



Chargesheet against
Rhea Chakraborty in
drugs case

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With 6.8% hike, China's
defence budget to cross
\$200 billion

Page 13



Pant, Washington
put India in control
of final Test

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NEARBY



'Budget allocation likely
to be over ₹65K crore'

NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party government is likely to present a budget with allocations over ₹65,000 crore for the 2021-22 fiscal, making it the highest allocation by any Delhi government since its first-ever session in 1993, sources said on Friday. The budget is likely to focus primarily on the health and education sectors.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3



25 students of Rajasthan govt. school test positive

JAIPUR

Twenty-five students, a teacher and two employees of a government boarding school for visually impaired children in Rajasthan's Udaipur city tested positive for COVID-19 on Friday. The school campus and the nearby localities were declared as "containment zone" and sanitisation work was started in the area.

NORTH & EAST ▶ PAGE 4

Currency smuggled at behest of Kerala CM: Customs Dept.

Affidavit is a plot to tarnish govt. ahead of poll: LDF

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOCHI

The Customs Department has informed the Kerala High Court that Swapna Suresh, one of the prime accused in the Kerala gold smuggling case, has said that the smuggling of foreign currency was carried out at the instance of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and Assembly Speaker P. Seeramakrishnan.

The Customs Department has registered a case in connection with the alleged smuggling of dollars worth nearly ₹1.3 crore by a former finance head of the UAE

THE ACCUSED



What happened:

- The dollar smuggling case surfaced during the investigation of the diplomatic channel gold smuggling case
- Allegedly, money received as a kickback from Mr. Eappen for helping Unitac secure the contract for Life Mission's project in Wadakkanchery was converted into dollars and smuggled out of the country through Mr. Shoukry

Khaled Mohamed Ali Shoukry, former finance head of the Consulate General of the U.A.E. at Thiruvananthapuram

Consulate, Thiruvananthapuram, to the United Arab Emirates.

The ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) said the affidavit was a political plot to tarnish the government ahead

of the Assembly election.

LDF activists plan to lay siege to Customs offices in Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi and Kozhikode on Saturday.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Mamata to contest from Nandigram, names 291 candidates

Trinamool list has 51 women on it, drop in Muslim candidates

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday announced candidates for 291 of the 294 Assembly seats in the State. The Trinamool Congress chairperson said she would contest from

Nandigram in Purba Medinipur district.

"I will contest from Nandigram, I had given my word and will stick to it," she said. She made it clear that she would not contest from Kolkata's Bhawanipur, which she represented for the past two terms.

All sections of society

The party's candidates' list comprises people from different sections of society, such as women, youth, film stars,

sportspersons and retired bureaucrats.

Ms. Banerjee said all sections of society had been given priority, including women and young and old, and different castes and communities. A closer look at the candidates' list signals that the Trinamool Congress has focused on winnability.

The list includes 51 women (18%), 79 Scheduled Caste (27%) and 17 Scheduled Tribe (6%) candidates.

Ms. Banerjee said there

Amazon Prime official gets relief from arrest

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday said the government's new rules to regulate OTT (over-the-top) platforms lacked teeth to punish violators or to screen offensive content, even as it protected Amazon Prime Video India commercial head Aparna Purohit from arrest in the *Tandav* web series row.

"We went through your Information Technology [Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code] Rules of 2021... These are merely guidelines. There is no provision for punishment or fine..."

ASHOK BHUSHAN,
SUPREME COURT JUDGE

We went through your Information Technology [Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code] Rules of 2021... These are merely guidelines. There is no provision for punishment or fine..."
ASHOK BHUSHAN,
SUPREME COURT JUDGE

Mr. Mehta agreed to con-

sider drafting new regulations or even legislation to address the concern raised by the court. "We can come out with it... We can come out with a draft and place it before the court," he stated. The court order said the

new rules were "more in the nature of guidelines" and there was "no effective mechanism for screening or to take appropriate action" against violators.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Running for the nation



Awareness campaign: Navy officers Sanjay Kumar and Ram Ratan, in red and black, running on the banks of Dal Lake in Srinagar while on their way to Ladakh on Friday. The officers are on the last leg of their initiative 'A run from Kanniyakumari to Kashmir', which aims to create awareness about non-communicable diseases. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

Plea seeks reopening of Nizamuddin centre

AAP govt. reply sought; Waqf board questions need to keep premises locked



The Nizamuddin centre has been locked since March 31, 2020, after several people who attended a religious congregation there contracted COVID-19. ■ FILE PHOTO: SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

to submit the status report. The Centre's counsel also sought some more time to submit its response.

