

on Sunday

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U.P. electors in Delhi to get leave to vote

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government on Saturday announced that polling days in adjacent Uttar Pradesh will be paid holidays for electors residing in the State employed in the Capital so they are able to exercise their franchise.

Polling in Uttar Pradesh will be held in seven phases starting February 10 followed by the second phase on February 14, the third on February 20, the fourth on February 23, the fifth on February 27 and the final phase on March 7.

The counting of votes will be held on March 10. Noida and Ghaziabad go to the polls on February 10.

The notice issued by the General Administrative Department, stated that the waiver applies to every citizen employed in any business, trade, industrial undertaking or any other establishment in Delhi entitled to vote in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls.

There should be no deduction in salary on account of holiday on the polling day, it stated.

## Violations on the rise yet again as COVID restrictions turn lax

Most fines issued for offences related to masks and social distancing norms

JATIN ANAND  
NEW DELHI

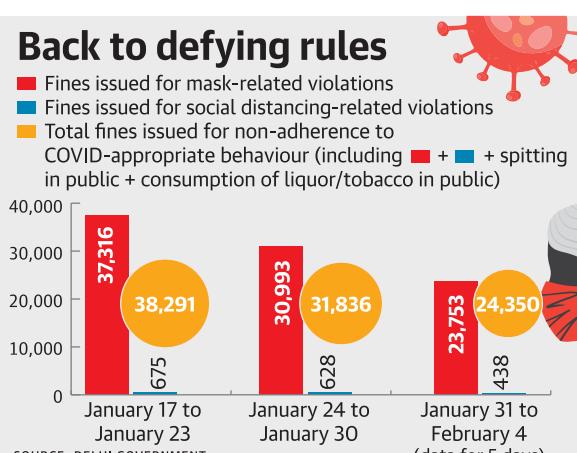
After a brief lull – thanks to strict enforcement – daily violations of COVID Appropriate Behaviour (CAB) are on the upswing in the Capital yet again. Almost all fines issued were for offences related to masks and non-adherence to social distancing norms.

With most restrictions aimed at breaking the chain of COVID infection having been lifted now, both violations and fines issued for them, are expected to spike over the coming days, according to government sources.

As the city unlocked progressively, fines worth around ₹19 crore were issued during a recent 19-day period, government records posit.

### Public health at risk

"The main objective behind levying fines is to deter citizens from behaviour which may be detrimental to them-



selves first and public health; but violations are still being noticed and, as a result, people are being prosecuted," a senior government official said, adding that stricter enforcement would continue.

According to the government, the daily number of challans fell from 5,470 per day between January 17 and 23 – when both the night and weekend curfew were in place – to 4,548 daily from January 24 to 31 after the

weekend curfew was lifted and shops were allowed to open without the odd-even rule.

**Jump in daily fines**  
However, the daily number of fines increased to 4,870 between January 31 and February 4.

With the reopening of higher learning institutes, spas, gyms and other establishments in addition to an hour's relaxation in the night

curfew on Friday, sources said, violations were expected to go up further.

Government teams prosecuted 38,291 people between January 17 and 23, 31,836 from January 24 to 31 and 24,350 between January 31 and February 4.

Most violators prosecuted were issued fines mainly for two offences – not wearing masks or not wearing them properly and not adhering to social distancing norms. Both the violations accounted for over 90% of the major share of the number of fines issued: 37,991 from January 17 to 23; 31,621 between January 24 and 31 in addition to 24,191 from January 31 to February 4.

According to the government, fines worth almost ₹19 crores were issued for these violations; while fines of over ₹7.64 crore were imposed from January 17 to 23, fines above ₹6.33 crore and ₹4.84 crore were issued from January 24 to 31 and January 31 to February 4, respectively.



A health worker administers vaccine dose to a young beneficiary at a dispensary in west Delhi on Saturday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

## COVID positivity falls to 2.8%

1,604 fresh infections, 17 deaths reported; decline in tests

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The downward trend in COVID-19 cases continued in the Capital on Saturday with the test positivity rate (TPR) falling to 2.87% from 3.85%, a day earlier, according to a Delhi government bulletin.

The positivity rate had peaked on January 14 to 30.64%, and has been on decline since.

ing the total deaths to 25,969, as per the bulletin. **Beds vacant**

Of the total 15,416 hospital beds for COVID-19, 93.2% were vacant. On January 13, 28,867 cases were reported in the city, the highest since the beginning of the pandemic.

## North body selling health centres: AAP

BJP leader calls allegations baseless

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

AAP MLA Vishesh Ravi has written again to L-G Arvind Baijal urging him to stop the BJP-ruled North Corporation from allegedly selling Jhandewalan Chest Clinic and Qutubgarh Dispensary Complex. The BJP termed the allegations as "baseless".

"After a failed first Expression Of Interest (EOI), the North MCD run has again raised EOI dated February 2 for selling Municipal land to the NGOs of individuals from the BJP," said Mr. Ravi. The MLA added that North MCD has "cleverly mentioned" only 400-500 sq m on the document whereas the total area at

Jhandewalan Clinic is 3700 sq m.

Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said that the allegation against the North body was false.

"The North body has no proposal to sell any of its health centres, it proposes to give 2 health centres on short lease to NGOs to run free charitable health services. The North body is a very old health centre at Jhandewalan & a hospital at Qutubgarh are lying closed for paucity of funds, and in wider public interest the civic body now proposes to handover them for a limited period lease to health sector NGOs to run free charitable services," he said.

Emergency services at the East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC)-run Swami Dayanand Hospital have been resumed – after remaining shut with the doctors and nurses going on strike since February 1.

Dr. K.P. Rewani, joint secretary, Municipal Corporation Doctors' Association, said that their strike was still ongoing.

Responding to reports on some doctors being fired for going on strike over the non-payment of salaries, the hospital's medical superintendent Rajni Khedwal, on Saturday, said, "No letter of termination has been issued

**We do not understand why the doctors have continued their strike despite the assurances**

VIKAS ANAND  
EDMC Commissioner

to any of the doctors who are on strike. Over 20 doctors have resumed their duties at the casualty ward; however, the remaining services are still shut. The remaining doctors have also been requested to resume their duties," said Ms. Khedwal.

Mr. Rewani said, "Some doctors who have joined only a few weeks ago have no salary dues. We have asked

them to rejoin duties out of good faith. Most of our demands, including the payment of salaries since November, have been agreed to. However, we have asked the civic body officials to count the strike period under regular hours of duty."

EDMC Commissioner Vikas Anand, however, said, "We have given them all assurances regarding the payment of their pending salaries, but they have not resumed their duties. Till the time this continues, they will not be paid for the days that they do not work on. We do not understand why the doctors have continued their strike despite the assurances."

## Anganwadi workers burn CM's effigy

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Anganwadi workers who have been protesting for higher wages for the past six days, burnt an effigy of AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday.

"The anganwadi workers of Delhi have been on an indefinite strike for the last six days. Arvind Kejriwal has been touring the poll-bound States of Goa and Punjab, completely ignoring the thousands of anganwadi caregivers," the Delhi State Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union said in statement.

Shivani Kaul, state president of the union said a team of anganwadi workers will go to Goa on Sunday and "expose Arvind Kejriwal and AAP".

## Teacher held for stealing bags from X-ray machines

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

ray machine. When she came out after frisking to collect her bag, she couldn't find it. On checking the CCTV footage, an unknown woman was seen taking her bag, the police said.

Similar incidents were reported at various metro stations.

During investigation, the police checked the CCTV footage of the incidents and found that the woman had entered and exited from different metro stations everyday.

On Friday, the police saw a woman standing outside Uttam Nagar West metro station who was looking similar to the woman seen in CCTV footage.

The woman was interrogated and apprehended.

## FOOD SPOT



RAHUL VERMA

## This one gets it JUST RIGHT

A smallish chicken, mildly sweet, cooked well, can be a treat to the palate



### Delicious surprise

I have to admit here that I have a love-hate relationship with the butter chicken. In some places, the dish is sickly sweet or cloyingly creamy. The perfect butter chicken has to have just the right balance of sweet and sour, and of cream and butter. Perhaps my taste is based on the way I cook it at home (with a paste of cashew nuts and a sprinkling of kasoori methi), but I do turn my nose up at a lot of the well-known restaurants' versions of the dish.

But Baba's butter chicken was excellent. It was also rather different from the usual fare. For one, it was not that radioactive red that describes a lot of gravies. It was actually light lemon in colour. Second, it wasn't too sweet or too rich. It was just mildly sweet and the texture was perfect - neither too creamy nor too light. The chicken was of a small size - not exactly anorexic, but not 'healthy' either. I didn't mind that, for a small chicken usually tastes better. I



**Rare Delight:** Butter chicken cooked in light lemon coloured gravy, hits all the right notes.

mopped up the gravy with the naan, and heaved a satisfied sigh.

Baba's is located at A 2, DDA Shopping Complex, Defence Colony. It has a robust vegetarian section, too - with dishes such as kali mirch paneer (₹390), kadhai mushroom (₹380) and yellow dal (₹280). There is also pesto paneer tikka (₹375) which sadly brought to mind a dish that I'd had at a friend's house and have been trying to forget ever since - butter chicken pasta.

The non-veg section includes lemon chicken (₹760 for full), rara meat (₹545), Baba's butter fish (₹795) and Dilliwallah butter chicken (aka tomato chicken) (₹760).

I judge a good book by the number of times I read it, and, likewise, a good eatery by repeated visits or orders. Baba's, you shall hear from me again.

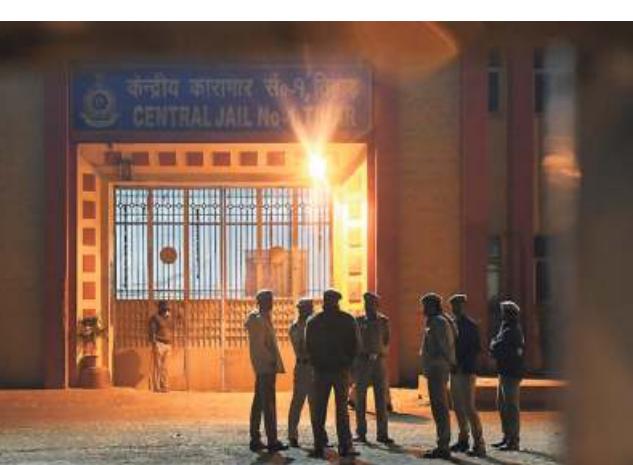
Repeated closures of the physical meeting facility and e-meeting woes have made reaching out to loved ones in jail difficult. There's finally relief in sight from February 10

ARNABJIT SURI  
NEW DELHI

For 30-year-old Rakhi, the last three months have been emotionally draining. Ever since her husband, the sole breadwinner of the family, was arrested in a case of robbery in November last year, she has met him in person only twice - once through a jail mulaqat and the second time during a court hearing.

"The facility to meet in person has been withdrawn. Even the court hearings are taking place through videoconferencing now. I have neither been able to book the 15-minute e-mulaqat nor the five-minute phone call. It is difficult to book a slot due to heavy rush and to get through an ordinary call is not easy because the prison administration does not respond to calls," a distraught Rakhi told *The Hindu*.

**Technical glitches**  
Her husband, Sunny, is lodged in Mandoli jail since November 22. "I even went to prison to get an appointment for e-mulaqat but the staffers



Covid-19 protocols allow limited visitors and that is why physical mulaqats have reduced, say prison officials. ■ V.V. KRISHNAN

sent me back saying that I needed to book it online. There are technical glitches every time I try to do it," she added.

Rakhi also mentioned that the prison staffers told her that Sunny keeps crying inside his cell. "I bought a second-hand smartphone to be able to do video calls with him. Even that is not possible now," she said.

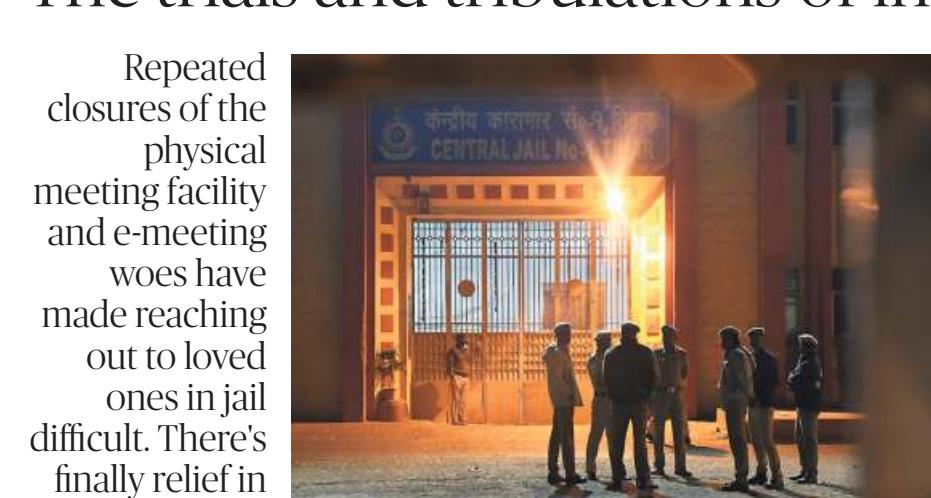
### Physical mulaqats

Many other families are experiencing similar emotions. Meeting their loved ones in jail has turned into a tedious process for them, thanks to repeated closures of physical mulaqats and technical difficulties in arranging e-mulaqats.

Prior to the first COVID-19 wave in 2020, each inmate was allowed one mulaqat with a single family member. On Saturday, the jail administration said that physical meetings will be resumed from February 10 with each inmate allowed one mulaqat with a single family member with 15 minutes.

Fifty-five-year-old Sarla Devi's son, Yashu Lakra, has been lodged in Tihar jail for the last 12 years in a case of murder. She said even if she is lucky to get through the five-minute phone call with her son, the poor network working fine but there may be some technical glitches at times. However, these are rare instances and are attended to immediately." Mr. Goel said, adding that upgradation of the LAN network within the jail complex is a project in the pipeline. "It will certainly improve the services in future," he said.

## The trials and tribulations of inmates' kin



does not allow them to hear each other clearly.

### Too short a time

"In any case, five minutes is too short a time and when calls get disconnected, it is disheartening," she said. "It feels like ages since I last spoke to my son. I haven't got a slot for an e-mulaqat for several weeks now and physical meetings and their durations too have been reduced," she rued.

For Simran too, meeting her 23-year-old brother Tinu, an undertrial in several Delhi riots cases, from behind a glass screen was much simpler than through a phone screen now. "I am not able to talk to him properly over the phone or do a video conference. The jail administration should look into it," she urged.

Prison officials said COVID-19 protocols allow limited visitors and that is why physical mulaqats have reduced. Otherwise, there is no limit on the number of daily mulaqats in a jail and inmates get enough opportunities to meet their relatives. On difficulties faced in booking an e-mulaqat, DG (Prisons) Sandeep Goel said, "e-mulaqats are allowed as per availability of slots. It happens twice a week with prior online booking, depending on the slot availability".

"Inmate calling system is working fine but there may be some technical glitches at times. However, these are rare instances and are attended to immediately." Mr. Goel said, adding that upgradation of the LAN network within the jail complex is a project in the pipeline. "It will certainly improve the services in future," he said.

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DELHI

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RISE 07:07 SET 18:05
RISE 10:26 SET 23:17
MONDAY, FEB. 07
RISE 07:06 SET 18:05
RISE 10:57 SET 00:00
TUESDAY, FEB. 08
RISE 07:05 SET 18:06
RISE 11:29 SET 00:12

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Delhi City 19 07  
Safdarjung 19 07  
Palam 18 07

Delhi Palam Today  
20°C A dry weather to continue. Moderate to dense fog will occur during cold morning. Day will be cool. Night will be cold and hazy.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow  
21°C The weather will be dry. Moderate to dense fog is expected in cold morning. Day will be pleasant. Night will be cold and hazy.

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# Rajasthan ready for its first separate Agriculture Budget

Focus on drip and sprinkler irrigation systems in view of water scarcity in State

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
JAIPUR

Preparations are in full swing for the first separate Agriculture Budget to be presented in the Rajasthan Assembly session starting on February 9, with the emphasis on welfare measures for farmers and innovations for the benefit of cultivators.

The Budget will especially promote drip and sprinkler irrigation systems in view of the scarcity of water in the State.

