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THE HINDU

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2019

INDIA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER SINCE 1878

DELHI
CITY EDITION
28 pages • ₹10.00

PRINTED AT · CHENNAI · COIMBATORE · BENGALURU · HYDERABAD · MADURAI · NOIDA · VISAKHAPATNAM · THIRUVANANTHAPURAM · KOCHI · VIJAYAWADA · MANGALURU · TIRUCHIRAPALLI · KOLKATA · HUBBALLI · MOHALI · MALAPPURAM · MUMBAI · TIRUPATI · LUCKNOW · CUTTACK · PATNA

NEARBY

Elusive Delhi hotel owner arrested

NEW DELHI

Rakesh Goel, owner of Hotel Arpit Palace, has been arrested in connection with the massive fire that killed 17 people on its premises, the police said on Sunday. The arrest was made at the IGI Airport on Saturday after the police received a tip-off that Goel was travelling from Qatar by an Indigo flight, they said.

DELHI METRO ▸ PAGE 1

Disgruntled Rajbhar to meet Amit Shah

LUCKNOW

After having offered to quit the Backward Class Welfare Ministry in Uttar Pradesh, Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party leader Om Prakash Rajbhar will now press his demands with the BJP's central leadership.

NEWS ▸ PAGE 11

EDGE ▸ 4 PAGES
DELHI METRO ▸ 6 PAGES

J&K administration withdraws security to separatist leaders

Move follows Pulwama terror attack, in which 40 CRPF jawans were killed

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

In the backdrop of the Pulwama attack by a suicide bomber in which 40 CRPF jawans were killed, the Governor's administration in Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday issued orders to withdraw all security personnel and government facilities provided to five separatist leaders in Kashmir.

The separatist leaders included Hurriyat chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, his two close aides Abdul Ghani Bhat and Bilal Ghani Lone.

Democratic Freedom Party chief Shabir Shah, who remains behind bars after the Enforcement Directorate arrested him in July 2017, and Democratic Liberation Party chief Hashim Qureshi, one of the accused in the hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane in 1971, are also among those whose security stands withdrawn.

"All security and any vehicles will stand withdrawn from Sunday evening. No security forces or cover should be provided, under any pretext, to them or any other separatists. If they have any other facilities provided by the Government, they are to be withdrawn forthwith," reads the government order.

It said the police headquarters would also review whether any facilities were offered to other separatists.

PDP leaders and workers taking out a rally in Srinagar on Sunday against the attack on Kashmiris. ▪ NISSAR AHMAD

The move comes two days after Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh talked about acting "against those who get money from across the border and are hand in glove with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)."

Never sought it: Mirwaiz

The Mirwaiz termed the move "a non-issue." "We never asked for it. The security of separatists was being politicised. It has no bearing nor can it in any way change the reality of the lingering Kashmir dispute," he said.

The Mirwaiz's father Moulvi Muhammad Farooq and his uncle were killed by unknown gunmen in two separate incidents since 1990. Lone's father Abdul Ghani was also killed. The government had blamed "unknown gunmen" for these incidents.

'False propaganda'

Meanwhile, Mr. Shah's wife Dr. Bilquees claimed that there was no security cover for her husband.

"This is a false propaganda. My husband has never ever trusted Indian security," she said.

Mr. Qureshi said his writings and articles have been "consistently against violence and terrorism in Kashmir" and "he faced a threat."

KASHMIRIS FACE THREATS, 100 RETURN HOME ▸ PAGE 10
'PAK. SPONSORED TERROR' FINDS AN ECHO AT MUNICH ▸ PAGE 10

Fire raging in my heart too: PM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the fire raging in the hearts of the people was in his heart too. At a public meeting in Bihar, he paid tributes to the two CRPF men from the State, Sanjay Kumar Sinha and Ratan Kumar Thakur, who were among the 40 soldiers killed in the Pulwama terror attack. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said the State government would give all help to the families of the two soldiers.

▸ PAGE 10

Shutdown in Kashmir Valley

The Kashmir Valley observed a shutdown on Sunday over the harassment of Kashmiri students and traders in other States after the Pulwama terror attack. A curfew continued for the third day in Jammu. The police sealed the PDP office in Jammu as party president Mehbooba Mufti arrived to hold a meeting. People stayed indoors and markets remained closed all day in the Valley. Mobile Internet was suspended. ▸ PAGE 10

Central forces to be moved by air for Kashmir deployment

A commercial flight will be available six days a week

VIJAITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has approved a plan to charter flights to transport Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) personnel deployed in the Kashmir Valley.

A commercial flight will be available six days a week exclusively for the movement of personnel from Srinagar-Delhi-Srinagar and Srinagar-Jammu-Srinagar, CRPF Director-General R.R. Bhatnagar told *The Hindu*.

Inputs gathered

The officer said intelligence had been gathered in the past two days and operations against terrorists would follow soon. "We operate under the parameters of law; there will be operations in conjunction with other security forces."

He said that following the Pulwama attack, a lot of false and inflammatory photographs were being circulated to incite passions, and an advisory had been issued, warning people not to forward such posts on social media.

Mr. Bhatnagar said the movement of large convoys was inevitable. "We have not had any convoy attack in the past two years. Now, we will have to initiate measures to counter this. With plans to fly the troops, we will be able to curtail some of the convoys but there will always be a need to move men and machine... Since elections are coming, there will be movement," he said.

No leak: The movement of convoys is visible to everyone, hence the question of any leak of information is irrelevant, CRPF Director-General R.R. Bhatnagar said. ▪ AFP

"The convoy movement is visible to everyone. It starts in the morning, so the question of any leak of information on its movement is irrelevant, it runs almost daily. We have also designated Delhi as a transit camp now. So they can fly directly to Srinagar and not halt at Jammu first," he said. Most personnel who were part of the convoy that was hit by the suicide bomber had got stuck at the Jammu camp for days as the highway was closed because of snowfall.

He said professional counselling would be given to the personnel if they felt traumatised after the February 14 attack. The CRPF bus that bore the impact of the explosion was fifth in the convoy and had 39 personnel on board. It was followed by other buses and vehicles.

"We have asked all our Commandants to speak to the personnel, especially those who were in the immediate vicinity of the bus. There is a sense of loss but there is determination also...they know they are a fighting force and they have to take up the challenge," he said.

He said the convoys had been strengthened by making the vehicles bullet-resistant. "But even a bullet-proof vehicle is not blast-proof," he said.

CRPF CAUTIONS PEOPLE AGAINST FAKE PHOTOS ▸ PAGE 10
COUNTER TO VEHICLE-BORNE AMBUSH ▸ PAGE 10

'Congress wants to build base, we want to stop BJP'

'It failed to forge Oppn. unity in Assembly polls'

AMIT BARUAH
OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

Taking a dig at the Congress approach in Uttar Pradesh, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav said the BSP and his party had sacrificed seats and come together to stop the BJP, but the grand old party was interested only in building itself.

In an interview to *The Hindu*, he said an understanding with the Congress "looks difficult at this moment" as the SP-BSP did not want to do anything that could give the "advantage" to the BJP, for the Congress did not have any presence in the State.

He said the Congress "missed the opportunity" to bring all Opposition parties together in the Assembly polls in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

Akhilesh Yadav

On the impact of Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, he said, "It's difficult to say anything right now," but added the "U.P. voter is very sensible".

'I LEARNT POLL TACTICS FROM THE BJP' ▸ PAGE 11

Shah swears by Citizenship Bill

BJP chief says Centre will not let Assam become 'another Kashmir'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Days after the deadly terror attack on a CRPF convoy in Pulwama, BJP president Amit Shah on Sunday sought to compare his party with the Congress on security issues, saying the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance would never let Assam become another Kashmir, if voted back to power.

His remark was in reference to the update of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam and the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill. From the BJP's point of view, both are meant for keeping Muslims of Bangladeshi origin out of the State historically allergic to migrants.

At a BJP youth rally at North Lakhimpur, Mr. Shah said the sacrifice of Maneswar Basumatari of Assam and other CRPF jawans killed in Pulwama on February 14 would not go in vain. "The Pakistan-backed terrorists will not be spared for the cowardly act. The sacrifice of the soldiers will not go in vain because this is a BJP government at the Centre, not a Congress government. The Narendra Modi government will not compromise on any security issue," he said.

BJP president Amit Shah at a BJP youth rally in North Lakhimpur in Assam. ▪ PTI

Mr. Shah said the NDA government started the NRC update in order that Assam might not become "another Kashmir", a term the party has been using to mean a demographic change by migrant Muslims.

Mr. Shah said his party would bring the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill back if it returned to power.

"If the BJP returns to power, [Prime Minister Narendra] Modiji will bring the Bill again," he said, insisting that the BJP would implement Clause 6 of the 1985 Assam Accord to safeguard the rights of the indigenous people.

Metro to curtail announcements on Magenta Line

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Starting Monday, the number of announcements inside trains on Magenta Line of the Delhi Metro will be reduced on a trial basis, officials said Sunday, adding the move was aimed at giving relief to commuters who complain about "excessive announcements".

DETAILS ▸ DELHI METRO PAGE 1

Bandar's sure-shot connection with military history

Cannonball relics from a Dutch armoury unearthed in Machilipatnam turn treasures

T. APPALA NAIDU
BANDARKOTA

Most people are highly possessive of artefacts unearthed in their backyard, but residents of Machilipatnam's Bandarkota area treasure something unusual: cannonballs. These solid metal shots from a past era of warfare have been turning up periodically in housing sites in the old parts of the town when they are excavated for construction.

Many households preserve the cannonballs, although a few simply dispose of them as scrap, unaware of their heritage value. "Unearthing old, used cannonballs is common in our area. I have one, and it is an echo of military history," says local resident P. Hanumath Rao.

Machilipatnam, in Andhra Pradesh, houses an old armoury dating back to the Dutch era, which is protected by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

Famine and storm

Part of the structure collapsed in heavy rain in 2016. The fortunes of Bandarkota changed decisively after a storm in the 19th century. Tracing the history of the fort, the Manual of Kistna District by Gordon Mackenzie says:

Solid impact: Visitors from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam displaying cannonballs in Bandarkota. ▪ T. APPALA NAIDU

"The pestilence that followed on the famine of 1832-3 induced the authorities to station no more European troops at Bandar and the storm wave of 1864 caused the withdrawal of the last sepoy regiment and ended the history of Masulipatam as a military station."

ASI monument assistant at the Dutch fort Subba Rao said his team had collected a cannonball from the local residents and put it on display.

A cannon was also kept on display at the entrance to the District Police grounds, after it was shifted from the railway station area.

"Until the 1960s, a cannon was operated by the local authorities without the use of cannonballs to avoid any untoward incident, producing just a deafening sound," a local resident Mohammad Silar said.

Many families do not disclose their cannonball find, fearing that the ASI might recover them.

DELHI Timings

MONDAY, FEB. 18				
	RISE	06:57	SET	18:13
	RISE	16:49	SET	05:48
TUESDAY, FEB. 19				
	RISE	06:56	SET	18:14
	RISE	16:00	SET	06:41
WEDNESDAY, FEB. 20				
	RISE	06:56	SET	18:15
	RISE	19:09	SET	07:29

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	22	10
Safdarjang	22	10
Palam	22	10

Delhi Palam Today
22°C Shallow fog/mist will persist. Day will be partly cloudy. There are chances of short spell of rain.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
23°C Pollution level will be moderate. Shallow fog/mist will persist during morning. Day will be comfortable.

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Punjab Cong. to shortlist names for LS polls

The list of proposed candidates will then be sent to party chief Rahul Gandhi for final selection

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHANDIGARH

The Punjab Congress will send a list of candidates shortlisted for the 13 Lok Sabha seats to Congress president Rahul Gandhi for final selection.

This was decided here in a meeting of the election committee of the State unit of the party for the coming Lok Sabha polls.

"The decision, which marks a new openness and stronger democratic systems in the party under the dynamic leadership of Rahul, Gandhi comes in response to the party president's suggestion that the State unit should send in the names of proposed candidates instead of merely authorising the high command to take a decision," a party release said.

Referring to the suggestion, Punjab Congress chief Sunil Jakhar mooted a proposal at the meeting to accept the same and move forward accordingly.

CM Amarinder Singh

Congress chief Rahul Gandhi

The objective is to ensure Congress' victory in the polls and the party forming the government at the Centre, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said, urging all party members to rise above personal relations and concerns to select only winnable candidates.

According to the release, Capt. Amarinder made it clear that he was not in favour of any alliance, suggesting that only Congress members/workers should be fielded in the polls.

He claimed that the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) were in disarray and the situation was clearly balanced in favour of the Congress.

AICC secretary in-charge of Punjab affairs Asha Kumari said a total of 180 applications had been received for 13 Lok Sabha seats from Punjab.

She said Rahul Gandhi wanted names of the shortlisted candidates, as per the procedure adopted by the party in Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh.

Ms. Kumari suggested that the list of applicants be circulated to all members, who can tick their choices and also add their own suggestions on possible candidates.

Given the criticality of these elections for the Congress and the country, it was important for the party to win all the 13 seats in Punjab, she said.

The meeting accepted the suggestion and decided that the names of the applicants be circulated among members of the election committee, from where the shortlisted names would go to the screening committee, which would send the same to the central election committee.

The members would be allowed to give preferential numbering also, as decided in the meeting.

No bar on sitting MLAs

During the meeting, it was decided that there would be no bar on sitting MLAs from contesting these polls, though it was clarified that the same should be considered only as an exceptional case.

Other members of the election committee present at the meeting included Pratap Singh Bajwa, Rajinder Kaur Bhattal, Rana Gurmit Sodhi, Gurpreet Singh Kangar, Bharat Bhushan Ashu, and heads of all frontal organisations of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee.

Lessons on martyrs in school textbooks

'Will develop feeling of patriotism'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JAIPUR

The valour and sacrifice of military and paramilitary personnel killed in action may soon be made part of the school curriculum in Rajasthan from the next academic session.

State Education Minister Govind Singh Dotasara said course curriculum committees have been directed to include lessons of bravery and sacrifice in books of Classes 1 to XII.

"After being moved by the Pulwama terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir, it has been decided to include lessons of bravery of martyrs in school books. It will develop a sense of respect for the martyrs among students and will develop feeling of patriotism," Mr. Dotasara said.

A candlelight vigil for martyrs of Pulwama terrorist attack. ▪

He said the curriculum committees for Classes 1 to VIII and classes IX to XII will decide the form and type of lessons to be included and submit their reports by February 20, and added that the time limit may be extended as per requirements.

President Kovind lauds farmers of Haryana

For new methods to manage stubble

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SONIPAT

President Ram Nath Kovind on Sunday praised the farmers of Haryana for adopting new methods to manage stubble and crop residue as he honoured some of them with 'Kisaan Ratna' and 'Krishi Ratna' awards.

Stubble burning by farmers in many States has been one of the major causes for air pollution for years, prompting the governments to ban the practice and encourage the growers to adopt alternative ways to manage crop residue.

Attack condemned

President Kovind, addressing the closing ceremony of the 4th Agri Leadership Summit organised by the Haryana government in Sonipat's Ganaur, condemned the Pulwama terrorist attack in which 40 CRPF soldiers were killed.

"Three days ago, some of our brave jawans lost their lives in a terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir. Along with every Indian, I condemn this heinous crime. The entire country is in mourning with the bereaved families. On behalf of the country, I express gratitude towards our brave soldiers and security personnel," he said.

The President honoured farmers with the 'Kisaan Ratna' and the 'Krishi Ratna' awards.

He said that the people and the government of Haryana were making efforts for the overall development of the State, including in enhancing ease of doing business and improving social indicators such as the child sex ratio.

Adoption of modern, 21st century technologies in agriculture was part of this process. The farmers, Mr. Kovind said, would benefit from such collaborations.

The President called for locating farming in a wider entrepreneurial context, and linking traditional farming to the agricultural value chain.

Mr. Kovind appreciated that farmers in Haryana, with the help from the State government, were adopting new methods to manage stubble and crop residue.

He also expressed confidence that farmers would help find a solution to the problem of pollution emanating from stubble burning.

Every year, Punjab and Haryana are blamed for rising air pollution and smog caused by crop residue burning by growers. The two States annually generate 220 lakh tonne and 65 lakh tonne of paddy stubble, respectively.

Farmers find stubble burning as an easy option as a way of its disposal in the wake of limited time available for next crop sowing.

Bullock cart racing to make a comeback at Kila Raipur meet

Punjab govt. nod to enact law in present Assembly session

Bullock cart racing at Kila Raipur in Ludhiana. ▪ FILE PHOTO: AKHILESH KUMAR

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

The Punjab government on Sunday paved the way for the revival of bullock cart races at the annual Kila Raipur rural sports meet in Ludhiana.

The Cabinet, which met under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, gave its nod to present the 'Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Punjab Amendment) Bill, 2019' in the current Budget Session of the State Assembly for enactment.

The bullock cart races were prohibited by the Supreme Court in 2014. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 (Central Act 59 of 1960) was enacted to prevent infliction of unnecessary cruelty and suffering on animals.

The Act also recognises the need to exempt the application of its provisions in certain circumstances.

'Significant role'

An official statement said that the State government has decided to exempt bullock-cart racing in Kila Raipur rural sports event from the provisions of the said Central Act 59 of 1960, in view of the significant role played by the traditional rural sports event and fair, which has been taking place at Kila Raipur (Ludhiana) since the 1930s.

"The government feels the sport also enriches the cultural heritage and tradition of Punjab, while being a great source of entertainment, especially for rural Punjab," said the statement.

The Cabinet also cleared the presentation of the Budget estimates for 2019-20, along with various accounts and CAG audit reports, in the ongoing budget session of the Assembly.

7 killed in Bihar road accident

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SIWAN

Seven persons were killed and nine others injured when a pick-up van carrying them collided head-on with a truck here, the police said on Sunday.

All the seven died on the spot, the police said.

The accident took place in the Sarai area of the district on Saturday night when the people were returning to their village here after attending a ceremony at a nearby place, the Additional Superintendent of Police of Siwan district, K.K. Mishra, said.

The truck sped away from the scene after the accident, Mr. Mishra added.

The deceased have been identified as Ajit Kumar (12), Brajesh Kumar (14), Shibu Kumar (20), Lal Babu Kumar (20), Sonu Kumar (17), Vikas Kumar (19) and Saheb Hussain (18), the ASP said.

Nine other occupants of the van were injured in the accident, the police officer said, adding that eight among them were admitted to Patna Medical College.

Cong., CPI may contest polls jointly in Odisha

CPI(M) and JMM may also be part of the seat-sharing understanding

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

The Congress and the Communist Party of India on Sunday confirmed that they were coming up with a pre-poll seat-sharing agreement to fight the upcoming elections against the Biju Janata Dal and the Bharatiya Janata Party in Odisha.

Along with the two parties, the CPI(M) and the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha will also be part of the seat-sharing understanding.

"It has been decided that the CPI, the CPI(M) and the Congress will fight the elections in an alliance. The seat-sharing formula has not been finalised. It is a fact that the CPI and the CPI(M) are joining us," said Niranjan Patnaik, president of the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee.

"In Odisha, we are speaking to the Congress. Not only the CPI, the CPI(M) is also talking to the Congress. It is more likely that the Congress, the CPI, the CPI(M) and the JMM would come together and fight the election jointly," said D. Raja, Member of Parliament and national secretary of CPI, here on Sunday.

Fascist forces

"We think there is need to prevent the BJP from taking any advantage in Odisha politics and, at the same time, we think the BJD's policy is not acceptable to us. Maintaining an equidistance from communal fascist forces and secular democratic forces will not help the State of Odisha and country as a whole," he said.

"Our State council has identified certain seats and we are discussing...what will be finalised is subject to negotiations. Right now, talks between the CPI and the Congress are continuing," said the CPI leader.

The State unit of the CPI (M) has already held preliminary discussions with a Congress team headed by Narasingha Mishra, Leader of the Opposition.

No formal talks yet

According to sources, the JMM has not held any formal talks with the Congress but feelers have been sent by both the parties to form a possible coalition for the next elections.

JNPT development works will generate lakhs of jobs: Gadkari

Says progress of Konkan region, people must happen; assures 80% jobs to locals

SUYASH KARANGUTKAR
MUMBAI

Union Minister for Road Transport, Highways and Shipping, Nitin Gadkari, on Sunday said that alongside the process of developing Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), the progress of the Konkan region and people must also take place.

Unveiling the Shiv-Samarth statue at Dastan Phata at JNPT on Sunday in the presence of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, and Union Minister for Heavy Industries and Public Sector Enterprises, Anant Geete, Mr. Gadkari said that at least 1.5 lakh jobs will be created through JNPT in the next two to three years. "The progress of Konkan region and people must happen. In the process of development at JNPT, these jobs will be created. At least 80 % jobs will be given to Konkan youths and son of soils," he said.

Busy day: Padmashree Appasaheb Dharmadhikari (from left), Chief Minister Devendra Fadanvis, Union Ministers Nitin Gadkari and Anant Geete in Uran on Sunday. • EMMANUAL YOGINI

The minister also laid the foundation for the development of Free Trade Warehouses at JNPT Special Economic Zone and declared the increase in draft of JNPT Mumbai Navigational Channel.

The channel will not only help the port navigate new generation container vessels, but will also increase the handling capacity, facilitate growth of economy of Indian trade through optimal utilisation of capacity and provide economic benefits to EXIM trade through faster turnaround time. The project cost is pegged at ₹2,029 crore.

Mr. Fadnavis said that developmental projects such as the one being undertaken at JNPT will not only create jobs but also bring more business to the State.

Sanjay Sethi, chairman, JNPT, said that the international maritime sector is evolving rapidly and the business demands are constantly changing. "Hence it is imperative that we also develop our capabilities to stay ahead in the competitive market," he added.

The Shiv-Samarth Smarak aims to promote art and culture, and connect society with local heritage. The project will include recreational facilities, an amphitheatre, landscaped garden and statutes of key personalities from Maharashtra.

Boycott tourism in Jammu and Kashmir: Sena MLC

Locals help militants by pelting stones on jawans, she says

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

Against the backdrop of the Pulwama terrorist attack that claimed lives of 40 CRPF personnel, a Shiv Sena MLC wants people from other parts of India to boycott tourism in Jammu and Kashmir for two years.

Sena legislator and spokesperson Manisha Kayande said boycotting tourism in Jammu and Kashmir, "where youth, women and children pelt stones on security forces", would hurt the economic resources of the State.

"The need of the hour is to counter the mentality behind keeping the State on tenterhooks by targeting Indian jawans," she said in a statement issued on Saturday.

Noting that Jammu and Kashmir is a beautiful state that attracts visitors from across the globe, Ms. Kayande said, "Tourism benefits the local people. If these resources earned are used against the country and the security forces, Indians should boycott tourism in the State for the next two years."

Manisha Kayande

> **The need of the hour is to counter the mentality behind keeping the State on tenterhooks.**
>
> MANISHA KAYANDE
> Shiv Sena MLA

"Whenever there is an encounter between militants and security agencies, locals pelt stones on jawans to help militants get away," she claimed.

The Sena leader also demanded boycott of all Chinese goods, saying that the country was supportive of Pakistan.

China on Friday condemned the Pulwama attack carried out by a Jaish suicide bomber but declined to back India's appeal to list the Pakistan-based terror group's chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist by the UN.

CRPF jawan alleges assault by policemen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PUNE

A 28-year-old CRPF jawan alleged he was "assaulted" and "handcuffed" by police personnel in Baramati on Sunday without any provocation when he went to invite them for a condolence meet for the soldiers killed in the Pulwama attack.

However, Additional Superintendent of Police Sandip Pakhale strongly refuted the allegations levelled by the jawan, Ashok Ingawale, from Songaon village, who is currently on leave. The officer in turn said that Mr. Ingawale got into a brawl with them at Baramati rural police station.

Mr. Ingawale, who claims to be posted in Jammu and Kashmir, said he was part of a small community group that decided to hold the meet during a Shiv Jayanti programme on Tuesday.

Former MLA Vishnu Wagh cremated

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PANAJI

Former Goa BJP MLA and writer Vishnu Wagh, who died in South Africa on February 8 while on tour, was cremated on Sunday in Ponda.

Wagh (53), MLA from the St. Andre constituency between 2012-17, and former Deputy Speaker in the Assembly, was ailing since August 2016 after suffering a stroke. His remains arrived in the State early on Sunday from South Africa and was received by the Goa Art and Culture Minister Govind Gawade.

'Inordinate delay in notifying Disability Act rules'

Think tank writes to Goa social welfare department with recommendations on draft

PRAKASH KAMAT
PANAJI

A think tank has written to the Goa Director of Social Welfare, a nodal department for persons with disability, over an inordinate delay in notifying the draft rules for the implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2016, in the State.

The Centre notified the Act in January, 2017. All States were given six months to frame rules and notify them.

"The rules are far from notified in Goa, the State has missed the deadline several times, breaching the Central directive," said Monika Singh of I-DARE, a registered think tank of activists and professionals working for persons with disability.

"Having gone through the draft of the rules we feel a lot of issues need to be addressed. The problems therein will not only dilute the spirit of the Act, but are also likely to land departments and stakeholders in a quagmire when implemented," the letter stated.

I-DARE said the rules have not been framed for some sub-sections under Section 101 of the Act, and that the some don't seem to be in sync with the Section. Apart from typographical and spelling errors, terminology used in the draft rules is offensive and derogatory to persons with disability. For example, the term 'mentally retarded' was used, which must be replaced with 'persons with an intellectual disability'.

The draft has specified persons from the field of science and medicine to head the research committee. However, I-DARE has pointed out that disability research is being carried out through allied fields, more robust than pure sciences and medicine. "We recommend that the rules be technically edited or checked by experts from fields like psychology, disability medicine and education," the letter said.

The group has asserted that rules need to be framed for the constitution and functioning of the search and selection committee for the appointment of a new Disability Commissioner. Details of the necessary infrastructure and human resource must be provided to avert a situation similar to when the past Commissioner resigned over non-cooperation and lack of infrastructure.

The think tank sought to know the current status of notification of the drafted rules, the process to be followed and time frame for it.

90,000 farmers counselled in 14 'suicide-prone' districts of Maharashtra

12,700 personnel trained as part of project Prerna

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government has said over 90,000 farmers in 14 "suicide-prone" districts of the State have been provided "counselling" under its project 'Prerna'.

Prerna, which has been underway since 2015 to stop farm suicides, comprises social workers, psychiatrists and Accredited Social Health Activist Scheme (ASHA) workers who counsel farmers suffering from depression.

An official release from the government identified these districts as Aurangabad, Beed, Jalna, Hingoli, Nanded, Latur, Osmanabad, Parbhani in Marathwada and Akola, Amravati, Buldhana, Washim, Yavatmal and Wardha in Vidarbha.

In the last three years, 2,000 medical officers, 10,000 semi-health staff and 20,000 ASHA workers have been trained on mental health as part of the project, it said. Subsequently, they have surveyed the 14 districts for counselling, the statement quoted State Health Minister Eknath Shinde as saying.

The release said 12,700 personnel have been trained as part of the project, and the 14 districts now have a total of 20,913 ASHA workers. These ASHA workers survey villages and contact the project's helpline number in case a farmer is in need of counselling.

26,000 calls received

About 26,000 calls were received on helpline number 104, the release said. As many as 8,000 farmers were treated individually and 6,000 counselled publicly.

IN BRIEF

NSS leadership spurns CPI(M)'s outreach bid

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Nair Service Society (NSS) general secretary G. Sukumaran Nair on Sunday appeared to have spurned the reconciliatory offer of the CPI(M) to work in tandem with the social organisation. In a statement, he warned CPI(M) State secretary Kodiyeri Balakrishnan, who appeared to have touched a raw nerve when he stated the majority of the NSS members agreed with the LDF and its progressive policies.

Police intensify manhunt for former Imam in Kerala

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala police have intensified its manhunt for a former Muslim cleric, accused of child rape, by expanding the scope of investigation to Bengaluru. Following information gathered by the investigatiors, a shadow team has been deployed to nab Shafeeq Al Qassimi.

Proud of son's sacrifice: jawan's mother

Mandya resident Chikkolamma says she is ready to send another son to serve in the military

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MANDYA

Hundreds of people from nearby villages, members of various organisations, officials, and political leaders thronged Mellahalli near Mandya on Sunday to pay homage to CRPF jawan H. Guru, who was killed in the Pulwama terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir.

Guru, the eldest son of Honnaiah and Chikkolamma, was laid to rest at Mellahalli, about 1 km from his village, Gudigere Colony, on Saturday.

The general public was not allowed to pay last respects to Guru on Saturday owing to the delayed arrival of the mortal remains. Hence, many people visited Mellahalli and performed puja at his *samadhi* on Sunday. They also collected ashes from the place, according to sources close to Guru's family.

