



Opening the doors: People attending Friday prayers at Sunehri Masjid in Peshawar in 2016. ■ REUTERS

attend Friday prayer congregations, but later they were stopped due to growing militancy.

"Now we have opened the upper portion again so that

women can offer Friday prayers alongside males in a separate section and listen to the Friday khutba [sermon]," the *Dawn News* quoted Mr. Ismail as saying.

we are the stronger campaign to defeat Trump, says Senator ahead of key Michigan race

TRIP GABRIEL
MATT STEVENS
DETROIT

Calibrating his approach for a tough head-to-head primary match-up in a year when many Democratic voters want to put up a united front, Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont on Friday renewed his attacks on former Vice-President Joe Biden's record on trade while also conceding that Mr. Biden could defeat President Donald Trump.

In Michigan, where the Sanders campaign is running a TV ad featuring an autoworker who says his community has been "decimated" by free trade deals, Mr. Sanders attacked Mr. Biden for his support of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the 1990s.

"Joe, you're wrong." "Joe Biden and I have a very serious disagreement with regards to NAFTA," Mr. Sanders said at a round table he



The last phase: Supporters of candidate Bernie Sanders during a campaign rally in Detroit, Michigan, on Friday. ■ AFP

convened of workers, union leaders and economists in Detroit before a rally attended by thousands. "Just last year – I'm not talking about 20 years ago – Joe said that voting for NAFTA, quote, was not a mistake, end of quote, and a few years before that he called NAFTA a success," Mr. Sanders said. "Joe, you're wrong. NAFTA was not a success. Voting for it was a big, big mistake."

As a long line of mostly young supporters filed into a downtown convention

He said the mosque's Friday sermons are likely to throw light on women's issues and their rights in Islam. "I am really happy, and this is a really good decision. We are hopeful that the mosque administration will allow women regularly also," Kousar Shah, 45, one of the women who offered prayers on Friday, told the *Dawn News*.

The construction of the Sunehri Masjid was completed in 1976. It is much-appreciated for its Mughal-style architecture.

The decision to allow women worshippers entry came days before International Women's Day on March 8 and the much-publicised "Aurat March" (Women's March) planned on the same day.

U.K. police to review Dubai princess case

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

British police said on Saturday that they were reviewing an investigation into the disappearance of the ruler of Dubai's daughter after a court found that she had been abducted by her father.

In a verdict, a British family court judge said that Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, who is Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE, had ordered the abduction of two of his adult daughters and their forcible return home.

One of the women, Sheikha Shamsa, was taken from the English city of Cambridge when she was 19 in August 2000, the court found.

Trump replaces Chief of Staff for the third time

Meadows is among his strong defenders

REUTERS
PALM BEACH/WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump parted ways on Friday with acting White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney and replaced him with conservative lawmaker and close ally Mark Meadows, who was a strong Trump defender during the Democratic impeachment drive.

Mr. Meadows takes over as the White House struggles to advance a consistent message about the COVID-19 crisis and as Mr. Trump goes into a bruising re-election contest. He becomes the fourth Chief of Staff in Mr. Trump's three years in office, tasked with attempting to bring order to a chaotic

presidency. Mr. Trump named Mr. Mulvaney to be his special U.S. envoy to Northern Ireland, just as he prepares to welcome Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar to Washington for St. Patrick's Day ceremonies later this month.



No ceasefire violation in Idlib, says Turkey

ISTANBUL Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar said there had been no violations of the ceasefire in Syria's Idlib, as part of the agreement with Russia, the Defence Ministry said on Saturday. "We will continue to be a deterrent force to prevent any violation to the ceasefire. None occurred since [it] entered into force," he said. ■ AFP

Russians held in Sweden over attack on blogger

STOCKHOLM Two Russian citizens have been arrested in Sweden suspected of a hammer attack last month on a blogger critical of Chechen strongman leader Ramzan Kadyrov, media reported on Saturday. The Chechen blogger claimed the man was sent by Russia to kill him. ■ AFP

SUDOKU

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	6		5	9	8			
9					3	4		
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	8				1	3		
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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

2	4	9	7	6	3	5	1	8

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SBI pegs maximum investment in Yes Bank at ₹10,000 crore

Investors have shown interest in the private lender post RBI plan, says SBI chief

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

State Bank of India, which can pick up a maximum 49% stake in Yes Bank as per the draft reconstruction plan drawn by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), expects the upper limit of investment in the private lender to be no more than ₹10,000 crore.

On Friday, the RBI announced a draft plan that put the authorised capital of the bank at ₹5,000 crore with 2,400 crore equity shares of ₹2 each aggregating to ₹4,800 crore.

The board of SBI had approved a proposal to explore investment opportunities in Yes Bank after the government put a moratorium on the lender till April 3 and capped deposit withdrawal at ₹50,000.

Addressing the media, SBI chairman Rajnish Kumar said investors had shown interest in Yes Bank after the RBI floated the draft plan on Friday evening.

"The [draft reconstruction] plan has been received by SBI and our investment and legal teams are doing the due diligence on the draft scheme. There is time till Monday for us to go back to RBI with comments," Mr. Kumar said.

"If SBI goes solo and picks up 49% stake, then immediate investment requirement is ₹2,450 crore," he said. He clarified that a potential investor needs to comply with the fit and proper criteria of RBI if they want to pick up more than 5% stake, as is the norm.

"There are many potential investors after seeing the scheme. They have approached us. And there are some good names. Anybody who wants to go above 5%,



Banking on goodwill: Rajnish Kumar, chairman, SBI, addressing the media in Mumbai on Saturday. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

they have to meet the fit and proper criteria of the RBI," he said. Observing investors saw opportunity in the country's financial sector, Mr. Kumar said SBI's investment team will hold discussions with the potential investors and then present a plan to the RBI along with other investors.

"That is a possibility but no firm decision has been made as of now," he said.

Impact on SBI's capital

The SBI chairman said the impact on the capital position of the bank due to the investment will not be significant.

"We have done our math. The capital ratios will not be impacted. There is very marginal impact on the bank's capital adequacy ratio. All the ratios, as a policy, we maintain them at 50 bps higher than the regulatory requirement. We will continue to do that without any further release of the capital," he said.

Mr. Kumar said there is

facie, the valuation looks fair.

"If it is ₹10 (per share) and [there are] 255 crore shares, then the value of the bank is ₹2,550 crore. The bank has 1,150 branches, they have a strong retail franchise, which has a very good technology platform. So, it appears the bank is worth ₹2,550 crore," he added.

Arm's-length
He clarified that the SBI will keep arm's-length from the day-to-day operations of Yes Bank and there was no question of conflict of interest. The SBI will also not try to lure the next customers of Yes Bank.

"We don't thrive in misery of others. One thing has to be very clear, that it is a strategic investment. Like we do with all our associate and subsidiaries, it will be a professional board and a professional management team.

The bank, as a shareholder and investor, has certain expectations from the management team and the board. Other than that, there is no question of any conflict of interest. We will keep, not one arm's-length but two arms'- length from Yes Bank," he said.

'no question' of requesting the government for any capital. Mr. Kumar defended the government's decision to rope in SBI for the bailout of Yes Bank and said a bank's failure had a consequences for the economy.

"SBI is a national institute of importance. When there is a banking institution in particular, the survival of the bank is a must otherwise there is a huge contagion effect. We have to keep in mind, when it is a bank, whether it is small, medium or big, its failure has huge consequences for the financial sector and the economy."

"If today, a resolution has to happen, realising that need, you need a credible name with the investors, creditors and depositors of the bank. Yes, SBI is standing behind it, has been asked to stand behind it," he added.

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Centre invites bids for BPCL sale

However, sliding crude oil prices may prove a dampener on the process

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The government on Saturday invited bids for the sale of its entire 52.98% stake in country's second biggest State-owned oil refiner Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (BPCL).

However, amid falling oil prices, analysts believe that the government will find it difficult to get a good valuation for the company.

"The government's plan to sell its stake in BPCL could be delayed, as many global oil majors that have been looking at the company as an outlet to refine their crude may revalue their bids in a scenario of sinking oil prices," said Fitch Ratings.



Get set: The government has set \$10 billion in minimum net worth as one of the eligibility criteria. ■ REUTERS

buying out the government's stake in BPCL.

Expressions of interest for the strategic sale of BPCL have been invited by May 2, as per the bid document by the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM).

"The Government of India is proposing strategic disinvestment of its entire shareholding in BPCL comprising 52.98% of BPCL's equity share capital, along with transfer of management control to a strategic buyer (except BPCL's equity shareholding of 61.65% in Numaligarh Refinery Limited)," said the bid document.

"Saudi Aramco and Royal Dutch Shell will be the front runners for BPCL. Saudi Aramco believes that their oil will last for eternity and so they want to get long-term

crude supply contracts for Saudi oil. For Shell, tough environmental norms in the West will be major factor to make refineries investment in India," a director of an oil marketing company (OMC) told *The Hindu*.

BPCL shares on the BSE closed down 3.74% to ₹402.85 on the BSE in a weak Mumbai market on Friday, valuing the company at ₹87,388.4 crore.

The government has set \$10 billion minimum net worth as one of the eligibility criteria in the expression of interest (EoI) for BPCL.

In case of a consortium of investors bidding for taking a stake in the oil refiner and marketer, the minimum net worth for each member has been set at \$1 billion, according to the bid document.

The government has explicitly excluded public sector units (PSUs), having 51% government ownership, from bidding for BPCL, a move that will make Indian Oil Corporation (IOCL) ineligible to bid for BPCL.

K.M. Mammen re-elected ATMA chief

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

Tyre major MRF's chairman and managing director K.M. Mammen has been unanimously re-elected chairman of the Auto-Tyre Manufacturers' Association (ATMA).

Anshuman Singhania, deputy MD, JK Tyre & Industries, is the vice-chairman. Founded in 1975, ATMA represents 11 large tyre companies comprising Indian and international tyre majors, representing over 95% of the tyres produced in India.

IndusInd defers AT1 bond plan

RBI scheme for Yes Bank said such bonds will be written down

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

IndusInd Bank has deferred its plan to raise additional tier-I (AT1) and tier-II bonds in view of the current market conditions.

The bank's board was scheduled to meet on Monday to approve the funding plan. The board meeting has now been deferred.

"The meeting of the board of directors of the bank was proposed to be held on Monday, March 9, 2020 to consider and approve, inter alia, the borrowing and raising of funds in Indian and/or fo-

reign currency by issuance of debt securities in the nature of Additional Tier I Capital (AT1) and/or tier II bonds (T2 bonds) of the bank.