The Board, represented by senior advocate Ramesh Gupta, contended that even after the Unlock-1 guidelines permitted religious places outside containment zones

ties to reassess the necessity of keeping the premises locked and asked for the locks to be removed from the Waqf premises. It said no action has been taken so far on the representation.

It further contended that even if the premises were part of any criminal investigation or trial, keeping it "under lock as an out-of-bounds area" was a "primitive method" of conducting an inquiry.

The Board said that "putting the property under lock for an indefinite period is not only interfering with the statutory rights of the Waqf Board, causing difficulty at various levels to the people who are directly interested in the waqf property, but discontent is also growing among members of the Muslim community at large".

T.N. polls: CM, Deputy CM in AIADMK first list

Four others, including two Ministers, have been fielded from their current seats

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The ruling AIADMK on Friday announced its first list of candidates for six constituencies.

Chief Minister and co-coordinator of the party, Edappadi K. Palaniswami, will be trying his luck again from his home constituency of Edappadi.

He has been elected from this seat four times: 1989, 1991, 2011 and 2016.

Deputy Chief Minister and co-coordinator of the party, O. Panneerselvam, has been nominated for Bodinayakanur, from where he got elected in 2011 and 2016. On two other occasions, he represented Periyakulam.

Two Ministers - D. Jayakumar and C.V. Shanmugam - have been chosen for their respective constituencies



AIADMK co-coordinator Edappadi K. Palaniswami (left) and AIADMK co-coordinator O. Panneerselvam coming out of the party office after announcing the first set of contestants for the Assembly elections. ■ R. RAGU

Royapuram in Chennai and Villupuram. This will be the seventh time that Mr. Jayakumar is being fielded from Royapuram. He lost only once, in 1996.

Two others - S. P. Shan-

ty stated that the names of the candidates were recommended by the high-level administrative committee.

Mix of communities

A senior office-bearer of the party said the first list of nominees represented a good mix of communities - Vellala Gounder, Mukkalathor, Meenavar, Vanniyar, Nadar and the SC. The release of the list was made, keeping in mind the "auspiciousness" of the day.

The list was made public, even as the ruling party had not yet finalised seat sharing arrangement with its prospective allies, barring the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK). Another functionary of the ruling party said the remaining candidates would be named by the party by Tuesday.

A press release of the par-

muganathan and S. Thenmozhi - have been fielded from their present constituencies, Srivilliputhur and Nilakottai, which are reserved for Scheduled Castes.

A press release of the par-

Delhi Police detained us on way to gurdwara'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A group of women protesters from the Singh border alleged that Delhi Police detained them on their way to Rakabganj Gurdwara on Wednesday. However, the police have refuted the allegations.

Samyukta Kisan Morcha said: "Just because they had flags of Nishan Sahib and Kisan Union on their cars, the police stopped them for checking. They were asked to remove the flags. When they refused, they were detained at Tilak Marg police station," the statement read. SKM said the group included a 2-year-old girl.

The police called this information "fake." It is clarified here that no such incident has happened near Mandir marg police station and no persons have been detained in this context....," tweeted SHO of the police station.

100 days on, protesters promise to stand firm till farm laws repealed

From winters to summers, farmers say they are ready to adapt to all scenarios

SHINJINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI

As the farmers' stir entered its 100th day, protesters at the Singh border on Friday remained firm on their demands and said they are in here for the long haul.



Effigies depicting the farmers' stir at Ghazipur. • R.V. MOORTHY

Farmers from Delhi's neighbouring States have been camping at the borders, demanding a legal guarantee of minimum support price and a repeal of the three controversial farm laws brought in by the Centre last year.

Stating that there was very little expectation from the government, a 60-year-old farmer from Punjab, Shaant Singh, said: "How can we expect that our issues will be resolved soon? This is a long fight and 100 days is nothing. We can only hope that through our sustained protest, they [government] will ultimately listen to us. If we

return without our demands being met, then we will die of hunger. So what is the point of returning now?"