A group of NSS students from the neighbouring Ramanagaram district told *The Hindu* that they would immerse the ashes in the Cauvery at Srirangapatna and pray for the families of every soldier in the country.

Homage to a hero: People at the samadhi of CRPF jawan H. Guru at Mellahalli on Sunday.

Film team

Actors Rishab Shetty and Haripriya, along with team members of their Kannada film *Bell Bottom*, visited Mellahalli and consoled the bereaved family. They handed over a cheque for ₹25,000 to the family. Congress leader from Mandya, Chandrashekar, handed over a cheque for ₹1 lakh to Ms. Chikkolamma.

Ms. Chikkolamma told presspersons that she was ready to send another son, H. Anand, to serve in the military. "We are proud of our son for sacrificing his life for the country. I am ready to send Anand [a Home Guard] to serve in the military. The Central government should consider our request," she said.

Ms. Chikkolamma said Guru had not informed them initially that he had joined the CRPF. According to her, Guru had told them he was joining the police department. Only after several months, they came to know that he had joined the CRPF, she said.

Sumalatha's help

In a goodwill gesture, actor Sumalatha, wife of actor-turned-politician, the late M.H. Ambareesh, said she would donate half an acre of land to Guru's family at Ambareesh's village Doddarasinakere, a few km away from Gudigere Colony in Maddur taluk. Guru hailed from an economically poor background and his parents run a laundry shop for their livelihood. The family had no land to perform his last rites.

According to sources, the Infosys Foundation too had decided to offer ₹10 lakh to Guru's family. The foundation's chairperson, Sudha Murty, would visit the family in March.

KTR donates ₹50 lakh

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

TRS working president K.T. Rama Rao on Sunday visited the CRPF southern regional headquarters here and handed over a cheque for ₹50 lakh to the Inspector General G.H.P. Raju as contribution to the families of CRPF personnel killed in the Pulwama terror attack.

Injured Chennur tigress K4 is safe and active

Foresters are monitoring her movement

S. HARPAL SINGH
ADILABAD

The Chennur tigress named K4, possibly in great pain because of what seems to be a tight wire snare around her abdomen, is safe and active. Recent camera trap pictures and reports from the tigress' movement show the three-year-old big cat to be active, notwithstanding the seemingly undernourished appearance for her age.

The injured animal, one of the four from the first litter of the famous tigress Phalguna of the Sirpur-Kagaznagar forests in the Kumram Bheem Asifabad district, has avoided every effort to capture it for treatment since the middle of last year. Her safety is guaranteed not only by the round-the-clock monitoring of her movement by two teams comprising 15 Forest Department personnel, but also because the ongoing special drive to protect forests and wild animals in the State has almost purged the area of poachers.

Being watched: K4, with a snare around its abdomen, captured on a camera trap in Chennur forests in January. ▪SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"The tigress has moved 30-40 km from Chennur to Neelwai during the last few days," a forest official said with reference to K4's movement based on reports emerging from the forest.

"There have been reports of cattle kills in places where the animal [K4] moved," he pointed out, indicating that the injured big cat is feeding on domestic animals, though on a few occasions it is believed to have killed wild boars and a nilgai.

Efforts to capture K4 have been intensified by the Forest Department, including placing live baits and traps.

"Yes, the big cat needs to be captured," said Hyderabad-based wildlife photographer Sanjeev Siva, who is associated with Conservation Lenses and Wildlife, a group of wildlife enthusiasts.

"It is high time the nature of K4's injuries were ascertained and the way its internal organs developed during the period. There is a fair chance of mating with male tigers crossing over from the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve, which could prove dangerous for her due to the suspected constriction around K4's abdomen and possible internal injuries," he said.

Stampede at mall after ₹10 saree offer

ASIAN NEWS INTERNATIONAL
HYDERABAD

A stampede-like situation occurred at a shopping mall in Siddipet here after women thronged to buy sarees priced at ₹10 each.

As word spread, the number of customers began to swell at the CMR shopping mall, police said on Sunday.

Several people were injured in the incident.

A woman also alleged that she lost her 5 tolas of gold chain, ₹6000 cash, and a debit card.

All for BPL benefits

- White cards taken to avail Arogyasri and double bedroom housing programmes
- Norms fro PMKSN specify that all employees other than attenders are ineligible under the scheme
- All white card-holders are above the rank of attenders
- 3,000 pensioners also have white cards
- Prime Minister to deposit ₹2,000 as Direct Benefit Transfer to identified beneficiaries on February 24
- Names of about 21 lakh farmers who satisfy norms under PMKSN in Telangana proposed to be sent to Centre on Monday
- Final phase of survey will reveal land holdings of government employees
- Identification of beneficiaries who are having pink ration cards to be assessed in the final phase

Doctors, CAs, among BPL cardholders

Checks expose ineligible beneficiaries

N. RAHUL
HYDERABAD

A cross-verification of database available with the Telangana Agriculture department to identify beneficiaries of the Prime Minister's Kisan Samman Nidhi (PMKSN) at gram sabhas in villages has revealed stunning details. About 7,000 Telangana government employees, 3,000 pensioners, doctors, advocates, chartered accountants, ex-MPs, MLAs and Ministers were found to be in possession of white ration cards issued to below-poverty-line (BPL) families in the past.

Govt. schemes

A senior official said it might not be the intention of such people to get subsidised ration from fair price shops but just have white cards to utilise government schemes like Aarogyasri and double bedroom housing. A majority of the cards were issued during the tenure of Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy as Chief Minister to enrol for Aarogyasri. Subsequently, they were retained by them for double bedroom housing under the Telangana Rashtra Samithi rule. The ration cards were also used as ID proof to obtain Aadhaar cards when the document had become popular for delivery of benefits under welfare programmes. Hence the craving for white cards because they guaranteed all benefits accruing to BPL families. They were taken in disguise, the official added.

As regards PMKSN, the field staff of the Agriculture department, holding gram sabha in villages since Friday to cross-check the list of beneficiaries that they have generated in Hyderabad, are surprised to find the names of employees and pensioners in their enquiries. The names were filtered according to the norms of PMKSN and given to field staff.

With Aadhaar number as the common denominator, the names were integrated with ration card holders as enlisted by the Civil Supplies Department in the process of filtration. Separately, the data of employees and pensioners were also gathered from treasury. Officials expect that less than 5% names may be weeded out in cross-verification on grounds of ineligibility.

IN BRIEF

Shatrughan Sinha lauds launch of Patna Metro

PATNA

Actor-turned-politician Shatrughan Sinha on Sunday hailed the Patna Metro Rail and other projects worth over ₹33,000 crore launched in Barauni by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying they would usher in progress for Bihar. "Great move forward in terms of development and progress in Bihar along with other projects... highly appreciated and applauded," he tweeted. PTI

Speeding truck mows down three in Rajasthan

Dholpur

Three people were killed when a speeding truck ran over them here on Sunday, the police said.The deceased have been identified as Rajkumar Chaudhary, Sultan Singh and Brijendra, Mania police station SHO Yogendra Singh said, adding that the truck driver apparently dozed off and hit the trio. PTI

Undertrial dies in Muzaffarnagar jail

MUZAFFARNAGAR

A 27-year-old undertrial died in the district jail here following an illness, officials said on Sunday. Jail Superintendent A.K. Shrivastava said Krishan, who was arrested in connection with a murder case, died on Saturday evening following an illness. The body was sent for post-mortem, he added. PTI

Nine child labourers rescued, two arrested

JAIPUR

Nine child labourers were rescued from a bangle manufacturing factory here, following which two men were arrested, the police said on Sunday. A raid was conducted at the factory on Saturday, Kotwali SHO Sandeep Saraswat said and the two men, identified as Mohammad Farooq and Mehfooz, were arrested. PTI

Paying tributes

Students painting Indian soldiers in Kolkata on Sunday to condemn the terror attack on CRPF jawans in Pulwama on Thursday. ▪ PTI

HAM radio operators put their hobby to test

Hold a camp in Chilika lake island to experiment transmission of messages during natural calamities

STAFF REPORTER
BERHAMPUR

Members of the Amateur Radio Society of Odisha got together at an uninhabited island within the Chilika lake to test their operational skill and technology to help the public during natural calamities such as cyclonic storms.

The team had chosen this island as it is inaccessible by conventional telecommunication network.

During their two-day camp at the island that ended on Sunday evening, eight licensed private HAM radio operators of Odisha experimented transmission of messages to the outside world through radio signals.

Amateur Radio Society of Odisha members with their equipment at the island in Chilika lake. ▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

'Used solar power'

It was an attempt to simulate real-life situation during any natural calamity when all conventional modes of communication cease to exist.

"To simulate such a situation, we remained cut-off from the outside world for two days and used solar power to operate our HAM radios. A bamboo pole was used as an antenna tower," said Gurudatta Panda, one of the participants.

Amateur radio operators can link up with other HAM enthusiasts through 'short wave' radio frequency.

Contacted 130 operators

During the event, these operators, despite their lack of infrastructure, managed to contact around 130 Amateur radio operators around the world.

Around 90 of these were from different parts of India while others were from countries including Denmark, Russia, Indonesia, Thailand and Australia.

On Sunday morning they made contacts with HAM enthusiasts of neighbouring countries except Pakistan.

According to ARSO members, the importance of HAM radios during natural calamities has not diminished in this era of advanced communication.

According to them, during the Titli cyclone, Gajapati district was completely cut-off from the outside world for a few hours. During that time HAM radio with the Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force became the main means of communication of the district administration with the outside world.

A big help

ARSO members feel that an increase in the number of Amateur radio enthusiasts in the State can be a major help to society in a cyclone and flood-prone State like Odisha.

On Sunday, Puri district administration representatives arrived at the island to watch the experiments being conducted by the Amateur radio activists.

"There are youths with technical education in electronics and telecommunication in all parts of Odisha who can take up Amateur radio as a hobby and help society at the time of need. In future, we may have HAM radio operators in all blocks of the State," said Priti Ranjan Mekap, another participant.

Apart from Mr. Panda and Mr. Mekap, other enthusiasts who participated in this event were Samir Ranjan Panda, Umakant Swain, Chandrasekhar Patnaik, Sunil Biswal, Tusharkant Mishra and Rajesh Kumar.

Four of family killed in road accident

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SIVASAGAR (ASSAM)

Four members of a family, including two women and a child, were killed and another was injured in a road accident in Sivasagar district on Sunday, the police said.

The incident happened at 4.45 p.m. when their vehicle collided with a bus at Bamunbari on National Highway-37 in upper Assam, the police said, adding, three members of the family died on the spot.

An eight-year-old boy succumbed to his injuries at a private hospital, the officer said. Another member of the family, who was driving the vehicle, was fighting for his life at the nursing home, he added.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY

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

Forecast for Monday: Thunderstorm accompanied by hailstorm, lightning and gusty winds likely at isolated places over Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, north Haryana and Chandigarh

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	7.2	23.4	13.4	Kozhikode	–	36.6	26.0
Ahmedabad	–	30.8	11.8	Kurnool	–	36.3	23.4
Aizawl	–	30.5	–	Lucknow	–	22.8	12.3
Allahabad	–	24.1	10.0	Madurai	–	37.9	00.0
Bengaluru	–	32.6	21.3	Mangaluru	–	33.8	21.8
Bhopal	–	25.7	9.2	Mumbai	–	29.6	14.6
Bhubaneswar	0.2	33.8	17.9	Mysuru	–	34.8	19.2
Chandigarh	–	20.6	10.1	New Delhi	–	21.9	10.5
Chennai	–	32.7	24.9	Patna	–	24.1	14.4
Coimbatore	–	36.2	24.0	Port Blair	–	31.4	24.1
Dehradun	–	21.7	8.7	Puducherry	–	33.7	24.6
Gangtok	15.8	12.0	5.5	Pune	–	32.6	10.8
Goa	–	30.9	18.3	Raipur	–	27.8	18.2
Guwahati	0.4	27.2	13.4	Ranchi	–	25.2	12.7
Hubballi	–	32.0	18.0	Shillong	4.6	15.8	5.2
Hyderabad	–	33.9	21.8	Shimla	–	10.2	3.7
Imphal	–	20.4	11.2	Srinagar	–	8.6	-2
Jaipur	–	–	10.4	Trivandrum	–	34.8	26.0
Kochi	1.4	31.0	25.2	Tiruchi	–	37.9	23.9
Kohima	1.4	21.8	6.5	Vijayawada	–	33.6	22.6
Kolkata	–	29.3	19.1	Visakhapatnam	–	30.0	23.8

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO_2	NO_2	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	57	.94	26	99	–	Poor
Bengaluru	7	.46	66	–	.155	Moderate
Chennai	8	.14	27	141	–	Moderate
Delhi	20	.82	48	282	.174	Poor
Hyderabad	1	151	19	95	91	Moderate
Kolkata	19	113	28	286	.180	Poor
Lucknow	10	.30	55	241	–	Poor
Mumbai	25	.45	91	107	.141	Moderate
Pune	29	.14	17	89	96	Good
Visakhapatnam	12	.37	32	93	.100	Moderate

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Vapi, Gujarat recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 301 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh recorded a healthy AQI score of 57

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

SO_2: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_2: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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

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

Caught down the wire: Punjab's blackbuck fight for existence

Stray cattle and dogs, barbed 'cobra' wire and changed land use patterns spell trouble for the majestic State animal

VIKAS VASUDEVA
ABOHAR

On the foggy winter afternoon of February 3, a phone call from a local, saying "An injured blackbuck, apparently attacked by stray dogs, is lying on a farm in Sardarpur village..." was enough to send a team of forest and wildlife personnel into rescue mode. They rushed to the spot in the Abohar Wildlife Sanctuary (AWS) to save the animal.

A young deer, about two years old, was lying on the farm with multiple injuries, after being attacked by a group of stray dogs. Chased by the canines, the blackbuck had rammed into barbed wires, which enclose agricultural fields to avoid crop damage from stray cattle. The injuries proved to be fatal, even though medical treatment was given, and the blackbuck succumbed within a few hours of the attack.

This is not an isolated incident. In 2019, so far, as many as eight blackbuck have died in the AWS, and a majority of them succumbed to their injuries, caused by barbed wires while trying to escape from stray dogs, officials told *The Hindu*.

Other unnatural reasons for blackbuck deaths include road accidents and falling into water storage tanks and concrete drains.

Marred by strays: A herd of blackbuck sauntering in open fields in Sardarpura village in Abohar district of Punjab. These indigenous deer often fall prey to barbed wire fences or get injured by stray dogs. At right, injured animals undergoing treatment at a rescue centre at Fazilka. ▪AKHILESH KUMAR

For the blackbuck, Punjab's State animal, it's a fight for existence at the AWS in Fazilka district. It faces a severe threat from stray cattle, attacks by stray dogs, and habitat fragmentation due to change in land use and cropping patterns over the past few years.

Avoidable casualties

State government data show that, in 2018, as many as 25 blackbuck died, while the Wildlife Wing was successful in saving the lives of 18 injured ones. In 2017, 42 blackbuck died in the sanctuary area, while 33 were saved after being provided medical treatment.

"Most of the blackbuck here are dying due to injuries caused by stray dog attacks. Feral dogs target young deer and expecting females. The problem has been aggravated in the past few years as locals trying to save their crops from stray cattle have put up barbed wires and nets. Such fencing of fields restricts the free movement of blackbuck and results in fatal injuries when they are chased by dogs," said Malkit Singh, Range Officer at AWS.

The district administration has banned the sale and use of barbed wires, yet its use continues unabated in the sanctuary area. Fencing agricultural fields, especially with cobra wires that have blade-edged iron wire mesh, has been a major cause of worry, and a key reason behind causing fatal injuries to blackbuck during dog attacks.

"We make people aware of the ill-effects of barbed wires. On Friday, in Khairpur village, our team convinced two farmers to remove cobra wires from their farms. This an ongoing process. We are making efforts to convince locals to take off these wires for the safety of blackbuck," said Mr. Singh.

The AWS is an open sanctuary, spread across private land in 13 villages. The blackbuck was notified as the State animal of Punjab in 1989 and its presence in the State is confined to the AWS due to the unique habitat of semi-arid plains consisting of agricultural fields, intermittent fallow-barren lands, scattered sand dunes, sand mounds and ridges.

Locals who have been peacefully co-existing with this near-threatened species of blackbuck for several years are annoyed with the alleged indifference of the State government towards solving the problem of stray cattle. They say that if the problem of stray cattle is resolved, then there would be no need for them to fence their farms with barbed wires, which would eventually allow free movement of blackbuck and help them thrive.

'Out of compulsion'

"It's not by choice but out of compulsion that I have fenced my farm with barbed wire. Stray cattle will destroy my standing crop if I don't take precautionary measures. I, or for that matter no one in my village, would want to hurt blackbuck, but what options do we have? We have to sustain our family," said Naresh Kumar, who has sown wheat in his 10 acres of family land in Mehrana village.

In AWS, where land in mainly owned by the Bishnoi community, there were 3,273 blackbuck according to the 2017 census, conducted jointly by the Punjab Biodiversity Board and the Department of Forest and Wildlife Preservation, against 3,500 in the year 2011.

Habitat disturbed

R.D. Bishnoi, State president of the Akhil Bhartiya Jeev Rakshak Bishnoi Samaj, said that, over the years, with habitat fragmentation due to change in land use and cropping pattern, the natural habitat of blackbuck had been disturbed.

"A few years ago, blackbuck in herds of 100-150 could be easily seen running here but nowadays, you will only find a group of 20-25 deer. Over the years, the fallow-barren lands have turned into lush green fields due to better irrigation facilities. Scattered sand dunes and sand mounds, which provided a unique environment for the blackbuck, are now vanishing as the area is being brought under farming with the help of the latest machines. All these factors have contributed to the fall in the population of this majestic species," said Mr. Bishnoi.

He said that successive governments had failed to find a solution to the problem of stray animals, which were not only destroying crops but had also caused the deaths of humans.

"While the government collects cow cess in the name of taking care of stray animals, the problem continues to grow."

"The growing population of stray animals also competes with blackbuck for the already shrinking open grasslands, resulting in their migration to adjoining areas outside the sanctuary," said Mr. Bishnoi.

AWS' Sub-Divisional Magistrate Poonam Singh said that the local administration, along with the Wildlife Department, had been persuading locals to remove barbed wires, especially the "cobra wires". "We are creating awareness among people about the ill-effects of these wires. Also, our teams remove these wires from time-to-time," she said.

IN BRIEF

Five rhino poachers arrested in Assam

GUWAHATI

Five alleged poachers were arrested on Sunday for killing an adult male rhino in Assam's Kaziranga National Park on Saturday and sawing off its horn. Four of them were arrested by police and Forest Department officials in Biswanath district while the fifth was caught by the police in Golaghat district. Poachers had in 2018 killed six rhinos in Kaziranga alone.

179 trafficking victims handed over to Nepal

IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh on Sunday handed over 179 Nepali victims of human trafficking to an official of the Nepal Embassy here. Among them, 147 are young girls and others middle-aged women. Police said they were rescued from the Imphal International Airport, bus stands and some hotels in the State capital.

Burkha-clad man booked for entering ladies toilet

PANAJI

The police in Goa booked a 35-year-old State government employee for dressing up in a burkha and entering a ladies toilet at the central bus stand here on Saturday. The accused was booked after being caught by commuters while exiting a ladies toilet at the bus stand. Charges of impersonation under Section 419 were slapped on the man, police said. IANS

Fatal fall

Human error suspected: Three passengers were killed and 30 others injured when their bus fell into a drain in Jabalpur district of Madhya Pradesh in the early hours of Sunday after the driver lost control. The bus was going to Nagpur from Allahabad. ▪PTI

Mob attacks police station in West Bengal

Incident staged to disturb communal harmony, say police

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

An incident of alleged kidnapping of a woman school teacher turned parts of the Labpur block in Birbhum district into a battlefield on Sunday.

A mob attacked the local police station with stones, while the police alleged that the objective of the purported kidnapping was to disturb communal peace in the area. Three persons, including the father of the allegedly kidnapped woman, Supravat Batabyal, a local Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader, were arrested.

MLA involved?

Interestingly, the Trinamool Congress's district leadership also indicated that their local MLA was possibly involved in the kidnapping of the 22-year-old school teacher.

Tension gripped Labpur on Saturday after the mob smashed the local Trinamool MLA Manirul Islam's vehicle and chased him, forcing him to take refuge in the police station. They alleged that Mr. Islam was involved in the kidnapping of the school teacher. The mob then attacked the police station and pelted stones on the personnel for some time.

The incident took place four days after Mr. Batabyal's daughter was allegedly kidnapped at gunpoint at Labpur. The woman's mother lodged a complaint at the Labpur Police Station. She, however, did not mention any names but claimed that "unknown miscreants" had kidnapped her daughter, district police officials said.

Following the arrest of the woman's father on Sunday, an ASP of Birbhum told journalists that the entire incident was "staged to implement a political agenda."

'Policies biased against rainfed agriculture'

Agriculture atlas maps agro biodiversity, lists differences

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
NEW DELHI

Three out of five farmers in India grow their crops using rainwater, instead of irrigation. However, per hectare government investment on their lands may be 20 times lower, procurement of their crops is a fraction of major irrigated land crops, and many of the flagship agriculture schemes are not tailored to benefit them.

A new rainfed agriculture atlas released this week documents the policy biases that are making farming unviable.

A new rainfed agriculture atlas released this week not only maps the agro biodiversity and socio-economic conditions prevailing in such areas, but also attempts to document the policy biases that are making farming unviable for many in these areas.

There has been "negligence" toward rainfed areas, which is leading to lower incomes for farmers in these regions, admitted Ashok Dalwai, CEO of the National Rainfed Area Authority. He also heads the government's Committee on Doubling of Farmers' Income.

Speaking on the sidelines of a conference on revitalising agriculture in rainfed areas, he said farmers in such areas are receiving 40% less of their income from agriculture in comparison to those in irrigated areas.

Sabyasachi Das, coordinator of the Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture Network, which published the atlas, laid out the stark differences in government policy and expenditure.

"Lands irrigated through big dams and canal networks get a per hectare investment of ₹5 lakh. Watershed management spending in rainfed lands is only ₹18,000-25,000," he said, adding that the difference in yield is not proportionate to the difference in investment.

"When it comes to procurement, over the decade between 2001-02 and 2011-12, the government spent ₹5.4 lakh crore on wheat and rice. Coarse cereals, which are grown in rainfed areas, only had ₹3,200 crore worth of procurement in the same period."

It's not just the quantum, but also the nature of investment that needs to change, he added.

Flagship government schemes, such as seed and fertiliser subsidies and soil health cards, are designed for irrigated areas and simply extended to rainfed farmers without taking their needs into consideration, said Dr. Das.

'No system'

For example, many hybrid seeds notified by the government scheme need plenty of water, fertilizer and pesticides to give high yields and are thus not useful to most rainfed farmers. Commercial fertilizers will simply burn out the soil without sufficient water. "The government has no system to channelise indigenous seeds or subsidise organic manure in the same way," he claimed.

Dr. Dalwai agreed that a more balanced approach was needed to give rainfed farmers the same research and technology focus and production support that their counterparts in irrigation areas have received over the last few decades.

Bureaucrat's transactions scrutinised

Maharashtra government looks into K.P. Bakshi's declaration

SHARAD VYAS
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government is looking into several transactions by two limited liability partnerships incorporated by top bureaucrat K.P. Bakshi, whose name has cropped up in a report by the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) on suspicious transactions worth over ₹2.5 crore during and after demonetisation in 2016.

As reported by *The Hindu* on Sunday, Mr. Bakshi, who was the Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) when some of the transactions were carried out, had transferred large sums into Oracon LLP and Crimson Park LLP, in which his sons Shivesh and Anjan and wife Neelima Bakshi are partners.

In his explanation on January 31, Mr. Bakshi informed the government of the existence of only one (Oracon) of the two firms, while keeping the incorporation of the other off the declaration note.

'Records revealed'

While Oracon was incorporated on May 28, 2016 with Shivesh and Neelima on board as designated partners, Crimson Park LLP was incorporated on January 28, 2014 with an 'obligation of contribution' to the tune of ₹1,00,000, and Bakshi Anjan and Bakshi Neelima as designated partners. The registered address of Crimson is shown in the records of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) to be 1404, Greenwood Hiranandani Estate, Ghodbunder Road, Thane.

In his explanation, Mr. Bakshi said the records of Oracon LLP had been revealed to the government, and the said company had applied for the opening of a demat account to buy tax-free infrastructure bonds for saving income tax.

"Since the process of the opening of the account was getting unduly delayed, my wife and son requested me to buy the above tax-free infrastructure bonds through my demat account, for which the LLP Co transferred the required amount to my bank account. Once the account was opened, the ITF bonds were transferred by me to the company's newly opened demat account," he said in his letter, responding to the letter of Chief Secretary D.K. Jain dated December 18, 2018. The response talks of cheque or NEFT transactions but does not mention Crimson Park LLP at all.

Earlier, as reported by *The Hindu*, the CVC report had also highlighted transactions made by a senior civil servant of the Bihar cadre.

BJP trying to grab power in Puducherry through backdoor tactics, says Stalin

'Kiran Bedi should be recalled to the Centre immediately'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PUDUCHERRY

DMK president M.K. Stalin on Sunday accused the Narendra Modi-led BJP government at the Centre of trying to grab power in Puducherry through "backdoor tactics" and by using Lieutenant-Governor Kiran Bedi as a pawn to achieve the goal.

Speaking to reporters after calling on Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy, his Cabinet colleagues and MLAs holding an indefinite *dharna* in front of the Raj Nivas, he said, "If the BJP has the courage to face the elections in Puducherry, it should do that instead of trying to grab power through backdoor tactics."

Mr. Stalin alleged that Ms. Bedi was constantly disturbing and harassing the duly elected government in Puducherry with the "direct blessings" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The CM and his Cabinet colleagues have been observing an indefinite *dharna* in front of the Raj Nivas for the last five days to press their 39-point charter of demands. Instead of taking steps to fulfil the demands, the L-G was placing obstacles and functioning like a dictator, Mr. Stalin said. "Her continued interference is undemocratic and also strikes at the spirit of the Constitution," he said.

"The Centre must immediately intervene and recall Ms. Bedi and ensure that the spirit of democracy is upheld," Mr. Stalin said.

He sought to know whether Ms. Bedi, a former police officer, was treating the Union Territory like the Tihar Jail, and its people, as inmates. "The failure on the part of Mr. Modi to take cognisance of the current development in Puducherry over the last five days is utterly shameful. The DMK will prevail upon the Centre to recall Ms. Bedi."

Commercial run begins of Vande Bharat

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

India's first semi-high speed train – Vande Bharat Express – began its first commercial run on Sunday, a day after it broke down on its way to Delhi from Varanasi.

"Vande Bharat Express left Delhi for Varanasi on Sunday on its first commercial run. Tickets sold out for the next two weeks," tweeted Railway Minister Piyush Goyal.

Northern Railway CPRO Deepak Kumar said the glitch on Saturday was "a case of skidding wheels after the train ran over a herd of cattle."

Delhi dilemma

Supreme Court's split decision flags the need to address complexities in Centre-UT ties

The Supreme Court's split decision on the question of whether the government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCTD) has executive control over those in its service points to the inherent complexity of the relations between the Delhi government and the Centre. The disadvantages of not having full statehood status has been felt by many elected regimes in Delhi. But under Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party government, and with the Narendra Modi government at the Centre, the extent of acrimony has been severe. Battles have been fought in the political and judicial spheres over whether some subject or the other falls under the Delhi government or is the exclusive preserve of the Centre. A Constitution Bench ruling last year provided a framework to resolve such issues. It held that the Lt. Governor has to act either on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers, or abide by the decision of the President on a reference made by him. The power to refer "any matter" to the President did not mean "every matter" should go that way. Specific issues were left to a Bench of Justices A.K. Sikri and Ashok Bhushan, which has resolved most issues. It has upheld the Delhi government's power to appoint prosecutors, levy and revise stamp duty on property transactions and issue notifications under the Delhi Electricity Reform Act.

Both judges agree that there is no 'service' in the Delhi government, as all its employees come under the 'Central services'. Its civil servants are drawn from the DANICS cadre, a service common to various Union Territories. Justice Sikri believes that going by a Constitution Bench decision last year, the NCTD would indeed have the power to deploy officials within its own departments. However, the absence of a public service in Delhi means Entry 41 in the State List (services; service commissions) would imply that it is a matter inapplicable to 'Union Territories', and therefore, the LG need not act on the Delhi government's aid and advice. Therefore, he favours a solution under which transfers and postings of officers in the rank of Joint Secretary and above could be directly submitted to the LG, and those of others be processed by the Council of Ministers and sent to the LG. In case of any dispute, the LG's view will prevail. Justice Bhushan, on the other hand, has ruled that once it is accepted that there is no 'service' under the NCTD, there is no scope for its government to exercise any executive power in this regard. A larger Bench will now decide on the question relating to control over the services. The more significant challenge is to find a way out of the complexities and problems thrown up by the multiple forms of federalism and power-sharing arrangements through which relations between the Centre and its constituent units are regulated.