**Power company**

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said during a pre-budget consultation with the farmers and representatives of dairy federations that the State government was considering a proposal to establish a separate power com-



provide electricity to the farmers in all districts for irrigating their fields during the day before March 2023 by developing a robust transmission system and ensuring adequate availability of power," he said.

The Chief Minister said at the consultation, held over the week-end, that his government would promote drip and sprinkler irrigation systems in view of scarcity of water and depleting ground-water level across the State.

He affirmed that the farmers' welfare would get the highest priority because agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry sectors were the backbone of the State's economy.

The announcement for the separate budget formulation for agriculture was

made in the 2021-22 State budget speech of Mr. Gehlot, who also holds the Finance portfolio.

The agriculture and related sectors, including dairy and animal husbandry, in the State, registered a growth rate of 3.45% in 2020-21 despite the adverse circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The State Cabinet had last month approved a proposal to establish an Agro-Industries Development Board with the objective of increasing the farmers' income by strengthening the agricultural marketing infrastructure. The Board will prepare a roadmap for connecting farmers with agro-processing and value addition and make recommendations for new policies.

ship where corruption is checked and the doors of growth and development have been opened."

"Now India has been emerging on the world stage. It is now a country where the poor not only have their rights but new dimensions of development and progress are in their hands," he added.

**'Not cooperating'**

Mr. Scindia later addressed a press conference at Kushab-hau Thakre Parivar – the State BJP office – here, where he accused the Bhupesh Baghel government of not cooperating with the Aviation Ministry.

When asked about Mr. Gandhi's 'two Indias' statement, Mr. Scindia said, "I am surprised that such a statement can be given by any citizen of India. My India is one and united. My country is a family. There has always been a brotherhood culture in my country."

"Perhaps Rahul Gandhi was referring to the situation before 2014 when no progress and development but only corruption and economic mismanagement existed," he said.

Talking to reporters at the Swami Vivekanand Airport in Raipur after arriving here on a day-long visit, the Union Minister said a new India is being created under the PM Narendra Modi's leader-

On the work being done for the expansion of airports in Chhattisgarh, Mr. Scindia said Raipur airport has a cargo facility in an area of 460 square mts and the Ministry has planned to increase it by 10 times.

## 'Winning 60 seats will depend on choice of CM'

Was never a worshipper of power, says Punjab Cong. chief Navjot Singh Sidhu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
CHANDIGARH

The choice of chief ministerial candidate will decide whether 60 MLAs are elected or not, Punjab Congress chief Navjot Singh Sidhu said on Saturday, referring to the number needed to form a government in the 117-member Assembly.

**People's trust**

Without naming any party, Mr. Sidhu made this remark ahead of the expected announcement of the Congress's chief ministerial candidate by party leader Rahul Gandhi during his visit to Ludhiana.

Mr. Sidhu also stressed that only a person who has a roadmap for Punjab and

who enjoys the people's trust can ensure 60 contestants get elected as legislators.

For several weeks now, both Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi and Mr. Sidhu have, directly or indirectly, made a case for themselves to be declared as the party's nominee for the top post.

Addressing the media in Amritsar on Saturday, Mr. Sidhu, who is contesting from Amritsar East, said he was never a "worshipper of power".

"But today Punjab has to decide a big thing. A person will become CM if there are 60 MLAs. Nobody is talking about 60 MLAs. Nobody talks about on which roadmap the government will be

formed," he said.

Mr. Sidhu again batted for his 'Punjab model' to bring the State back on its feet. "It is not Sidhu's model but State's model and if anyone has a better model he will accept that too," he said.

He said, "Sixty MLAs will be made by that person who has a roadmap and enjoys people's trust. The truth is that the face will decide whether 60 (contestants) become MLAs or not."

Referring to his joining the Congress after leaving the BJP ahead of 2017 polls, Mr. Sidhu said he did not leave the party to join another for any post and in fact, he had given up his Rajya Sabha membership. "I came (into Congress) because I have

concern for Punjab," he said.

Mr. Sidhu said his fight has always been against those who have looted Punjab.

**Punjab model**

"My Punjab model is meant to change the lives of children, youths and people of the State," he said.

"Punjabis have to decide which face will implement this (Punjab model). On whose name, 60 (contestants) will be elected as MLAs. The biggest question is what is his policy, what is his character and what is his morality," he asked.

"Can a person, who is part of the mafia, stop it?" he further asked as he targeted the previous Akali and Amarinder Singh led regimes.

## Maharashtra revises price limits for official EVs

Long-term savings on fuel costs will compensate for higher price: official

ALOK DESHPANDE  
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government's decision to procure electric vehicles (EVs) only for official use from April 1, 2022, will cost the exchequer an extra ₹5 lakh per car.

The Finance Department on February 3 issued a resolution setting the price limit to buy new EVs. However, no limit on the price for a EV has been set for the Governor, Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister, Chief Justice of the High Court and Lokayukta. This is in continuation with the previous policy.

The ceiling for cars for Cabinet Ministers, for cars to be used for State guests and during Ministers' tour to districts, High Court judges and



Electric vehicles parked at Mantralaya in Mumbai. ■ FILE PHOTO

sioner of Right to Service, and president of Maharashtra Public Service Commission has been set at ₹20 lakh, up from the previous ₹15 lakh.

For the rest, including Additional Chief Secretaries, Principal Secretaries and Secretaries; State Information Commissioners and members of the MPSC and right to service commission, the price limit is ₹17 lakh, up from ₹12 lakh.

Asked about the increase in price limit, an official from the Finance Department said

it is due to current high prices of the EVs. "But eventually, we will be cutting down on fuel cost and that will compensate the hike in prices," he said.

## M.P.'s new excise policy challenged in HC

'It also violates provisions of the M.P. Excise Act, Food Safety and Standards Act'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
JABALPUR

A writ petition was filed in the Madhya Pradesh High Court on Saturday challenging certain provisions of the State government's excise policy for 2022-23 announced recently.

The petition filed by city-based social organisation Nagrik Upbhokta Margdarshak Manch has claimed some items, like the composite shops having country-made

and foreign liquor, relocation of existing shops, allowing sale of liquor in supermarkets, etc., were in violation of the Constitutional provisions.

The State government had issued a notification for the excise arrangement (policy) for financial year 2022-23 on January 21.

**Sale in supermarkets**

Nagrik Upbhokta Margdarshak Manch president P.G.

Najpandey told PTI that Article 47 of the Constitution lays down that the State shall endeavour to bring about prohibition of consumption of intoxicating drinks and drugs that are injurious to health, except for medicinal purposes.

"The arrangement allows sale of liquor in supermarkets in Indore, Bhopal, Jabalpur and Gwalior, while there is no provision for rural areas. The excise policy also violates

provisions of the M.P. Excise Act and Food Safety and Standards Act," he said.

The new policy has proposed a reduction in alcohol prices by 20% to increase sales and mop up more revenue.

It has also okayed liquor sales in all airports and select supermarkets in four big cities, while home bar licences can be obtained by people having an annual income of over ₹1 crore.

## Slab collapse: accused in police custody till Feb. 15

Six labourers from Bihar were killed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
PUNE

A local court here on Saturday remanded in police custody four persons arrested in connection with the slab collapse at a construction site in Pune, in which six labourers were killed.

Five labourers from Bihar were killed and as many injured after a net of steel bars meant for building a slab at the basement level collapsed at a construction site in Yerwada late on Thursday night.

The project manager and three other employees of the contractor firm were arrested and an inquiry was

instituted. "The four accused were produced before the court on Saturday. They have been remanded in police custody till February 15," Deputy Commissioner of Police Rohidas Patil said.

The remand was sought, as the police wanted to probe the incident and verify the responsibilities of the persons involved.

An offence was registered against the staff under sections 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) and 336 (rash and negligent act endangering life) of the IPC on Friday evening.

The project manager and three other employees of the contractor firm were arrested and an inquiry was

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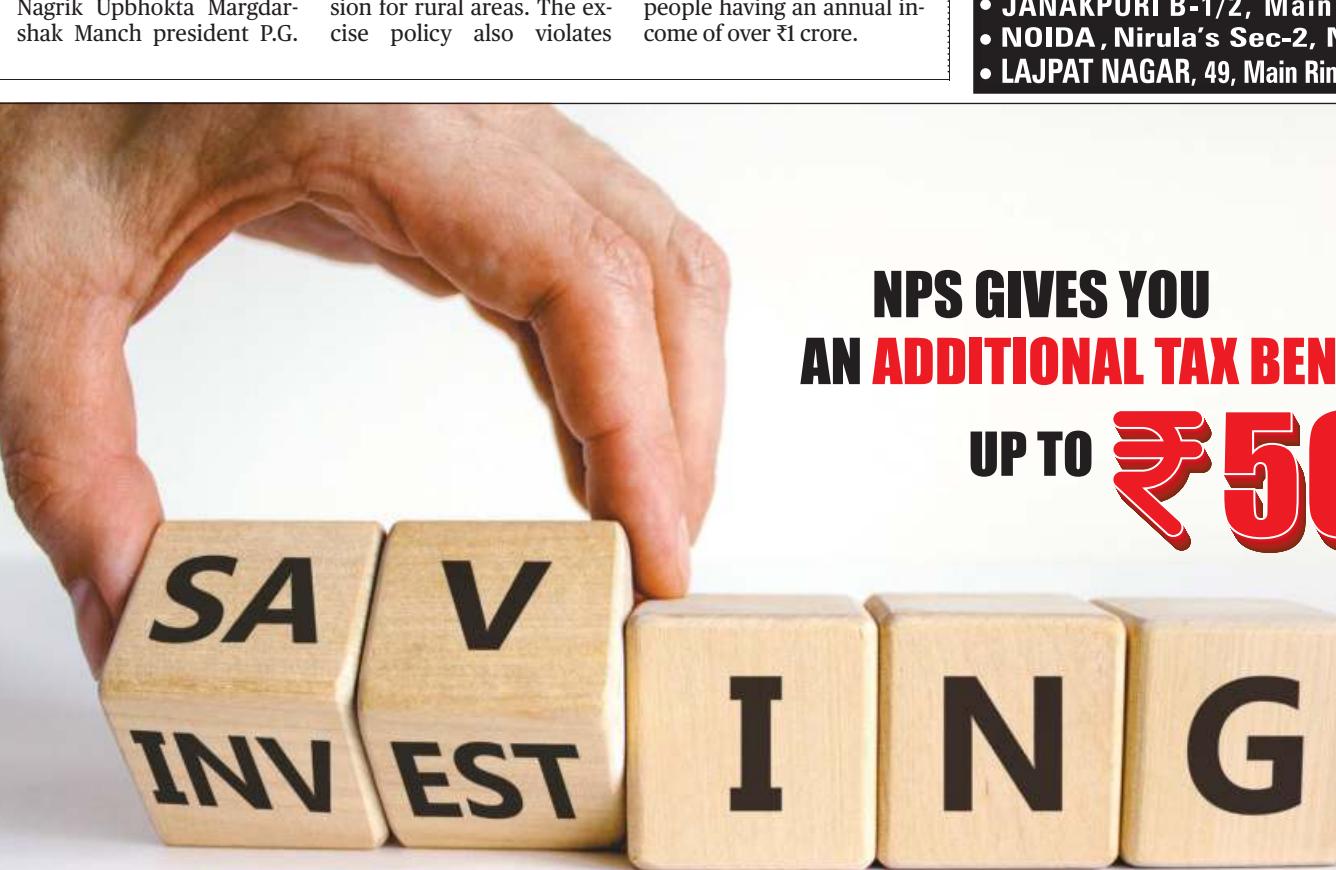
**THE HINDU**

**India's National Newspaper**

**Two killed in reactor blast at pharma firm**

ANKLESHWAR

Two workers died and three were injured in a blast at a reactor of a pharma company in Ankleswar in Gujarat, police said. The blast occurred in a chemical reactor at Abhilasha Pharma on Friday evening, an officer from Ankleswar GIDC police said. The deceased were identified as Hari Om Upadhyay (53) and Sundar Singh. (22), the officer said. PTI



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**Short Tender Notice**

**(Inviting e-tender)**

Sealed bid (two bid systems) affixing court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25/- (rupees eight and paisa twenty five) only or IPO Rs. 10/- (in case the bidder outside the state of Assam) are invited manufacturer/accredited dealer for **Supply and Installation Computer Workstation for Multi Disciplinary Research Unit (MDRU)** at Jorhat Medical College & Hospital Jorhat as per following schedule.

Date and Time of Publishing of e-Bid Document	Date and Time of Pre Bid Meeting	Date and Time of start of Bid submission	Date and Time of End of Bid submission	Date and Time of Opening of E-Technical Bid	Tentative Date and Time of Opening of E-Price Bid
12:00 P.M. of 07/02/2021	12:00 P.M. of 14/02/2022	11:00 A.M. of 15/02/2021	12:00 P.M. of 03/03/2022	1:00 P.M. of 03/03/2022	Shall be communicated only to the technically qualified bidders subsequently

- The complete e-tender document may be obtained from the e-tender portal: <https://assamtenders.gov.in/> & our official website: <http://jorhatmedicalcollege.in>.
- The participating bidders should have valid Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) and have to register in the portal <https://assamtenders.gov.in>.
- The tender shall be submitted online only through the website <https://assamtenders.gov.in>. The bidders must be submit a hardcopy of their tender documents to the O/o. the Principal cum Chief Superintendent, JMC&H, Jorhat after successful submission of their tender through online on or before 03-03-2022 at 12:00 p.m.
- The institute reserves the right to reject any/all applications without assigning any reason whatsoever.

Principal cum Chief Superintendent, Jorhat Medical College & Hospital, Jorhat

Janasanyog No.C/11568/21

**HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT**

**Tel.01972-288041**  
**Email -ee-bar-hp@nic.in**

**INVITATION FOR BID (IFB)**

The Executive Engineer HPPWD Division Barsar on behalf of Governor of H.P invited/Re-invited the item rate bids, in electronic tendering system from the eligible class of Contractors registered with HPPWD for the works as detailed in the table.

Sr. No.	Name of work	Estimate Cost	Starting date for downloading Bid	Earnest Money	Deadline for Submission of Bid.
1.	C/O Vety. Dispensary Building at Kalwal, (SH- C/O Building Portion i/c W.S and S.I., Septic Tank, Soak Pit, Site Development and Rain Water Harvesting Tank) (Deposit Work) Time- Nine Months, Cost of Form-Rs. 500.00 only, Eligible of Class- D.	Rs.16,63,805.00 only.	10-02-2022 From 10:30A.M	Rs. 32,500.00 only.	17-02-2022 Up to 10:30 A.M
2.	C/O Additional Accommodation for 2 Nos. Class Rooms at Govt High School Building at Fogti District Hamirpur H.P. (SH- C/O 2 Nos. Class Room with Verandah) (Deposit Work). Time- Nine Months, Cost of Forms-Rs. 1500.00 only, Eligible of Class- D.	Rs34,51,981.00 only.	10-02-2022 From 10:30A.M	Rs. 59,300.00 only.	17-02-2022 Up to 10:30 A.M

The bidders are advised to note other details of tenders from the department website [www.hptenders.gov.in](http://www.hptenders.gov.in)

Executive Engineer,  
HPPWD, Division Barsar  
District Hamirpur H.P Pin.174305  
On behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh

HP / 6687/21-22

**UT, GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KATHUA**

Displaced Persons / WPRs, Cell acrkathua-jk@gov.in  
No.DCK/WPRs/OTS/2021-22/ Dated 04-02-2022

**NOTICE**

This is for information of the General Public / WPRs (West Pakistani Refugees) of 1947 that the files/ cases received by this office for "One Time Settlement" (OTS) from Tehsils viz. Kathua, Hirnagar, Nagri Parole and Marheen, have been scrutinized by the District Level Screening and Approval Committee, for WPRs of 1947, from serial no 71 to 92 (Total 22 cases) (also uploaded on <https://kathua.nic.in>) for inviting objections by the non-applicants and other left out beneficiaries (WPRs), if any. Objections/queries, if any, regarding the said cases can be addressed to this office or concerned Tehsildars within 15 days of the publication of this notice. If in case, no objection(s) are received at the end of the prescribed time period, the above mentioned relief cases shall be considered for disbursement of relief amount in favour of the applicants, listed in annexure "A".