Market conditions

In view of the current market conditions and since the bank is adequately capitalised at present, it has been decided not to consider raising the Basel III-compliant debt capital instruments for the time being," the bank said.

This is in conformity with the extant regulations issued by Reserve Bank of India based on the Basel framework," the central bank had said.

The move comes after the Reserve Bank of India's draft reconstruction scheme for Yes Bank was released on



THE HINDU GROUP

LOVE LETTERS WILL NEVER GO OUT OF FASHION.

The year is 2020, but affectionate words are still very much in demand.

This International Women's Day, show your love and gratitude by writing

a few deserving lines for the wonderful women in your life.

The best of the entries will receive memorable goodies from us.

Mail your good words to hello@thehindu.co.in

Send in your entries on or before 8th March 2020.

THE HINDU



Follow The Hindu Reader Connect for contest and updates



Getting ready: The all-new Creta gets finishing touches at Hyundai's Sriperumbudur facility, near Chennai. ■ N. ANAND

ing at the response, we will start exporting it. This happened in the case of Hyundai Venue. In this case, we will start exporting from June/July 2020 onwards."

According to him, the SUV was designed by deploying 3D printing and scanning which were used to detect stress points that needed corrections.

Tarun Garg, director, sales, marketing and service, HMIL said that the Creta came with over 50 connectivity features and it was best in its class.

The all-new Creta offers five new powertrain options, in 10 colour options, including two-dual tone options. Bookings for the SUV started on March 2 and deliveries will commence in the third week of March.

The new car will feature blue link connectivity, bringing in 'Hello Blue Link' - a wake-up word to activate voice recognition service at ease for in-car control and assistance alongside new smart watch integrated blue link application, he said.

On exports, he said: "Our first priority is to cater to the domestic market and look-

ing at the response, we will start exporting it. This happened in the case of Hyundai Venue. In this case, we will start exporting from June/July 2020 onwards."

According to him, the SUV was designed by deploying 3D printing and scanning which were used to detect stress points that needed corrections.

of our product portfolio for 2020 that focuses on the push for C & D segment cars.

These products are big on customisation and exclusivity and hence, sold in limited numbers. So far, we have received an extremely positive response for both the Audi Q8 and the Audi A8 L from prospective customers.

Your take on EVs...

■ EVs are the way forward but the market is not going to develop overnight. Infrastructure plays an important role. Tangible measures by the government towards e-mobility infrastructure and adequate support towards the import of electric vehicles would be a welcome move. Ideally, the government should do something for PHEVs (plug-in hybrid electric vehicles) because it is a step towards electrification. The launch of Audi e-tron (its first electric car) is on the cards and we will announce the launch timeline in due course.

market declined, we saw a strong traction in the luxury pre-owned car segment. Audi Approved: plus, our pre-owned car business, registered a year-on-year growth of 11% in 2019.

Your outlook for 2020?

■ We have been optimistic about the growth of the luxury car segment on the back of the India growth story, which remains intact. We believe that the luxury car market will take a leap sometime in the future, we only don't know when. In terms of what is notable while the overall car

growth estimates for the luxury car market, we estimate it to remain flat in 2020 and are hopeful of positive revival starting 2021.

What is the scenario for cars costing above ₹1 crore?

■ The recently launched Audi Q8 and the Audi A8 L form an extremely important part

CM
YK

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GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Crypto relief

What does the recent Supreme Court of India order reinstating virtual currency activities mean?

SRIRAM SRINIVASAN

The story so far: On Wednesday, March 4, a three-judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India struck down a 2018 circular of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), which sought to prevent banks and institutions from dealing in “virtual currencies” – also referred to as cryptocurrencies, an example being Bitcoin – and providing services to those engaged in trading in such currencies. The Court order comes seven months after an inter-ministerial committee recommended that cryptocurrencies be banned, proposing instead that an official digital currency be launched in the country.

Why did the case land in court? It has its origins in the writ petitions filed by the industry body, the Internet and Mobile Association of India, and several crypto exchanges, their shareholders, and traders. They challenged the RBI circular on many counts. Through that circular, the RBI had forbidden banks from extending a range of services to facilitate individuals and entities in dealing with cryptocurrencies. The list of such services included “maintaining accounts, registering, trading, settling, clearing, giving loans against virtual tokens, accepting them as collateral, opening accounts of exchanges dealing with them and transfer/receipt of money in accounts relating to purchase/sale of VCs [or virtual currencies].”

The petitioners gave instances of virtual currency exchanges shutting down as a result of this circular. There was also a mention of how money lying in the account of one of the exchanges got frozen. The petitioners questioned the RBI’s power in prohibiting trading in virtual currencies; they wondered how the RBI could propose an outright ban when all other stakeholders such as the Department of Economic Affairs, the Securities and Exchange Board of India, the Central Board of Direct Taxes, among others, had battened for a regulatory regime; they also challenged the circular on the grounds of lack of proportionality (the idea that regulatory action should not be disproportionate to the goals such action seeks to achieve).

Why does the central banker find virtual currencies problematic? This can be understood by how the RBI defined virtual currencies in 2013, which the Court said was perhaps the first time it took note of “technology risks in changing business environment”. The RBI defined such currency, the Court order notes, “as a type of unregulated digital money, issued and controlled by its developers and used and accepted by the members of a specific virtual community”. The absence of a centralised authority running it, seen as a plus by those who back cryptocurrencies, is viewed as a drawback by official monetary systems. There are other factors too. The value of such currencies has been driven purely by speculative impulses, and they have had a volatile journey all along. The anonymity that the system ensures has also been misused in the past, with cryptocurrencies said to enable funding of terrorist operations. There is also fear that it could undermine the monetary system and render policies ineffective. And all these fears are shared by the global financial system.

Why did the Court rule in favour of the petitioners? Justices Rohinton Nariman, Aniruddha Bose and V. Ramasubramanian set aside the RBI circular of 2018, saying, “It is not possible for us to hold that the impugned measure is proportionate.” Their reasoning was based on the fact that the RBI had not found that the activities of virtual currency exchanges had adversely affected the entities it regulated. This, even as virtual currencies (VC) have not been banned in the country. “... but the trading in VCs and the functioning of VC exchanges are sent to comatose [sic] by the impugned circular by disconnecting their lifeline namely, the interface with the regular banking sector,” the order said.

But while doing so, they have indicated quite strongly that the central bank has the requisite power to regulate or prohibit virtual currencies. They have noted that: “Anything that may pose a threat to or have an impact on the financial system of the country, can be regulated or prohibited by RBI, despite the said activity not forming part of the credit system or payment system.”

Will relief for the cryptocurrency ecosystem be shortlived?

Quite likely. The inter-Ministerial committee had recommended an outright ban on cryptocurrencies. A draft law was also put in place. This verdict may not have changed the direction in which our policymakers want to go with respect to cryptocurrencies. *The Economic Times* has reported that the RBI is planning to file a review petition in the Supreme Court.

How is India containing COVID-19?

Are there enough testing facilities in the country? What happens when a person tests positive?

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN

The story so far: On Saturday, India’s Health Ministry said the total number of the highly contagious coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases in the country had risen to 34. In December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) had declared an outbreak of the febrile respiratory illness of unknown etiology from Wuhan, Hubei province of China. The outbreak was epidemiologically linked to the Wuhan Seafood Wholesale Market involving the sale of seafood and live animals. Later named COVID-19, it has now spread to more than 90 countries apart from China, – there are 101,923 confirmed cases and 3,486 deaths from 94 countries, areas and territories (as on March 7, 10:00 CET). WHO has declared the outbreak as a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern.”

What do we know about the virus?

Little is known about the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), which currently has no vaccine and has the potential to cause severe illnesses and pneumonia, according to senior health officials in the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). It primarily spreads through the respiratory droplets of infected people. If a person touches a surface or object that has been infected by the virus and then touches his own mouth, nose, or eyes, he may get infected. Symptoms of COVID-19 appear within two to 14 days after exposure and include fever, cough, a runny nose and difficulty in breathing.

Where is screening being done?

As preventive measures, the Health Ministry has recommended universal screening of all international flights, cancellation of biometric attendance for all ministries till March 31, advised against mass gatherings. The Indian Army is now establishing additional quarantine facilities for 1,500 personnel (total) which will be activated at locations as part of the overall effort. The tentative locations identified are at Jaisalmer (Rajasthan), Suratgarh (Rajasthan), Secunderabad (Telangana), Chennai (Tamil Nadu) and Kolkata (West Bengal).

The Ministry has also suggested augmenting isolation facilities in hospitals across India besides ensuring adequate supply of protective gear, medicines and other essential services.

What is the process?

Universal screening for coronavirus is being done at 30 airports having international operations. A total of 7,26,122 passengers have been screened so far from 7,108 flights (as on March 7).

Airlines have been instructed to make in-flight announcements about COVID-19 and all international passengers are being asked to fill the ‘Self Reporting Form’ in duplicate. Those picked out through thermal screening are sent for further tests and isolation and treatment if necessary to designated hospitals including Ram Manohar Lohia and Safdarjung Hospital (both in Delhi). The government has adopted these measures such as universal screening of passengers, filling up self-declaration forms, surveillance of those who have come in contact with infected persons to contain the spread.

What happens if a person tested has fever?

Points of entry such as airports, sea ports, borders have set up a protocol of thermal screening, which means anyone with fever will be picked out. All passengers coming into India are being screened. In case a passenger has a temperature, he is referred for further tests at designated hospitals where COVID-19 symptoms are



REUTERS

matched, the country he comes from is looked into, exposure is checked and samples are collected for testing.

Isolation (home/hospital) is advised for a period of 14 to 21 days when the case samples of the suspected person are sent for testing. If he tests positive, he is sent for treatment and all his contacts are then traced. The test results for COVID-19 are obtained in four to five hours. The virus has an incubation period of about 14 days. According to health officials, India is following WHO-prescribed guidelines to detect, treat and contain the virus.

How is the infection being treated?

A WHO release says: “We are dealing with a new virus and WHO is working closely with clinicians caring for patients with COVID-19, across the globe and international experts on infectious disease to better understand, in real time, the clinical presentation, natural history and treatment interventions for COVID-19.” It adds that a majority of patients with COVID-19 are adults and most patients (80%) experienced mild illness. Approximately 14% experienced severe disease and 5% were critically ill worldwide.

In India, a senior health official said WHO-prescribed patient management guidance was being followed, which included interim clinical care guidance for hospitalised patients and home care guidance for those with a milder infection which may be treated at home in isolation when the health system is strained.

What are the challenges?

Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said, “India’s additional challenge is to contain clusters due to local transmission. We have provided the Containment Action Plan to all the States. A national level training workshop has been conducted for all the States and hospitals on COVID-19 management which will then be taken up at the district level. Senior officers of the Ministry have been deputed to States and UTs [Union Territories] to review their preparedness and provide required guidance in the containment efforts.”