Strange emergency

Donald Trump's latest move further undermines American democracy

Declaring a state of national emergency is hardly a trivial decision. While the U.S. has done so in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks and similar exigencies, President Donald Trump has opted for this measure in the context of what he has described as "an invasion of drugs and criminals" from across the border with Mexico. The move has further polarised Washington and put the strident immigration debate front and centre again. The context for the emergency is the longest federal government shutdown in U.S. history, for 35 days, that resulted in the shuttering of nine government agencies and the furlough of 800,000 government workers. The primary cause was Mr. Trump's refusal to sign off on Congressional appropriations bills unless lawmakers agreed to hand over $5.7 billion to fund his plan to construct a border wall with Mexico. As the cost to the U.S. economy of the shutdown soared close to $11 billion by late-January, Mr. Trump backed down on his demand, yet warned that unless Congress yielded on the border wall funding, "I will use the powers afforded to me under the laws and the Constitution of the U.S. to address this emergency." Now he appears to have made good on that statement, probably on the basis that during national emergencies U.S. law permits the diversion of funds from military or disaster relief budgets to tackle the "crisis" at hand.

This begs the question of how real the emergency is and why the White House is devoting its considerable political capital to this one policy issue. Mr. Trump frequently alludes to the migration crisis that he believes has engulfed the southern border. It is true that more than 2,000 people were turned away or arrested at the border each day during November 2018, numbers that U.S. immigration hawks have seized upon to press the argument for a wall. Yet this figure has decreased considerably over the past decade, and border crossings by undocumented migrants are at an all-time low, down from 1.3 million in 2001 to about 40,000 in 2018. If this is then a purely political move that panders to Mr. Trump's conservative voter base, it may stand on wobbly legal foundations. Already, the first few lawsuits challenging the emergency declaration are working their way through the courts. Further, Democrats, who now control the House of Representatives, may under their constitutional powers vote to terminate the emergency. This would put the Republican-controlled Senate on the back foot by requiring it to clarify its position on the *status quo*, by either supporting or defeating such a resolution. While Mr. Trump's supporters are doubtless celebrating their Commander-in-Chief's chutzpah for this move, the truth is that it will only take the U.S. further away from the ideal of peaceful coexistence within a pluralistic democracy.

The challenge in the Pulwama attack

India cannot achieve its strategic objectives if Kashmiris remain targets of harassment, and minorities are vilified

SYED ATA HASNAIN

In recent months, those with experience in monitoring Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan had been getting distinctly uncomfortable. There were signals emanating from Pakistan pointing to a new turn. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan was trying to make overtures to India and conveying that his government would be one with a difference, a 'Naya-Pakistan' as he called it. Pakistan Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa had earlier attempted to confound observers through a long interaction with the media, which came to be touted as the Bajwa Doctrine, and was 'supposed' to be a hand of friendship. The offer to open the Kartarpur Corridor and the fast-track progress to the conduct of ceremonies to launch the construction of the project were uncharacteristic. His presence at the ceremony on the Pakistani side appeared to reflect total consensus and support of the Army.

It was somehow the wrong time for Pakistan to be making peace overtures when the Indian elections were approaching. Pakistan could not have expected any big and strategic decisions, and sure enough India's response to everything was lukewarm. The circumstances did not permit any traction unless a firm commitment was given about the withdrawal of all support from across the border to terrorists.

New terror tactics

Whenever Pakistan starts to speak the language of peace, it raises hackles in India because it seems evident that something unusual is in the offing and overtures are primarily there to bait India. It has been proved again at Pulwama, with the most dastardly act perpetrated since the beginning of the 30-year-long proxy war in Jammu & Kashmir.

Two issues are of relevance here. The first is that the return of the car bomb and the improvised explosive device (IED) to the Kashmir theatre was predicted for the last one year. The trend had died out after the last effective IED attack, on an Army bus in July 2008, and the last car bomb attack, again on an Army bus on the very same road, in 2004. IEDs had been rampant earlier but car bombs were few and far between. It was the progressive improvement in the fabrication of IEDs and car bombs in the wars in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan and the internal security environment of Pakistan that probably gave an impetus to perceptions about their potential usage once again in Kashmir.

The Pakistani experience had also much to do with religiously radicalised young men strapped with explosives detonating themselves at gatherings of people – the suicide bomber as against the suicide fighter. Suicide bombing was neither experienced in earlier years nor has it manifested itself yet in Kashmir. Its threat potential, of course, remains live and its entry could further change the nature of the proxy war.

Pakistan's deep state has been aware that the Indian security forces have achieved much in the last two years in terms of neutralisation of terrorists, although almost the same number have been added through fresh recruitment or infiltration. In order to reduce the domination and effectiveness achieved by the security forces

EMMANUAL YOGINI

and to limit their freedom of movement, the reintroduction of these devices could achieve much. That is because the unpredictability factor of IEDs and car bombs is so high that it forces a larger than normal deployment of security forces.

Sign of Pakistan's confidence

The second relevant issue, or observation, is that Pakistan's self-confidence has been increasing. This has been despite the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) surveillance, its reduced foreign exchange reserves and a failing economy. The backing from China and, most importantly, Pakistan's enhanced geostrategic and geopolitical significance in the light of the U.S. decision to pull out in full from Afghanistan have also contributed to it. The moment that decision on Afghanistan was taken, Pakistan once again acquired leverage with the big powers and all stakeholders for peace in Afghanistan. The realisation that it held the key to the return of the Taliban, the upholding of all its agreements with the foreign forces and future stability, gave Pakistan a strategic boost. The U.S. started courting it in a reversal of President Donald Trump's policy which had questioned the utility of such nations which had taken excess U.S. funding as aid and never delivered strategic advantage to it.

It is the first sign of Pakistan's increasing confidence that can be seen in the Pulwama attack executed by the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), an organisation virtually sponsored and owned by Pakistan's intelligence agencies. Initial investigation suggests careful planning, infiltration of an 'IED doctor' (a technical person capable of fabricating IEDs) and a module fully functional at work with a network of overground workers. An apparent risk analysis in Pakistan would have revealed that with the internal health and state of equipment of the Indian armed forces under intense negative discussion in India, the feasibility of a response would be remote. An energetic impetus to terror would follow and this would probably have an effect on the electoral prospects of the current National Democratic Alliance government, besides preparing ground for extended violence into the future. Time and again Pakistan has been wrong in the assessments it makes.

While the mortal remains of 40 Central Reserve Police Force personnel were transported for last rites to cities and villages all over India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi publicly promised retribution for the loss and emphasised that he had given the freedom of choosing the time, mode and place to the Indian Army. A rare political consensus, short-lived no doubt, has appeared in New Delhi, and the media is discussing military options. To be realistic, that is how the modern world functions, on the power of public opinion.

If that be so, what options does the Indian government have? The diplomatic one is already under execution although the energy of Indian diplomacy to paint Pakistan red must flow longer and focus on not only important capitals of the world but also significant international think tanks and media. The Most Favoured Nation status and measures involving control of water under the Indus Waters Treaty remain soft options, sans much optics. It's the military domain which is demanding Mr. Modi's focus. A risk analysis would already be under way to examine a range of options or combinations. It could start with covert operations which can be ongoing, to trans-border raids several notches higher than the surgical strikes and targeting Pakistan Army resources as against terrorist infrastructure, and surgical air strikes against terrorist bases inside Pakistan. Ground-based operations restricted to Jammu & Kashmir and harking back to some of the options of yesteryear could form a part of the overall response. However, it should be remembered that Pakistan will not permit such actions without its military response, which too would be robust.

Time to be cool headed

The Indian national leadership would do well not to be guided by the immediacy of electoral considerations; national security interests transcend this. Whatever are the selected options, the two things that would make for stronger execution are political consensus and management of internal social cohesion. India cannot achieve its strategic objectives if Kashmiris remain targets of physical abuse and harassment, and minorities are vilified on social media. It is a difficult time for India and the leadership has to work overtime to ensure that the Indian armed forces have a 'firm base' to operate from; that is always a military need anyway.

Syed Ata Hasnain retired as Lt. General from the Indian Army

How the 16th Lok Sabha fared

Important bills were passed; but going forward there must be debate on the anti-defection law

M.R. MADHAVAN

The 16th Lok Sabha had its final sitting last Wednesday, marking an end to a disappointing five-year period. This Lok Sabha was surpassed only by the preceding one in terms of the low number of hours it worked. It met for 1,615 hours, 40% lower than all full-term Parliaments. This shows a decline in the number of sitting days over the decades as well as a significant part of the scheduled time lost to disruptions. This Lok Sabha sat for 331 days (against a 468-day average for all previous full-term Lok Sabhas), and lost 16% of its time to disruptions.

Though there were no extreme incidents – an MP used pepper spray in the 15th Lok Sabha – MPs often broke the rules. The House was often disrupted by MPs carrying placards, entering the well, and even on occasion, blocking their colleagues from speaking. A big casualty was Question Hour – the Lok Sabha lost a third of this time and the Rajya Sabha 60%; consequently, just 18% of the starred questions in each House got an oral reply.

Another notable event was the Speaker blaming unruly behaviour for her inability to count the required number of MPs demanding a no-confidence motion but allowing the Union Budget to be passed in the interim. There was a similar episode at the end of the 15th Lok Sabha when the Speaker was unable to conduct a no-confidence motion but let the House pass the Act to bifurcate the State of Andhra Pradesh.

Key legislation

However, Parliament made some important laws. The Goods and Services Tax was implemented and the bankruptcy code was enacted. The IIM Act gave premier management educational institutions a level of autonomy not available to other public educational institutions. The Juvenile Justice Act allowed children (between 16 and 18 years) accused of committing heinous crimes to be prosecuted as adults. New Acts were passed: for treatment of mental health patients, and those with HIV/AIDS. Another Act was passed to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities.

There was some effort to address the issues of corruption, black money and leakages. The Prevention of Corruption Act was amended to make bribe-giving an offence. Laws were made requiring a declaration of assets held

V.V. KRISHNAN

outside India, and to declare as fugitives those economic offenders who had fled the country. The Aadhaar Act was passed to create a biometric-based identity system.

Bill passing

This brings us to the manner in which some Bills were passed. The Aadhaar Act was passed as a Money Bill – and upheld (incorrectly in my opinion) by the Supreme Court. The Constitution defines a Bill as a Money Bill if it contains provisions that exclusively relate to taxes or government spending. Importantly, such Bills need majority support only in the Lok Sabha, with the Rajya Sabha having just a recommendatory role. Arguing that Aadhaar was primarily a subsidy delivery mechanism, and not an identity system seems like a stretch, but that was the majority decision of the Supreme Court. However, there has not been much conversation on the various Finance Bills that have been passed as Money Bills.

The Finance Bill is traditionally introduced with the Budget, and contains all the legislative changes to tax laws. Therefore, it is usually a Money Bill. However, Finance Bills, in the last few years, have included items which have no relation to taxes or to expenditure of the government. The Finance Bill, 2015 included provisions to merge the regulator of commodity exchanges with the Securities and Exchange Board of India. The Finance Bill, 2016 included amendments to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act which relate to donations to non-profits. The Finance Bill, 2017 went further and changed the compositions of 19 quasi-judicial bodies such as the Securities Appellate Tribunal, the National Green Tribunal and the Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT), and repealed seven other bodies including the Competition Appellate Tribunal.

About half the clauses of the 2018 Bill were on issues unrelated to taxes. Even the Finance Bill, 2019 presented with the interim Budget amended the provisions related to attaching property under the money laundering law. It is difficult to see how these Bills would fall within the narrow definition of Money Bill, as defined in Article 110 of the Constitution.

A few other Bills, such as the Triple Talaq Bill and the Citizenship Bill, were passed by the Lok Sabha but will lapse as they were not passed by the Rajya Sabha. It is evident that the government was able to have its way on every issue in the Lok Sabha and was held in check only due to a lack of majority in the Rajya Sabha; even this check was bypassed occasionally using the Money Bill route. The government could do this as a result of the anti-defection provision which gives complete control of all party votes to the party leadership. This law has converted MPs from being representatives of the people to delegates of the party. If the party in government has a majority of its own, it can have any provision passed; even coalition governments have to convince just a handful of leaders of their alliance partners.

Review the anti-defection law

Parliament plays the central role in our democracy by holding the government to account and scrutinising proposed laws and financial priorities. With the end of the 16th Lok Sabha, it is time to ponder on how to make this institution more effective. An important step will be by reviewing the anti-defection law that has hollowed out the institution.

M.R. Madhavan is the President and co-founder of PRS Legislative Research

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

India's response

The Pulwama terror attack is numbing. However, at this critical situation, we are duty-bound to maintain communal harmony for the sake of our great nation. In this connection, some of the shocking developments in different parts of the country are unacceptable ("Centre moves to restore calm in Jammu", "Protests and panic after attack" and "Tension in Haryana village as mood turns against students", all February 17). For example, the threats being issued to people from Kashmir are spoiling the atmosphere of peace and communal harmony. Those who are seeding more enmity and disturbing harmony are the real enemies of India. We need to act against them too just as we would handle external aggression.

ABDUR RAUF,
Mumbai

■ Given that Pakistan is brazen about its nuclear status and geo-political importance (*vis-à-vis* Afghanistan) – using it as leverage to attain its own ends with the U.S. and the Western bloc – and also enjoys an all-weather friendship with China, most of the global condemnation is wont to be nothing more than paying lip service with no concrete action being taken against terror outfits. India-Pakistan peace overtures have been scuttled by the war-happy Army of Pakistan; never mind even if it has proven to be detrimental for that nation. The all-powerful security establishment of Pakistan cares very little for the welfare of Pakistanis.

NALINI VIJAYARAGHAVAN,
Thiruvananthapuram

■ The Kashmir issue is far more complicated than it appears, especially when there seems to be a sense of alienation in the Valley. An eye for eye leaves the whole world blind and giving the Indian Army full freedom to act can escalate tension in the Valley. The lives of our soldiers are important but any retributive step needs to be well thought out.

ASMITA SINGH,
New Delhi

■ Political unity in India and the government revoking MFN status to Pakistan are fine, but the point is about effective moves after this. Terrorism is a growing industry, made easier through modern communication technology. India should reach out to the civilian population in Pakistan so that the influence of the deep state is eliminated. Global consensus on a accepted definition of terror remains in limbo because there is no meeting ground. Quick-fix solutions are not the answer and the world must needs to be realistic on how to deal with the menace of terror.

HARSAHIB SINGH,
Ludhiana, Punjab

■ India has waited enough, by requesting Pakistan and appealing for international intervention, in asking that some of the most wanted terrorists are handed over. If from miles away the U.S. was able to get Osama bin Laden, can't India plan a similar offensive across the border, perhaps enlisting the cooperation of Afghanistan and Iran?

S.V. VENKATAKRISHNAN,
Bengaluru

Bailing an airline out

One can only see a clear winner in the bank-led rescue attempt of Jet Airways – Naresh Goyal, who will be laughing all the way to the bank, with the banks becoming majority shareholders while management control could remain with Mr. Goyal ('Business' page, "In rescue effort, banks to acquire majority stake in Jet", February 15). Conversion of bank debt into equity at a notional value of ₹1 is nothing but recognition that the debt would not be paid. To add insult to injury, banks have also committed themselves to meet a "funding gap" of ₹8,500 crore, which is nothing but taking a quasi-equity exposure at debt pricing. There seems to be little new contribution by the promoters in the entire scheme by way of fresh funds. What benefit would lenders have by becoming majority shareholders with nominees on the board? There are various interconnected reasons as to why banks essentially fund through debt rather than equity. If banks began preferring equity exposure to debt, for whatever reasons, the cost of financial intermediation would rise substantially, making Indian industry totally non-competitive. Overall, the deal appears to be another case of public resources being used for private gain.

SUSHIL PRASAD,
Hyderabad

A pat for Odisha

It is no surprise that Odisha has won the *Sportstar* Aces award for 'Best State for Promotion of Sports' ('Sport' page, "Odisha is now a key sports destination", February 17). The three big ticket events have enhanced Odisha's name. Sport teaches one about the importance of team work and fosters healthy competition. Odisha has shown us the way.

RIYAZURRAHMAN,
Ramanagara, Karnataka

MORE LETTERS ONLINE:
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One purpose, many differences

Taking on the BJP is not enough; the Opposition must work on its common agenda

SMITA GUPTA

The Opposition parties that have banded together against the BJP need to go beyond State-level alliances. They must present not only a common pre-poll agenda with a storyline distinct from that of the ruling party, but also a united front, minimising competition among their members in key States.

Despite the Narendra Modi government losing some of its sheen, the BJP's well-oiled machine presents a formidable challenge to the Opposition. But it is becoming apparent that the Congress, which is still riding high after its 2018 electoral victories in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, is doing all it can to strengthen itself even as it tries to rally the other secular Opposition parties to take on the BJP.

Some fraught relations

The resulting tension has manifest itself in the Congress's equation with the smaller parties. Barring the States where the Congress is in a direct fight with the BJP, its interests clash with those of the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal; the Samajwadi Party (SP), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) in Uttar Pradesh; the Left parties in Kerala and Tripura; the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi; and even the Janata Dal (Secular) in Karnataka, where the two are currently sharing power. In some other States, the Congress's relationship with its allies – whether the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, the Nationalist Congress Party, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, or the National Conference – is somewhat less strained. As things stand, it will fight against its "national allies" in at least three States – U.P., Kerala and Tripura – and is likely to have a seat-sharing agreement with the Left parties in West Bengal against the Trinamool.

The fraught relations between the Congress and some of its allies were visible in Parliament. On February 12, the SP and other Opposition parties were upset when the Congress did not join their protest in the Rajya Sabha after SP chief Akhilesh Yadav was prevented by the BJP government in U.P. from boarding a flight to Allahabad. A day later, Congress MP Adhir Chowdhury accused the Trinamool on the floor of the Lok Sabha of involvement in the chit fund scam; only NC leader Farooq Abdullah intervened. An incensed West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee confronted UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi in Parliament House, "I won't forget it." Taken aback, Ms. Gandhi sought to placate her: "We may accuse each other, but we are still friends." Even as this was playing out in Parliament, the Congress declared it would fight the elections in U.P. "on the front foot", rather than meekly accept the two seats left for it by the SP-BSP-RLD combine. A circumspect Mr. Yadav welcomed Priyanka Gandhi's entry into full-time politics, but BSP supremo Mayawati fired her first salvo against the Congress last week: M.P.'s Congress administration and U.P.'s BJP government, she tweeted, were alike as both had used the draconian National Security Act against Muslims accused of cow slaughter.

"The Congress is doing all it can to strengthen itself." Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra at a road show in Lucknow. ▪ RAJEEV BHATT

This has upset the Opposition parties, as U.P.'s 80 Lok Sabha seats hold the key to forming the next government at the Centre. They are also concerned that this tension will adversely affect the momentum that the Opposition got after the swearing-in of the Congress-JD (S) government in Karnataka in 2018. At the Opposition protest at New Delhi's Jantar Mantar on the closing day of Parliament, Mr. Abdullah advised his colleagues: "Defeat Modi first, then think of the Prime Minister's chair. Big causes need sacrifices. The days are over when there was the flag of one party across the country." Ms. Banerjee took the hint and responded that while she would not concede an inch in West Bengal, all the Opposition parties are willing to come together "nationally".

In the Congress, however, leaders and party workers alike believe that as members of "the only national party with an inclusive agenda", they must first strengthen their own organisation. They say that they cannot be "held hostage" by regional parties such as the SP, BSP and RLD in U.P.– or, for that matter, in any other State. They are optimistic that the ideology that binds the Opposition parties will ensure that even those who contest against each other in the elections – for tactical or other reasons – will come together after the results are in.

A common minimum programme

In the absence of a substantive pre-poll alliance, Opposition leaders who met at NCP chief Sharad Pawar's residence on February 13 discussed whether a common minimum programme could hold the constituents together in a "pre-poll alliance" to avoid "post-poll irritants". These Opposition parties have realised that this is critical as it will not only ensure that voters take them more seriously after the elections if they forge ahead of the BJP-led NDA, but the President too will be compelled to call them first to form a government. In the absence of a pre-poll alliance with a common agenda, he is likely to call the single largest party, which may well be the BJP, despite predictions that its numbers will slump.

What is driving the Opposition today is the energy and combativeness of younger regional leaders, particularly Ms. Banerjee, the Telugu Desam Party's N. Chandrababu Naidu, and the AAP's Arvind Kejriwal. Mr. Abdullah, Mr. Pawar and former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda are playing the role of elder statesmen. There is also a grudging acceptance from some Opposition leaders that Mr. Gandhi's steadfast attack of the BJP, and particularly Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on the Rafale deal has not just dented Mr. Modi's seemingly immaculate image, but also provided a "political line" for the Opposition.

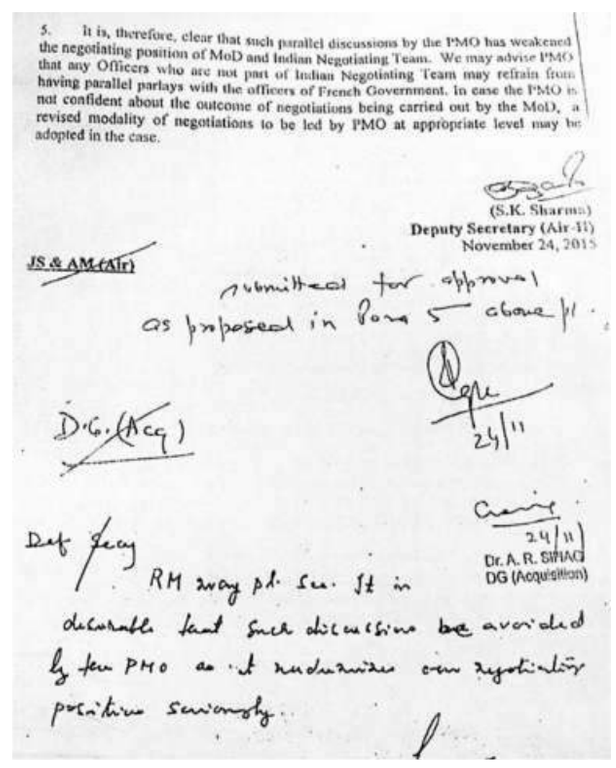
Today, the Pulwama terror attack poses a fresh challenge to the Opposition. It will require the combined political skills of leaders to ensure that the BJP and the RSS do not use this carnage to polarise voters on religious lines.

Smita Gupta is Senior Fellow, The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Neither vainglorious nor venturesome

An image published in 'The Hindu' was not doctored, as some have claimed



5. It is, therefore, clear that such parallel discussions by the PMO has weakened the negotiating position of MoD and Indian Negotiating Team. We may advise PMO that any Officers who are not part of Indian Negotiating Team may refrain from having parallel parlays with the officers of French Government. In case the PMO is not confident about the outcome of negotiations being carried out by the MoD, a revised modality of negotiations to be led by PMO at appropriate level may be adopted in the case.

(S.K. Sharma)
Deputy Secretary (Air-II)
November 24, 2015

JS & AM (Air)

submitted for approval as proposed in Para 5 above pl.

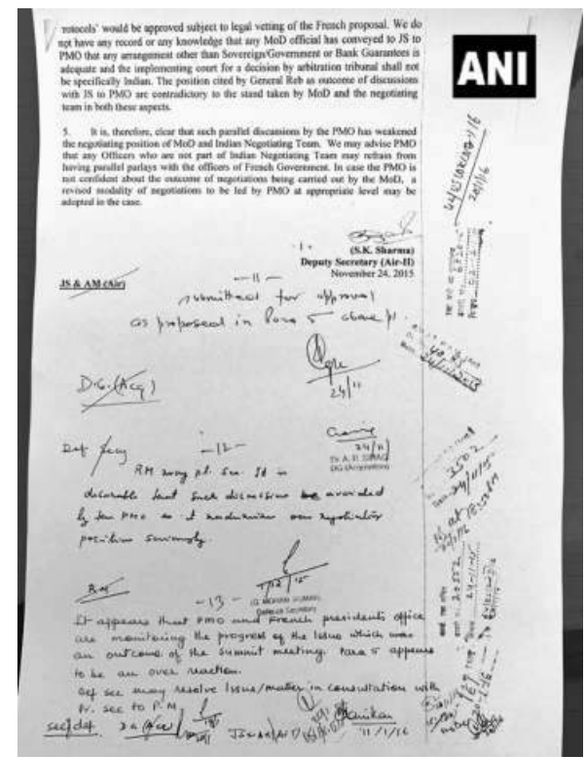
D.G. (Acq)

24/11

Def Secy

RM may pl. see. It is desirable that such discussions be avoided by the PMO as it undermines our negotiating position seriously.

Dr. A. R. SIBAL
DG (Acquisition)



ANI

protocols' would be approved subject to legal vetting of the French proposal. We do not have any record or any knowledge that any MoD official has conveyed to JS to PMO that any arrangement other than Sovereign/Government or Bank Guarantees is adequate and the implementing court for a decision by arbitration tribunal shall not be specifically Indian. The position cited by General Reb as outcome of discussions with JS to PMO are contradictory to the stand taken by MoD and the negotiating team in both these aspects.

5. It is, therefore, clear that such parallel discussions by the PMO has weakened the negotiating position of MoD and Indian Negotiating Team. We may advise PMO that any Officers who are not part of Indian Negotiating Team may refrain from having parallel parlays with the officers of French Government. In case the PMO is not confident about the outcome of negotiations being carried out by the MoD, a revised modality of negotiations to be led by PMO at appropriate level may be adopted in the case.

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It appears that PMO and French presidents office are monitoring the progress of the issue which was an outcome of the summit meeting. This appears to be an over reaction.

Def see may resolve issue/matter in consultation with Fr. see to PM

A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

A reader referred to my column, "Means and ends matter" (Sept. 22, 2014), and cited a tweet by the political commentator Abhijit Iyer-Mitra to question this paper's investigation into the Rafale deal. My column was not only about what journalists report, but also about how they gather information. Mr. Iyer-Mitra's provocative tweet was: "I have to register my STRONG PROTEST with @the_hindu. It's one thing having an editorial line but cropping out photos to avoid inconvenient facts like here where @manoharparrikar clearly instructs the DS MoD to coordinate with PMO (courtesy @ANI) is BLATANTLY UNETHICAL."

As a staunch defender of the regime, Mr. Iyer-Mitra is free to arrive at his own conclusions from the given documents, but he cannot level charges against others without going through the documents in the public domain carefully. Jeff Jarvis, professor at Craig Newmark Journalism School, New York, wrote about journalists: "It is the sacred duty of journalists to listen to the public they serve. It is then their duty to bring journalistic value – reporting facts, explanation, context, education, connections, understanding, empathy, action, options – to the public conversation. Journalism is that conversation. Democracy is that conversation." I believe that this column has become a forum for readers and journalists to have a meaningful conversation that tries to break the polarising narrative that is corroding our public discourse.

Before explaining the shortcomings in Mr. Iyer-Mitra's allegations, let me explain the core editorial values that guide this newspaper's handling of images. Any unethical cropping or digital altering is seen as an act of dereliction. For instance, on April 1, 2009, a senior staff photographer doctored an image of two mynas in sync. This was carried on page 2. But some sharp eyes noticed the discrepancy, and the internal investigation by the then Readers' Editor (RE), K. Narayanan, which included a study of the picture enlarged 200 times, firmly established that the image was manipulated. The editor-in-chief apologised and the RE wrote a scathing column, "Venturesome, vainglorious" (April 13, 2009), about the permanent scar created by this act of duplicity.

In his desire to justify his earlier stand of defending the Rafale deal, Mr. Iyer-Mitra is oblivious to some of the crucial forensic details that distinguish the Defence Ministry's internal note dated November 24, 2015, in a facsimile carried by *The Hindu* on February 8, 2019 (in image 1), and the image showing the file noting by then Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar in response to the Ministry's note on the negotiations, which *The Hindu* carried on February 9, 2019 (in image 2).

A close look at the note published by N. Ram, as part of his investigation, reveals that the document was from an earlier date. In that, officials of the Defence Ministry draw the attention of the Defence Minister to the fact that there was a parallel negotiation being led by the Prime Minister's Office. The page has only the observation of the officials. There is no numbering or sequencing of opinions. In the note released by the government through ANI, every opinion is numbered, and Mr. Parrikar's opinion is clearly marked 13, which means it was a subsequent document. The numberings, which are quite conspicuous in the ANI document, prove that *The Hindu* published both documents without any doctoring.

readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

SINGLE FILE

Making art inclusive

Events like the Kochi-Muziris Biennale serve a vital purpose

KUNAL RAY

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Art ought to be an enabler but that is perhaps utopian. Exhibitions have now proliferated and there is a plethora of art events, but whom or what are these events for? For a privileged few who access these spaces which are deeply hierarchical in nature? Galleries in a traditional sense have remained the preserve of the elite. This has led to the emergence of non-normative, alternative art spaces where newer alliances and engagements can be embraced.