Sd/- Sandeep Seointra (JKAS)  
Assistant Commissioner (Rev.),  
Nodal Officer, DPs/WPRs Cell, Kathua.

DIP/J-12603/21

**SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED**



General Public is hereby informed that one person **Namedly: Murari Lal, S/o Kashiram, R/o: C-91, Laxmi Park, Nangloi, Delhi, Age: 65 Years, Height: 5'5", Complexion: Fair, Face: Round, Wearing: Crem Colour Kurta and White Colour pajama & Brown Colour Shoes** has been missing/kidnapped since 23.12.2021 from the area of P.S. Nihal Vihar, Delhi. In this regard **DD No. 89-A, Dated 24.12.2021**, has been registered at P.S. Nihal Vihar, Delhi.

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing/kidnapped person but no clue has come to light so far. If anyone have any information about this missing/kidnapped person please inform to the following:-

**Web-site : <http://cbi.nic.in>**  
**E-Mail ID: cic@cbi.gov.in**  
**Fax: 011-23011334**  
**DP/1465/OD/2022 Ph.: 011-25946700, 25946710**

**JAL SHAKTI DEPARTMENT, JAMMU**

**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER JAL SHAKTI (PHE) CITY DIVISION NO-I, JAMMU**

TeleNo.:0191-2543654 e-mail- xenphety1@gmail.com,

**SHORT NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER**

e-NIT NO. JSPECHECD-I/22 OF 2021-2022

For and behalf of Lieutenant Governor of J&K Union Territory, Short Term (Item Wise Based) E-Tenders are invited by the Executive Engineer Jal Shakti (PHE) City Division No-I Jammu, online from approved and reputed/registered contractors under two cover system, Cover 1 consisting of technical bid and Cover 2 consisting of financial bid having sufficient experience in execution of civil nature of works. The detail of works is as below:-

S. No	Name of work	Estimated Cost (Rs. In Lakhs)	Cost of Tender Document (In Rs)	Earnest Money (In Rs)	Class of Contractor	Time allowed for Completion
1	2	3	4	5	7	8
1	Execution of emergent nature of works in Ward No. 08 JMC. (Non Plan 8448-102 Grant in aid)	1.89	200	3800/-	A to D	20 days
	1. Changing the alignment /Replacing C.J with G.I Pipes near Jammu Motors Under Ward No. 08.					
	2. Emergent day to day maintenance of water supply line at various spots of Ward No.8.					

**Position of funds: Authorized by JMC (Non Plan 8448-102 Grant in aid)**

**Position of AAI: Accorded**

- Date of Publishing 01-02-2022(1600Hrs)
- Bid documents can be seen at and downloaded from the website <http://jkttenders.gov.in> from 01-02-2022 (1600Hrs).
- The Bids shall be deposited on the website <http://jkttenders.gov.in> from 01-02-2022 (1600Hrs) to 07-02-2022 (1300Hrs).
- Furnishing of hard copies of bids immediately after submission of e-tenders has been dispensed with as per Govt. Order No. OM No. A/24/2017-651 Dated 07-06-2018. The same shall be obtained only from the bidder who is declared as L1 after opening of financial bids.

Sd/-Executive Engineer  
Jal Shakti (PHE) City Division No.I, Jammu

DIP-J1251/21/21

**HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT**

Phone No. 01905- 22172

E-mail: ee-elem-hp@nic.in

**INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)**

The Executive Engineer Dehra Division HPPWD Dehra H.P. on behalf of Governor of H.P. invites the item rate bids, in the electronic tendering system from the eligible class of contractors registered with HPPWD for the works as detailed in the table.

Sr. No	Name of work	Estimated Cost (Rs.)	Starting date for downloading Bid	Earnest Money	Deadline for submission of Bid.
1	Construction of road from Tutru (Dehra Bhawani road) via Bhagnora Choudhary and Harizan Basu upto GPS Bharwara Km. 0/0 to 2/500 (SH: Formation cutting at RD 2/375 to 2/500, R/W at RD 2/365 to 2/450 and 3/00 to 3/200, C.I. 10/200, and C.I.C. Cement concrete pavement at RD 2/225 to 2/350) and Edge wall at RD 2/165 to 2/225 (under Industrial corridor)	Rs. 18,84,243.00	10-02-2022 10:00 AM	Rs. 38,000/- (6:00 PM)	
2	Construction of bridge on road Sih to Dodru road over Dodru Nallah (Chho) (SH: C/O 19.75 mtr, RCC 3-beam bridge) (Under MMGSY)	Rs. 72,94,955.00	10-02-2022 10:00 AM	Rs. 14,60,000.00 (6:00 PM)	17-02-2022

The bidders are advised to note other details of tender form the department website [www.hptenders.gov.in](http://www.hptenders.gov.in). Date of opening of tender 18.02.2022.

Executive Engineer,  
Dehra Division HPPWD, Dehra

Pin No. 177101,  
Tel. No. 01970-233116,  
E-mail- ee-deh-hp@nic.in

on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh

HP / 6666/21-22

HIM LOK SAMPAK

**GOVERNMENT OF HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT**

**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER NATIONAL HIGHWAYS, BLOCK-D, NIRMAN BHAWAN, NIGAM VIHAR, SHIMLA-171002**

**Notice Inviting Bid**

Bid No. PW-CE-NH-CTR-Tender Notice/EPC-43/2022 Dated: 03-02-2022

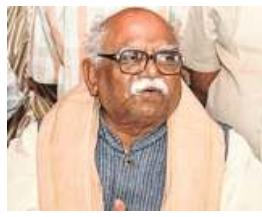
RFP for Improvement of Stretchers/ Junctions and Providing Road Safety measures on NH-503 (Extn) at following locations:- i) Pakka Paroh Km. 2/900 to 3/700, (ii) Baduhi (near Dussara) Km. 13/750 to 14/150 (iii) Kuthiyari Km. 4/908 to 6/677, (iv) Diara Km. 14/150 to 15/665 and (v) Basal Km. 25/900 to 27/450 in the State of Himachal Pradesh on EPC mode. (Tender No. EPC-43/2022) through an Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Contract.

The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways through Chief Engineer NH HPPWD Shimla is engaged in the development of National Highways and as part of this Endeavour, it has been decided to undertake Improvement of Stretchers/ Junctions and Providing Road Safety measures on NH-503 (Extn) at following locations:- i) Pakka Paroh Km. 2/900 to 3/700, (ii) Baduhi (near Dussara) Km. 13/750 to 14/150 (iii) Kuthiyari Km. 4/908 to 6/677, (iv) Diara Km. 14/150 to 15/665 and (v) Basal Km. 25/900 to 27/450 in the State of Himachal Pradesh on EPC mode. (Tender No. EPC-43/2022) through an Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Contract.

Himachal Pradesh Public Works Department through Chief Engineer NH HPPWD Shimla now invites bids from eligible contractors for the following project:

State	NH No.	Tender Pack- age	Name of Work	Estimated Civil Cost Of Project*	Completion period	Maintenance Period
Himachal Pradesh	503 Extn.	EPC-43/2022	Improvement of Stretchers/ Junctions and Providing Road Safety measures on NH-503 (Extn) at following locations:- i) Pakka Paroh Km. 2/900 to 3/700, (ii) Bad			

IN BRIEF



Janga Reddy, who beat Narasimha Rao, no more

HYDERABAD

Chandupatla Janga Reddy, former BJP MP, who shot to fame defeating P.V. Narasimha Rao from Hanamkonda Parliament constituency in 1984, passed away on Saturday due to age related issues. A Jan Sangh activist from his early days, Mr. Reddy dedicated his life to the ideology of the Jan Sangh and later the BJP.

A.P. govt. staff call off proposed strike

VIJAYAWADA

After nearly seven hours of negotiations on the Revised Pay Scales-2022 on Saturday, the government employees of Andhra Pradesh called off the proposed indefinite strike as most of their demands were conceded by the Group of Ministers (GoM).

## Actor requests CJI to order probe into leak of abuse video

She sends copies of her letter to the President and PM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOCCHI

The woman actor who was allegedly kidnapped and sexually abused in February 2017 has requested the Chief Justice of India to order an investigation into reports that visuals of the attack were leaked from the Ernakulam District Sessions Court.

Terming media reports about such a leak "shocking and a blatant violation of her privacy", the actor alleged that the visuals, which had been supposedly handed over to the court in a sealed

## Centre to form FPOs with small farmers

Prime Minister says country committed to achieving net zero by 2070 to tackle climate change

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has stated that the Union government is resolved to mobilise small farmers into farmer producer organisations (FPOs) and make them influential market forces in the years to come to improve their incomes by developing agriculture value chain.

"We are also committed to save the farming community from the impact of climate change with focus on back to basics in fusion with march to future. In that direction, impetus was given to digital agriculture, natural and chemical-free farming in the recent Budget and it will throw open a world of opportunities to the youth too," the Prime Minister said at the 50th anniversary celebrations of the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) at Patancheru here on



Prime Minister Narendra Modi visiting an exhibition stall at ICRISAT in Telangana on Saturday. ■ MOHD ARIF

Saturday.

Speaking after launching the celebrations and inaugurating two new research facilities – Climate Change Research Facility on Plant Protection and Rapid Facility – he said drought proofing work was also going on in 170

districts across the country. He mentioned the successful example of ICRISAT's work in Bundelkhand on 'per drop more crop', on which he visited an exhibition stall too at ICRISAT.

Stating that small and marginal farmers comprised about 80% of the community

## KCR, Ministers stay away

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao did not participate in the programmes of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at ICRISAT as well. Muchintal.

None of the Ministers nor senior officials were present at the functions nor Mr. Chandrasekhar Rao received or saw off Mr. Modi at Shamshabad airport. Though there was no official

word for his absence, it was explained over social media that Mr. Rao had decided to stay away as he was unwell.

The TRS leaders took to Twitter later saying both the functions were organised by non-governmental organisations and hence the Prime Minister's visit fell under the category of private visit. There was no need for the Chief Minister to receive the Prime Minister on a private visit.

## Govt. says college students should follow dress code

Karnataka has been facing hijab row

KARNATAKA BUREAU  
MANGALURU/BENGALURU

The BJP government in Karnataka late on Saturday issued an order stating that students have to comply with the dress code prescribed by College Development Committees.

Udupi district over the past month has seen Muslim students wearing hijabs being barred from entering into classrooms, while a section of Hindu students, who have turned up wearing saffron shawls as a counter, have also been barred entry.

Meanwhile, in Kundapura town of Udupi district, students of two private colleges – Bandarkar Pre University College and R.N. Shetty PU College – took out a procession by wearing saffron shawl, amidst heavy police presence. The Government PU College Kun-

dapura, which has declared holiday for students, had a meeting of college betterment committee and decided to continue with the present bar on students from entering the campus with hijab and saffron shawl.

Minister for Kannada, Culture and Energy V. Sunil Kumar on Sunday challenged those speaking in favour of wearing hijab inside educational institutions, including former Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, to fight for the entry of Muslim women to masjids.

He described the hijab issue as a "conspiracy to create unrest in Karnataka. On the one hand, they [fundamentalists] deny permission to women in every walk of social life, and on the other, try to dictate terms to educational institutions, which is not acceptable to the Government," he said.

## Rahul offers support to hijab-wearing students

'Country robbing future of daughters'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said the country is robbing the future of its daughters by letting the hijab come in the way of their education.

Coming out in support of hijab-wearing Muslim girl students not allowed entry in educational institutes in Karnataka, he said goddess Saraswati does not differentiate and gives knowledge to all.

"By letting students' hijab come in the way of their education, we are robbing the future of the daughters of India," he said.

The hijab row has snow-

balled into a major controversy in Karnataka.

The issue started in early January at the government girls' pre-university college in Udupi, where six students attended classes wearing headscarves in violation of the dress code. The college had allowed hijab on the campus but not inside the classrooms.

The students protested, but they were barred from attending the classes. The girls continued their protest by sitting outside the classrooms. One of the students had moved the Karnataka HC, seeking interim relief to attend classes wearing the hijab.

## Swapna's 'disclosures' spark big political row in Kerala

G. ANAND  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Swapna Suresh, the prime accused in the UAE diplomatic baggage gold smuggling scandal, gave a combative television interview on Friday in which she appeared to suggest that M. Sivasankar, former Principal Secretary to Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, was complicit in the economic offence.

Swapna, who exuded the image of a wronged but defiant woman in the lengthy one-on-one, alleged that Mr. Sivasankar was the "mastermind" of the operation and she, a hapless victim. An "unflattering" portrait of

connections in the erstwhile LDF government.

The headline-grabbing interview sparked a furious political row on Saturday. The Congress and the BJP attempted to exploit the "damning revelations" by Swapna to resurrect the politically moribund scandal.

The government appeared undefended against the cutting attacks.

An LDF insider denied the insinuation that Swapna's politically charged interview had scared "Pinarayi" apologists off the airwaves. He termed the current controversy a tempest in a teapot with scarce political import.



Swapna Suresh

## Enter the dragon



Giving a facelift: Painters colouring the dragon statue on the beach road as part of the beach beautification ahead of the Presidential Fleet Review, in Visakhapatnam on Saturday. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

## A.P. police yet to make arrests in pastor's case

He 'sexually exploited' 17 women

STAFF REPORTER  
VISAKHAPATNAM

The district police are yet to make any arrests in the case of alleged sexual exploitation of women by a 42-year-old pastor, A. Anil Kumar alias Prem Das, at Payakkaopeta in Visakhapatnam district.

According to sources in police, Additional SP of Narsipatnam, D. Manikanta is investigating the case and ascertaining the facts.

It was learnt that the 17 women who are lodged on the trust premises by the pastor since the last four years were allegedly sexually exploited and did not speak anything against the pastor during the investigation.

Apart from the women, there were seven boys who have been kept there forcibly and made to work as slaves and were also tortured, the victim informed the police.

The BSP has fielded Praetek Pandey from Katehari and to Chandra Prakash Ver-

## Seven Muslims in BSP's list of 54 candidates

Fields Khwaja  
Samsuddin  
against U.P. CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
LUCKNOW

The Bahujan Samaj Party on Saturday released a list of 54 candidates for the upcoming Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, fielding Khwaja Samsuddin against Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath from Gorakhpur Urban constituency.

In its latest list, the Ms. Mayawati-led party has given tickets to seven Muslim candidates.

The Bahujan Samaj Party has fielded Santosh Tiwari from Fazilnagar Assembly constituency in Kushinagar district. Mr. Tiwari will take on Samajwadi Party (SP) candidate and former BSP leader Swami Prasad Maurya.

The BSP has fielded Praetek Pandey from Katehari and to Chandra Prakash Ver-

ma from Akbarpur. Both constituencies fall under Ambedkar Nagar district.

In the 2017 State Assembly elections, BSP's Lalji Verma and Ram Achal Rajbhar had won from Kathewadi and Akbarpur respectively.

In November last year, Mr. Verma and Mr. Rajbhar joined the SP at a 'Janadesh Maharashtra' in Ambedkar Nagar.

The BSP has fielded its sitting MLA Uma Shankar Singh from Rastra in Ballia.

The party has named Rajaendra Singh as its candidate from Chittarpur in Gorakhpur. The seat was earlier held by Vinay Shankar Tiwari, who quit the party and joined the SP.

The 54 Assembly constituencies for which the BSP announced its candidates cover Ambedkar Nagar, Balrampur, Siddharthanagar, Basti, Sant Kabir Nagar, Maharajganj, Gorakhpur, Kushinagar, Deoria and Bal-

drinking water to the animals, says Mr. Mathew.

As part of fodder management, 289 hectares of coarse grasslands have been trimmed to grow soft grass, and weeds removed on 83 hectares of forest land. Sanctuary authorities are also planning to map fields and water bodies to ensure fodder supply during the dry season.

Fire breakers have been erected along 195 km, including a 27-km stretch on the State borders, at a width of 10 metres.

"We have conducted four awareness sessions on forest fire to sensitise those residing on the fringes of the forests. We are planning to organise 20 more similar sessions in the coming days," says Mr. Mathew.

The sanctuary authorities have registered 186 phone numbers of forest staff with the Forest Survey of India. The latter would issue alerts on incidences of forest fire to the registered phone numbers so that officials can respond quickly.

A round-the-clock control room is set up to issue alerts in case of forest fires. This can be reached at 0493 6223500 and 8547603486.

As many as 160 front-line

forest staff, including 130 temporary forest watchers, are deployed for protection with essential equipment and wireless sets.

