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NEARBY



Jamia reopens library
months after vandalism

NEW DELHI
The main library of Jamia Millia Islamia, which was vandalised on December 15 last year after the police entered it following anti-CAA protests, was reopened after renovation on Wednesday. Dr. Zakir Husain Library has undergone extensive renovation, the university said in a statement.

CITY ▶ PAGE 4

Assembly to discuss
NPR, NRC, COVID-19

NEW DELHI
The Delhi Assembly will hold a one-day session on Friday to discuss the NPR, the NRC and COVID-19. Party leaders said that AAP may push for a stand against the NPR.

CITY ▶ PAGE 5

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OPPORTUNITIES ▶ PAGE 7

COVID-19 now a pandemic, says WHO; India confirms 60 cases

Over 1,18,000 positive cases have been reported globally across 114 countries

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN

NEW DELHI
The World Health Organization (WHO) on Wednesday said that according to its assessment, COVID-19 "can be characterised as a pandemic".

"WHO has been assessing this outbreak round-the-clock and we are deeply concerned both by the alarming levels of spread and severity, and by the alarming levels of inaction," it said.

According to the WHO, a pandemic is declared when a new disease for which people do not have immunity spreads around the world beyond expectations. It noted with concern that 1,18,000 positive cases had been reported in 114 countries, and more than 90% of cases were in just four.

Visas suspended
With 60 confirmed cases in India, the Central government on Wednesday issued a travel advisory stating that all existing visas, except di-



Growing concern: People enquiring at a COVID-19 helpdesk in Thiruvananthapuram on Wednesday. ■ S. MAHINSHA

plomatic, official, UN/international organisations, employment and project visas, stand suspended till April 15, and this order will come into effect from March 13 at the port of departure.

The new advisory, issued following a meeting of the Group of Ministers, noted that visa-free travel facility granted to OCI card holders would be kept in abeyance till April 15. It added that any foreign national who intends to travel to India for compell-

ing reason may contact the nearest Indian mission and all incoming travellers, including Indian nationals arriving from or having visited China, Italy, Iran, Republic of Korea, France, Spain and Germany after February 15 shall be quarantined for a minimum period of 14 days.

"Provision for testing primarily for students/compassionate cases in Italy to be made and collection for samples to be organised accordingly. Those tested negative

will be allowed to travel and will be quarantined on arrival in India for 14 days," the release added.

It also noted that international traffic through land borders would be restricted.

Fresh cases

The number of confirmed cases in India is 60 with two fresh cases – one each from Delhi and Rajasthan being reported – according to a release issued by the Union Health Ministry.

However, as per health officials from the States, the number of cases may be up to 65, but they are yet to be confirmed by the Centre. "There are now 60 positive cases [including the 3 cases from Kerala discharged earlier]," noted the Health Ministry, which confirmed cases from Kerala (8), Karnataka and Maharashtra reported earlier this week by the State governments.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12
MORE REPORT ON ▶ PAGES 4, 8 & 9

Jyotiraditya Scindia joins BJP, says Congress is in denial

He praised the leadership of PM Narendra Modi

NISTULA HEBBAR

NEW DELHI

Former Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Wednesday formally joined the BJP after resigning from the primary membership of the Congress on Tuesday. He lauded the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and said the Congress was in "denial" about reality.

At a press conference at the BJP headquarters in New Delhi, Mr. Scindia, 49, joined the party in the presence of its president, J.P. Nadda, Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, Madhya Pradesh unit chief Vishnu Datt Sharma, general secretaries Anil Jain and Arun Singh as well as spokespersons Jay Pande and Zafar Islam.

Mr. Islam, a friend of Mr. Scindia from the latter's days as an investment banker, was involved in him crossing over to the BJP.

Welcoming Mr. Scindia into the BJP, Mr. Nadda recalled the party's founder and the



New start: Jyotiraditya Scindia being welcomed by BJP chief J.P. Nadda in New Delhi on Wednesday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

former's grandmother, the late Vijaya Raje Scindia, and said, "He [Scindia] is joining his family and we welcome him."

Mr. Scindia spoke rather emotionally about his move. He said there were two dates that had a profound impact on his life – September 30, 2001, the day his father, the late Madhavrao Scindia, passed away in a plane crash; and March 10, 2020, also the 75th birth anniversary of his father, when he decided to leave the Congress after finding himself at a "crossroads".

'PROMISES NOT KEPT' ▶ PAGE 13
MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGE 13
A ROYAL SOMERSAULT ▶ EDIT

Suspension of seven Cong. MPs revoked

Need to preserve dignity of House: Birla

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed a resolution revoking the suspension of seven Congress members with immediate effect. The resolution was moved by Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Arjun Ram Meghwal and passed by a voice vote.

With this, the MPs – Gaurav Gogoi, T.N. Prathapan, Dean Kuriakose, R. Unnithan, Manickam Tagore, Benyamin Behannan and Gurjeet Singh Auja – who were suspended on March 5 for the remaining sittings of the Budget session, returned to the House.

"This House is the temple of democracy and dialogue and dispute are important aspects of it. We need to preserve the dignity of the House," Speaker Om Birla said in his remarks revoking the suspension. "I appreciate the fact that many floor leaders have denounced the habit of rushing to the Well of the House," he added.

Mr. Birla, who had been



Speaker Om Birla

keeping away from the Lok Sabha for the last three working days of the House and was reportedly very upset with the disruptions, held an all-party meeting just before the suspension was revoked. He later returned to preside over the House.

Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said his party never wanted to dishonour the Chair or disturb the functioning of the House, as he sought revocation of suspension of the members.

Noting that it is the responsibility of both the Opposition and the Treasury Benches to maintain the dignity of the House, he said, "You don't give life sentence to someone for just killing a pigeon."

(With PTI inputs)

SC to hear Uttar Pradesh plea on Lucknow banners today

Allahabad High Court had ordered removal of the posters

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court will hear on Thursday an appeal filed by the Uttar Pradesh government challenging an Allahabad High Court order to the district and police authorities in Lucknow to "forthwith" remove roadside banners displaying the personal details of select persons accused of "vandalism" during the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act protests in December 2019.

A Vacation Bench of Justices U.U. Lalit and Aniruddha Bose is scheduled to hear the State's special leave petition. The petition is against the finding of a Bench led by Allahabad High Court Chief Justice Govind Mathur that had *suo motu* taken cognisance of the issue.

The High Court had summoned the Lucknow District Magistrate and police chief for an explanation and held that the wayside posters were a violation of individual privacy, a fundamental

right which globally "underpins human dignity and key values of a democracy".

In a 14-page order on March 9, it said, "This fundamental right provides lungs to the edifice of our entire constitutional system... Slightest injury to it is impermissible as that may be fatal for our values designed and depicted in the Preamble of the Constitution".

HC erred, says State

The State has argued that the HC erred in invoking public interest jurisdiction, saying it was available only to address the problems plaguing the underprivileged lot. The persons whose personal details were displayed on the banners were "capable enough to agitate their grievance, if any, at their own".

In its order, the High Court had addressed this line of argument, saying the "economic status of the persons directly affected in such matters is not material. The prime consideration before

the Court is to prevent the assault on fundamental rights". The State has challenged the jurisdiction of the Allahabad Bench of the High Court to *suo motu* take cognisance of the banners in Lucknow. There is a separate Bench in Lucknow.

The State has argued that the object of displaying personal details of the individuals is to deter the mischief mongers from causing damage to public and private property. Courts should not interfere in *bona fide* action by invoking the public interest jurisdiction.

The High Court had justified its *suo motu* intervention, saying public display of the personal details of citizens on roadside banners is "undemocratic functioning of government agencies which are supposed to treat all members of public with respect and courtesy and at all times should behave in manner that upholds constitutional and democratic values".

Role of L-G and govt. intertwined: Madras HC

They are expected to act in unison'

MOHAMMED IMRANULLAH S.
CHENNAI

The Madras High Court on Wednesday said a government is "a trustee for the little man who should not have a perception that the running of the government is a gigantic conspiracy".

It held that the role of Puducherry's Lieutenant Governor and that of an elected government in the Union Territory were intertwined as per law, and therefore they were expected to act in unison and not in division.

Judgment set aside

Chief Justice Amreshwar Pratap Sahi and Justice Subramonium Prasad gave the ruling, setting aside the judgment of a single judge who, according to the Bench, had delivered a verdict in favour of the elected government and held that the L-G could not interfere with its day-to-day functioning by fostering a "basically incorrect" opinion that the legislature of the Union Territory was on a par with that of a State.



Puducherry Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi

"The view of the learned single judge suffers from a basic fallacy of drawing a parallel on the basis of expected notions of democracy and republicanism vis-à-vis the status of elected legislature of a Union Territory and that of a State. This cannot be done by a judicial pronouncement and has to be through a legislative process by the appropriate legislature. For the time being, there is no such law that may equate or put them at par," the Bench said.

A BRIDGE ▶ PAGE 12

SBI cuts fixed deposit, lending rates

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The State Bank of India on Wednesday reduced its lending rate by 10-15 bps, and lowered fixed deposit and savings account interest rates. It also waived the minimum balance requirement for savings accounts.

SBI has reduced the one-year marginal cost of fund-based lending rate by 10 basis points to 7.75% with effect from March 10.

"This is the tenth consecutive cut in MCLR in FY 2019-20," the bank said.

As a result, equated monthly instalments on eligible home loan accounts linked to MCLR will get cheaper by around ₹7 per 1 lakh on a 30-year loan. EMIs on car loans will also be reduced by ₹5 per 1 lakh on a 7-year loan.

The bank has reduced the retail term deposit rates by 10 bps for deposits with a maturity of one year and above while the rate has been cut by 50 bps for deposits up to 45 days.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12

Amit Shah lauds police for controlling Delhi riots

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday lauded Delhi Police for "controlling the Delhi riots within 36 hours" and informed the Lok Sabha that the Centre plans to attach the properties of all those who indulged in arson and rioting.

Mr. Shah in his reply to the debate on Delhi riots, said the government would take such strict actions against the rioters "that they would serve as a lesson for future". None will be spared, irrespective of religion, caste or party affiliation, he said.



Amit Shah

Detentions spark fear among Chand Bagh residents

At least nine men have been picked up by Crime Branch officers since Monday

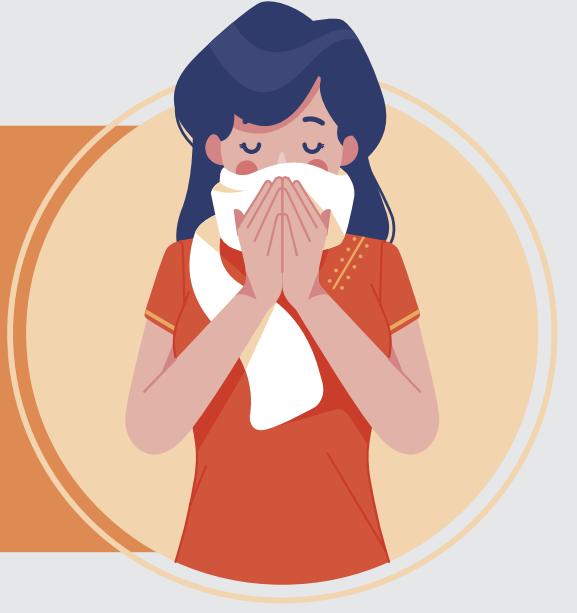
HEMAMI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

"My brother was thrashed for hours before he was let off," alleged Haji Bhure, standing at his grocery store in the Chand Bagh area in north-east Delhi. Released on Wednesday morning, Mushahid's family sent him off immediately to their home town, Budaun in Uttar Pradesh. The 35-year-old was picked up by police around 12 noon on Monday from the same store where his brother was attending to customers on Wednesday. "They came and



A street in Chand Bagh where multiple detentions have taken place in the last three days. ■ HEMAMI BHANDARI

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) GENERAL ADVISORY FOR PUBLIC



The 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a contagious virus that causes respiratory infection, can transfer from human to human.

SYMPTOMS

- FEVER
- DIFFICULTY IN BREATHING
- COUGHING
- TIGHTNESS OF CHEST
- RUNNING NOSE
- HEAD ACHE
- FEELING OF BEING UNWELL
- PNEUMONIA
- KIDNEY FAILURE

MODE OF TRANSMISSION

Human Coronavirus (COVID-19) most commonly spread from an infected person to other through:

- Coughing and sneezing
- Close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hand
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes before washing your hands

HOW TO REDUCE RISK OF CORONAVIRUS INFECTION (COVID-19)

- Clean hand with soap and water or alcohol based hand rub
- Cover nose and mouth when coughing & sneezing with tissue or flexed elbow
- Avoid close contact & maintain 1 meter distance with anyone
- Isolation of persons travelling from affected countries for atleast 14 days.

DipShabdarth/D035219-20

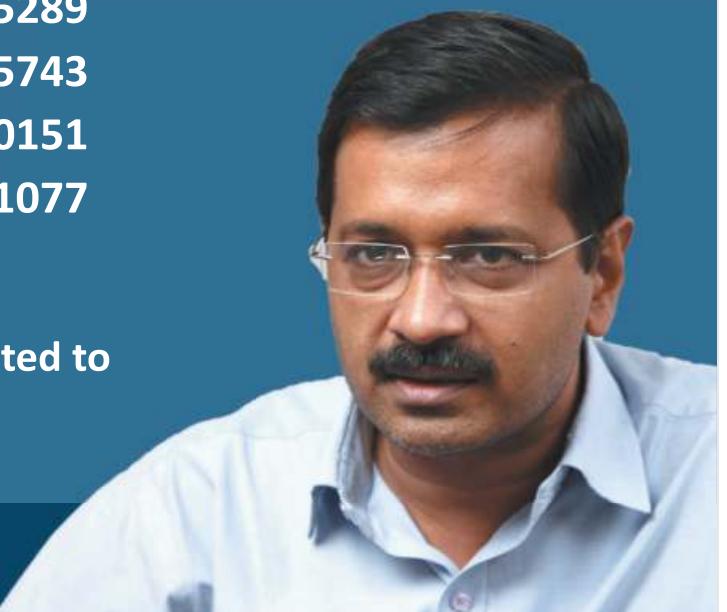
DO's	DON'Ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cover your nose and mouth with disposable tissue or handkerchief while coughing or sneezing • Throw used tissues into closed bins immediately after use • Frequently wash your hands with soap and water • Avoid crowded places/big gatherings • Person suffering from Influenza like illness must be confined to home • Stay more than one meter distance from persons sick with flu • Take adequate sleep and rest • Drink plenty of water/liquids and eat nutritious food • See a doctor if feel unwell (fever, difficulty breathing & cough). While visiting doctor, wear a mask/cloth to cover your mouth and nose. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touching eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands • Hugging, kissing and shaking hands while greeting • Spitting in public places • Taking medicines without consulting doctor • Disposal of used napkin or tissue paper in open areas • Touching surfaces usually used by public (Railing, door gates, etc)

Control Room Numbers at State and District level

State DGHS (HQ)	011-22307145, 22300012, 22300036
North	011-27708768
South	011-29531277
East	011-22050908, 22051234
West	011-25195529
North-West	011-25951182

South-West	011-25066674
South-East	011-26476410
North-East	011-22115289
New Delhi	011-23385743
Central	011-23270151
Shahdara	011-22111077

24*7 Control Room has been established at DGHS (HQ), may be contacted for any query related to COVID-19 Ph: 011-22307145, 22300012, 22300036



1,100 rioters identified using facial recognition technology: Amit Shah

Nearly 300 of them came from Uttar Pradesh, says Union Home Minister

VIJAYA SINGH
NEW DELHI

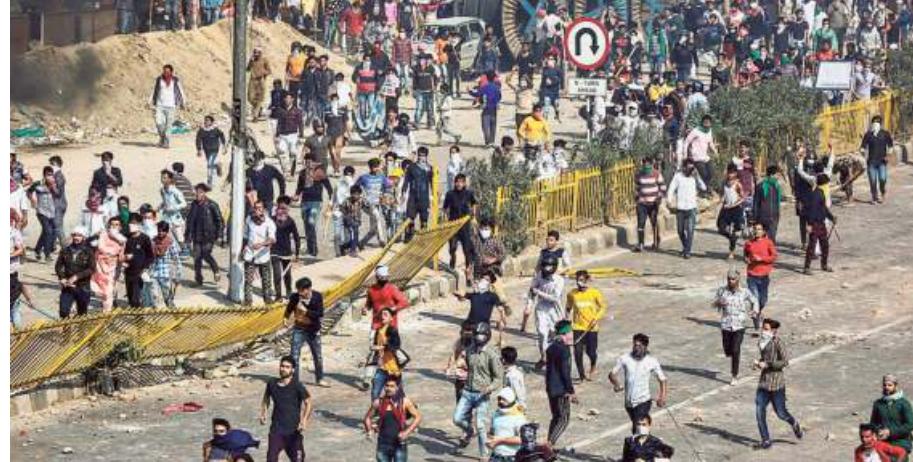
Home Minister Amit Shah said on Wednesday that police are using facial recognition software to track down the suspects involved in the Delhi riots that killed 53 people.

Mr. Shah said officers had fed Voter ID, driving licence and other details into the software to identify the suspects involved in serious crimes like murder and arson.

"Police have identified 1,100 people through the facial recognition technology. Nearly 300 people came from Uttar Pradesh. It was a planned conspiracy," said Mr. Shah while replying to a short duration discussion on Delhi riots in Lok Sabha.

He said the footage procured from Close Circuit Television Cameras (CCTV) and other mediums was being scientifically analysed. "CCTV footage is being analysed on 25 computers. The software does not recognise religion. Action will be taken against anyone found indulging in the act, no one will be spared," Mr. Shah said.

Earlier, Delhi Police had used the technology during various anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) protests in the city. This is the first time the government has admitted using the software that also has privacy concerns.



People supporting the new citizenship law and those opposing it clash during a protest in the city on February 24. ■ REUTERS

A senior Delhi Police officer told *The Hindu* that the footage procured from CCTV, media persons and the public was matched with photographs stored in the database of Election Commission and e-Vahan, a pan-India database of vehicle registration maintained by Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

Matching of photos

"Our personnel were also recording videos when the riots were on. Once we had clear video footage, the software was used to match the photographs with that in the database of EC and e-Vahan to identify the suspects. Basically, even if someone changes

his appearance, the chin and the eye do not change. These are the two key facial features that will help us nab the suspects," said the police officer.

The officer added that most of the 300 suspects who came from Uttar Pradesh to carry out the violence had criminal records against them and their culpability was established through the facial recognition software.

Delhi Police has been taking the help of private software companies to use the technology in aiding the investigations. "We have the photographs and the database. All we have to do is to key in a particular geographical area and the software

matches the two set of photographs," the officer said.

Social media accounts

He said the police had identified 60 social media accounts that were created on February 22 to create unrest and were deactivated on February 26.

"Twenty five cases have been registered under the Information Technology Act. The riots were engineered and the social media accounts were used to organise protests when [U.S. President] Donald Trump was here. They think they will escape the law if they deactivate the accounts, nobody will be spared, they will be fished out," Dr. Amar Pal Singh, a resident.

Kin of deceased law student protest outside school over its de-sealing

'Will kill myself, but won't let exams be conducted here'



The victim's relatives on dharna outside Rajdhani Senior Secondary Public School in Shiv Vihar on Wednesday. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

can be sealed why can't the school remain sealed? This school had weapons, a slingshot, petrol bombs...I will not let it open...it is a den of death that doesn't deserve the presence of innocent children," he alleged.

According to the police and school authorities, the school had been de-sealed as per the requisite legal formalities and provisions. "We have collected the required evidence and there is no reason for the school to be shut given that hundreds of children scheduled to appear for exams are involved," said Alok Kumar, Joint Commissioner of Police [eastern range].

"The school can open and

we will provide necessary arrangement to ensure the security of the children and its staff as and when required," Mr. Kumar added.

Sadaf Faisal, school's principal, said she and her staff could make the necessary arrangements for the exams within a day but it seemed difficult given the circumstances.

"The safety and security of the children and the staff is important to me. All we need is a day to prepare the date sheet and exam schedule. But given the circumstances, I don't think we will go down that road at least for the time being and especially tomorrow [Thursday]," Ms. Faisal said.

Plea in HC to remove hate speech from social media

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday sought response of the Centre on a plea to remove fake news and hate speech being circulated on social media and online platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Google.

A Bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice C. Hari Shankar issued notice to the Ministries of Home Affairs, Finance, and Information Technology and three online platforms seeking their stands on the petition by K.N. Govindacharya.

Mr. Govindacharya, represented by advocate Virag Gupta, sought directions to the three platforms to disclose information about their designated officers in India as required under the IT Rules.

The petition has alleged that social media platforms "have become a haven for hate speech" and in the absence of details of designated officers, there is "no clear mechanism to enforce justice".

"If our homes and shops

can be sealed why can't the school remain sealed? This school had weapons, a slingshot, petrol bombs...I will not let it open...it is a den of death that doesn't deserve the presence of innocent children," he alleged.

According to the police and school authorities, the school had been de-sealed as per the requisite legal formalities and provisions. "We have collected the required evidence and there is no reason for the school to be shut given that hundreds of children scheduled to appear for exams are involved," said Alok Kumar, Joint Commissioner of Police [eastern range].

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Fresh plea alleges hate speech by Cong., BJP leaders

It seeks registration of cases, setting up of SIT to assess damage during violence

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A fresh petition filed in the Delhi High Court has alleged that hate speeches were made by Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Salman Khurshid and BJP's Anurag Thakur and Kapil Mishra.

The plea, filed by Deepak Madan, has sought registration of cases against those allegedly making hate speeches and setting up of a special investigation team (SIT) to assess property damage in the riots in north-east Delhi.

The petition also sought the attachment of properties of people allegedly involved in making hate speeches and suggested selling them off to compensate victims of the communal violence.

Mr. Madan has also sought direction to the government "to restrain any political party or person from giving any speech and organise any rally until the peace and situation within Delhi is under control



Police did not take action against the politicians on time so as to control them from making any further hate speeches and provoke the public which has lead to the massacre

PETITION

and normal". It said the alleged hate speeches by political figures were not only defamatory but also provocative in nature and led to the recent riots.

"After the passing of the Citizenship [Amendment] Act, leaders of various political parties raised slogans against the amendment and gave hate speeches," the plea said.

The plea has sought booking of these leaders under the National Security Act (NSA) for allegedly continuously posting hate speeches and disturbing the country's inter-

grity as their speeches led to destruction of properties in different areas of north-east Delhi.

The plea claimed that no action has been taken against the politicians who allegedly delivered hate speeches, even though "impact of the hate and provocative speeches have been seen in north-east, east Delhi and Shahdara district where instances of multiple riots and mob attacks has caused deaths, loss of properties and severe injuries in many cases".

The petition claimed that

the police, instead of taking steps to stop rioters, merely stood as spectators.

Police inaction

"Delhi Police did not exercise due diligence against the political persons when hate speeches were delivered by them on public platform. The State Police did not take action against the political persons on time so as to control them from making any further hate speeches and provoke the public which has lead to such a big massacre," the petition alleged.

Riot victims rebuild their lives by day, escape to safety after dusk

Residents unable to overcome the fear that violence left behind

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI

Residents of Shiv Vihar race against time to rebuild their lives as much as possible till dusk everyday. But after sunset, all of them leave the locality and move to safer places as a collective sense of fear accompanies each evening since the violence ripped across the locality on February 25.

Outside the vandalised or burnt remains of their houses and shops in gali number 20 here on Wednesday, neighbours – both Hindus and Muslims – are encouraging each other to ready the requisite documents for paperwork related to claims for compensation, exchanging tips on quick repair work which could, at least, allow the partial utilisation of their property and sharing accounts of their escape to safety a fortnight ago.

Recalling past

"I came to my clinic around 9 a.m. that Tuesday and, thankfully, left for my relatives' place in Shanti Nagar, where I am still put up with my family. A few hours later, they [rioters] entered the locality from two sides and did what they wanted. It has been over a fortnight since the incident took place but people are still scared. Streets are empty as soon as it gets dark," said Dr. Amar Pal Singh, a resident.



Dr. Amar Pal Singh (left) talking to Abdul Aziz Khan (extreme right) as Ali Ahmed looks on (middle). ■ JATIN ANAND

Rambaran Singh Baghel, who owned a provisional store in the area, said. "We have been depending on aid from outsiders – whether NGOs or individual donors – since the afternoon of February 25 when I escaped to a relatives' house with my family fearing the worst. I come here every morning and stay for the paperwork till dark. There is still a sense of fear...anything can happen."

Jannat Khatoon, 70, said, she was thankful that her 77-year-old husband Abdul Aziz Khan made it home well on time despite being late for the afternoon prayers at the Madina Masjid, which was later vandalised.

"Stone pelting by a mob wearing helmets began just metres away on the main road near Shiv Vihar drain. We took refuge behind the cremation ground for hours before escaping to Chaman Park. We will go back where we have sought shelter," she said as she stood at the gate of her ransacked home.

Ali Ahmed, whose religious book store, Alim Books, that stood next to Dr. Singh's clinic, said he had shifted to a rented accommodation in Mustafabad. "Our house was in the middle of the area with Hindu homes [that were left untouched] on both sides in phase 5, gali number 7. *Abhi bhi kuch pata nahin; kabhi bhi kuch bhi ho sakta hai* [One still doesn't know; anything may happen any time]."

Sense of pain

Nasima Khatoon, whose provisional store was destroyed in the violence, said "Everyone is feeling the same pain – some more, some less. There is so much rubble here that one doesn't know what it used to be before."

Don't harass innocent people: Rai

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Labour Minister Gopal Rai on Wednesday evening met senior police officials of riot-affected north-east Delhi and urged them to take action against the guilty and not to harass innocent people based on "misleading information".

"After the riots, we have been getting complaints from different constituencies that cases have been filed against people who were not involved in it. We had held a meeting with the police officers earlier on the situation and found that the lower level officers are filing the cases."

The Minister met Joint Commissioner of Police Alok Kumar and Deputy Commissioner of Police Ved Prakash Surya of north-east Delhi and later said that they deliberated on how the police officers must be careful in reporting cases so that innocent people are not arrested or wrongly framed.

"Strict action must be taken against those who have strong evidence against them. No action on behalf of the police must be taken under any provocation or if it is misleading. The police have assured that no wrong action will be taken and the senior officers will also take cognisance of such a complaint," Mr. Rai said.

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Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology with the financial support of Dept. of Science and Technology, Govt. of India is offering following training programs with scholarship for the students belonging to scheduled tribe community.
Category 1 - Students studying higher secondary, intermediate or 10+2 level
Category 2 - Students of 2nd/ 3rd/ 4th year BSc/BTech/BE or equivalent
Category 3 - Students of 1st/2nd year of MSc/MTech or equivalent
For details on the programs please visit our website: <https://www.scitmst.ac.in> or contact Registrar, SCITMST, Trivandrum on the email or telephone number given below:
Email: regoffice@scitmst.ac.in; Tel: 0471 - 2524269 / 289 / 649.