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale, which began in 2012, feels like redemption in many ways. It is one of India's biggest achievements in making art inclusive. Hordes of people show up at the venues every day, many of whom have limited or no prior exposure to the visual arts. These are the common masses who turn their Sunday trip to the city into a visit to the biennale.

One of the major initiatives of the biennale during each edition has been to reflect stories of the local people and their histories. Thus, besides a lot of otherwise perplexing art from far removed contexts like Romania or Hungary, the visitors also find a representation of themselves in paintings, videos or photography.

For instance, in the ongoing edition, Nilima Sheikh's painting 'Salam Chechi' is a tribute to the ubiquitous Malayali nurse. Artist Vipin Dhanurdharan has portraits of local people who had welcomed him into their home for meals. He organises a community cooking and dining event every week by inviting experts to cook traditional recipes unique to various communities living in Kochi (in picture). The current edition curated by artist Anita Dube is titled 'Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life'. Dube's politics are at the forefront. She has tried to make the marginal visible, to situate the unheard and the unseen at the centre of her discourse.

Art without politics is no art at all and could you think of a better place than Kerala to rise up to the challenge? Feminism, identity politics, gender rights, LGBTQ representation and farmers' issues are replete in this edition. This is art of our 'contemporary' ethos because it is reflective of the times we live in. Contemporary is just not cutting-edge art practice, but art that takes a distinct position vis-à-vis the current sociopolitical climate of the country. Amidst shrinking spaces of debate and dialogue and growing apathy for compassion, spaces like these are the need of the hour.

In her curatorial note, Dube writes, "If we desire a better life on this earth – our unique and beautiful planet – we must in all humility start to reject an existence in the service of capital. 'Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life' asks and searches for questions in the hope of dialogue." Through dialogue, we shall thrive.

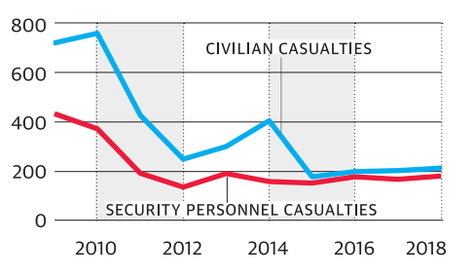
The writer teaches literary and cultural studies at FLAME University, Pune

DATA POINT

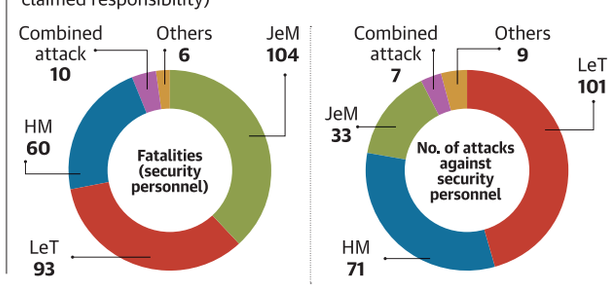
Terror targets

Civilian fatalities in terrorist attacks in J&K have come down over the years, while casualties among security force personnel have remained more or less the same since 2013. The majority of the attacks that caused the deaths of security personnel in the State were perpetrated by the JeM and LeT. The incidence of casualties of security personnel has been higher in Maoist attacks. By **Varun B. Krishnan**

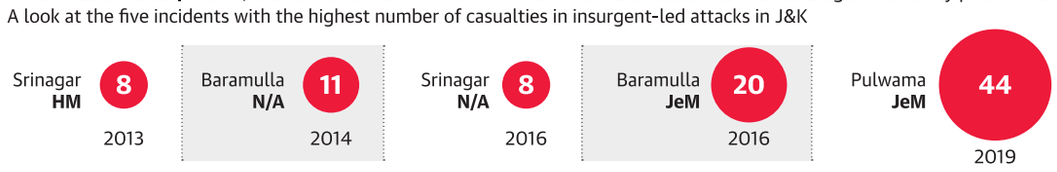
Changing target | Insurgents have been targeting security establishments more than civilian areas in recent years. This has resulted in lower civilian casualties in Jammu and Kashmir



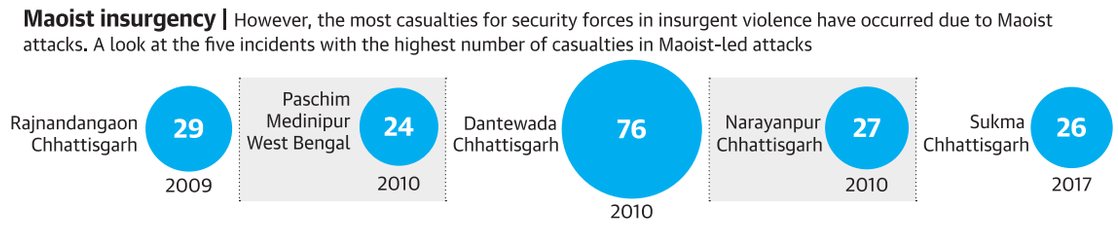
Perpetrators | Fatalities in attacks led by the JeM were the highest, while the highest number of attacks in the past decade were carried out by the LeT (in incidents where organisations claimed responsibility)



Most casualties | In J&K, the Pulwama incident was the worst in terms of casualties in attacks against security personnel. A look at the five incidents with the highest number of casualties in insurgent-led attacks in J&K



Maoist insurgency | However, the most casualties for security forces in insurgent violence have occurred due to Maoist attacks. A look at the five incidents with the highest number of casualties in Maoist-led attacks



* JeM: Jaish-e-Mohammed; LeT: Lashkar-e-Taiba; HM: Hizb-ul-Mujahideen | Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 18, 1969

President warns against 'danger of violence'

The President, Dr. Zakir Husain, to-day [February 16] declared that the problems of integrated economic development in the country required political stability. He called upon all political parties in the country to endeavour to strive towards this end and promote rapid social and economic development. Addressing the joint session of both the Houses of Parliament, which assembled to-day [February 17] for its budget session, Dr. Zakir Husain expressed concern at what he called the "danger of violence from certain political groups" and said that the doctrines propounded by these groups were clearly subversive of the Constitution and the rule of law and detrimental to orderly government and progress.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 18, 1919

Schools and Depressed Classes.

For some time past a strong agitation has been kept up against the elevation of the depressed classes in which their Highnesses the Maharaja and Yuvaraja [of Mysore] are personally interested. At Sringeri, the head-quarters of the successors of Sankaracharya, Mr. C.R. Reddy, the new Inspector-General of Education, permitted the admission of three Halepyka boys belonging to the community above the depressed classes to the Government Anglo-Vernacular School. But as a protest against this, parents of other boys withdrew their children from the school and started a new national school and prayed for Government grant. A [Mysore] Government order on this subject dated 29th November, 1918, says: The Government cannot uphold the view that any one shall be excluded from public schools on the ground of caste as the schools maintained from public revenues are intended for the benefit of all classes of people in the State in the same way as railways, hospitals, courts of law, and other public institutions.

CONCEPTUAL

Naturalistic fallacy

PHILOSOPHY

Also known as the "is-ought" fallacy, this refers to a logical fallacy wherein people falsely derive moral values regarding what is right or wrong based on certain objective natural facts. A person committing the naturalistic fallacy may believe that since people are endowed with different abilities by nature, it is morally justified to discriminate among them. A political conservative, for instance, may believe that it is justified to discriminate between men and women since they are gifted with different abilities by nature. The naturalistic fallacy was first proposed by British philosopher George Edware Moore in his famous 1903 book *Principia Ethica*.

MORE ON THE WEB

Watch: How elephant Chinna Thambi got captured - yet again

bit.ly/ChinnaThambiVideo

Kashmiris face threats, nearly 100 return home

CRPF receives distress calls from students

VIJAITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

Apprehending physical and verbal attacks from frenzied groups in the wake of the Pulwama terror attack, nearly 100 Jammu and Kashmir students from various colleges across North India, mostly from Dehradun in Uttarakhand, have returned to the Valley.

The police control room in J&K received 50 distress calls in the past two days.

The CRPF received distress calls from Kashmiris in Jammu city, Maharashtra and Dehradun, seeking assistance, a senior government official told *The Hindu*.

The J&K administration informed the Union Home Ministry that most of the distress calls were coming from Dehradun and Ambala.

Case against students

A few Kashmiri students and residents were booked for posting messages celebrating the Pulwama terror attack on social media. After reports of attacks on Kashmiris emerged, the CRPF on Saturday issued an advisory and said all such students and residents could contact its toll-free helpline, 14411, for assistance in case of any "difficulties or harassment".

The helpline was established in 2017 to help the local Kashmiri population. The Home Ministry had issued an advisory to all States and Union Territories on Saturday to ensure the security and safety of Kashmiri students and residents.

"Over 24 hours since Saturday evening (till Sunday), we received 22 calls from Kashmiris. Some sought security due to apprehensions of harassment. A few families in Jammu requested for food items as they have not been able to go to markets which are shut due to curfew. Representatives from the nearest CRPF unit and offices in Jammu were sent to these callers with food and other essentials," an official said.

Nasir Khuehami, a spokesperson of the J&K Students Organisation, said that in the past three days, its helpline (9915378749) received 800 calls from Kashmiri students and their parents. "Most calls are coming from Dehradun. Many students were thrashed by members of the Bajrang Dal and the VHP. The police are helping us and so far 100 students have returned home. I stayed in Dehradun for four years but never witnessed something like this before. No one treated us as an outsider," Mr. Khuehami said. He said a temporary shelter had been set up in Chandigarh.

Ashok Kumar, Additional Director-General of Police, Uttarakhand, said police pickets and patrolling had been enhanced for educational institutions and hostels.

Frayed tempers: Protesters clashing with the police in Jammu on Sunday during a curfew imposed for the third day after clashes broke out between two communities. ▪PTI

Shutdown in Kashmir over harassment of students

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

The Kashmir Valley on Sunday observed a shutdown over the "harassment" and "expulsion" of students and traders outside J&K. A curfew continued for the third straight day in Jammu. The police sealed the PDP office in Jammu as party president Mehbooba Mufti arrived to hold a party meeting.

People stayed indoors and markets remained closed all day in the Valley. Several trade bodies called the shutdown. Mobile Internet was suspended. A police official said no major violence was reported in the State.

A man said his son, a student in Dehradun, was "terrified because of the street protests and threats, asking them to vacate". A woman from Bandipora said her daughter was among the four facing expulsion from a college in Jaipur for remarks on social media. National Conference vice-president Omar Abdullah said these students should have been feted for staying away from politics and conflict.

CRPF warns against fake photos, news

Attempt to incite hatred, says force

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The CRPF on Sunday cautioned people against "fake pictures" being circulated online of body parts of the 40 jawans killed in the Pulwama attack.

"It has been noticed that on social media some miscreants are trying to circulate fake pictures of body parts of our martyrs to invoke hatred while we stand united.

"Please DO NOT circulate/share/like such photographs or posts," the force said on its official Twitter handle – @crpfindia.

It asked people to report any such content by sending an email to *webpro@crpf.gov.in*

Officials said a number of such photographs of badly mutilated bodies were being circulated and the development was brought to the notice of force officials after which the advisory was issued.

The paramilitary force, that has deployed about 65,000 personnel as part of 61 battalions in Jammu and Kashmir, issued another advisory on bogus messages being circulated on social media vis-a-vis Kashmiri students based in various places in the country.

"Fake news about harassment of students from Kashmir is being propagated by various miscreants on social media. CRPF helpline has enquired about complaints about harassment and found them incorrect. "These are attempts to invoke hatred. Please DO NOT circulate such posts," it said in its second post on Twitter.

3 J&K students among 4 held in Bengaluru

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

Four persons, including three nursing college students from Jammu & Kashmir, were arrested in Bengaluru on Sunday for posting derogatory comments on Facebook about the Pulwama terror attack.

The arrested students are Haris Manzoor, Gowhar Mustaq and Zakir Maqbool. While Mr. Manzoor and Mr. Mustaq are students of Spurthy College, Mr. Maqbool is a student of Chinai College. They stayed together in a hostel at Marasuru in Anekal.

The students were arrested on a complaint lodged by college principal Babu D., who alleged that the trio had posted a comment abusing Army personnel on Facebook.

Meanwhile, the Belagavi police in Karnataka have arrested a schoolteacher on sedition charge for sharing pro-Pakistan posts on social media.

The teacher, from Kadabi Shivapur village near Saundatti, was arrested on Saturday after someone noticed her posts on WhatsApp and informed the police. As the news spread, some miscreants tried to set her house on fire.

The teacher was produced in a local court on Sunday and remanded in judicial custody, the police said.

Six youths who set fire to the house have been arrested. A case has been registered at the Murgod police station.

Some Hindu and Kannada organisations took out a rally at Murgod, seeking the release of the arrested persons.

(With PTI inputs)

PM shares anguish over Pulwama

'I can see the fire raging in your heart ... that fire is raging in my heart too'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BEGUSARAI

Paying homage to the dead in the Pulwama attack, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said here on Sunday that the fire raging in the hearts of the people was in his heart too.

"I can see the fire raging in your heart ... that fire is raging in my heart too," he told the gathering at a public meeting in Barauni of Begusari district.

Mr. Modi paid tributes to the two CRPF men from Bihar, Sanjay Kumar Sinha and Ratan Kumar Thakur, who were among the 40 killed in the terror attack.

"I express my heartfelt condolences and tributes to these two brave soldiers," he said.

Earlier, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, his deputy Sushil Kumar Modi and Union Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said the country was seething after the Pulwama attack and "our martyrs' blood would not go in vain."

"We will teach them a hard lesson," Mr. Nitish Kumar said.

The Chief Minister announced that the State government would provide all help for the family of the two martyrs from the State.

Poll mode: Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing the gathering at Begusarai in Bihar on Sunday. ▪RANJEET KUMAR

Two track development

Inaugurating several projects worth ₹33,000 crore, the Prime Minister listed development works done by the Centre, and thanked Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for the projects he undertook in the State.

"Bihar and eastern India have so much potential for growth and the day is not far off when this region would become a development hub," he said.

"Under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Yojna my government will give ₹7.5 lakh directly to the bank account of the country's farmers in the next 10 years," the PM announced.

He also said his government has been following two tracks for development. "First is infrastructure-based and the second is to make life better for the oppressed and suppressed people of the country," he said, while adding that "the road to the new India goes through these two tracks of development."

'Pak. sponsored terrorism' finds an echo at Munich

Countries condemn Pulwama attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUNICH/NEW DELHI

India raised the issue of the Pulwama terror attack during bilateral meetings with several countries, including the U.S., Germany and Russia, at the three-day Munich Security Conference that concluded on Sunday, officials said.

The 55th Munich Security Conference, which brings together global leaders and security experts from across the world, was attended by India's Deputy National Security Adviser Pankaj Saran.

On the sidelines of the conference, Mr. Saran held bilateral meetings with representatives of several countries who unequivocally condemned the attack and extended their condolences to the bereaved families. The meetings, according to the officials, were held with the representatives of the U.S., Germany, Russia, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation), Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Bangladesh, Mongolia, Armenia and Oman. There was widespread support for India's concerns over Pakistan-sponsored terrorism on Indian soil, they said.

Pankaj Saran

Rajnath vows strong response

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

A strong retaliatory action in response to the Pulwama terror attack is certain and the martyrdom of the jawans would not go in vain, said Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday.

"I give assurance that the sacrifices of our soldiers in the Pulwama terror attack will never go in vain and the country stands shoulder to shoulder at this juncture," said Mr. Singh, addressing party workers at Ranital in Odisha's Bhadrak district.

The Home Minister paid tributes to the two CRPF soldiers from the State, Manoj Kumar Behea and Prasanna Sahoo, who were among the 40 killed in Pulwama.

Security personnel keeping vigil in Jammu on Sunday. ▪AP

CRPF plans counter to vehicle-borne ambush

New SOP for convoys soon: official

S. VIJAY KUMAR
CHENNAI

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) will strategise its security protocol in Jammu & Kashmir in the wake of the Pulwama attack.

Since this is the first ambush using an explosives-laden vehicle by a suicide bomber in the past 10 years, the force will modernise its Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) in the movement of convoy and security at camps, a senior CRPF official told *The Hindu* on Sunday.

"This is the first attack using vehicle-borne IED in the Valley since 2009. So the focus of security arrangements was more on preventing other types of ambush. Now that this unfortunate incident has happened, we will modernise the SOP by deploying modern technology, including drones, mine-protected vehicles, explosive detectors and jammers," the officer, who preferred not to be named, said.

On questions raised as to why a large contingent of jawans was being transported by road, he said about 50,000 CRPF personnel were deployed in J&K and an average of 5% of them were on leave on any given day. The jawans targeted in the Pulwama attack were all returning to work from leave. The attack came as a rude shock and there was no specific intelligence alert on this terror module, he said.

> **We will deploy drones, mine-protected vehicles, explosive detectors and jammers**
> CRPF OFFICIAL

The official added that the CRPF would put together its expertise and experience in preventing another Pulwama-type attack. The focus would also be to minimise the extent of damage in the event of an attack since no security system could be fool-proof.

He parried questions on the nature and source of explosives since the matter was being probed by the National Investigation Agency and the Jammu & Kashmir police.

'Kashmiris will be protected in Punjab'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said on Sunday that all Kashmiri students in the State would be given protection.

Talking to journalists at Mohali, he said that following reports of harassment of Kashmiri students after the Pulwama attack, he has asked the police to protect them in the State.

"No innocent person will be allowed to be subjected to any harassment in Punjab. We will not play into the hands of the forces trying to divide us in the name of religion," he said.

4 held in U.P. for posting 'objectionable' remarks

Communal harmony could have been disturbed: police

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh police have arrested at least four persons in different districts for posting allegedly objectionable remarks on social media on the Pulwama suicide attack.

A youth identified as Mohammad Osama was arrested in Mau for allegedly justifying the Pulwama attack, the police said.

A resident of Madanpur area, Mr. Osama, in a Facebook post, called the attack a retaliation for the atrocities committed by the Army in Kashmir. He was booked under Section 153A of the Indian Penal Code and Section 66 of the IT Act.

Superintendent of Police Surendra Bahadur said "communal harmony could have been disturbed by the objectionable post".

In Ballia, one Ravi Prakash Maurya was arrested on similar charges, while in Lucknow, a first-year student, Razab Khan, was arrested and also expelled from his college for an objectionable post on Pulwama, the police said.

Pro-Pak. slogan

The police arrested one Taufeek at Bansi in Siddharthnagar district for allegedly writing a pro-Pakistan slogan on Facebook.

The police crackdown comes after a student of Aligarh Muslim University was on Friday booked for allegedly posting an objectionable tweet on the CRPF personnel who died in the suicide attack.

Basim Hilal, a mathematics student at the university, allegedly posted on Twitter, "How's the Jaish? Great Sir," playing on a dialogue from the recently released film *Uri*. A case has been registered against the student, who hails from Jammu and Kashmir, at the Civil Lines police station in Aligarh. The university has also suspended him.

Show of support: Residents of Lucknow protesting on Saturday against the killing of CRPF personnel. ▪RAJEEV BHATT

Four women students booked for sedition

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

The Rajasthan police on Sunday booked four women paramedical students of Kashmiri origin under sedition charges for allegedly posting on social media pictures of their purported celebration of the Pulwama terror attack.

An FIR was registered at Jaipur district's Chandwaji police station based on a complaint lodged by authorities of the National Institute of Medical Sciences, a private university where the students are studying.

The university has also suspended the second-year students.

Jaipur (Rural) Superintendent of Police Harendra Kumar said the FIR was registered under Sections 124-A (sedition) and 153-A (promoting enmity between different groups) of the IPC and relevant provisions of the Information Technology Act.

"A senior officer is probing the matter," he said.

Kashmiri doctor in Kolkata decides to stay

He was threatened, asked to leave city

SUVOJIT BAGCHI
KOLKATA

For the first few hours of Saturday morning, Dr. Rafique Dar (name changed to protect identity), had made up his mind to leave Kolkata.

The Kashmiri cardiologist was threatened and told to leave the city to ensure the safety of his family. But by evening, he changed his mind following a massive outpouring of what he described as "love and care from his fellow city dwellers." The middle-aged doctor from Srinagar has been residing in Kolkata since 2007.

"I have made this my home and I want to live here," said Dr. Dar, who is married to a Bengali Christian teacher. But following two incidents in quick succession, his confidence in Kolkata started receding.

On Saturday morning, a group of men encircled him at his doorstep and told him they would "destroy" his family if he did not leave for Kashmir in 24 hours. The men, unarmed and in their 20s, abused him and Kashmiris, for the Pulwama attack. A similar incident took place on Friday evening.

Policemen standing guard at the doctor's home.

Following the incidents, Dr. Dar wrote to the Chief Minister, who did not respond, but the chairperson of the State's Child Rights Commission, Ananya Chakraborty, called to ensure his safety. Earlier, the Home Ministry had issued an advisory to the States to provide safety to Kashmiris. Dr. Dar thanked a Kashmiri journalist for circulating his post where he appealed for "protection", which went viral.

INTERVIEW | AKHILESH YADAV

'I learnt poll tactics from the BJP, and I'm using the same formula'

Absence of a PM face won't be a drawback for the Opposition, and regional parties may win more seats than the Congress and the BJP, says former U.P. CM

AMIT BARUAH
OMAR RASHID

Samajwadi Party president and former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister **Akhilesh Yadav** *talks about the State's politics, his party's tie-up with the BSP, and the wider Opposition unity in the run-up to the Lok Sabha election. Excerpts:*

Tell us how your alliance with Mayawati was clinched?

■ The alliance started off with the byelections [2018]. And I wanted [to win] from [the seat] where the CM [Yogi Adityanath] won elections many times, never losing. With an anti-Muslim pitch, he would win elections. I gave the ticket to the son of the Nishad Party president. I got my party's vote transferred. Similarly, I took support from the BSP and got their vote transferred. And we won the seat. The byelections gave us a start.

In the 2014 and 2017 elections, BJP people say they didn't have any alliance but in U.P. itself, they had alliances with Rajbhar's party [Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party] and Apna Dal. Then they broke away big leaders of the BSP on the basis of caste. They elected a backward as their State president – sending a message among the OBCs that a backward will be CM – and won by lying to them. The BJP's vote percentage was high. Other than this, we had no other political means to stop the BJP.

You are saying that Gorakhpur was an experiment that worked for you?

■ This experiment happened in Gorakhpur, Phulpur, Kairana and then Noorpur. They lost four seats. I had given my candidate to the RLD [Rashtriya Lok Dal] and taken one candidate from another party; the symbol in Gorakhpur was cycle, in Kairana it was handpump. Political management of this kind, I did it for the first time. I had done a lot of work, but along with the work arithmetic is necessary. And this is what the BJP does.

Basically, you are saying you are using the BJP's own tactics.

■ True. I have learnt this from the BJP. And I'm using the formula against them.

You have said that you ended a 25-year dispute with the BSP in 25 minutes. What happened in those 25 minutes?

■ My bigger goal is that a party with an ideology like BJP's is removed. I did not put any conditions [with Mayawati]. And when that happens, talks become easier.

Any conditions from her side?

■ No conditions from her side as well. Since there were no conditions from my side, even if there was something, I would not know of it.

You also have a good equation with Rahul Gandhi and fought the 2017 Assembly elections together. How come that chemistry did not translate into a broader alliance with the Congress in 2019?

■ It is the responsibility of the Congress to bring together all parties, and it had the opportunity in the M.P., Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan elections. They missed that opportunity... it appears their strategy is to contest alone everywhere. They want to build their party. I have sacrificed 40 seats; Mayawati*ji* has also done the same.

I feel the message has gone to the people on the issue of Rafale, that there is something wrong.

Is there still any scope for involving the Congress in the run-up to the poll?

■ They are a national party but they don't have a presence in U.P. Nothing we do should give the advantage to the BJP. [An understanding with the Congress] looks difficult at this moment.

What will be the impact of Priyanka Gandhi Vadra?

■ It's difficult to say anything right now because the U.P. voter is very sensible.

Do you think the details of the Rafale deal, which have been exposed in the media including *The Hindu*, could be an election issue?

■ I feel the message has gone to the people on the issue of Rafale, that there is something wrong. But unemployment and farmers' woes are big issues.

A lot of people ask the question that if there is a non-BJP coalition government in 2019, will it be able to run the country and provide effective leadership?

■ A coalition government decided on the nuclear deal. Manmohan Singh*ji* was PM for 10 years. And this is also a coalition government, not a BJP government but an NDA government...

It doesn't behave as an alliance government, but a BJP one. Plus, they have a face in Modi. Who do you have, you are being asked.

■ The question is not the face. A face can come any time. I ask them that if their current face fails, what alternative do they have?

So you don't think the absence of a face is a drawback for the non-BJP Opposition parties?

■ I will say something else. All our regional leaders; are they faces or not? It may happen that regional parties win more seats than the Congress and the BJP.

Do you have PM aspirations?

■ No. But I want to make a new PM. A person like me will be happy if the new PM is from U.P.

You think the country could have a woman Dalit PM?

■ Why not... you might discover that even the Congress will extend support.

In a hypothetical situation, if the BSP and you get 50-60 seats, will you propose that India should have its first Dalit woman PM?

■ I will not say this at this moment. My focus is that we both win more seats together.

There is talk that you won't find it easy to transfer votes to each other, especially the Yadavs' to BSP, because of the social conflict for so many years.

■ We did the same thing in two [by]elections. Votes were transferred.

Has the BJP made you feel that you are an OBC?

■ At least they showed me a way in politics by calling me backward. But my work is forward. Our work is visionary.

How serious is this issue of stray cattle in U.P.?

Farmers have faced a lot of damage, people have lost their lives. It is called *pashudhan* because when the farmer's cow stopped giving milk, he sold it and with that money he would buy another one. Now they have disrupted that entire chain.

There are corruption charges popping up against you, and Mayawati as well.

In the mining case, I will reply once I get the notice. As far as the Gomti riverfront goes, their only problem is that I built a better one than the Sabarmati riverfront in Ahmedabad. That's why the CBI and ED [raids].

Full interview on http://bit.ly/AkhileshYadavIntw

IN BRIEF

Sushma urges Bulgaria NRIs to invest in India

SOFIA

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj on Sunday hailed India as a land of opportunity and invited the Indians in Bulgaria to invest in the country and participate in its transformative journey. Addressing the Indian community here, she lauded them for its "commendable role" in boosting bilateral ties. Ms. Swaraj offered floral tribute at the Mahatma Gandhi Statue here. PTI

Three Afghan nationals detained in Jaipur

JAIPUR

Three Afghan nationals were detained here on Sunday after they failed to produce documents for a New Delhi-registered car they were travelling in, the police said. Two of them are students of a private university in Noida and the other of a Kabul university. They had university IDs, passports and visas. Intelligence and Anti-Terrorism Squad officials were questioning them. PTI

Pak. cricketers' photos removed from stadium

CHANDIGARH

The Punjab Cricket Association (PCA) on Sunday removed the photographs of Pakistani cricketers from various points inside the Mohali stadium as a "humble step" to show solidarity with the families of those killed in the Pulwama terror attack. The decision was taken at a meeting of the cricket body's office-bearers here, PCA treasurer Ajay Tyagi said. He said there were nearly 15 photos of Pakistani cricketers inside the stadium at various points such as the galleries and the "hall of fame". PTI

'Will neither contest nor support any party in LS poll'

Assembly election is our focus, says Rajinikanth

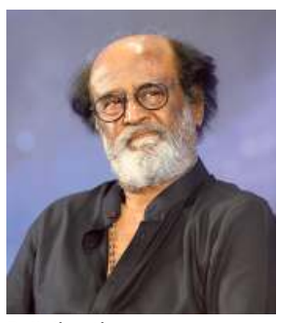
STAFF REPORTER
CHENNAI

Actor and aspiring politician Rajinikanth on Sunday categorically ruled out extending his support to any political party in the upcoming Lok Sabha election.

He said he will not be contesting the Parliamentary polls, and reiterated that the Assembly election "is our focus".

"No political party has my support for the [up]coming Parliamentary election. Therefore, no one should use my image or the flag of the Rajini Makkal Mandram or the Rajini Rasigar Mandram while campaigning," he said in a statement.

On December 31, 2017, while announcing his intention to enter politics, the actor made it clear that he will field candidates in 234 Assembly constituencies as and when elections were held in the State. He ruled out contesting the local body polls and was non-committal on the Parliamentary election.



Rajinikanth

In his statement on Sunday, Mr. Rajinikanth, who has in the past voiced support for the inter-linking of rivers, said, "One of Tamil Nadu's main issues is water.

I urge people to vote for whichever party they think can solve Tamil Nadu's water crisis

In the upcoming Lok Sabha election, I urge people to vote for whichever party they think can form a stable and strong government at the Centre and solve Tamil Nadu's water crisis."