As part from 24 permanent anti-poaching camps and five watchtowers at strategic points, 15 new treetop machans (temporary watchtowers) have started functioning on the four forest ranges of the sanctuary.

This year, the sanctuary authorities have registered 186 phone numbers of forest staff with the Forest Survey of India. The latter would issue alerts on incidences of forest fire to the registered phone numbers so that officials can respond quickly.

A round-the-clock control room is set up to issue alerts in case of forest fires. This can be reached at 0493 6223500 and 8547603486.

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As many as 160 front-line

## Telangana CM violated his oath of office, says Anand Sharma

KCR had called for a debate on writing a new Constitution

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao has 'violated' his oath of office by demanding the Constitution of India to be re-written, Deputy Leader of the Congress in the Rajya Sabha Anand Sharma said on Saturday.

In a series of tweets, Mr. Sharma said it was a trap laid by people who want to 'dismantle' Constitutional democracy.

"Strongly disagreeing with K. Chandrashekhar Rao, Chief Minister Telangana on his call for rewriting of constitution, which is unacceptable. This is a trap of

those who are plotting to dismantle India's constitutional democracy which guaranteed justiciable rights for all," Mr. Sharma said.

"PM, Union Ministers,



Anand Sharma

Chief Ministers and MPs have taken oath to uphold Constitution. @TelanganaCM has violated his oath of office, which is a matter of concern," he added.

On February 1, Mr. Rao had called for a debate on writing a new Constitution to prevent the Centre from "usurping" the power of the States.

"India needs to draft an entirely new Constitution which is in tune with the growing aspirations of the people and to ensure the progress of the country. A new Constitution is the only way to prevent the Centre from usurping the powers of the state," Mr. Rao had said.

Flow from T.N.  
and Karnataka low  
due to better rain  
in reserves



Greener pastures: A herd of elephants spotted on the Kerala-Karnataka border at Moolehole early this week.

for wild animals during summer owing to the easy availability of fodder and water throughout the year. Nevertheless, officials have made highly structured measures to ensure the availability of

The sanctuary is a haven

CM YK

FROM PAGE ONE

## Many seats redrawn in J&K delimitation draft

It has also earmarked nine seats for Schedule Tribes and seven seats for Schedule Castes.

"Our recommendations have been thrown to the wind. The Commission has gone by their own will and wish," said NC MP Nasain Masoodi. He said all changes advocated by the panel as per their second draft proposal "are totally unconstitutional".

"We had made the Commission understand how this exercise was unconstitutional. All the important

suggestions and recommendations have been completely ignored," Mr. Masoodi said.

### Ploy to disempower

A Peoples Democratic Party spokesman said the entire exercise of the delimitation is a part of major ploy to disempower people of J&K by division of secular and majority votes. "It is unfortunate that all the constitutional apparatus was being put into action to achieve this sinister design of BJP," the PDP said.

## 'Not surprised to be left out of campaigner list'



Navjot Singh Sidhu during a door-to-door election campaign for the upcoming Assembly elections, in Amritsar. ■ AFP

"I would like to ensure that the people who helped me win the Lok Sabha elections come to the Assembly as MLAs," the Congress leader said.

The Congress MP has also tweeted pictures of himself campaigning with the party's Mohali MLA, Balbir Singh Sidhu.

"I find it rather quixotic that I can be utilised for campaigning in Assam and West Bengal but the same yardstick doesn't apply to my home State, where I have spent 40 years of my political life," he added.

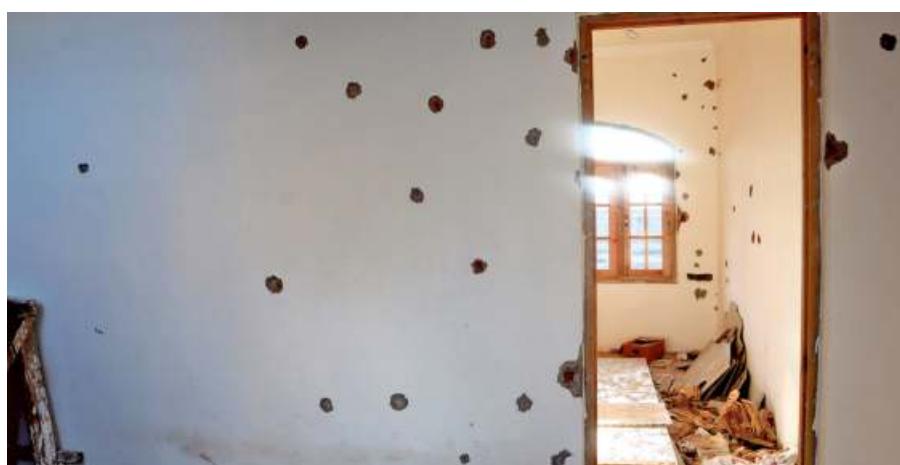
### Peculiar situation

With former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi all set to name the party's chief ministerial candidate during his February 6 visit to the State, Mr. Tewari responded to the question of whether naming a chief ministerial candidate would help the party's prospects.

"Ideally, in a Westminster model, the elected lawmakers should elect the leader. But this hybrid model of a presidential style of campaigning within the Westminster model has created a peculiar situation. Irrespective of the 'noise at the top' and the daily inane exchanges, we are doing our best on the ground to ensure the Congress wins," he said.

Talking of the public spats between Pradesh Congress Committee chief Navjot Singh Sidhu and Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi, the Congress MP said, "Insofar as the noise at the top is concerned, it is for the people who put them there to handle it."

Mr. Tewari, who was part of the 'G-23' group of 23 leaders that had written to party president Sonia Gandhi, been seeking internal reforms in the party, refused to elaborate on the "evolving situation".



Deadly spray: A bullet-ridden wall after two militants were gunned down in an encounter in the Zakura area of Jammu and Kashmir on Saturday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

## Two TRF militants killed in Srinagar encounter, say police

'One of them behind killing of a head constable on Jan. 29'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
SRINAGAR

Two militants of The Resistance Front (TRF) were killed during a pre-dawn anti-militancy operation on the outskirts of Srinagar on Saturday.

The slain terrorists were identified as Ikhlaq Ahmad Hajam from Kujer Frisal in Kulgam and Adil Nisar Dar from Malangpora in Pulwama. Both were linked to the Lashkar-e-Taiba's TRF outfit," Inspector General of Police Vijay Kumar said.

According to the police, Hajam had been active since June 2021, and Dar had been active since August 2021. "Both the killed terrorists were categorised terrorists and part of groups involved in several terror crime cases, including attacks on security forces. They were also instrumental in motivating gullible youth to join terror folds and in reviving the over-ground workers' network," the police said.

cordoned off. "During the search operation, the hiding terrorists fired indiscriminately upon the search party, which was retaliated effectively, leading to an encounter," the police said.

According to the police, Hajam had been active since June 2021, and Dar had been active since August 2021.

"Both the killed terrorists were categorised terrorists and part of groups involved in several terror crime cases, including attacks on security forces. They were also instrumental in motivating gullible youth to join terror folds and in reviving the over-ground workers' network," the police said.

### Arms recovered

"Incriminating material, arms and ammunition, including two pistols and five hand grenades, were recovered from the site of the encounter. All the recovered materials have been taken into case records for further investigation," the police said.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Vijay Kumar said he was wanted in three cases for "glorifying terrorism, spreading fake news and inciting general public for creating law and order situations."

## Kashmir scribe sent to 10-day police custody

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
SRINAGAR

Fahad Shah, 33, editor of the online news portal *The Kashmir Walla* was remanded in 10 days police custody by the judicial magistrate, Pulwama, on Saturday.

The judge has also asked the police to submit the grounds of detention.

Mr. Shah, who was arrested on Friday on sedition charges and under Sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, was presented before the Pulwama court on Saturday.

According to the statement issued by *The Kashmir Walla*, Mr. Shah was arrested after he was called to submit a statement in an on-going investigation launched after the reports on events at a gunfight in the south Kashmir district on January 29, 2020.

"Since January 31 when Shah was summoned for questioning, he has co-operated with the police investigation. Shah faces charges of sedition and the anti-terror law. If convicted, he faces life imprisonment," it said.

In the day, addressing reporters after a multi-party meeting chaired by the Chief Minister, Health Minister M. Subramanian said Mr. Appavu would decide the date for the special session. "We will discuss the objections raised by the Governor [to the earlier legislation] and adopt a Bill. We will send it to the Governor for him to forward it to the Union Government for Presidential assent," he said.

The Minister expressed the hope that even though the AIADMK boycotted Saturday's meeting, it would attend the special session. Mr. Subramanian said the

session would be held at the Legislative Assembly hall in Fort St George.

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## Committed to ending inequalities: PM

Modi unveils 216-foot-tall statue of Vaishnavite saint Sri Ramanujacharya near Hyderabad

N. RAHUL  
HYDERABAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday underscored the Union government's commitment to eliminating inequalities in the country while pursuing the path of "sab ka saath, sab ka vikas" (everyone's support, everyone's progress).

Speaking after dedicating a 216-foot-tall statue of Vaishnavite saint Sri Ramanujacharya at Muchintal, near here, on Saturday, Mr. Modi said social justice was embedded in all the Central welfare programmes such as Jan Dhan, free cooking gas connections to the poor, and the Swachh Bharat Mission.

Mr. Modi said India had a strong traditional base which drew strength from the preaching of great men like Sri Ramanujacharya. There was, however, no conflict between tradition and development. Even B.R. Ambedkar subscribed to the teachings of Sri Ramanujacharya, he said.

Mr. Modi said there was



With prayers: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Tridandi Chinna Jeer Swamy and Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan on unveiling the Sri Ramanujacharya statue. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

no social sanction for evils such as discrimination in this age. World over, the social order was "live and let live" with honour and dignity, he said.

Mr. Modi praised the great tradition of Telugu culture, which had been enhanced in recent times by the film industry here. The recognition of the Ramappa temple in the erstwhile Warangal dis-

trict as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO and of Pochampalli as a world tourism village by the World Tourism Organization was an extension of the rich cultural heritage left behind by the Satavahana and Kakatiya dynasties, the PM said.

Draped in a long yellow silk cloth running down over his shoulders and sporting a tilak on his forehead, Mr. Modi was conducted to a thatched shed amid chanting of the Vedas by *ruthviks*.

After he performed *purnahuti* of Viswakarma Ishtu, a ritual aimed at achieving one's goals, Mr. Modi was driven to the statue in a long convoy of vehicles.

At the base of the statue were ornately built replicas of Vaishnavite temples.

The Prime Minister was accompanied by Telangana Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan and Tridandi Chinna Jeer Swamy, who explained the significance of the arrangements on the way.

Mr. Modi pressed the button at the fall of darkness to illuminate the statue and mark its unveiling. The Jeer Swamy then explained how Mr. Modi had enhanced the reputation of the country in the comity of nations by agreeing to unveil the statue, adding that there could not have been a more qualified person than Mr. Modi to complete the formalities.

Union Minister of State for Tourism G. Kishan Reddy said the statue made the ashram here a spiritual centre. Mr. Modi's 50-minute speech was marked by glowing tributes to Sri Ramanujacharya and Alwan saints who had established Vaishnavite temples across the country. The people of India owed their value system to the preaching of equality by the great saints.

"We received information about posters put up by Left Wing Extremists of Madanpur Rampur area around 9.30 a.m. The journalist reached the spot before the security forces could go there. We suspect he might have stepped on the IED planted near the poster or the IED was triggered when he pulled the poster," said Sarvana Vivek M., Kalahandi SP.

The poster was reportedly put up by the KKB division of the CPI(Maoist).

## Journalist killed in IED blast in Odisha

STAFF REPORTER  
BHUBANESWAR

A journalist died in an improvised explosive device (IED) blast when he approached a poster allegedly put up by the CPI (Maoist) asking people to boycott elections to the Panchayati Raj institutions in Kalahandi district of Odisha on Saturday.

The incident took place around noon when Rohit Biswal, a journalist of an Odia daily, visited Damda Karlakhunta area.

"We received information about posters put up by Left Wing Extremists of Madanpur Rampur area around 9.30 a.m. The journalist reached the spot before the security forces could go there. We suspect he might have stepped on the IED planted near the poster or the IED was triggered when he pulled the poster," said Sarvana Vivek M., Kalahandi SP.

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## Lata Mangeshkar in critical condition

Singer is back on ventilator support

STAFF REPORTER  
MUMBAI

The health of veteran singer Lata Mangeshkar, who has been admitted in a Mumbai hospital for over a month now, deteriorated further on Saturday, her doctor said.

"Lata Mangeshkarji is in ICU and continues to be under aggressive therapy. Her condition is critical but she is tolerating and responding to the treatment," Dr. Pratit Samdani of Breach Candy Hospital, where Ms. Mangeshkar is admitted, said.

She is on ventilator support and her condition is critical.

On January 27, her official Twitter handle was updated with a statement that read, "Lata didi continues to be in ICU at Breach Candy hospital, Mumbai under treatment. Presently, she is showing signs of improvement but will remain under observation of the team of doctors headed by Dr Pratit Samdani."

Her health deteriorated on Saturday, after which she has been provided ventilator support again.



MNS Chief Raj Thackeray with doctor Pratit Samdani at the hospital.

## Welcoming spring



MBBS students of King George Medical University in Lucknow celebrating Basant Panchami on Saturday. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

## T.N. special Assembly session on Feb. 8 on NEET

THE HINDU BUREAU  
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Assembly Speaker M. Appavu on Saturday evening announced that a special session of the Legislative Assembly would be held at 10 a.m. on February 8 to discuss the return of the Bill against NEET by Governor R. Ravi.

He said the session would

be held at the Legislative Assembly hall in Fort St George.

Earlier in the day, addressing reporters after a multi-party meeting chaired by the Chief Minister, Health Minister M. Subramanian said Mr. Appavu would decide the date for the special session.

The Minister expressed the hope that even though the AIADMK boycotted Saturday's meeting, it would attend the special session.

Earlier, moving a resolution in the all-party meeting, he said NEET had not only affected poor and middle class students but also deprived the State governments of their right to admit students in medical colleges.

urban local body elections slated for February 19, would not come in the way of holding the Assembly session.

Earlier, moving a resolution in the all-party meeting, he said NEET had not only affected poor and middle class students but also deprived the State governments of their right to admit students in medical colleges.



# 'Govt. job' our only hope, say Bihar students in crammed coaching institutes

Patna's burgeoning training industry draws thousands of aspirants, many of whom joined the protests that triggered violence in the State last month

**AMARNATH TEWARY**

**PATNA**  
Stuck in a narrow, dingy by-lane in the Musallalpur area of Patna, hemmed in by ugly buildings, old structures with temporary walls and rickety corrugated roofs, is a windowless eight-by-eight feet room in a four-storey structure. Here, brothers Aryan and Aditya Raj have crammed their cots, study table, books, coaching material, clothes, gas stove, LPG cylinder and other sundry things they need to get by. Nearly 70 students preparing for different competitive examinations stay in this building. Each floor has one common toilet. About 80% of the residents cook themselves. Others have a tiffin delivery service. Hygiene is terrible. Diarrhoea is a common disease. Daylight barely reaches even the footpaths outside.

"This is where we dream of getting a government job, day and night. It's our only hope in being here," says Mr. Aryan Raj, who is preparing for an exam while his younger brother makes hundreds of coaching institutes dot these localities. Around them, traffic bleats, dimly lit hotels are infested with mosquitoes, and flies settle on roadside food carts.

"This is the hub of coaching institutes in Patna. Students from across Bihar pour in, chasing their

thick chapattis on the single burner gas stove set on the floor. Sons of a government school teacher, they have come to Patna from Jhajha of Jamui district nearly 300 km away, spending not less ₹10,000 every month on chasing their dream.

A walk through the dank maze of ever narrowing lanes and bylanes smelling of sewage and sweets in the Musallalpur, Chak Musallalpur, Bhikhna Pahari, Bazaar Samiti, Mahendru Ghat and Ashok Rajpath areas of Patna reveals thousands of students entering or leaving decrepit lodgings daily. They come from all corners of the State, even neighbouring States, seeking classes in particular subjects or with a particular teacher.