DIRECTOR

TMB Tamilnad Mercantile Bank Ltd
Be a step ahead in life
Registered office: 57, V. E. Road, Thoothukudi – 628 002
email : secretarial@tmbank.in
CIN: U65110TN1921PLC001908
NOTICE FOR 94th TO THE 97th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS AND REMOTE E-VOTING INFORMATION
Notice is hereby given that:
1. The 94th to 97th Annual General Meetings (AGMs), pertaining to years 2015-2016 to 2018-2019, of the members of Tamilnad Mercantile Bank Limited is scheduled to be held on Thursday, the 9th of April, 2020 at 10.00 a.m. onwards at AVM Kamalvel Mahal, 109 – E, Ettayapuram Road, Thoothukudi – 628 002 to transact the business as detailed in the Notice of AGMs along with explanatory statement pursuant to Section 102 of the Companies Act, 2013. These AGMs are being convened pursuant to the order passed by the Hon'ble High Court of Madras on 06.02.2020. Hon'ble Shri Justice R.Balasubramanian (Former Judge) has been appointed as the Chairman of the AGMs.
2. Pursuant to provisions of Section 101 of the Companies Act, 2013 read with Rule 18 of the Companies (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014 and Secretarial Standard on General Meetings, the electronic copies of the Notice of AGMs and Annual Reports for the financial years 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 have been sent to all the members on 7th March, 2020 whose email IDs are registered with the Bank/ Depository Participants. The same is also available on the banks website www.tmb.in. Physical copies of the notice of the AGMs and Annual Reports for all the four financial years have also been sent to all the members at their registered addresses by Speed Post. The dispatch of the all the notice and the annual reports has been completed on 9th March 2020.
Members who have not received the Notice and Annual Reports may download the same from the website of the Bank www.tmb.in or from the website CDSL www.evotingindia.com.
3. The members holding shares either in physical form or in dematerialized form, as on the cut off date on Thursday, April 02, 2020 may cast their vote electronically on the ordinary and special business as set out in the Notice of AGMs through electronic voting systems of Central Depository Services India Limited (CDSL) from a place other than venue of AGMs ("Remote e-voting"). Further, the facility for electronic voting provided by CDSL shall be made available at the AGMs venue and the members attending the meetings who have not cast their vote by remote e-voting, shall be able to exercise their right to vote at the AGM venue. All the members are informed that:
a) the ordinary and the special business as set out in the Notice of AGMs may be transacted through electronic means.
b) the remote e-voting shall commence on Monday, April 06, 2020 at 09.00 A.M and shall end on Wednesday, April 08, 2020 at 05.00 P.M.
c) the cut off date for determining the eligibility to vote by electronic means or at the AGMs is Thursday, April 02, 2020.
d) (i) The user ID and password will be provided by the CDSL by email to the members whose email IDs are registered with the Bank/DP or in PIN mailer through Registered Post to other members for the AGM.
(ii) Please follow all steps in the Electronic Voting - General Instructions to cast the vote.
e) In case members have any queries or issues regarding e-voting, they may refer the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Members and remote e-voting user manual for Members available at the download section of helpdesk.evoting@cdislindia.com; or call on toll free no.: 1800-225-533. In case of any specific queries please call to this mobile no. 9566141888
f) User ID and Password are being generated specifically for casting the vote in these AGMs by remote e-voting. This User ID and password are being sent by CDSL directly and members should use this User ID and password only.
g) Members can also update their mobile number and e-mail ID in the user profile details of the folio which may be used for sending future communication(s).
h) Shri Nagendra D.Rao, Company Secretary in practice and the present Vice President of ICSI has been appointed as the Scrutinizer to scrutinize the e-voting and to ensure that the e-voting process is held in a fair and transparent manner.
i) Any person, who acquires shares of the Bank and becomes Member of the Bank after dispatch of the Notice of AGMs and holding shares on the cut-off date i.e. April 02, 2020, may

Kin of couple held for 'IS links' swear by their innocence

Prolonged Internet shutdown behind the duo shifting to Delhi, they claim

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

The family in Srinagar's posh Shiv Pora locality of the couple arrested by the Delhi police for alleged links to the Khorasan module of the Islamic State (IS) links swear by their innocence.

"They got married five months ago. Both are professionals. My brother was associated with a United Kingdom-based information technology company. The reason behind shifting to Delhi was the prolonged Internet shutdown. The allegations of their links (with IS) are fictitious," said Sehrish Sami, sister of Jahanzaib Sami Wani, who along with his wife Hina Bashir Beig were arrested from Delhi's Jamia Nagar on March 8.

Jahanzaib, who passed out from a missionary school in Srinagar, has been studying and working in many parts of the country, said his sister.

After finishing a bachelor's degree in electronics and communication from



Hina Bashir Beig and Jahanzaib Sami Wani.

(Amendment) Act and were in possession of "objectionable material". DCP (Special Cell) Pramod Singh Kushwah said the couple had moved to Delhi from Srinagar in August 2019.

The family claimed Jahanzaib's is a case of mistaken identity and the Delhi police did not bother to inform the family "as per law".

Ms. Sami said her brother returned to Kashmir for his wedding on October 6, 2019 and returned to the Capital with his wife on October 26.

"We were told by neighbours that the police came

looking for another person in the Delhi apartment. In fact, my sister-in-law volunteered to accompany her husband. Why would she accompany him if she was involved?" said another relative.

Ms. Beig, 36, also a professional with a degree in finance management, has been questioned by the police about her sudden decision to "use purdah", the family claimed.

She used to wear Western clothes not long ago when she worked in a private company. The police have even traced her pictures on Facebook in Western outfits, claimed the family.

Another family member said both of them are "religious" and abide by Islamic tenets such as reading the Koran and offering prayers. "How is that a crime?" the family member said.

"They were planning to return home following the restoration of Internet. All allegations are a farce," said Jahanzaib's sister.



Before and after: A vandalised Dr. Zakir Husain Library on December 15, 2019; it was reopened on Wednesday after extensive renovation. ■ R.V. MOORTHY, SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Jamia reopens library nearly three months after vandalism

Police had entered campus 'in pursuit of anti-CAA protesters'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The main library of Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI), which was vandalised on December 15, 2019, after the police entered it following anti-CAA protests, was reopened after renovation on Wednesday.

D. Zakir Husain Library has undergone extensive renovation and efforts have been made to provide better facilities to students by installing LED lights as well as new and comfortable chairs, the university said in a statement.

"With a capacity to seat

800 students, and comprising a reading hall, research floor, reference and periodical sections, and a digital resource centre with 150 computers, the library resumed all its services on Wednesday. The textbook and research sections of the library are open till midnight," a JMI official said.

The library proposes to strengthen its user services in coming days by extensively leveraging information and communication technologies. "It is a matter of great satisfaction that despite heavy odds, the library has been able to utilise its budgetary allocation completely and renew its subscription to electronic databases," the university stated.

During the three months that the library remained closed, efforts were made to improve the functioning of a number of faculty and departmental libraries by deputing the staff of the central library. "The time was also utilised to migrate library management software to an open source software for more effective integration and discovery of resources," the university added.

HC seeks reply from govt. over COVID-19 prevention

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday sought response from the Union Ministry of Health and the Delhi government on a petition seeking proper and adequate measures to combat COVID-19.

The petition seeks to make readily available important and relevant information on the disease, and medical facilities for testing and treatment.

During the hearing, Central government standing counsel Anil Soni, appearing for the Ministry, told the Bench that "state-of-the-art" medical facilities in the High Court be put to use to check whether people coming here are infected as "prevention is better than cure".

It also urged the court to direct setting up of a monitoring committee under supervision of experts in the field. The petition claimed that the steps being taken by the Centre are not sufficient to handle a mass outbreak.

Man held for setting religious books on fire

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

Some religious books left covered on a wooden bed outside Jama Masjid in Old Gurugram here were set alight along with three pushcarts in the early hours of Tuesday. A Delhi Transport Corporation bus conductor has been arrested in connection with the incident.

Gurugram Police spokesperson Subhash Boken said the accused Vikas (40), a resident of Dabas village in Delhi, has also confessed to his involvement in a similar incident in May last year wherein a Muslim tailor in Jackupura was beaten up and told to chant "Jai Shri Ram" when he was returning from a mosque after offering namaz.

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

IF YOU HAVE:

1. Direct close contact with Laboratory confirmed positive COVID-19 case
2. History of travel to COVID-19 affected countries* like China, Hong Kong, Republic of Korea, Japan, Italy, Thailand, Singapore, Iran, Malaysia, France, Spain and Germany

THEN YOU ARE MANDATED TO :

1. Undergo self-imposed isolation at home (quarantine) for a period of 14 days from the date of your arrival.
2. Self-monitor your health and follow required Do's and Don'ts as detailed below:
 - Observe good personal hygiene.
 - Monitor your health.
 - Practice frequent hand washing with soap and water or use an alcohol based hand sanitizer.
 - Follow respiratory etiquettes - cover your mouth with tissue or handkerchief while coughing.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
 - Avoid close contact with people who are unwell or showing symptoms of illness, such as cough, difficulty in breathing etc.
 - Wear a mask if you have symptoms such as cough, fever or difficulty in breathing.
 - Contact local doctor immediately if you have cough, fever or difficulty in breathing.
3. Immediately contact health Authorities on following numbers, if you develop symptoms of fever, cough, cold, breathlessness etc.

HIMACHAL PARDESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

e-Procurement Notice

INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

1. The Executive Engineer HPPWD Dharamshala Division, on behalf of Governor of H.P invites the item rate bids, in electronic tendering system, for following works from the eligible and approved contractors registered with HPPWD:

Sr. No.	Name of work	Estimated cost in Rs.	Earnest Money	Time Limit	Start date for downloading bid	Deadline for submission of Bid
1.	Construction of Warehouse for storage of Electronic Voting Machine (EVMs) and VVPATs at Dari Dharamshala in District Kangra (H.P.) SH-CIO Warehouse for storage of Electronic Voting Machine (EVMs) and VVPATs including water supply, sanitary installation & Rain water harvesting system (2 nd call)	2,64,44,537/-	2,96,950/-	Eighteen months	19.03.2020	31.03.2020

The bidders are advised to note other details of tenders from the departmental website <https://hp.tenders.gov.in>. The Executive Engineer reserves the right to reject any tender or all tenders without assigning any reasons.

Sd/-
Executive Engineer,
Dharamshala Division,
HP.PWD, Dharamshala.
On behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh.

HP/5446/19-20

HIM SUCHANA AVAM JAN SAMPAK.

Himachal Pradesh Public Works Department

e-Procurement Notice

Invitation for Bids (IFB)

The Executive Engineer, Tissa HPPWD Tissa-176316 on H.P. on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh, invites the items rate bids, in electronic tendering system from the eligible class of contractors registered with HPPWD for the works as detailed in the table:-

Sr. No. work	Estimated cost in Rs.	Starting date of download	Earliest Money	Deadline for submission of bid	Time Limit	Eligible Class
1. Construc-tion of Office Building of Tissa Division at Bhanjaru (SH: Building Portion including WS & SI and rain water harvesting tank and septic tank)	22777399.00	18/03/2020	261000.00	06/04/2020	Eighteen Months up to 11.00 AM	A

The bidders are advised to note other details of tenders from the department website www.hptenders.gov.in.

Executive Engineer
Tissa Division HPPWD, Tissa at Bhanjaru.

HP/5423/19-20

Tissa Division HPPWD, Tissa at Bhanjaru.

Sd/-

Tissa Division HPPWD, Tissa at Bhanjaru.

Executive Engineer

HPPWD, Tissa at Bhanjaru.

HIMURJA
(H.P. Govt. Energy Development Agency)
Block 8-A SDA Complex, Kasumti, Shimla-171009.
Telephone 0177-2621783 Fax-0177-2622635

CORRIGENDUM-II

Date of receiving and opening of the tender No. HIMURJA (F-7) Solar Lanterns/ 2020-21 published in Divya Himachal (Himachal Edition) & The Hindu (Delhi Edition) on 05-02-2020 for supply of 10000 Nos Solar Lanterns to H.P. has now been re-scheduled as under:-

Date of receiving of tender : 17-03-2020 up to 1:00 PM
Date of opening of tender : 17-03-2020 at 3:00 PM

Other terms and conditions shall remain unchanged.

Sd/-
Executive Engineer (E)
HIMURJA, Urja Bhawan,
Kasumti, Shimla-171009.

Control Room Numbers at State and District level

State DGHS (HQ)	011-22307145, 22300012, 22300036	South-West	011-25066674
North	011-27708768	South-East	011-26476410
South	011-29531277	North-East	011-22115289
East	011-22050908, 22051234	New Delhi	011-23385743
West	011-25195529	Central	011-23270151
North-West	011-25951182	Shahdara	011-22111077

24*7 Control Room has been established at DGHS (HQ), may be contacted for any query related to COVID-19 Ph: 011-22307145, 22300012, 22300036

* List of affected countries is at <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Timings

DELHI

THURSDAY, MAR. 12	
RISE 06:34	SET 18:28
RISE 21:32	SET 08:30
FRIDAY, MAR. 13	
RISE 06:33	SET 18:29
RISE 22:38	SET 09:11
SATURDAY, MAR. 14	
RISE 06:32	SET 18:29
RISE 23:43	SET 09:53

Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 27 15
Safdarjung 27 15
Palam 28 15

Delhi Palam Today
27°C Haze/mist is likely in the morning. A partly cloudy sky is likely. Spells of rain may occur.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
28°C Shallow fog is likely in the morning. A cloudy sky is likely. One or two spells of rain may occur.

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THE HINDU
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Assembly to discuss NPR, NRC, COVID-19 tomorrow

'House may pass resolution to adopt NPR in old format'

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Assembly will hold a one-day special session on Friday to discuss the National Population Register (NPR), the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and COVID-19. Party leaders said that AAP may push for a stand against the NPR and NRC in the current format during the session.

"The Assembly is likely to pass a resolution to implement NPR in its older format without the new questions which have created a dispute," an AAP leader told *The Hindu*. With 62 MLAs, AAP has a brute majority in the 70-member Delhi Assembly.

About eight States have already passed some form of a resolution against the NPR or NRC in the current format. The Chief Minister has been critical of the NPR and NRC in multiple interviews and he will further clarify his

stand in the Assembly," another AAP leader said.

The decision to hold the Assembly session was taken in a Cabinet meeting on Wednesday chaired by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. AAP did not officially comment on what will be their stand on the NPR and NRC in the Assembly session.

BJP attacks move
Attacking the decision to hold the Assembly session, Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri alleged the move was in line with the AAP government's bid to "politicise" the issue of the amended citizenship law and the NRC.

The political opposition across the country, he alleged, was indulging in propaganda against CAA and NRC to mislead citizens, despite Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "clarification"

that the Act was not against any Indian citizen.

Similarly, he argued, the NRC was formulated during the tenure of the Congress-led UPA government and it "would not be implemented anywhere in the country" except in Assam as per Supreme Court directions.

"There is no other objective behind the session... If this government is really serious about Delhi then it should discuss issues such as controlling pollution, improving its crumbling public transportation infrastructure, and making clean potable water available to its citizens because even the Supreme Court has observed that Delhi has become a gas chamber," Mr. Bidhuri said.

Meanwhile, Delhi Assembly Speaker Ram Niwas Goel said that AAP MLA Dilip Pandey has been appointed as the chief whip of the ruling party in the Assembly.

Over 50% decline in PCR calls this Holi

Dip is likely due to people staying at home in view of rise in COVID-19 cases: police

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police received over 50% less Police Control Room (PCR) calls this Holi as compared to 2019.

"The calls to PCR drastically reduced to 8,667 in comparison to 18,798 last year. The Delhi Police appreciates the cooperation of residents for a peaceful Holi," the police said.

They added that a total of 647 challans were issued for drunken driving, 181 for triple riding, 1,192 for not wearing helmets and 156 for dangerous driving on Holi. •PTI



A total of 647 challans were issued for drunken driving, and 156 for dangerous driving on Holi. •PTI

for triple riding and 5,092 for without helmet

A senior officer said that that the reason for the decrease in number of PCR calls is due to rise in COVID-19 cases. "Many people decided against playing the

festival or played at their homes," he added.

Police Commissioner S.N. Srivastava also inspected the deployment of the force across the Capital and greeted them on the occasion of Holi. In a statement, the police said Mr. Srivastava met members of the Aman committee in North East district where the riots broke out last month and extended Holi greetings.

Three accidents
Three persons died in three separate accidents on Tuesday. While one incident was reported from north Delhi's Civil Lines area, others were reported from south-west Delhi's Kapashera and Rohini's Kanjhawala area.

At Civil Lines, the victim

has been identified as Sumit. He was going with his friend Sonu Srivastav to Badarpur to celebrate Holi at his (Sonu's) in-laws' house on the victim's bike. The two were drunk and Sumit was allegedly driving rash when they bike hit a divider and the two got injured. Sumit later succumbed to his injuries at AIIMS Trauma Centre, the police said.

In the second incident, one person died while another – both students – were injured when their car rammed a pole in Kapashera area. The accident happened on Tuesday afternoon.

In the third incident, a man died after his bike skid in Rohini's Kanjhawala area on Tuesday night.

Online portal told to pay ₹11K for defective mobile phone

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

A district consumer disputes redressal forum here has directed e-commerce platform Flipkart to compensate a complainant by paying over ₹11,000 for delivering a defective mobile handset and failing to redress the grievance.

Holding the online portal deficient in services, the consumer panel said, "We hold the opposite party [Flipkart] guilty of deficiency in service as it has failed to establish beyond reasonable doubt that it had indeed taken any concrete steps for reverse pickup of the subject mobile phone from the complainant or took any measures or resolutions or steps to redress the grievance of the complainant except filing a cryptic written statement to wriggle out of liability."

The directions came when the forum was hearing a complaint moved by city resident Deepansh Agarwal who contended that a handset bought by him for his uncle turned out to be defective. It was also alleged that the online portal failed to get the handset picked up despite the complainant generating a request for return or replacement.

While noting that the portal had accepted the fact that an alternative number was provided to it by the complainant, the consumer panel observed, "The opposite party has failed to place any cogent evidence by way of e-mail correspondence or otherwise of alleged four attempts made by it for having the subject mobile picked up since there is no such to this effect."

HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT e-Procurement Notice

INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

The Executive Engineer HPPWD Bangana Division Distt Una H.P on behalf of Governor of H.P invites the online bids for item rate, in electronic tendering in 2 Cover System for the below mentioned works from the eligible and approved contractors/Firms registered with HPPWD Department.

Sr. No	Name of Work	Estimated Cost	EMD	Time Limit	Cost of Tender	Eligible class of Contractor
1.	Construction & MT of Link road from UAM road to Malanger via Dugar Ghati,Plata,Rakkhar,Kushan Bramman & Tarkhanka and Bhaleti Bhugrian Dohgi km. 0/00 to 5/085 under NABARD RIDF-XXV (SH: C/o 5/7 mtr wide Formation cutting and filling, Retaining wall, Cross Drainage work, P/L GSB,WMM,premix carpet surfacing with seal coat, C/o U & V-shape drain, Parapets , KM, Stone and Sign Board in Km 0/00 to 1/425).	9638744	129000	One Year	2000	Class- A & B
2.	Construction & MT of Link road from UAM road to Malanger via Dugar Ghati,Plata,Rakkhar,Kushan Bramman & Tarkhanka and Bhaleti Bhugrian Dohgi km. 0/00 to 5/085 under NABARD RIDF-XXV (SH: C/o 5/7 mtr wide Formation cutting and filling, Retaining wall, Cross Drainage work, P/L GSB,WMM,premix carpet surfacing with seal coat, C/o U & V-shape drain, Parapets , KM, Stone and Sign Board in Km 3/840 to 5/085).	8315011	116000	Nine Month	2000	Class- B
3.	Construction & MT of Link road from UAM road to Malanger via Dugar Ghati,Plata,Rakkhar,Kushan Bramman & Tarkhanka and Bhaleti Bhugrian Dohgi km. 0/00 to 5/085 under NABARD RIDF-XXV (SH: C/o 5/7 mtr wide Formation cutting and filling, Retaining wall, Cross Drainage work, P/L GSB,WMM,premix carpet surfacing with seal coat, C/o U & V-shape drain, Parapets , KM, Stone and Sign Board in Km 3/840 to 5/085).	6170411	94500	Six Month	2000	Class- C
4.	Construction & MT of road from TMBD road to village Bhattian via Lower Dobar & Kushyan km. 0/0 to 5/085 under NABARD RIDF-XXV (SH: C/o 5/7 mtr wide Formation cutting, Retaining wall, Cross Drainage work, GSB,WMM,M/T,U-shape drain, Parapets , crash barrier ,road stud with lens reflector and KM, Stone and Sign Board in Km 0/0 to 5/085).	30947833	342000	One Year	5000	Class- A & B
1.	Availability of Bid Document and mode of submission: The Bid document is available online and bid should be submitted in online mode on website https://htptenders.gov.in . Bidder will be required to register in the web-site which is free of cost. For submission of bids, the bidder is required to have Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) from one of the authorized Certifying Authorities (CA). Aspiring bidders who have not obtained the user ID and password for participating in e-tendering in HPPWD may obtain the same from the website: https://htptenders.gov.in . Digital signature is mandatory to participate in the e-tendering. Bidders already possessing the digital signature issued from authorized CAs can use the same in this tender.					
2.	Key Dates:					
1.	Date of Online Publication	03.04.2020	11:00 HRS			
2.	Document Download Start and End Date	03.04.2020	11:30 HRS 08.04.2020 upto 17:00 HRS			
3.	Bid Submission Start and End Date	03.04.2020	11:30 HRS 08.04.2020 upto 17:00 HRS			
4.	Physical Submission of EMD and Cost of Tender Document	09.04.2020	upto 11:00HRS			
5.	Date of Technical Bid opening	09.04.2020	11:30 HRS			
6.	Evaluation of Technical Bid.					Evaluation of technical Bid will be followed after verification of the documents.

1. TENDER DETAILS:

2. The Tender Documents shall be uploaded online in 2 Covers:
Cover 1: shall contain scanned copies of all "Technical Documents/ Eligibility Information".
Cover 2: shall contain "BOQ/Financial Bid", where contractor will quote his offer for each item.
3. SUBMISSION OF ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS: The bidders are required to submit (a) original demand draft towards the cost of bid document and (b) original bid security/Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) and other Technical Documents in *O/o Executive Engineer HPPWD Division Bangana H.P* as specified in Key dates Sr. No. 5 on Tender Opening Date, failing which the bids will be declared non-responsive.
4. BID OPENING DETAILS: The bids shall be opened on **09.04.2020 at 11:30 HRS** in the office *Executive Engineer, Bangana Division HPPWD Bangana H.P* by the authorised officer. In their interest the tenderers are advised to be present along with original documents at the time of opening of tenders. If the officer happens to be closed on the date of opening of the bids as specified, the bids will be opened on the next working day at the same time and venue.
5. The bids for the work shall remain valid for acceptance for a period not less than 120 days after the deadline date for bid submission.
6. Other details can be seen in the bidding documents. The officer inviting tender shall not be held liable for any delays due to system failure beyond his control. Even though the system will attempt to notify the bidders of any bid updates, the Employer shall not be liable for any information not received by the bidder. It is the bidders' responsibility to verify the website for the latest information related to the tender.
7. The copy of EPF NO/GST No must be attached.

HIM SUCHNA
AWAM JANSAMPARK.
Executive Engineer
HPPWD Division Bangana
Distt Una H.P on behalf of
Governor of Himachal Pradesh

HP/5388/19-20

AAP names Mohaniya as Uttarakhand in-charge

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Wednesday appointed Sangam Vihar MLA Dinesh Mohaniya as the party's in-charge of Uttarakhand.

Similarly, he argued, the NRC was formulated during the tenure of the Congress-led UPA government and it "would not be implemented anywhere in the country" except in Assam as per Supreme Court directions.

"There is no other objective behind the session... If this government is really serious about Delhi then it should discuss issues such as controlling pollution, improving its crumbling public transportation infrastructure, and making clean potable water available to its citizens because even the Supreme Court has observed that Delhi has become a gas chamber," Mr. Bidhuri said.

"There is no other objective behind the session... If this government is really serious about Delhi then it should discuss issues such as controlling pollution, improving its crumbling public transportation infrastructure, and making clean potable water available to its citizens because even the Supreme Court has observed that Delhi has become a gas chamber," Mr. Bidhuri said.

"The party has entrusted Mr. Mohaniya with a huge responsibility to strengthen the party's organisation in Uttarakhand," an official statement said.

The MLA said that he will work to bring the "AAP model of governance in Delhi" to every household in Uttarakhand.

Young faces take lead in Delhi Cong.

Former MLA Anil Chaudhary appointed DPCC chief

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday appointed former Patparganj MLA Anil Chaudhary as president of the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC).

The post was lying vacant after Subhash Chopra resigned after the party's dismal performance in the Delhi Assembly elections. Ms. Gandhi also appointed Abhishek Dutt, Shivani Chopra, Jaikishan, Mudit Agarwal and Ali Hassan as vice-presidents of the DPCC.

After its sweeping victory in the Delhi Assembly elections, AAP has been focusing more on other States. Senior party leader and Delhi Minister Gopal Rai had said that AAP would fight all local body elections across the country "wherever the party has a unit".

"The party has entrusted Mr. Mohaniya with a huge responsibility to strengthen the party's organisation in Uttarakhand," an official statement said.

The party has entrusted Mr. Mohaniya with a huge responsibility to strengthen the party's organisation in Uttarakhand," an official statement said.

The MLA said that he will work to bring the "AAP model of governance in Delhi" to every household in Uttarakhand.

After being appointed as

high command has replaced its senior guard to bring in people who can revamp the party. After looking at the developments in Madhya Pradesh with Jyotiraditya Scindia, the high command has perhaps taken a cue and brought the next generation of leaders to the forefront," a senior Delhi Congress leader said.

Three of the new vice-presidents are children of senior Delhi Congress leaders. Shivaani Chopra is the daughter of Subhash Chopra; Mudit Agarwal is J.P. Agarwal's son; and Ali Hassan is Hasan Ahmed's son. Abhishek Dutt is a two-time councillor and was the party's candidate from the Kasturba Nagar Assembly constituency.

'Go for peace deal with or without NSCN (I-M)'

'NNPGs, Centre can sign any day because it is Nagas' desire'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

A conglomerate of seven Naga extremist groups has asked the Indian government to sign the prolonged peace deal at the earliest, with or without the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), also known as the

Isak-Muivah faction of NSCN.

Several rounds of talks between the Centre and the NSCN (I-M) since the latter declared truce in 1997 have proved inconclusive despite the signing of the nebulous Framework Agreement in August 2015.

The ambit of the "Naga political issue" was expanded two years later to include the Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) comprising outfits that have been rivals of the NSCN (I-M).

After three days of discussions with Nagaland Governor R.N. Ravi, the NNPGs on Tuesday evening advised going for the final agreement even if the NSCN (I-M) refuses to come on board.

The NSCN (I-M) has been adamant about getting a separate flag and constitution as part of the peace deal.

"The Working Committee of the NNPGs and the Centre can sign the agreement any day because it is the desire of the Nagas. We have distributed

the status paper among our people, which is acceptable to them," a leader of the NNPGs said.

Common ground

The Centre reportedly wants all the Naga stakeholder groups to find common ground before the final agreement is signed. In a statement on February 27, the NSCN (I-M) reiterated its demand for a separate flag and constitution, but the NNPGs have favoured working on these aspects after

signing the peace deal.

A few days ago, Mr. Ravi had accused the NSCN (I-M) of delaying the signing of the accord with their demand.

One of the goals of the NSCN (I-M) has been the creation of "Greater Nagaland", a homeland comprising all Naga-inhabited areas in the Northeast.

The Centre has assured Nagaland's neighbours – Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur – that their territorial integrity would be protected.

PIL for ban on pellet guns dismissed

Forces have to necessarily use force in self-defence: J&K HC

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

Dismissing a public interest litigation seeking a ban on use of pellet shotguns on protesters in J&K, the High Court on Wednesday observed that security forces "have to necessarily use force in their self-defence".

Dismissed the PIL, Justices Dhiraj Singh Thakur and Ali Mohammad Magrey observed:



*FILE PHOTO

"Almost every day, in the guise of protests, security personnel, their camps and police stations were targeted by unruly crowds. If the protest is not peaceful and security persons are attacked by huge and violent mobs, they have to necessarily use force in their self-defence."

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"Almost every day, in the guise of protests, security personnel, their camps and police stations were targeted by unruly crowds. If the protest is not peaceful and security persons are attacked by huge and violent mobs, they have to necessarily use force in their self-defence."

"...But for discharge of public duty by such security force personnel who were being attacked by violent mobs during that period.

The court decision has come as a shock to the Kashmir-based Pellet Victim's Association (PVA), which has been holding a campaign for banning the shotguns.

"Many youths can't see.

There was need to take strong note on the use of pellet guns. Pellet and other deadly weapons are used against unarmed civilians, including students," a PVA spokesman said.

Talking to *The Hindu*, a pellet victim from Pulwama said:

"The court has failed to create any deterrence or even question the wanton use of pellet guns in Kashmir in the past."

its obligation in as much as they have made ex-gratia payments to most of the injured persons.

"Having regard to the ground situation prevailing, the Ministry of Home Affairs has already constituted a committee of experts for exploring other alternative to pellet guns... We are not inclined to prohibit the use of pellet guns in rare and extreme situations," the court observed.

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Akhilesh, Shivpal share stage

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

ETAWAH (U.P.) Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav and his uncle Shivpal Yadav shared a stage during the Holi celebrations in Etawah amid chants of "chacha-bhatija zindabad" after parting ways around two years ago. However, Mr. Akhilesh signalled to the supporters to stop the slogan during the programme attended by party patriarch Mulayam Singh, Ram Gopal Yadav, Dharmendra Yadav and Tejpratap Singh Yadav on Tuesday.

SEARCH FOR MISSING PERSON



General public is here by informed that one person Namely: Suryanath Singh S/o Late Mata Far Singh R/Factory No. H-158, Sec-3 DSIDC, Bawan, Delhi, Age: 52 Years, Height: 5'5", Face: Round, Complexion: Shallow, Wearing: Blue Coloured Stripped Shirt Grey Pant & Black Shoes, has been missing since 26.01.2020 from the area of P.S. Bawana, Delhi.

In this regard a DD No. 35A dated 29.01.2020 has been lodged at P.S. Bawana, Delhi.

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out information about this Person but no clue has come to light so far.

Any person having any information or clue about this Person kindly inform to the following.