He added that the Ministry has designated the District Collector as the nodal officer for containment operations. States have been guided in terms of identifying the containment zone, buffer zone and preparation of a micro plan to ensure effective active and passive surveillance and contact tracing through inter-

disciplinary teams in the areas where cases are located. A 24-hour seven day control room is operational with call centre number 011-23978046. So far, more than 9,200 calls have been attended to including 667 international calls, as per information released by the Health Ministry (March 5).

Are testing labs being

Chemicals and Fertilizers Minister D.V. Sadananda Gowda said India has sufficient stocks of active pharmaceutical ingredients – the raw materials needed to make medicines – to last the next three months. The statement comes amid reports of disrupted supply chains for active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) from China due to the outbreak. He said, “The export ban on 26 APIs for common medicines was imposed to ensure that there is no domestic shortage due to the coronavirus outbreak.”

What are health officials advising?

Health officials said hands must be regularly and thoroughly cleaned with an alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water. A distance of at least 1 metre (3 feet) must be maintained from a person coughing or sneezing. If a person has fever, cough and experiences difficulty breathing, medical attention must be sought. The officials said there is no need to panic and start buying masks.

Why did Yes Bank have to be bailed out?

How will the Reserve Bank of India plan impact depositors? What are the implications for the banking sector?

MANOJIT SAHA

The story so far: On the advice of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the government imposed a moratorium on Yes Bank with effect from 6 p.m. on March 5 up to April 3. Subsequently, the RBI superseded the private sector lender’s board and appointed as an administrator, Prashant Kumar, who was serving as chief financial officer and deputy managing director at State Bank of India (SBI). Mr. Kumar resigned from the SBI to assume charge as the administrator of Yes Bank. Under the moratorium, deposit withdrawals have been capped at ₹50,000. Within 24 hours, the RBI proposed a reconstruction scheme under which SBI could take a maximum 49% stake in the restructured capital of the bank.

Why was the moratorium imposed?

The banking regulator, while recommending the moratorium, cited a steady decline in Yes Bank’s financial position mainly due to the lender’s inability to raise adequate capital to make provisions for potential non-performing assets. This failing resulted in downgrades by credit rating agencies, which in turn made capital raising even more difficult – a vicious cycle that further worsened its financials.

This apart there were serious lapses in corporate governance.

The RBI said, “The bank has also experienced serious governance issues and practices in the recent years which have led to steady decline of the bank,” adding that it had been in constant engagement with the bank’s management to find ways to strengthen its balance sheet and liquidity.

“Since a bank and market led revival is a preferred option over a regulatory restructuring, the Reserve Bank made all efforts to facilitate such a process and gave adequate opportunity to the bank’s management to draw up a credible revival plan, which did not materialise. In the meantime, the bank was facing regular outflow of liquidity,” the RBI explained on March 5, laying out the rationale for the moratorium.

When did it all start?

As on March 31, 2014, the bank’s loan book was ₹55,633 crore and deposits were ₹74,192 crore. Since then, over the next five-and-a-half years, the loan book expanded fourfold to ₹2,24,505 crore as on September 30, 2019, at the end of the second quarter of the current financial year, while deposit growth failed to keep pace and increased less than three times to ₹2,09,497 crore. The bank is yet to announce results for the third quarter. Asset quality also worsened during the period with



gross non-performing assets sharply rising from 0.31% as on March 31, 2014, to 7.39% at the end of September 2019.

The exponential growth at Yes Bank during that period also came under the regulator’s scanner. The lender has substantial exposure to several troubled borrowers including the Anil Ambani-led Reliance group, Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Ltd (DHFL) and IL&FS. This resulted in the RBI refusing to grant its then Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Rana Kapoor – also the bank’s co-founder – another three-year term after his tenure ended in August 2018. The RBI did not make public the reason for its decision to not extend Mr. Kapoor’s term. Finally he was given an extension till end-January 2019.

The tipping point probably came earlier this year when one of the bank’s independent directors and chairman of the board’s audit committee, Uttam Prakash Agarwal, resigned from the board in January citing governance issues. The RBI, meanwhile, had been taking stock of the developments at the bank on a regular basis for the last few months.

What will be the likely impact on depositors?

While deposit withdrawals have been capped at ₹50,000, there are exceptions under which a higher amount can be withdrawn, with the permission of the RBI.

The RBI will allow a customer to withdraw more than ₹50,000 under the following conditions: (i) in connection with the medical treatment of the depositor or any person actually dependent on the depositor; (ii) towards the cost of higher education of the depositor or any person actually dependent on him for education in India or outside India; (iii) to pay obligatory expenses in connection with marriage or other ceremonies of the depositor or his/her children or of any other person

actually dependent upon depositor; (iv) or any other unavoidable emergency.

The total withdrawal should, however, not exceed ₹5 lakh or the actual balance in the account, whichever is lower.

What about deposit insurance?

In case Yes Bank goes belly up for any reason, depositors will not lose all their money since deposits up to ₹5 lakh are covered under deposit insurance.

While the deposit insurance cover was ₹1 lakh till recently, this was increased to ₹5 lakh in the aftermath of the crisis at the Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank Limited where caps too were set on deposit withdrawals. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the increase in deposit insurance in the Budget.

Will the developments at Yes Bank pose a systemic risk?

While the government and the regulator have asserted that the problem is solely related to this particular bank, ratings agency Fitch Ratings said the latest developments spotlight the governance risks in India’s banking sector.

It said, “There is a risk that the already poor operating environment for the banking sector could suffer further impairment if the government’s efforts to tackle problems in the bank fail to provide reassurance to depositors and investors,” while also assigning a negative outlook to India’s banking sector.

What is the way forward?

The RBI has come up with a draft reconstruction plan for Yes Bank which proposes that depositors’ funds would be protected. The employees would also have the same service conditions, including remuneration, at least for one year. However, in the case of key managerial personnel, the new board would be empowered to take a call.

The SBI, which has received board approval to invest in Yes Bank, will have to pick up to 49% stake, according to the scheme, at a price that is not less than ₹10 for each share having a face value of ₹2.

The investor bank (SBI) also cannot reduce its holding below 26% before the completion of three years from the date of infusion of the capital.

SNAPSHOTS

**Diversity in drosophila**

Fruit flies (*Drosophila melanogaster*) were made to walk following a line, and while some took a straight path, others made a wavy pattern. Such behavioural diversity, which was constant for each individual, was seen to arise because of differences in the wiring up of neurons in the visual system. The greater the asymmetry in the brain circuit, the better the fly was able to follow the line, according to an article published in *Science*.

**Sniffing out diseases**

Dogs were tested for their abilities to sniff and identify a bacterial plant disease known as citrus huanglongbing. This is caused by the bacterium *Candidatus Liberibacter asiaticus* which has jumped from the animal kingdom to plants in the last 200 years. The dogs could detect 30-day-old infections, while genetic testing could reveal the disease only much later. The *PNAS* article estimates that about 92% of trees in an orchard could be saved by such early detection.

**Memory replayed**

While studying the brains of epilepsy patients temporarily living with electrodes implanted in their brains, in order to monitor brain activity, researchers learnt about the way episodic memory (memories of our past experiences) is stored. During a memory task, the neurons fired in a particular pattern when the patient learnt a word pair. This pattern of firing was repeated just before the patient recalled the words. The research was published in *Science*.

The Sun brings out a fresh batch of sunspots

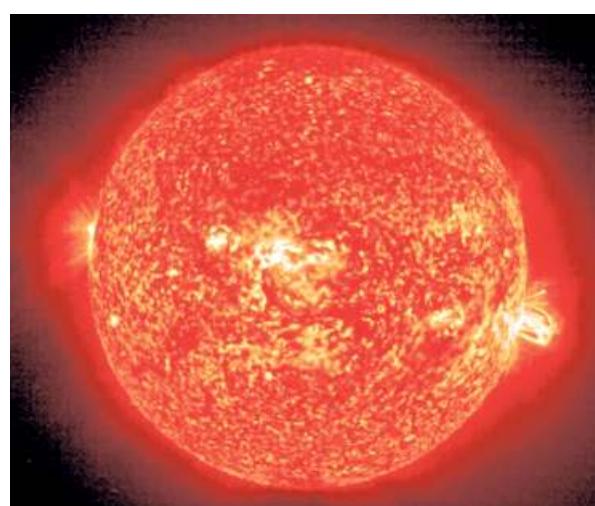
The sunspots identified by researchers from IISER Kolkata herald the start of a new solar cycle

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

Sun spots are relatively cooler spots on the Sun's surface. Their number waxes and wanes in cycles that last 11 years approximately. We are currently at the minimum of one such cycle. Amidst claims that the Sun would "go silent" and not give out sunspots for an extended period, a group from IISER Kolkata has shown that the next sunspot cycle has begun and the Sun has indeed spoken. Their results were published in *Research Notes of the American Astronomical Society*.

From our safe distance about 148 million km, the Sun appears to be sedate and constant. However, huge solar flares and coronal mass ejections spew material from its surface into outer space. They originate from sunspots, an important phenomenon that people have been following for hundreds of years.

Sunspots occur in pairs, with a leader and a follower. They originate deep within the Sun and become visible when they pop out. Their number is not constant but shows a minimum and then rises up to a maximum and then falls again in what is called the solar cycle. So far,



Not sedate: Huge solar flares and coronal mass ejections spew material from the solar surface into outer space • AFP

astronomers have documented 24 such cycles, the last one ended in 2019.

Start of cycle 25

Following a weakening trend in activity over the last few cycles, there were predictions that the Sun would go silent into a grand minimum in activity, with the disappearance of cycles. However, a team from IISER Kolkata has shown that there are signs that cycle 25 has just begun. They used the data from the instrument Helioseismic and Magnetic Imager aboard NASA's space-based Solar Dynamics Observatory

for their calculations.

"There has been a lot of controversy about solar cycle 25 stemming from observations of a weakening trend in solar activity over the past three sunspot cycles. This has led to speculation that the solar cycle is about to die and we are going to enter a grand minimum in solar activity lasting many decades. Some groups have claimed that this would give rise to a mini ice age and cooling of global climate," says Dibyendu Nandi of IISER Kolkata who led the effort. "Our findings indicate that sunspot cycle 25 fields have already

started appearing, implying that we are going to have a solar cycle. Speculation and predictions of a grand minimum are unfounded."