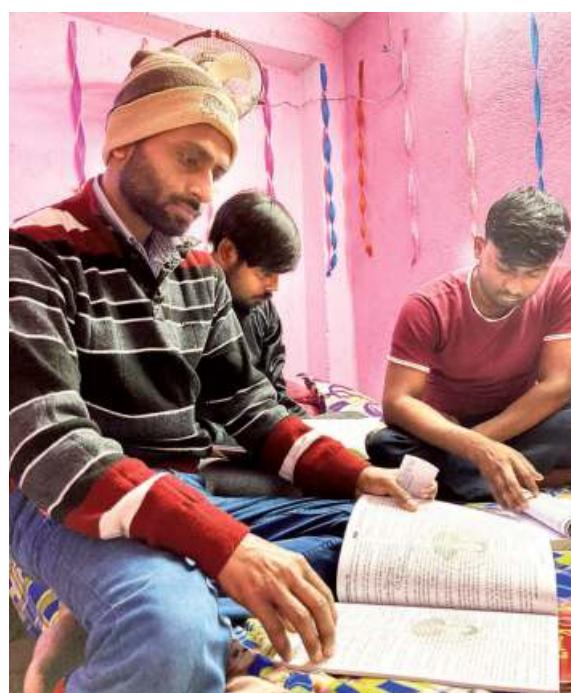
Hundreds of coaching institutes dot these localities. Around them, traffic bleats, dimly lit hotels are infested with mosquitoes, and flies settle on roadside food carts.

"Not even 10% of students are here these days due to the COVID-19 lockdown as we take classes online. In normal days, it's not possible to find a place to stand," says Pradeep Kumar

dreams of getting a government job, and they keep chasing it for years," says Devesh Manglam Dev, adding that he kept missing the grade by a mark or two and is now nearing the age limit to appear for them. "What to do? There is no other option for us except to stay in such hellish conditions and prepare for exams," he rues. "Over 90% of students like me come here from a rural background and live in such pitiable conditions for years to get a government job."

**Stable income**  
But why only a government job? "Because it's permanent, and it gives the stability of regular income to run our family," Mr. Dev says with a smile. His friends Ravi and Rajdip Kumar agree, signs of shyness in their eyes.

of Kautilya and the Pathway coaching institute. "At my coaching institute, a student gets support for every subject under one roof. They don't have to go anywhere else. That's why we are pop-



**Long haul:** Students preparing for government recruitment examinations in Patna. •AMARNATH TEWARY

billboards of other coaching institutes. They claim to prepare students for jobs in Group-D services and the Indian Railways, and help them pass the Staff Selection Committee and Bihar Public Service Commission exams. The shutters to the establishment are locked.

#### Teacher stars

Teacher Faisal Khan, popular among students as "Khan sir", is among the six teachers against whom the Patna district administration recently lodged a first information report (FIR) at the Patrakar Nagar police station for allegedly "inciting" students to protest, which rocked Bihar and neighbouring Uttar Pradesh for three days from January 25. Since then, Mr. Khan has been unreachable and incommunicado.

"Hopefully, we will start our classes from February 7, when the lockdown norms will be lifted. Khan sir is very much around and will take classes," the institute's manager, Rana Pratap Singh, said over the phone

of an office staff. "Khan sir is popular among students because of his style of teaching in local lingo with local references. He sounds like us and makes it easy," says Mr. Aditya Raj, who adds that students have to reach "Khan sir's" classes two hours beforehand to get a seat inside the hall. "Otherwise, one has to stand outside or sit in the next hall to hear his lecture on a screen," he says.

On the evening of January 25, thousands of students suddenly gathered at the Rajendra Nagar railway terminal in Patna and blocked the movement of trains while protesting against the results of the Railway Recruitment Board's non-technical popular categories exams for jobs as train assistants, guards, junior clerks, time-keepers and stationmasters.

For nearly 35,000 vacancies, nearly 1.25 crore candidates had applied. Of them, 60 lakh candidates appeared from all over India, with the remaining majority appearing from Bihar, where joblessness is a major issue among students.

"Do they [the government] really want us to fry and sell pakodas (fried snack) for a living," asks Niranjan Kumar, a history graduate from Patna University, as his friends share a laugh at a corner tea stall in the Chak Musallalpur area on a chilly winter day in early February.

Meanwhile, ever since the State government reserved 35% seats for women in the police services, a large number of girls too arrive in Patna from rural areas, living in similarly pitiable conditions to make the grade.

Braving winter winds early in the morning, hundreds of these girls undergo physical training on the road outside the Moin-ul-Haq Stadium in the Rajendra Nagar area of Patna "as the gates of the stadium are locked due to COVID-19 restrictions", says aspirant Anita Kumari, who is here all the way from Saharsa district.

"A government job is a permanent thing," she too says with a smile.

## NMC clarifies on fees for private medical colleges

50% of seats to have govt. fee structure

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
**NEW DELHI**

The fees for 50% of seats in private medical colleges and deemed universities should be at par with that of the government medical colleges in the same State or Union Territory, according to a decision of the National Medical Commission (NMC).

The benefit of this fee structure will be first made available to those candidates who have availed themselves of government quota seats, which will be limited to 50% of the sanctioned seats of the private medical college or deemed

universities, says an office memorandum of the NMC issued on February 3.

This decision is as per the National Medical Commission Act, 2019 which empowers the NMC to determine the fees for 50% of seats in private and medical institutions since they fall under the ambit of this law.

The office memorandum also says if government quota seats are less than 50% of the seats in a college, then this benefit will pass on to remaining candidates on the basis of merit. An expert committee had made the recommendations on the fees.

## One held in Gujarat after trafficking attempt fails

Row over payment, agents attack kin

**MAHESH LANGA**  
**AHMEDABAD**

Less than a month after bodies of four members of a family from Gujarat were found along the US-Canada border after they were reportedly stranded in a blizzard while trying to cross over illegally, another instance of human trafficking surfaced in Gandhinagar district on Saturday.

In the latest case, a Patel couple from Gandhinagar's Kalol was on its way

to the US with the help of agents who had promised them a safe passage for a fee of ₹1.1 crore.

The couple flew to Delhi from Ahmedabad but had to return after a disagreement with the agents over payment of the first instalment.

The agents later opened fire at the residence of the couple's relatives demanding immediate payment.

The Commerce Ministry and the Ministry of External Affairs that are coordinating India's position declined to comment on the negotiations, which official sources said are at a "critical and sensitive" stage in Geneva.

Officials said it seemed clear that the Western trade negotiators wanted to "limit" any benefits of the waiver only to African countries, and not pave the way for Indian manufacturers who,

with their large production capacities, would easily undercut Western competitors.

"Waiving of intellectual property rights will neither lead to increased production of vaccines or increased deployment nor practical solutions to fight the virus of COVID-19 vaccines since IP is not the barrier... waiving of intellectual property rights could impact patient safety by opening doors for counterfeit vaccines to enter the supply chain," said a statement issued in May 2021.

"Our topmost priority should be to address the supply side constraints, including IP barriers, to augment the manufacturing of vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics, essential for treatment, prevention and control of the ongoing pandemic."

Sources told *The Hindu*

## SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★

Some airlines have approached govt. for subsidy extension

**JAGRITI CHANDRA**  
**NEW DELHI**

Only one out of four routes under the low-cost flying scheme called UDAN have survived after completing the government's subsidy period of three years, according to information shared by the Ministry of Civil Aviation before a parliamentary panel.

"Of the 94 RCS-Udan routes that have completed 3-year tenure till 30.11.2021, only 22 routes are in operation," the Ministry told the

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture which tabled its report in Parliament last week.

Nearly five years ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the first flight under Ude Desh Ka Aam Naagrik (UDAN) scheme, also known as regional connectivity scheme (RCS).

The aim of the scheme was to take flying to the masses and improve air connectivity to tier-2 and -3 cities.

Under the scheme, airlines have to cap fares at ₹2,500 per seat per hour of flight for 50% of the seats in a plane for which they receive a viability gap funding (subsidy) from the government



**More connectivity:** The Mysuru airport is among those that have benefited from the UDAN scheme. •FILE PHOTO

along with some other benefits. The government expected that after the expiry of the three-year subsidy period, airlines would be able to sustain the routes without outside support.

The scheme document says the key guiding principle is to encourage "sustain-

tions. Of the 154 unconnected airports (including 14 water-aerodromes and 36 heliports) have been identified for operation of RCS flights) planned to be revived, 65 have resumed flights.

The government has also told the committee that 300 routes "have been affected due to poor demand on account of COVID-19 pandemic situation".

Officials of the Ministry of Civil Aviation say this means that the routes have seen demand plummet in view of which the government has allowed airlines to reduce their frequency to 60%, on the condition that the subsidy too will be cut proportionately.



**Keeping track:** A health worker taking swab samples for COVID-19 testing in New Delhi. •R.V. MOORTHY

## Fewer deaths than during last week

**THE HINDU DATA TEAM**  
**CHENNAI**

The country recorded 1,06,953 new COVID-19 cases on Saturday. The total number of infections has reached 4.21 crore, and the active cases have crossed the 13.4 lakh mark.

The figures are based on the State bulletins released until 10 p.m. on Saturday. However, Ladakh, Tripura, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, Jharkhand, and Lakshadweep had not yet released data for the day.

Kerala recorded 33,538 infections on Saturday, followed by Karnataka (12,009) and Maharashtra (11,394).

## COVID-19

for which were made available on Saturday). The test positivity rate (the number of cases detected per 100 tests) was 6.6%.

As of Saturday, 93.3% of the eligible population has been vaccinated with at least one dose, while 71.6% have received both doses. In the 15-17 age cohort, 74.1% of the population have received their first dose. Altogether, 95 crore first doses, 72.9 crore second doses, and 1.4 crore booster doses have been administered.

According to the order, the Hyderabad-based company is expected to provide the supplies in February.

Centre to buy 5 crore doses of Corbevax

The Centre has placed a purchase order with Biological E for five crore doses of Covid vaccine Corbevax each costing ₹45 excluding taxes, official sources said on Saturday.

The figures are based on the State bulletins released until 10 p.m. on Saturday. However, Ladakh, Tripura, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, Jharkhand, and Lakshadweep had not yet released data for the day.

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# Xi flexes diplomatic muscle at Olympics

He hosts two dozen leaders in a banquet

ANANTH KRISHNAN  
HONG KONG

Hosting more than two dozen visiting world leaders in a banquet in Beijing on Saturday, China's President Xi Jinping called for countries "to practice true multilateralism" and "uphold the international system centred on the United Nations".

Reading between the lines of the message, carefully couched in diplomatic language, was a thinly veiled criticism of the U.S., which China has accused, particularly in the wake of recently deteriorating relations, of practicing "hegemony" and undermining the UN-centred order. That message was conveyed recently in more explicit terms by the country's Foreign Minister Wang



**Forging ties:** Chinese President Xi Jinping, right, with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Beijing on Saturday. ■ AP

Yi, who in his end-of-year review of China's foreign policy contrasted Mr. Xi "pointing out unequivocally that there is but one international order, that is the international system with the UN at its core" with "a certain country's interference in the internal affairs of other countries in the name of democracy and human rights, and the fabrication of false narratives of democra-

The list of who wasn't present was just as revealing. Ahead of the games, the U.S., U.K., Australia, Japan and Canada were among countries that announced a "diplomatic boycott" – their athletes are participating – citing China's human rights violations in Xinjiang.

India initially did not join the boycott and in November expressed support for the Games along with Russia following a meeting of the foreign ministers of Russia, India and China. That changed on Thursday when India said it would not send an official to attend the opening ceremony to protest China's decision to select a PLA regiment commander involved in the June 15, 2020 Galwan Valley clash as one of the Olympic torchbearers.

While China has hit out at the U.S. for "politicising" the Games, the event has at the same time offered for Beijing

## Additional U.S. troops arrive in Poland

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WARSAW

U.S. soldiers arrived in Poland on Saturday as part of NATO moves to send in extra troops over fears that Russia could invade Ukraine, a Polish army spokesman told AFP.

"The first batch has arrived at the airport in Jasionka" in southwestern Poland, Major Przemyslaw Lipczynski said, adding that the bulk of a contingent of 1,700 U.S. soldiers would come "soon". He said the soldiers who arrived on Saturday were from the 82nd Division.

Washington said last week it would send about 3,000 additional troops to eastern Europe.



Joe Biden

them, in the name of promoting safety and non-proliferation.

The civilian programme includes Iran's increasing stockpiles of enriched uranium.

"Absent this sanctions waiver, detailed technical

discussions with third parties regarding disposition of stockpiles and other activities of nonproliferation value cannot take place," the official said, insisting on anonymity.

The Vienna talks, which include Iran, the United States, Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia, are at a key stage where the parties have to make "critical political decisions," a senior U.S. official said last week.

"The technical discussions facilitated by the waiver are necessary in the final weeks of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) talks," the State Department official said on Friday.

The U.S. official insisted

an important diplomatic platform, as Saturday's banquet underlined, after two years of a pause in its diplomatic activity, which was limited to virtual engagements. Mr. Xi has not left China since mid-January 2020, when he visited Myanmar, and there have been no major incoming foreign visits until the Olympics this month. The Chinese state media highlighted that Mr. Putin was the first foreign leader to confirm his attendance at the Games, and the growing closeness in China-Russia ties has been in focus this week. On Friday, Mr. Xi and Mr. Putin in a lengthy joint statement that followed talks outlined a common position on a range of issues from human rights to attacking NATO's "expansionism" in Europe and America's Indo-Pacific strategy in Asia for having a "negative impact" on the region.

But the destination of choice now for her son Aaron, who is six, is the ski slopes in Beijing's suburbs, one of dozens that have sprouted in the past five years as China prepared for the Winter Olympic Games, which began on Friday.

When Beijing won the bid in 2015, the Chinese government saw both a pride project – securing the distinction of becoming the first city to host both the summer and winter games – and a massive sporting and commercial opportunity.

China has never been a winter sport nation. In the past six years, however, there has been a more than 300% increase in the number of skating rinks. The country has in this time also added more than 250 new ski resorts, with the total number now crossing 800.

Ms. Huang said skiing was previously the preserve of the rich, given the few options in China and the preference of the wealthy to usually head to Europe. That has now changed.

After companies such as the firm where she works began organising annual retreats in ski – and not the usual beach – resorts, she enrolled her child in skiing winter camps. "A day on the slopes," she said, "is now not much more than buying two tickets to see the Forbidden City", costing a little over 100 Yuan (around ₹1,000) if you have your own equipment.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, as China shut its doors to the world – which are still yet to open two years later with stringent travel restrictions – the usual huge outflow of international tourism was instead directed inwards. Among the service industries that capitalised the most, according to tourism data, were ski resorts, with more than 300 million trips in 2021-22 related to winter sports.

China's cold northeast, which receives plenty of snowfall, is home to many of the resorts. But closer to the arid capital, artificial snow is being used in towns like Chongli, which is hosting many of the events this month. Unlike for recreational activities which do not require heavy snowfall, there are strict standards and density requirements for the Olympics. Man-made snow had to be used in the previous two games in South Korea and Russia as well.

That has triggered a debate about the environmental impact, with reports estimating that 49 million gallons of water will be used in a part of the country that suffers from water shortages.

Organisers point out that is only a small fraction of daily water consumption in Beijing, accounting for less than 2% of the usage in Yanqing district, which is

# In China, Olympics fuels winter sports boom

A growing number of Chinese are taking to the slopes

ANANTH KRISHNAN  
HONG KONG

Arona Huang, like most Chinese parents, had football and tennis lessons on the weekend schedule for her child.



**Fun avenues:** Rebecca Luo, left, with skiers on the slopes near Beijing. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

hosting events. In Chongli, the water demand for the games will account for a higher 10% of the normal usage. To mitigate that consumption, conduits have been built in Yanqing to direct the snowmelt to reservoirs, along with a new sewage treatment plant. That is less of a problem in the country's northeast, in provinces like Jilin, or in Xinjiang in the far west, which is also on a resort-building spree, that receive heavy snow.

## Novelty and thrills

Part of the attraction for a new generation of winter sports enthusiasts is both the novelty of a new experience and the thrills involved, even if the expenses are higher, albeit decreasing, with the surfeit of new venues. "You have to overcome strong fear when pushing yourself to go down steeper slopes," said Rebecca Luo, a national certified ski instructor. "But if you do, you find fulfillment."

She said this winter was the busiest by far of the past five seasons she has seen on the country's slopes. But even after the glare of the Olympics subsides, skiers expect the crowds aren't likely to thin. At least, that is what China's latest booming industry is betting on.