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Forces have to necessarily use force in self-defence: J&K HC

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The invisible mover

Here are examples of what a culture of trust can do for employee morale and organisational development

LIFFY THOMAS
PRINCE FREDERICK

How does an organisation build a culture of trust?"

The answer has two strands to it.

Firstly, structurally the organisation should have the capacity to accommodate a culture of trust. And then, in the dynamic environment of everyday interactions, it should promote small but significant efforts that add to this culture.

Simple gestures

In human interactions, we notice trust is built by solicitous acts carried out on a sustained basis. It doesn't have to be any different in the organisational context. Trust can get rock-solid during a crisis, if a sense of caring shines through the dark hour.

It takes just simple, meaningful and timely gestures to achieve this.

"In our intranet system, we have a small box that asks every employee - 'How are you feeling today?' There are three faces, green with the regular smiley; red with an inverted mouth-line, signifying a frown; and yellow with a mouth set in a flat line. When someone presses the red one, there is a trigger in my mailbox. It will also go to the people practice team. One of us will respond immediately to this person who doesn't seem to be having a good day at work."

If I don't see any response going out from the people practice team, I will respond myself. It sends out a message to employees that as an organisation we are responding to any need you

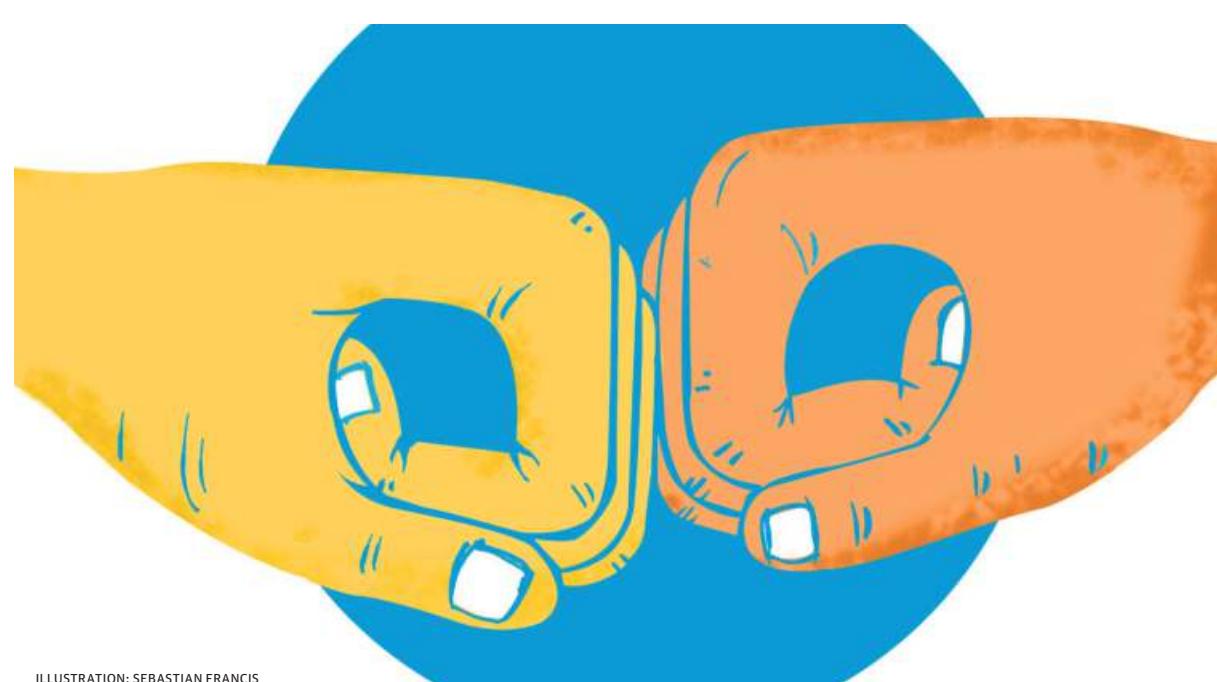


ILLUSTRATION: SEBASTIAN FRANCIS

may have," Sharon S. Rajkumar, general manager and happiness evangelist, Happiest Minds Technologies.

Timely help

Now, with COVID-19 raising concerns, there are some organisations that are proactive in ensuring their employees' safety. These companies have already started encouraging their employees to work from home as a precautionary measure.

Cactus is now planning a drill to see if its workforce across the country can work from home. As a big scientific communication company, this may cause certain impediments to its regular course of functioning, but it seems prepared to make the effort necessary to ford any challenges that may arise.

"In marketing, for instance, 20% of our employees already work from home. In certain other func-

tions, remote-working can affect operational efficiency and so our HR teams have asked all teams to gear up for a test run to see if all employees can shift to a remote-working arrangement if the situation warrants it. The idea is to check how ready each team is for such a working arrangement, and understand the pain points that may arise as a result of this change so that they can be addressed," says Dina Mukherjee, director marketing, Cactus.

When it is pointed out to her that this measure may essentially be about maintaining operations even in the event of a huge outbreak, Dina says that Cactus' remote-working systems have already been fine-tuned through a approach that embraces transparency and trust.

"I had worked with co-located teams before joining this organisation, where I

now have 16 people reporting to me and this includes colleagues from global teams where the contact is over mail or Skype. It was a challenge. I speak once a week with each team member; and once a month, we meet as a team. I set out my expectations and then I had to trust them to meet those expectations. My team built that trust for me."

A point of vulnerability

Building a culture of trust through caring may mean that organisations are willing to start from a point of vulnerability. "In our organisation, we have something called the happiness framework, which consists of 7 Cs, and credibility is one of them. When there is no conflict between the 'say' and the 'do', there is credibility. Organisations have to constantly check if their 'say-do' ratio is right," says Sharon.

Make it natural

Organisations have to build trust in a manner that does not make the exercise obvious.

It should be as natural as breathing, and can't be obtrusive.

"We have many informal ways to build trust, which is important; otherwise it will look like an organisational agenda," says Ritu Agast, head of HR, Pearson.

According to Ritu, weaving trust into the fabric of an organisation would mean looking at mundane aspects that constitute its regular day.

"In our organisation, there is a conscious effort to encourage discussions in the open, so that all members of a team feel included and valued.

"The meeting rooms are mainly used only when a conversation has to be kept private; or when a team needs the quiet space to

brainstorm for ideas," says Ritu.

She adds that announcements involving larger organisational policy matters, should be delivered to small groups by vertical heads so that there is scope for answering the many questions they may have.

Document wisely

"Documenting a discussion can create distrust. Unless there are action points to be derived from a conversation, do not document it," says Ritu.

An organisation is well on the way to building trust when it has a robust and dynamic feedback mechanism for its employees to suggest improvements to existing systems. Such features signify an openness on the part of the management.

Smita Saha, vice president - HR & Regional HR Lead, Astrazeneca says that 'Pulse', a bi-annual feedback process followed by the pharmaceutical company has given all

Awards for 15 women entrepreneurs

Niti Aayog recognises sterling initiatives

PTI

Niti Aayog conferred awards on 15 women for their entrepreneurial initiatives that have broken new ground in a variety of fields, including teaching, food industry and social sector. The awards are being presented Niti Aayog's Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) since 2018.

The awardees include Priyanka Mokshmar, co-founder of Vaayu Home Appliances that provides affordable and environmentally feasible alternatives to traditional AC units; Ramya Venkataraman's Centre for Teacher Accreditation (CENTA) that offers a certification framework for assessment of teachers' skills and competen-

cy; Shilpi Kapoor for BarrierBreak, a company focused on the accessibility of technology for those with disabilities; and Rinka Banerjee's Thinking Forks for a consulting organisation with expertise in the food and nutrition industry.

Nidhi Pant for combating issues around waste and farmers' living standards through her Science for Society's innovative idea of selling dehydrated vegetable snacks; and Anupriya Balikai's Spookfish Innovations for improving the standard of products and quality control assurance for food packaging. Praveen Nair was given the special jury award for Salaam Baalak Trust, which has worked in rehabilitating over 81,000 destitute and homeless children.

Sebi invites applications

PTI

Markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) is inviting applications to fill 147 senior executive-level vacancies.

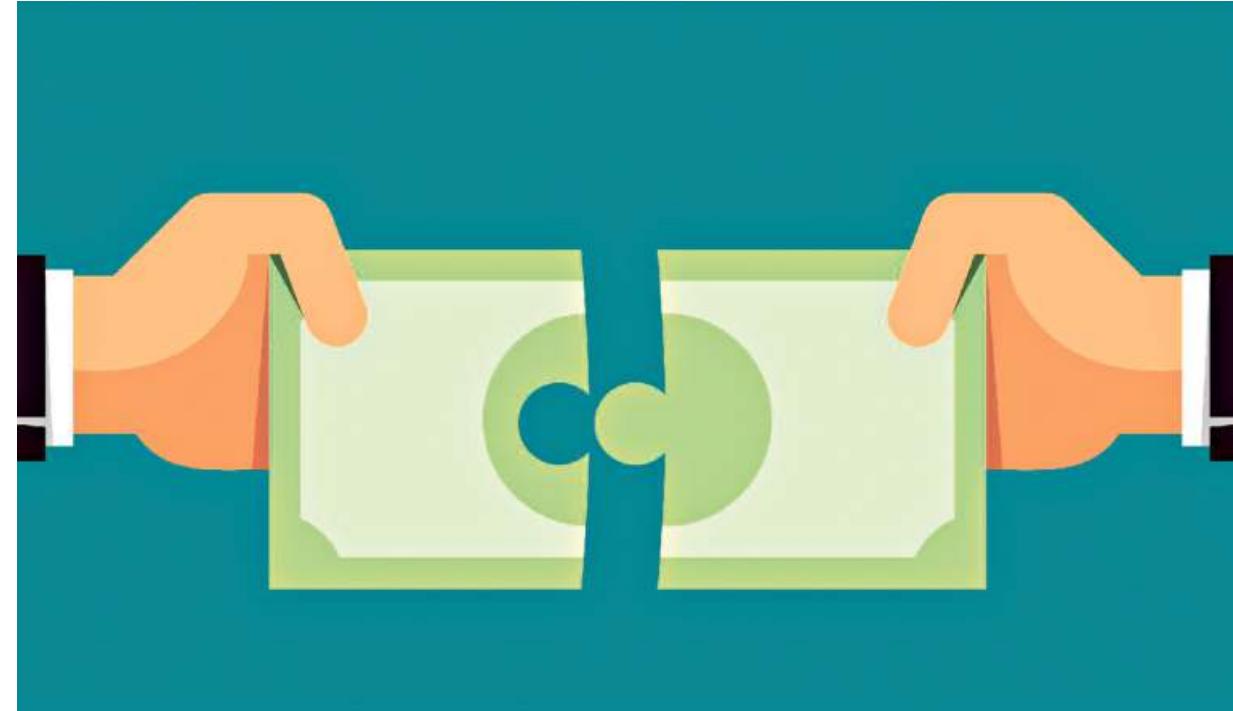
Applications have been invited for 80 posts of Assistant Manager for general stream, 34 posts for research stream and 22 vacancies for Information Technology department. In addition, it has invited applications for engineering and official language streams.

for the posts through the online mode only and the application window is open till March 23, the regulator said in a notice.

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'Most leaders rank diversity, culture low on list of priorities'

A new study shows there is a hidden value in closing the equality progress gap



GENERAL



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Human Resource	10	

ASSISTANT MANAGERS Advt. No. 03 / 2020

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A new research says that a significant gap exists between the way leaders and employees view progress toward equality in their organisations.

The Accenture report titled 'Getting to Equal 2020: The Hidden Value of Culture Makers' – based on findings from 28 countries including India – found that organisations are at an "inflection point."

According to the study, a majority of leaders (91% in India) said an inclusive workplace culture is crucial to the success of their business. At the same time, there is a perception gap. Nearly all leaders in India (94%) believe their people feel included, yet just one third (36%) of employees

agree. Two out of three leaders (66%) feel they create empowering environments where people have a sense of belonging, however less than half (48%) of employees agree.

Most leaders also rank diversity and workplace culture low on their list of top organisational priorities. According to them, brand recognition and quality (84%), followed by financial performance (78%) were among the top priorities. Only 37% ranked diversity and culture on top.

Aligning leaders' perceptions with those of their employees would yield significant upsides. Both women and men would advance faster and global profits would increase by US\$3.7

trillion, including US\$ 1.35 trillion in the Asia Pacific region, said the report.

If the gap were closed by half, in India, the proportion of women who feel like a key member of their team with real influence over decisions would rise from 1-in-5 to more than 1-in-3. Also, annual retention rate in India would increase from 88% to 90%.

Culture makers According to the report, a small percentage of leaders – 'Culture Makers' – are more committed to building equal cultures. These leaders recognise the importance of factors such as transparency in pay, family leave and the freedom to be creative in helping em-

ployees thrive.

Culture Makers globally are more likely to have spoken out on a range of workplace issues, including gender equality and sexual harassment.

Such leaders lead organisations that yield 3x higher profits than their peers.

The report lays out steps to help close perception gaps and drive progress toward a more equal culture that enables leaders to continuously evolve their strategies to meet changing needs.

Bold leadership, comprehensive action and an empowering environment are anchors for creating a culture of equality, added the report.

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IN BRIEF

Vivekananda Reddy
murder case goes to CBI

VIJAYAWADA
The High Court on Wednesday ordered that the Andhra Pradesh government should hand over the Y.S. Vivekananda Reddy murder case to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), keeping in mind the tardy pace of the investigation by the Special Investigation Team since the incident took place on March 15, 2019.

Dead birds spark bird
flu fear in Kerala

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
Dead birds found on trees at the MLA Hostel here caused a flutter on Wednesday. The incident sparked concern in the wake of the bird flu (Avian Influenza) outbreak in Kozhikode. But animal husbandry officials here said it could be a stray incident. Three dead birds were found on trees and recovered with the help of the Fire and Rescue Services.

Indian Bank to auction TDP MLA's property

'Firm in which he once served as director defaulted on payment of ₹220.66 crore'



Ganta Srinivasa Rao

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM
For the second time in six months, Indian Bank has put up a property belonging to TDP MLA Ganta Srinivasa Rao for e-auction.

The decision to e-auction an apartment built in 444 sq yards at Balayya Sastry Layout was taken because of default on loans to the tune of ₹220.66 crore.

The auction process was initiated by the bank's Daba Gardens branch. A notification was issued in newspapers stating that the online auction would be conducted on April 16. Application can

ISRO shortlists
368 student
'scientists'SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has shortlisted 358 high school students from across the country to be part of its second annual 'catch them young' programme, YuViKa. The provisional list has 10 local students in the Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) category. The final pool of over 100 'budding scientists' from Class 9 will be selected by March 31 and they will take part in a two-week residential awareness programme to be held in different ISRO centres from May 11 to 22, ISRO said.

The online selection process began in February. The five girls and five boys shortlisted from Karnataka are from schools in Nipani, Challakere, Bairindur, Holenarsipur, Bangarpet, and rural Mysuru.

Night sky



Brightly lit: Tourists enjoying the view of Visakhapatnam on their way to Kailasagiri Hill in a cable car on Wednesday. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

Quick legal service will be at hand in Kerala police stations

KELSA to launch early access to justice protocol today

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOCHI

Anyone asked to be present at a Police Station in Kerala for questioning can now get the support of lawyers at all Police Stations across the State, following the early access to justice protocol introduced by the Kerala State Legal Services Authority (KELSA). On reaching the police station, officials are expected to hand over a charter of rights available for every person. The rights of persons during the pre-arrest stage and while being arrested will be explained in the charter.

"You have the right to know why the police have

called you for interrogation and the right to know what the police think you have done. You have the right not to answer the questions which have the effect of self-incrimination. You also have the right to have a lawyer present if the police interview you. You can avail yourselves of free legal assistance from the nearest legal service authority," reads the charter.

One lawyer will be put in charge of cluster of four Police Stations in a locality and the service of the lawyer will be available round the clock. The lawyers will be paid by the authority for their service, said K.T. Nizar

Cocoon production in Karnataka poised to pick up

Climate change and use of pesticides bring mulberry disease under control in the State

LAIQH A KHAN
MYSURU

Cocoon production in Karnataka, which had been hit by a mulberry disease, appears poised to pick up just in time to meet the growing demand for indigenous silk.

The leafroller insect, which eats the shoots of mulberry plants, had affected the production in the State. With the climate change in the last few days and the use of pesticides bringing the disease under control, most cocoon markets have reported an increase in arrivals. The prices of cocoon, which had remained high for the last three months, had begun to ease in the last one week, said Deputy Director of Sericulture in Ramanagara district Munishi Basaiah.

Keralites stranded in airports,
State condemns Centre's order

Indians coming from Italy, Korea asked to get health certificates

G. ANAND
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala government will introduce a resolution with the Opposition approval in the Assembly on Thursday to condemn the Central government for decreeing that Indian citizens require a COVID-19 negative certification to travel to their country from Italy and Korea.

A calling attention motion moved by Communist Party of India (Marxist) legislator K.V. Abdul Kader on Wednesday drew the attention of the House to the plight of Keralites stranded at airports in Italy for want of such a certificate. Distressing video messages sent by the grounded families to their relatives here narrate their inability to procure such proof at the last minute before boarding their flight home.



Safety measures: An employee of the Kalamassery Medical College being disinfected using a spray. ■ H. VIBHU

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan slammed the Director General of Civil Aviation for making COVID-19-free medical testimonials compulsory for families which booked flights home. He said the decision was primitive. It sought to keep citizens out of their own country simply because they had an illness. It was a form of social ostracisation that did not suit a democratic polity.

He said he had sought the

Sabarimala temple to open tomorrow

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PATHANAMTHITTA

Amid the tight vigil in the district against the backdrop of the second wave of COVID-19 outbreak in Kerala, the Lord Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala will open on March 13 afternoon for the five-day monthly rituals in the Malayalam month of 'Meenom', which begins on March 14.

The Travancore Devaswom Board has appealed to devotees not to visit the shrine during the period as part of the government's efforts to check the spread of the virus. Talking to *The Hindu*, Devaswom executive officer Rajendraprasad said only routine rituals would be conducted. A skeleton staff would be deployed and there would be no accommodation or *annadanam* during the period. Neither the temple administration nor government agencies would provide any pilgrim facility at the holy hillock and Pampa.

Mr. Rajendraprasad said prasadams counters, including appam-arava-na sales counters, would remain closed. The *neyyabhishekam* ticket counter, too, would remain closed.

However, the board would perform the customary *neyyabhishekam* to the deity in the morning.

Telangana techie will be discharged soon: Minister

'No new cases reported in the State'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
HYDERABAD

A 76-year-old man from Kalaburagi, suspected to be infected with coronavirus, died on Tuesday night, and the exact cause of his death is being ascertained, officials said. Karnataka Health Minister B. Sriramulu on Wednesday said there was no confirmation that the death was due to COVID-19.

The patient's condition had improved and he would

go home soon, he told reporters here.

He asked people not to panic and said the government would provide treatment if anyone tests positive due to travel history to the affected countries.

The State reported its first COVID-19 case on March 2 when the software engineer, who returned from Dubai, tested positive.

South Central Railway plans trip from Tirupati to Kashmir

Train will leave Renigunta on May 26 and return on June 7

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI

The Indian Railway Catering Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) is planning to run a train to Kashmir under its flagship 'Bharat Darshan' programme directly from the temple city. The idea is to promote Tirupati, currently a tourist destination, as an originating point for national tourism.

The special train by South Central Railway (SCR) will leave Renigunta around midnight of May 26 to reach Delhi in the early hours of May 29. After local sightseeing, the train will proceed to Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra station, from where tourists will be taken to Srinagar by bus.

At Srinagar, the tourists will visit the Mughal Gardens, Dal Lake and take a



Shikara boat ride. Gulmarg at a height of 2,370 km and Sonmarg, 83 km away in Sindh valley, are the other attractions," announced IRCTC Joint General Manager N. Sanjeevaiah here on Wednesday. The tourists will be brought to Mata Vaishno Devi Katra station, from where they shall plan on their own to visit the shrine before departing, so as to reach Tirupati early on June 7.

"At ₹19,215 per head for

non-AC and ₹21,735 for AC three-tier coach, including food, accommodation on multi-sharing basis, tour escort, security on train and road transfers, this is the most economical package for a 10-night-11-day package," said Mr. Sanjeevaiah. Passengers can enter or detract at any of the stations, like Renigunta, Nellore, Ongole, Vijayawada, Guntur, Nalgonda, Secunderabad, Kazipet, Ramagundam and Nagpur.

Only 800 passengers can be accommodated on this train, which has 12 sleeper, one AC three-tier, one pantry and two guard coaches. Booking can be done at 0877-2222010 (Tirupati), 0866-2572280 (Vijayawada), 040-27702407 (Secunderabad zonal office) or the website www.irctctourism.com.

silk. "One consignment of 10,000 metres of fabric is unable to leave the port in China owing to COVID-19," he said.

But according to a Central Silk Board (CSB) source: "Indian silk weaving industry caters primarily to the domestic market. Exports play a limited role."

The silk goods manufacturers catering to the local market, including the sari makers, are unperturbed. "We use only home-grown silk to weave our Mysore Silk saris," said Krishnappa, General Manager of Karnataka Silk Industries Corporation (KSIC) in Mysuru. President of the Karnataka Weavers' Federation T.V. Maruthi said that most sari manufacturers do not depend on Chinese silk like earlier.



A file photo of the cocoon market in Ramanagara.

The cocoon market in Ramanagara, one of the largest in the State, was trading 25 to 30 tonnes of cocoons daily during the last three to four months when the production was low. But, in the last one week, the arrivals had crossed 50 tonnes a day,

consequently bringing down the price, the officials said.

The average price of cocoons, used to between ₹480 and ₹495 for the crossbreed and between ₹630 and ₹670 for the superior quality bivoltine during January and February, has eased to an av-

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOCHEE

Anyone asked to be present at a Police Station in Kerala for questioning can now get the support of lawyers at all Police Stations across the State, following the early access to justice protocol introduced by the Kerala State Legal Services Authority (KELSA). On reaching the police station, officials are expected to hand over a charter of rights available for every person. The rights of persons during the pre-arrest stage and while being arrested will be explained in the charter.

"You have the right to know why the police have

called you for interrogation and the right to know what the police think you have done. You have the right not to answer the questions which have the effect of self-incrimination. You also have the right to have a lawyer present if the police interview you. You can avail yourselves of free legal assistance from the nearest legal service authority," reads the charter.

'States to be asked to invoke Epidemic Disease Act'

Centre has constituted a Group of Ministers to review the steps taken for the management of COVID-19

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN

NEW DELHI

"It has been decided that all States/Union Territories should be advised to invoke provisions of Section 2 of the Epidemic Disease Act, 1897 so that all advisories being issued from time to time by the Ministry/State/UTs are enforceable," Health Secretary Preeti Sudan said on Wednesday, after a meeting of a high-level Group of Ministers here.

The GoM was constituted to review the measures taken for the management of COVID-19 in India.

Ms. Sudan added that as a measure of prevention, it is reiterated that as per the travel advisory, passengers with travel history to China, Hong Kong, Republic of Korea, Ja-

pan, Italy, Thailand, Singapore, Iran, Malaysia, France, Spain and Germany should undergo self-imposed quarantine for 14 days from the date of their arrival, and their employers should facilitate work-from-home for such employees during this period.

The meeting was also attended by Secretaries and other senior officials of the relevant Ministries and Departments.

IMA's appeal

Meanwhile, the Indian Medical Association (IMA) said that sharing data of infected people on a daily basis with the public has created panic across the country.

It appealed to the government to "classify the data" of



Precautionary steps: Medical personnel checking tourists at the Junagarh fort in Bikaner on Wednesday. ■ PTI

the pandemic and take appropriate action with "clinical precision."

In a release, the association noted that doctors and hospitals remain a silver lining in otherwise clueless sit-

uations for the common man, and every doctor should function as a source of credible information in their locality and instil confidence and trust in the public.

The International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) also issued new guidance to help protect children and schools from transmission of the COVID-19.

Practical checklists

"The guidance provides critical considerations and practical checklists to keep schools safe. It also advises national and local authorities on how to adapt and implement emergency plans for educational facilities," the release said. The release noted that in the event of school closures, the guidance includes recommendations to mitigate against the possible negative impacts on children's learning

and well-being. "This means having solid plans in place to ensure the continuity of learning, including remote learning options such as online education strategies and radio broadcasts of academic content, and access to essential services for all children. These plans should also include necessary steps for the eventual safe reopening of schools," it said.

The group added that the guidance, while specific to countries that have already confirmed the transmission of COVID-19, is still relevant in all other contexts.

"Education can encourage students to become advocates for disease prevention and control at home, in school, and in their community," the guidance said.

U.S. diplomat's visit cancelled

He was to meet Rajnath Singh

DINAKAR PERI

NEW DELHI

After some back and forth, U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper's visit has been cancelled due to the continuing proliferation of COVID-19, defence and diplomatic sources confirmed.

"The decision to cancel the visit came on Tuesday," an official source said on Wednesday. Mr. Esper was scheduled to visit New Delhi on March 15 and 16.

He was to hold discussions with his Indian counterpart Rajnath Singh and review the decisions taken during U.S. President Donald Trump's visit to India earlier this month.

This is the latest in a series of cancellations of high-



profile visits and engagements due to COVID-19 spreading across the globe.

Recently, the largest multilateral exercise, Milan-2020, hosted by the Navy in Visakhapatnam between March 18 and 28, was indefinitely postponed as a precaution.

There is no scarcity, says Mizoram govt.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The Mizoram government said there was enough supply of essential commodities to last three months. The State had announced on Monday that it would seal its borders, barring a few entry-exit points, triggering panic-buying.

The government also initiated a probe against a social media post that accentuated the panic. The post claimed that a COVID-19-infected man had entered the State from Assam. "They (people) have been made to realise that sealing of borders does not mean stopping the transportation of goods," said Lalhriatluai Ralte, Mizoram's Director of Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs.

53 Indians stranded at Rome airport without certificates

Indian embassy not available, complain passengers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

At least 53 Indian nationals got stranded at Rome's Fiumicino International Airport after authorities prevented them from boarding aircraft as they did not have medical certificates of being free of COVID-19. The Government of India had issued a notification on March 6 urging all travellers from South Korea and Italy to get tested at certified laboratories in those countries before arriving in India.

The notification came into force on the midnight of Tuesday, prompting airlines to stop those without the certificates. Writer Janice Paraiat, who is among the



Indian tourists waiting at a train station in Venice, Italy, on Tuesday. ■ GETTY IMAGES

stranded Indians at the Rome airport, complained that the embassy of India was not available for assistance to the passengers who were unaware of the notification. "It has been harrow-

ing. Hours of trying to make calls, being given multiple numbers, and conflicting information, and of course no compensation in sight," Ms. Paraiat said in a social media message.

Fijo of Kerala, who has been stranded with 39 passengers at the Rome airport since Tuesday, said they had been assured that a medical team from India would reach Rome to test them, but had not received any details.

Both the passengers at the airport told *The Hindu* that the notification was not known to the larger Indian community and as a result, many others of subsequent flights are expected to get stranded.

SC comes down on sexual harassment at workplace

Court order comes on a complaint by a bank officer

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Sexual harassment at workplace is an affront to their fundamental right to equality and a life with dignity, the Supreme Court has held in a judgment.

"Sexual harassment at the workplace is an affront to the fundamental rights of a woman to equality under Articles 14 and 15 and her right to live with dignity under Article 21 of the Constitution as well as her right to practice any profession or to carry on any occupation, trade or business," a Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud observed in a February 25 verdict.

The verdict, authored by Justice Chandrachud, was based on a complaint made

by a senior officer of the Punjab and Sind Bank, that she was transferred out from Indore to Jabalpur because she had complained about irregularities and corruption.

The woman, a chief manager and Scale IV officer, said she was also sexually harassed by her senior officer.

Mala fide transfer
Though the court held that employees cannot have a "choice of postings" unless if the transfer was proved to be mala fide or without authority, it found that her transfer was an act of reprisal against her complaints about the irregularities in the branch.

"She was transferred out and sent to a branch which

was expected to be occupied by a Scale I officer. This is symptomatic of a carrot and stick policy adopted to suborn the dignity of a woman who is aggrieved by unfair treatment at her workplace. The law cannot countenance this. The order of transfer was an act of unfair treatment and is vitiated by mala fide," the court concluded. Confirming the State High Court's decision in March last year to quash her transfer, the court ordered her to be reposted in Indore and held her entitled to receive litigation costs of ₹50,000 from the bank.

The court referred to the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act of 2013, saying its very purpose was to provide protection to working women.

Forcible dispossession of a person's property is a human rights violation'

Due process of law is must, says Supreme Court

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has reiterated that forcible dispossess of a person of his private property without due process of law is a violation of human rights.