Maunder minimum

Why is this so important to us on Earth? After all the sunspots look small and are hardly even visible to us. Contrary to this, sunspot activity may be correlated with climate on Earth. In the period between 1645 and 1715, sunspot activity had come to a halt on the Sun - a phenomenon referred to as the Maunder minimum. This coincided with extremely cold weather globally. So sunspots may have a relevance to climate on Earth. Such links are tenuous, but definitely solar activity affects space weather, which can have an impact on space-based satellites, GPS, power grids and so on.

Solar dynamo

Given the high temperatures in the Sun, matter exists there in the form of plasma, where the electrons are stripped away from the nuclei. The Sun is made of hot ionised plasma whose motions generate magnetic fields in the solar interior by harnessing the energy of the plasma flows. This mechanism is known as the solar dynamo mechanism (or magnetohydrodynamic dynamo mechanism). "Simply stated, it is a process by which kinetic energy of plasma motions is converted to magnetic energy, which generates the magnetised sunspots, giving rise to the solar cycle," explains Prof. Nandi.

Evidence of a 'social network' in early animals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

and colonising large areas of the sea floor, they said. The rangeomorphs may have been some of the first animals to exist, although their strange anatomies have puzzled palaeontologists for years.

These organisms do not appear to have had mouths, organs or means of moving, according to the researchers. One suggestion is that they absorbed nutrients from the water around them, they said.

Rooted rangeomorphs

Since rangeomorphs could not move and are preserved where they lived, it is possible to analyse whole populations from the fossil record. Earlier studies of rangeomorphs have looked at how these organisms managed to reproduce and be so successful in their time.

"These organisms seem to have been able to quickly colonise the sea floor, and we often see one dominant species on these fossil beds," said Alex Liu from University of Cambridge's Department of Earth Sciences. "How this happens ecologically has been a longstanding question - these filaments may explain how they were able to do that," Liu said.

Finally, India shares two SARS-CoV-2 genome sequences

NIV deposits two genome sequences in public databases a day after *The Hindu* reported that India has not shared them

R. PRASAD

India has finally shared two whole genome sequence data of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) with the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID).

The two sequences were shared by the Pune-based National Institute of Virology. This news comes after *The Hindu* reported on March 4 that India has not shared any genome sequence data with the GISAID.

"We shared the two sequences with GISAID on March 5 evening," said Priya Abraham, Director of NIV. "We had shared the sequences with GenBank [a public database] about two weeks ago." However, the GenBank website mentions that whole



Lab culture: Undated electron microscope image shows the novel corona virus SARS-CoV-2, orange, emerging from the surface of cells, grey • AP

genome sequences of two oronasopharynx (mouth, nose, throat) samples collected on January 27 and January 31 from two COVID-19 patients in Kerala were deposited in GenBank only on March 6.

The accession number of the two sequences is MT012098 (collected on January 27) and MT050493 (collected on January 31).

The two sequences were shared by Varsha Potdar and others from NIV. Dr. Potdar

heads the Influenza Group and her "major interest is molecular epidemiology of influenza and other respiratory viruses".

In a tweet on March 6 evening, Newstrain said it has "updated" the database with "two SARS-CoV-2 sequences from Kerala sampled at the end of January". It added: "These sequences do not link very closely to other sequences in the tree."

First cases

The three adults in Kerala who were found to be infected with the novel virus had returned from Wuhan. The first COVID-19 patient in India, a medical student who had returned from Wuhan, was laboratory confirmed by NIV on January 30. Two more adults from Kerala

were laboratory confirmed by NIV within a couple of days.

Different from others

At this point, it is not clear why the sequences appear to differ from the rest in the phylogenetic tree. A virologist who did not want to be named said that it could possibly be due to sequencing errors over time. The former is more likely and this can be resolved by adding more sequences."

"NIV should rule out sequencing errors or contact Chinese CDC to find out if these sequences are linked to other sequences in Wuhan and not deposited in GISAID," says Shahid Jameel, CEO of the Wellcome Trust/DBT India Alliance.

Referring to the Indian genome sequences not closely linked to other sequences in the tree, Dr Chitra Pattabirama

man from the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru says: "There are at least two possibilities - sequences could reflect the variations of the virus in China or they could be errors in sequencing, which can be corrected over time. The former is more likely and this can be resolved by adding more sequences."

Why study genomes

Studying viral genome sequences immensely helps in epidemiological investigations.

"Sequencing the genome of novel coronavirus will help us to know where the virus came from and how the virus has spread. For instance, by sequencing the genome of the virus isolated from an Indian patient, it will

become possible to know if the virus had come from China or any other country," Gautam Menon, professor of physics and biology at Ashoka University, Sonipat, Haryana, and the Chennai-based Institute of Mathematical Sciences had earlier told *The Hindu*.

So far, 26 countries, including India, have shared 178 SARS-CoV-2 genome sequences with the GISAID. At 70, China has shared the highest number of sequences.

The other countries that have shared higher number of sequences are the U.S. (22), Australia and Japan (10 each), and Singapore and South Korea (eight each). Nepal, Vietnam and Cambodia have also shared one sequence each.

How wounded plants heal, survive

Creating injuries similar to what plants suffer took nearly a decade

ASWATHI PACHA

It's hard life being a plant! From pathogens and herbivores to unfavourable weather, they are constantly injured or wounded and their sessile lifestyle only adds to the trouble. Despite all this, they heal and survive. How did they evolve such a great repair mechanism? What are the molecules and proteins aiding it? These were some of the questions an international team of researchers set out to answer and have now found some interesting mechanisms.

Ability to repair

A paper recently published in *Development* shows that a protein named PLETHORA (PLT), which encodes stem cell promoting factors, helps in the regeneration of the vascular system at the site of injury. This protein binds to and activates the expression of another gene (CUC2).

These two together increase the production of a plant growth hormone called auxin at the wound site. The combination of these proteins and hormones gives the plant the ability to repair wounds.

The corresponding author of the paper Kalika Prasad explains that the work spanned nearly a decade to create the right set of injuries mimicking those that plants encounter throughout their life and then hunt for the plant proteins that help in this essential quick fix. He is from the School of Biology at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research at Thiruvananthapuram (IISER-Tvm).

Another interesting find was that these two proteins did not play any role in the general development of vascular system but stepped into action only during



Silent healer: A protein named PLETHORA, which encodes stem cell promoting factors, helps in the regeneration of the vascular system at the site of injury. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

plants communicate within their different parts and with other plants during injury, not much was known about how they handle the injury. Though we carried out the initial studies on the roadside mustard plant, we noticed similar results when tested using rice PLT protein too," he adds.

Regenerating veins

It was seen that the injury healed not just at the surface but the veins regenerated too. "There was proliferation of the epithelial cells to seal the wounds and also functional restoration of tissue cells. The vein regeneration is very essential as transport of food, hormone, water, happens through it and any disruption may further hinder the plant growth," explains Dhanya Radhakrishnan, PhD scholar and first author of the paper from IISER-Tvm.

Another interesting find was that these two proteins did not play any role in the general development of vascular system but stepped into action only during

its injury.

"We were able to set up a mathematical model that gave us guidance that as the size of the wound changes the nature of the repair changes. The numerical simulations showed that after a particular size injury, the plant will be unable to regenerate or heal," adds Anil Shaji from the Department of Physics at IISER-Tvm. He is one of the authors of the papers and has set out to uncover the physical processes like the flow of hormones that are involved in this healing process.

"We are now trying to find out all the different genes and pathways involved in the healing process and also the cellular reprogramming events. To decode if the day-night conditions affect this process would also be interesting," adds Anju P.S., a research scholar and one of the first authors of the paper from the institute. The researchers hope that in the future these genes can be produced in surplus to create plants that can withstand insect attack and other injuries.

Imposing travel restrictions alone has 'modest' effect on virus spread

R. PRASAD

Travel restrictions in areas that have been affected by novel coronavirus can only modestly reduce the spread of the outbreak, a new modelling study published in *Science* finds.

The spread of the virus can be reduced by cutting the transmission chain. This can be achieved through early detection and isolation of people found infected with the virus as well as by bringing about behavioural changes and raising awareness level in the community.

Even "sustained" restrictions on travel to and from mainland China by as much as 90% only can only "modestly affect the epidemic trajectory" unless combined with a 50% or higher cut in transmission in the community, the study found.

Shutting down Wuhan and imposing travel ban in the city on January 23 delayed the epidemic from spreading to other parts of mainland China by just three to five days.

Even when travel restrictions are as high as 90%, the epidemic in mainland China is delayed for no more than two weeks if concomitant steps to reduce virus transmission are not taken, the authors found.

One of the reasons is that by January 23 when travel ban was introduced in Wuhan, the virus had already spread to other parts of mainland China.

Travel restrictions to China introduced by several countries, including the U.S., and a reduction or suspension of flight to China by 59 airline companies have not

achieved extraordinary results in reducing the spread of the virus outside China, the study finds.

There was an initial 10-fold reduction in the number of imported cases when travel restrictions from China were introduced. But according to the model, by March 1, the number of imported cases per day shot up to 170 and 35 for 40% and 90% travel restrictions, respectively.

The number of cases outside mainland China will "resume its growth" after two-three weeks from cases that had their origin elsewhere, the model suggests.

The reason: despite the travel restrictions to and from mainland China, a large number of people who were already infected by the virus have been travelling across national borders without being detected.

Of the several imported cases, a couple of cases could be "seeding multiple outbreaks" across the world, thus leading to an expansion of the epidemic. This was observed in the case of Iran, South Korea and Italy after mid-February.

The concurrent presence of both travel and transmissibility reductions, however, produce a much larger synergistic effect visible by both delaying the epidemic activity in Mainland China and the number of internationally imported cases," the authors write.

"Moving forward we expect that travel restrictions to COVID-19 affected areas will have modest effects, and that transmission-reduction interventions will provide the greatest benefit to mitigate the epidemic," they note.

This week's question

Q Does prolonged usage of smartphone, laptop and other gadgets lead to myopia?

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in

The women who kicked the hornet's nest

Women's groups in Pakistan are set to take out 'Aurat March' defying threats from extremists

LAHORE



Thousands of women across Pakistani cities will join the Aurat March (Women's March) on Sunday to mark the International Women's Day, defying threats and warnings issued by conservative and right-wing groups. Since 2018, Aurat March has been held in many cities including Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad, demanding equality and an end to gender discrimination.

This year's charter of demands include a just economic system, freedom from exploitation and discrimination, reproductive rights, transgender rights and child rights. However, certain groups have come out against the march, threatening to use violence against the activists.



Mehmal Sarfraz
is a journalist
based in Lahore

the slogan 'Mera Jism, Meri Marzi'. The show's anchor didn't stop Mr. Qamar. Instead, she kept asking Ms. Sirmed to talk when her turn comes. The organisers of the march have not backed down in the face of threats.