The actor met 32 district representatives of his Mandram from across the State at his Poes Garden bungalow in Chennai on Sunday. The announcement of his decision not to contest the upcoming polls came shortly after.

Rajini Makkal Mandram was set up last year as a launch vehicle for his proposed political party.

Disgruntled Rajbhar to meet Shah in Delhi

To discuss sub-categorisation of OBC quota

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

After having offered to quit the Backward Class Welfare Ministry in Uttar Pradesh, Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party leader Om Prakash Rajbhar will now press his demands with the BJP's central leadership.

A disgruntled Mr. Rajbhar last week handed back the Backward Class Welfare portfolio to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, accusing his government of neglecting Other Backward Classes and discriminating against them. However, Mr. Adityanath rejected the proposal, said Arun Rajbhar, SBSP general secretary, on Sunday.

The SBSP chief will now meet BJP president Amit Shah in Delhi on Tuesday to discuss implementation of the report proposing sub-categorisation of the OBC quota.

Mr. Rajbhar has given the BJP time till February 24 to fulfil his demands after which he will decide if he will continue the alliance. He was irked after not a single member recommended by him was included in the committee of the backward caste panel.

The SBSP and the BJP contested together in the 2017 Assembly elections, with the SBSP winning four seats, while additionally transferring its crucial Rajbhar vote to the BJP in Purvanchal.

'BJP neglecting OBCs'

However, ever since coming to power, Mr. Rajbhar has asserted himself on issues related to the backward castes and often accused the BJP of neglecting them despite having come to power through their votes.

Bomb blasts on the rise in J&K, says report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Jammu and Kashmir has seen a steady increase in IED and other blasts over the past five years, with 2018 witnessing a 57% jump, a new report says. In areas affected by Left-wing extremism and the northeast, the number has gone down.

Thirty-five blasts took place in J&K in 2014, 46 in 2015, 69 in 2016, 70 in 2017 and 117 last year. The report was presented by the National Bomb Data Centre of the National Security Guard during an international conference here on the IEDs.

The report made a special mention of J&K and the growing threat posed by IEDs and similar explosives.

Cong. proposes names for 26 Maharashtra seats

Milind Deora, Sushil Kumar Shinde, Mukul Wasnik and Rajeev Satav find a place among probables

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

The Congress Maharashtra unit has sent a final list of possible candidates for 26 Lok Sabha constituencies in the State to the All India Congress Committee.

On the list, Milind Deora (Mumbai South), Sushil Kumar Shinde (Solapur), Charulata Tokas (Wardha), Mukul Wasnik (Ramtek), Rajeev Satav (Hingoli), Manikrao Thakre (Yavatmal) and Amita Chavan (Nanded) have no competitors. Latur (Scheduled Caste reserved) has the highest number of ticket aspirants with the selection committee receiving 31 names.

Mallikarjun Kharge and Sanjay Nirupam ▪ EMMANUAL YOGINI

The Congress high command has deferred a decision on the complaints raised by party leaders against Mumbai Congress president Sanjay Nirupam, and asked his opponents to focus on the Lok Sabha election rather than go about infighting.

Mallikarjun Kharge, the Maharashtra party in-charge, held a meeting last week in a hotel in south Mumbai to discuss preparations for the election.

"[Mr. Kharge] held talks with all senior leaders in the State and also with him [Mr. Nirupam]. As things stand today, each leader has been asked to concentrate on his or her respective constituency for the elections. The more pressure local leaders want to put on the central leadership, the more it is likely that no decision will be taken," said a leader present at the meetings.

The works of the campaign and the election committees, the political climate, and demands of alliance partners were reviewed. State Congress president Ashok Chavan and Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly Radhakrishna Vikhe-Patil were present.

Jadhav case hearing at ICJ from today

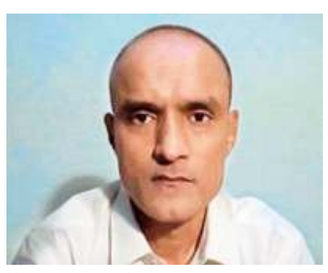
Public hearing to conclude on Thursday, decision by summer

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
THE HAGUE

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) will hold public hearings in the Kulbhushan Jadhav case from Monday at The Hague during which India and Pakistan will present their arguments.

Mr. Jadhav, 48, was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court on charges of espionage and terrorism in April 2017. India moved the ICJ a month later. A 10-member Bench of the ICJ on May 18, 2017 restrained Pakistan from executing Mr. Jadhav till adjudication.

The ICJ has set a timetable for the public hearing from Monday to Thursday. The court's decision is expected by summer.



Kulbhushan Jadhav

Harish Salve, who represents India, is expected to submit his arguments first. The English Queen's Counsel, Khawar Qureshi, will make submissions for Pakistan on Tuesday. India will reply on Wednesday, and Islamabad will make its closing submissions on Thursday.

The hearings will be streamed live on the court's website and on UN Web TV.

"India will present its case before the court. Since the matter is *sub judice*, it is not appropriate for me to state our position in public. Whatever we have to do, we will do at the court," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said last week in response to a question.

Pakistan's Attorney-General Anwar Mansoor would lead the Pakistani delegation and Director-General, South Asia, Mohammad Faisal would lead the Foreign Office side.

ELSEWHERE

Netanyahu chooses Likud rival as Foreign Minister

JERUSALEM

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced on Sunday that he was relinquishing the role of Foreign Minister and handing it to a rival from within his Likud party, Israel Katz. The move comes ahead of April 9 elections and follows court challenges arguing that Mr. Netanyahu has taken on too many portfolios. AFP

9 killed as Bangladesh slum catches fire

DHAKA

A major fire in Bangladesh gutted over 200 shanties, killing at least nine persons including two children in Chittagong on Sunday. The blaze broke out in the wee hours when most of the slum dwellers were asleep, *Dhaka Tribune* reported. PTI

Israel to withhold tax transfers to Palestine

JERUSALEM

Israel said its security Cabinet on Sunday decided to withhold $138 million in tax transfers to the Palestinian Authority over its payments to prisoners jailed for attacks on Israelis. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the withheld cash would be equal to that paid by the PA last year. Israel alleges the payments encourage further violence. AFP

Indian in Dubai accused of molesting girl at mall

DUBAI

An Indian salesman has been accused of sexually harassing a 15-year-old girl at a mall in Dubai, according to a media report. The 31-year-old Indian spotted the girl at the shop where he worked while her mother was busy talking to another employee. PTI

U.S. asks Europe to 'take back IS fighters'

The Syrian Democratic Forces hold hundreds of foreigners accused of fighting for the jihadist group

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BAGHOUZ

U.S. President Donald Trump on Sunday called on his European allies to take back alleged jihadists captured in Syria, as Islamic State (IS) group fighters defended the last scrap of their "caliphate".

After years of fighting IS, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) hold hundreds of foreigners accused of fighting for the group, as well as related women and children.

Possible U.S. withdrawal

Syria's Kurds have repeatedly called for their countries of origin to take them back, but these nations have been reluctant. The issue has taken on greater urgency, however, amid fears of a security vacuum since Mr. Trump's shock announcement in December that U.S. troops would withdraw.

"The United States is asking Britain, France, Germany and other European allies to take back over 800 ISIS fighters that we captured in Syria and put them on trial," Mr. Trump said in a tweet, using another acronym for IS.

"The Caliphate is ready to fall. The alternative is not a good one in that we will be forced to release them. The U.S. does not want to watch as these ISIS fighters permeate Europe, which is where they are expected to go."

His tweet prompted a reaction from Paris, Brussels and Berlin. In Syria, "it is the Kurds who hold them (the French jihadists) and we have every confidence in their ability to keep them detained", French junior Interior Minister Laurent Nunez told the BFM news channel. If suspected jihadists return to France, "they will all be tried, and incarcerated,", he said. France this month opened the door to bringing back its citizens.

A girl near a destroyed building in Hajin, Syria. GETTY IMAGES

A French source said that an estimated 150 French nationals, including 90 children, could be brought back to France, but authorities have not confirmed any planned transfer.

In Belgium, Justice Minister Koen Geens called for a collective "European solution" to the problem of foreign fighters, urging a solution that carries the least security risks. "We currently have mothers and children in northern Syria, but also some fighters who are known," he told Belgian public television network VRT.

In Germany, Foreign Ministry sources said "the federal government is examining options to enable German citizens to leave Syria, especially in humanitarian cases".

Thousands of people have streamed out of the so-called "Baghouz pocket" in recent weeks, but hundreds of civilians are believed to still be inside.

Trump's choice for UN envoy pulls out

Cites 'family reasons' for withdrawal

REUTERS
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump's choice for Ambassador to the UN, Heather Nauert, has withdrawn from consideration for the job for family reasons, the State Department said on Saturday.

Ms. Nauert was State Department spokeswoman when Mr. Trump chose her for the UN position. She had been criticised by Democrats for her lack of diplomatic experience.

"The past two months have been gruelling for my family and therefore it is in the best interest of my family that I withdraw my name from consideration," Ms. Nauert said in a State Department statement.

A person familiar with the matter said Ms. Nauert withdrew from consideration because she had a nanny who was in the U.S. legally but did not have the proper work visa.

Heather Nauert. AFP

Ms. Nauert joined the State Department as spokeswoman in April 2017.

U.S. Ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell, previously the longest serving U.S. spokesman at the UN, is among the possible replacements, a source said.

Iran summons Pak. envoy over suicide attack

Tehran seeks action against group responsible for last week's blast that killed 27

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TEHRAN

Iran's Foreign Ministry on Sunday summoned the Pakistani Ambassador after Tehran accused Islamabad of harbouring a jihadist group behind a deadly suicide attack on security forces. "The Islamic Republic of Iran expects Pakistan's government and Army to seriously confront... the terrorist groups active on its border with Iran," the Foreign Ministry said.

An Iranian official at the Ministry called on Pakistan to quickly take the necessary steps for the identification and arrest of the attack's perpetrators. The suicide bombing on Wednesday killed 27 members of Iran's Revolutionary Guards travelling on a bus in the volatile south-eastern province of Sistan-Balochistan, which straddles the border with Pakistan. The attack was claimed by the jihadist outfit Jaish al-Adl ("Army of Justice"). It was formed in 2012 as a successor to the Sunni extremist group Jundallah (Soldiers of God), which waged a deadly insurgency for a decade before it was severely weakened by the capture and execution of its leader Abdolmalek Rigi in 2010.

Well-wishers on Saturday mourning the death of Revolutionary Guard members in Isfahan. AP

Iran Revolutionary Guards commander Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari on Saturday blamed Pakistan's Army and Inter-Services Intelligence agency for sheltering the jihadists.

"The government of Pakistan must pay the price of harbouring these terrorist groups and this price will undoubtedly be very high," Major-General Jafari told mourners gathered at funerals for the dead in Isfahan.

Javad Zarif slams Pence over 'ignorant, hateful' comments

Future of nuclear deal on the brink, says Iran Foreign Minister

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MUNICH

Iran's Foreign Minister on Sunday launched a blistering attack on U.S. Vice-President Mike Pence, saying his allegations that Tehran was plotting a "new Holocaust" were "hateful" and "ignorant".

Mohammad Javad Zarif told the Munich Security Conference that Mr. Pence's demands for the EU to follow the U.S. in abandoning the 2015 Iran nuclear deal amounted to asking Europe to undermine its own security. And Mr. Zarif piled fresh pressure on the EU, telling Brussels that a trade mechanism to bypass U.S. sanctions on Iran was inadequate and it needed to do more if it wanted to save the accord.

Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif. REUTERS

Mr. Zarif slammed Mr. Pence, saying that he had "arrogantly demanded that Europe must join the U.S. in undermining its own security and breaking its obligations" to the treaty under international law.

Mr. Zarif welcomed the EU's political support but said it was not enough, and demanded Europe "walk the walk". He warned that the future of the nuclear deal was "on the brink", saying that while polls showed 51% of Iranians still supported staying in, there were many who thought Tehran had got a bad deal.

'Abe nominated Trump for Nobel at U.S. request'

Praised thaw with N. Korea, says daily

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TOKYO

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe nominated U.S. President Donald Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize last autumn after being requested to do so by Washington, a Japanese newspaper reported on Sunday.

Washington sounded out Tokyo over the possibility of nominating Mr. Trump for the prize after his summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in June last year, an unnamed Japanese government source told the *Asahi Shimbun*. The report came after Mr. Trump's claim on Friday that Mr. Abe had nominated him for the prize. Mr. Trump said Mr. Abe had sent him a copy of a five-page nomination letter delivered to the Nobel Peace Prize committee in which the Japanese leader praised his efforts in defusing tensions with Pyongyang.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. GETTY IMAGES

"He said 'I have nominated you respectfully on behalf of Japan. I am asking them to give you the Nobel Peace Prize.' I said thank you," Mr. Trump told reporters at the White House. "Many other people feel that way, too. I'll probably never get it. That's okay."

Saudi Prince gets royal welcome in Pakistan

Warmly embraced by PM, Army chief

REUTERS
ISLAMABAD

Saudi Arabia's Mohammed bin Salman was greeted with a booming 21-gun salute in Pakistan on Sunday, as the powerful royal scion kicked off an Asia tour.

The Crown Prince launched his diplomatic trip in Islamabad, where he was set to sign a raft of investment deals believed to be worth billions that Pakistan hopes will provide welcome relief to its teetering economy. He was warmly embraced by Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan and powerful Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa as he stepped onto a red carpet flanked by an honour guard at a military airbase near Islamabad.

The Prince will travel to India after his Pakistan visit, where he will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. He is expected to finish the trip with a visit to China on Thursday and Friday.

A poster in Islamabad featuring Prince Mohammed bin Salman. AFP

Pakistan is facing a serious balance of payments crisis and hopes its long-time ally Saudi Arabia will throw the struggling economy a lifeline, specifically in the form of a $10 billion investment in a refinery and oil complex in the south-west of the county.

Wide angle, narrow prism

A week ahead of the 91st Academy Awards, a look at the numbers related to the Best Foreign Film Oscar reveals that juries have traditionally tended to favour films from Western Europe. On the other hand, countries in South Asia and Africa – despite India and Nigeria being among the nations producing the most number of films – have not been sufficiently recognised

How is a foreign film defined?

A foreign-language film is defined as one "produced outside the U.S. with a predominantly non-English dialogue track

How many countries have submitted films to the Oscars?

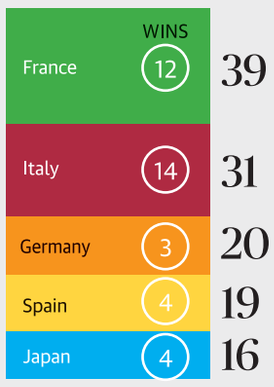
a) Close to **118 countries** have submitted at least one film since 1948. The total number of films submitted runs to more than 2,000

b) Only **54 countries/territories** – excluding the erstwhile Yugoslavia and including Puerto Rico, Taiwan and Hong Kong as separate entities – can boast of an Oscar nomination

d) India has made **more than 50 submissions**, three of which have found a place in the list

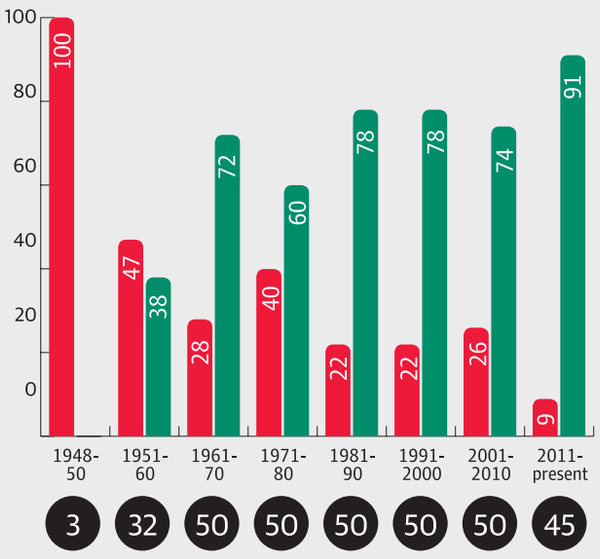
Top nominee countries

France with 39 nominations and Italy with 31 figure at the top. Among Asian countries, Japan tops the list



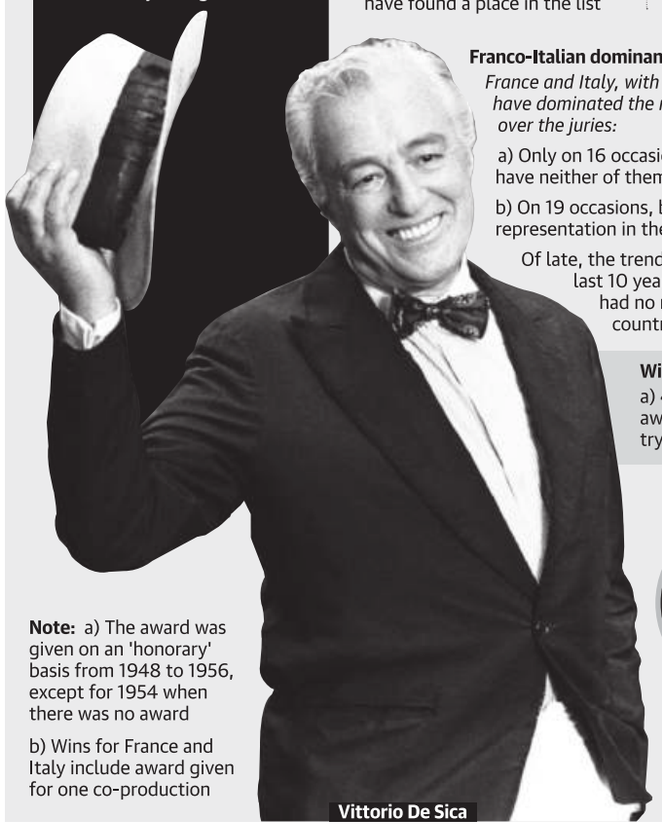
Diversification of choices

France, Italy, Germany, Spain and Japan have collectively contributed a major share of the nominations to the Oscars. In the last decade, though, nominees have predominantly been from other countries with only 9% from these five.



Directors who reigned supreme

SOURCE: OSCARS.ORG



Vittorio De Sica

Franco-Italian dominance

France and Italy, with 12 and 14 wins respectively, have dominated the race. Two facts prove their hold over the juries:

a) Only on 16 occasions, out of the 70 since 1948, have neither of them figured in the nominees' list

b) On 19 occasions, both countries have found representation in the nominee list

Of late, the trend seems to be changing. In the last 10 years, six of the award editions have had no nominee from either of the two countries

Winner count

a) **43 out of 70 times**, the award has gone to a country in **Western Europe**

b) Only **seven** times has an **Asian** country won an award

c) Only **thrice** has an **African** country won it

THE AUTEURS

Akira Kurosawa

Asghar Farhadi

India's nominee (1958)

- **Vittorio De Sica** and **Federico Fellini**, both from Italy, have held the trophy the **most** number of times – **four**
- **De Sica** is the only director to have had **five** nominations

Federico Fellini

Note: a) The award was given on an 'honorary' basis from 1948 to 1956, except for 1954 when there was no award

b) Wins for France and Italy include award given for one co-production

Riyadh defends app that allows men to track women

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
RIYADH

Saudi Arabia on Saturday defended a mobile app that allows men in the kingdom to track women relatives after rights groups and a U.S. lawmaker criticised tech giants for offering it.

The Absher app provides services for "all members of the society... including women, the elderly, and people with special needs", the Interior Ministry said.

The free app is available on Android and Apple smartphones and allows users to renew passports, visas and eases a variety of other electronic services.

But critics have said the app enables abuse against women and girls by allowing men to track their movements. Apple CEO Tim Cook told U.S. National Public Radio earlier this week that he had not heard of the app, but would "take a look at it".

'Abusive practice'

U.S. Senator Ron Wyden has called on both Apple and Google to remove the app, arguing on Twitter that it promotes "abusive practises against women".

Under Saudi law, women must have consent from a husband or immediate male relative to renew passports or leave the country.

The Ministry criticised what it called a "systematic campaign aimed at questioning the purpose of the services". It rejected what it described as "attempts to politicise" the tool.

This comes as Saudi Arabia faces intense scrutiny over the shocking murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi last year, which has renewed criticism of the kingdom's rights record.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has garnered international attention with his rapid rise to power and promise of social and economic reforms.

But the kingdom has detained a number of human rights and women campaigners, some of them accused of undermining national security, with scant public information about their whereabouts or the legal status of their cases.

U.S. man charged with hate crime for attacking Sikh clerk

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW YORK

A man was arrested on hate crime charges in California after he punched a Sikh clerk and threw hot coffee on him as he believed the victim was a Muslim. The man, identified as John Crain, threw the hot coffee at the clerk and then punched him in the face before fleeing on Wednesday in Marysville, *The Sacramento Bee* reported.

The clerk told officers that Mr. Crain had prepared himself a cup of coffee and attempted to leave without paying. He is seen in the CCTV footage confronting Mr. Crain before being attacked. Mr. Crain admitted to the officers that he had assaulted the clerk. He told police he "hated Muslims" and attacked the Sikh clerk because he believed he was Muslim. He was later booked into Yuba County Jail for theft, assault and hate crimes charges.

IN BRIEF

Pawan Hans bidders to get share buy pact soon

NEW DELHI

The final share purchase agreement (SPA) will be shared soon with shortlisted bidders of Pawan Hans for selling the government and ONGC's stake in the helicopter service provider, an official said. A meeting of the Alternative Mechanism on strategic disinvestment would be called soon to get the clearance for the final SPA. The government holds 51% stake in Pawan Hans and ONGC, the rest. PTI

Jaitley to address RBI central board today

NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley will address the customary post-budget meeting of the central board of the Reserve Bank of India on Monday and highlight the key points of the Interim Budget, including the fiscal consolidation roadmap. The meeting will take a call on the interim dividend to be paid to the government in the current fiscal, sources said. The Centre expects ₹28,000 crore from the RBI as interim dividend for 2018-19. PTI

Indian Bank raises term deposits rates

CHENNAI

Chennai-based public sector lender Indian Bank has revised interest rates on domestic term deposits with immediate effect. "..announces upward revision in interest rate on domestic term deposits by 50 bps to 90 bps for amount less than ₹one crore across various tenors from three years to less than five years, five years and above five years," the bank said in a statement here. PTI

States allocation: panel sticks to 2011 census

Proposals will impact Central Budget and those presented by States for 2020-21, says N.K. Singh

TCA SHARAD RAGHAVAN
NEW DELHI

The 15th Finance Commission will not alter its approach on solely using the 2011 Census for population figures in its calculations for allocations to States, Chairman N.K. Singh said in an interview.

However, he added that other measures would be included that would ensure that States that have performed well by controlling population growth would not be penalised.

"The final decision is that, as far as we are concerned, the Commission is a recipient of the Terms of Reference (ToR)," Mr. Singh said. "It is not the creator of the Terms. Having received the Presidential Order, we are obligated by the Constitution to act on the basis of the Presidential Order. It is very clear that wherever population has to be used as a criterion, that population should be what is in the Census of 2011."

Balancing act: Finance panel will ensure that efficiency and performance are not penalised, says N.K.Singh. ▪ R.V. MOORTHY

"The ToR also do say [we are] to look at incentives for States that have achieved success in terms of replacement rates and better demographic management," Mr. Singh added. "So we will be looking at that. The intention of the Commission is to try and see that in no way is efficiency and performance penalised, so we will try to see what kind of a balance we are able to come up with."

The panel will be visiting Telangana on Monday, which would take the total number of States so far visited to 19. After Telangana, the Commission is scheduled to visit Rajasthan. "It is a race against time," Mr. Singh said.

"There is an order from the President that by November 1 our report is expected. We will try to conform to that deadline to the extent possible. The point is that flexibility is very limited in the sense that our report will be an overarching factor for the first regular Budget of the new government, that is, the Budget presented in 2020."

He said that the recommendations of the Commission, especially to do with the quantum of devolution to the States, will have a bearing on not only the Central Budget but also those presented by the States for the year 2020-21.

States' finances weaker

In general, State finances are in a weaker position than the Centre's, but we need not be in a celebratory mood regarding the Centre's finances either. he said. Perhaps for very good reasons, they have kicked the can on the fiscal deficit and debt targets down the road.

The Chairman, however, said the Commission had not yet finalised whether it would be altering the previous Commission's recommendation that 42% of the Centre's tax revenue be shared with the States.

Pilots wanted in the next 10 years

Years	First officers	Commanders	Commanders from upgrades
2019	1,086	150	568
2020	1,357	299	641
2021	1,295	69	743
2022	1,439	83	822
2023	1,584	116	894
2024	1,764	137	990
2025	1,966	161	1,099
2026	1,614	133	959
2027	1,738	145	1,031
2028	1,872	138	1,108

While the number of flying training organisations declined to 30 in 2018 from 35 in 2015, training aircraft have increased to 360 in 2018 from 308 in 2015

DGCA keeping tabs on IndiGo's crew strength

Airline needs to match fleet expansion

JAGRITI CHANDRA
NEW DELHI

Aviation watchdog DGCA is monitoring IndiGo to check if the airline has sufficient crew to match its rapid fleet expansion, according to a top official.

IndiGo has decided to cancel at least 30 flights per day in February and March due to shortage of pilots.

The country's biggest airline in market share (43%) and fleet size (208 aircraft) has nearly 400 more planes on order and 3,000 pilots on its rolls. "For new inductions, airlines need to show availability of crew. We are closely monitoring the same for IndiGo," a DGCA official said on condition of anonymity, adding that the agency was in touch with the airline on its plans to address the present shortage of pilots.

IndiGo added a plane every week in 2018, expanding its fleet size from 153 planes in December 2017 to 208 planes in December 2018.

In the same year, it accounted for two-thirds of the 21 million additional seats deployed by airlines on domestic routes. In FY 2019, airlines are expected to add another 90 planes and take the combined fleet size to 754 aircraft, according to aviation consultancy firm Centre for Asia Pacific Aviation (CAPA). In order to fuel this expansion, airlines will need 30% more pilots in 2020 than 2019 – 1,357 first officers and 299 new commanders (apart from 641 commanders upgraded from first officers).

The requirement for pilots will more than double in the next 10 years from 7,963 in 2018 to 17,164 in 2028, according to CAPA.

Impact on growth

Aviation experts fear that the shortage of pilots could arrest the growth of the rapidly expanding sector, expected to be the world's third biggest aviation market in 2024. "Pilot shortage could hurt growth and has already impacted the expansion of ATR operations," Kapil Kaul, CEO & Director, CAPA South Asia, said. "Pilot shortage is a structural problem and is unlikely to change in the near term."

Anil Ambani reaches truce with lenders

No sale of pledged shares till September, Reliance Group to pay on due dates

PIYUSH PANDEY
MUMBAI

Reliance Group has reached an in-principle standstill understanding with more than 90% of lenders at the promoter group level, after L&T Finance and Edelweiss Group dumped the Anil Ambani Group shares, causing an unprecedented fall in the share prices of Reliance Power and other group firms earlier this month.

As per the understanding, these lenders will not enforce security or sell any of the promoters' pledged shares till September 30, 2019, on account of lower collateral cover or reduced margin due to the steep decline in share prices recently, a source in the know of the development told *The Hindu*.

Anil Ambani

Reliance Group will pay the principal and interest to the lenders as per the scheduled due dates specified in the loan agreements.

Investment bankers

The Group has also informed the lenders that it has appointed investment bankers to place a part of promoters' direct 30% shareholding in Reliance Power Ltd. with select institutional investors. Road shows by investment bankers are likely to commence next week.

The value of promoters' stake in Reliance Power, before the fall in share prices, was more than ₹2,500 crore, and would have cleared over 65% of total promoter borrowings.

Reliance Infrastructure Ltd. holds 40% equity in Reliance Power, and even after placement of its holding by the promoters, the majority stake and control remains with the Reliance Group.

Reliance Group has nine lenders at the promoters' level and exposure to the group for mutual funds (MFs) stands at ₹1,000 crore. Key lenders are Templeton MF, DHFL Primeamerica MF, Indiabulls MF, IndusInd Bank and Yes Bank.

Franklin Templeton, with 90% of MF exposure has supported Reliance Group promoters, while Primeamerica MF and Indiabulls MF have a combined exposure of less than ₹100 crore and are expected to be paid off, in full, before March 31, 2019. L&T Finance does not have any exposure in Reliance Group, while Edelweiss Group still has an exposure of ₹150 crore.

A Reliance Group spokesperson said, "We are grateful to our lenders for believing in the intrinsic and fundamental value of our companies, and granting their in-principle approval to standstill arrangements."

Reliance Capital shares closed marginally up at ₹148.55 on Friday.