In a recent judgment by a Bench led by Justice S.K. Kaul, the court stressed that right to property is both a human right and a constitutional right – the latter under Article 300A of the Constitution.

"It is accepted in every jurisprudence and by different political thinkers that some amount of property right is an indispensable safeguard against tyranny and economic oppression of the government... Property itself is the seed bed which must be



conserved if other constitutional values are to flourish," the judgment quoted a precedent.

The verdict came on the acquisition of a few acres in Sikkim by the State's Agricultural department in 1980 for building the Progeny Orchard Regional Centre. The land was recorded in two names – 1.29 acres in the name of the Maharaja of Sikkim and 7.07 acres in the

name of Man Bahadur Bennett, who was the father of the original appellant in this case. The judgment found that "in this case, the appellant could not have been forcibly dispossessed of her property without any legal sanction..."

The court gave the State three months' time from the date of the judgment for it to "make up their mind as to what they want to do". "Would they still like to retain the land by issuing a proper notification, or would they like to surrender possession of the land. In either eventuality, the question of payment for use and occupation would still arise, which will have to be determined in accordance with law," the judgment said.

GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT/ WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

PROJECTS CIRCLE, TIRUNELVELI-II

SHORT TERM TENDER NOTICE NO. 2nd / P.C / TNY / 2019-2020 DATED-09.03.2020

FORM OF CONTRACT : LUMP SUM (TWO COVER SYSTEM)

PRE QUALIFICATION-RATE TENDER AND RATE TENDER

For and on behalf of Governor of Tamil Nadu sealed Tenders are invited from the contractors registered in Public works Department in the First Class state level to the Office of Superintending Engineer, WRD/PWD., Projects Circle, Tirunelveli-627 002, (1) one sealed tender (Two cover system) consisting of two separate covers one for Pre-Qualification with EMD and other one for Price Tender for the work of Diversion of Surplus Water from the Ramanaidu Reservoir to the Jambunadhi System of Tanks and Excavation of a New Canal from Marankulam to Kallur Tank under the Kangeyan Aricut System in Gadana river of Tirunelveli District and (3) one sealed Price Tender with EMD for the work of Excavation of a New Link Canal from Umrelajangai Tank to Karumankul Tank in Kadayanallur Taluk of Tenkasi District with the name of works duly super scribbled in all the covers.

Tender Schedule Available Date : 16.03.2020 to 30.03.2020 upto 5.45 P.M.

Tender Schedule Receiving Date : upto 3.00 P.M. on 31.03.2020

Tender Schedule Opening for one Pre-Qualification tender and Two Price Tenders at : 3.30 P.M. on 31.03.2020

Total No. of works : 3 (Three)

Approximate Total value of all works : Rs.4358.30 Lakhs

[[(1)Rs.4005.16+(2)172.05+(3)181.09Lakhs]

For further details and tender documents visit the website www.tenders.tn.gov.in

(If any changes / Corrections / Corrigendum in the tender, it will be published in the above Government website only)

SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, WRD/PWD., PROJECTS CIRCLE, TIRUNELVELI 2.

DIPR/1363/TENDER/2020

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY

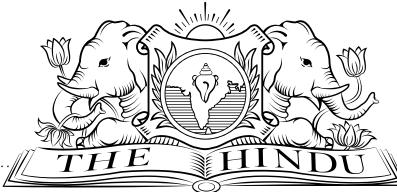


TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 17:00 HRS)

Forecast for Thursday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning and squalls likely at isolated places over Odisha, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit-Baltistan, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, east Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Vidarbha and Gangetic West Bengal.

CITY RAIN MAX MIN CITY RAIN MAX MIN

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...33.0	15.0	15.0	Kozhikode	...36.0	26.0	26.0
Ahmedabad	...30.0	18.0	18.0	Kurnool	...38.0	26.0	26.0
Aizawl	...23.0	11.0	11.0	Lucknow	...27.0	16.0	16.0
Allahabad	...28.0	14.0	14.0	Madurai	...37.0	24.0	24.0
Bengaluru	...34.0	22.0	22.0	Mangaluru	...36.0	25.0	25.0
Bhopal	...31.0	16.0	16.0	Mumbai	...30.0	20.0	20.0
Bhubaneswar	...34.0	22.0	22.0	Mysuru	...34.0	22.0	22.0
Chandigarh	...25.0	14.0	14.0	New Delhi	1.0	27.0	15.0
Chennai	...32.0	23.0	23.0	Patna	...27.0	16.0	16.0
Coimbatore	...35.0	24.0	24.0	Port Blair	...31.0	24.0	24.0
Dehradoon	...22.0	13.0	13.0	Puducherry	...33.0	24.0	24.0
Gangtok	...15.0	9.0	9.0	Pune	...32.0	18.0	18.0
Goa	...33.0	21.0	21.0	Raipur	...28.0	18.0	18.0
Guwahati	...31.0	15.0	15.0	Ranchi	10.2	25.0	16.0
Hubballi	...33.0	19.0	19.0	Shillong	...19.0	5.0	5.0
Hyderabad	...35.0	23.0	23.0	Shimla	...13.0	5.0	5.0
Imphal	...27.0	9.0	9.0	Srinagar	...14.0</td		



A royal somersault

Scindia's switch to the BJP poses questions about the politics he professed until now

Jyotiraditya Scindia's departure from the Congress and his arrival in the BJP reveal many traits of both parties and the man himself. That he is termed as the lost future of the Congress is itself an irony, but a more intriguing question is whether the party was intuitive in not honouring any further someone who could so effortlessly cross over to the opposite ideological extreme. His aunt and BJP leader Yashodhara Raje Scindia likened his switch to a "homecoming." In his crossing over, he also betrayed a popular mandate that he himself worked to win for the Congress in Madhya Pradesh in 2018. The Kamal Nath government is likely to collapse, and Shivraj Singh Chouhan who lost the poll appears set to return as CM with Mr. Scindia's collaboration. As for the Congress, which needs every morsel to keep itself alive, it can ill-afford the loss of a State government and an urbane face who has a wider appeal. With his decamping, a new template is on offer for other Congress leaders who are ambitious and impatient at the same time, and are free of the force of conviction. The Congress is drifting into an annihilating eddy. Its interim president, Sonia Gandhi, still its most authoritative person, will have to do what is in her command to steer it back on course. His exit poses two questions for the Congress – the commitment of its leaders to a core ideology, and what it can do to hold it self together in this moment of crisis. Surely, the party needs to promote a new crop of young and rooted leaders from the country's social diversity, who find it a vehicle of their aspirations and political empowerment.

Mr. Scindia's formal ordination as a Hindutva torch-bearer will not automatically raise him to a dominion role in a party so overwhelmingly under the personalised command of Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. True, he was an enthusiastic supporter of the abrupt nullification of Jammu and Kashmir's special constitutional status last year, but he had also openly called out the BJP government's insensitivity and inefficiency in controlling the communal violence in Delhi in February. Mr. Scindia will have to earn his saffron stripes, and the rites of that initiation will be prolonged and testing. The BJP, and the Modi-Shah combine that rail against dynastic and entitlement politics, will have to spin a new story for Mr. Scindia, who will be the fifth Gwalior royalty to adorn a formal position in the party. His father, Madhavrao Scindia, who spent most of his life as a Congressman, had started his career as a Jan Sangh leader. While his lineage might be a burden of sorts in the anti-elite politics that the current BJP leadership claims to promote, the aged association of his family with Hindutva politics could make him eligible for a welcome that the RSS usually does not offer to latecomers. As he said, it will be a new beginning.

For a level playing field

ECI's plans to strengthen the electoral process are welcome, but some require scrutiny

Even as electoral democracy has taken strong root in India, there is no gainsaying the fact that some unhealthy patterns have emerged. While voter electoral participation has remained robust, with the poor voting in large numbers, candidates and winners in Assembly and Lok Sabha polls have largely been from affluent sections – some even with several criminal cases against them. With elections becoming expensive, most parties have sought to field richer candidates irrespective of their merit in representing public interest. Current campaign finance regulations by the Election Commission of India that seek transparency on expenses by party and candidate, and prescribe limits on a candidate's expenditure, have not been sufficient deterrents. Poll results have tended to be a function of either party or leader preference by the voter rather than a statement on the capability of the candidate. In many cases, capable candidates stand no chance against the money power of more affluent candidates. News that the ECI is considering tightening ways to cap the expenditure of parties is therefore quite welcome, as it should provide a more level playing field. But even this can be meaningful only if there is more transparency in campaign finance which suggests that the electoral bonds system, as it is in place now, is untenable. The ECI has also suggested bringing social media and print media under the "silent period" ambit after campaigning ends. Regulating social media will be difficult and it remains to be seen how the ECI will implement this.

The ECI's plans to introduce new "safe and secure" voting methods, however, need thorough scrutiny. The use now of the EVM as a standalone, one-time programmable chip-based system, along with administrative safeguards renders it a safe mechanism that is not vulnerable to hacking. Any other "online" form of voting that is based on networked systems should be avoided. The idea of an Aadhaar-linked remote voting system that is sought to be built as a prototype could be problematic considering how the unique identity card has excluded genuine beneficiaries when used in welfare schemes, not to mention the inherent vulnerabilities in its recognition mechanisms. Two key measures are missing from the recommendations – the need for more teeth for the ECI in its fight against "vote buying" and hate speech. Increasingly, parties have resorted to bribing voters in the form of money and other commodities in return for votes, and while the ECI has tried to warn outfits or in some cases postponed polls, these have not deterred them. In times when hate speech is used during elections, the ECI has only managed to rap the offending candidates or party spokespersons on the knuckles but stricter norms including disqualification of the candidate would be needed for true deterrence.

Fail-safe exit for America, but a worry for India

New Delhi seems to be the only entity on the losing end in Afghanistan's unfolding game of chess and patience



HAPPYMON JACOB

The recently negotiated peace deal between the United States and the Taliban is unlikely to bring peace to Afghanistan, is geopolitically disadvantageous for India, and has serious implications for our national security. The terms of the deal, the manner in which it was negotiated as well as the geopolitical context in which it was stitched up indicate that it was more about providing an honourable exit route for the U.S.'s Trump administration from its military campaign in Afghanistan than about ending violence in the country. Within 24 hours of the much-publicised deal, violence and major disagreements about the deal began erupting in Afghanistan. Given that the Taliban negotiated from a position of strength, the Trump administration from weakness and little political will, and that the Ashraf Ghani administration in Afghanistan was by and large a clueless bystander in all of this, means that the country is perhaps on the verge of yet another long-drawn out and internecine battle.

Geopolitical futures

When the Taliban came to power in the mid-1990s in Kabul, it had few backers in the world, nor was it seen as a useful commodity by the great powers or the states in the region, except for Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. And the international community was almost united in offering a normative pushback against the violent outfit. As a result, the Taliban was at best reluc-

tantly tolerated until it messed up towards the end of its regime in Kabul. The Northern Alliance, supported by countries such as Russia and India, kept up its military pressure against the Taliban while it was in power. The situation today, at least for the moment, is perhaps the exact opposite of what was the case then. The Taliban today is also more worldly-wise and might have learned, during its exile, to deal with the international system and play the game of balance of power. More so, it may not necessarily be a puppet of the Pakistani deep state once it returns to power.

Given the war fatigue and the geopolitical stakes in Afghanistan, most of the key players in the region and otherwise have been in negotiations with the Taliban one way or another, and for one reason or another, lending the terror group certain legitimacy in the process. Today, the Taliban is the flavour of the season – anyone desirous of a stake in Afghanistan or does not want its domestic turmoil to spill over into their country would want to keep the Taliban in good humour. There is another reason why the Taliban has many suitors – because the U.S. withdrawal by and large suits everyone, be it China, Pakistan, Iran, or Russia. Suddenly, the Taliban appears to have been forgiven for its sordid past and unforgivable sins because for most of these countries, the U.S. is the bigger challenge than the Taliban.

India's Afghan puritanism

The only state that seems to be on the losing end, unfortunately, of this unfolding game of chess and patience in Afghanistan is India. It did not have to be this way: if the earlier Taliban regime was anti-India, it was also because India had militarily supported the Northern Alliance that kept up the military



pressure against the Taliban. Today's Taliban does not share the same animus for New Delhi. New Delhi, therefore, could have re-jigged its approach to Taliban this time around. However, it put all its eggs in the Ashraf Ghani basket, even on the eve of the signing of the peace deal in Doha. New Delhi also, for most intents and objectives, adopted a puritanical approach to the Taliban, neither reaching out to the Taliban nor exploiting the fissures within it; one, because it did not want to irk the elected government in Kabul and two, because it adopts a moralistic approach to dealing with extremist groups in general – not a smart diplomatic strategy. This moralistic attitude, also a diplomatically lazy one, I would say, that be it Pakistan or Afghanistan, India would only talk to the legitimate government in that country, is a self-defeating position. The world is not that perfect, nor are states all that uniform, created in the shape and image of the Westphalian forefather. Smart statecraft, therefore, is dealing with what you have and making the best of it.

As a result, India's relations with Afghanistan will take a hit in the immediate aftermath of the deal. Here is why. With China, India's strategic adversary, deeply involved in the geopolitics and geo-economics of the region, including in Afghanistan, India's traditional ability to influence the region's

political and security outcomes will be severely limited. This will be further exacerbated by the withdrawal of the U.S., India's closest friend, from the region. Other regional actors in Afghanistan are also less friendly towards India than ever before: Iran feels let down by India given how the latter has behaved towards it at the behest of the Americans; for Russia, India is only one of the many friends in the region – the exclusivity of Russia-India relations is a thing of the past – and Pakistan would consider targeting India a fair game.

Unless New Delhi carefully envisages a counter strategy, these factors will increasingly push India into a geopolitical tough spot in the region. It should worry us that our political class is focused on domestic politics while the region is becoming ever more uncertain and evidently unfavourable to us.

Taliban and Kashmir angle

While the direct physical impact of the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan on Kashmir will be negligible, this will not be without serious implications for the unfolding situation in Kashmir's restive regions. The most important impact is going to be psychological. Disenchanted Kashmiri youngsters, and there are a lot of them, will interpret the events in Afghanistan as follows: "If the mighty superpower USA could be defeated by the Taliban in Afghanistan with help from the Pakistan army, defeating Indian forces in Kashmir won't be impossible after all." This enthusiasm is completely misplaced, but that is not the point. That the Kashmiri youth might pick up guns drawing inspiration from the situation in Afghanistan is indeed the point.

Second, the U.S.-Taliban deal cannot survive without Pakistan's

assistance towards ensuring its success, and the U.S. and its allies recognise that. Such a recognition of Pakistan's utility provides the country with an ability, as and when it wishes to, to up the ante in Kashmir.

Third, New Delhi's official statement which describes Afghanistan as a "contiguous neighbour" – meaning that India considers Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) a part of its sovereign territory – will make Pakistan and China sit up and take notice. Recall that India also made a similar claim about Aksai Chin in the wake of its August decision on Kashmir. Erstwhile rhetorical claims on PoK and Aksai Chin have suddenly assumed lot more geopolitical significance today making conciliatory approaches to conflict resolution ever more difficult.

Victory of fundamentalism

The return of the Taliban, however unavoidable that may be, signals a victory of religious fundamentalism in the region and it will have serious implications for the region as a whole. Not only is the Taliban's return a victory for a puritanical religious outfit, it is also an act in legitimising it. More so, given that a new Taliban-led dispensation in Afghanistan will be far more accepted by the international community than the last time around (1996 to 2001) also means increased acceptability for such regimes in general, either out of necessity or as a function of geopolitical calculations. That the Taliban mass-murdered its opponents into statehood in the 21st century and that this might provide potential inspiration to other outfits in the region and outside should indeed worry us.

Happymon Jacob teaches national security at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

A COVID-19 control plan made simple

The country needs a dedicated disaster management operation, with the Prime Minister at the helm



T. JACOB JOHN

The COVID-19 outbreak is not yet an epidemic in India – as of today. From what is happening globally, a huge epidemic, an avalanche, growing bigger week after week, is predictable. Today it is a crisis looming on the horizon, but tomorrow it may turn out to be a disaster of unprecedented proportions.

The track record

Culturally we are always optimistic; we do not react fast as most problems, even outbreaks, have a tendency to settle down. So far we have stoically confronted all the new and resurgent communicable diseases that appeared in recent decades. We have shown surge capacity of crisis management during the 2018 Nipah epidemic in Kerala. We handled the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) scare of 2003 extremely efficiently. The 2009 pandemic influenza H1N1 was also confronted reasonably well. Our weakness in dealing with seasonal influenza is embarrassing: there is no national policy to control seasonal flu. We ignore the high flu death rates reported annually. We manage

short-term crisis very well but not long-term disease control – like running a short sprint but with no stamina to go on running a marathon.

From early February the reality of a very unusual SARS COVID-19 epidemic was known to all Health Ministry officers. In early January only China was known to have the coronavirus, but today more than 100 countries are affected. That speed is about the same as that of the pandemic influenza H1N1 of 2009.

What comes first

The onerous responsibility of confronting SARS COVID-19 does not rest with the Union Health Secretary who is the administrative head of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. It does not rest with the Director of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) unless specifically empowered; The NCDC functions well only when smaller problems erupt in various States. The Director General of Health Services (DGHS) could be the person, but epidemic control is more than health-care service. The DGHS has limited executive powers and there is no competent public health infrastructure under the Directorate. The job of the Department of Health Research and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) under the unified command of the Secretary Department of Health Research-cum-DG

ICMR, is to research all questions identified by the DGHS and the Director of the NCDC. We do need research but priority number one is the control of the epidemic.

The Minister for Health is a key person but this epidemic is more than a medical problem. Many ministries such as those of travel, tourism, industry, education, economics, railways and local governments are all being affected. So this disease avalanche requires responses of unprecedented speed, spread and magnitude.

All officials listed above have a hundred and one things on their minds all the time. India needs a dedicated disaster management operation for this epidemic. The one person who can, and must, take immediate responsibility and manage the crisis the best possible way is none other than the Prime Minister himself. The Prime Minister should declare a national emergency and establish a 'war-machinery', with a 'task force' of the best experts in the country, of proven capability and track record against communicable diseases.

The war room should have all necessary facilities and should run

a 24-hour control room. The support of the Ministers of all the relevant Ministries and their officers should be accessible to the task force. The job of the task force ought to have one goal: manage the epidemic, to minimise the spread and damage of the virus, and to mitigate the sufferings of all people everywhere.

Once the task force designs a strategy with tactics, the Ministry of Health as well as all Ministries must implement them. The terms of reference of the task force must include the design of immediate, short-term, medium-term and long-term responses. The absence of such an empowered agency has had serious repercussions.

The slip-ups

International airports were instructed by the Ministry concerned to screen all passengers arriving from China. That was fine and towards January-end and early-February, two individuals returning from Wuhan, China, to Kerala were detected to be infected with "severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)". The time to establish a national agency such as the task force to advise the government on all necessary interventions was immediately thereafter. A 24-hour control room should have been operational by the second week of February. The infection was rapidly expanding in various countries. Shortly thereafter some 24 coun-

tries outside China, Hong Kong and Macau were known to be infected. When was Italy identified as a potential source of virus in travellers? On February 20, the following countries had reported over 20 infections: Japan, Thailand, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan. Italy was not in that list.

The next day Italy had 20 cases; thereafter the daily numbers were 79, 155, 229 and 322. Italy was identified as a potential source for screening of air travellers only on March 1. On February 29 a family travelling from Italy to Kerala did not fall within the screening net. That flaw resulted in a cluster of cases in Kerala – Italy should have been identified as a potential source on February 22 when the number of cases jumped from 20 to 79. All existing agencies and officers have many responsibilities. An agency exclusively for managing a constant and continuous watch on all developments – biomedical and sociological – and to recommend remedial and containment measures is essential in order to face this epidemic.

Public education must be technically correct and timely. Only one agency should be the source of all information; the cacophony prevalent now must be curbed. The ball is in the Prime Minister's court.

Dr. T. Jacob John, a retired doctor from CMC Vellore, is Chairman, Rotary Club of Vellore TB Control Society

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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



Exit Scindia

The Indian National Congress's ignominious defeat in the last Lok Sabha election, just after winning some Assembly elections, should have made its leaders to deeply introspect, close ranks and work together for the revival of the party (Page 1, "Scindia meets Modi, quits Congress", March 11). But it seems the stranglehold of the old guard and coterie politics continues to hold sway in the grand old party, giving no room for the younger generation. The exit of a high profile leader like Jyotiraditya Scindia from the party indicates its moribund state and the short-sightedness of the leadership. The fact that the party could not accommodate a leader of some stature in a State

where it is in power speaks loudly about poor political management skills. From its political victories in some States in the last two years, it is evident that people are willing to give the Congress another chance, but it only appears to be frittering away its chances. Mr. Scindia's exit could now result in a domino effect as far as other younger leaders such as Sachin Pilot and Milind Deora are concerned. It is time the old guard takes note and saves the party from further marginalisation in the political arena.

KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI,
Hyderabad

■ Mr. Scindia's unceremonious exit has sent a tremor through India's political landscape, with many questioning the

old party's lack of support to young leaders. It is clear that the Gandhi family is wary of the creation of an alternative power structure within the party. Even though the Congress party came back to power in Madhya Pradesh after years, it is unfortunate that it will not be able to fulfil its electoral promises.

C.K. SUBRAMANIAM,
Navi Mumbai

■ The predicament of the Congress, especially in Madhya Pradesh, is more a self-inflicted one. It appears the trouble has been brewing for a while, and by wantonly not addressing Mr. Scindia's genuine concerns. After the Lok Sabha election debacle, it seems that a lack of internal democracy is catalysing the disintegration of the Congress. At this rate, it won't come as a surprise if

the Congress is reduced to a status of a regional party – if not already.

A. VENKATASUBRAMANIAN,
Tennur, Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu

■ I feel that there is nothing for the BJP to be elated about. Mr. Scindia's act is one of rank opportunism. What is the guarantee that the defector will stick on with the BJP?

AADARSH NARAYANAN,
Coimbatore

■ The most revealing issue is how without an iota of self-introspection, Mr. Scindia, who is a politician with promise, has chosen to join a party which he has opposed tooth and nail – for its authoritarian outlook and its undemocratic ways of functioning. He could as well have formed a separate entity in the Assembly with

loyal MLAs backing him. Finally, most of our politicians prove that they are power hungry.

K. RAMALINGAM,
Chennai

■ Mr. Scindia has said he left the Congress because he was stifled and could not serve the people. I think both he and others like him still in the Congress should leave the mother party and form the real Indian National Congress, sans prefixes or suffixes, where the young at heart with fire in their bellies can work in a democratic way for the betterment of the people and the country. The time for action is now.

MATHEW GAINNEOS,
Thiruvananthapuram

Banking woes
It is not the lack of existing rules and regulations that

should be cited for the messy situation in the banking system. It is the slackness and indifference on the part of the enforcement agencies, for reasons best known to them, especially in the case of Yes Bank. It is also not clear why the promoter is being questioned for his misdeeds after much delay especially when there was evidence earlier to nail him. It is a pity that the interests of lakhs of depositors are being compromised due to the impasse attitude of the regulator and the government. With the imminent merger of banks, investors are also being deprived of varied choices of banks to invest in different baskets.

V. SUBRAMANIAN,
Chennai

Ruling against judicial transparency

A recent Supreme Court verdict has barred citizens from accessing court records under the RTI Act



PRASHANT REDDY T.

In its recent decision, in the *Chief Information Commissioner v. High Court of Gujarat* case, the Supreme Court, regrettably, barred citizens from securing access to court records under the Right to Information (RTI) Act. Instead, the court held that such records can be accessed only through the rules laid down by each High Court under Article 225 of the Constitution. The Registry of the Supreme Court was litigating a similar case (*Registrar, Supreme Court of India v. R.S. Misra*) before the Delhi High Court for several years after the CIC had ordered it to provide copies of pleadings filed in a case, under the RTI Act, rather than insisting on litigants filing an application under the Supreme Court Rules.

Though the particular decision taken earlier this month does not preclude the application of the RTI Act to the administrative side of the court, it does firmly slam the door shut on accessing, under the RTI Act, the millions of court records filed on the judicial side.

Importance of sharing records
Before explaining the faults and the consequences with this decision of the Supreme Court, it is necessary to understand the importance of court records to public discourse in India. A significant number of decisions taken by the courts influence our daily life. Every prosecution before a criminal court is essentially an opportunity to hold the police accountable just as every writ petition is an opportunity to hold the government accountable. Similarly, a significant number of commercial lawsuits are opportunities to learn more about corporations and the manner in which commercial transactions are executed in the country.

In all of these cases, the pleadings filed by either party contain reams of information that are useful to a range of stakeholders such as citizens, journalists, academics, shareholders, etc., who can better inform the public discourse on the ramifications of



GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO

these decisions. This is especially true in cases of public interest litigation, where the courts indulge in policymaking on the basis of the report of an *amicus curiae* or an expert committee set up by judges. The reports of these committees are not accessible to third parties, though they may be impacted by these decisions, because they form part of the court record and are hence outside the purview of the RTI Act.

There is no question of arguing for the confidentiality of these records because it is now a well-recognised principle that all judicial proceedings must take place in open court, unless prohibited by law for reasonable purposes. But, while it is completely legal for anyone to sit in court and take notes while a lawyer narrates the content of pleadings, the courts make it as difficult as possible to access the pleadings in a simple manner. That said, for those with deeper pockets, it is only a matter of paying out a bribe to get copies of pleadings "informally".

The overriding Section

The Supreme Court's verdict in this case hinged on Section 22 of the RTI Act which states that the RTI Act shall override any other law to the extent that the latter is inconsistent with the former. The Section states: "Act to have an overriding effect – The pro-

visions of this Act shall have effect notwithstanding anything inconsistent therewith contained in the Official Secrets Act, 1923 (19 of 1923), and any other law for the time being in force or in any instrument having effect by virtue of any law other than this Act."

The wording of the provision reveals that the drafters of the RTI Act were clearly aware that it may conflict with other laws and wanted to ensure that the procedure under the Act overruled the procedure in existing legislation. Despite this crystal-clear wording of Section 22, the Supreme Court and, on previous occasions, the High Courts, have concluded exactly the opposite.

In this particular judgment, the apex court cited an obscure service law precedent to claim that a general law with a *non-obstante* clause (such as Section 22) cannot overrule a special law. What appears to have misled the court's attention is that the wording of the *non-obstante* clause in the precedent was completely different from Section 22 and hence the precedent itself was not applicable to the facts of this case.

Further, not satisfied with citing an obscure precedent, the court also proceeded to speculate that Section 22 could not be interpreted in a manner that implied repeal of other laws since the RTI Act was clear that it was

repealing only the earlier Freedom of Information Act, 2002. This is bewildering reasoning because the entire point of *non-obstante* clauses like Section 22 is to save the legislature the job of identifying each and every conflict between different laws. The reason that the Freedom of Information Act had to be specifically repealed was because it was on exactly the same issue as the RTI Act.

From a citizen's perspective, this decision is problematic for two reasons. One, most High Court Rules allow only parties to a legal proceeding to access the records of a case. Some High Courts may allow third parties to access court records if they can justify their request. This is entirely unlike the RTI Act, where no reasons are required to be provided thereby vastly reducing the possibility of administrative discretion.

Logistical difficulties

The second reason this judgment spells bad news is that unlike the RTI Act, the procedure under the Rules of most High Courts is challenging from a logistical perspective, apart from lacking in any significant safeguards. An application under the RTI Act can be made by post, with the fee being deposited through a postal order. The procedure is simple enough to enable most citizens file RTI applications by themselves. Not so for the procedure under the High Court Rules. Most High Courts and the Supreme Court require physical filing of an application with the Registry, and a hearing before a judge to determine whether records should be given. In an atmosphere where it is becoming increasingly difficult for ordinary litigants to even enter court premises because of thoughtless measures in the name of security, it becomes a logistical nightmare for citizens to file an application with the Registry.

The Supreme Court fails to understand that the judiciary's track record of transparency is vastly inferior when compared to other arms of the state. In today's world where every public institution is striving to become more transparent, the continued resistance from the judiciary to making itself transparent in a meaningful manner will have an eroding effect on its legitimacy.

The writer is an advocate

Economic uncertainty rises

Supply shocks from China have caused a fall in production and decline in demand, leading to fears of recession



ARUN KUMAR

a decline in inflation. Expenditures on health and disease control will rise but not enough to counter the slowdown.

The impact on the small producers is likely to be sharper due to the fact that they have small working capital. As demand declines, they are left holding inventory and also have to pay wages; this exhausts their working capital. If their units shut down for even a few months, it becomes difficult to bring them back to life. The financial sector is not very much attuned to catering to their demand and, hence, they have to depend on the more expensive source of private funds.