Daljinder Singh, a farmer from Punjab's Patiala district, said: "The movement has indeed continued successfully for a very long time

and we are as determined as we were on the first day. We are not bothered about how long this will continue. We will remain firm on our demands and we will not move from here unless the laws are repealed."

He also said that they

have adapted to all kinds of scenarios. "We have no problem here whatsoever. We have put coolers inside the trolleys and if required we will get air conditioners as well. Nothing can stop us and this movement will continue till the laws are repealed," he said.

'Stay till 2024 if needed'

Seen constructing shack-like structures with bamboo and hay, Manjinder Singh, another farmer from Punjab's Roopnagar district, said: "We have made enough arrangements for ourselves here and will continue doing so for as long as required. Whatever the unions tell us, we will act accordingly regarding the future plan of action. As of now, we are here to stay, even if that means that we are made to stay here till 2024."

'Iron Lady' of OROP stir inspires women to back farmers' cause

Sudesh Goyat appeals to women in Haryana to take part in protest

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI

Sudesh Goyat, an Indian Army veteran's wife, has been mobilising women from rural Haryana to be a part of the farmers' protest and empowering them in more ways than one over the last three months.

Ms. Goyat is also fondly known as the 'Iron Lady' of the One Rank One Pension (OROP) protests at Jantar Mantar, during which she was on a relay hunger strike for close to two years and had sought to raise issues related to war widows.



Activist Sudesh Goyat (right) with women from Haryana at the border in New Delhi. • V.V. KRISHNAN

the women to seek inspiration from our sisters in Punjab and participate even if it was for a few minutes on the stage. Most of them were reluctant about standing in front of so many people – something they had never even thought of doing in their household-centric lives – but, gradually, they came," she added.

Equal rights

As farmers prepare to honour over a hundred others like her at a grand ceremony on International Women's Day this Monday, Ms. Goyat, a farmer's daughter from the Sisar village in Haryana's Hisar, said the protests had given women from Haryana, the opportunity to prove they were equal to the men by sitting shoulder to shoulder with them in agricultural fields was rewarding enough in itself.

Rajpuri from Hisar's Bhudha Bhana, who led the *raag kavita* recitation, could barely contain her excitement or restrain exhibiting her gratitude to Ms. Goyat after walking down from the stage. "For a lot of women from villages in Haryana, this is perhaps the first time they have stepped into the public space which explains their initial reluctance which, however, does not persist for long after their first performance on stage," Ms. Goyat said.

"Naari komal hai, par kamzor nahin" [Woman is gentle but not weak]; hundreds of women who never thought of stepping beyond the threshold of their house are here now bolstering the perseverance of their men on the streets," she said.

Decomposed bodies of couple found inside rented house

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The police on Friday said they have recovered decomposed bodies of a couple from a house in west Delhi's Tilak Nagar.

The bodies were found after the neighbours called the police on the intervening night of Wednesday

and Thursday, complaining of a foul smell coming from the house.

'No external injuries'

When the team reached the spot, they found the door locked from inside and broke it open.

"Decomposed bodies of a man and a woman were

found lying on the floor. No external injuries were seen on the bodies. An almost empty liquor bottle and some supplements, and wrappers of tablets were also found at the spot," an officer said.

The woman, Priyanka Bist, from Nainital was working with a consultant

cy firm in Gurugram while her 29-year-old friend Pawan Paliwal from Uttam Nagar, was a gym trainer and also into modelling, they said.

The woman used to live in a rented accommodation in old Mahabir Nagar. Two days ago, her friend had come to meet her at

her place.

No foul play suspected, an officer said, adding that they did not find any note. Post-mortem reports are awaited to ascertain the exact cause of death.

Families of the deceased have been informed.

They told the police that the two were friends.

Draw for scheme to be held on March 10: DDA

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) on Friday said the draw for this year's housing scheme will be held on March 10. "The draw of allotment will be based on a random number generation system and will be held in the presence of judges and senior officers of the DDA," the urban body said, adding that the general public will be able to view the live telecast on the DDA website.

The housing scheme was launched on January 2 this year with 1,354 flats on offer.

Woman, two children found dead inside house

Her family suspects foul play, blames husband; magisterial inquiry initiated

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

10.30 p.m. regarding the incident. Following this, a team reached the spot.