RBI turns net buyer of dollars in FY19

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India has turned net buyer of dollars in December, first time in the current fiscal, as it purchased $607 million of the greenback on a net basis from the spot market, according to a data. The RBI bought $837 million and sold $230 million in the spot market during the reporting month.

As against this, in December 2017, the RBI was a net buyer of $5.647 billion, after it bought $6.008 billion from the market and sold $361 million. Between April and November 2018, the central bank had net sold $26.51 billion in the spot market against net purchase of $18.017 billion in the same period in 2017.

Malvinder files complaint against kin

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Former Fortis Healthcare promoter Malvinder Singh has filed a criminal complaint against his brother Shivinder Singh, spiritual head of the Radha Soami Satsang Gurinder Singh Dhillon, and others alleging financial fraud and threats to kill him.

The other persons who were named in the complaint included Gurkirat Singh Dhillon, Gurpreet Singh Dillon, Shabnam Dhillon, Godhwani kin – Sunil and Sanjay.

Mr. Malvinder, who filed the complaint before the Economic Offences Wing here, alleged that Gurinder Singh Dhillon or Baba, through his lawyer Ferida Chopra, threatened to kill him.

M&M to roll out 'Pininfarina' car

Luxury EV to launch in 2020; may not hit Indian roads

LALATENDU MISHRA
MUMBAI

Mahindra & Mahindra's (M&M) ambition to get into the big league of luxury automotive manufacturing will turn into reality when the first Pininfarina-branded hypercar will hit the roads by the end of 2020.

But the all-electric car is unlikely to be introduced in India as sales volumes are expected to be low, given that the price is understood to be in the region of $2 million. The hypercar is targeted at customers in Europe and the U.S.

Collector's item

"The car under production will be a collector's item. It will be a product of aspiration and an object of desire. Like art, its value will appreciate over the years," Pawan Goenka, managing director, M&M, said. It will be a limited edition and a maximum of 150 units will be produced, to ensure exclusivity.

Pawan Goenka

"It is too early to say how much the car will cost but it be an expensive one," Dr Goenka said.

The car is being developed in Europe by Automobili Pininfarina, a 100% subsidiary of M&M. This company will manufacture the car under the brand name Pininfarina, which is a marquee global automobile brand.

It has been done through a brand licensing agreement with Italian automobile design firm Pininfarina SpA . In 2015, the Mahindra Group acquired 76% stake in this firm, which is being run independently.

For Pininfarina SpA, which has designed sports and luxury cars for Ferrari, Maserati and Rolls-Royce, to name a few, Automobili Pininfarina is a client and the design firm has 'nothing to do with the production of the new hypercar.'

"Both are separate companies. Even people from the automotive sector of Mahindra do not sit on the board of Pininfarina SpA, to ensure client confidentiality," Dr. Goenka added.

Sterlite closure: downstream units await SC ruling today

Many units have shut down following copper shortage

K.T. JAGANNATHAN
CHENNAI

The Supreme Court's decision on a batch of appeals against an order by the National Green Tribunal directing reopening of Sterlite Copper at Thoothukudi is awaited with more than customary interest by a host of downstream units, especially the electrical and telecom industries.

The apex court is expected to give verdict on the appeals on Monday. The consumption of refined copper is estimated at about 6.5 lakh tonnes. Electrical industry accounts for about 40% of copper consumption, followed by wire and cable which account for 28%. "The growth of the copper industry is highly dependent on the demand for products such as power and telecommunication cables, transformers, generators, radiators and other ancillary components. Hence, its growth is closely linked with the country's economic and industrial growth," said an industry source.

The share of electrical and telecom industry in total consumption is 56%. This is followed by transport (8%), consumer durables (7%), building and construction (7%), general engineering goods (6%) and others (16%).

Since the closure of the Sterlite unit, consuming units have been forced to rely on costlier imports. Some have also been forced to scale down operations or even shut shop due to the copper shortage.

"FDI in telecom helped raise teledensity from 0.4%-9% in the last 10 years. This success will create a huge opportunity for copper in the last mile in the form of structured wiring and coaxial cables in India," a telecom source said. Given this, the industry is hoping that Supreme Court verdict will break the logjam in the Sterlite imbroglio.

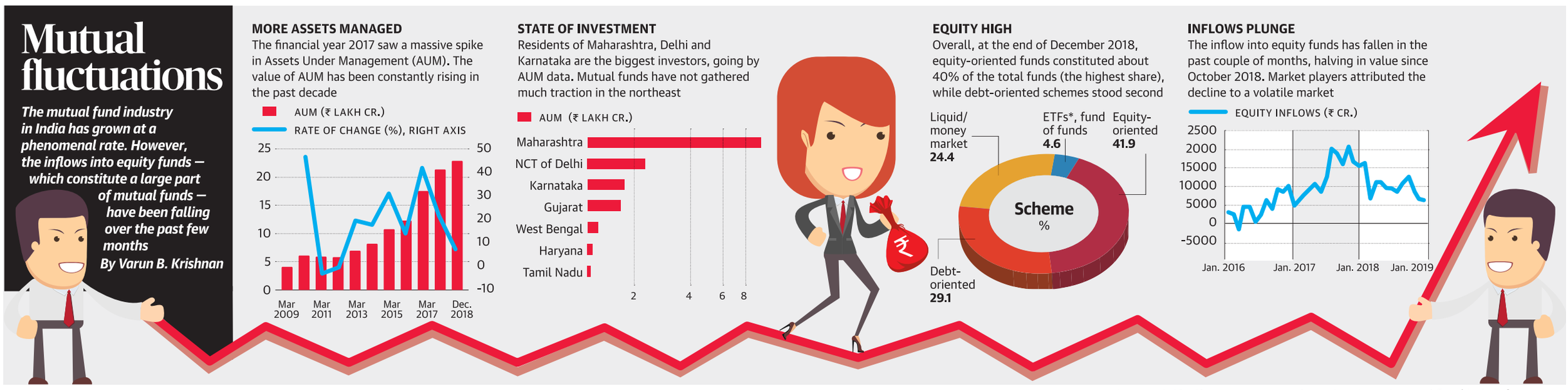
Panel backs old system for oil block bid

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Two years after the government shifted to revenue sharing contracts for oil and gas block auctions, a high-level panel has suggested reverting to the earlier system of awarding areas in most basins based on exploration commitment.

The six-member panel, headed by NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman Rajiv Kumar, in its report submitted on January 29, stated that "unexplored areas in Category II & III basins be bid out exclusively based on exploration work programme."

"No revenue or production sharing other than payment of statutory levies [including royalty]" should be the criteria, the panel said.



*ETFs: Exchange traded fund | Source: Association of Mutual Funds in India, CMIE | Graphic: L. Balamurugan

Inflation is tamed, but households don't think so

Identifying the reasons for the gap between perception and reality is crucial to indicate inflation is well under control

AARATI KRISHNAN

While many macro indicators relating to India are all over the place, one indicator that is behaving itself is the inflation rate.

After averaging 10.4% in the five years from 2009 to 2013, CPI inflation for industrial workers (the old measure of consumer price inflation) collapsed to 4.91% in the last five years. The new CPI series flagged off in 2012 shows even more heartening trends. It shows that consumer-level inflation has stayed below 4% for 12 consecutive months now, nosediving to 2% in January 2019.

So, is this record-low inflation getting noticed by ordinary Indians?

Fears moderate

Since 2005, the RBI has been conducting a statistical survey of inflation expectations of Indian households four or five times every year. It quizzes 5,800 selected respondents from 18 cities on their perception of current and future inflation rates.

This survey shows that the proportion of households expecting prices to rise has been falling steadily in the last five years. In fact, just last week, the Monetary Policy Committee cited the sharp decline in household inflation expectations while cutting interest rates.

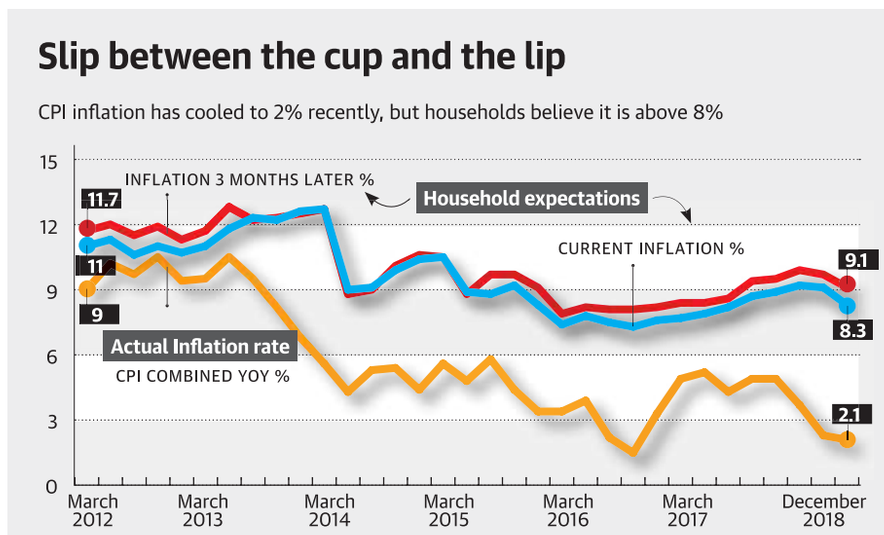
In June 2013, there was near unanimity among RBI's survey participants that prices would rise in the coming months, with 99.1% of the survey respondents bracing for it. But after consistently topping 95% from end-2009 to June 2013, the proportion of people expecting prices to rise began to moderate from the second half of 2013. Hovering at 70 to 80% for the last five years, the proportion stood at 72.9% in the latest December 2018 survey.

The fear that inflation will spiral out of control has receded in the last five years too. In June 2013, 66% of the survey participants believed that prices would rise at a faster rate in future. The latest survey though, showed only 46% expecting higher inflation, with nearly a fifth of respondents even saying that they expected no price rise in the coming months.

But while households seem to be aware of a receding inflation threat, their perception of current inflation rates are at wide variance with the official data.

In December 2018, India's CPI inflation rate stood at just 2.1%. But when asked where the current inflation rate is, RBI's survey participants gave out numbers that averaged to 8.3%. They also expected the inflation rate to be at 9.1% in three months' time and at 8.6% in one year's time.

Comparing the data from RBI's inflation expectation surveys against actual CPI inflation over a decade, it is clear that the gap between perception and reality has been widening. One of the worst spells of inflation experienced by Indian consumers in the past decade occurred in 2013, when official CPI inflation stayed above 10% for four consecutive months from August to November 2013. At that time, households asked by RBI to estimate current inflation rates pegged the number at 12%-plus.



Source: RBI surveys on household inflation expectations, MOSPI

But after flaring up in late 2013, the CPI inflation rate moderated to 7% by August 2014 and been heading further south in the four and half years that followed. But household estimates of inflation remained stuck at 7-8% in this period.

So, when inflation was sky-high at 10%, Indian households believed it to be 12%-plus. Now, when it is at 2%, they still believe it to be at 8.3%. In effect the gap between actual inflation data and the layman's perception of it has sharply widened.

Why the gap?

So why do Indian households believe that prices are rising at over 8% a year when CPI data shows nothing of the sort? Researchers within and outside the RBI, who have studied the survey over the years, have offered several explanations.

Some suggest that Indian household expectations of inflation tend to be 'adaptive.' That is, when asked about inflation rates or expectations, households base their responses on past data, instead of sticking their neck out on how prices would move in future.

But even if households base their inflation 'predictions' on past data, it isn't clear why they have remained anchored to inflation rates that prevailed a good four years ago.

Others critique the survey questions as being too complicated for laymen to grasp.

Some flag the possibility that 5,800 respondents for this survey don't really represent a broad cross-section of the population. This can certainly be true, as RBI's survey is confined to urban respondents from 18 chosen cities while the CPI Combined captures the inflation experience in rural areas as well.

Rural consumers are estimated to spend far more on food items than their urban counterparts.

Food items, which have been deflating on collapsing crop prices, carry a weight of 54% in the CPI Rural index, but only 36% in the CPI Urban index.

Spending patterns vary

A third and very likely possibility is that the actual spending patterns of Indian households now bear very little resemblance to the weights assumed in the CPI index.

Given that the current CPI series has 2012 as its base year, the weights that it assigns to different items of the household budget are based on spending patterns captured a good seven years ago. Recently, MPC member Ravindra Dholakia argued to replace this outdated method of fixed-base inflation indexing with a contemporary chain-weighted index.

But if it turns out that Indian households are increasingly cutting back on their food budgets to splurge on housing, health, entertainment and education, an index rejig could actually bump up the official inflation rate.

Overall, figuring out the reasons for the widening gap between perception and reality on consumer price inflation, is important for a government keen to convince the electorate that it has succeeded in taming the inflation monster.

RBI needs to crack this puzzle too, to reassure the common man that its hawkish interest rate policies have done him some good

Incubating agro forestry models — an idea blooms

Forum to foster 'emerging industry'

M. SOUNDARIYA PREETHA

The Aadhimalai Pazhangudiyinar Producer Company at Kotagiri is a farmer-producer firm with 1,609 tribal people from the Nilgiris region as its shareholders.

Started in 2013 and incubated by Keystone Foundation, this company currently has four production centres and runs four retail outlets. It sells non-timber forest produce such as honey, amla and coconut, and value-added products, including coffee and pickles, candies, and textiles, all grown or produced by the tribal people. These are sold in bulk to traders and in the retail market.

Expansion plans

"We are looking at business development. We want to expand to cities, probably to Bengaluru first, and increase production. But, all the six directors of the company are tribal people and cannot bring in much investment. Financial institutions will not support us as we do not have assets. All the machinery that we have are given by government agencies or organisations. We are heavily dependent on government support," says A. Sudhir, CEO.

Hence, when the company learnt about the Agroforestry Business Incubation Forum project, which is to be inaugurated at Mettupalayam on February 19, it joined the forum as a member. The incubation facility would have the machinery that the company needs. "We can use the machinery for a fee and need not invest in equipment. The logistics cost will not be high as the facility is at Mettupalayam. We can increase production and in turn, our procurement of produce from the tribals will go up," he adds.

GREEN SHOOTS

The company is one of the 20-plus members enrolled so far with the project. The facility has been set up by the Forest College and Research Institute of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University on its premises at Mettupalayam with ₹2.4 crore financial support from the Entrepreneurship Development and Innovation Institute. The agro forestry business incubation centre is said to be the first-of-its-kind in India. "Agro forestry is an emerging industry with big time opportunities," says Anandan Ramasami, CEO of the Forum.

The centre's aim is to develop entrepreneurship in agro forestry and create business opportunities. It will have a lab and machinery to produce value-added items, equipment to develop products on a pilot scale and a training centre. It will accommodate 20-50 incubatees at a time with an incubation period of about two years.

NBFCs will retain place under the sun

Expect reset in liquidity strategies; non-retail asset quality, a key monitorable

KRISHNAN SITARAMAN

After a steady growth over the past few fiscals, the trajectory of NBFCs (non-banking financial companies) and housing finance companies (HFCs) is set to change again after the latest round of liquidity challenges.

This fiscal, interest rates and borrowing costs started swinging north. This, coupled with liquidity issues faced by NBFCs in the last five months or so, have resulted in funding access challenges.

Measures by the Government of India, the Reserve Bank of India, the State Bank of India, and the National Housing Bank have for sure mitigated the stress to an extent, but it's not business as usual yet.

Cutting disbursements

In the third quarter of this fiscal, non-banks have curtailed disbursements by 20-40%, even more in the non-retail segments. Consequently, growth in assets under management (AUM) is expected to halve in the second half, and lower the entire fiscal's AUM growth to about 15%.

That said, annualised growth of NBFCS in the first half of this fiscal was a healthy 20%, similar to the 18% compound annual growth seen between fiscals 2014 and 2018. This was because of their inherent strengths such as excellent customer relationships, adaptability, local knowledge and innovativeness.

Their share of overall financial system credit, which rose 500 basis points (bps) since March 2014 to 18% in March 2018, is unlikely to change this fiscal, despite the expected moderation in growth. Over the medium term, as access to funding improves, retail asset classes should exhibit a relatively steady growth.

GETTYIMAGES/ISTOCK

Sound liquidity policies will help build resilience to short-term liquidity shocks.

Intense competition

Nevertheless, competition will remain intense, especially from private sector banks and potentially from some large public sector banks, as they find their mojo back after asset quality challenges recede.

Further, wholesale lending, which has been one of the growth engines in the recent times for NBFCs, will decelerate.

This could have second-order effects on the asset quality for this book. Delinquencies could increase, given the fact that credit flow to the sector is slowing down. We also remain watchful of the asset quality in small and medium enterprises financing, especially the loans against property (LAP) segment. That is because of the sensitivity of borrowers to prolonged funding crunch.

Since 2015, stress in LAP has been coming to the fore. With seasoning of the portfolios and reduction in balance transfer cases, non-performing assets (NPAs) in LAP are expected to rise further and cross 3% in the medium term.

However, quality in the traditional retail asset classes such as vehicle finance and home loans is unlikely to be impacted much, given the granularity of loan books.

So where are the major shifts due to occur?

One, there will be a structural shift in the liquidity and liability management of NBFCs. The quantum and quality of liquidity cushion would become a key differentiator, going ahead.

Low interest rates between fiscals 2015 and 2018 led to higher capital market borrowings, especially short-term, by NBFCs.

This led to a mismatch in asset-liability maturity profiles for entities with longer-term assets. While most NBFCs had maintained adequate bank lines for these, access in a timely manner became challenging, putting the spotlight on cash and equivalents in balance sheets. Diversification in bank lines and ensuring steady access to sanctioned bank lines will also be a focus area.

Two, NBFCs are expected to re-orient their resource profile by reducing reliance on short-term borrowings.

Three, while their funding requirement will remain high, commercial banks, saddled with their own issues (both in terms of capital and Prompt Corrective Action framework stipulations), are unlikely to immediately fill the void.

In such a scenario, retail bonds offer an attractive option, but are costlier.

Securitisation

Securitisation has clearly emerged a preferred source of funding of late, with volumes in the first nine months of the current fiscal well exceeding that for the entire last fiscal.

Overall, sound liquidity policies will help build resilience to short-term liquidity shocks, and structurally strengthen the sector.

Amid all this, it's important to note that NBFCs have navigated a few cycles of stress over the past two decades.

While these have caused short-term pain, they have also spawned structural changes after periods of adjustment which have made the sector stronger.

That cycle should repeat yet again, and NBFCs, after a period of adjustment, are expected to continue their key role in the Indian financial system.

(The writer is Senior Director - Financial Sector and Structured Finance Ratings, CRISIL)

INTERVIEW | ARIJIT BASU

'Idea is to strengthen bank's balance sheet'

Govt. spending spurs loan demand, but private investment yet to revive: SBI MD

MANOJIT SAHA

From changes in functions and risk assessment processes to accelerated provisioning, **Arijit Basu,** *MD, State Bank of India, explains the steps the country's largest lender has taken to strengthen the balance sheet: Excerpts from an interview:*

SBI has recorded corporate credit growth of about 20% y-o-y till December. Where is the demand coming from?

■ One is due to low base. Two, we are extending loans to very well-rated and less-risky firms. Growth has come from government's infrastructure spending. We have extended loans to firms like NHAI, SIDBI, Nabard, PFC, REC etc. Other than that, the firms we have given loans to are very good names like HDFC or Bajaj Finance.

Is the momentum continuing this quarter also?

■ We have a pipeline, like highway projects, where we have virtually government guarantee and we have sanctioned a few loans, some of them may get disbursed.

But may be we will not end up with 20% growth. Our guidance is somewhere in the region of 12-15%. Retail has grown very well, and also home loans. For retail, we will end the year with 18-20% growth. The aim is to ensure that the quality of the assets improves.

What steps is the bank taking to ensure this?

■ We have introduced a lot of risk mitigating processes which is a major structural change this financial year.

There is now a credit risk review committee for loans above ₹10 crore, before it goes to the sanctioning committee. They do a risk heat map, whether it is high risk, low risk, etc. They can even give a no-go. This is an addition to the credit risk assessment. The idea is to prepare a balance sheet so that it can absorb any shock.

How will you do that?

■ You can achieve that by making upfront provision. In the third quarter, we have utilised ₹5,800 crore of earnings to make accelerated provisioning which we were not required to do. IL&FS for example, we had limited exposure, but whatever exposure we have at the holding company level, we felt that the haircut will be 50%. So, instead of 15% which is all that we were required to do, we have provided 50%. Similarly, we were required to make 40% provision for the power sector projects, but we have made 50% provisioning as we estimate the haircut could be 50%. We will continue to do this process till the balance sheet becomes so strong that whatever happens it will not impact our [profit and loss account].

Slippages have been lower than last year. What is the guidance for this year and the next?

■ This year, slippages are significantly lower. Corporate slippages will be drastically lower compared to last year. Up to December, corporate slippages were less than ₹8,000 crore and total slippages were around ₹30,000 crore. In FY18, corporate slippage was about ₹80,000 crore. This year, total slippages should be significantly lower given the position achieved till Q3. Next year, slippages should come down even more. Even if there are unexpected events, slippages will be within the guidance.

We have introduced a lot of risk mitigating processes which is a major structural change in this financial year

What organisational changes has SBI undertaken to address asset quality issue?

■ We had expanded the corporate accounts group (CAG) to 8 branches in different cities, handling about 500 accounts. Many of these large corporate slippages happened from CAG.

The main purpose for starting the CAG was for better service and solutions to the best-rated and the most-valuable firms. But because CAG was expanded to a level where there were a number of stressed assets, this could not be performed effectively. Now, we have retained only blue chip firms – AA or AAA – in CAG. There are now just four branches. The number of accounts has come down from 500 to 200.

What happened to the other companies in the CAG?

■ We have formed a new group called commercial clients group – CCG. There are 2,500 corporate accounts in the bank, out of which 200 are in CAG and the remaining are in CCG.

Is private investment rising?

■ We have not seen that much of a revival in private investment till now. Whatever is happening in the private side is linked to the government.

Real Kashmir-Minerva fixture at centre of controversy

Title-rivals Chennai City, East Bengal concerned

I-LEAGUE

N. SUDARSHAN
BENGALURU

Minerva Punjab's refusal to travel to Srinagar for Monday's I-League match against Real Kashmir has triggered a row, leaving the AIFF in a quandary. Minerva's decision means Kashmir is set to be awarded a 3-0 victory – a result with huge consequences in a title race that is going to the wire.

Ranjit Bajaj, the Minerva owner, has called on the AIFF to postpone the tie on account of the prevailing "unsafe" situation in Jammu and Kashmir. The home club, though, believes the I-League should not call the game off, insisting that all is normal in the city, and is going ahead with its preparations. Chennai City FC (CFC) and East Bengal, who are battling Real Kashmir for the title, are understandably concerned.

"The AIFF should have postponed it till the situation was normal," Bajaj told *The Hindu*. "My foreign players have got travel advisories from their embassies. How can I force them [to play]? By playing football there they just want to show everything is normal. But everything is not normal."

"It is not just a mere forfeit...the 3+ goal difference is unfair on teams fighting for the title. Minerva has been having a bad season [9th place fighting relegation] but we have not lost more than 1-0 in any game. We have even beaten East Bengal away. So it is definitely not going to be a 3-0 result if we play."

Meraj's take

Kashmir co-owner Shamim Meraj said the reasons for the Minerva no-show had more to it than what meets the eye. "If the police has said that they will give security, you have to believe them," he said. "Our coach David Robertson, one of the most famous Brits, has got no advisory. Neither have our six foreign players."

Meraj also referred to Bajaj's allegedly inflammatory posts about Real Kashmir and said it was his players' security that has now been compromised.

"What if we say we are feeling unsafe in Orissa [before Indian Arrows match] next? We don't want it to become an 'us versus them' thing.

"Bengaluru FC-B has to play Lonestar [Kashmir] in Srinagar. Would they come if AIFF had decided to postpone our match? Myself, Sandeep Chattoo [co-owner] and the whole club believe football will live in Kashmir and we will ensure it does."

Unfortunate: With Minerva refusing to travel to Srinagar, local fans will be deprived of watching an engrossing contest. ▪NISSAR AHMAD

Collaborative approach

Rohit Ramesh, Chennai City owner, said a more collaborative approach could have worked. His club is top on 34 points from 16 games, with Real Kashmir and East Bengal tied for second spot on 32.

In fact the latter is set to travel to Srinagar on February 28 for what could be the title-decider. Sanjit Sen, East Bengal CEO said that he had conveyed his concerns and was waiting for an official response.

"Forfeiting and giving three points to the other team is not fair play," said Rohit. "The East Bengal game was postponed because of weather. During a crisis scenario like this, can't they change the date?"

Situation normal

Even as Bajaj stated that Minerva was ready to play the fixture at a venue outside Kashmir, I-league CEO Surnando Dhar said the situation in Kashmir had returned to normal.

"We had several rounds of meetings with our local admins, security," he said. "Our referees and match commissioner reached three days before and their eyes and ears are on the ground. They have been moving around Srinagar, markets are open, life is normal. What happened [the attack] was unfortunate. The match would have been the right answer. If a team doesn't turn up despite all assurances, appropriate action will be taken."

Bengaluru FC said it would consult the AIFF soon and then decide on its 'B' team travelling to Lonestar Kashmir on February 28 for a I-League second division encounter.

'BCCI should donate to martyrs' families'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

BCCI acting president C.K. Khanna Sunday appealed to Committee of Administrators chief Vinod Rai to sanction at least ₹5 crore for the families of the Indian soldiers martyred in the Pulwama terror attack.

Former India opener Virender Sehwag has already declared that children of martyr's families will be provided free education at his 'Sehwag International School' if they wish to apply.

"We are saddened and join our fellow Indian citizens in condemning the dastardly Pulwama Terror attack.

"Our heartfelt condolences to the families of the martyred soldiers," Khanna wrote in a letter to COA, office bearers and state units.

"I request the Committee of Administrators that BCCI should contribute at least ₹5 crore through the appropriate government agencies to the families of the martyred soldiers," the acting president further wrote.

East Bengal holds Churchill in a hotly-contested affair

The result is a setback to the home side's title aspirations

Y.B. SARANGI
KOLKATA

In a hotly-contested affair that witnessed four yellow cards and several instances of heated exchanges, East Bengal held Churchill Brothers to a 1-1 draw in an I-League encounter at the Salt Lake Stadium here on Sunday.

The result was a setback to EB's title aspirations as the red-and-gold brigade managed to tie on 32 points with second-placed Real Kashmir. Churchill improved its tally to 31.

EB, which was eager to gain early ground against a depleted Churchill, soon understood the Goan team's sturdy game.

Star striker Willis Plaza and debutant Christ Remi, who replaced Dawda Ceesay, showed good coordination with the Churchill midfield to pose constant threat on the home citadel.

The Churchill defence closed the gaps and tackled with purpose to deny any easy chance to EB.

Soon after key defender Borja was booked in the ninth minute, EB had a close shave as Chesterpoul Lyngdoh's shot sailed over the bar.

EB built its moves but met with frustration more often than not.

Laldanmawia Ralte's header off a Lalrindika Ralte free-kick went just wide in the 17th minute.

Churchill custodian V. Baskaran's brave and clean collection prevented solitary raider Lalram Chullova's dashing march in the 20th minute.

Spectacular save

Baskaran needed medical attention due to his clash with Chullova, but recovered to fashion the most spectacular save of the match.

Enrique, who was utterly frustrated to see his stunning left-footer fly over in the 31st minute, was in the thick of things as he sent in a precise cross from the goal-line on right.

But Antonio Dovale's shot was magically palmed away by an air-borne Baskaran close to the break.

Churchill defended hard and launched some penetrating counters after the switch of ends.

Rakshit Dagar brilliantly saved Nenda Novakovic's header off Nicholas Fernandes corner in the 50th minute, but had no answer when Nicholas' beautiful long ball was tapped in by Plaza in the 68th minute.

However, the 43,768 home fans burst into celebrations when Lalrindika curled it in from right to convert a free-kick 10 minutes later.

The result: East Bengal 1 (Lalrindika 78) drew with Churchill Brothers 1 (Plaza 68).

Girona scuttles Real's hope

Barcelona grinds out a tough win while Atletico Madrid retakes No. 2 spot

EURO LEAGUES

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MADRID

Real Madrid threw away its lead and perhaps its hopes of catching Barcelona as Girona came from behind to pull off a shock 2-1 victory at the Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday.

Girona had not won in 13 matches and looked on course for a seventh straight defeat when Casemiro headed a dominant Madrid ahead in the first half.

But complacency set in, and Girona took full advantage as Cristhian Stuani scored a penalty and Portu nodded in at the back post, leaving the European champions scrapping even for a point before Sergio Ramos was sent off in the 90th minute.

Barcelona had beaten Real Valladolid by a single goal on Saturday but its stodgy display continued a period of uncertainty for the Catalans, who still have to go to the Bernabeu later this month.