Also, as the economy declines, the already substantial non-performing assets (NPAs) of banks and the non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) will increase in India. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has already reported falling business and consumer confidence and a decline in capacity utilisation in the organised sectors of the economy. These factors are being aggravated by the virus-related impact, further denting investment.

Boosting demand and investment

Consumer confidence will remain low for a while even after the intensity of the spread of the virus declines with the onset of summer. But there is no certainty about this since the World Health Organization (WHO) says that not enough is known about this virus. People the world over are scared and anticipate trouble ahead, so they are unlikely to resume buying discretionary items. Car sales in China have plummeted and are unlikely to revive soon. People save more when the future is uncertain; hence, demand is not likely to increase immediately. Due to fear of lockdown and shortages, it is likely that people will hold more cash and essential items at their homes. Central banks will have to be prepared to issue more currency. They have reduced interest rates but this will have little impact since the primary reason for the global downturn and stock market volatility is decline in sentiment following the spread of the virus. It is not a cyclical downturn.

In brief, the problem is not fully understood but fears of a big impact have grown. Supply shocks emanating from China have spread and due to impact on production, incomes are declining, leading to a fall in demand and threat of global recession. The poor are likely to be impacted more in India. At present only the short run can be anticipated but since uncertainty has increased, governments will have to take fiscal steps anticipating the worst in the long run.

Arun Kumar is Malcolm Adiseshiah Chair Professor, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi

A self-created political decline

The Congress's 'first family' is precipitating the fall of a party it was charged with safeguarding

MOHAMMED AYOOB

With Jyotiraditya Scindia's defection, the Congress Party has advanced further on the path toward an apparent self-fulfilling prophecy of political irrelevance. It is easy to blame Mr. Scindia for a lack of morality, ideological commitment and loyalty to his party but such blame only scratches the surface of the problem. Lack of morality and party loyalty and the absence of ideological commitment among Indian politicians are on display every day. The Congress leadership should have factored this into its calculations, especially when it comes to relatively young, ambitious and capable members.

The Congress high command's inability to take seriously clear indications of Mr. Scindia's unhappiness, especially over the party high command's dithering over his nomination to the Rajya Sabha, shows a shocking degree of political ineptitude. Moreover, Mr. Scindia's recent statements on the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), dissenting from the leadership's views, and his call for greater inner-party democracy should have also rung alarm bells in 10 Janpath.

Despite the façade of ideological division between the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political culture of the two parties is quite similar. As the Scindia affair – and it is not the exception but the rule in Indian politics – clearly denotes, the objective of most Indian politicians is power and more power. The Ajit Pawar episode in Maharashtra and the blatant luring by the BJP of Congress and Janata Dal (Secular) MLAs in Karnataka in exchange for ministerial berths were recent demonstrations of this phenomenon.

However, there are three major differences between the BJP and the Congress. First, the BJP, thanks to its parent organisation the RSS, is a cadre-based party with organisational discipline instilled into the psyche of its members. Two, loyalty to the party and to its residual ideology among Congress members has plummeted as the party has turned into a family enterprise. Three, the BJP has been in power for the past six years



and is far-better equipped to attract potential defectors through the offer of perks and offices.

However, these factors by themselves do not provide the full explanation for the defections from the Congress of ambitious politicians such as Mr. Scindia. Although the RSS-BJP leadership may be authoritarian, the political environment within the Congress seems to be far more stifling of dissent. The decades-long vice-like control of the party by

the Gandhi family and its sycophants is the main reason for this repressive atmosphere. Bright and gifted second-rung figures in the party are afraid of expressing disagreement with the Gandhi family's views, leave alone criticise them, even in private. One wonders how these talented politicians, many of whom have been denied their due place despite their capabilities, have continued to remain within the fold despite the clearly oppressive atmosphere.

Speculation is rife that Sachin Pilot, passed over for the Chief Minister's position of Rajasthan, may be contemplating following Mr. Scindia's footsteps. Some observers believe that one of the reasons why Mr. Scindia and Mr. Pilot, both in their 40s, have been passed over for the positions they coveted and possibly deserved is because of Sonia Gandhi's apprehension that they may outshine her son, also in his 40s, and capture the party's leadership.

If true, this is an example of the worst form of nepotistic behaviour, and it has likely written the political death warrant of India's Grand Old Party. The Congress seems to have become so organisationally decrepit that it is difficult to imagine that it can revive itself. Over the years, it has become increasingly clear that the 'first family' is precipitating the decline of the very institution that it was charged with safeguarding. Mr. Scindia's defection has brought the party closer to such an end-game scenario.

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



DATA POINT

Not passing the buck

The dynamic pricing of petrol has not resulted in a fall in retail prices commensurate with crude oil price crashes. Crude oil prices have fallen again lately, coinciding with an economic slowdown, but the high share of central excise duties have resulted in retail prices remaining relatively high. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan and Suman Sen

1. LOST IN TRANSLATION | Petrol prices in Delhi (—, left-axis) remained above the ₹70/litre mark on March 10. Since late-2014, crude oil has experienced price crashes on many occasions. But this has rarely translated into a reduction in retail petrol prices. This is largely due to the rupee's depreciation and a high share of excise duties

2. CENTRE'S HIGH SHARE | The graph shows retail petrol price in Delhi (—) and the States' (—) share of revenue from it. While the States' share has remained constant, the Centre's has increased many times after late 2014, peaking in mid-2016. This explains why the retail price never dropped despite a huge crash in oil prices

The centre has increased its share of taxes from petrol further during the economic slowdown

3. TAX AND CESS ACCRUAL | Due to an ever-increasing share of the central excise duty on petrol products, the government's revenue soared while that of the States' also gradually increased. Graph shows revenue earned by the Centre (—) and the States (—) in ₹crore

4. STATES OF VAT | Telangana charges the highest VAT/Sales Tax on petrol as of March 2020. Gujarat, Punjab, Arunachal Pradesh levy the least. The table shows VAT/Sales tax range for various States as of March 2020

VAT (% range)	States
<20	Gujarat, Punjab, Arunachal
=20 & <25	J & K, Tripura, Haryana, Bihar, Jharkhand, Meghalaya, Goa, Mizoram
=25 & <30	Delhi, U.P, Maharashtra, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, H.P, Manipur, Nagaland, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, W.B.
=30 & <35	T.N., M.P., Assam, Karnataka, A.P., Kerala, Rajasthan
>35	Telangana

Source: PPAC, Indian oil corporation limited

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 12, 1970

India not to go in for atom bomb

The Defence Minister, Mr. Swaran Singh turned down in the Lok Sabha to-day [March 11, New Delhi] the Jan Sangh member, Mr. Kanwarlal Gupta's demand that India should go nuclear. Replying to a half-hour debate raised by Mr. Gupta, the Minister said nothing had happened to change the policy decision taken by the Government in this matter. Mr. Singh described as "hypothetical" and declined to answer a question whether the Government's decision meant that India would not go in for nuclear weapon programme for all times to come. But he said that the "primary consideration" (in taking such decisions) was the safeguarding of the nation's security. At the present moment, the decision of the Government was as had been stated. "If the situation changes, can decide what other action we should take," he observed. Mr. Swaran Singh also assured the members that India would not sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in its present form even though it had been ratified by more than the requisite 40 countries. The treaty was no guarantee against vertical proliferation of the nuclear weapons by the nuclear club members.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 12, 1920

Social Conditions in England.

Mr. A. Rangaswami Iyengar delivered a lecture in Tamil on "Social Condition in England" last when the Hon'ble Mr. B.V. Narasimha Iyer presided. In the course of his lecture he drew pointed attention to the ordered civil life in England as contrasted with our own undeveloped and irregular civic consciousness. Given a sound education in the public school at their early age, brought up in the healthy atmosphere of freedom with an innate sense of equality of man to man, the "get up" and behaviour of even the commonest individual in England is something arresting. In public places like the market and railway stations, the self-imposed discipline and order is equally remarkable. Advertising to club life, he said, the freest interchange of thought on subjects like politics, party polemics and sociology was characteristic and the influence it exerts on men and things is great and potential. The hospitality, wholesome and voluntary which is characteristic of Indian homes is a thing impossible in England. Each man is sufficient unto himself and thought of the neighbour cannot disturb the tenor of an Englishman's daily routine. Even a domestic servant freely discussed politics with a feeling that he was one among the democracy.

FROM PAGE ONE

COVID-19 is now a pandemic, says WHO

Kerala has till now reported 17 cases, including the three patients who were discharged last month following recovery.

Pune authorities said three more persons, who were part of a 40-member tour group that recently travelled to Dubai, have tested positive. In a late night development, a Nagpur-based man tested positive for coronavirus. This takes the tally of positive cases in Pune district to eight and that in Maharashtra to 11.

2 IT employees affected
Two employees working with IT companies Dell and Mindtree have tested positive, according to company statements. However, their locations were not disclosed.

Army sources said on Wednesday that 83 individuals who arrived from Italy on AI flight AI1138 on March 11 have been quarantined at Manesar. "The evacuees will be monitored for two weeks by doctors. If any individual is suspected to be infected, he/she will be shifted to an isolation facility," they said.

"About 119 people who were on board the Diamond Princess cruise ship off the Japan coast and brought back in a special flight from Japan and currently at Manesar will complete their two weeks of quarantine on Wednesday. Once the final test results are out, which are expected by Thursday, they will be allowed to go home with their detailed documentation sent to the District/ State surveillance units for further surveillance," a source noted.

948 evacuated
India has so far evacuated 948 passengers from coronavirus-affected countries. Of these, 900 are Indian citizens and 48 belong to other nationalities.

A 76-year-old man suspected to be infected has died in Karnataka's Kalaburagi, the District Health and Family Welfare department said on Wednesday. "Mohammed Hussain Siddiqui's swab samples have been sent to a lab in Bengaluru. The report is awaited," offi-

cials said. Mr. Siddiqui had recently returned from Saudi Arabia.

Public transport

The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has issued an advisory to reduce the spread of the virus by taking steps to ensure sanitisation of seats, handles and bars in public transport.

"The hygiene and sanitation may be stepped up at all the bus terminals and the display of public health messages may be ensured on public transport vehicles," it said.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in his statement in the Rajya Sabha noted that India would send a team of doctors to Italy by Thursday for testing its nationals, while samples of 529 more people have been brought from Iran.

Iran, Italy in focus
He said the Indian government was working with the Iranian authorities to operate some limited commercial flights for facilitating early return of the remaining Indians after testing them. He added that Iran and Italy were two "focal points" for the government. "There are over 6,000 Indians in various provinces of Iran, which include 1,100 pilgrims, nearly 300 students and about 1,000 fishermen. The others are on a longer term stay for earning a livelihood and education," he said.

Recalling former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's statement, "When a big tree falls, the earth beneath shakes", the Home Minister attacked the Congress over the anti-Sikh riots and claimed that 76% of riot-related deaths had taken place under Congress watch.

"They have no moral right to talk about riots," he told

the Lok Sabha, though the Congress members had left the House.

On BJP leader Kapil Mishra's speech, he said the matter was being examined by the police.

Giving details of the action taken by the police, the Home Minister said that 700 first information reports (FIRs) had so far been registered, 2,647 people arrested and 1,100 people identified as those involved in riots with the help of a special face recognition software. "Face recognition software does not look at their religion or their clothes," the Home Minister said.

Furthering the conspiracy theory, the Home Minister said 300 people had come in from neighbouring Uttar Pradesh during the riots and

62 social media accounts were active during that period. He informed the House that three persons had been arrested for allegedly funding the riots.

He said two special investigation teams had been formed to handle offences of a serious nature.

Dwelling on the reasons why the riots spread so fast, Mr. Shah said northeast Delhi, spread over 61 sq. km, had the highest population density, with 20 lakh people living in mixed localities with very narrow lanes that made it difficult for the police and fire brigade vehicles to move in quickly. The area had a history of riots and was known for its criminal elements, he said.

Mr. Shah said the government had written to the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court to nominate a judge who could head a claims commission to work on attaching the properties of those who indulged in riots and damaged property.

Rajya Sabha adjourned in quick time

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha was adjourned till 2 p.m. within five minutes of convening on Wednesday morning after the Opposition parties raised the Delhi riots and the 48-hour ban on two Malayalam news channels for their coverage of the riots.

The Opposition again heckled Minister of State for Finance Anurag Thakur when he got up to table government papers. For the past many days, the Opposition has been jeering at Mr. Thakur, whenever he stood up in the House, repeating his *goli maaro* comment during the Delhi election campaign.

The Left parties had moved an adjournment motion demanding a discussion on the 48-hour ban imposed on Asianet News and Media One TV. The I&B Ministry revoked the ban within hours with Union Minister Prakash Javadekar conceding it as a mistake. CPI(M) leader Elamaram Karim told presspersons that "The fact that they issued orders to ban the two channels show their fascist intentions. The order was symptomatic of their behaviour where they will use administrative force to stop any kind of dissenting voice."

Some Congress members raised the political happenings in Madhya Pradesh where the party's government is facing a crisis.

Shah lauds police for controlling riots

Centre plans to attach properties of arsonists

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday lauded the Delhi Police for "controlling the Delhi riots within 36 hours", and informed the Lok Sabha that the Centre planned to attach the properties of all those who indulged in arson and rioting.



In the hot seat: Home Minister Amit Shah speaking in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday. ■ LSTV/PTI

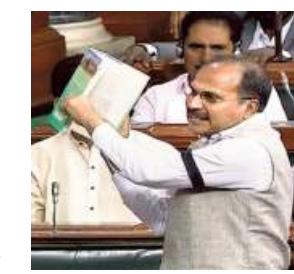
None will be spared, irrespective of religion, caste or party affiliation

AMIT SHAH
Home Minister

Opposition seeks judicial probe into violence

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Opposition leaders on Wednesday targeted Home Minister Amit Shah for the failure of the Delhi police to immediately control the riots, with several of them asking for his resignation and many parties including the Congress demanding a judicial inquiry into the violence.



Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury

community was targeted. The BJP hit back by alleging a well-orchestrated conspiracy behind the riots and blamed the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act protests for escalating the situation.

Initiating the debate, Congress leader in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury wondered how

were active during that period. He informed the House that three persons had been arrested for allegedly funding the riots.

He said two special investigation teams had been formed to handle offences of a serious nature.

Dwelling on the reasons why the riots spread so fast, Mr. Shah said northeast Delhi, spread over 61 sq. km, had the highest population density, with 20 lakh people living in mixed localities with very narrow lanes that made it difficult for the police and fire brigade vehicles to move in quickly. The area had a history of riots and was known for its criminal elements, he said.

Mr. Shah said the government had written to the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court to nominate a judge who could head a claims commission to work on attaching the properties of those who indulged in riots and damaged property.

Putting up a strong defence, BJP leader Meenakshi Lekhi called the violence a well-planned conspiracy that involved a well-known global investor who allegedly funded a civil society activist to end India's nationalism and blamed an Aam Aadmi Party councillor for instigating violence and storing weapons.

Referring to the killing of IB officer Ankit Sharma during the riots, she said 400 wounds were found on his body. "What kind of hatred was this... we should discuss that also," she said and blamed the Congress for misleading minorities over the CAA.

Calling for an impartial probe, AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi said there was a "tsunami of Hindutva hate" and that the minority

Cut fuel prices, Rahul tells PM

Government yet to pass on low rates to consumers, claims Congress leader

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

In his only comment on the political developments in Madhya Pradesh, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi took a dig at the Narendra Modi government on Wednesday. While busy bringing an elected government down, it ignored the crash in the global oil prices and is yet to pass on the benefit to consumers, he wrote on Twitter.

He pointed out that the oil prices had come down by 35%, and demanded that the prices of petrol, diesel and LPG be brought down to the pre-2004 levels. Petrol price must be reduced to below ₹60 a litre.

"Hey @PMOIndia, while you were busy destabilising an elected Congress govt, you may have missed noticing



Keeping track: Rahul Gandhi with other Congress MPs in Parliament House on Wednesday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

the 35% crash in global oil prices. Could you please pass on the benefit to Indians by slashing #petrol prices to under ₹60 per litre? Will help boost the stalled economy," Mr. Gandhi said.

Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said

leum products should be withdrawn immediately until it is brought under the GST," he said in a statement.

He said the fuel prices were at a 15-year low and the government must pass on the benefit to bring the economy back on track. "In dollar terms, the international crude oil prices are down to the level of November 2004, when petrol, diesel and LPG were available at ₹37.84, ₹26.28 and ₹281.60 per cylinder respectively, which were quite cheap in comparison with the present rates," Mr. Surjewala said. He said that in the past six years, the government and oil companies had been making huge gains. "The BJP government has looted more than ₹16 lakh crore in the last five years by levying exorbitant taxes on petrol and diesel," he said.

Congress appoints new Karnataka, Delhi chiefs

Shivakumar, Anil Chaudhary get nod

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

On a day senior leader Jyoti Scindia joined the BJP, the Congress filled party posts in Karnataka and Delhi. The party's troubleshooter D.K. Shivakumar will head the Karnataka unit and former MLA Anil Chaudhary the Delhi unit.

Mr. Shivakumar replaces Dinesh Gundu Rao as the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee chief, ending a long-drawn power tussle with former Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. Mr. Rao, known to be a close associate of Mr. Siddaramaiah, was appointed PCC president on the latter's insistence, sources said.

Eashwar Khadre, Satish Jarkiholi and Saleem Ahmed have been

named working presidents of the State unit, a party statement said. Ajay Singh has been appointed Chief Whip in the Assembly, while Mr. Shivakumar's loyalist M. Narayanaswamy will be the Chief Whip in the Legislative Council.

Mr. Chaudhary is taking over from Subash Chopra who resigned as Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee chief after the party could not win any seat in the Assembly election. Mr. Chaudhary has become one of the youngest presidents of the Delhi party unit has had. The average age of the Delhi team has been brought down with the appointment of Abhishek Dutt, Shivani Chopra, Jaikishan, Mudit Agarwal and Ali Hassan as vice-presidents.

Scindia, Athawale in BJP first list of RS candidates

JD(U) renominates Harivansh

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI/PATNA

The BJP on Wednesday released its first list of Rajya Sabha candidates for the March 26 election, with Jyoti Scindia, newly inducted from the Congress, on the list.

Mr. Scindia has been nominated from Madhya Pradesh, but the party is yet to announce a second candidate from the State. The list has nine candidates including Union Minister Ramdas Athawale, Republican Party of India leader from Maharashtra; former Congress leader Bhupaneshwar Kalita and Biswajeet Daimary of the Bodo People's Front (an NDA ally) from Assam; and Udayan Raje Bhonsle, who had come over from the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) from Maharashtra. Vivek Thakur, son of former Union Minister C.P. Thakur, has been nominated from Bihar and Deepak Prakash, president of the Jharkhand party unit, from Jharkhand.

They asserted that the protests for the cause of the oppressed class and the indigenous people of Assam have never been against the unity and sovereignty of India, directly or indirectly. The petitioners also cited Mr. Gogoi's deteriorating health in captivity and said the people of the State were apprehensive that the amended Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act would be misused against him and other detainees as part of political vendetta.



Ramdas Athawale

second list is expected soon, with two nominations from Gujarat, one from Himachal Pradesh and one each from Haryana and Madhya Pradesh.

Ally's choice
The Janata Dal(United), an ally of the BJP, announced the names of Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh Narayan Singh and Ram Nath Thakur as its candidates. Three of the seats falling vacant are with the JD(U) and two with the BJP.

Nirbhaya convict raises assault charge

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Pawan Kumar Gupta, one of the four death row convicts in the Nirbhaya gang rape and murder case, on Wednesday moved a Delhi court seeking registration of an FIR against two constables for allegedly physically assaulting him in Mandoli jail last year.

The court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Karkardooma, has fixed Pawan's complaint for hearing at 2 p.m. on Thursday, said A.P. Singh, counsel for the condemned犯人

犯人. The complaint seeks a direction to the SHO of the Harsh Vihar Police Station to register the FIR against constable Anil Kumar and another unidentified constable. The complaint said that since Pawan is to be hanged soon, it is necessary to allow him to appear as a witness for identifying both policemen. The complaint alleged that Pawan was badly beaten up by the two constables on July 26 and 29, 2019 when he was lodged in the Mandoli central jail in East Delhi.

L-G is a bridge between govt. and Centre: HC

Kiran Bedi welcomes ruling

MOHAMMED IMRANULLAH S.
CHENNAI

The Madras High Court, which on Wednesday held that Puducherry's Lieutenant Governor and the elected government should act in unison, said the State legislatures were a creation of the Constitution, whereas the Union Territory legislatures were created under a law such as the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963.

Chief Justice Amreshwar Pratap Sahu and Justice Subramonium Prasad made it clear that Puducherry is still not a 'belonging' but a pride of the nation and a native pride of the people of the diverse geographical locations. Stating that the constitutional provisions, the 1963 Act as well as the Rules of Business of the Government of Puducherry lay down the role to be played by the elected government, the Lieutenant Governor and the Centre, the Bench said the laws expect the Lieutenant Governor to act as a bridge between the local government and the Centre and the latter to play

the role of an umpire whenever there was a disagreement between the Lieutenant Governor and the Council of Ministers.

"To say the Lieutenant Governor has an integral role has also to be understood in the light that it is neither meant to be overwhelmingly awkward or overreaching but at the same time is not a mere illusory role. The role is that of a governing mechanism in the true sense that controls and acts as a bridge between the popularly elected government and the Centre," it added.

Welcoming the ruling, Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi said, "Law has spoken." She said, "Let's all respect the judgement in letter and spirit and work together for the benefit of people of Puducherry based on integrity and efficiency." Chief Minister V. Narayanaswamy said he would give a detailed response later. "It is a lengthy judgment and I will have to read the order fully before making any remarks," he said.

(With inputs from Puducherry)

President petitioned for Akhil Gogoi's release

Protest was against CAA: petitioners

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

At least 500 people in Assam have petitioned President Ram Nath Kovind seeking the release of peasant leader Akhil Gogoi who was arrested in December 2019 for allegedly fomenting violence during the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

The petition was routed through the Asom Songrami Mancha, a new socio-political party on Wednesday.

"...you are aware of the fact that the peace-loving people of Assam has (sic) vehemently protested against the controversial CAA, 2019, as it poses serious threat to the socio-cultural existence and demographic landscape of Assam and its indigenous people," said Mancha's president Diganta Konwar in a

petition to the president. The petitioners said Mr. Gogoi, leader of the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti, and many others had during the democratic anti-CAA protests were detained and sent to judicial custody after being slapped with various charges, including that of sedition.

They asserted that the protests for the cause of the oppressed class and the indigenous people of Assam have never been against the unity and sovereignty of India, directly or indirectly.

The petitioners also cited Mr. Gogoi's deteriorating health in captivity and said the people of the State were apprehensive that the amended Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act would be misused against him and other detainees as part of political vendetta.

The prosecution sought an extension citing his interrogation with regard to several other loan sanctions amounting to ₹30,000 crore that had come to light. The ED claimed that the former Yes Bank MD and CEO was involved in transactions with 78 companies owned by Mr. Kapoor and his family, and had sanctioned loans of up to ₹30,000 crore during his tenure at the bank. The former Yes Bank co-founder was arrested on Sunday under provisions of the PMLA by the ED and was remanded in custody till March 11. Meanwhile, a case with the CBI was also lodged after various documents pertaining to loan sanctions to several entities were recovered from a DHFL-related probe which was conducted at Mr. Kapoor's residence on March

Scindia's entry will strengthen BJP, says Chouhan

22 rebel MLAs will vote with BJP in case of a floor test, says Scindia aide

SIDHARTH YADAV
BHOJPAL

Jyotiraditya Scindia's entry will strengthen the BJP in the State and mean the entire Scindia family now works with the party, BJP vice-president and former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said on Wednesday.

Speaking to presspersons here in the presence of Yashodhara Raje Scindia, Mr. Scindia's aunt, he said that this day reminded him of Rajmataji [Vijaya Raje Scindia], who laid the foundation of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in the State and nurtured BJP workers.

Mr. Chouhan said the party would gain from the ener-

gy of Mr. Scindia who chose the BJP to serve the country. "He comes from a tradition wherein politics has been understood as a medium to serve the public." Mr. Jyotiraditya was the only popular Congress leader in the State. "We will walk together. Maharaj and Shivraj have become one," he said.

'They are together'
Denying the Congress's claim that it was in touch with the rebel MLAs supporting Mr. Scindia, Ms. Yashodhara Raje Scindia said, "All his MLAs will come with us. Their loyalty is not expedient, they will stick to tradition."

Pankaj Chaturvedi, spokesman of Mr. Scindia, said



Rooting for Maharaj: Shivraj Singh Chouhan, centre, addressing a press conference with BJP leader Yashodhara Raje Scindia, right, in Bhopal on Wednesday.

A.M. FAROUQI

the 22 MLAs would vote for the BJP in case of a floor test. "The number of such MLAs will reach 40," he said.

The Congress office bus-

ted with activity, as leaders flew the MLAs to Jaipur in the morning. Congress spokesperson Shobha Oza said 96 MLAs, including four Inde-

pendents, were flown out, but party sources kept the number down. Two BSP MLAs and an SP MLA, who had earlier backed the go-

vernment, were not seen boarding the flight.

Former Urban Development and Housing Minister Jaivardhan Singh said, "When the Congress takes the floor test, we will prove our majority. It is unfortunate Mr. Scindia has left the party despite appeals for his return."

Former Forest Minister Umang Singh said the MLAs had been huddled together to "contain the situation". "The way the BJP has tried to lure our MLAs, they won't be able to repeat that ever again in Madhya Pradesh. Wait and watch. Moreover, our MLAs in Bengaluru are still with the Congress, their hearts are still with us."

Congress MLA Sajan Singh Verma, who has been asked, along with MLA Govind Singh, to reach out to

the rebel MLAs in Bengaluru, returned to Bhopal in the morning.

Petition to Speaker

Two Congress MLAs submitted a petition to the Speaker seeking disqualification of six rebel Ministers for anti-party activities.

The petition said that flying away to Bengaluru during political distress in the State, remaining in constant touch with BJP members there, refusing to comply with a notice served on them by the State party leader to return to Bhopal in light of the Rajya Sabha election and blocking means of communication by keeping phones off, all showed that they had voluntarily given up the party membership and were "hobnobbing" with BJP to destabilise the government.

No impact in Maharashtra, says Pawar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Nationalist Congress Party leader Sharad Pawar has said he trusts the capabilities of Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath, and many believe he can do miracles.

"From whatever knowledge I have of Maharashtra politics, these developments [in Madhya Pradesh] won't have any impact on the MVA government, which is on the right path," Mr. Pawar said, asked about the claim of some BJP leaders that the government would come down by Gudi Padwa at March-end.

He filed his nomination for the March 26 Rajya Sabha election.

INTERVIEW | DIGVIJAYA SINGH

'You will see a surprise when floor test happens'

We were ready to make Scindia the MPCC chief or Deputy CM but he seems to have made up his mind: Congress leader

SANDEEP PHUKAN

Amid the current political crisis in Madhya Pradesh, with former Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia quitting the Congress and joining the BJP and 22 MLAs resigning, former Chief Minister and senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh said the Kamal Nath government had the numbers. Excerpts from an interview he gave to The Hindu over phone.

Should not Chief Minister Kamal Nath now resign because numbers don't seem to be with him after the resignation of the MLAs?

the floor test happens, you will see a surprise.

So when will the floor test happen?

■ No, why should he resign when he has the numbers and the resignations of the MLAs have not been accepted yet. They are still MLAs.

But where are the numbers with 20 or so MLAs resigning?

■ You leave that to us. When



C The Speaker will verify the resignations of all 22 MLAs and then order a floor test

never took a firm stand against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, and didn't speak against the National Register of Citizens or the National Population Register.

But there was some opposition from State BJP leaders and these leaders felt that they can break the Congress government without Scindia joining. They told Amit Shah that they can do this on their own but it didn't materialise because we thwarted their attempt.

It is only after they failed

that Amit Shah decided on Scindiaji and his supporters. So 17 Congress MLAs, who were Scindiaji's supporters, were helped by BJP leaders Arvind Bhadoria and Ashutosh Tiwari to go to Bengaluru.

If you were aware of all this, why didn't you reach out to Mr. Scindia?

■ Of course, we did. Soon after the abortive attempt to take away our MLAs took place, I told him that such a thing is happening. Thereafter Scindiaji was here for a wedding. I wanted to meet him but he said he was out. He had stopped taking my calls.

Last Sunday, Kamal Nathji was to meet him in Delhi, but his phone was switched off. We were told that he had fever and had got swine flu and therefore cannot speak. I then texted him to wish a speedy recovery.

But the charge is that Congress leadership, Sonia Gandhi as well as Rahul, ignored his claim to head Madhya Pradesh Congress. And you and Kamal Nath got together to ignore him and his supporters.