Right to say 'No'

Talking to *The Hindu*, Ms. Sirmed said she would march because she wanted to exercise her right to say 'NO'. "No to stereotypes and the social construct that makes women perpetually suffer while men keep abusing them with impunity. Because I want to say no to male privilege. Because I want to say no to sexual harassment, honour crimes, domestic violence, structural exclusion of women from economic, social and political spheres. No to the glass ceiling."

Ms. Sirmed added that most of all, she would march because "I want to smash patriarchy to little pieces. As little as the minds of men who enjoy and abuse their privilege."



Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, Chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), told *The Hindu* that his party has and would always support women's rights movements and causes of the marginalised. "We strongly believe and wish for an inclusive, progres-

sive and tolerant Pakistan. We should not allow right-wing elements in our society to disrupt the Aurat March. Freedom of expression and right to a peaceful assembly is enshrined in our Constitution. The government must provide security to the Aurat March processions after open threats by extremist groups."

Mr. Bhutto-Zardari's late mother, Benazir Bhutto, was the first woman Prime Minister of Pakistan. "My mother broke the glass ceiling decades ago." Mr. Bhutto-Zardari said that those who used to say that women cannot successfully rule a country were proved wrong. "She [Benazir Bhutto] successfully led the democratic struggle against two dictatorships and in both her tenures brought about much-needed social reforms. It was during her tenure that Pakistan signed and ratified the UN convention on elimination of discrimination against women."

The controversy over the march has even reached the High Court in Lahore. A petitioner wanted the

court to stop the march from going ahead as it would "spread anarchy, vulgarity, blasphemy and hatred" of Islam. The court ruled it should proceed. Earlier this month, the Islamabad High Court also dismissed a petition to stop Aurat March. On March 6, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority asked TV channels to refrain from broadcasting "vulgar/inappropriate content" with regard to the march.

Feminist scholar and educationist Rubina Saigol said the march was important at so many levels for the feminist movement in Pakistan. "The way that some provocative slogans and placards are being discussed in mainstream media and social media shows how fragile male ego can be and how these slogans have hit patriarchy." Ms. Saigol believes that Aurat March has started a new phase in feminism.

"This is the age of social media. It helps get the word far more quickly and far more forcefully than in the past."

Testing the power of personal touch

Putin and Erdogan used personal diplomacy to avoid a direct confrontation in Syria's Idlib

MOSCOW



As crisis soared in Syria's Idlib and the possibility of a direct confrontation between Russia and Turkey was rising, most policy wonks in Moscow were looking forward to the March 5 meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Both nations had held several meetings at the Foreign Ministry level in the recent past, but failed to reach a consensus on Syria.

At the summit, Mr. Putin and Mr. Erdogan agreed to implement a ceasefire in Syria's rebel-held Idlib, which had seen major attacks by Moscow-backed Syrian government recently. Even as Russia and Turkey back rival factions in Syria's conflict,



Ksenia Kondratieva
is a journalist
based in Moscow



sidents, both looking pale and tired, said the discussion had been "intense and difficult but constructive". The agreement reached is a positive development for both countries as well as for Syria, say analysts.

"It is clear that a single meeting,

even at the highest level, will not be able to resolve the crisis, but it is certainly giving confidence that the talks will continue, and we might see Putin travelling to Turkey for the next round," said Farhad Ibragimov, an expert at Moscow-based think tank, the Valdai International Discussion Club.

Preventing further escalation

The very fact that Mr. Erdogan came to Moscow for talks suggested there were hopes for some kind of agreement at the very highest level, Andrei Kortunov, Director General of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), said in an interview to Radio Rossii. He, too, pointed out the two Presidents would not be able to completely solve the issues between Moscow and Ankara regarding their engagement in Syria. However, it was important to prevent further escalation in Idlib and divert any possibility of a direct clash between Russian and Turkish forces, which was achieved.

Russia-Turkey relations have been far from rosy, especially in the last decade. In 2015, a Russian jet was shot down by Turkey over the Syrian skies and in the following year, the Russian Ambassador in Ankara was shot dead. Despite these challenges, both countries deepened their ties in recent years through a lot of deals.

These include the supply of S-400 air defence systems, the construction of the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant and the TurkStream gas pipeline launched by the two Presidents in February.

While the two leaders were meeting in the Kremlin, Russian bloggers were highlighting the symbolism of the summit. Mr. Putin held the initial meeting with Mr. Erdogan underneath a bronze sculpture 'Crossing the Balkans' by Evgeny Lanceray, depicting troops of the Russian Empire during Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, one of many wars that the two empires fought in the past.

On the other side of the room where Russian and Turkish leaders

met was a large sculpture of Russian empress Catherine the Great who was responsible for annexation of the Crimea in 1783 from the Ottomans.

Symbolism aside, economic cooperation also featured in the talks, said officials. People close to negotiations note that Mr. Erdogan had included Turkey's Economic Minister in the delegation for this Moscow visit, which indicated that Syria was not the only point of discussion.

One of the first statements made by Mr. Erdogan upon his return to Istanbul from Moscow was that Turkey would activate its S-400 advanced missile systems delivered by Russia last year in coming April. This means Turkey is ready for another round of bickering with its NATO partners, who oppose the deal. This could be a message from Mr. Erdogan that Russo-Turkish ties are on track despite the Syria troubles.

The tensions between the two countries look eased for now, but Syria remains on the brink.

A deal for an uncertain future

The U.S.-Taliban deal fails to take the Afghan govt. into confidence on ending the 19-year-long war

KABUL



On February 29, a date that comes only once in four years, the U.S. administration signed a deal with the Taliban, whom they have been fighting for almost 19 years in Afghanistan.

The historic deal signed in Qatar was a result of nearly 18 months of negotiations between the U.S. Special Representative, Zalmay Khalilzad, and the Taliban leadership. Among other things, the deal promises the Taliban the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan, which has been a key demand of the group. However, except for a few consultations, the talks did not involve the Afghan government, although the deal has set the stage for an



Ruchi Kumar
is a journalist
based in Kabul

intra-Afghan dialogue, scheduled to begin on March 10.

"Given the entire structure of the process, the U.S.-Taliban deal was intentionally very narrow in its goals and objectives because it is still a very early step in the process," explained Andrew Watkins, a senior analyst on Afghanistan at the International Crisis Group. "An official in Kabul put it really well: 'In this deal, the Taliban received specific points of assurances, while the U.S. received flexibility'. This is important in the long term because it allows the U.S., knowing that there will be many challenges, to be a judge of whether or not the Taliban met their obligations," he added.

It is not surprising that the Taliban would use this opportunity to boost the morale of its fighters, said Mr. Watkins. "This is not surprising because if you look at the Taliban's messaging directed towards its own members, one thing that you see is their insistence on victory. This is a huge part in the Taliban's organisational unity, the ability for them to keep such a large group of people as a coherent movement, fighting against the government. If they drop this narrative, the members, many of

whom fight for different reasons, may question their leadership what they are fighting for," he added.

Life in fear

However, it has left Afghans fearful of what it may mean for their future. "As someone who has lived under the Taliban regime, I am terrified of seeing a future where Kabul is once again under the Taliban's control," said the student from Kabul, recalling the horrors of growing up in Kandahar in the 1990s when the Taliban regime took control of the country after a bloody civil war. "They had their own benchmark for the length of beard and hair and even hairstyles. I remember them destroying video cassettes and televisions. I remember how they were beheading people in stadium, I remember how we lived in fear."

The deal does not provide specific safeguards for the progress made in the last two decades since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, leaving many Afghans, especially the women and mi-



norities, feeling betrayed. However, Mr. Watkins is hopeful that this deal will evolve in the coming months to include more definitive demands of the Afghan people.

"As of now, this is intended to initiate the negotiations that will deal with the substantive issues: the future of Afghanistan's state and society. And of course, that includes women's rights, minority rights, and press freedom, among other things," he said.

Afghans latch their hopes on the Afghan government to ensure the protection of their freedoms and rights, while also negotiating with the Taliban for reduction of violence.

Meanwhile, the promised intra-Afghan peace process has hit a snag, as the Afghan government refused to support the U.S.'s promise to release nearly 5,000 Taliban prisoners.

"The release of prisoners is not the U.S.'s authority, it is the authority of the government of Afghanistan," President Ashraf Ghani told local media a day after the deal was signed. The same was reiterated by Sediq Seddiqi, a spokesperson to the President: "It is not reasonable or logical to release 5,000 prisoners before the Taliban agrees to the Afghan people's demand for a ceasefire."

Virus scare keeps visitors away from 'paradise' island

Sri Lanka's tourism sector, hit by terror attacks last year, sees another crisis amid virus outbreak

COLOMBO



In December 2019, Sri Lanka recorded as many as 2,41,663 tourist arrivals. It was 4.5% lesser than the number in December 2018, but still significant. In crossing the 2,00,000-mark, the figure showed that Sri Lanka's resilient tourism industry had bounced back, following one of its most testing phases in the aftermath of the Easter terror bombings that was dreading another disaster.

The serial blasts, which claimed over 250 lives – including about 45 foreigners – repulsed visitors from the paradise island so much that even the best deals at luxury hotels didn't cut it for most. The arrivals last year fell by 18% from the 2.3 million arrivals in 2018, but it still meant



Meera Srinivasan
is The Hindu's
Colombo
correspondent



home for the Chinese New Year, asking them to stay back until the green light is given for safe travel by the Sri Lankan and Chinese authorities.

However, the virus will hit the island in other ways. The Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority's

(SLTDA) data show a 17.7% slump in tourist arrivals in February. The fall is widely attributed to COVID-19, and its global impact on tourism and international travel.

While screening mechanisms have been added to airports and ports, last week, Sri Lanka halted cruise tourism amid reports of COVID-19 spreading to Europe and the U.S., among its key source markets. Sri Lanka draws nearly 60 cruise calls a year that tour operators say translates to roughly 1,000 visitors. "Cruise passengers usually spend a day in Colombo, and would do curated walking tours for them for about \$50. Now that is nothing for tourists on a cruise, but for us it was still some money, especially after a devastating year," said Ajit De Soysa, managing director, Ceylon Travel. The big companies "still manage", he said, but smaller companies like his that spent millions early last year on promotions are in a tough spot, as they hardly made any return on investment last year. Sri

Lanka has almost entirely lost Chinese tourists this year and that has hurt, especially since China had emerged one of the top source markets for the tourism industry in the last few years.

Following COVID-19, however, China is off the list of top 10 tourist generating markets so far this year. According to the SLTDA, tourist arrivals from China fell by 92.5% in February compared to the corresponding month last year.