That *Clasico* will be a lot less nervy now, given Barca's cushion has been extended to nine points over Real, with Atletico jumping back above it into second, seven points off the top.

On target: Cristhian Stuani brings Girona on level terms with Real Madrid with this penalty strike. ▪AFP

The results: La Liga: Real Madrid 1 (Casemiro 25) lost to Girona 2 (Stuani 65-pen, Portu 75).

Serie A: SPAL 1 (Petagna 36) lost to Fiorentina 4 (Fernandes 44, Veretout 79-pen, Simeone 80, Gerson 81).

Saturday: La Liga: Celta Vigo 1 (Mendez 88-pen) lost to Levante 4 (Morales 20, 62, Coke 40, Mayoral 89); Rayo Vallecano 0 lost to Atletico Madrid 1 (Griezmann 74); Real Sociedad 3 (Oyarzabal 50, 59, Willian Jose 75) bt Leganes 0; Barcelona 1 (Messi 43-pen) bt Real Valladolid 0.

Serie A: Cagliari 2 (Pavoletti 66, 85) drew with Parma 1 (Kucka 40); Atalanta 1 (Freuler 33) lost to AC Milan 3 (Piatek 45+1, 61, Calhanoglu 55).

Bundesliga: Schalke 0 drew with Freiburg 0; Hoffenheim 3 (Joelinton 4, Belfodil 14, Demirbay 80) bt Hanover 0; VfB Stuttgart 1 (Zuber 16-pen) lost to RB Leipzig 3 (Poulsen 6, 74, Sabitzer 68); VfL Wolfsburg 3 (Arnold 4, Weghorst 70-pen, Knoche 76) bt Mainz 05 0; Hertha Berlin 1 (Selke 25) drew with Werder Bremen 1 (Pizarro 90+6).

Gayle to quit ODIs after WC

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ST. JOHN'S

Veteran West Indies batsman Chris Gayle will retire from One-Day International cricket after this year's World Cup in England and Wales, Windies Cricket announced on Sunday.

The big-hitting 39-year-old opener, who has 9,727 runs in 284 ODIs, is set to play his first international since last July against England on Wednesday.

Gayle needs 677 more runs to surpass the great Brian Lara as the West Indies' all-time record ODI runscorer, a feat he will be hoping to achieve at his fifth World Cup, which starts on May 30.

He has been mainly a T20 specialist since making his last Test appearance in 2014, and most recently played in the Bangladesh Premier League.

Since making his debut in 1999, Gayle has also scored a Windies record of 23 ODI hundreds, including the first ever World Cup double century against Zimbabwe four years ago.

The world's best to be honoured today

LAUREUS AWARDS

P.K. AJITH KUMAR
MONTE CARLO

Many of the brightest stars of world sport have assembled in this picturesque city of Monaco, the small country bordering France. On Monday, we will find out who will outshine the rest of the competition and walk away with the Laureus World Sports Awards.

Ever since its inception in 1999, the awards have grown in stature and become sport's answer to the Oscars of cinema. Little wonder the city's hotels are filled by international sports personalities, past and present. Olympic gold medallists, World Cup winners...you name it, they are here.

Though there are awards to be won in various categories, the focus will mainly be on the Sportsman and the Sportswoman of the Year.

Roger Federer, Usain Bolt, Novak Djokovic, Sebastian Vettel, Rafael Nadal, Serena Williams, Simone Biles, Missy Franklin, Yelena Isinbayeva and Justine Henin – some of them on multiple occasions – have been among the winners.

For the Sportsman of the Year award, Djokovic, the tennis World No. 1, is joined in the list by Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton, World-Cup winning French footballer Kylian Mbappe, NBA superstar LeBron James and FIFA World Cup Golden Ball winner Modric, while gymnast Biles will face competition from Grand Slam champions Angelique Kerber and Simona Halep and Winter Olympic champions Ester Ledecka and Mikaela Shiffrin and triathlete Daniela Ryf.

Phogat in contention

India has something to look forward to in the World Comeback of the Year as wrestler Vinesh Phogat is among the nominees. She is the first Indian to feature in such an elite Laureus list.

Athletics legend Sergey Bubka, a Laureus World Sports Academy member, said he was glad that the organisation was acknowledging outstanding achievement in sport all over the world. "It is a great honour for a sportsperson to be recognised like this," he told *The Hindu*. "It is great to see so many athletes together in one place."

(The writer is in Monte Carlo at the invitation of Laureus for the Academy's annual awards)

Rewarding noble work: Yuwa's Neeta Kumari, Hema Kumari, Konika Kumari and Radha Kumari, along with Sean Fitzpatrick, Missy Franklin, Kosovare Asllani, Arsene Wenger and Nawal El Moutawakel, pose with the Laureus statuette. ▪SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Yuwa wins *Sport for Good* honour

P.K. AJITH KUMAR
MONTE CARLO

The four girls faced the world media with aplomb. And with absolute happiness.

Radha Kumari, Neeta Kumari, Konika Kumari and Hema Kumari were all delighted when the organisation they represent, Yuwa, was declared the winner of the *Laureus Sport for Good* Award here on Sunday.

Yuwa, an NGO started in Jharkhand by Americans Franz Gastler and Rose Thomson Gastler for empowering the girl child using football, has been chosen as the winner among hundreds of programmes around the world.

The girls are having the time of their lives here. "It is great just being here," said Radha.

They have been able to play some football with legends here, like the World-Cup winning Brazilian Cafu and former Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger. "They are technically good," Wenger said. "They showed football could be a team game though it is said to be a sport played by 11 selfish players."

Nelly completes the 'Korda Slam'

Upholds family tradition of winning Open titles in Australia

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ADELAIDE

Nelly Korda added to an amazing family tradition of winning top titles down under by claiming the LPGA Australian Open by two shots in Adelaide and celebrating with a scissor-kick on Sunday.

The World No. 16 American has been the form player of recent months, and has now scored two wins and two other top three finishes in her last five events.

In holding off South Korean challenger Ko Jin-young, Korda joined her father, sister and brother in being crowned an Open champion on Australian soil.

Dad Petr got the ball rolling by winning the Australian Open tennis Grand Slam in 1998, beating Marcelo Rios, and celebrated with his trademark scissor-kick.

Her sister Jessica then won the Australian Open golf in 2012, duplicating her father's celebration, as did brother Sebastian when he took out the Australian Open tennis boys' title last year.

Not to be outdone, Nelly also nailed the 'Korda Kick' after her final round 67.

Just minutes after tapping in a par putt at the 18th hole, she was handed a phone and her elder sister was looking at her through Facetime.

Joy unbound: Nelly Korda celebrates with the family's trademark scissor-kick after her win on Sunday. ▪AFP

Korda put it in context: "I'm finally a part of the club. She was pretty much screaming congratulations, she was so happy for me. I mean this win was really special for my family," she added.

"I think there's something in the air here, we love coming down under.

"I just got off the phone with my Dad and he said 'well, congratulations, you're part of the Korda Slam now'."

Korda was the overnight leader and held her nerve despite a bogey on the 15th to beat Ko by two and Taiwan's Hsu Wei-ling by five.

Diallo dazzles in the slam dunk contest

Harris bests Stephen Curry to claim three-point honours

NBA

ASHWIN ACHAL
CHARLOTTE

Brooklyn Nets guard Joe Harris sprang a surprise by claiming the three-point contest title at the NBA All-Star weekend here.

Harris was in prime shooting form, going past favourite Stephen Curry by four points in the final round. Stephen's younger brother Seth, meanwhile, didn't make it past the first round.

"It feels surreal to win, but shooting off a rack is not indicative of me being a better shooter than Stephen. He is the best shooter of all time," a humble Harris said.

Oklahoma City Thunder guard Hamidou Diallo won the Slam Dunk contest, showcasing his dazzling athletic abilities.

Spectacular highlight

The Nigerian provided a spectacular highlight when he dunked over 7' 1" Hall Of Fame centre Shaquille O'Neal, and hung on the rim by his elbow.

Asked if he knew he could make the dunk, Diallo said, "I was sure of it. I wouldn't have brought O'Neal out there if I wasn't sure."

Boston Celtics' Jayson Tatum clinched the Skills Challenge trophy in dramatic style, when he sank a three-pointer from half-court to edge out Trae Young.

(*The writer is in Charlotte on invitation from NBA*)

Defying gravity: Hamidou Diallo rises majestically to clear Shaquille O'Neal and slam in the dunk. ▪AFP

The Maverick 'old man' on his last leg

Nowitzki to call it quits at season end

ASHWIN ACHAL
CHARLOTTE

Dirk Nowitzki has piled up an enviable resume during his 21-year NBA career.

A 14-time All-Star, an NBA champion (2011), seventh on the list of all-time leading scorers, etc. The German is regarded as one of the best foreign players to have ever featured in the NBA.

Nowitzki's storied run is soon coming to an end, even though he has not officially announced it yet.

"This could be my last season, and this is surely my last appearance as an All-Star. It has been quite emotional this season. I received standing ovations at stadiums in Boston, New York, Indiana and other places. I'm humbled, and it's something I'll never forget.

"I was just a kid who came out of nowhere 20 years ago, and now I'm getting standing ovations in opposition arenas," Nowitzki said.

The 40-year-old, who has spent his entire NBA career with Dallas Mavericks, joked about being the old man in his team.

"My teammates call me grandfather. I was once the one making fun of the old dudes. When I was 30, Jason Kidd was 36, and he used to get massages before and after the game. I would roll my eyes and say 'Come on man, let's get going already'.

"Now I'm the old man on the massage table. That's the circle of life," Nowitzki said.

And what better place to make his All-Star swansong than Michael Jordan's home State. Jordan is also the principal owner of Charlotte Bobcats, and thus acts as the host of this All-Star weekend.

Dirk Nowitzki. ▪AFP

"I've played many matches against Jordan, and I played at Jordan's last All-Star game as well, in Atlanta (2003). I can tell my grandkids that I shared the court with the greatest player of all time," he said.

Nowitzki recalled the start of his basketball journey, when he was spotted by acclaimed coach Holger Geschwindner at age 15.

The championship ring he received in 2011 stands out as the highlight. "In 2006, we lost the Finals to Dwyane Wade and his Miami Heat. So it was great to get revenge on Wade and Miami when we beat them in the 2011 Finals. In a weird way, I'm happy that Wade defeated us in 2006, because it motivated me to become a better player."

Sporting Smile primed for an encore

HYDERABAD: Sporting Smile, who is in fine nick, may score again in the Alcock Arabian Million (1,400m), the chief event of the races to be held here on Monday (Feb. 18).

1 **DELHI RACE CLUB CUP** (1,200m), 3-y-o only (Terms), 1-45 p.m.: 1. Pontinus Pilate (6) P. Trevor 55.5, 2. Versallies (5) Kiran Naidu 54, 3. Troubadour (7) Kunal Bunde 51.5, 4. Ayur Shakti (2) Kuldeep Singh 50, 5. Blickfang (3) Md. Ismail 50, 6. Her Legacy (4) N. Rawal 50, 7. Most Wanted (8) Nakhat Singh 50 and 8. Zip Zip Zip (1) Akshay Kumar 50.

1. VERSALLIES, 2. PONTINUS PILATE, 3. ZIP ZIP ZIP

2 **KALESHWARAM CUP (DIV. I)**, (1,400m), 4-y-o & over, rated 26 to 46 (Cat. III), 2-15: 1. Guiding Force (3) N. Rawal 60, 2. Alta Vita (2) R.S. Jodha 59.5, 3. Vijay's Empress (7) Gaurav Singh 59.5, 4. Mahathi (9) A.A. Vikrant 58, 5. Vashishta (6) Deepak Singh 57, 6. Darshish (4) Akshay Kumar 56, 7. Tiger Of The Sea (10) Surya Prakash 56, 8. My Windfall (8) Md. Ismail 54.5, 9. Royal Avenger (1) B.R. Kumar 53 and 10 Royal Dancer (5) Kuldeep Singh 51.

1. DARSHISH, 2. GUIDING FORCE, 3. VASHISHTA

3 **BALLERINA STAR PLATE** (2,000m), 4-y-o & over, rated upto 30 (Cat. III), 2-45: 1. Brave Warrior (2) Koushik 60, 2. Nazariya (7) P. Trevor 60, 3. Recumbentibus (10) Kuldeep Singh 60, 4. Halo's Princess (8) Ashhad Asbar 59.5, 5. Golden Xanthus (6) Sai Kumar 58, 6. Samba (9) B.R. Kumar 57.5, 7. Dhool Ka Phool (5) Deepak Singh 57, 8. Vijay's Harmony (4) Aneel 56.5, 9. Actually (3) Akshay Kumar 54, 10. Kohinoor Legend (–) (–) 54 and 11. Turf Emperor (1) Gopal Singh 52.5.

1. ACTUALLY, 2. SAMBA, 3. NAZARIYA

4 **KALESHWARAM CUP (DIV. II)**, (1,400m), 4-y-o & over, rated 26 to 46 (Cat. III), 3-15: 1. Princess Of Dreams (9) A.A. Vikrant 60, 2. Supurinto (3) Gopal Singh 59.5, 3. Platinum Claasz (7) Deepak Singh 57.5, 4. Dandy Man (6) Akshay Kumar 57, 5. Indian Aristocrat (4) B.R. Kumar 56.5, 6. Soul Empress (5) Kuldeep Singh 56, 7. Withrosemakeup (2) Neeraj 55, 8. Handsome Duo (8) Ashhad Asbar 54.5 and 9. Moka (1) P. Trevor 51.

1. SOUL EMPRESS, 2. DANDY MAN, 3. HANDSOME DUO

5 **RED KNIGHT PLATE** (1,200m), 4-y-o & over, rated 42 to 62 (Cat. II), 3-45: 1. Long Range (5) Akshay Kumar 60, 2. Digger (8) Rafique Sk. 59, 3. New State (10) Kuldeep Singh 58, 4. Shandaar (2) Md. Ismail 57, 5. Classy Guy (6) Nakhat Singh 56, 6. Palsy Walsy (1) Rohit Kumar 56, 7. Excellent Hope (11) Neeraj 55.5, 8. One One One (3) Koushik 55, 9. Honest Hunter (9) Ashhad Asbar 53.5, 10. Takisha (7) Gopal Singh 53.5, 11. Crimson Fire (4) G. Naresh 52.5, and 12. Natasha (12) Jitendra Singh 52.5.

1. ONE ONE ONE, 2. LONG RANGE, 3. EXCELLENT HOPE

6 **ALCOCK ARABIAN MILLION** (1,400m), 3-y-o only (Terms), 4-15: 1. Blazer (3) P. Trevor 56, 2. Sporting Smile (2) Kuldeep Singh 54.5, 3. Francis Bacon (4) Neeraj 52, 4. Artistryy (1) Akshay Kumar 50.5 and 5. Royal Ruby (5) Nakhat Singh 50.5.

1. SPORTING SMILE, 2. BLAZER

7 **KING'S CROWN PLATE** (1,200m), 4-y-o & over, rated 26 to 46 (Cat. III), 4-45: 1. Snow Castle (8) Aeel 60, 2. Khan Sahib (11) Md. Ismail 59.5, 3. Reach The Heights (12) Kunal Bunde 58, 4. Southern Meteor (4) Gaurav Singh 55.5, 5. Tokyo Jam (10) Akshay Kumar 55.5, 6. Top Sprint (1) Sai Kumar 55, 7. Vega Cassandra (9) Nakhat Singh 55, 8. Composure (13) C.P. Bopanna 54, 9. Yogya (5) Deepak Singh 54, 10. Secretary (6) Kuldeep Singh 53.5, 11. Super Act (2) A.A. Vikrant 53.5, 12. Invasion (7) Surya Prakash 52.5, 13. Razor World (14) N. Rawal 52.5 and 14. Sefarina (3) B.R. Kumar 52.5.

1. TOKYO JAM, 2. VEGA CASSANDRA, 3. SECRETARY

Day's best: **DARSHISH**

Double: **VERSALLIES – SPORTING SMILE**

Jkt: 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7; Tr (1): 2, 3 & 4; (ii): 5, 6 & 7; Tla: all races.

Ace Ace Ace clinches feature

HYDERABAD: Sequeira trained-Ace Ace Ace (Akshay Kumar astride) clinched the M.C.E.M.E. Rolling Trophy, the feature event of the races here on Sunday (Feb. 17). The winner is owned by Mr. M. Ramachandra Rao. The trainer-jockey combination scored three more winners on the day.

1 **PLEASURE HUNT PLATE (DIV. I)**, (1,400m), maiden 3-y-o (Cat. II), (Terms): **GUTSY LOOK** (Akshay Kumar) 1, Swansea (Kuldeep Singh) 2, Shivalik Valley (Nakhat Singh) 3 and Augenstern (Suraj Narredu) 4. 1/4, 1-1/2 and 1. 1m, 26.73s. ₹34 (w), 9, 6 and 7 (p), SHP: 22, FP: 146, Q: 38, Tla: 355. Favourite: Swansea.

Owners: M/s. P. Prabhakar Reddy & Rama Seshu Eyunni. Trainer: Sequeira.

2 **SQUANDERER PLATE (DIV. II)**, (1,600m), 4-y-o & over, rated upto 30 (Cat. III): **SEMIRA** (Afroz Khan) 1, New Comer (Jitendra Singh) 2, Eau Claire (Rohit Kumar) 3 and Dormello (Akshay Kumar) 4. 4-3/4, 1-3/4 and 2. 1m, 39.82s. ₹19 (w), 5, 8 and 5 (p), SHP: 23, FP: 104, Q: 59, Tla: 170. Favourite: Eau Claire.

Owner: Mr. Mir Saqafath Ali Khan. Trainer: M.F. Alikhan.

3 **PLEASURE HUNT PLATE (DIV. II)**, (1,400m), maiden 3-y-o only (Cat. II), (Terms): **HAVELOCK CRUISE** (Kiran Naidu) 1, Red Snaper (Kuldeep Singh) 2, Red River (Koushik) 3 and Star Racer (Nakhat Singh) 4. 3-3/4, 1/4 and shd. 1m, 26.42s. ₹8 (w), 5, 11 and 9 (p), SHP: 27, FP: 52, Q: 49, Tla: 354. Favourite: Havelock Cruise.

Owners: M/s. K.S.N. Murthy, P. Ranga Raju & C. Nanda Kumar. Trainer: D. Netto.

4 **SEVEN HILLS PLATE** (1,800m), 4-y-o & over, rated 26 to 46 (Cat. III): **BALIUS** (Akshay Kumar) 1, Royal Style (Md. Ismail) 2, Nathu La (Suraj Narredu) 3 and Yogastha (Afroz Khan) 4. 2, 1 and shd. 1m, 53.09s. ₹7 (w), 7, 8 and 7 (p), SHP: 27, FP: 42, Q: 35, Tla: 100. Favourite: Balius.

Owners: M/s. Y. Damodar & Ashok Kumar Gupta. Trainer: Sequeira.

5 **M.C.E.M.E. ROLLING TROPHY** (1,400m), 4-y-o & over, rated 42 to 62 (Cat. II): **ACE ACE ACE** (Akshay Kumar) 1, Meka's (B.R. Kumar) 2, Lockhart (Deepak Singh) 3 and Kamyar (Ashhad Asbar) 4. 2, nk and 1-1/2. 1m, 25.20s. ₹11 (w), 7, 15 and 18 (p), SHP: 51, FP: 221, Q: 152, Tla: 2,918. Favourite: Ace Ace Ace.

Owner: Mr. M. Ramachandra Rao. Trainer: Sequeira.

6 **DR. M.A.M. RAMASWAMY MEMORIAL CUP (DIV. I)**, (1,400m), 5-y-o & over, rated 42 to 62, (Cat.II): **VANCOUVER** (R.S. Jodha) 1, Humaaghar (Rafique Sk.) 2, Rutilant (Suraj Narredu) 3 and N R I Symbol (Nakhat Singh) 4. Shd, 3/4 and 1/2. 1m, 25.63s. ₹52 (w), 13, 19 and 7 (p), SHP: 50, FP: 1,497, Q: 726, Tla: 5,670. Favourite: N R I Symbol.

Owners: Mr. Rahul Rachupalli, Wg. Cdr. D.S. Gill (retd.) & Mr. Rajesh Shanghai. Trainer: D. Netto.

7 **DR. M.A.M. RAMASWAMY MEMORIAL CUP (DIV. II)**, (1,400m), 5-y-o & over, rated 42 to 62 (Cat. II): **MIRACLE KING** (Akshay Kumar) 1, George Cross (Suraj Narredu) 2, Marina Del Rey (B.R. Kumar) 3 and Euro Zone (Nakhat Singh) 4. 1-3/4, 1/2 and 1/2. 1m, 25.62s. ₹22 (w), 11, 14 and 14 (p), SHP: 36, FP: 81, Q: 54, Tla: 726. Favourite: Bayrd.

Owner: Mr. Y. Damodar. Trainer: Sequeira.

8 **SQUANDERER PLATE (DIV. II)**, (1,600m), 4-y-o & over, rated upto 30 (Cat. III): **AJMAL BIRJU** (Gopal Singh) 1, Symbol Of Star's (Gaurav Singh) 2, Mossad (Afroz Khan) 3 and Adamant And Rising (G. Naresh) 4. 2, 4-1/2 and 2. 1m, 40.82s. Rs. 12 (w), 8, 8 and 8 (p), SHP: 27, FP: 58, Q: 31, Tla: 320. Favourite: Ajmal Birju.

Owners: M/s. P. Prabhakar Redyy & Rama Seshu Eyunni. Trainer: Laxman Singh.

Jackpot: ₹2,410 (174 tkts.).

Runner-up: 446 (403 tkts.), Treble (i): 611 (83 tkts.), (ii): 36 (1,350 tkts.), (iii): 527 (101 tkts.).

BFC crashes to disappointing defeat

SPORTS BUREAU
NEW DELHI

Bengaluru FC crashed to its third defeat of the season after former Blues' striker Daniel Lalhlimpuia came off the bench to score two second-half goals as Delhi Dynamos came away 3-2 winner at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here on Sunday.

Trailing by a Ulises Davila goal (9), Carles Cuadrat's men fought back with goals from Boithang Haokip (20) and substitute Sunil Chhetri (73) before Lalhlimpuia made the most of goalkeeping errors from Gurpreet Singh Sandhu to fire home a brace (77, 82).

However, the Blues, who became the first side this season to seal a play-off berth, continue to lead the table with 31 points, three more than FC Goa which has a game in hand.

BFC will now take on FC Goa at home on Thursday.

Chennai Spartans makes the semifinals

Verhoeff, Sorokins and Naveen Raja Jacob do the star turn

PRO VOLLEYBALL

S. DIPAK RAGAV
CHENNAI

In a must-win match for both sides, Chennai Spartans came out all guns blazing to beat Ahmedabad Defenders 4-1 (15-6, 13-15, 15-13, 15-11, 15-12) and reach the semifinals of the RuPay Pro Volleyball league here at the Nehru Indoor Stadium on Sunday.

The win was largely thanks to the splendid performances from the trio of Rudy Verhoeff (20 points), Ruslans Sorokins and Naveen Raja Jacob (17 points each).

In the first set, Spartans produced a clinical display with seamless coordination and barely committed any errors. The home team raced to a 6-2 lead with Naveen and G.S. Akhin leading the charge initially before Verhoeff produced a super serve and a spike.

Naveen then came up with two powerful spikes including one on the super point to take the set 15-6.

In command: Naveen Raja Jacob was at his best as Chennai Spartans put it past the Ahmedabad Defenders. ▪M. VEDHAN

The second set saw the Defenders come up with a more disciplined approach while at the same time benefiting from unforced errors from Spartans to race to a 7-2 lead with Mandeep Singh producing some powerful spikes.

Spartans' other foreigner Ruslans Sorokins was the only one on target producing two spikes and a block, including a spike on super point to narrow the lead at 7-8. From there on both teams were neck-and-neck, though Defenders had its nose ahead. At 13-14, Naveen went for a big serve and missed the line narrowly surrendering the set.

The third set was another close one, with both teams tied at 9-9 at one point. However, it was Spartans that held the nerves better at crucial junctures with Naveen once again proving how dangerous he could be when he gets going.

Defenders played the super point with G. Vaishnav producing a spike to get a two-point lead but Spartans and Naveen fought back similarly to level it at 11-11.

Naveen then produced a service winner before an unforced error from the visitors gave Spartans a two-point lead.

The home team then took the set with spikes from Verhoeff and Sorokins.

The fourth set belonged to Verhoeff as he scored seven points with a mix of powerful and deftly placed spikes as the Defenders had little answer to the Canadian's prowess.

The home team always had a comfortable edge and closed out the set and match at 15-11 handing Defenders its fourth defeat in as many matches.

Dandi March wins Longchamp Million

MUMBAI: Dandi March, ridden by A. Sandesh, won the Longchamp Million, the main event of Sunday's (Feb.17) races. The winner is owned by Mr. Vikram Bachhawat rep. Bacchawat Farms Pvt Ltd. S.K. Sunderji trains the winner.

1 **LT. COL. GOVIND SINGH (VRC) TROPHY** (1,600m), Maiden, 3-y-o only: **ASTOUNDING BAY** (Yash) 1, Silver King (R. Downey) 2, Moriseiki (Sandesh) 3 and Principessa (Parmar) 4. Sh, 1/2 and 11. 1m, 39.30s. ₹17 (w), 12 and 13 (p). SHP: 35, FP: 56, Q: 45, Tanala: 65 and 27. Favourite: Astounding Bay.

Owners: Mrs. B.E. Saldhana, M/s. Mark Saldhana & Madhav G. Patankar. Trainer: M. Narredu.

2 **BRAZIL CUP** (1,600m), Cl. V, rated 4 to 30: **SYLVESTER** (Sandesh) 1, Flying Dragon (Ayyar) 2, Whoopsidaisy (Peter) 3 and Tianjin Honey (T.S. Jodha) 4. Hd, 1-1/2 and 1/2. 1m, 39.13s. ₹17 (w), 14, 19 and 26 (p). SHP: 60, FP: 84, Q: 63, Tanala: 524 and 332. Favourite: Sylvester.

Owners: Ms. Priti Singh, M/s. Kishore P. Rungta, Gaurav K. Rungta & Kr. Digvijay Singh Shekhawat rep. Jai Govind Stud & Agri Farm (PF)s. Trainer: Adhirajsingh Jodha.

NOTE: In this race Eternal Memories (Neeraj up) planted in the starting stalls and did not participate.

3 **DR. GOVIND R.GURBAXANI MEMORIAL TROPHY** (1,000m), Cl. III, rated 40 to 66: **POKERFACE** (B. Nikhil) 1, Charging Tigress (Shubham) 2, True Grit (Neeraj) 3 and Oracle (Trevor) 4. 1-1/4, Hd and 1/2. 58.93s. ₹87 (w), 19, 38 and 15 (p). SHP: 85, FP: 579, Q: 399, Tanala: 21,646 and 3,092. Favourite: Oracle.

Owners: Mr. Jaydev M. Mody rep. J.M. Livestock Pvt. Ltd. Trainer: Nosher Cama.

4 **LONGCHAMP MILLION** (1,200m), 3-y-o only: **DANDI MARCH** (Sandesh) 1, Thailand (Trevor) 2, Namaqua (L. Roche) 3 and Ms Boss (R. Downey) 4. 3/4, 4-1/2 and 5-1/2. 1m, 11.86s. ₹26 (w), 13 and 13 (p). SHP: 34, FP: 63, Q: 13, Tanala: 111 and 46. Favourite: Thailand.

Owners: Mr. Vikram Bacchawat rep. Bacchawat Farms Pvt. Ltd. Trainer: S.K. Sunderji.

5 **INDIAN NAVY TROPHY** (1,200m), Cl. IV, rated 20 to 46: **DIVINE POWER** (Parmar) 1, Jetfire (Sandesh) 2, Myrcella (Chouhan) 3 and Officer In Command (Neeraj) 4. 1-1/2, 1-14 and Nk. 1m, 11.74s. ₹58 (w), 16, 11 and 14 (p). SHP: 37, FP: 85, Q: 50, Tanala: 270 and 119. Favourite: Jetfire.

Owners: M/s. Solomon F. Sopher & Altaf Hussain. Trainer: Altaf Hussain.

6 **FLYING BRAVE PLATE** (1,000m), Cl. V, rated 4 to 30: **UNIMAGINABLE** (Kaviraj) 1, Speedo (Malam) 2, Bee Quirky (Niranjan) 3 and Padmakosa (Vishal) 4. Not run: Hexahedron. 1-3/4, 4 and Nose. 1m 00.60s. ₹18 (w), 12, 23 and 22 (p). SHP: 49, FP: 56, Q: 34, Tanala: 205 and 158. Favourite: Unimaginable.

Owners: Mr. Niraj Tyagi and Mr. Vikas Sachdeva rep. Blazing Saddles (PF)s. Trainer: Vishal Gaikwad.