■ That's rubbish. There was no question of not offering a Rajya Sabha seat. We were also ready to make him the Madhya Pradesh Congress Committee president or Deputy Chief Minister. But he seems to have made up his mind.

Mr. Bishnoi, 51, on Wednesday wrote on Twitter: "Leadership is not about being in charge. Leadership is about looking after those in our charge..." There are several devoted party leaders across the country who feel alienated and discontented, he said.

'Several leaders feel alienated'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

the party holding positions of power were Youth Congress, NSUI activists when Indira Gandhi lost the election in 1977. I became a PCC chief in 1984, and it took 14 more years before I became the CM in 1998," he said.

Opposing the demand from certain leaders that the Congress go for an organisational election to choose a new president, Mr. Gehlot said the last election had taken place only two years ago. "Rahul Gandhi was elected president then. In a particular situation, Rahulji quit the post, and we should allow him the time he wants to think about it. We don't need an election now. Soniaji is the president, and she should continue the present arrangement in consultation with State leaders and others," he said.

The Congress has 107 MLAs and the BJP has 72 in the 200-member Assembly. The Congress has the support of at least 10 Independent MLAs and a few other smaller parties.

His deputy and State party chief Sachin Pilot is reportedly upset with Mr. Gehlot, but the Chief Minister did not directly answer a question on the topic. He said the younger generation must show patience and wait for their turn. "Many of us in

fight, but a naked misuse of power and money."

The Chief Minister said his government in Rajasthan did not face such a threat, as he had comfortable numbers in the Assembly. "In Madhya Pradesh, our government has a narrow majority and the BJP is trying to exploit the situation."

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Virus toll soars in Italy; U.S. cases double

Deaths rise by a quarter to 631 in Italy; New York deploys National Guard as the situation worsens

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ROMA
Italians braced for a second day of national lockdown on Wednesday after a sharp spike in coronavirus-related deaths, as New York deployed the National Guard to contain a disease that has sown worldwide panic.

Europe's hardest-hit country said the death toll from COVID-19 had risen on Tuesday by a third to 631, with the surging epidemic playing havoc with global sporting, cultural and political events.

While authorities in China, where the outbreak began, have declared it "basically curbed", cases are multiplying around the world, sparking panic buying in shops, and wild swings on financial markets.

Its seemingly relentless march has now claimed its first victim in Central America, with a 64-year-old man dying in Panama on Tuesday. Indonesia also reported its first death.

China remains the hardest-hit overall with more than 80,000 cases and



Fighting spirit: A couple placing a banner that reads "everything will be fine" outside their house in Turin on Wednesday after Italy ordered a nationwide lockdown. ■ REUTERS

3,000 deaths, out of a global total of 1,7339 cases and 4,251 fatalities in 107 countries and territories, according to an AFP tally.

Beijing reported an increase in imported cases Wednesday.

Nevertheless, some companies in Wuhan, the Chinese city where the virus emerged late last year, are to be allowed to return to work.

Coronavirus is infecting all walks of life, including politics, with U.S. Democratic presidential hopefuls Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden both cancelling rallies.

And amid criticism of the U.S. authorities' response, New York deployed the National Guard for the first time during the crisis to help contain the spread of the disease from an infection-hit suburb.

"It is a dramatic action, but it is the largest cluster in the country. This is literally a matter of life and death," said State Governor Andrew Cuomo. At least 28 people have died in the U.S. with 1,025 infected – nearly double the 550 total confirmed cases the day before.

Meanwhile, Iran reported 63 new deaths, the highest single-day toll in the three weeks since the Islamic republic announced the first deaths from the outbreak.

U.K. Health Minister tests positive for coronavirus

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LONDON
A former British government Minister on Wednesday called for Parliament to be suspended after a parliamentarian was infected.

Rory Stewart, a former Conservative MP who is now running to be Mayor of London, said the lower House of Commons "should cease to meet in person" to avoid any further spread.

His comments came after Nadine Dorries, Junior

70% of Germans at risk: Merkel

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BERLIN

Chancellor Angela Merkel, citing expert estimates, said that up to 70% of German population could be infected by SARS-CoV-2. Germany had confirmed some 1,300 infections, with two deaths. The government has recommended the cancellation of all events with over 1,000 people.

Kuwait to halt all flights

REUTERS

DUBAI

Kuwait has announced a halt to all commercial flights to and from Kuwait City International Airport starting Friday and until further notice. A public holiday has been declared from March 12 to March 26, with work resuming on March 29.

Weinstein sentenced to 23 years in jail for rape, assault

Over 100 women had accused him of predatory behaviour

REUTERS

NEW YORK

Former movie producer Harvey Weinstein was sentenced on Wednesday to 23 years in prison for sexual assault and rape after giving a rambling court statement sympathising with men accused of sexual misconduct during the #MeToo era.



Harvey Weinstein

The sentence was handed down in Manhattan criminal court by Justice James Burke, who presided over Weinstein's trial. A jury on February 24 found Weinstein, 67, guilty of sexually assaulting a former production assistant and raping a former aspiring actress.

"I feel remorse for all of the men who are going through this fight," Weinstein told the court before he was sentenced, sounding unrepentant.

Weinstein said he was worried about the "thousands of men who are losing due process" during the #MeToo movement just as people in the past had their

ment in court, one of the victims spoke of the trauma she had endured since the attack, saying, "It scarred me deeply, mentally and emotionally, perhaps irreparably, perhaps forever."

Prosecutors in court filings last week said the sentence should reflect not only the crimes of which he was convicted, but a "lifetime of abuse towards others."

More than 100 women, including famous actresses, have accused Weinstein of sexual misconduct stretching back decades, fueling the #MeToo movement against sexual abuse and harassment.

The jury of seven men and five women acquitted Weinstein on the most serious charges, a single count of first-degree rape as well as two counts of predatory sexual assault, which carried a potential life sentence. Those charges relied on testimony by another actress, who said Weinstein raped her in the early 1990s.

Sri Lanka calls for cooperation after tourist guide gets infected

MEERA SRINIVASAN

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka on Wednesday urged the public to cooperate with the government to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the island nation, after a local tourist guide tested positive for the new coronavirus.

The 52-year-old tourist guide was on Tuesday found to be the first Sri Lankan to be infected by the virus, according to the Director General of Health Dr. Anil Jasinghe. The patient has been sent to the infectious diseases hospital, a press release from the President's Media Division said.

Primary contacts
Authorities are checking on the people who may have come into contact with the patient.

Earlier, a Chinese tourist visiting Sri Lanka tested positive for COVID-19, and she

returned to China in February, following treatment in quarantine.

Further, from Tuesday onwards, the Sri Lankan government has enforced mandatory quarantine of all passengers arriving from countries, including Iran, Italy and South Korea.

Meanwhile, the Government Information Department has said that Sri Lanka has suspended visa on arrival until further notice.

Nadine Dorries

Health Minister, revealed late on Tuesday that she had been diagnosed with COVID-19.

Parliament passes amendment allowing Putin to stay in power

REUTERS

MOSCOW

Constitutional changes allowing Vladimir Putin to run for President again in 2024 sailed through Russia's lower house of Parliament on Wednesday, opening the way for him to potentially stay in power until 2036.

Mr. Putin, a former KGB officer, is currently required by the Constitution to step down in 2024 when his second sequential and fourth

presidential term ends. But the amendment would formally reset his presidential term tally to zero.

The 450-seat State Duma, the lower house of Parliament, on Wednesday voted in favour of the change, along with other amendments to the Constitution, by 383 votes. Nobody voted against, but 43 lawmakers abstained. Twenty-four lawmakers were absent.

If, as Mr. Putin critics ex-

ELSEWHERE



Taliban rejects offer to free 1,500 prisoners

KABUL
Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on Wednesday promised an initial release of 1,500 Taliban prisoners as a "goodwill gesture". The Taliban rejected the offer and sought the release of all 5,000 prisoners at once. AFP

Palestinian teen shot dead by Israeli forces

NABLUS
A Palestinian teenager was allegedly shot dead by Israeli forces during clashes in the occupied West Bank.

Mohammed Hamayel, 15, "died as a result of being shot in the face, the Palestinian Health Ministry said.

+ Biden widens lead over Sanders with wins

Former Vice-President takes four States in primaries, appeals for unity in party



Joe Biden

there were questions on Tuesday night about Mr. Sanders's continuation in the primaries, the Vermont Senator announced on Wednesday afternoon that he would stay in the race and debate Mr. Biden on Sunday.

Mr. Sanders won North Dakota and led in the second most delegate-rich State for the night – Washington. With delegates still being counted, Mr. Sanders had won a total of 110 on Tuesday (684 cumulatively), but that was still not enough to keep up with Mr. Biden's 176 (846 cumulatively).

Mr. Biden's win by huge margins among African American voters across States – for instance, 87% in

Mississippi versus Mr. Sanders's 10% in that State, as per exit polls conducted by Edison Media Research and analysed by the *Washington Post*. However, he also won the white vote – by narrower margins – in Michigan, Missouri and Mississippi.

In Michigan, Mr. Biden won the African American vote by 53% against Mr. Sanders's 37%. Significantly, the very voters – rural and suburban whites – who had handed Mr. Sanders a victory against Hilary Clinton in the Michigan primary in 2016 were now part of the reason for Mr. Biden's victory in the State. Mr. Sanders won among Latinos and younger people – those under 45, and he won strongly in the 18-29 age group.

Voter turnout

Mr. Sanders's campaign has banked on their ability to motivate a higher voter turnout but preliminary results from Tuesday suggest that they did not pull this off.

On Tuesday night, Mr. Biden spoke of unity in Philadelphia. "I want to thank Bernie Sanders and his supporters for their tireless energy and their passion,"

he said. "We share a common goal. Together, we will defeat Donald Trump. We will defeat him together."

Mr. Sanders was the leading candidate at the end of February after coming second in Iowa in terms of delegates, first in Nevada by a large margin and tied for delegates with former candidate Pete Buttigieg. Mr. Biden's crucial February 29 victory in South Carolina, which hinged on support from African Americans brought the former Vice-President back into the race and gave him the momentum to go into Super Tuesday (March 3). Also crucial to his performance last Tuesday was getting endorsed by former rivals, Mr. Buttigieg and Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar, who dropped out of the race.

The vote was the climax of a year of fierce debates between MPs as the civilian government attempted to reform the Constitution and reduce the military's stranglehold on Parliament.

The Parliament also rejected a proposed constitutional amendment that would have allowed the country's de facto leader, Ms. Suu Kyi, to officially become President.

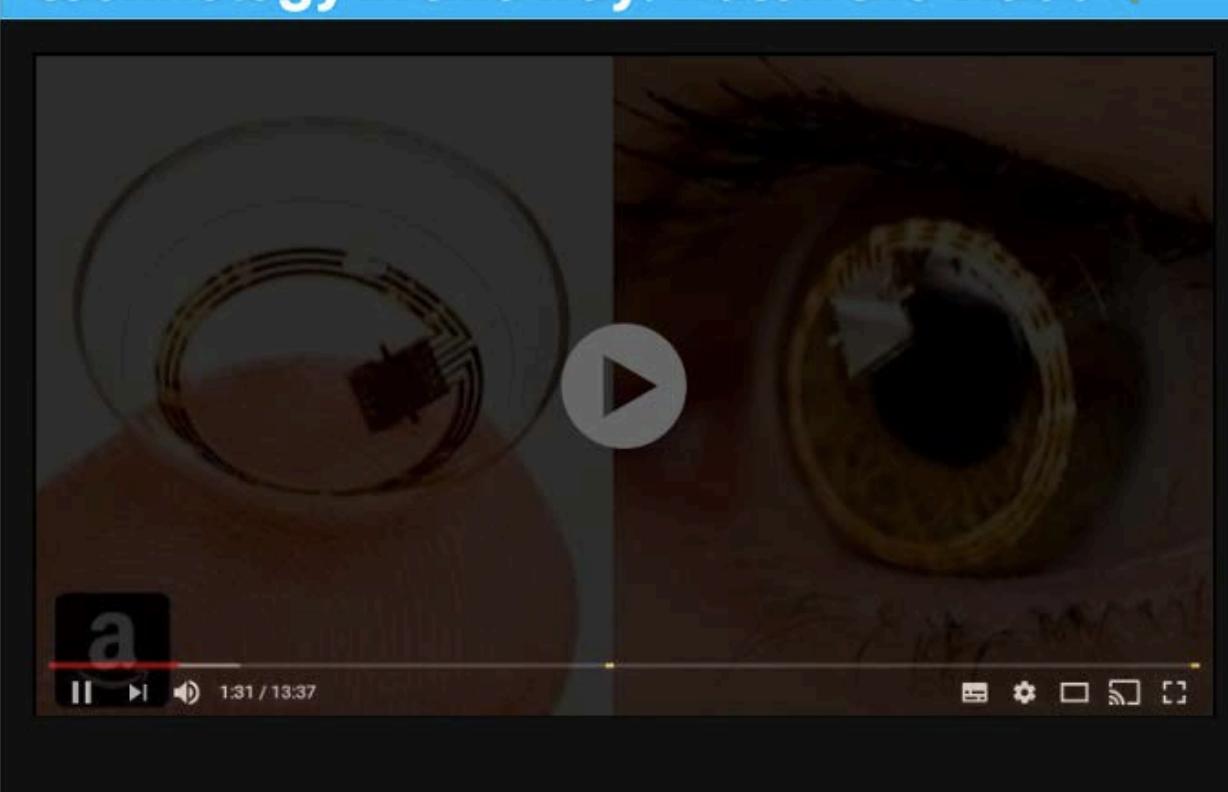
But the military still wields considerable power, appointing three key Ministers – defence, border and home affairs.

Crucially, it holds a quarter of parliamentary seats, effectively giving it a veto over any legislation.

The Parliament also rejected a proposed constitutional amendment that would have allowed the country's de facto leader, Ms. Suu Kyi, to officially become President.

Article 59(f) of the constitution bars a person from becoming President if his or her spouse or children are foreign citizens. Her two sons are British nationals, as was her late husband.

Now people are taking wrong advantage of technology in this way. watch the video



SUDOKU

4			3	7		1		
7						6		
2			6	9	5			7
			6			9		
1	3					7	4	
5					8			
5			7	1	4			2
7						1		
3			2	5		4		

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 12879

P	L	A	N	G	E	N	T	S	T	I	C	K	S
L	N	O	E	S	U	A	C						
A	G	O	T	H	R	O	U	G					
I	M	T	A	I	N	S	E						
E	L	S	E	U	N	I							
M	U	N	D	S	P	R	E	A					
W	A	S	P	I	O	V	E	R	D				
Y	A	C	K	S	D	E	I	N	G				
G	O	P	R	C	R	V	P						
A	U	T	A	B	S	E	R						
M	R	C	N	N	V	U	P						
E	S	T	E	E	M	D	E	F	E	R	R	A	L

Solution to Tuesday's Sudoku

1	7	5	9	2	6	3	8	4

MARKET WATCH

	11-03-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	35697	-0.18
US Dollar	73.68	0.66
Gold	44517	-1.15
Brent oil	36.07	-2.36

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	320.20	-1.70
Asian Paints	1882.85	15.70
Axis Bank	619.35	-4.20
Bajaj Auto	2591.55	18.20
Bajaj Finance	8254.00	46.90
Bharti Airtel	4030.65	3.85
BPLC	404.40	-19.45
Britannia Ind	3048.30	51.80
Cipla	417.10	-9.05
Coal India	168.00	10.05
Dr Reddys Lab	3000.60	-60.65
Eicher Motors	17753.60	-132.20
GAIL (India)	90.50	-9.95
Grasim Ind	625.25	-9.35
HCL Tech	536.80	-3.65
HDFC	2036.25	8.35
HDFC Bank	1113.80	6.50
Hero MotoCorp	2036.05	8.00
Hindalco	137.80	-5.65
Hind Unilever	2155.00	33.50
ICICI Bank	465.65	7.90
IndusInd Bank	853.55	-49.55
Bharti Infralet	224.75	13.75
Infosys	686.00	-18.45
Indian Oil Corp	96.90	-2.50
ITC	175.65	-1.55
JSW Steel	223.50	-5.55
Kotak Bank	1589.30	11.15
L&T	1116.95	15.00
M&M	451.60	-11.60
Maruti Suzuki	6146.30	-54.80
Nestle India Ltd.	16048.55	17.20
NTPC	103.05	0.15
ONGC	71.70	-2.85
PowerGrid Corp	181.40	0.45
Reliance Ind	1153.55	39.40
State Bank	245.10	-8.35
Sun Pharma	385.95	-7.40
Tata Motors	98.90	-6.80
Tata Steel	299.75	-22.55
TCS	1953.70	-18.65
Tech Mahindra	708.55	3.75
Titan	1187.65	-15.80
UltraTech Cement	3993.40	-103.95
UPL	516.95	3.95
Vedanta	92.00	-2.90
Wipro	213.10	-1.30
YES Bank	28.80	7.55
Zee Entertainment	209.50	15.05

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	73.43	73.75
Euro	83.21	83.58
British Pound	94.83	95.25
Japanese Yen (100)	70.17	70.48
Chinese Yuan	10.57	10.62
Swiss Franc	78.57	78.91
Singapore Dollar	52.85	53.09
Canadian Dollar	53.48	53.72
Malaysian Ringgit	17.34	17.44

Source: Indian Bank

BULLION RATES CHENNAI

March 11 rates in rupees with previous rates in parentheses

Retail Silver (1g) 49.5 (49.5)

22 ct gold (1 g) 4164 (4181)

Industry starts sneezing from impact of virus

Pesticide sector hit by input issues

Local inventories sufficient for now but further disruptions may hurt, says govt.

PRISCILLA JEBARAJA
YUTHIKA BHARGAVA
NEW DELHI

The Indian pesticide industry is heavily dependent on Chinese imports for raw materials, and could be heavily impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak, according to an analysis prepared by the Agriculture Ministry.

The Ministry estimates that domestic inventories may be sufficient for the kharif sowing season, but any further supply disruptions could hurt farmers. Industry insiders and analysts say that a good rabi or winter crop season and the possibility of a locust attack could deplete inventories sooner than expected, raising prices by about 15%.

"Pesticide industry in India heavily depends on import of around 15 technical insecticides from China," says the analysis submitted to the Finance Ministry last week as part of an overall assessment of the impact of the virus outbreak on Indian industries. Technical insecticides are an intermediate product used in the manufacture of commercial pesticides.

"Out of the 15 pesticides, Acephate, Cartap, Buprofezin, Pretilachlor represent 80-90% trade from China whereas Imidacloprid, Azoxystrobin, Imazapyr, Acetamiprid represent 40-50% import from China. We understand they are now back up to about 40% production capacity, which has restarted in March. But there are still barriers on internal movement in China, plus [delays in] shipping out of China. So, the gap has built up, availability is very tight and now, prices have gone crazy."

Challenge or opportunity? As manufacturing and logistics are paralysed in China, India has a chance to raise market share, says the sector's representative body. ■ B. VELANKANNI RAJ

factories were shut for their New Year festival, and then, there was the coronavirus," says Rajesh Aggarwal, MD, Insecticides India.

"We understand they are now back up to about 40% production capacity, which has restarted in March. But there are still barriers on internal movement in China, plus [delays in] shipping out of China. So, the gap has built up, availability is very tight and now, prices have gone crazy."

"There is a major supply gap, as no container has come from China in the last two months. In fact, it started in early January when



However, Mr. Aggarwal said inventories are lower than usual for this season because of excellent rains extending the rabi season in parts of the country.

He estimated a 15% rise in the wholesale price of pesticides. Ratings and research agency Crisil also raised some red flags, although it felt that the procurement season for the rabi season is largely over. "In case the manufacturing facilities do not operationalise by end of February, there could be some impact in procuring raw material for the upcoming kharif season," said an early impact report.

Crisil Research director Hetal Gandhi added that the news of a locust attack in the region could increase demand and deplete stocks.

"May is peak season for stocking, and there may be a 15-20 day delay," she said, noting that delays in dispatches was the major concern. "The first quarter of the year accounts for 35% of revenue for Indian pesticide companies, so, if the raw material does not reach in time, there could be significant impact."

"They are being slow and lethargic and we may miss golden opportunities."

Supply chain problems hamper auto production

Sector exploring alternatives to China

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Automobile production across all categories, including that of passenger vehicles and two-wheelers, is likely to be 'critically' hampered due to supply chain disruption as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, particularly in China, according to the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM).

Stating that many automakers in India import about 10% of their raw materials from China, Rajan Wadhura, president at SIAM, said that the disruption in availability of these parts is likely to critically hamper production across all segments including pas-

senger vehicles, commercial vehicles, three-wheelers and two-wheelers. The disruption will 'gravely' affect electric vehicle production, Mr. Wadhura added.

The auto industry, he added, had maintained inventory at the beginning of the year in anticipation of the Chinese New Year.

However, with the current lock-down in China, supplies for BS-VI vehicles are likely to be impacted. "Manufacturers are exploring alternatives to fulfil their supply chain demands, but that would also take a substantial [period] of time to reach stable production scale as these components would need regulatory testing," Mr. Wadhura added.

Gems, jewellery exports drop

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

India's gems and jewellery exports declined 20.26% to ₹20,763.28 crore in February, hit by the global outbreak of COVID-19, credit crunch and customs issues, GJEPC said.

The sector had recorded exports of ₹26,039.32 crore in February 2019, the Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) said.

"The fall in exports has been happening over some time on global economic slowdown coupled with credit crunch and customs issues. Now, the global outbreak of COVID-19 has added to the existing issues," GJEPC vice-chairman Colin Shah told PTI here.

Institutional investments in real estate may slow down: Colliers

Occupancy in flexible workspaces to stay muted in March

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

There could be slower decision-making, in terms of institutional investments in the first half of 2020, constraining capital deployment in India, according to realty advisory Colliers.

In 2019, institutional investments from Singapore, Hong Kong and mainland China together accounted for 28% of total real estate investment in India, however, on account of COVID-19, there could be a slowdown in the first half of the calendar, Colliers said in a report titled COVID-19: Impact on



India Real Estate.

India has been less affected than east Asia, but since March 2, the virus has been spreading in the country.

On space uptake, Colliers said it was expecting some delayed decision-making by occupiers who depend on

clearances from overseas, especially Asia. "We foresee occupancy in flexible workspaces to stay muted in March, especially in Delhi NCR, as several start-ups encourage employees to work from home," Sankey Prasad, MD and chairman, India Colliers International.

The current scenario following the spread of the virus in India warrants greater stress on wellness and hygiene in the workplace and therefore, companies should review their business continuity plans in preparation for further spread of the virus, the report said.

'Allow temporary write-down of Yes Bank's additional tier 1 bonds'

AMFI plea to avoid huge hit to net asset value of schemes

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) has written to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to allow fund houses a temporary write down of additional tier 1 bonds of Yes Bank to avoid a huge hit on the net asset value of schemes that hold such bonds.

The industry body wrote to the banking regulator after the proposed restructuring scheme of the troubled private sector bank mentioned that such bonds would be permanently written off. "As an industry body, we have written to both RBI and SEBI," said AMFI chief executive N.S. Venkatesh during a media call on Wednesday. "We have written



ten before the cut-off date [for submitting comments] of the restructuring scheme of Yes Bank. Our comments have been given. Now they will examine it," he added.

This assumes significance as many fund houses including, Nippon India Mutual Fund, Kotak Mutual Fund and Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund, among others, stand to lose thousands of crores if the additional tier 1 bonds are completely written off.

Going ahead, industry players expect the ongoing volatility to affect mutual fund flows to a certain extent.

"Deal with bondholders in process"

REUTERS
MUMBAI

The administrator of Yes Bank told Reuters a deal with some bondholders who have opposed a State-led rescue was under discussion, possibly clearing the way for a restructuring of the stricken lender.

"We are in the process," said Prashant Kumar, the administrator appointed by the central bank, which has taken control of Yes Bank. He, however, declined to provide details of the discussions.

Some Yes Bank bondholders had filed a court petition against the rescue deal, which would see them taking a write-down, according to a source and a document seen by Reuters.

Some reports said the bondholders had proposed to convert \$1.15 billion worth bonds into equity.

IndiGo says its revenue may take a big hit due to COVID-19

Airline cites fall in demand for travel, rupee depreciation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

IndiGo, the country's biggest airline by market size, informed the stock exchanges on Wednesday that the spread of COVID-19 is likely to severely impact its revenues because of a fall in demand for travel.

"Over the past few days... week-on-week, we have seen a 15-20% decline in our daily bookings. Please note that the numbers could change from here based on how the situation evolves. We expect our quarterly earnings to be materially impacted because of the above," the airline said in its filing to the Bombay Stock Exchange.

Since January, the airline has cancelled its operations to Chengdu, Guangzhou and Hong Kong in China, as well as reduced its frequencies to



several destinations in the southeast Asia.

The airline has told the BSE that while it was able to initially redeploy aircraft freed up to other destinations and protect its revenue from any material harm, it was unable to do so any more as the passenger demand itself had taken a hit in the past few days.

SEBI not to lift ban on Thapar, others

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Regulator SEBI on Wednesday refused to lift the capital market ban imposed on fraud-hit CG Power and Industrial Solutions' ex-chairman Gautam Thapar and three other former officials in a case related to diversion of funds.

Besides Mr.



SRAVASTI DATTA

Nick Arnold, author of the popular *Horrible Science* series, says: "I predicted the emergence of new viruses in the Far East in my book *Deadly Diseases*, about 10 years before it happened. The threat of new viruses is just one example of changes affecting the whole world. Science is essential if one has to combat scares such as the coronavirus."

Nick is on a three-city tour in India – Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Delhi. The elements of horror and humour are the reasons why the books are so well received. "With *Horrible Science*, I can be both scary and funny. Sometimes, you see something and you think it is scary and then you realise it is not and you laugh. So I can be scary and funny and get children get excited about science."

The *Horrible Science* series is a reflection of who Nick is. "If you read the books, you will see that it is me talking and thinking – that is my personality. I love to make people laugh and to perform." He describes how he entertains students he meets. "Some of my favourite experiments involve putting water on top of people's heads. So a simple experiment is to get a plastic bottle and make some holes in the bottom, fill it with water and put the lid on, and you say to people, okay so these have holes and you put it on the head and the water will come out...but it doesn't, until you take the top off, it's like switching on a tap, and all water goes on your head...children find that very funny. The students are constantly

'I can be scary and funny'

For over 20 years, Nick Arnold has combined horror and humour to make the sciences appealing to children and adults alike

amazed at how exciting things happen with simple, everyday objects."

Nick remembers a time when during a *Horrible Science* show (in which he conducts experiments, competitions, and challenges) he broke his arm, but went ahead with the show. "There was a one-leg table that tipped over easily. I had this idea about an experiment. I was going to be a tree sucking up water and so I had to climb on a table and practise being a tree and balance on the table. The table went over and I went over and I broke my arm. And then 60 children walked into the shop where I was, and wanted a *Horrible Science* show." There was one blessing though: "Luckily, I am right-handed. I had my broken arm akimbo, waving at the children with my left hand. And then I signed books.... It hurt a lot."

Nick says he likes to over research for his books. "Researching



Live wire Nick says his brain is constantly buzzing with ideas

■ SAMPATH KUMAR G. P.

is like packing a bag for a journey. When we think what do we need for a journey, we try to find everything and put it into our bag. I do that all the time with my research. I do not know what I am going to use so I want to take everything. But I go through what I find and then select the best and most important things."

His research sources include everything from books and magazines to newspapers and the internet. "Also I have been fortunate to meet some real scientists, and I always ask them 'So what is the most horrible thing that has happened to you?' And I put that information in my books."

Though Nick studied history at University, he enjoyed biology in school. "I had a very good biology teacher. I was also very interested in writing horrible stories, so I loved my English lessons. I discovered that the other sciences, chemistry and physics were just as exciting as biology, when I started writing books and researching science for myself." Nick says he loves all the sciences for different reasons. "I love the way physics can explain quite everything in quite simple ways as long as you can understand the way of thinking of physics. I love biology because it is so diverse and there are these gross, disgusting details. I love chemistry because I love the way that you can mix things up and make amazing things out of them. But most of all, I love it when children get excited about science, because they are the future, and we need more scientists, we need more doctors, we need more engineers."

Imagination is key to science, Nick says: "Consider this, some of the most amazing discoveries come like a flash. A

scientist's imagination helps develop new ideas. For children learning science, imagination encourages them to understand the facts."

Nick's approach to his books have changed a little bit over the years. "Science is changing all the time, and so each year I have to change my books a little bit with new 'discoveries.' He, however, disagrees that children aren't reading as much. In fact he says that is completely untrue. "Children always like to read books. The big change is of course the internet has become much more common. Although the internet is good for getting information, you can only get little bits of information. If you want to be entertained and if you want something that will talk to

you, that you want to come back to, you need a book."