An officer said that the matter came to the fore when the husband returned home from work.

'Broke open door'

The police suspect that the woman killed her children – 4-year-old son and six-month-old daughter – before taking her own life.

Her family, however, suspects foul play.

A senior officer said a PCR call was received at

said.

The police said the couple had an argument in the morning over a *mundan* ceremony [ritual] of a relative's child back in their village in Bihar's Madhubani.

'She seemed fine'

The brother said he spoke to her on Thursday evening and she "seemed fine".

The police said a magisterial inquiry has been initiated.

"Suicide prevention helpline: Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health, Telephone: 011-4076 9002, Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-7.30 p.m.

School dropouts held for duping woman of ₹7 lakh

Manhunt on for an accused from W.B.

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Two school dropouts have been arrested for allegedly duping people on the pretext of KYC update, the police said on Friday.

On December 18 last, complainant Pooja Sarin from Mehrauli told the police that she got a call from an unknown number; the caller introduced himself as a bank official. He obtained her documents on the pretext of KYC update and also took an OTP from the complainant. Next, she saw that ₹7 lakh was deducted from her account.

The police then registered an FIR in the matter.

During investigation, it was revealed that the cheated amount was transferred to various banks and wallets. Accordingly, the account statements of the alleged accounts were analysed and linked details were checked.

"During analysis of transactions, it was found that one person was using the

accused dupe people on pretext of KYC update. They transfer cheated amounts to various accounts on commission basis

POLICE OFFICER

linked mobile at Himmat Nagar, Gujarat. A team was sent to Himmat Nagar. Acting on a tip-off, a person named Azad was apprehended," said Atul Thakur, DCP (South).

During interrogation, he confessed to the crime. He said that he had come in contact with one Rahul Kumar from Bihar. They met at Bhitwadi in Rajasthan.

"Rahul knew a man, Vartha, from Nadiya in West Bengal who asked him to provide him bank accounts to shift cheated amounts on a commission basis. Rahul contacted Azad for the same," said Mr. Thakur.

Further probe is on to arrest Vartha.

HIMACHAL PRADESH JAL SHAKTI VIBHAG

Short terms sealed item rate tenders on form 6 & 8 are hereby invited by the undersigned on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh for the following works from the approved and eligible contractors, so as to reach in this office on or before 10.03.2021 at 3.00 PM and will be opened on the same day at 3.30 PM in the presence of intending contractors or their authorized representatives at Jal Shakti Division Chamba. The tender form can be had from Jal Shakti Division Chamba against cash payment (Non-Refundable) on or before 09.03.2021. The earnest money in the shape of National saving certificate/ Time deposits Accounts/ Saving Accounts in any of the Post office / Bank in Himachal Pradesh duly pledged in favour of the Executive Engineer Jal Shakti Division Chamba must be accompanied with each tender. Conditional tenders and tenders received without earnest money will be summarily rejected. The offer of the tenders shall be kept open for 120 days. The Executive Engineer Jal Shakti Division Chamba reserves the right to reject the tenders without assigning any reasons.

Sr. No.	Name of work	Estimated Cost	Ernest Money	Time limit	Cost of tender form
1.	Providing Sewerage Scheme to leftout area Chamba town in Tehsil & Distt. Chamba (SH- C/O V. Notches weir MS inlet Chamber/Bridge on S.S.T at 0.49 MLD Capacity Sewerage treatment Plant Karian).	211112/-	4222/-	Three Month	250/-
2.	C/O Pump house to Fish farm in Sultanpur in Tehsil & Distt. Chamba (SH- C/O Pump house).	322130/-	6443/-	Three Month	250/-
3.	Providing Sewerage Scheme to leftout area Chamba town in Tehsil & Distt. Chamba (SH- C/O Boundary wall for 0.49 MLD STP at Karian).	234607/-	4692/-	Three Month	250/-
4.	Provision of 5 Nos Tube well for Drought affected water supply Schemes in Chamba Constituency Tehsil & Distt. Chamba (SH- C/o 1 No tube well for WSS Sultanpur at Baloo).	491092/-	9822/-	Three Month	250/-
5.	Providing Sewerage Scheme to leftout area Chamba town in Tehsil & Distt. Chamba (SH- C/O footpath/walkways for 0.49 MLD STP at Karian).	156635/-	3133/-	Three Month	250/-

Terms & Conditions:- 1. Before offering the rates the terms and conditions attached with the schedule of quantity may be gone through carefully. 2. Conditional tenders without earnest money will be rightly be rejected. 3. The contractor shall enclose enlistment/renewal order with his application for obtaining the tender documents. 4. Latest income tax and sale tax clearance certificate as well as Pan No must be attached with the application failing which the documents will not issued to those contractors. 5. The contractor shall produce registration of labour license from the competent authority under contract Act 1970 failing which no tender shall be issued to him.