# Junta 'torch' houses in Myanmar

Villagers, anti-coup fighters accuse military of burning down 800 homes

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BANGKOK

Myanmar villagers and anti-coup fighters have accused troops of burning hundreds of homes in the country's restive northwest, as the junta seeks to crush resistance to its rule.

Mass protests against last year's coup have been met with a brutal military crackdown, and violence has flared across Myanmar as civilians form "people's defence forces" (PDF) to oppose the junta.

A woman from Bin village in the Sagaing region, which has seen recent clashes, said troops had arrived in the early hours of Monday.

"They shelled artillery and fired guns before coming in," she said on Friday, adding that the sound had sent villagers fleeing.



**Mangled remains:** Burnt buildings in Mingin Township where more than 105 structures were destroyed. ■ AFP

been razed in the two villages, and images obtained by AFP purporting to be of Bin village showed the remains of dozens of burnt-out buildings.

AFP could not independently verify the reports from the remote region.

### Livelihood affected

The fires consumed properties, motorbikes and carts, said another local who was helping to coordinate aid for those displaced from Inn Ma Hte. "For them, it will be difficult to regain their livelihoods," he said, requesting anonymity.

State-run TV ran a report on Thursday accusing PDF fighters of starting the fires, and published images it claimed showed burnt-out buildings destroyed by "terrorists".

Local media also reported that hundreds of homes had

**KALOJI NARAYANA RAO UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES TELANGANA STATE**  
NOTIFICATION FOR MBBS/BDS ADMISSIONS 2021-22  
Application forms online are invited from candidates qualified in NEET - UG - 2021 for admission into MBBS/BDS courses 2021-22 for Management Quota seats in private colleges affiliated to KNRUHS, Warangal from 06-02-2022 to 13-02-2022  
For detailed Notification and Prospectus refer to KNRUHS website : [www.knruhs.telangana.gov.in](http://www.knruhs.telangana.gov.in)  
DPR R.O.No. 20954-PP/CL/ADVT/1/2021-22 Dt. 05.02.2022  
**REGISTRAR**

**GREAT VISHAKHAPATNAM MUNICIPAL CORPORATION**  
Tender Notice No. 01/2021-22/GVMC/SE(P-II)/EE/PD-IV/DB/DT:03-02-2022 (2nd call)  
01. Number of Works : 05 (Five)  
02. Work of Values (ECV) : Rs.785.35 Lakhs  
03. Down Loading Starting Date : 04-02-2022 @ 5.00 PM  
04. Down Loading End Date : 21-02-2022 @ 3.00 PM  
05. Last date for Submission of Bid : 21-02-2022 @ 5.00 PM  
Further details at <http://www.approcurement.gov.in>  
O/o the Executive Engineer (PD-IV) Superintending Engineer (Projects Division -III), GVMC  
Division

**PURABI DAIRY**  
West Assam Milk Producers' Cooperative Union Ltd. (WAMUL)  
World Bank Financed Assam Agribusiness and Rural Transformation Project (APART)  
Ref No. MD/PC/APART/E-Tender/2021-22/028 Dated: 06 February 2022  
**E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE**  
The West Assam Milk Producers' Cooperative Union Limited (WAMUL) is an implementing agency of World Bank Financed (APART) Project and now intends to purchase the following items from the eligible bidder as mentioned below:  

S.I.	Category	Date of publishing tender	Last date of submission of Quotations
1	40 litre S.S Milk Cans	08-02-2022	10-03-2022
2	50 Litre LN Containers	09-02-2022	11-03-2022
3	Chest-Cooler & Visi-Cooler of various capacity	10-02-2022	12-03-2022
4	Bulk Milk Coolers (3KL & 5KL)	12-02-2022	14-03-2022

The details of the E-tender will be published and available at [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in) as mentioned above. If any corrigendum will be issued, it will be published in [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in) on or before last date and timing for submission of bid. No separate notification for publication of corrigendum or extension of last date of submission of bid will be made through Newspaper advertisement.  
Sd/- Managing Director



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M ND-NDE

## SNAPSHOTS



## Choking oceans

A new study that uses climate models to predict how the reduction of dissolved oxygen in water will take place finds that this process began in regions of the ocean that support marine life around 2021. The study, published in *Geophysical Research Letters*, predicts that this deoxygenation would begin affecting all parts of the ocean by 2080. This can impact marine ecosystems worldwide.



## Moon magic

Scientists conjecture that the size of our Moon may play a vital role in making the Earth what it is. Added to this, researchers from Rochester University in the U.S. estimate that planets with masses more than six times that of the Earth are incapable of having such a large moon. This constraint can guide astronomers to study exomoons to spot Earth-like bodies.

## Antarctic microbes may help in plastic clean-up

REUTERS

A team of Argentine scientists is using microorganisms native to Antarctica to explore the idea of cleaning up pollution from fuels and, potentially, plastics in the pristine expanses of the white continent.

The tiny microbes munch through the waste, creating a naturally occurring cleaning system for pollution caused by diesel that is used as a source of electricity and heat for research bases in the frozen Antarctic.

The continent is protected by a 1961 Madrid Protocol that stipulates it must be kept in a pristine state.

The research on how the microbes could help with plastic waste could have potential for wider environmental issues.

"This work uses the potential of native microorganisms - bacteria and fungi that inhabit the Antarctic soil, even when it is contaminated," said Dr. Lucas Ruiberto, a biochemist.

"What for us is a contaminant, for them can be food."

Ruberto said that the team helped the microbes

## IGIB develops future-proof primers, kits for RT-PCR test

The pool of primers has been developed to target regions of the virus which are unlikely to undergo mutations

R. PRASAD

Using its expertise in genome sequencing and analysis pipeline of genome sequence data, the Delhi-based CSIR lab Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB) has successfully developed a unique pool of primers and kits to be used in RT-PCR testing of SARS-CoV-2 virus.

The most distinguishing aspect of the work carried by a team led by Dr. Sridhar Sivasubbu and Dr. Vinod Scaria at IGIB was that developing primers that will not be affected by mutations seen in SARS-CoV-2 variants. This may allow the primers to detect any new SARS-CoV-2 variants that might emerge immediately of the novel mutations that the variants might have. The primers developed in a way future-proofs the ability to detect without fail any new SARS-CoV-2 variants that may emerge.

## Many mutations

The Omicron variant, for instance, has 32 mutations in the spike protein alone. None of these mutations were seen in other variants that emerged earlier – the Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta. Each new variant that emerges develops a unique set of

mutations that makes it more transmissible and/or causes severe disease.

RT-PCR tests currently available contain primers for two or more genes. The gene targets selected could be a combination of S gene, N gene and E gene.

Based on over 40,000 high-quality SARS-CoV-2 virus genome sequence data available in the public domain including a significant large number of genome sequences from India, Dr. Sivasubbu's team, which includes two PhD students – Paras Sehgal and Gyan Ranjan, was able to identify nearly 80,000 unique variants. The high number of variants seen is because SARS-CoV-2 is a rapidly mutating virus and tends to collect mutations during infection. The SARS-CoV-2 is naturally endowed to collect about one mutation every 10-14 days.

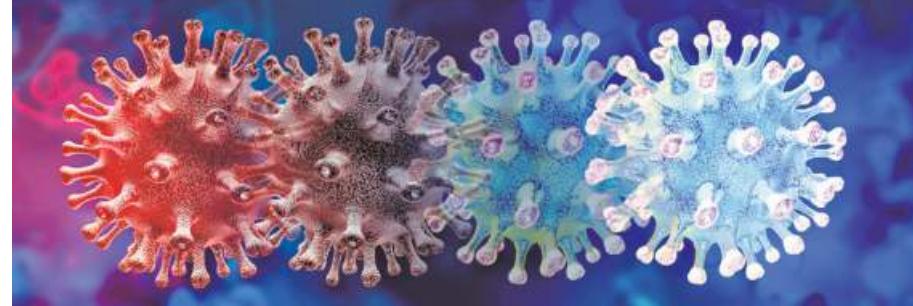
"Though the SARS-CoV-2 is a rapidly mutating virus, we found that not all regions of the virus were accumulating mutations at the same rate. There are some regions of the virus which collect mutations at a fast rate while some other regions tend to collect mutations at a slow rate," says Dr. Sivasubbu.

"We at IGIB already had an

## A robust test against mutations

The CSIR Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology at Delhi has developed a unique pool of primers and kits to be used in RT-PCR testing of SARS-CoV-2 virus

- Currently available RT-PCR tests contain primers for two or more genes
- Some regions of the virus collect mutations at a faster rate than others
- Based on the knowledge of the conserved regions in the virus, the team developed a pool of primers that would be future-proof
- The technology has been transferred to Siemens Healthcare and the product tested and approved by ICMR and launched on 25 January this year



algorithm that allowed us to look at the conserved regions that were not prone to accumulating mutations.. This allowed us to analyse which regions of the virus are conserved and which were not," says Dr. Sivasubbu.

Conserved region of a virus contains genes which are very essential and hence either do not undergo any mutations or such mutations

happen rarely.

In parallel, the IGIB researchers had also collected information about primers used in commercial and non-commercial tests across the world. "Once we had the mutation map of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, and by using the information gathered by studying the primers used across the world, we found that a majority of primers designed and used were overlapping

with the regions of the virus collecting significant number of mutations," he says.

## Strategic problem

"The primers widely in use have a small strategic problem. We realised that at some point in the future, the existing primers used in RT-PCR test kits for detecting SARS-CoV-2 virus would not be able to bind properly to the genome leading to errors

neous results," Dr. Sivasubbu says. The primers were tested to detect all the SARS-CoV-2 variants – the Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta and Omicron. Based on the knowledge of the conserved regions in the virus, the team developed a pool of primers that would be future-proof. Each RT-PCR test uses at least two gene targets and each gene target requires a pair of primers. The pool of primers developed by IGIB will allow them to be used in various combinations.

"The pool of primers has been developed to target regions of the virus which are unlikely to undergo mutations. So the primers developed for RT-PCR tests will perform very well when new variants emerge," says Dr. Anurag Agrawal, Director of IGIB.

The development of the mutation map of SARS-CoV-2 virus and the pool of primers were done in collaboration with Siemens Healthcare Private Limited. The technology has been transferred to the company and the product tested and approved by ICMR and launched on January 25 this year.

Siemens will be manufacturing the tests (IMDX SARS-CoV-2 Multiplex ORF1ab/N

## RT-PCR: Cycle threshold value does not hold clinical relevance

A survey of 700 labs in the U.S. found that the Ct values could vary by up to 12 cycles for the same target gene across labs

LANCELOT PINTO



**How it works:** When the processed sample is placed in an RT-PCR machine, the viral genetic material is amplified. Two copies of genetic material become four, four become eight in the next cycle, and so on. ■ GETTY IMAGES

## The Ct value is

dynamical and can evolve rapidly. A low Ct value at the time of diagnosis does not mean that it will stay low the next day (as the body's immunity kicks in)

pies. This is unscientific for several reasons.

## Dynamic measure

Firstly, the Ct value is a dynamic measure and can evolve rapidly. A low Ct value at the time of diagnosis does not mean that it will stay low the next day (as the body's immunity kicks in). Similarly, a swab done very early in the infection may reveal a high Ct value, which if repeated a day or two later, may reveal a lower Ct value. It is possible for this reason that Ct values have not been convincingly correlated with disease severity, and serve no role in predicting the trajectory for a patient (yet, this is commonly used as an argument to prescribe tests and medicines).

Secondly, several technical and logistical factors influence the value: the way specimens are collected (a quick superficial

swab versus an aggressive swab), the type of specimen (nasal versus pharyngeal versus nasopharyngeal), the medium in which the swab is transported, the time lag between collection of the specimen and processing. All of this can influence the quantum of viral genetic material present, and subsequently, the Ct value. In a letter published in *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, the College of American Pathologists (CAP) Microbiology Committee reports how a survey of 700 laboratories in the U.S. using standardised proficiency testing material from the same batch found a variability in Ct values by 14 cycles. Even within the same test at the same lab the Ct values could vary by 3 cycles for different target genes, and up to 12 cycles for the same target gene across labs.

The letter reiterated the fact that these RT-PCR assays were not approved to be used quantitatively, but as a positive/negative test.

**The caveats**  
Does the Ct value have any real value at all? Studies suggest that when used early in

the disease, it may correlate with transmissibility at the time of testing. This, again, needs to be viewed with the caveats of the dynamic nature of the value, and the unfeasibility of serial testing, in addition to the technical variability alluded to above. When used to decide when a person can come out of isolation in high-risk settings such as hospitals, the Ct value may be a guide in older patients, those who are immunocompromised and those who have severe disease, all of which are patient groups in whom prolonged viral shedding has been reported.

The knowledge of the Ct value offers no insight to the treating clinician or the patient, and amounts to "noise" without a meaningful clinical "signal". It causes panic, and the value is being used to drive irrational testing and treatment measures. Labs should consider not reporting Ct values on a routine basis.

(Lancelot Pinto is a Consultant Respiriologist at P.D. Hinduja National Hospital and Medical Research Centre, Mumbai)

## A quantum solution to a 243-year-old maths problem

The 36 officers puzzle was first posed by Swiss mathematician Leonhard Euler in 1779

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

A famous problem that has perplexed mathematicians since 1779 has been settled, but with a quantum twist, by a collaboration of six Indian and Polish researchers, two of whom are from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras. The researchers have solved using matrix methods, the quantum equivalent of the classical problem. This could potentially be used in quantum secret sharing protocols – which will be useful when quantum computers come into play; parallel teleportation, which is a way to transferring information across distances; and even perhaps may come in useful in solving the problem of quantum gravity.

## Long-lived puzzles

Numerical puzzles often appear simple when phrased but can occupy mathematicians for hundreds of years. The 36 officers puzzle was first posed by Swiss mathematician Leonhard Euler. The puzzle can be described as follows:

There are six regiments,

each containing six officers of six different ranks. The question is, can you place the 36 officers in a square arrangement with six rows and six columns such that no row or column repeats an officer's rank or regiment?

This puzzle was guessed to be unsolvable by Euler in 1779 and proven to be so by the French amateur mathematician G. Tarry in 1901.

Squares such as this are often encountered in Sudoku and other magic squares of size n. Euler's 36 officers problem (for which n=6) and generalisations of it to other values of n = 2, 3, etc are examples of Orthogonal Latin Squares (OLS). In this case, OLS solutions exist for all values of n except 2 and 6.

## A quantum solution

Now Tarry had explicitly shown that n = 6 (36 officers puzzle) has no solution. But suppose the officers were not classical objects but were quantum entities, would this still be true? This is what physicists who joined the group of problem solvers started asking.

Classically, this problem cannot be solved, but what if



the officers were quantum entities? Here, it is necessary to understand "quantum entanglement". To get an idea, take 2 boxes, one in Chennai and other in Shopian, one containing a red (R) cube and other a blue (B) one. We think of the state as RB or BR depending on if the Chennai box contains a red or blue cube. A quantum entangled state, is a weird "superposition" of these two which physicists represent by RB+BR. The strange thing about this state is that opening the Chennai box can reveal it to contain a blue or red cube and the nature of entanglement is to ensure that the other distant box contains a cube of the opposite colour. Repeating the experiment with an identical set of boxes, can result in the reverse colours immediately. This leads to what is popularly known as "spooky action at a distance" and maximal entanglement leads to perfect correlation.

Another famous example is that of Schrödinger's cat.

## Officers entangled

In the case of quantum offic-

ers, the state may similarly exist in a superposition of officer states. One of the things the researchers have shown is that there is a connection between the classical OLS solutions, whenever it exists, and the nature of the quantum state associated with it.

It can be used to construct what are called Absolutely Maximally Entangled (AME) states. These are states in which any subset of the entities is maximally correlated with the others in the sense of the red and blue cubes above.

In the case Euler's problem, starting from the quantum equivalent of what is nearly an OLS solution, the researchers run an algorithm that tunes it and tries to approach the perfect AME state which will be the quantum OLS in the forbidden dimension n=6. "Given that we were studying a 36-dimensional matrix, which contained 1,296 entries, it was

like looking for a needle in a haystack," says Arul Lakshminarayanan from IIT Madras, who led the study along with Karol Zyczkowski from Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland.