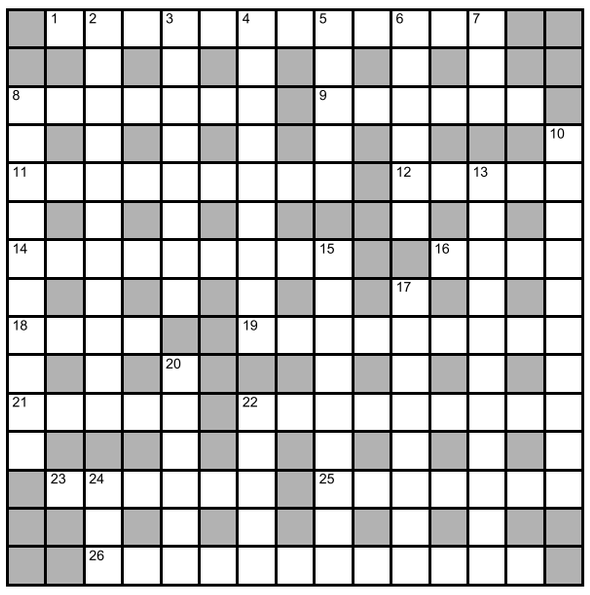
Jackpot: 70%: ₹7,027 (81 tkts.) and 30%: ₹1,876 (130 tkts.).

Treble: ₹722 (74 tkts.).

Super Jackpot: 70%₹6,360 (11 tkts.) and 30%: ₹2,498 (12 tkts.).

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12552

(set by Neyartha)



ACROSS

1 Frustrating arrangement traps Oscar in a borderline unethical public relations exercise (12)
8 Consult a naturalist for the provision of a grape variety (7)
9 Princess leaving the old-timer at sea with a grape variety (6)
11 Abandoned in a state of flux (9)
12 Grape variety from a Greek character getting a century on return (5)
14 An order of mammals requiring the corn Ravi cooked with a vitamin (9)
16 We're getting the energy to go in front with a pitcher (4)
18 Send out the inverted timer after removing the cap (4)
19 Vani sung off-key after consuming the old French grape (9)
21 A time for bats to fly with the speaker's chess piece (5)
22 Firm British sailors hunt for something likely to be seen in an American field (9)
23 Grape variety to laugh at? That is right! (6)
25 Single Yankee sent out by the Democrat to get a tight-fitting garment (7)
26 Adamant Rani's netting in tatters (12)

DOWN

2 Egocentric description of the portions in a buffet? (4-7)
3 Come by again to treat tainted segment (8)
4 Cattle herd supervisor's coin flip welcomes the storyteller upset by a follower (5,4)
5 Poem in recital by daughter covered with frost (5)
6 Enter uninvited into an Italian website featuring a low vibrating sound from the south (6)
7 Slime made from grinding of offal originally (3)
8 Countess made to go around Switzerland to get the family shields (10)
10 Description of a person in a birthday suit? (5,5)
13 Left out landowner has no hesitation in re-development for a profit occasionally (3,3,5)
15 Samurai in trouble after hiding half a pound in the fish tanks (9)
17 Grape variety for a sweet white wine (8)
20 Sense a narrow focus? (6)
22 Vatican court gets an article to barter for the old trinket (5)
24 Bird needing no introduction to the Maori tribes (3)

SUDOKU

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

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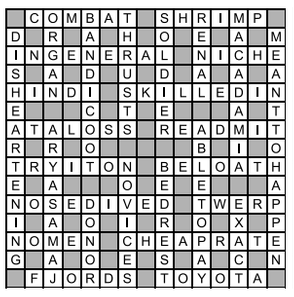
DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 12551



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

A jnani's detachment

Jatabharata's story is told in the Bhagavata Purana. Bharata was deeply involved in penance, but his attachment to a deer nullified all the benefits of his penance and he was reborn to the second wife of Sage Angirasa. Because he had been a tapasvi in his previous birth, he still remembered all that had happened in his previous janma. He, therefore, knew the dangers of worldly attachments, said Akkarakkani Srinidhi, in a discourse. He did not engage in conversation with others. He was blind and deaf to what went on around him, for he spent all his time in dhyana. He was well versed in sacred literature, having studied the same in his previous birth. So, when his father sought to instruct him, Jatabharata showed no interest in learning. In course of time, the sage and his second wife died. The first wife's nine sons did not realise the greatness of Jatabharata. Jatabharata was forced to do menial jobs to get some food, but he ate what was given to him, regardless of whether it was tasty or not. He ate not for pleasure, but to keep alive. He was a jnani, who had understood the nature of the atma. So, he did not care about the impermanent body. He remained unwashed and dressed in filthy clothes. His brothers exploited his indifference to wealth and made him work in their fields, without giving him proper food. But he ate what was given as if it were nectar. Jatabharata slept on the floor, and did not care for any comforts. When some people tried to harm Jatabharata, he remained unharmed. In fact, those who tried to kill him, were themselves destroyed. Narrating the story of Jatabharata to Pareekshit, Suka says that if we try to harm jnanis, we will suffer for it. It is, therefore not surprising that jnanis are unafraid, even when someone comes to attack them.

IN BRIEF

Tefera breaks 1500m indoor World record

BIRMINGHAM

Ethiopia's Samuel Tefera set a new 1500m indoor world record here on Saturday as he broke a mark that had stood for more than 20 years. Tefera upstaged compatriot Yomif Kejelcha to stop the clock in a time of 3min 31.04sec, shaving 0.14sec off the previous record set by Moroccan middle-distance great Hicham El Guerrouj in 1997. Kejelcha came second in an outright personal best of 3:31.58. AFP

Farbrace leaves England for Warwickshire role

LONDON

England coach Trevor Bayliss will lose a key member of his staff ahead of the team's home World Cup and Ashes after it was announced on Saturday that assistant coach Paul Farbrace will leave to join Warwickshire. Farbrace, credited with helping kick-start England's revival in one-day cricket, will succeed Ashley Giles as sport director at Edgbaston after England's tour of the West Indies ends next month. AFP

Santa Cruz keeps featherweight title

LOS ANGELES

Mexico's Leo Santa Cruz defended his World Boxing Association featherweight title on Saturday, dominating compatriot Rafael Rivera to win by a unanimous 12-round decision. All three judges gave Santa Cruz victory by scores of 119-109 as the champion improved to 36-1-1, marking the third defence in his second reign in the division. AFP

Saha back in Bengal squad

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Wicketkeeper-batsman Wriddhiman Saha on Sunday made a comeback to the Bengal squad for the upcoming group matches of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 tournament to be played at Cuttack from February 21.

Saha was out of action after last year's Indian Premier League due to injuries.

Experienced batsman Sudip Chatterjee did not feature in the 15-member squad.

The squad: Manoj Tiwary (captain), Abhimanyu Easwaran (vice-captain), Wriddhiman Saha (wk), Ashoke Dinda, Shreevats Goswami (wk), Vivek Singh, Writtick Chatterjee, Ritwik Roy Chowdhury, Shahbaz Ahamad, Pradipta Pramanik, Kanishk Seth, Sayan Ghosh, Ishan Porel, Prayas Ray Barman and Ayan Bhattacharjee.

Mahmudullah, Boult fined

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHRISTCHURCH

New Zealand bowler Trent Boult and Bangladesh all-rounder Mahmudullah have been fined for breaching the code of conduct during the second One-Day International here on Saturday.

Boult was fined 15% of his match fee for an "audible obscenity" while Mahmudullah was fined 10%for "abuse" of equipment for striking the fence with his bat.

Jitendra wins 50K gold

Suraj on top in the boys' under-20 10K category

NATL. RACE WALK

K. KEERTHIVASAN
CHENNAI

Rajasthan's Jitendra Singh Rathore wasn't fully fit, but was in high spirits. The 29-year-old, working as an Havildar in the Army Sports Institute (Pune) won the men's 50Km gold in the Open National racewalk championship here on Sunday, in a time of 4 hours 23 minutes and 23 seconds.

In the absence of tough competition, Jitendra enjoyed a comfortable lead for the major part of the race. For a while early in the race, Joshi Sagar was trailing close to him, but in the last three-four kilometres, Jitendra pushed ahead of the bunch.

"I have a niggling [right] shoulder problem. But I had nothing but gold on my mind. Moreover, there was no competition [here]," said Jitendra.

Coached by Olympian Basant Bahadur Rana, Jitendra said had it not been for the hot weather conditions, he would have probably recorded a better time.

His personal best came in the Open Nationals last year (3:58.55.82) in Delhi where he had finished second behind Sandeep Kumar, the reigning National record holder.

Jitendra was confident of making the qualifying mark of 3:59.00 at the forthcoming Japan National championships in Oshima, to make it to the Doha World championships.

Earlier, Suraj Panwar of Uttarakhand, who won silver in the Youth Olympics in Buenos Aires (in 5000m) late last year, clinched the gold in the boys' u-20 10K run.

Meanwhile, the Athletics Federation of India is hopeful of finalising the jumps foreign coach for the promising long-jumper Sreeshankar, after the Asian championships in April.

The results:

Men: 50K: 1. Jitendra Singh Rathore (Raj) 4:23.22, 2. Joshi Sagar (Guj) 4:24.21, 3. Pawan Kumar (Har) 4:30.39, 4. Ankit Kumar (UP) 4:43.43, 5. Jyot Bumrah (Pun) 4:44.13.

10K: U-20: Junior boys: 1 Suraj Panwar (Utr) 43:19.00, 2. Juned (Har) 43:32.00, 3. Farman Ali (UP) 44:50, 4. Sanjay Kumar (Raj) 47:27, 5. Vijay Vishwakarma (Goa) 49:04.00.

Junior girls: 1. Roji Patel (Utr) 53:38.00, 2. Suvarna Kapase (MP) 55:36, 3. Gurpreet Kaur (Pun) 57:00, 4. Sneha Yadav (UP) 1:02:07, 5. Nikita Nannavare (Mah) 1:03:44.

Keeping cool: Jitendra Singh Rathore felt he could have had a better timing if not for the hot weather conditions. ▪R. RAGU

Amit shines, India assured of five medals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Asian Games gold medallist Amit Panghal started the season on a strong note as Indian boxers packed enough power into their punches to assure themselves of five medals in the 70th Strandja Memorial Boxing in Sofia, Bulgaria, on Sunday.

Panghal made the semifinal after a closely contested 3-2 win over Ukraine's Nazar Kurotchyn in the 49kg category.

The Indian women pugilists too guaranteed four medals at the end of the third day at the prestigious tournament.

Lovlina Borgohain (69kg), who won the bronze at the 2018 AIBA Wold Women Boxing Championships, put up a robust display to beat Brazil's Soarez Beatriz in a unanimous 5-0 victory and assure the first medal for the women boxers.

Following suit was young boxer, Manju Rani, who defeated Bonati Roberta of Italy with a unanimous 5-0 verdict.

Former world junior champion Nikhat Zareen (51kg) lived up to the expectations by outclassing Buryam Yana of Belarus 5-0.

The results (pre-qaurterfinals): 49kg: Amit Panghal bt Nazar Kurotchyn (Ukr) 3-2; **52kg:** Gaurav Solanki bt Anvar Muzaparov (Kaz) 3-2/

91kg: Naman Tanwar bt Michal Soczynski (Pol) 5-0; Jasin Ljama (MKD) bt Ankush Dahiya RSC.

69kg: Lovlina Borgohain bt Soarez Beatriz (Bra) 5-0. **48kg:** Manju Rani bt Bonati Roberta (Ita) 5-0.

Make Irani Cup the season opener: Pandit

Says playing it at the end of long Ranji campaign is taxing

M.R. PRAVEEN CHANDRAN
NAGPUR

Chandrakant Pandit, coach of the victorious Vidarbha team, has re-opened the debate on Irani Cup schedule, stating that he wants the match to signal the beginning of a new domestic season.

"The Ranji Trophy is a long drawn tournament which takes more than four months and the winning team has to play at least 10 to 11 matches.

"The players will be tired after a long season and they will be carrying injuries," he told the media on Saturday.

"It is difficult for them to recover and start all over again and give their 100 percent for the Irani Cup a few days after the Ranji final.

"Personally I feel the Irani Cup should be held at the beginning of the season."

Chandrakant Pandit. ▪FILE
PHOTO: VIVEK BENDRE

The former Mumbai player gave credit to 41-year-old Wasim Jaffer – his side's professional player – for the success his team enjoyed this season.

> **The winning team has to play at least 10 to 11 matches, the players will be tired after a long season.**

The coach said Jaffer's contribution should not be measured merely by the number of runs he scored and that his presence in the dressing room brought in a lot of value addition.

"He is an important member of our squad. He brings in a wealth of experience and his contribution is not the number of runs scored. He is a vital link between young players and the team management.

"He is like an elder brother to many of them and they confide their problems with him.

"He is always ready to help them. Jaffer gives us a feedback about a player attitude and it is of immense help to us," he said.

Despite the double, Pandit feels there is still scope for improvement and chose the occasion to remind his players about the bare cupboard in the shorter format of the game

"We have won four titles in two years. That is fine. But we have lost four that is how I look at it.

"We will try to build up from here to see what can be done to win more trophies. I told boys that we have done so well without Wasim Jaffer and Umesh Yadav.

"So with them we can do wonders. We still have to improve a lot in other formats to be a great side," he said.

All eyes will be on Smriti, the captain

G. VISWANATH
MUMBAI

In rollicking form during the recent One-Day International and Twenty20 series tour of New Zealand, Smriti Mandhana will be keen to demonstrate her captaincy talent when she leads Board President's XI in the only limited-over warm-up game against England at the Wankhede Stadium here on Monday.

India and England will play three ICC Women's Championship matches at the same venue on February 22, 25 and 28.

The head coach of the national team, W. V. Raman, will also get a chance to assess the quality of the home side that is filled with fringe players.

Apart from Smriti, two known faces in the team are Devika Vaidya (left-hand bat and leg-spinner) and Veda Krishnamurthy, who was dropped for the tour of New Zealand.

The England team has been bolstered by the return of Katherine Brunt and Sarah Taylor, both of whom missed the ICC Women's T20 World Cup in the West Indies last year.

The teams: Board President's XI: Smriti Mandhana (Capt.), Veda Krishnamurthy, Devika Vaidya, Sabbhineni Meghana, Bharati Fulmali, Komal Zanzad, Ravi Kalpana, Priya Punia, Harleen Deol, Reemalaxmi Ekka, Manali Dakshini, Minnu Mani and Tanuja Kanwar

England: Heather Knight (Capt.), Tammy Beaumont, Katherine Brunt, Kate Cross, Sophia Dunkley, Sophie Ecclestone, Georgia Elwiss, Alex Hartley, Amy Jones, Laura Marsh, Nat Sciver, Anya Shrubsole, Sarah Taylor, Lauren Winfield and Danni Wyatt.

Smriti Mandhana. ▪FILE
PHOTO: VIVEK BENDRE

Mertens reigns in Qatar

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
DOHA

Belgium's Elise Mertens claimed the biggest win of her career on Saturday, surprisingly coming from a set down to beat Simona Halep and clinch the Qatar Open.

The World No. 21 won 3-6, 6-4, 6-3, despite being outclassed in the first set, overcoming an eight-minute medical time-out for back pain in the second set, and losing 18 consecutive points at one stage in the match.

"It's a big moment for me, getting that victory," said a jubilant Mertens, 23, afterwards. "I think this one would be, especially also with the tennis I played, the nicest one, nicest victory."

The results: Qatar Open: Final: Elise Mertens bt Simona Halep 3-6, 6-4, 6-3.

Rotterdam Open: Semifinals: Stan Wawrinka bt Kei Nishikori 6-2, 4-6, 6-4; Gael Monfils bt Daniil Medvedev 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

DELHI ROUND-UP

Simran Shergill does the star turn for Jindal Panther

NEW DELHI: Simran Shergill scored three goals as Jindal Panther scored a 6-5 victory over Rajnigandha Achievers in the final of the Jiwaji Rao Scindia Gold Cup 10-goal polo tournament at the Jaipur Polo ground here on Sunday.

When 16 seconds were left on the clock in the fourth chukker, and with the scored tied at 5-5, Jindal Panther tom Brodie converted a penalty for the winning goal.

He had two goals in the match.

Naveen Jindal was adjudged the 'most valuable player' of the tournament and his mare Pataka was declared the 'best polo pony'.

The polo season will continue with the Army Polo Championship at the Army Equestrian Centre, Delhi Cantonment, on Modnay.

The results (final): Jindal Panther 6 (Simran Shergill 3, Tom Brodie 2, Naveen Jindal) bt Rajnigandha Achievers 5 (Matthew Perry 3, Gaurav Sahgal, Salim Azmi).

YMCA tournament from today

NEW DELHI: International player Kiran Pal Rana and some state and Delhi University players will be seen in action at the 22nd New Delhi YMCA volleyball tournament which begins at the YMCA Complex here on Monday.

The five-day tournament has attracted 40 teams from University and Institutions. Men's defending champions Central Reserve Police Force-A along with Air Force, the runner-up, will be in the fray for the men's title.

In the women's section, too, CRPF will have an edge.

Triumphant: The Jindal Panther team with the Jiwaji Rao Scindia Gold Cup. ▪SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

RSPB to meet MP for title

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
HISAR (HARYANA)

Defending champions Railway Sports Promotion Board (RSPB) defeated Haryana 8-0 to set up a title clash with Madhya Pradesh in the ninth Hockey India senior women national championship (division A) here on Sunday.

While RSPB beat Haryana convincingly in the first semifinal, Madhya Pradesh eked out a close 2-1 win over Maharashtra in the other last-four game.

In the first semifinal, RSPB scored through Vandana Katariya (6th, 16th, 38th minutes), Anupa Barla (44, 44), Navjot Kaur (18), Deep Grace Ekka (48) and Neha (51) to register the commanding win.

Madhya Pradesh scored the first goal in the 34th minute through Pooja Rani from a a penalty corner before doubling the lead in the 47th minute through Narender Kaur.

Maharashtra tried hard to forge a comeback and reduced the gap with a 53rd-minute strike by H. Lalruatfeli, but it was not enough.

Brathwaite, Cottrell in ODI squad

ANI
LONDON

Pacers Carlos Brathwaite and Sheldon Cottrell have been included in the West Indies' 14-member squad for the first two ODIs of their upcoming five-match series against England.

The squad (for first two matches): Jason Holder (capt), Fabian Allen, Devendra Bishoo, Carlos Brathwaite, Darren Bravo, John Campbell, Sheldon Cottrell, Chris Gayle, Shimron Hetmyer, Shai Hope, Ashley Nurse, Nicholas Pooran, Kemar Roach, Oshane Thomas.

IN BRIEF

NASA mulls buying new rides to space

ORLANDO

NASA said on Friday it was weighing an option to buy two additional astronaut seats aboard a Russian rocket as a contingency plan against further delays in the launch systems being developed by SpaceX and Boeing Co. The companies are building rocket-and-capsule launch systems to return astronauts to the International Space Station. REUTERS

Archaeologists discover Incan tomb in Peru

LIMA

Archaeologists have discovered an Incan tomb in the Lambayeque region, where an elite member of the pre-Columbian empire was buried. They believe the tomb belonged to a noble Inca based on the presence of "spondylus," a type of sea shell always present in the graves of important figures from the Incan period. AFP

Beer from 133-year-old shipwreck may yield brew

COBLESKILL

A bottle from a 133-year-old shipwreck may yield yeast for a new brew. Students at the State University of New York uncorked a bottle from the shipwrecked SS Oregon. A brewing company plans to develop a brew if students are able to extract yeast. AP

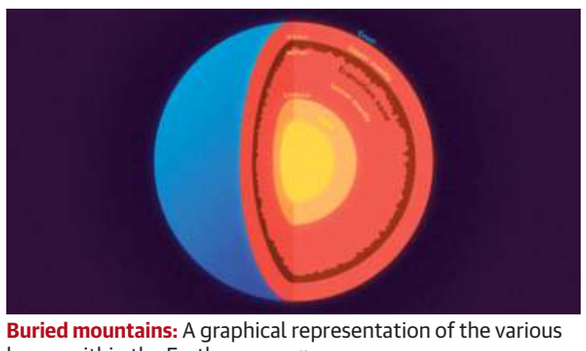
Scientists discover massive mountains under Earth's crust

They found the topography on a layer located 660 km below the surface

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON

Scientists have discovered massive mountains in the Earth's mantle, an advance that may change our understanding of how the planet was formed. Most school children learn that the Earth has three layers: a crust, mantle and core, which is subdivided into an inner and outer core.

While that is not wrong, it does leave out several other layers that scientists have identified within the Earth.



Buried mountains: A graphical representation of the various layers within the Earth. HTTPS://WWW.PRINCETON.EDU

Earthquake data

In a study published in the journal *Science*, scientists used data from an enormous earthquake in Bolivia to find mountains and other topography on a layer located 660 km straight down, which separates the upper and lower mantle.

Lacking a formal name for this layer, the researchers simply call it "the 660-km boundary."

To peer deep into the Earth, scientists from the Princeton University in the U.S. and the Institute of Geodesy and Geophysics in China, used the most powerful waves on the planet, which are generated by massive earthquakes.

Data from earthquakes that are magnitude 7.0 or higher send out shockwaves in all directions that can travel through the core to the other side of the planet – and back again.

For this study, the key data came from waves picked up after a magnitude 8.2 earthquake – the second-largest deep earthquake ever recorded – that shook Bolivia in 1994.

The researchers also examined a layer 410 km down, at the top of the mid-mantle "transition zone," and they did not find similar roughness. The presence of roughness on the 660-km boundary has significant implications for understanding how our planet formed and evolved.

Nadav Lapid with the Golden Bear. REUTERS

Israeli film *Synonyms* reigns at Berlinale

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BERLIN

Israeli director Nadav Lapid won the Golden Bear top prize at the Berlin film festival Saturday for *Synonyms* about an expatriate in Paris wrestling with his identity.

Mr. Lapid said the sexually explicit, semi-autobiographical movie, which deals with a young man who has fled Israel over its fraught political situation, might cause a "scandal" in his home country.

"But for me the film is also a big celebration... of cinema," he said.

The runner-up jury prize went to French filmmaker Francois Ozon for *By the Grace of God*, a wrenching drama based on real-life survivors of rampant sexual molestation in the Catholic church.

NY museum to return looted coffin to Egypt

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NEW YORK

The Metropolitan Museum of Art will return an ancient gilded coffin to Egypt after New York prosecutors determined that it had been looted from that country, the museum said.

The museum had purchased the prized coffin, dating from the first century BCE, in July 2017 from a Paris art dealer for a price of nearly $4 million.

But the Manhattan district attorney's office determined that the mummy-shaped golden coffin had been sold with fake documentation, including a forged 1971 Egyptian export license. It was not clear what had sparked the district attorney's investigation.

The statement quoted Met CEO Daniel Weiss as apologising to the Egyptian people and specifically to Antiquities Minister Khaled El-Enany. "After we learned that the Museum was a victim of fraud and unwittingly participated in the illegal trade of antiquities, we worked with the DA's office for its return to Egypt," Mr. Weiss said.

The museum said it would "consider all available remedies to recoup the purchase price of the coffin" and would commit itself "to identifying how justice can be served, and how we can help to deter future offences."

MoMA vowed to "review and revise its acquisitions process."

What the world needs is a personal war on plastic

Nearly 300 mn tonnes created worldwide each year, including single-use items like straws, end up in landfills or oceans

STEVEN KURUTZ

For Beth Terry, the epiphany came when she read an article about how albatross chicks are being killed by discarded plastic. It was time to banish plastic from her life.

First, she focused on her kitchen and got rid of the shopping bags and the washed salads in plastic tubs.

Then she turned to her bathroom, where she switched to shampoo bars instead of bottles and made her own hair conditioner from apple cider vinegar. Toothpaste without plastic packaging was exceptionally hard to find, so she started making her own with baking soda.

Kicking the habit: A woman purchasing tomatoes at a farmers market in Los Angeles. NYT

Sometimes her personal war on plastic created awkward moments. During a vacation to Disneyland in California to run a half-marathon, Ms. Terry and her husband left their reusable cloth bags in the hotel, soon discovering that the local supermarket only had plastic bags. How to carry a bunch of apples, oranges, avocados and melons?

"We just rolled it up in our T-shirts and carried it that way," said Ms. Terry, 54.

Resistance is the key

Treating plastic like a drug habit that needs to be kicked is a lifestyle pledge being shared by more consumers, horrified by the nearly 300 million tonnes of plastic created worldwide each year, much of it in the form of single-use items like straws, that end up in landfills or the ocean.

Designers have embraced plastic free as a new challenge, whether it's building a supermarket aisle without plastic or making eco-friendly clothing that does not involve virgin plastic.

What companies can do

Even some Fortune 500 companies like Procter & Gamble and PepsiCo want a piece of the action. This summer, those companies will test selling products like Tropicana orange juice in glass bottles, Pantene shampoo in aluminum bottles and other items in refillable nonplastic containers.

"The awareness has exploded," said Susan Freinkel, a journalist and the author of *Plastic: A Toxic Love Story*.

"I wake up and think, 'How am I going to make it through the day without using any single-use plastic?'" said Dianna Cohen, 53, an artist. "Right away the challenge hits you in the bathroom with the toothbrush."

For her, the answer is often the farmers' markets, to which she brings her own bags. "I bring baskets and canvas bags to put vegetables in. I will bring my own glass jam jars."

Like many who aim to live plastic free, Ms. Cohen never leaves home without her eco-survival kit, which includes a steel cup, bamboo utensils, two stainless-steel straws and a cloth bag.

Jay Sinha and Chantal Plamondon, who live in Wakefield, started the store Life Without Plastic in 2006, a few years after their son was born. They wanted to avoid exposing him to toxins found in many baby bottles, but they had trouble finding a safer alternative. When Ms. Plamondon tracked down a glass bottle, it was one of the first items they sold. Since then, the site and its customer base have evolved. NY TIMES

Princes William and Harry prepare to go separate ways

Seek a more independent path for their charity work and royal duties

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON

Britain's Princes William and Harry, known to be very close, are preparing to go their separate ways, seeking a more independent path from each other in terms of their charity work and royal duties.

Courtiers hope that a formal separation of their staff may also help ease some recently-reported tensions between the brothers and their wives – Kate Middleton and Meghan Markle, according to *The Sunday Times*.

The Princes, grandsons of Queen Elizabeth II, are expected to create separate "courts" before the birth of Prince Harry's first child, due in April or May.

Until now they operated via what was referred to as a joint royal household but now they will carve out more distinctive roles for themselves.

Royal split: A file photo of Prince William, left, and Prince Harry at a film premiere in London. AFP

The brothers will operate through separate staff and communication teams, a move seen as a way for them to seek out a more independent path from each other in terms of their charity work and royal duties.

The future king

The division of their shared household after 10 years reflects their increasingly different responsibilities, with Prince William set to take on additional duties as a future king after father Charles.

Prince Harry and his pregnant wife Meghan – the Duke and Duchess of Sussex – will shortly move from Kensington Palace to Frogmore Cottage, on the Queen's Windsor estate. However, their new office and staff is expected to remain at Kensington Palace.

"William and Harry are working to make sure the Sussexes have an office that can support their family when they move to Frogmore this spring. This work has been under way since before last year's wedding (of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle)," a royal source was quoted as saying.

Male privilege in rural Hong Kong

Policy faces fire as men can build a three-storey house without paying a land fee

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
HONG KONG

Sitting in the spacious courtyard of an 18th-century ancestral hall belonging to his clan, William Liu defiantly rejects a lucrative birthright that his special status as one of Hong Kong's male indigenous villagers affords him.

Mr. Liu hails from the rural northern part of Hong Kong known as the "New Territories", which were leased by Britain from China in 1898.

Under a colonial-era policy that remains in place, any male who can trace his lineage back to that period has the right to build a three-storey house on his land without paying a land fee.

In a city with the world's least affordable property market, that exclusively male right is a major windfall.

William Liu, a 22-year old democracy activist, in the courtyard of an 18th century ancestral hall belonging to his clan. AFP

But it is being challenged in the courts as both discriminatory to women and unfair to millions of Hong Kongers unable to get on the property ladder.

Mr. Liu is a villager who agrees with the court case against the building rights.

"It's an unfair policy and I will not use it," the 22-year-old said.

Discriminatory policy

Mr. Liu, a democracy activist, is opposed both to the discriminatory nature of the policy and the way the city's connected housing developers have still been able to use it to build properties.

"The small house policy has turned into something that is just being abused by a small handful of people working with developers to make money," he explained.

Liber Research Community, a local land concern group, estimates that at least one out of four indigenous houses in the New Territories have been built illegally, with commercial developers making secret deals with villagers to use their land rights.

Authorities largely turn a blind eye to the practice.

The so-called "ding rights" were enacted in 1972 by the British as an interim measure to improve living standards for farmers. It continued after the 1997 handover to China.