Nick also contributes to the *Wild Lives* series, in which there is an Indian connection. "The idea

was that people would write diaries about a particular wild animal. I am very pleased to have written about tigers set in Ranthambore. It's a story about a particular tiger but with lots of facts, which if children read they become experts on tigers," he says.

Nick says his brain is constantly buzzing with ideas. "I am always learning about interesting facts, especially horrible science facts. Once I find these facts, I then have these dreams about them. So I imagine stories about them and ideas and people doing things that I can put in my books."

So what's next for the *Horrible Science* series? "I am not sure; it is up to the publishers. I hope they will be a big celebration of 25 years of *Horrible Sciences*. "We will have to see what happens." And his favourite scientist? "He was a horrible, nasty man. If I met him he would have been nasty to me because I am not a scientist, but I would still admire him because he discovered how everything in the Universe works without a computer, just using his mind and thinking about it. He is Isaac Newton."

Meet Nick Arnold at Scholastic India, Ground floor, A 27, Sigma Centre, Infocity 1, Sector 34, Gurugram; 11 a.m.

They usually perform these stunts especially at dawn and dusk, coming out of roost or before they roost for the night.

Rosy Starlings lead quite the nomadic life and are seen in Delhi twice. Once is in September when flocks spend a few days in our garden by roosting in fruiting trees like mulberry, and then carrying on Southwards (till even Sri Lanka). The second time is during their reverse migration in the month of March-April, when they move upwards and then to their breeding grounds. The best places to see their murmuration are Lodhi Garden, India Gate and other open areas with a lot of fruit-bearing trees in Lutyen's Delhi.

My grandmother believed that one's never too old to learn something new, and always showed a keen interest in my work. Ever since she learned to recognise this bird following our first conversation, she would often point them out to me and others who visited her. I lost her recently.

Now, a Rosy Starling will always remind me of her incredible strength, free-spirited nature, and her determination to learn and share her knowledge with others. The fact that she always supported me in all my endeavours, will continue to motivate me to show people the beautiful world outside (and sometimes inside) their homes and offices.

The writer is the founder of NINOX - Owl About Nature, a nature-awareness initiative. He is the Delhi-NCR reviewer for Ebird, a Cornell University initiative, monitoring rare sightings of birds. He formerly led a programme of WWF India

PEOPLE

Binge it real good

Two long-time friends, both techies, build an app so you don't waste time looking for the perfect series on OTT media

When Sai Kiran Rathana browsed streaming sites looking for something to watch, he wouldn't realise how much time he was wasting. One evening, last August, he saw a full 90 minutes go by, and called up his old friend Sai Kiran Alagundula to crib. The two had met in 2011 during the Microsoft Student Partner (MSP) programme, and had kept in touch ever since so they became each other's sounding boards for ideating.

"The situation might seem mundane to many," Rathana says, "but time is precious and who wouldn't want to watch something just right for them? So we came together to form AwesomeLabs." They began brainstorming on possible solutions.

Now based in Hyderabad, Rathana and Alagundula came up with Bingelt, a free multi-device app, which leverages Artificial Intelligence to help users discover aggregated OTT content, while also building peer-to-peer recommendations. Bingelt also doubles as a social platform to connect friends and family who share similar interests.

By September, they had the prototype. The next three months picked up pace with a beta stage including a closed group of testers. By January 2nd, they were ready with a launch with Apple and Android compatibility (works on iOS 10.0.5+, Android KitKat and above). Rathana undertakes the innovation and development side of Bingelt, while Alagundula oversees the business and marketing aspects.

The app, like most entertainment apps, has a minimal two-tone aesthetic with a clutter-free user experience. There are currently six main sections including a static home page where recommendations show up on an infinite scroll screen. A section titled 'Top Recommendations' is divided into 'My Circle' and 'Global', the former changing its content depending on who you have in your friends list and the latter updating when new content is released across various streaming platforms.

Is this different from, say, the ratings recommendations on Netflix? Rathana explains that these recommendations come from your friends, and people you may or may not know. "The current user base for Bingelt is around 1,000 users, and 50 to 60 daily active users. We've started seeing a lot of traction lately and adding new users every day."

Rathana says that current users are spread across India and the U.S. "This was really helpful in testing. For example, we have Rick and Morty on Netflix in India, but the licensing model for Netflix USA does not have the show. So if I were to recommend this show to my friend there, it would not have the same streaming logo badge for them. That is one development I have been really particular about perfecting," says Rathana.

The social side of Bingelt allows users to create interest-based groups to organically (in some way) share movie or series picks. "This is still helping people stay in touch," says Rathana, "and while we do have a strong AI, there's nothing quite like having that trusted recommendation from someone you know, which is the core spirit of our app." Each recommendation comes with the streaming logo badge (for Netflix, Hotstar and Amazon Prime) as per their availability. "We are looking forward to include more streaming platforms which the country keeps creating."

It does not have in-app paid features yet, which Alagundula says could change in the near future. "Right now, we are focussed on user aggregation and seeing how people respond to our app."

Though the app is currently available on smartphones and iPads, AwesomeLabs want to bring a smart-TV compatibility to make streaming smoother.

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

ABHISHEK GULSHAN

One of my fondest memories is from four years ago, standing with my then 90-year-old Paati (grandmother) on our balcony, facing an old mulberry (Shatoot) tree. In spite of her diminished hearing, she could make out a cacophony of chattering calls from the tree and asked me if I knew what they were. I was quick to point out a flock of Rosy Starling, and spent 10 minutes telling her about them, their flocking roosting behaviour, and their constant chatter while roosting or feeding.

The Rosy Starling is a medium-sized (19-24 cm) passerine (perching) bird in the starling family, gregarious in nature, thus living and moving in communal harmony. It is a vision in black and pale pink, hence the name. The males are often more vibrant than the females. During their breeding time (May-June), they assume a longer crest and showcase a pink beak and legs (yellow-orange-ish in non-breeding times). Juveniles are considerably duller with brown, black, and white shades on the body. The scientific name *Pastor roseus* has been derived from the Latin word 'pastor' meaning shepherd and 'roseus,' literally meaning rosy or rose-coloured.

Starlings are mostly found in flocks, and this bird is no different. It breeds in Eastern Europe and certain parts of Asia in huge colonies along the Steppes. During breeding season, they follow an insectivore diet, feeding mostly on invertebrates. At this time, they help farmers get rid of locusts and



Through the chatter

Spotting the nomadic and noisy Rosy Starling, a vision in black and pink

other pests on their land, thus acting like natural pest controllers. Their breeding is lined perfectly with the abundance of locusts and grasshoppers to satiate their innate need for food during these times. Once the pairing is complete, both adults assist in building a nest which is placed in crevices on cliffs, in old buildings, and in tree holes as well.

Their feeding behaviour changes drastically when they migrate in mid-July-August, to the Indian Subcontinent and other tropical areas in Asia. Here they feed on fruits and berries (wild and cultivated)



and also eat white millet (*jowar*) with an occasional insect too.

The Rosy Starling is a strong flier, has a direct flight, accompa-

nied by rapid wing-beats and short glides. It is one of the very few birds that spends very less time in its breeding range and spends most of the year in its wintering range.

Huge flocks of these starlings often indulge in a mass aerial stunt where thousands of birds swoop and dive in unison – called starling murmuration, a phenomenon captured in several videos and pictures online.

It is a mesmerising act of pure pleasure. One may assume that they flock together to evade predators like falcons and eagles that have the tendency to hunt singled out birds.

Now, a Rosy Starling will always remind me of her incredible strength, free-spirited nature, and her determination to learn and share her knowledge with others. The fact that she always supported me in all my endeavours, will continue to motivate me to show people the beautiful world outside (and sometimes inside) their homes and offices.

The writer is the founder of NINOX - Owl About Nature, a nature-awareness initiative. He is the Delhi-NCR reviewer for Ebird, a Cornell University initiative, monitoring rare sightings of birds. He formerly led a programme of WWF India

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Rosy Starlings lead quite the nomadic life and are seen in Delhi twice. Once is in September when flocks spend a few days in our garden by roosting in fruiting trees like mulberry, and then carrying on Southwards (till even Sri Lanka). The second time is during their reverse migration in the month of March-April, when they move upwards and then to their breeding grounds. The best places to see their murmuration are Lodhi Garden, India Gate and other open areas with a lot of fruit-bearing trees in Lutyen's Delhi.

My grandmother believed that one's never too old to learn something new, and always showed a keen interest in my work. Ever since she learned to recognise this bird following our first conversation, she would often point them out to me and others who visited her. I lost her recently.

Now, a Rosy Starling will always

remind me of her incredible

strength, free-spirited nature,

and her determination to

learn and share her

knowledge with others.

The fact that she always

supported me in all my

endeavours, will

continue to motivate

me to show people

the beautiful world

outside (and sometimes

inside) their homes and

offices.

It does not have in-app paid features yet, which

Alagundula says could change

in the near future. "Right now, we are focussed on user aggregation and seeing how people respond to our app."

Though the app is currently available on smartphones and iPads, AwesomeLabs want to bring a smart-TV compatibility to make streaming smoother.

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

They usually perform these stunts especially at dawn and dusk, coming out of roost or before they roost for the night.

Rosy Starlings lead quite the nomadic life and are seen in Delhi twice. Once is in September when flocks spend a few days in our garden by roost

Pause your travel plans

How the fast-becoming pandemic of the novel Coronavirus is disrupting travel in India

PRAVEEN SUDEVAN

Vishal Radhakrishnan, 31, last December, planned a 15-day Euro trip with his sister, who lives in the U.S. It was to be his first long vacation in nearly two years. Leave approved, flights and hotels booked, he was eager for his first visit to England, Spain, and Italy. He never imagined an epidemic would put an end to his plans.

As we go to press, according to the WHO, 463 people have died and over 9,172 affected by COVID-19 in Italy, which has the most serious outbreak after China.

Though the number of cases in Spain is comparatively less at 1,622 (according to Spain's Health Ministry), it, definitely, is not safe for Vishal to vacation. "I hope to visit some parts of England at least," he says, even as the number of cases in the U.K. rose to 323. With the U.S. restricting travel, his sister has backed out of the trip. Vishal is now figuring out cancellations and refunds. "Help desks aren't really helpful because they are flooded with calls. So, I might need to visit the airlines and travel booking agencies in person to sort this out," he says.

Back home

India is monitoring its gates closely to curb the spread of the disease.

An advisory from the Bureau of Immigration announced the suspension of visas granted on or before March 3 to nationals of Italy, Iran, South Korea and Japan, who have not entered the country yet. The advisory also added that all foreign and Indian nationals entering India from any port are required to furnish a self-declaration form (including phone number, address in



India, and travel history), to health and immigration officials. India, in February, had cancelled existing e-visas issued to all foreign nationals of China and advised Indians to avoid travelling to the country.

Meanwhile, airlines, hotels, tour operators and other travel-related offices are attempting to decrease the disruption caused by the disease. Travel operator, Ixigo, has announced a full refund for all flight bookings to China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Iran, Italy, Spain, Singapore, South Korea and Japan. The policy is applicable on both one-way and return bookings for travel dates upto March 31.

Its co-founder Rajnish Kumar expects the situation to improve in the summer travel season. He adds, "While we have seen a slowdown in the top countries impacted, there is still a demand to travel to other areas. On the international front, people are still actively booking their vacations for places like Sri Lanka, Maldives, Vietnam, Thailand and Bhutan."

Airbnb is letting hosts and guests from severely affected regions cancel reservations without charges.

Anyone who can't complete their trip due to official travel restrictions, medical or disease control duties, flight or ground transport cancellation initiated by the provider due to COVID-19, or suspected or

confirmed cases of COVID-19 are also exempted from cancellation fee.

Air India, GoAir, IndiGo, Emirates among other airlines have announced full refunds on cancelled flights on select routes. But many passengers on social media, who cancelled their travel due to the fear of contracting the disease, expressed their displeasure on being charged a cancellation fee. Emirates has asked its staff to take unpaid leave for up to a month, as demand for air travel has plummeted.

Its Chief Operating Officer, Adel Al Redha, says, "With the outbreak of COVID-19, some countries have imposed travel restrictions on entry for operating crew and passengers,

which has resulted in Emirates having to amend its operating schedule by either reducing frequencies or cancelling flights to specific destinations."

Vinay Malhotra, VFS' Regional Group COO for South Asia, Middle East & North Africa, and Americas, says, "We are exploring steps to assuage the concerns of people about busy public areas due to the nature of the virus. For example, for visa customers who want to avoid returning to the visa centres to pick up their passports, we are considering discounted rates on courier return services so their processed passports can be delivered to their home or office instead. We are also

increasing panic

Cindu Muthuvairavan works for a Danish company in Sharjah. "Business trips are not advised unless the situation is very important," she says, "Working from home is encouraged." The United Arab Emirates' Ministry of Health and Prevention said people entering the country will have to undergo medical check-ups. The country with a majority of expats has already shut daycare centres and instructed schools to close. Many of Cindu's Indian colleagues' plans to travel home during summer now appear uncertain.

Now, domestic travel is also being disrupted in India. Mayur Venkatesh, a sales engineer from Coimbatore, says, "My job requires me to travel extensively. Even hotels where I stay, now seem to be a potential threat. You never know who was there before. This creates a roadblock for business plans. Some things can be discussed over the phone, but there are key decisions that can only be finalised in a face to face meeting. In such circumstances, the COVID-19 threat becomes a huge hindrance."

April is usually the onset of summer vacation in India, but travel goals for this year will have to wait.

The real picture (From top) An illustration depicting the screening process, passengers at a terminal • GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK
contemplating lower fees for our Visa at your Doorstep service, for those customers who are requesting an alternative to visiting the centres to submit visa applications.

Increasing panic

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April is usually the onset of summer vacation in India, but travel goals for this year will have to wait.

Dial 011-23978046 to reach the 24x7 helpline number or e-mail ncvoc2019@gmail.com with queries

PEANUTS



Is it true that hot weather conditions can prevent COVID-19 transmission?

It can probably inhibit the growth, viability or stability of the virus but to what extent we do not know. If the virus is already in my body and I sneeze, you will get it. There is no question of heat in such situations. We know that it survives in the human body at 37 degree Celsius. So, heat is no deterrent for its transmission. The only probability is that it may not survive in the outside environment. So, to say that the hot Indian summer will inhibit it... no, it will transmit as effectively. But the virus may not survive outside for long. That is the only advantage.

DR. V. RAMASUBRAMANIAN
Consultant, Infectious Diseases, Apollo Hospitals

How soon can a vaccine be developed for COVID-19?

All international passengers are being screened. All the touch points of passenger flow area like entry and exit gates, aerobridges, immigration counters, baggage trolleys and floor areas are frequently cleaned. The [Chennai] airport has five automatic sanitiser dispensers. Bottled sanitisers are provided by Airports Authority of India (AAI) at various points. Also, awareness posters, digital TV displays and Dos and Don'ts at passenger flow locations.

SPOKESPERSON
AAI Chennai

Are there any home remedies to treat COVID-19?

Go ahead with home remedies if you want, but none of them work on Coronavirus.

DR. K.K. AGGARWAL

Compiled by Deepa Alexander, Pradeep Kumar and Priyadarshini Paitandy

POOCH CAFE



CALVIN AND HOBBES



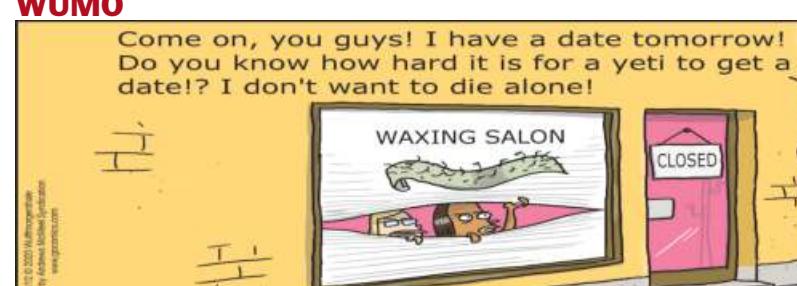
HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



TIGER



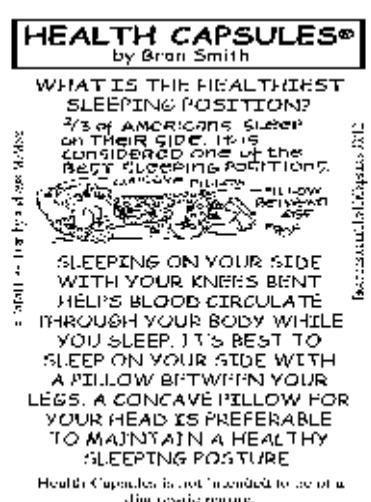
WUMO



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



GRAFFITI



THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13325

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21				22		
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To play The Guardian Quick Crossword, The Hindu Cryptic crossword, Sudoku & other puzzles online, scan the QR code.

7 Lodestone, for example (6)

9 Don Quixote author (9)

13 Catch (7)

14 Fabric – a fat eft (anag) (7)

15 Lethargic (6)

16 Iran, formerly (6)

18 Less than average tidal rises and falls (5)

20 Speak (5)

The solution will appear on March 13, 2020.

Solution No. 13325

P	O	S	Y	H	O	G	G	W	I	T
I	O	N	H	O	H	N	O			
P	I	C	C	O	L	O	E	L	F	I
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CM YK

India far from being obvious favourite

Rain threat looms large over ODI series-opener against South Africa



Time for a turnaround: The Indian team would be keen to put behind the horrors of the tour of New Zealand and get back to winning ways against South Africa. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

SA IN INDIA

RAKESH RAO
DHARAMSHALA

Following a harsh reality check in New Zealand, Virat Kohli and his men are back in familiar environs. Backed by vociferous crowds, favourable conditions and pitches, the recently-battered team will look to redeem itself against an in-form South Africa in the three-match ODI series beginning here on Thursday.

Looking to break the five-match losing streak – all three ODIs and both Tests – to New Zealand, India could well turn to its time-tested “spin-to-win” mantra. But that alone is not going to do the trick. The batsmen need to fire to restore confidence in the dressing room.

Indeed, three ODIs in a week will test India’s top-order in the continued absence of an injured Rohit Sharma. The Law of Averages seem to have finally caught up with Kohli. Returning from injury, Shikhar Dhawan is expected to take time to get back in to

the groove. An impetuous and inexperienced Prithvi Shaw is still a ‘work-in-progress’.

The rays of hope come from K.L. Rahul, Shreyas Iyer and Manish Pandey, who look increasingly hungry to cement their spots in the playing XI. Among these, Rahul now finds himself saddled with the job of keeping the wickets, something that his name-sake and fellow Karnataka cricketer Rahul Dravid once did so reluctantly.

With the team management going back to the idea of a specialist batsman-turned-makeshift keeper in search of the “right balance” or add to the options of playing an additional batsman or a bowler, one cannot help sparing a thought for the young Rishabh Pant.

Writing on the wall
Reduced to a bench-warmer during the three ODIs in New Zealand recently, Pant is going through a crisis of form, and with it, confidence. His understandable lack of self-belief has reflected in his job

behind the stumps in the two Tests that followed.

With Kohli and coach Ravi Shastri keen to wipe out the recent unpleasant memories, Pant could still find himself out of favour, probably like Shubman Gill. If the think-tank continues to opt for Rahul as the first-choice keeper, Pant should read the writing on the wall.

Victim of expectation

Like Pant, Jasprit Bumrah is learning to how it feels to become a victim of expectations. Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Hardik Pandya are back from injuries. The spin-duo of Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal are looking to strike in tandem. Navdeep Saini is aiming to resume his run on home-turf.

In short, this team does not look like an obvious favourite against South Africa, currently riding a high. Not many realise that South Africa is here after maintaining its domination over Australia by winning 11 out of the last 12 ODIs.

A first
In the absence of an injured Kagiso Rabada, the pace attack consists of Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Beuran Hendricks and recent debutant Lutho Sipamla, not to forget seam-bowling all-rounder Andile Phehlukwayo. Test spinner Keshav Maharaj and

Smuts provide the slower options. Interestingly, it will be a first for these bowlers to play an ODI in India.

■ India and South Africa face off in an ODI for the first time at Dharamshala

■ India comes into this series after losing 0-3 in New Zealand. In contrast, South Africa blanked Australia 3-0 at home.

■ However, after the 2019 WC, India has a clean record in ODIs at home – beating West Indies and Australia 2-1. South Africa, meanwhile, drew 1-1 with England in that period apart from beating Australia.

■ South Africa won 3-2 the last time it played an ODI series in India (Oct. 2015).

■ From that series, six – three each from both teams – have retained their places. They are Kohli, Dhawan, Bhuvneshwar, du Plessis, de Kock and Miller.

Bowlers lack experience: de Kock

RAKESH RAO
DHARAMSHALA

With coronavirus in the news and the rain clouds in attendance, cricketers from India and South Africa chose to take it easy on the eve of the first ODI here.

Ahead of Thursday’s clash Indians had an “optional session” on the ground and the South Africans opted for a brief feel of the “nets” in the stadium complex before it rained heavily.

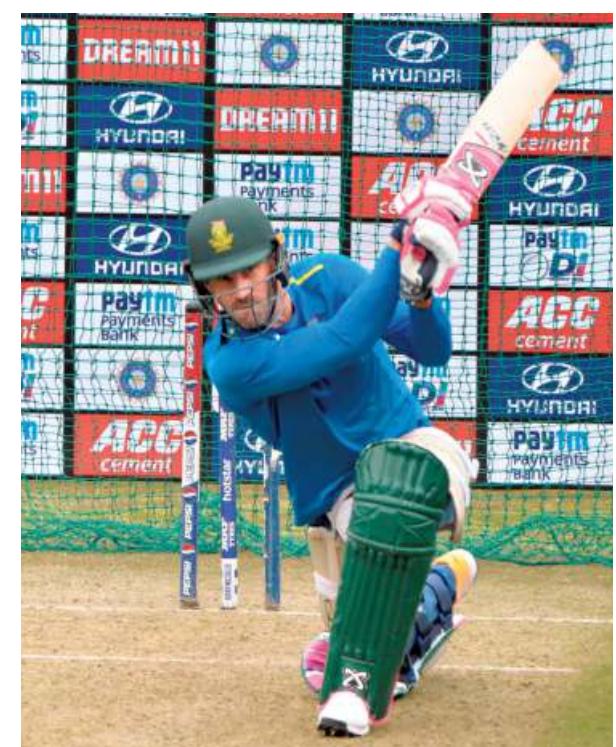
Skipper Quinton de Kock underlined the importance of the presence of his predecessor Faf du Plessis, back in the team after a break against the visiting Australians.

“He plays a big, big role for us from a leadership point of view. I think he is here to help a lot of the younger guys in our team. And he also knows that he has a lot of value to give in this team. So it’s still great to him around,” said de Kock.

Acknowledging the team’s bowling lacked experience, the skipper said, “Obviously we understand that we have come here with quite an inexperienced (bowling) side in these conditions but obviously it’s important for guys like Faf, me, David Miller to help out these guys around.”

Describing India as an “unbelievable team” de Kock said, “they got great bowlers, great batsmen. But I’m sure we’ve also come in here with a lot of confidence and I’m sure we’ll have a good series, anyway.”

Saliva on ball
Both de Kock and Bhuvneshwar Kumar were asked about the



Crucial member: Quinton de Kock underlined the importance of Faf du Plessis, saying he plays a big role from a leadership point of view. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

pacers using saliva on the ball in these days of coronavirus.

In response, de Kock said, “Our team doctors and management have made sure all are fit and don’t have coronavirus. So we’ll attend to that to still keep the ball shining.”

Bhuvneshwar wasn’t as sure. “Right now, I can’t say. But if we don’t use saliva and get hit, then you people (from the media) will say you didn’t bowl well. In any case, we’ll follow our doctor’s advice in dealing with coronavirus.”

BCCI monitoring virus outbreak

SPORTS REPORTER
CHENNAI

South Africa: Quinton de Kock (Capt.), Jaaneman Malan, Faf du Plessis, Temba Bavuma, Rassie van der Dussen, Jon-Jon Smuts, Kyle Verreyne, Heinrich Klaasen, David Miller, George Linde, Andile Phehlukwayo, Keshav Maharaj, Anrich Nortje, Lutho Sipamla, Beuran Hendricks and Lungi Ngidi.

Match begins at 1.30 p.m.

standard guidelines issued by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as well as the Union Ministry of Health and Welfare.

The BCCI has also issued a mandate to the airlines, team hotels, State associations and medical teams at venues about the thorough sanitisation of all

the facilities before and during team use.

To ensure the safety of the spectators, the State associations along with the healthcare service providers/hospitals are

ensuring that appropriate information, education and communication material are being provided.

COVID-19 – IPL GC meeting on Saturday

IPL

AMOL KARHADKAR
MUMBAI

The Governing Council of the Indian Premier League (IPL) will meet here on Saturday to discuss the imminent threat of COVID-19 that’s set to affect the T20 league’s 13th edition. The decision came on a day when the Maharashtra government had a discussion to propose that the IPL games in the State, including the season-opener and the final, be staged behind closed doors.

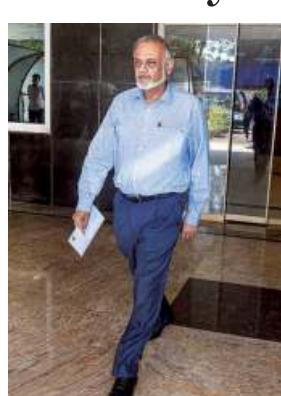
The Maharashtra government’s proposal comes a day after the Karnataka government wrote to the Union Government to disallow matches to be staged in Karnataka.

Business interest
With two of the nine States, where 60 IPL games are scheduled to be played from March 29, voicing their concern, the IPL authorities will have to act swiftly to ensure the business interest of the league is taken care of without compromising safety of players.

The GC meeting, to be chaired by Brijesh Patel, is set to be attended by BCCI president Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah. With the secretary’s father being the Union Home Minister, a possible solution is likely to be tabled before the GC.

With Karnataka and Maharashtra – two States with positive COVID-19 cases on the rise – having initiated action despite the Maharashtra government supporting a veterans’ cricket league now, other State governments are likely to step in and oppose IPL, which invariably finds itself in some controversy ahead of every edition.

While GC members are



Brijesh Patel. ■ PTI

IPL: overseas players’ participation in doubt

AMOL KARHADKAR
MUMBAI

A directive from the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare on Wednesday has put the participation of foreign players in IPL 2020 in doubt.

The ministry tweeted that “all existing visas, except diplomatic, official, UN / International Organisations, employment, project visas, stand suspended till 15th April 2020.”

According to “Details of Visas Granted by India” manual on the Ministry of Home Affairs, Clause 40 (xv) specifies “Foreign nationals who are engaged in commercial sports events in India on contract (including coaches) like Indian Premier League, Indian Soccer League, etc., with remuner-

ation. They may be granted ‘B-Sports’ Visa with multiple entry facility for appropriate period. Such a foreign national shall comply with all the statutory obligations like payment of taxes, etc.”

Since B-Sports – or even Business Visa – is not specified in the list of exceptions by the health ministry on Wednesday, it is highly unlikely that any overseas cricketer can join his IPL franchise at least before April 15.

While IPL officials remained unavailable for a comment, officials from a couple of franchisees said it is “too early” to comment on the impact of the advisory. “We will have to consult our legal teams to ascertain the nature of players’ visas,” said a CEO of a franchise.

Albie, Rhodes deliver for South Africa

LEGENDS T20

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NAVI MUMBAI

Albie Morkel (54 not out off 30 balls) and Jonty Rhodes (53 not out off 40) helped South Africa defeat West Indies by six wickets with nine balls to spare in the Unacademy Road Safety World Series match at the D.Y. Patil stadium on Wednesday.

West Indies scored a modest 143 for eight in 20 overs, with Paul Harris taking three wickets for SA. The Proteas chased down the target with ease to start on a winning note.

Four league games at Pune have been called off while two matches, scheduled to be held in Navi Mumbai will be held behind closed doors.

According to information from sources, this is in ac-



Quickfire knock: Albie Morkel scored an unbeaten 54 off 30 balls to guide South Africa home. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

cordance with the Maharashtra government’s decision to cancel all public gatherings to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Sindhu advances

ALL ENGLAND

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BIRMINGHAM

World champion P.V. Sindhu made a confident start at the All England Open, beating American Beiwin Zhang 21-14, 21-17 in 42 minutes, here on Wednesday. However, it was curtains for K. Srikanth and B. Sai Praneeth.

The results (first round): **Men:** P.V. Sindhu bt Beiwin Zhang (USA) 21-14, 21-17. **Doubles:** Ashwini Ponnappa & Sikki Reddy bt Jenny Moore & Victoria Williams (Eng) 5-4 retd.

Men: Chen Long (Chn) bt K. Srikanth 21-15, 21-16; Jun Peng Zhao (Chn) bt B. Sai Praneeth 21-12, 21-13.