"When we ran the algorithm, we realized that we should not start from the neighbourhood of the approximate solution but somewhat away from it," says Suhail Ahmad Rather, who is a PhD student in his fourth year at IIT Madras and one of the first authors of the paper which has been accepted for publication in *Physical Review Letters*. "There is an art involved in it," says Prof. Lakshminarayanan.

An amusing twist to the story comes in when you consider the three amplitudes a, b and c, that made up the solution. The three form a Pythagorean triad, that is,  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ . Further the ratio b/a was the golden mean (approximately equal to 1.618) which is seen in many natural and constructed patterns. Is there then something more to the story? Is this, as Prof. Lakshminarayanan feels, the tip of an iceberg?



## Question Corner

## Earliest solar storm

## What is the earliest record of a solar storm?

Through analysis of ice cores from Greenland and Antarctica, a research team has found evidence of an extreme solar storm that occurred about 9,200 years ago. What puzzles the researchers is that the storm took place during one of the sun's more quiet phases – during which it is generally believed our planet is less exposed to such events. It is currently believed that solar storms are more likely during the so-called sunspot cycle. Research now shows (*Nature Communications*) that this may not always be the case for very large storms.

"We have studied drill cores from Greenland and Antarctica, and

discovered traces of a massive solar storm that hit Earth during one of the Sun's passive phases about 9,200 years ago," Raimund Muscheler, geology researcher at Lund University says in a press release.

The researchers scoured the drill cores for peaks of the radioactive isotopes beryllium-10 and chlorine-36. These are produced by high-energy cosmic particles that reach Earth, and can be preserved in ice and sediment. Cosmogenic radionuclides, such as carbon-14, beryllium-10 and chlorine-36, are produced within the Earth's atmosphere as a result of the interactions of galactic cosmic rays (GCR) with its constituents and are modulated by the solar and the Earth's magnetic fields. The enhanced flux of relatively lower energy particles during a solar energetic particle event (SEP) can trigger additional production of cosmogenic radionuclides, leaving an imprint in environmental archives.

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



Still unknown: U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaking on the 'Havana Syndrome.' ■ AP

## Mystery illness

What is the 'Havana Syndrome' that has afflicted many American diplomats around the world?

SIRIRAM LAKSHMAN

**The story so far:** A recent U.S. intelligence report says that 'Havana Syndrome' – a collection of symptoms and related brain injuries, reported by U.S. officials, particularly diplomats in embassies – could be caused by pulsed electromagnetic energy or close-range ultrasound. These findings are somewhat different in tone from a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report from January, which, in a majority of cases, suggested other causes for the phenomena, such as underlying medical conditions.

What is it?

■ 'Havana Syndrome' is a colloquial name given to a set of symptoms such as dizziness, hearing loss, headaches, vertigo, nausea, memory loss and possible brain injuries first reported by 16 U.S. Embassy staff and their family members in Havana, Cuba, in 2016-17. There have been other instances of the phenomenon, which has mostly impacted U.S. officials. A staffer traveling in India with CIA Director Bill Burns complained of 'Havana Syndrome' like symptoms last September. Officials were reportedly very concerned, as per reports, that an adversary could have obtained a confidential CIA travel itinerary. In August, Vice President Kamala Harris's arrival in Vietnam was delayed after reports of an 'anomalous health incident' or AHI, in Hanoi. Other countries from which American officials have reported AHIs include Colombia, Russia, China and Uzbekistan. Cases ascribed to the 'Havana Syndrome' have also been reported from within the U.S.

What did the latest investigation find?

■ A panel, constituted by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the CIA, said on Wednesday that some of the 'Havana Syndrome' cases could have been caused by pulsed electromagnetic energy in the radio frequency. The results of the investigation did not point to who may have been behind the phenomenon, nor commented on their motivations.

A partially redacted report summary finds that the symptoms of AHI are "genuine and compelling." Some individuals were affected in the same space, and they showed temporary elevations in biomarker levels that are linked to cellular injury. Significantly, the investigation found that a subset of the AHIs could have been caused by external stimuli and could not be explained by known medical and environmental conditions. Psychosocial factors alone do not explain the core characteristics, the report finds, although they may cause other incidents or contribute to long-term

effects. These other incidents could occur via hypervigilance or reactions to stress especially among individuals who are security-oriented. The investigation identified four "core characteristics" that describe all AHIs. First, a hearing impact. Second, the existence of other almost simultaneous symptoms such as a loss of balance or vertigo. Third, a "strong sense of locality or directionality." Fourth, the absence of other conditions, medical or environmental, that could have caused these symptoms. The core characteristics could plausibly be explained by pulsed electromagnetic energy, possibly sent using nonstandard antennas and techniques, from as far as "tens of hundreds of metres", including through building materials, the report says. Ultrasound, from a nearby source, could also explain the AHIs, the panel finds, as it rules out biological and chemical agents, ionising radiation, bulk-heating from electromagnetic energy, and sound of various frequencies as "implausible explanations."

Are the latest results consistent with earlier findings?

■ The interim results of a CIA investigation into 'Havana Syndrome' were reported by the American press in January. The investigation concluded, for the time being at least, that it was unlikely that a foreign power was attempting, in a sustained manner, to attack U.S. officials and diplomats. The majority of the cases were thought to be caused by medical conditions – including undiagnosed bacterial infections and brain tumours, the Associated Press reported. Only in a "few dozen" cases was the jury still out and foreign interference had not been ruled out in these instances. Lawmakers criticised the CIA for releasing an interim report that was inconclusive. While the panel's investigation does not contradict the CIA's findings, the thrust of it is different, pointing to the plausible involvement of an external frequency source and thereby leaving open the possibility that an actor – such as a country adversarial to the U.S. – might be behind some of the cases.

What happens next?

■ The publicly available part of the recommendations of the latest study seem to suggest a focus on collecting more data and identifying AHIs more clearly, such as by developing more sensitive and specific tests for biomarkers and rolling out more objective clinical measurements for the incidents. Another recommendation is communicating better to U.S. government employees in order to reduce the impacts of psychosocial factors and neurological disorders, irrespective of their causes. U.S. government bodies, such as the CIA and the State Department, also continue to investigate the source of these possible attacks.

## Crypto riddle: tax first, recognition later?

What is the debate around the legality of cryptocurrencies after the announcement of a 30% tax?

SIRIRAM Srinivasan

**The story so far:** In her Budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman introduced a 30% tax on income earned from transfer of virtual digital assets. The Government is yet to recognise cryptocurrencies, including Bitcoin and Ethereum, but this ambiguity has not stopped people from trading in digital assets in large numbers, which apparently forced the Government's hand in announcing a tax on such transactions. At a press conference after presenting the Budget, Ms. Sitharaman said consultation is underway with stakeholders on digital assets, adding that there is no clarity yet on how the Government of India will regulate cryptocurrencies.

What would be the tax component for income from virtual digital assets?

■ The Budget has proposed a 30% tax on income from the "transfer of any virtual digital asset." Secondly, except for the cost of acquisition, no deduction will be allowed. Thirdly, losses from such transfers cannot be set off against any income. Fourthly, tax will be deducted at source at the rate of 1%, so as to capture transaction details, thus initiating a tax deducted at source (TDS) mechanism.

What has been India's approach to cryptocurrencies?

■ The Government and the Reserve Bank of India have in the past cautioned people against considering cryptocurrencies as legal tender. The fact that transactions using such currencies can easily bypass the tax net, and therefore be used for illicit transactions, have been bothering governments across the world.

The Reserve Bank of India, in 2018, directed banks not to provide services to the cryptocurrency ecosystem. The Supreme Court set this aside, calling the move disproportionate, given that such currencies were not banned in the country. A law on cryptocurrencies, which was supposed to have been brought in last year, is yet to see the light of day. The broad expectation about the Government's approach to this was set by a 2019 report by an inter-ministerial committee which recommended a ban on all cryptocurrencies.



There has been a phenomenal increase in transactions in virtual digital assets, said Nirmala Sitharaman, and the magnitude and frequency of these transactions have made it imperative to provide for a specific tax regime.

How has the cryptocurrency ecosystem read this move?

■ All major players have welcomed it. They have understood it as a move that provides clarity and "mainstreams" their industry. Nischal Shetty, the CEO of cryptocurrency exchange WazirX, tweeted that the Government has legitimised the industry. He wrote: "This doubles down on the fact that virtual digital assets are legal in India."

The industry is now ready to lobby with the Government to bring down the tax on par with other asset classes.

Does this mean that cryptocurrencies are legal?

■ Statements by ministers and bureaucrats after the

Budget seem to suggest that the legality of cryptocurrencies in the country is still a grey area, never mind the tax.

In an interview with Bloomberg TV, Finance Secretary T.V. Somanathan said: "They are in a grey area. It's not illegal to buy and sell crypto."

He further said, "We have now put in a taxation framework that treats crypto assets the same way we treat winnings from horse races, or from bets and other speculative transactions."

Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar told NDTV a day after the Budget, "Yesterday's Budget has given a direct answer – crypto won't be banned."

However, Ms. Sitharaman, in an interview with Times Now, seemed to suggest that the question on the ban hasn't been decided one way or another. She also seemed to divorce the taxability issue from the legitimacy issue.

She said, "There is no way anything can stop a sovereign Government from taxing an activity. Banning or not banning will come subsequently when the consultations give me inputs. But would you say till then I do not even tax the huge profits being transacted? I will. Legitimate or not legitimate is a different question, taxing is completely my prerogative."

In recent days, experts have pointed out that the legal position is in sync with this thought process.

For instance, the verdict in the *Commissioner of Income Tax v. Piara Singh* in 1980 quoted from the judgment in the *Commissioner of Income Tax, Gujarat v. SC Kothari*, in which the court had observed that "if the business is illegal, neither the profits earned nor the losses incurred would be enforceable in law. But, that does not take the profits out of the taxing statute."

## Why are India's imports from China rising?

If trade is booming, what is the state of other aspects of economic relations, including investments?

ANANTH KRISHNAN

**The story so far:** While many countries, including India, have spoken of the need to reduce reliance on China particularly in the wake of COVID-19 and disruption to supply chains, trade figures released last month showed imports have only continued to surge in 2021, rebounding after a fall in trade in 2020 because of the pandemic. The rising trade comes amid continuing tensions with China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), where disengagement negotiations have been slow moving. The rising trade does not, however, suggest a return to normalcy in relations. Other areas, such as investment, remain in a deep freeze amid the continuing chill in bilateral relations.

What did India import from China in 2021?

■ India's trade with China in 2021 reached \$125.6 billion, according to figures released in January by China's General Administration of Customs (GAC). This was the first time that trade crossed the \$100 billion mark. India's imports from China accounted for \$97.5 billion, while exports reached \$28.1 billion, both records. Compared to 2019 – trade declined substantially in 2020 because of the pandemic, which exaggerates the year-on-year increase – imports are up 30%. Exports to China, meanwhile, are up by as much as 56%. The trade deficit, a long-term source of concern for India, is up by 22% since 2019, having declined last year.

What is driving India's imports?

■ India's biggest imports are electrical and mechanical machinery, a range of chemicals that are intermediate im-



ports used by industries, active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), auto components, and since 2020, a large amount of medical supplies. According to figures available with India's Ministry of Commerce, all those key imports continued to rise in 2021. The total value of the top 100 import categories – each of which accounts for more than \$100 million in imports – was up by \$16 billion in the last year, reaching \$45 billion. The top items included both finished goods such as integrated circuits (up 147%), laptops and computers (up 77%) and oxygen concentrators (up four-fold) and intermediate products such as chemicals (of these, acetic acid imports were up eight-fold).

What does the recent trend of trade figures suggest?

■ Experts say India's dependence on China for finished goods has shown no signs of easing, which is a cause for concern. The rise in intermediate imports is, however, less of a concern as it is a sign of industrial recovery and greater demand for inputs. While Indian

exports to China have also grown, up by more than 50% in the last two years, these are mostly raw materials such as ores, as well as cotton and seafood, and not finished products. The five-year trend shows the trade deficit continues to widen. The deficit has grown from \$51.8 billion in 2017 to \$69.4 billion in 2021.

What are the implications for India-China relations?

■ While trade continues to boom, other aspects of economic relations have dramatically changed in the past two years. In the wake of the LAC crisis starting April 2020, the message from New Delhi was that it cannot be business as usual while there are tensions along the border. Investments from China in the past year have plunged amid tighter curbs. In the tech and telecom space, the once rapidly increasing Chinese investments in start-ups including from tech giants such as Alibaba and Tencent, has come to an abrupt halt, more than 200 apps remain banned, and Chinese firms have been kept out of 5G trials so far. India has also tightened scrutiny on Chinese firms in India, recently conducting tax investigations into companies including smartphone manufacturer Xiaomi. Those moves last month prompted a statement from China's Ministry of Commerce calling on India to "provide a fair, transparent and non-discriminatory environment for Chinese businesses". While the trade pattern is unlikely to dramatically change in the near future, even as New Delhi considers a long-term plan to reduce some of these import dependencies by either accelerating long-discussed but slow-moving plans to manufacture some of these critical goods in India or source elsewhere, the rest of the India-China economic relationship still remains somewhat in a state of freeze as talks continue to resolve the tensions along the border.

## When will new Vande Bharat trains be launched?

Who is designing the 400 trains? Where will they be manufactured? What is distinct about them?

YUTHIKA BHARGAVA

**The story so far:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has in the Union Budget for 2022-2023 proposed the development and manufacture of 400 new Vande Bharat trains in the next three years. In her speech, Ms. Sitharaman said these would be "new generation" trains with better energy efficiency and passenger riding experience.

What is it?

■ The Vande Bharat train is an indigenously designed and manufactured semi high speed, self-propelled train that is touted as the next major leap for the Indian Railways in terms of speed and passenger convenience since the introduction of Rajdhani trains. These trains, dubbed as Train 18 during the development phase, operate without a locomotive and are based on a propulsion system called distributed traction power technology, by which each car of the train set is powered. The Vande Bharat coaches incorporate passenger amenities including on-board WiFi entertainment, GPS-based passenger information system, CCTVs, automatic doors in all coaches, rotating chairs and bio-vacuum type toilets like in aircraft.

The first Vande Bharat was manufactured by the Integral Coach Factory (ICF), Chennai, in about 18 months as part of the 'Make in India' programme, at a cost of about ₹100 crore. The current version of the train has 16 coaches with 14 ordinary chair cars and two executive class chair cars. The train has a passenger

carrying capacity of more than 1,100 people. It can achieve a maximum speed of 160 kmph due to faster acceleration and deceleration, reducing journey time by 25% to 45%. It also has an intelligent braking system with power regeneration for better energy efficiency thereby making it cost, energy and environment efficient. The Vande Bharat was India's first attempt at adaptation of the train set technology

compared with conventional systems of passenger coaches hauled by separate locomotives. The train set configuration though complex is faster, easier to maintain, consumes less energy, and has greater flexibility in train operation, according to the Indian Railways.

How many Vande Bharat trains do the Railways currently operate?

■ Currently, two Vande Bharat Expresses are operational – one between New Delhi and Varanasi and the other from New Delhi to Katra. Following this, the Railways had issued a more than ₹2,000 crore contract for making 44 more such trains. However, the first tender was cancelled and reissued to align it with the 'Make in India' policy. For

the first time, the tender required a minimum 75% local content requirement of the total value of the tender. In August 2020, Hyderabad-based Medha Servo Drives Ltd. won the contract for designing and manufacturing the propulsion, control and other equipment needed to make the 44 train sets. The rakes or train sets, the Railways had announced, would be manufactured at three of its production units – 24 rakes at ICF, Chennai and 10 rakes each at the RCF Kapurthala and at the Modern Coach Factory, Raebareli. On the delivery schedule of these rakes, the Railways had said that the first two prototype rakes would be delivered in 20 months (or by March-April 2022), thereafter on successful commissioning, the firm would be delivering an average of six rakes per quarter.

What is the current status of the programme?

■ Speaking to reporters after the Budget announcement, Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said that designing for version 2.0 of these trains had been completed and that testing was expected to commence from April onwards, while serial production for these rakes was likely to begin by September. On the 400 new trains, Mr. Vaishnaw said the announcement had given the Railways a target of coming out with an even better version. The design updates in the upcoming trains would focus on safety and comfort of the passengers, including reduced noise and vibration levels. The Railways is also said to be considering the use of aluminium instead of steel in the construction of the coaches as this would help make the trains much lighter thereby improving energy efficiency, and also making the trains faster.