Impact on economy

Representatives from Sri Lanka's \$4.4 billion tourism industry recently met to review the situation and brainstorm ways to tackle the situation, *Daily FT* reported. Weighing in, the Central Bank has said the COVID-19 outbreak is likely to affect Sri Lanka's economic performance. Observing that the "exact" impact on the Sri Lankan economy would depend on the extent of the global spread of COVID-19, its persistence and policy responses of major eco-

nomies and trading partners, the apex bank has noted that Sri Lanka's economic links with China could be directly affected as significant volumes of consumer goods, intermediate goods and investment goods are imported from that country.

"The likely slowdown of the global economy and disruptions to the supply chain could affect Sri Lanka's merchandise and service exports as well as related logistics. The slowdown in global tourist movements will affect Sri Lanka's tourism sector, in addition to the direct impact of lower arrivals from China. The spread of the virus to countries with a significant number of Sri Lankan migrant workers could affect remittance inflows as well," the Central Bank said in a recent statement.

The smaller the tour operating company is the greater the impact, according to Mr. De Soysa. "And it's not just us, a crisis means cab operators, auto-rickshaw drivers, souvenir sellers – so many small players like them are hit badly."

Australia has the edge, India the momentum

It will be the defending champion's sixth successive final while the Women in Blue haven't lost a game in this edition

T20 WORLD CUP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MELBOURNE
India Women will have to overcome big-match pressure as it aims to exorcise the ghosts of the past in the T20 World Cup final against Australia in front of a record crowd at the Melbourne Cricket Ground here on Sunday.

Group top

India goes into the final unbeaten after topping the group stage where it beat four-time champion Australia in the tournament-opener. The refreshing fire-power of 16-year-old Shafali Verma at the top and consistency of India's spin-heavy bowling attack has contributed massively to the team's success so far.

However, much more is needed from star batters Smriti Mandhana and Harmanpreet if India is to win its maiden ICC trophy. The brittle middle-order too needs to deliver. And besides doing the right things on the field, India will also have to win the battle of nerves.

Australia, having beaten India in the preceding tri-series final, finds itself in familiar territory having made its sixth successive final in seven editions.

The Australians know how to win the big moments in high-pressure games, while the Indians have been found wanting on that front. India



Say cheese! Pop star Katy Perry may have just inspired the Indian women to go into the final skirmish with a song on their lips.

• GETTY IMAGES

capitulated to England in the 2017 ODI World Cup final and 2018 World T20 semifinal.

India will expect Shafali to provide another flying start and hope this time the experienced Smriti also fires. There can't be a bigger stage for Harmanpreet to be back amongst the runs.

If it was not for Shafali, India would have struggled to

post competitive totals.

Leggie Poonam Yadav has made a sensational comeback from a finger injury and is the tournament's leading wicket-taker with nine alongside Australia pacer Megan Schutt.

Pacer Shikha Pandey, too, has been impressive, while the left-arm spin duo of Radha Yadav and Rajeshwari

Gayakwad has kept things tight. It will be interesting to see how the Australians play Poonam on Sunday as the leggie was all over them in the opener.

Australia, led by Meg Lanning, will be backing itself to win in front of the home fans, though a sizeable number of Indian fans too is expected at the MCG.

The teams (from): Australia: Rachael Haynes, Megan Schutt, Alyssa Healy, Meg Lanning (Capt.), Jess Jonassen, Delissa Kimmence, Beth Mooney, Nicola Carey, Ashleigh Gardner, Sophie Molineux, Georgia Wareham, Erin Burns, Molly Strano and Annabel Sutherland.

India: Harmanpreet Kaur (Capt.), Smriti Mandhana, Shikha Pandey, Poonam Yadav, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Veda Krish-

namurthy, Deepthi Sharma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Pooja Vasstrakar, Tanya Bhatia, Radha Yadav, Harleen Deol, Arundhati Reddy, Shafali Verma and Richa Ghosh.

Umpires: Kim Cotton, Ahsan Raza; **TV umpire:** Gregory Brathwaite; **Fourth umpire:** Langton Rusere; **Match referee:** Chris Broad.

Match starts at 12.30 p.m. IST

The story of the Finals

Here's how the summit clashes of the T20 World Cup have panned out:

2009: New Zealand 85 in 20 overs (Katherine Brunt 3/6) lost to England 86/4 in 17 overs (Claire Taylor 39 n.o.)

Player-of-the-match: Katherine Brunt

THE HONOURS BOARD

2009: England

2010: Australia

2012: Australia

2014: Australia

2016: West Indies

2018: Australia

2020: ?

■ It will be the Aussies' sixth straight appearance in a final

■ Its only loss in a final came against West Indies in 2016

■ In 2010 and 2012, it pipped New Zealand and England by the thinnest of margins (three and four runs respectively)

HOW THE TEAMS REACHED MELBOURNE

INDIA

GROUP STAGE: Beat Australia by 17 runs, Sydney

■ Beat Bangladesh by 18 runs, Perth

■ Beat New Zealand by three runs, Melbourne

■ Beat Sri Lanka by seven wickets, Melbourne

SEMIFINAL: Match against England washed out, India progressed by virtue of toppling group (England had finished second in its group)



AUSTRALIA

GROUP STAGE: Lost to India by 17 runs, Sydney

■ Beat Sri Lanka by five wickets, Perth

■ Beat Bangladesh by 86 runs, Canberra

■ Beat New Zealand by four runs, Melbourne

SEMIFINAL: Beat South Africa by five runs (DLS method)

COMPILATION BY G. PRASAD

The swing factor

As India gears up to face Australia in its maiden T20 World Cup final, a look at who has chipped in and who hasn't for Harmanpreet Kaur's side and Meg Lanning's team

INDIA

The positives

■ Shafali has blazed away at the top of the order (161 in four outings at a strike-rate of 161.00)

■ Poonam has turned on the magic in the middle-and-end overs (nine wickets at an economy rate of 5.56 and a strike-rate of 10.6)

■ Seamer Shikha Pandey (seven scalps), and spinners Radha Yadav (5), Rajeshwari Gayakwad (5) and Deepthi Sharma (2) - have complemented Poonam

■ Tanya Bhatia's big gloves have been involved in nine dismissals (six catches and three stumpings), the highest in this edition



SHAFALI

TANYA

The negatives

■ Harmanpreet Kaur (26 runs in four innings with a highest of 15) and Smriti Mandhana (38 in three with 17 her highest) are yet to click into gear

■ No Indian batter has made a half-century so far, with Deepthi Sharma's unbeaten 49 against Australia being the best

■ Though it has done well in PowerPlay (46/2 in six overs vs Australia; 54/2 vs Bangladesh; 49/1 vs New Zealand; 49/1 vs Sri Lanka), it has turned PowerlessPlay in the middle overs as the team has either failed to sustain the momentum or lost wickets in a heap

AUSTRALIA

The positives

■ Playing in its sixth consecutive final, the team has the experience to handle the big occasion and the home advantage

■ Ever since they lost to India in the opener, it has been a tough ride for the hosts. They came back from the dead in the group phase, edging New Zealand by four runs in a virtual quarterfinal, before overcoming South Africa by five runs in the semifinal. Come Sunday, the players will be battle-hardened

■ The bowlers have made their presence felt, Georgia Wareham in particular. The leggie spun it the hosts' way in the hum-dinger against the Kiwis



GEORGIA WAREHAM

The negatives

■ The absence of Elyse Perry, arguably the most influential all-rounder of this generation, will be a big blow to the side

■ The presence of too many strokemakers can be counterproductive at times, as the opening game against India showed. From a dominant position, Australia slid to defeat

COMPILED BY R. NARAYANAN

Harmanpreet's words stirred me up: Poonam



Get it right! Poonam Yadav has not looked back since drawing skipper Harmanpreet Kaur's displeasure during the opener against Australia. ■ AFP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MELBOURNE

It was a stinging rebuke from skipper Harmanpreet Kaur during the tournament opener against Australia that fired up Poonam Yadav, who eventually played an instrumental role in India's march to its maiden Women's T20 World Cup final.

The 28-year-old Indian has emerged as India's wrecker-in-chief with nine wickets, including a four-wicket haul in the opening match.

"When I got hit for a six in the first over, she (Harmanpreet) came to me and said,

'Poonam, you're one of the most experienced players in the team, and we expect better from you,' Poonam was quoted as saying by the ICC.

"So, that kind of stirred something within me. I told myself if my captain has that much faith in me, I should be able to make a comeback. I took a wicket off the very next ball, and haven't looked back since."

"Now when I look back at that moment, it means so much in the context of my individual performance and run to the Final," said the bowler from Agra.

Forced break playing on captain's mind

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MELBOURNE

A forced eight-day break has affected India's preparations going into the T20 World Cup final on Sunday, but the team is ready to rise to the occasion, said skipper Harmanpreet Kaur.

India had defeated Sri Lanka in its last game on Saturday, followed by a semi-final washout, which meant the visitors haven't played for the last eight days and Harmanpreet conceded her team had been 'restless'.

"We haven't been outdoors much and we didn't play the important game against England," said Harmanpreet on the eve of the



Eye on the ball: Coach W.V. Raman has some words of advice for Smriti Mandhana. ■ AFP

A Nawab who stood out from the rest

Wasim Jaffer carried on in the domestic circuit long after ending his international stint

BIDDING ADIEU

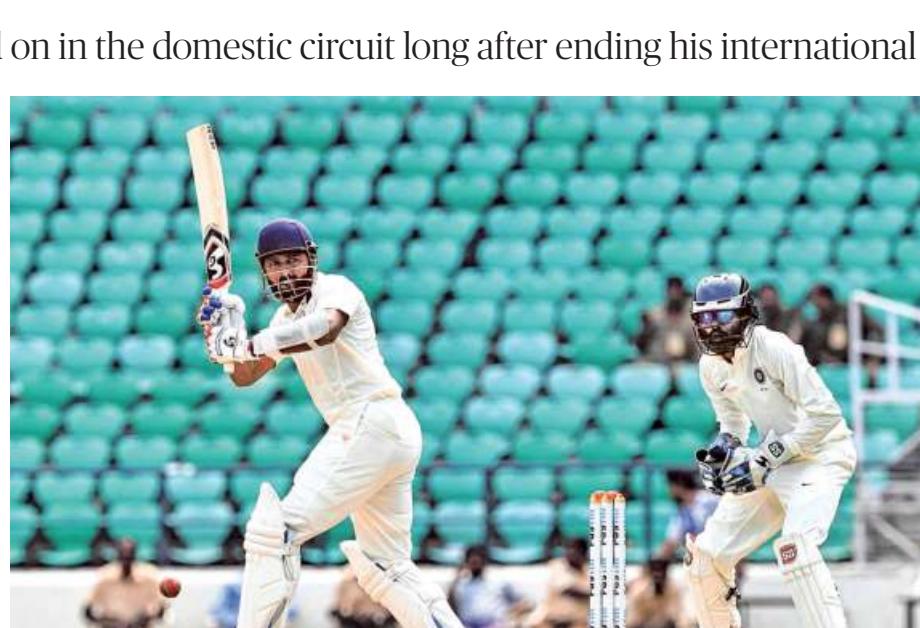
AMOL KARHADKAR

MUMBAI

More than 24 years ago even as Saurashtra's batsmen were pounding the Mumbai bowlers on a placid Rajkot track in a Ranji Trophy league game, a Mumbai senior asked a rookie – playing his second First Class game – to egg the bowlers on and pressurise the batsmen a bit. The novice replied: "Woh sab theek hai but apna batting aayega kya (that's fine but will we get to bat at all?)"