Mixed doubles: Si Wei Zheng & Ya Qiong Huang (Chn) bt Pranaav Jerry Chopra & Sikki Reddy lost 21-13, 11-21, 21-17.

It was a team hat-trick, says Harbhajan Singh

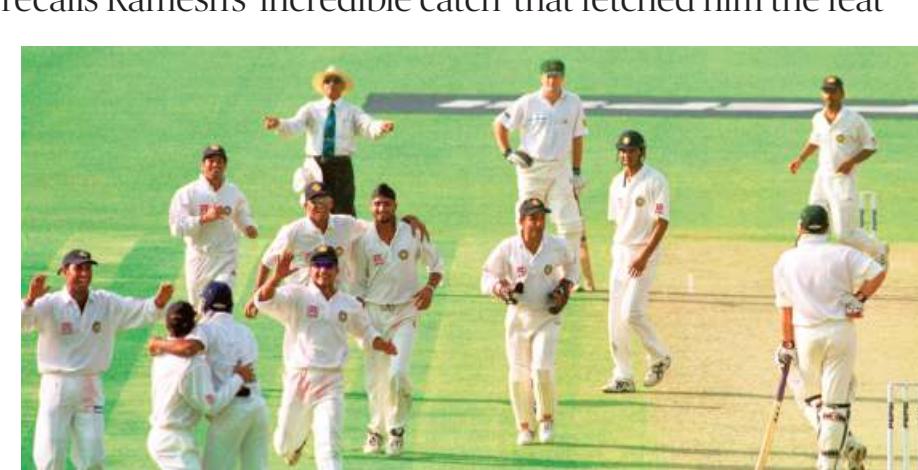
Veteran off-spinner recalls Ramesh’s ‘incredible catch’ that fetched him the feat

FLASHBACK

VIJAY LOKAPALLY
NEW DELHI

Who celebrated the Harbhajan Singh hat-trick the most on the opening day of the iconic India-Australia Test at the Eden Gardens on March 11, 2001? “Not me,” revealed the off-spinner. Then? “Rahul (Dravid) and Sadogopan (Ramesh). The hat-trick wicket (the first by an Indian) was because of the incredible catch by Ramesh,” recalled Harbhajan, who claimed 13 wickets in that Test.

“BCCI and IPL governing council will take a decision. I cannot comment on it because I feel they are the best judges and they will take a call on this. I am sure BCCI and governing council will discuss it with the teams and come up with a solution. I am sure they will have the best answers,” said Ramesh at a promotional event.



A frame from history: The Indians are an ecstatic bunch as Harbhajan Singh claims the country's first hat-trick by dismissing Shane Warne caught by Sadagopan Ramesh in the Kolkata Test ■ FILE PHOTO: SUSHANT PATRONOBISH

wicket in the first two sessions. They were just belting us. (Matthew) Hayden’s wicket gave us the break-

through,” said the off-spinner.

One wicket led to another. “I was happy to get Mark

jan. “Ponting was a prize wicket because he can be unsparing. There was not much turn and I just looked to bowl wicket-to-wicket. I was lucky in the sense that the ball went straight, did not turn,” remembered Harbhajan.

When Gilchrist took guard, Harbhajan, playing his 10th Test, told himself not to drift the ball. “It was simple. I had to bowl within the stumps. Line was important. I knew he loves to sweep and I had to deny him. Once again the ball stayed flat and Gilly had no chance. He was trapped plumb.”

The hat-trick ball had Harbhajan thinking a lot. “I was aware that Warne shuffles a lot. I obviously kept my eyes on the bat, just in case an edge came my way. It did. I saw it in a flash and put out my right hand. It was a firm flick really and I hung on. At that moment I couldn’t remember how Bhajji celebrated because Rahul had jumped to hug me,” said Ramesh.

Looking back on that feat, Harbhajan – who took 417 wickets from 103 Tests – noted, “I learnt how one ball, one wicket, can change things. It was the most important day of my career. It taught me never to lose hope.”

TV PICKS

NBA: Sony Ten 1 (SD & HD), 6 a.m.**Ranji Trophy:** Final, day four, Star Sports 2 (SD & HD), 9.30 p.m.**India vs South Africa:** 1st ODI, Star Sports 1 (SD & HD), 1.30 p.m.**All-England badminton championships:** Star Sports 3, 2.30 p.m.**Europa League:** Sony Ten 1, 2, 3 & Sony Six SD & HD, 1.30 a.m. (Friday).

IN BRIEF



Brooklyn Nets edges past LA Lakers

LOS ANGELES
Spencer Dinwiddie, in pic., scored 23 points and hit the go-ahead basket, and Caris LeVert added 22 points as the Brooklyn Nets surprised the host Los Angeles Lakers 104-102 in the NBA on Tuesday night.**The results:** Celtics 114 bt Pacers 111; Wizards 122 bt Knicks 115; Bulls 108 bt Cavaliers 103; Rockets 117 bt Timberwolves 111; Magic 120 bt Grizzlies 115; Pelicans 119 bt Mavericks 109; Trail Blazers 121 bt Suns 105; Clippers 131 bt Warriors 107; Nets 104 bt Lakers 102. REUTERS**Pankaj Advani wins 34th National title**AHMEDABAD
Ace cueist Pankaj Advani clinched the National 6-Red snooker championship with a convincing 7-3 win over Maharashtra's Ishpreet Singh in the final here on Wednesday. It is the 34th National title overall for Advani. Aimee Kamani overcame Vidya Pillai 4-2 to win the women's title. PTI

Indian Open golf put off

GURUGRAM
The Indian Open golf tournament has been postponed due to the coronavirus threat, the European Tour and Asian Tour announced on Wednesday. The event had been due to take place between March 19 and 22 at the DLF Golf and Country Club. Organisers said they were looking into the possibility of rescheduling the tournament later in the year. The move follows the cancellations of the China Open, Maybank Championship and Kenya Open. AFP

BCB's World XI vs Asia XI matches postponed

DHAKA
The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Wednesday postponed the World XI versus Asia XI matches, which would have marked the birth centenary celebrations of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, owing to the coronavirus outbreak. The matches were scheduled on March 21 and 22 here. PTI

Bangladesh seals series

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
DHAKA
Bangladesh beat Zimbabwe by nine wickets in the second T20I to clinch the two-match series 2-0 in Dhaka on Wednesday. **The scores:** Zimbabwe 119/7 in 20 overs (Brendon Taylor 59 n.o., Craig Ervine 29, Al-Amin Hossain 2/22, Mustafizur Rahman 2/25) lost to Bangladesh 120/1 in 15.5 overs (Liton Das 60 n.o., Md Naim 33).

Fito saves the day for CCFC

AFC CUP
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI
Adolfo Fito's brace, including a strike in the dying minutes, saved Chennai City FC the blushes as it drew 2-2 with Maziya Sports & Recreation in a Group-E match of the AFC Cup at the Nehru Stadium here on Wednesday. Maziya scored two goals in three minutes and led 2-1 before Mirinda's goal. **The result:** CCFC 2 (Adolfo Fito 11 & 90) drew with Maziya S&R 2 (Mohamed Irfaan 64, Ibrahim Mahadee 67).

Chatterjee keeps Bengal afloat in tall pursuit

Saurashtra's last-wicket pair collects some useful runs to swell total to 425

RANJI TROPHY

Y.B. SARANGI
RAJKOT

A resolute Sudip Chatterjee's fighting, unbeaten 47 kept Bengal in a challenging quest for the first-innings lead in the Ranji Trophy final against Saurashtra here on Wednesday.

In reply to the host's formidable 425 in the first innings, Bengal relied on Chatterjee's knock to reach 134 for three at stumps on day three at the Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium.

Akash Deep claimed his fourth wicket by dismissing Chirag Jani in the second over after Saurashtra resumed at 384 for eight. The last pair, Dharmendrasinh Jadeja (33 not out, 52b, 5x4) and Jaydev Unadkat (20, 35b, 3x4), added 38 of the 41 runs collected by Saurashtra in the



Key player: Bengal will pin a lot of hope on Sudip Chatterjee (47 batting) in its bid to secure the first-innings lead. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

morning. Shahbaz Ahmed bowled Unadkat to end the host's innings.

Bengal had a decent start, thanks to debutant Sudip

Gharami's positive approach. The right-hander's timing and placement fetched him four boundaries, including two consecutive ones off Unadkat.

Saurashtra exerted pressure to get two vital wickets and reduced Bengal to 35 for two at lunch. Dharmendra

had Gharami caught at forward short-leg and Prerak Mankad removed Abhimanyu Easwaran, who was adjudged lbw off a delivery that

SCA curator rejects Arun Lal's opinion

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
RAJKOT

The Saurashtra Cricket Association (SCA) head curator, Mahendra Rajdev, on Wednesday rejected Bengal coach Arun Lal's opinion that the SCA Stadium pitch was poor.

"I was surprised to see the critical statement of Arun Lal, the Bengal team coach and mentor, after the first day's play (of the Ranji Trophy final between Bengal and Saurashtra) when Bengal had the upper hand," said Rajdev in statement.

"The pitch may not have had extra bounce which Bengal bowlers were looking for, but that does not make the wicket poor.

"It is a rather hasty and poor judgement by the Bengal coach and it may not be



Mahendra Rajdev. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

beneficial for their own players when the coach makes a statement like this.

"It is the same pitch for both the teams and was prepared under the neutral curator (L. Prashanth Rao's supervision) from the BCCI," he added.

For Himali Desai, the senior-most female scorer in the country, spending quarter of a century in a profession dominated by men was the best possible way to stay connected with the game she loved the most.

Forty-four-year old Himali, a Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) panel scorer who is employed as a statistician by the Saurashtra Cricket Association (SCA), has performed duty in two Tests, 11 ODIs, three T20Is, some IPL matches and numerous Ranji and other domestic matches. She is the only woman Duckworth-Levis manager in the country.

The seniormost among a handful of female scorers, Himali – who played inter-university cricket as a wicketkeeper-batsman – says the

passion for the game was paramount for her. "I wanted to stay connected with cricket, so I chose this," Himali, posted in the press box for the Ranji Trophy final between Saurashtra and Bengal here, told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

"In 1994, I passed the State panel exam and in 1997 the BCCI exam. We were just

two girls and the other girl left scoring due to some personal problems. "I did not come to this profession for money. I was passionate about cricket. Later, I came to know that scorers were also paid. My first earning was from the Cochin Beher Trophy match between Saurashtra and Baroda in 1994. I got ₹100 per day.

All matches are equal
"From a concentration point of view, all matches are equal to me. There is no extra pressure in international matches. One has to remain more alert though, as it goes live on TV."

Himali thanked SCA for its support and felt proud to be associated with the association's effort to create a huge database of statistics.

"I doubt if any other association has Ranji data since 1950. We have database of women's (all formats) and C.K. Nayudu Trophy for Saurashtra and are working on Vijay Merchant and Cooch Behar stats."

Looking back at her journey, Himali said, "Everybody, including players, respects me. I have never felt out of place. It's like a family," said Himali.

ISSF will try to maintain event calendar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) has assured all member associations that it would try to ensure the conduct of all competitions scheduled to be held before the Olympics in Tokyo, to maintain "fairness of opportunities to all athletes to win quota places," according to the established regulations.

The ISSF has thus reasoned that the World Cup in Delhi, originally to be staged from March 15, was rescheduled for rifle pistol from May 4 to 13, and shotgun from May 20 to 29, for the same reason.

However, the ISSF has set April 15 as the deadline for the organisers and participants to decide about the F World Cups and continental championships.

Rahane backs shadow tours, but with a rider

'It will be better if we can get similar conditions as in internationals'

AMOL KARHADKAR
MUMBAI

At a time when shadow tours ahead of India's overseas trips clashing with the domestic cricket season have been severely criticised by legendary cricketers, Ajinkya Rahane, the Test vice-captain, has supported the initiative, albeit with a rider.

Important
"I feel it is important to have a shadow tour because you get to know the conditions really well."

"The only thing I feel is the wickets that we get in shadow games are completely different than what we get in international games," Rahane said, on the sidelines of an event to announce his investment in Merakisan, an organic farming initiative of Mahindra Group.

"That's an area but you cannot control that when you go overseas. But I feel if we can get similar conditions that we get in international matches, that will be better for shadow tours."

"The game that I played for India-A in New Zealand, that was a complete flat wicket. We lost three or four wickets in two days, so that's an area to improve."

Need for balance

With the BCCI having started organising shadow tours ahead of major overseas assignments for the last two years, it has resulted in the Ranji Trophy being depleted, let alone internationals.

Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar has expressed his disapproval of the shadow tour idea.

However, Rahane said



New initiative: Ajinkya Rahane at a promotional event, along with Ashok Sharma MD & CEO, Mahindra Agri Solutions, centre, and Prashant Patil, CEO, MeraKisan. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

there has to be a "balance" between shadow tours and domestic cricket.

"You have got to balance it out. Yes, domestic cricket is really important. As a Test player, if you get time to play domestic cricket, you should play domestic cricket but I still feel, it's important to

have a shadow tour ahead of an overseas Test series. You get used to the conditions.

Jet lag is also a factor. Seven and a half hour difference (with New Zealand time zone)," he said.

"Those small small things, getting used to weather, it's also important. I think the

have a shadow tour ahead of an overseas Test series. You get used to the conditions. Jet lag is also a factor. Seven and a half hour difference (with New Zealand time zone)," he said.

"Those small small things, getting used to weather, it's also important. I think the

BCCI has done a really good job by starting shadow tours. But whenever I can, I always give importance to Ranji Trophy cricket. I think players should play (Ranji) whenever possible."

Despite playing three Ranji games, then having a training stint at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru followed by an appearance for India-A in New Zealand, Rahane could garner only 91 runs in four innings in New Zealand.

Unperturbed
But the seasoned pro stressed he was neither worried for lack of runs nor about succumbing to short-ball ploy used by the Kiwi pacers. He admitted that the Kiwi pacers "used breeze very well" in the series in which India was whitewashed 2-0.

painful hits to his ribs.

The top six in the 63kg category were entitled to Olympic berths in the ongoing event.

Both Kaushik and Garside had lost in the quarterfinals.

However, first-timer Sachin Kumar (81kg) was pummelled by Shabbos Negmatulloev of Tajikistan in his box-off final to bow out of contention for an Olympic place.

Injured Vikas wins silver
Olympic-bound CWG champion Krishan signed off with a silver medal after an eye injury in the semifinal forced him to pull out of the final against Jordan's Zeyad Eashash.

Kaushik Tokyo-bound



Prevailing: Manish Kumar ecstatic after winning a draining box-off against Harrison Garside. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

BOXING

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AMMAN

World bronze-medallist Manish Kaushik (63kg) on Wednesday became the ninth Indian boxer to book an Olympic berth after winning a brutal box-off at the Asian Qualifiers as the country recorded its best-ever qualifying numbers for the quadrennial showpiece.

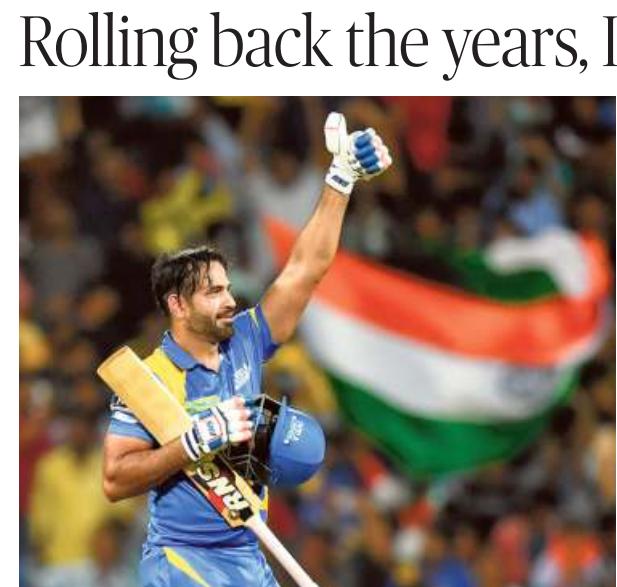
In a repeat of the 2018 CWG final, Kaushik defeated the CWG champion Krishan and second Harrison Garside 4-1 after a draining showdown which left the Australian with a bloodied face and the Indian exhausted by

starting with Tuesday's Basque derby. Real Sociedad is now above Getafe and Atletico Madrid, with 46 points from 27 games. Eibar, 16th and two points clear of the relegation zone, was hampered by its lack of fans.

The result:

Eibar 1 (Charles 90-pen) lost to Real Sociedad 2 (Oyarzabal 16-pen, Willian Jose 75).

Rolling back the years, Irfan Pathan style



Vintage stuff: Pathan's quick-fire 57 off 31 deliveries ensured India Legends' come-from-behind victory. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

SHAYAN ACHARYA
MUMBAI

Irfan Pathan rolled back the years on Tuesday evening, with his quick-fire 57 off 31 deliveries to guide India Legends home in a rather close Unacademy Road Safety World Series fixture against Sri Lanka Legends.

Coming in at a time, when India Legends was five wickets down, chasing 139, Pathan had a challenging job on hand. But the former India pace ace – known for his big-hitting, coming lower down the order – held his nerve and crafted his innings with six boundaries and three sixes.

And as he walked back to

pavilion, the first thing Pathan asked his team-mates was, "Is Sachin (Tendulkar) paaji happy?"

After all, having played with Tendulkar for long, Pathan knows how particular Tendulkar is about every aspect of the game. "When you play with a legend like Tendulkar, he ensures that every match is played seriously. We have to respect whatever paaji says and we follow that. He wants us to give our best," Pathan said.

Being the captain of India Legends, Tendulkar, obviously, was happy with the way his team fought back. "After the game, I had a word with paaji, and he was very

happy. That was a very special moment for me," Pathan said. A seasoned campaigner, Pathan retired from all forms of the game in January this year. But he returned to action after quite a while, and admitted that it was a bit challenging to get into the shape.

"We had very little time for training. There were hardly four sessions before the first game," Pathan said. "I was in Russia before coming for the tournament, so in that extreme conditions, I tried bowling a couple of overs. It was snowing, but I wanted to get going. When you haven't bowled for a year, it gets challenging."

Real Sociedad climbed to fourth in La Liga with a 2-1 win at Eibar on Tuesday, in the first Spanish match played without fans as part of measures to combat the spread of coronavirus.

La Liga said the next two rounds of fixtures would be played in empty stadiums,



Ambitious: Shivpal Singh is targeting the 91m mark this year. ■ FILE PHOTO

Javelin thrower Shivpal qualifies for Olympics

Says he will work on the 'block' issues after winning in a South African meet

ATHLETICS

STAN RAYAN
KOCHI

He has been having issues with the 'block' while throwing the javelin for some time.

Still, Shivpal Singh produced an impressive 85.47m effort in the Athletics Central North West League meet at Potchefstroom, South Africa, on Tuesday evening, a throw that helped the 24-year-old to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics.

He is the second Indian javelin thrower to make the cut. Neeraj Chopra, the World No. 4 and the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games champion, had qualified with an 87.86m effort in another ACNW League meet, also at Potchefstroom, in late January. The entry standard for Tokyo is 85m.

"I was not surprised with this throw because I had

done a bigger one last year," Shivpal, the World No. 16, told *The Hindu* shortly after winning the gold.

"But my block is still not good, I still have issues with it, I've got to work on it."

Shivpal, who had won the Asian championship in Doha in April last year with a personal best 86.23m, has been very inconsistent after that. He could only manage a best of 78.97m in the qualification round of the Doha World championships in October and failed to progress to the final.

Improving

Surprisingly, he was in impressive form in smaller meets towards the end of last year with an 83.33m effort in the World Military Games in Wuhan in October and 84.16m in the South Asian Games in Kathmandu in December.

Shivpal, coached by Germany's former World record holder Uwe Hohn, feels this year could be his best and surprised one when he spoke about his 91m goal for the year.

Neeraj's impressive performances in international meets have removed the mental barrier for javelin throwers in the country...a sort of Saina Nehwal effect in badminton. And it looks like the javelin throwers now believe that nothing is impossible!

But it will be wonderful if Shivpal's big throw comes in a big meet.

Annu also wins

Meanwhile, National record holder Annu Rani, also an Asian silver medallist who finished eighth in the Doha Worlds last year, won the women's event in the meet with a 61.15m effort.

The 27-year-old, who has a personal best of 62.43m, is chasing the 64m that will carry her to the Olympics.

Leipzig punishes lacklustre Spurs

Ilicic nets four as Atalanta romps past Valencia

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

AGENCIES
LEIPZIG

RB Leipzig's Marcel Sabitzer scored two early goals as it eased past last year's Champions League finalist Tottenham Hotspur 3-0 in its last 16 second-leg tie on Tuesday to reach its first quarterfinals by 4-0 on aggregate.

Sabitzer fired the lively German side in front with a low shot from about 20 metres after 10 minutes and it never looked back, pinning the visitor, which was without injured strikers Harry Kane and Son Heung-min, in its own half.

Leipzig's captain was then given far too much space in the 21st to head home Angelino's cross at the near post after Serge Aurier's poor clearance as the Spurs' players heads started to drop.

Emil Forsberg completed the victory with a third goal from inside the box in the 87th as Leipzig, which only got promoted to the Bundesliga in 2016, reached its first quarterfinal in Europe's premier club competition.

Stunning display

Atalanta's Josip Ilicic scored four goals in a stunning individual display to lead it to a



Josip Ilicic. ■ AP

4-3 Champions League last-16, second-leg win over Valencia, that completed an 8-4 aggregate victory, at an empty Mestalla.

Playing in the Champions League for the first time this season, Atalanta's European adventure continued in emphatic fashion as Slovenian Ilicic netted twice in each half to guide his side comfortably into the quarterfinals.

Valencia defender Mouctar Diakhaby conceded two penalties in the first half, both converted by Ilicic, either side of Kevin Gameiro's equaliser.

Gameiro headed home a second and Ferran Torres put Valencia ahead on the night but Slovenian play-maker Ilicic completed his



Two-goal hero: Marcel Sabitzer, left, was the star of the day for Leipzig. ■ REUTERS

hat-trick and then curled in a sumptuous fourth as his team reached the quarterfinals.

Valencia started badly, with the hapless Diakhaby bringing down Ilicic inside the second minute and the Slovenian converted from the penalty spot to give the visitor a dream start.

Gameiro pounced on a loose ball and slotted home to level but Gian Piero Gasperini's A side could not be repressed.

The Italians went back ahead two minutes before the break after Diakhaby handled in the area to concede another penalty, dispatched by Ilicic.

Remo Freuler crashed an effort against the crossbar for Atalanta but Gameiro headed home Torres's cross to level on the night after 51 minutes. Electric winger Torres, recently linked with Barcelona by Spanish media, lobbed home to give the host some hope, but the sublime Ilicic wrapped up the tie with two classy finishes.

The results (last-16, second-leg) RB Leipzig 3 (Sabitzer 10, 21, Forsberg 87) bt Tottenham Hotspur 0 (Leipzig won 4-0 on aggregate); Valencia 3 (Gameiro 21, 51, Ferran Torres 67) lost to Atalanta 4 (Ilicic 3-pen, 43-pen, 71, 82). (Atalanta won 8-4 on aggregate).

Women's ODI WC to have reserve days for semifinals and final

CRICKET

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WELLINGTON

A harsh lesson learnt after England women bowed out of T20 World Cup without actually playing the semifinal against India, the ICC has now allocated a reserve day each for the two semifinals and final of the 2021 ODI edition in New Zealand. The ICC released the 31-match schedule for the tournament, starting February 6 to March 7 in New Zealand with reserve days scheduled for all three knockout matches a day later.

Last week, England was forced to make an exit from the T20 Women's World Cup after their semifinal clash was washed out resulting in India, the higher ranked side in the group stage, progressing to the final. The ICC had faced a lot of flak for not keeping a reserve day of the recently concluded Women's T20 World Cup.

The Women's ODI World Cup will be played at six venues, including Eden Park (Auckland), Bay Oval (Tauranga), Seddon Park (Hamilton), University Oval (Dunedin), Basin Reserve (Wellington) and Hagley Oval (Christchurch).

The iconic Basin Reserve will stage the highly anticipated Trans-Tasman showdown between New Zealand and Australia on Feb. 13. Auckland will host the opening game between the host and a qualifying team, the semifinals will be played in Tauranga and Hamilton on February 3 and 4 respectively with the summit clash scheduled to take place in Christchurch on March 7.

"It's a match we absolutely fizz about as players – taking on the Aussies is always a huge thrill. Cricket fans who come along to the Basin Reserve on Saturday the 13th of February will no doubt see a lot of passion from both teams," New Zealand captain, Sophie Devine said.

New Zealand, Australia, England and South Africa have already qualified for the World Cup. The remaining four teams will be established following the completion of the ICC Women's Championship and a subsequent qualifying tournament in Sri Lanka in July.

The eight-team round robin format will see all teams play each other, with the top four teams qualifying for semifinals. The prize money for the showpiece of women's international cricket will total NZ\$ 5.5million, and all matches will be broadcast live to a huge global audience.

**Government of India
Public Enterprises Selection Board**
invites applications for the post of
Director (Marketing)
in
Indian Oil Corporation Limited
Last date of receipt of applications in
PESB is by 15.00 hours on
12th May, 2020
For details login to website
<http://www.pesb.gov.in>

Harika loses to Stefanova

CHESS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LAUSANNE

Indian Grandmaster Dronavalli Harika went down to Bulgaria's Antoaneta Stefanova slipping to seventh place with only four points after the eighth round in the FIDE Women's Grand Prix chess tournament.

95-move game
The lower-rated Stefanova (Elo 2453) outlasted the Indian no.2 (Elo rating 2518) in a 95-move game late on Tuesday to improve to 3.5 points.

Kashlinskaya, who was the joint leader with compatriot Alexandra Goryachkina after the seventh round, lost to world champion Ju Wenjun to slip to joint second spot.

It was the first win in the tournament for Ju Wenjun, who made the most of a blunder by her opponent on the 22nd move and took her tally to four points.

Georgian Nana Dzagnidze outplayed Frenchwoman Marie Sebag in 34 moves to joint Goryachkina at the top of the standings with five points.

There are three more rounds to go in the strong 12-player tournament including the world champion Wenjun, which is the third in the series of four Grands Prix from which the two with the highest points tally would qualify for the next candidates event.

The results (eighth round):

D. Harika 4 lost to Antoaneta Stefanova (Bul) 3.5; Anna Muzychuk (Ukr) 4.5 drew with Zhanasya Abdumalik (Kaz) 4.5.

Alexandra Goryachkina (Rus) 5 drew with Pia Cramling (Swe) 4.

Mariya Muzychuk (Ukr) 4.5 bt Alexandra Kosteniuk (Rus) 2; Nana Dzagnidze (Geo) 5 bt Marie Sebag (Fra) 2.5.

Alena Kashlinskaya (Rus) 4.5 lost to Ju Wenjun (Chn) 4.

A big inspiration for everyone: Ankita

Gives credit to entire team for the historic achievement



Proud teacher: Rutuja Bhosale, left, and Ankita Raina with coach Hemant Bendrey in Pune on return from Dubai. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

FED CUP

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

It took Indian women's tennis 30 years to make the breakthrough and make the World Group play-off. It has taken Ankita Raina only eight years. "This should boost Indian women's tennis. It is a big inspiration for everyone and should give the girls belief," Ankita said, delighted to be part of the historic achievement.

Ankita has always pushed herself hard in the Fed Cup and while playing for the country.

"For me personally, it was a great example of pushing my limits much more than ever before, as I was playing two matches within half an hour. So playing a singles three-setter and then playing a doubles three-setter definitely showed how much you can challenge yourself physically," she remarked.

Ankita played the most crucial singles rubber against Aldila Sutjiadi of Indonesia on the last day, when she had to rescue the team from 0-1 down, "play under pressure and make sure the tie goes into the deciding doubles".

The best-ranked Indian woman in singles and doubles, Ankita gracefully shared the credit. "Our cap-

team. You can be top-50, but if you don't have two or three more good players from your country, it is tough," said Ankita, back home, after the unforgettable week in Dubai.

Originally, the tournament was scheduled to be played in China, and was postponed and shifted to Dubai, following the outbreak of the coronavirus.

Ankita has always pushed herself hard in the Fed Cup and while playing for the country.

"It was great that Rutuja and me were part of this historic moment. We have played Fed Cup together and at different times. It was such a special moment that India qualified this time when we were together," she said.

She also had a word of thanks for Hemant Bendrey who has trained them both. "Hats off to his dedication, sacrifice and perseverance for so many years."

Having stopped looking for another Sania, Indian women's tennis has started finding performers who inspire confidence of a bright tomorrow.

The best-ranked Indian woman in singles and doubles, Ankita gracefully shared the credit. "Our cap-

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