## ISIS

# The Islamic State without a 'Caliphate'

The Caliphate Baghdadi established in 2014 has turned itself into an underground Islamist insurgency with branches across countries

STANLY JOHNY

**T**he life and death of Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi were similar to that of many other top commanders of the Islamic State (IS). He had served in Saddam Hussein's military in Iraq. He joined Sunni militancy after the fall of the Saddam regime in 2003. In 2007, he became a member of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). In 2009, he was imprisoned in Camp Bucca, a notorious U.S.-run prison in Iraq that turned out to be a factory of radicalisation. Out of prison, he went back to the al-Qaeda fold, which was called the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). Within the ISI, Qurayshi worked closely with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the future founder leader of the Islamic State 'Caliphate' who was also an inmate of Camp Bucca. In 2019, after Baghdadi killed himself during a U.S. raid at his house in Syria's jihadist-controlled Idlib, Qurayshi, whose real name was Amir Muhammad Sa'id Abdal-Rahman al-Mawla, was appointed by the 'Shura Council' as the new leader of the IS. Twenty-seven months later, on February 3, 2022, Qurayshi blew himself up along with his family, like his predecessor, amid a U.S. raid at his residence in Idlib. The IS will now have to find a new 'caliph' to run the caliphate that no longer exists.

**The rise**

The roots of the Islamic State can be traced to the ruins of Iraq. The chaos and anarchy that prevailed in Iraq after the 2003 American invasion

threw open opportunities for jihadist networks in the region. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, born in Jordan and trained in Afghanistan, laid the foundations of the AQI after the invasion. Zarqawi turned the anti-American resistance into a sectarian civil war between the minority Sunnis and the majority Shias. By 2005-06, the AQI plunged Iraq, especially the northern and central provinces, into a deadly cycle of violence.

Zarqawi, a Salafi-Jihadist who set up AQI with the blessings of Osama bin Laden, was killed in an American strike in 2006, which was a body blow to his terror enterprise. Later, Iraq's Sunnis tribesmen, fed up with the growing sectarian conflict and the AQI's mindless violence, set up, with support from the U.S., militia groups ('Sunni Awakening') to take on al-Qaeda. While the Awakening militias resisted the jihadists on the ground, the U.S. continued to carry out strikes targeting the AQI's leaders. Abu Ayyub al-Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, Zarqawi's successors, were killed in U.S. strikes. These setbacks substantially weakened al-Qaeda in Iraq. It was after Omar al-Baghdadi's death, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi rose to the leadership of the AQI, also called the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI).

Desperately trying to revive the lost fortunes of the ISI, Baghdadi found an opportunity when a civil strife broke out in Syria in 2011. What began as anti-regime demonstrations as part of 'the Arab Spring' protests, the crisis in Syria quickly

slipped into an armed conflict, with the government of President Bashar al-Assad, backed by Iran, on one side, and different armed militias, backed by Mr. Assad's regional rivals, from Turkey to Saudi Arabia, on the other. Baghdadi dispatched a group of militants, under the command

### The repeated military setbacks in Iraq and Syria have weakened the Islamic State organisationally, but its revivalist ideology and terrorist capability remain unbroken

mand of Abu Muhammad al-Joulani, across the border to set up an al-Qaeda unit in Syria. Joulani established Jabhat al-Nusra, the Syrian arm of al-Qaeda, which captured territories in the lawless, civil war-hit eastern Syria that was awash with money, weapons and militants. Baghdadi and Joulani would part ways when the former insisted that al-Nusra join the ISI to create the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS), a new ter-

rorist entity independent of al-Qaeda. Joulani refused to break ties with al-Qaeda and those who were loyal to Baghdadi joined ISIS, also called the Islamic State, or IS. (Joulani is now running Syria's Idlib province, the last outpost of the civil war).

Exploiting the civil war in Syria and the growing resentment among the Sunnis against the sectarian policies of the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in Iraq, the IS, under Baghdadi's command, grew fast. It captured territories, from Raqqqa in eastern Syria to Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq, straddling the borders of the two countries.

On July 4, 2014, the first Friday of the Muslim holy month Ramzan, Baghdad, who then had a \$10 million bounty on his head, appeared at the *minbar* (pulpit) of the Grand Mosque of Mosul. Dressed in a wavy black robe and wearing a black turban, he announced the establishment of a new Caliphate. He also asked for obedience from the world's Muslims as he had been "elected" as their *wali* (custodian). At its peak, the IS Caliphate had spread from Deir Ez-zor in eastern Syria to the

outskirts of Baghdad, encompassing territories as large as Great Britain.

But the Caliphate would crumble within years. In Iraq and Syria, different coalitions were formed to defeat the IS. The first setback came in Kobane, a Kurdish town on the Syrian-Turkish border where Kurdish militias, backed by the U.S., defeated the IS. Palmyra, the ancient Syrian city, was recaptured from the IS by the Syrian government troops, backed by Russia. In Iraq, the national army, Iran-trained Popular Mobilisation Forces (Shia militias) and the Peshmerga (the Iraqi Kurdish militia), with help from the U.S., fought for every inch of the lost territory and reclaimed them. In 2019, the IS lost its last shred of enclave, Baghouz in Syria, to the Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish militia. In the same year, Baghdadi was killed.

**New model**  
Baghdadi introduced a new model in the global jihadist landscape. Al-Qaeda largely operated as a hit-and-run organisation. The IS built a proto-state in the name of the Caliphate and held on to its territories for years. The pro-

militants in Hasakah with a truck bomb and a gun battle followed, while IS inmates inside the jail revolted against the guards. It was also the most ambitious attack ordered by Qurayshi, who was personally involved in the raid, according to some reports. The raid was, however, a failure as hundreds of U.S. troops joined the Syrian Democratic Forces, the Kurdish militia, to push back the IS. In less than two weeks, came Qurayshi's death.

The Caliphate was destroyed. The Caliphs were killed. And the foot soldiers are dispersed. For a terrorist group that grew from nothing to a proto-regime controlling some of the biggest cities in the Arab world within a span of few years, this is a period of setbacks and retreat. But its revivalist ideology and terrorist capabilities, as demonstrated in Hasakah last month, remain unbroken. Also, the geopolitical conditions that allowed the IS to rise in the first place haven't changed much in Asia and Africa. When conflicts continue in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and West Africa, the IS or al-Qaeda would always find a way to survive the occasional setbacks.



## In Focus

■ The roots of the IS can be traced to al-Qaeda in Iraq, founded by Abu Musab Zarqawi after the U.S. invasion of the country in 2003

■ Under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the IS captured territories across the Syrian-Iraqi border and declared an Islamic State Caliphate

■ The physical Caliphate of the IS was destroyed by 2019 by different coalition forces, including the Kurdish and Shia militias, Iraqi and Syrian armies and the U.S. and Russia

## VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY

# The comedian-turned-President

Ukraine's beleaguered leader is playing down the risks of a Russian invasion

G. SAMPATH

The rising tensions between Ukraine and Russia have made headlines for months. But strangely enough, the discourse around an impending invasion has mostly focused on, and ascribed agency to, non-Ukrainians - Russian President Vladimir Putin, U.S. President Joe Biden, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and assorted EU functionaries. The conflict has been portrayed as one between Russia and the West, with Ukraine painted as a mere battleground. But now, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (44) has come to the centre stage. Over the past fortnight, Mr. Zelensky has repeatedly asked world leaders to tone down the war rhetoric, even going to the extent of suggesting that the U.S. is creating unnecessary panic. Commenting on the Russian troop build-up of 100,000 soldiers, described by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg as "unusual", he said: "The risks have not just existed for a day, and they have not become bigger. The only thing that has become bigger is the hype around them."

While NATO and the U.S. seem to believe that Russia has enough firepower on the ground to launch an invasion in February, Mr. Zelensky believes Mr. Putin hasn't made up his mind to invade. He believes Russia's real plan is not to invade but to destabilise Ukraine inter-



ILLUSTRATION: J.A. PREMKUMAR

nally. He has harped on how the 'panic' fomented by the West is harming Ukraine's economy, raising borrowing costs, spooking investors. The very day Mr. Biden warned that a Russian attack was imminent, Zelensky posted a video message asking everyone to "calm down". Playing down the risks of a Russian invasion is at odds with the rhetoric of his Western allies. So why is Mr. Zelensky doing it? Some analysts believe it could be from a calculation that the West might use the heightened threat perception as leverage to negotiate a deal with Moscow that Ukraine may not like but be forced to go with. At the same time, those who have tracked Mr. Zelensky's public life for long aren't overly surprised by his positions.

Mr. Zelensky was a comedian whose TV show, 'Servant of the People', revolved around a school teacher who becomes President. He rode the popularity of his

comedy show to become a presidential candidate. As an outsider with no political track record or party affiliation, he ran on a plank of vague populism. His election campaign was almost entirely online - with no rallies, speeches, press conferences or travel across the country. But Ukrainians, many projecting the image of his television persona onto his political self, voted to make him President in 2019, preferring him to the incumbent Petro Poroshenko, who became identified with the corrupt oligarchic elite.

**Showbiz team**  
As President, Mr. Zelensky, belying expectations that he would assemble a team of competent professionals to run the government, appointed members of his comedy studio to key positions. Ivan Bakanov, who used to be director of Kvarnal 95, Mr. Zelensky's production company, heads Ukraine's Security Service. The

head of the presidential administration, Andriy Yermak, is a movie producer. Serhiy Shefir, the chief presidential adviser, is a screenwriter.

In October 2021, notwithstanding his strident anti-corruption rhetoric, Mr. Zelensky faced embarrassing questions when his own name cropped up in the Pandora Papers as one of the beneficiaries. The network of offshore holdings closely tracked Mr. Zelensky's own loyalist network of showbiz professionals-turned-political aides.

In recent times, Mr. Zelensky has been accused of turning authoritarian. He has launched criminal proceedings against independent journalists. In February 2021, the government shut down several pro-Russia media outlets. And there is a pronounced trend of labelling critics as "pro-Russian". The U.S. and Europe, driven primarily by strategic concerns, could be overstating the democratic credentials of the Zelensky regime in an attempt to occupy the moral higher ground against the deprivations of Mr. Putin. Ukraine under Mr. Zelensky, though formally democratic, remains closer to the stereotype of a former Soviet republic trapped in the oligarch-authoritarian nexus. While reading Mr. Putin's mind is notoriously difficult, Mr. Zelensky's shifting stances suggest some helpful clues may well lie in Ukraine's domestic politics.

## MASOOD KHAN

# Controversial diplomat

Pak's next envoy to the U.S. faces allegations of having 'a soft spot' for jihadists

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE

**O**n Saturday, the Foreign Ministry of Pakistan announced that the U.S. has accepted the appointment of the new envoy of Islamabad to Washington DC. The clearance of Masood Khan, former President of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, has taken an unusually long time since it was first proposed by Pakistan in November 2021. The post of the Ambassador in the U.S. is usually reserved for the topmost diplomats of Pakistan that includes figures like Jamsheed Marker and Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, and the delay from the U.S. raised eyebrows. Pakistan had hinted that India was exerting influence over the State Department, causing the delay.

On Thursday, the Official Spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs, Arindam Bagchi described the allegation as "preposterous". The controversy, however, had a reflection in a campaign by the Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies (FIIDS), a U.S.-based organisation involved in campaigning on issues that matter to India. In a statement, the FIIDS pointed out a series of factors from the past that reflected the ideological and political leanings of Mr. Khan, indicating that he harbours a "soft spot for Jihadist terrorists".

The allegation appeared relevant in the backdrop of a recent hostage crisis in a

Jewish place of worship in Texas. The hostage taker had reportedly sought the release of Afifa Siddiqui, the 49-year-old Pakistani scientist, who was jailed for 86 years in 2010 for plotting the murder of American soldiers in Afghanistan. The hostage taker was killed by the law enforcement personnel but the incident brought the focus back to the Siddiqui case.

**Support for Islamists**  
Siddiqui's release has often been sought by the radical wings among the Islamists, and the FIIDS pointed out that Mr. Khan had publicly voiced his support for her release. On May 7, 2020, as the U.S. troops were preparing to withdraw from Afghanistan as part of a deal the Trump administration signed with the Taliban, Mr. Khan had put out a tweet with a photograph of Siddiqui, and said: "The U.S. Government can find a way to free Afifa Siddiqui. Wash-

ington has negotiated a peace deal with the Taliban, once considered invertebrate enemies. Room must now be created for Afifa's freedom. Long overdue. Will be a bonanza for winning hearts and minds." The FIIDS also accused Mr. Khan of having sympathy for terrorist outfits like Harkat ul-Mujahideen and said he had shared a stage with Fazl-ur Rahman Khalil, the founder of HUM, which is an internationally proscribed terrorist outfit.

The post of the Ambassador is usually occupied by career diplomats and Masood Khan comes with both diplomatic and political experiences. He served as the President of PoK between August 2016 and August 2021, and had also served Pakistan at the UN as its Permanent Representative and as Ambassador in Beijing. He had made several controversial comments about the developments in Kashmir, especially after the abroga-

ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR



tion of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. PoK comprises the western part of Kashmir, which has been under Pakistani control since the conflict of 1947.

It has a self-governing status within the federation of provinces in Pakistan. Islamabad claims that PoK is "independent", though that status is not reflected within Pakistan.

Mr. Khan, as the 'President' of the region, had described the present Indian government as "fascist" and praised slain militant Burhan Wani as hero. His appointment was also opposed by U.S. Congressman Scott Perry, who urged the Biden administration to pause the process of appointment of Mr. Khan, citing his "bona fide" soft spot for jihadist ideologies.

**Campaign on Kashmir**  
In the past, he had been photographed with the Pakistani-American lobbyist Ghulam Nabi Fai, who has often courted controversy for his campaign on Kashmir in Washington DC. Mr. Khan is expected to take up his new assignment soon as the tenure of the current Pakistan Ambassador, Asad Majeed Khan, ends.

The Ambassador-designate's new responsibilities in Washington may include careful balancing of international concerns as the Afghanistan situation is yet to stabilise since the Taliban takeover of the country following the withdrawal of U.S. forces last year.







**Road to pre-history:** An aerial view of the under-construction Khavda-Khadir road in Kutch. The World Heritage Site of Dholavira is situated on the Khadir island.

## Connecting Dholavira

A road under construction will open new vistas for the World Heritage Site situated on an island in Kutch

VIJAY SONEJI

**B**efore Partition, Khadir Mahal, part of the princely State of Kutch, was known for business and livestock trade. Khadir is surrounded by the Great Rann of Kutch and the Little Rann of Kutch. Dholavira, a Harappan city situated on the island of Khadir, near the India-Pakistan International Border, came into limelight after UNESCO declared it a World Heritage Site on July 27, 2021.

The Khadir Bet (island) was known for its superior quality of Bajra, a millet, goats and berries, says Jilubha Soda, sarpanch of Dholavira. The name Khadir comes from the word *Khad* in the Kutchi language, which means grass.

While Khavda and Khadir are just 31.9 km away from each other, as the crow flies, the lack of road connectivity till now forced the people to travel 288 km to reach each other. But after the construction of a National Highway, the distance will be bridged. Once this road comes up, traffic from Bhuj will reach Khavda and then cross over to Khadir.

"We are on the almost last stage of construction and it will take only two months to complete," says Satyandra Mishra, project manager of the site. People are eagerly waiting for the road to be officially opened as it will open the doors of the Khadir Bet and increase the brotherhood between Hindu Khadir and Muslim Khavda, says Mahadev Barad, a young local social worker.

Dholavira and a fossil park are now the pride of the island, but the Bhajdo Hill and the Meruda Takkari Hill are yet to become famous.



**On the edge:** Boys stand near the last pillar of Kadhwand village on the Khavda side after which the area falls under the Great Rann.



**Short cut:** A herd of cows cross the road under construction.



**Geographic landmark:** The Tropic of Cancer line on the Khavda side of the new road.



**Alive history:** The Harappan site of Dholavira in Khadir.



**Early life:** A Brachiosaurus model at the fossil park in Dholavira.



**Photo point:** Photographers have made the area around Khadir a spot for pre-wedding shoots.



**Before time:** Private transport plies on the yet-to-be-completed road.



**Desert cuisine:** A woman in Khadir making rotis from flour of Bajra, which the island is famous for.