Appetite for runs

After Saurashtra declared at a gargantuan 595 for four, the rookie came out to open and scored an unbeaten 314. Wasim Jaffer had well and truly arrived, taking his appetite for runs from Mumbai's maidans to the bigger stage. Since then – and till he



Inspirational: Wasim Jaffer's commitment and drive over a long period is unparalleled.

• VIVEK BENDRE

announced his retirement on Saturday after a glittering career turning out for Mumbai, India and Vidarbha –

Jaffer has continued in the same vein. But more than the plethora of records he has notched up – especially

in the Ranji Trophy – Jaffer has inspired both his contemporaries and the next generation, especially those who worship the purest form of cricket.

Jaffer's rise in itself is an inspirational tale. The son of a bus driver, he grew up in a transit camp near the Bandra reclamation. Jaffer would bat for endless hours

part of nine Ranji titles – may seem seamless but that is the result of astonishing hardwork put in over the years to be at his best.

End of an era

With Jaffer's retirement, perhaps, comes the end of an era of domestic giants. He may well be the last of those who continued to ply their trade on the domestic circuit for years after ending their international sojourn.

He persisted with what he loved doing the most – batting long hours and passing on his work ethic to youngsters – for more than a decade since his last international appearance.

Seldom will you see any cricketer from the IPL generation returning to domestic cricket after being dropped from the national team. That is where Nawab – as Jaffer is fondly called by teammates – stood out from the rest.

Wasim's journey in numbers

	M	I	R	Avg.	HS	50s	100s
Test	31	58	1944	34.10	212	11	5
First Class	260	421	19410	50.67	314*	97	51
ODIs	2	2	10	5.00	10	0	0
List A	118	117	4849	44.08	178*	33	10



1 Jaffer is the only batsman to have twice tallied more than 1,000 runs in a Ranji Trophy season. He scored 1,260 in 2008-09 and 1,037 in 2018

Chennaiyin FC has the final say

Despite losing the second leg 4-2 against Goa, it reaches the summit clash with a 6-5 aggregate

ISL

K. KEERTHIVASAN
FATORDA

FC Goa gave it its all in the dying minutes and even came close to taking the match away from Chennaiyin FC (CFC). In the end, however, it was the visiting team that had the last laugh.

Despite the 2-4 defeat to Goa in the second leg semifinal of an entertaining Indian Super League (ISL) contest at the Nehru Stadium here on Saturday, CFC progressed on better aggregate (6-5). With that, it reached its third final in six seasons.

Down 0-2 in the first half and completely outplayed by the host, Chennaiyin regrouped to equalise in the second session.

Goa made it a nervy finish with two quick goals from substitute Edu Bedia and Mourtada Fall in the 81st and 83rd minutes. With 11 minutes, including injury time, remaining for the final whistle, the home team still needed two goals to emerge triumphant on aggregate.

Goa applied immense pressure and had quite a few shots at goal, but Chennaiyin stood strong.

In command

The hosts had the bulk of the ball possession in the first



What a finish! Chennaiyin FC players celebrate after the thrilling semifinal against Goa. ■ SPORTZPICS/ISL

half and ran circles around the visitor. Be it the long passes from Ahmed Jahouh or Brandon Fernandes from midfield, Goa created plenty of chances and came close a few times.

Goa went ahead through an own goal from Chennaiyin. A cross from the right from Brandon saw defender Lucian Goian head it into his own net.

In the 21st minute, the

host doubled the lead with a doughty header by Fall off a free kick by Brandon.

Chennaiyin reduced the margin, seven minutes into the second period, through Lallianzuala Chhangte, who turned in a rebound from the 'keeper after a left-footed strike by Rafael Crivellaro.

Crivellaro was in the thick of things again as his corner kick saw striker Nerijus Valskis powerfully head home.

With that header, Valskis swelled his tally to 14 goals.

Failing again

Goa continued to fail under pressure in the climactic phase. This is the fifth time it has lost in the playoffs in six editions, including in two finals.

CFC retained its team while Hugo Boumous and Brandon Fernandes returned for Goa. Boumous,

however, had to be replaced in the 21st minute after he sustained an injury.

Prior to kick off, Goa skipper Mandar Dessai received the league winner's shield from Martin Bain, CEO of FSDL, for topping the league stages.

The result: FC Goa 4 (Lucian Gioia 10 (og), Mourtada Fall 21 & 83, Edu Bedia 81) bt CFC 2 (Lallianzuala Chhangte 52, Neric Valskis 59).

Liverpool back to winning ways

Arsenal closes gap on top four; Atletico-Sevilla play out a draw

EURO LEAGUES

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LIVERPOOL

Liverpool moved to within nine points of claiming the Premier League title by coming from behind to beat Bournemouth 2-1 as Arsenal boosted its charge towards the Champions League places with a 1-0 win over West Ham.

Callum Wilson's controversial early opener threatened a major upset at Anfield. But all of Liverpool's setbacks of late have come away from home and it set an English top-flight record for 22 consecutive home league wins as two quickfire goals from Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mane turned the game around.

The runaway league leader still needed a miraculous goal-line clearance from James Milner to deny Ryan Fraser an equaliser.

Atletico Madrid will hope



Prolific duo: Sadio Mane and Mohamed Salah got on the scoresheet for Liverpool yet again. ■ AP

for a tighter contest against Liverpool in the Champions League after playing out a frantic 2-2 draw against Sevilla in LaLiga on Saturday.

Joaó Felix looked as sharp at the Wanda Metropolitano as he has done all season and

The results: Premier League:

Liverpool 2 (Salah 25, Mane 33) bt Bournemouth 1 (Wilson 9); Arsenal 1 (Lacazette 78) bt West Ham 0; Crystal Palace 1 (Ayew 28) bt Watford 0; Sheffield United 1 (Sharp 36) bt Norwich 0; Southampton 0 lost to Newcastle 1 (Saint-Maximin 79); Wolves 0 drew with Brighton 0.

La Liga: Eibar 1 (Bigas 90+2) lost to Mallorca 2 (Dani Rodriguez 42, Kubo 78); Atletico Madrid 2 (Morata 32 pen, Felix 36) drew with Sevilla 2 (L. de Jong 19, Ocampos 43+pen).

Bundesliga: Bayer Leverkusen 4 (Havertz 4, Bellarabi 14, Paulinho 49, 55) bt Eintracht Frankfurt 0; VfL Wolfsburg 0 drew with RB Leipzig 0; Hertha Berlin 2 (Stark 41, Cunha 60) drew with Werder Bremen 2 (Sargent 3, Klaassen 6); Freiburg 3 (Sallai 34, Gunter 55, Koch 82) bt Union Berlin 1 (Andersson 61); Schalke 1 (McKinnon 20) drew with Hoffenheim 1 (Baumgartner 69).

Friday: La Liga: Alaves 1 (Edgar 73) drew with Valencia 1 (Parejo 34).

Bundesliga: Paderborn 1 (Serben 73) lost to Cologne 2 (Mere 28, Hector 36).

completed a four-minute comeback for Atletico after Alvaro Morata's penalty cancelled out Luuk de Jong's opener for Sevilla. But Lucas Ocampos levelled with another penalty for Sevilla.

The results: Premier League:

28, Hector 36).

Leandro Paes and Rohan Bopanna kept the Indian team's hopes alive by winning the doubles 6-3, 6-7(9), 7-5 against Mate Pavic and Franko Skugor of Croatia in the Davis Cup qualifier tie here on Saturday.

But, Marin Cilic proved too strong for India No. 1 Sumit Nagal, who came in for

Prajnesh Gunneswaran for the reverse singles. The former US Open champion and World No. 3 won 6-0, 6-1 against Nagal to seal the tie for Croatia.

Cilic may have slipped to

37th in the rankings, but

showed a lot of resolve to

close out the tie, after Skugor and Pavic had run Paes

and Bopanna close after sav-

ing two match points in the

second set tie-breaker.

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fifth game of the decider, but

the two broke Skugor's serve

in the eighth and 12th games

in a tight decider.

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TV PICKS

T20 World Cup: Final, Star Sports 1 & 2 (SD & HD), 12.30 p.m.
ISL: Star Sports 1 & 2 (SD & HD), 7.15 p.m.
Premier League: SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 7.20 p.m. & 9.40 p.m.
Bundesliga: SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 7.40 p.m. & 10.15 p.m.
Serie A: Sony Ten 1 & 2 (SD & HD) 7.30 p.m. & 10.30 p.m. (Sony Ten 2 & HD).
NBA: Sony Ten 1 (SD & HD), 8.30 a.m.

IN BRIEF



James, Davis dominate as Lakers make playoff

LOS ANGELES

LeBron James and Anthony Davis (*in pic*) scored all but one of Los Angeles' points in the final quarter as the Lakers rallied to beat NBA-leading Milwaukee Bucks 113-102 and clinch a play-off spot on Friday. The dynamic duo combined for 67 points as James scored 11 of his team-high 37 points in the final quarter and Davis scored 14 of his 30.

The results: Washington Wizards 118 bt Atlanta Hawks 112; Brooklyn Nets 139 bt San Antonio Spurs 120; New York Knicks 103 lost to Oklahoma City Thunder 126; Boston Celtics 94 lost to Utah Jazz 99; Chicago Bulls 102 lost to Indiana Pacers 108; Minnesota Timberwolves 118 lost to Orlando Magic 132; New Orleans Pelicans 110 bt Miami Heat 104; Dallas Mavericks 121 bt Memphis Grizzlies 96; Phoenix Suns 127 bt Portland Trail Blazers 117; LA Lakers 113 bt Milwaukee Bucks 103. **AFP**



No fans, no play, says LeBron James

LOS ANGELES

Basketball superstar LeBron James said on Friday he wouldn't play if his Los Angeles Lakers has to hold games behind closed doors due to the coronavirus outbreak. The NBA has reportedly told teams to look into strategies on how to play without fans in the arena amid concerns over the spreading virus. "Nah. It's impossible," James said. "If I show up to the arena and there ain't no fans in the crowd, then I ain't playing."

Zeel Desai storms into final
CAIRO
 Fifth seed Zeel Desai stormed into the final by outplaying second seed Valeriya Yushchenko of Russia 6-1, 6-0 in the \$15,000 ITF women's tennis tournament here on Saturday. In the final, the 21-year-old Zeel will play top seed Sandra Samir of Egypt.

In the doubles title clash, Zeel and Stepana Rogozinska Dzik of Poland lost 7-5, 6-2 to the top-seeded pair of Jacqueline Cabaj Awad and Sandra Samir.

The results (semifinals):

Zeel Desai bt Valeriya Yushchenko (Rus) 6-1, 6-0.

Doubles (final): Jacqueline Cabaj Awad (Swe) & Sandra Samir bt Stepana Rogozinska Dzik (Pol) & Zeel 7-5, 6-2.



Trump to honour golfers Sorenstam, Player

WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump will honour retired professional golfers Anna Sorenstam (*in pic*) and Gary Player with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian honour. The White House announced on Friday that Sorenstam and Player would receive the medal on March 23, joining Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Charlie Sifford and Tiger Woods as the only golfers to receive the award. Sorenstam completed her LPGA career with 72 tournament victories.

AFP

I can drop myself to accommodate Cheteshwar

I don't mind breaking any winning combination, says Saurashtra captain Unadkat

RANJI TROPHY

Y.B. SARANGI

RAJKOT
 The camaraderie between Saurashtra's two stars – captain Jaydev Unadkat and Test batsman Cheteshwar Pujara – may inspire the other teammates in the Ranji Trophy final against Bengal, starting at the Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium here on Monday.

Unadkat was encouraged with the return of Pujara, who was part of the Indian Test side in New Zealand. "I can drop myself to accommodate Cheteshwar. With Cheteshwar and Ravindra Jadeja coming into the team, I don't mind breaking any winning combination," said Unadkat on Saturday.

However, he was not too concerned about Jadeja's

unavailability.

Confidence boost

"Cheteshwar is back in the team and it's a big advantage. If Cheteshwar is there, the team plays differently. The confidence increases. That's going to show in the match for sure."

Pujara returned the compliment. "From the start of the season, the way we are playing, probably it's one of the best seasons for Saurashtra. All the guys have contributed at some stage."

"Jaydev has bowled exceptionally well. He is the top wicket-taker and is also leading the team well. The communication part is really good for us," said Pujara.

Handling pressure

Pujara, who has scored three half-centuries and a double hundred in five matches this

season, underlined the importance of handling pressure.

If Cheteshwar is there, the team plays differently. The confidence increases. That's going to show in the match for sure

season, underlined the importance of handling pressure.

"Saurashtra will continue to play the way it has been playing. I don't think we need to take any extra pressure. If the team can play back-to-back finals, then it has a lot of strength and the potential to win the Ranji Trophy."

"Pressure will be there for the final. How to handle pressure is important. You should take it as just another match," said Pujara, who was in touch with Unadkat from New Zealand during Saurashtra's tense semifinal against Gujarat.

Bengal has brought left-arm seamers Geet Puri and Roshan Singh with the squad to let its batsmen get accustomed to the angles created by southpaws ahead of facing an in-form Unadkat.

"This is being done to get used to different angles. It is helping us. We will also use our experience of playing some left-arm seamers through the season," said Bengal captain Abhimanyu Easwaran.

Meanwhile, according to sources, Board of Control for Cricket in India president and former Cricket Association of Bengal chief Sourav Ganguly has sent some technical inputs for Abhimanyu, who has not been able to realise his potential this season.



Experience counts: Cheteshwar Pujara's return will be a big boost for Saurashtra in the Ranji final against Bengal. ■ GETTY IMAGES

AIFF chief laments lack of sponsors

But, sees encouraging signs of the game making progress

VIJAY LOKAPALLY

NEW DELHI

Lack of infrastructure and sponsorship have been the main impediments to the growth of football in the country, according to All India Football Federation (AIFF) president Praful Patel, whose term comes to an end later this year.

"The biggest drawback for football, and many other sports in the country, has been lack of finances. It is like the chicken-egg conundrum. What comes first? The money comes first or the level of the competition goes higher first," Patel said in a chat with *The Hindu* here.

Corporate backing

"Sponsors prefer cricket. Other sports suffer, but Indian football has attracted a lot of corporate support in recent times. Football viewership and attendance at stadiums have increased. It is creating a new, more robust financial eco-system," he said.

The AIFF chief lamented the lack of proper stadiums. "Football has suffered from infrastructural constraints but there has been some improvement of late. We used to have I-League matches in the afternoons and played in poor quality stadiums.

"Now grounds have improved, matches are played under floodlights and there



Good news: Praful Patel is pleased with the growing status of football in India. ■ VIJAY LOKAPALLY

is TV coverage. We have also procured land in Delhi (in Dwarka). AIFF will have its own stadium," he said.

Elucidating his optimism, Patel noted: "Five years ago the money we spent on football was say ₹100 crore. Now it is close to ₹1000 crore. Once the National teams starts performing better, more people will start watching and following football. I can see that change coming."

Reflecting on his tenure, Patel said: "We have significantly been able to professionalise the game right from the grassroots to the league structure. The AIFF is now a body geared to handle all aspects of the game with utmost professionalism.

"More important is the focus – the people playing, watching, their number has grown exponentially. Football earlier was individuals playing for the country in

team format. There was no coordinated approach. It has changed now."

Patel admitted he was disappointed with the performance of the National team. "We supported the team fully, we have never cut corners. I feel they could have done better. Now we have a new coach. Let's back them.

Unfair comparison

"It is unfortunate that people watch EPL and La Liga on TV and they expect the same thing in India. Those leagues are good because the world's best are playing in it. Why don't they watch other leagues of the world. Why just these two. Let us not compare." He had good words for women footballers. "Our women will qualify for the World Cup before the men do. I am sure the men will qualify for the 2026 World Cup."

er matters," he said.

All India Football Federation (AIFF) general secretary Kushal Das said that the match against the Asian Champion in Bhubaneswar has been postponed and a new date will be known next week.

"India's match against Qatar has been postponed.

"It will be played later this year but the new date is yet to be decided," Das said.

Asked about the status of the match against Afghanistan on June 9, he said, "That match will also be postponed."

Das said the new dates of India's remaining World Cup qualifier matches will be known during a meeting between the AFC and AIFF officials in New Delhi on Tuesday.

"The meeting will discuss about the new dates of these matches, besides other

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Coronavirus continued to wreak havoc with sporting events as India's 2022 FIFA World Cup qualifiers match against Qatar, scheduled to be held on March 26, has now been postponed due to the spread of the deadly virus.

er matters," he said.

Already out of World Cup contention after failing to win a single game, India is also scheduled to play against Bangladesh (June 4, Dhaka) and Afghanistan (June 9, Kolkata).

The FIFA and the AFC had said that they will provide an update on these fixtures in the coming days.

Camp cancelled

The Indian team was to begin a camp under head coach Igor Stimac in Bhubaneswar from Monday, but it has now been cancelled.

"The camp now stands cancelled. There is no point of having the camp as the match against Qatar has been postponed," a source in the AIFF said.

India is now seeking to qualify for the 2023 Asian Cup.

Harika stays in joint lead

CHESS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

LAUSANNE

Grandmaster D. Harika settled for a draw with Alexandra Goryachkina of Russia in the fifth round to remain in joint lead with 3.5 points at the FIDE Women's Grand Prix chess tournament here.

World No. 9 Harika and Goryachkina opted for a draw in 31 moves in a Semi-Slav game on Friday. The Indian faces former World champion Alexandra Kosteniuk in the sixth round.

In the only decisive game of the day, Georgia's Nana

Dzagnidze beat Anna Muzychuk (Ukraine) in 44 moves. World champion Ju Wenjun of China and Mariya Muzychuk (Ukraine) battled it out for 81 moves before settling for a draw.

The results (fifth round): Dzagnidze 3.5 drew with Alexandra Goryachkina (Rus) 3.5; Nana Dzagnidze (Geo) 3 bt Anna Muzychuk (Ukr) 2.5; Ju Wenjun (Chn) 2 drew with Mariya Muzychuk (Ukr) 2.5; Marie Sebag (Fra) 2 drew with Piia Cramling (Swe) 2.5; Antoneta Stefanova (Bul) 2 drew with Alexandra Kosteniuk (Rus) 2; Zhanaya Abdumalik (Kaz) 2.5 drew with Alina Kashlinskaya (Rus) 3.

Woods to miss Players Championship

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

MIAMI

Reigning Masters champion Tiger Woods will miss next week's USPGA Tour Players Championship golf with a back issue as the 15-time Major winner's return to defend his crown at Augusta National looms.

Woods, according to the tour website, told PGA commissioner Jay Monahan he would skip the signature event, which typically boasts one of golf's strongest fields.

Woods will miss the biggest Masters tune-up and

have only three weeks of competition before chasing a sixth career green jacket – if he's able to play by April 9.

Ronaldinho and brother arrested in Paraguay

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ASUNCION

Former Brazilian football star Ronaldinho and his brother were arrested here on Friday, Paraguay's public ministry said, after entering the country on fake passports. "The Attorney-General's office issued a warrant for their arrest, charged the player Ronaldinho with using a public document with false content and requested preventive detention," the ministry tweeted.

Sources from the public prosecutor's office said the brothers would be summoned for a hearing on Sunday. Ronaldinho and his brother Roberto de Assis Moreira finished a court appearance and left the Palace of Justice on Friday night. Ronaldinho declined to comment to reporters.

The state Attorney-General decided to rectify a request for "opportunity criteria" in favour of the 2005 Ballon d'Or winner and changed prosecutors for the case. The original prosecutor, Federico Delfino, had decided on Thursday not to pursue charges. A new prosecutor ordered the arrest.

"With the power-hitters, good bowlers – they play a major part in the shorter format. So, we still have one of the best T20 squads around. But we still have to go out and play well to win matches. Don't take anyone lightly, play as hard as you can, and you will win."

Commitment pays off for Wangjam

He is BFC coach Cuadrat's trusted soldier

N. SUDARSHAN

BENGALURU



Exciting talent: Suresh Wangjam's raw pace and power has drawn gasps of appreciation from the Bengaluru FC faithful. ■ MURALI KUMAR

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