Note:- No tender forms will be issued to those contractors who have not completed the work within the stipulated period and having more than two works in hand under this Division.

Executive Engineer,
Jal Shakti Division Chamba.

GOVERNMENT OF HIMACHAL PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER NATIONAL HIGHWAYS, BLOCK-D, NIRMAN BHAWAN, NIGAM VIHAR, SHIMLA-171002		TENDER NOTICE			
S.R. NO.	NAME OF BOARD/CORP./AUTH	NAME OF WORK NOTICE TENDER		OPENING DATE CLOSING DATE (TIME)	AMOUNT / EMD (APPROX.) IN RUPEES
1	HSVP GURUGRAM	A/MTC. OF 70/100/150/135/180/200 WATT LED STREET LIGHT POINTS INSTALLED ON METAL POLE ON ROAD SECTOR 63-64-65-66-67-68-69-70 POLICE STATION SECTOR 49-50-51-52-53-54-55-56-69-70 HSV GURUGRAM +9 OTHER WORK.		CLOSING DATE 22.03.2021	122 LACS
2	HAZED	PUBLICATION OF E-TENDER NOTICE FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR EMPLOYMENT OF LABOURERS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF CUSTOM MILLING OF MUSTARD SEED AND SUPPLY OF FORTIFIED KACHCHI GHANI MUSTARD OIL.		CLOSING DATE 19.03.2021	5 LACS
3	HAZED	PUBLICATION OF E-TENDER NOTICE FOR SUPPLY AND INSTALLATION OF ALL-IN-ONE COMPUTERS, SERVERS, LAPTOPS FOR HAZED, PANCHKULA.		04.03.2021 12.03.2021	₹2% of the estimated quoted price
4	VISHWAKARMA SKILL UNIVERSITY	SUPPLY AND INSTALLATION OF WELDING SIMULATOR (AMPLIFIED REALITY) LAB + 1 OTHER WORK.		08.03.2021 08.04.2021	0% of the tender value
5	HSIDC	UP-GRADATION OF ROAD (EXCLUDING 10 MONTHS DEFECT LIABILITY PERIOD) AT INDUSTRIAL ESTATE PHASE-I TO KUNDLI, DISTT. SONIPAT.		08.03.2021 30.03.2021	518.93 lacs

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION KINDLY VISIT : www.haryanaeprocurement.gov.in or www.etenders.hry.nic.in

Timings**DELHI**

SATURDAY, MAR. 06
RISE 06:41 SET 18:24
RISE 01:01 SET 11:40
SUNDAY, MAR. 07
RISE 06:40 SET 18:25
RISE 02:06 SET 12:33
MONDAY, MAR. 08
RISE 06:39 SET 18:26
RISE 03:07 SET 13:31

Delhi Weather

max	min
32	14
32	14
30	16

Delhi Palam Today

32°C A cool misty/hazy morning and slight warm day likely to remain with sunny sky. Winds speed would decrease.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow

34°C Rise in temperature likely. Warm day with partly cloudy sky. A spell of thunderstorm and rain may occur at some places.

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Budget allocation likely to be over ₹65,000 crore'

Focus will primarily be on health and education sectors

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The AAP-led Delhi government is likely to present a budget with allocations over and above ₹65,000 crore for the 2021-22 fiscal, making it the highest allocation by any government since its first-ever session in 1993, sources said on Friday.

To focus primarily on the health and education sectors, the AAP government would add the 'Deshbhakti' head as a significant component to the budget this year, according to sources,

Patriotic programmes
"The Delhi government seeks to commemorate and celebrate each of the 75 weeks till the 75th Independence Day, on August 15, 2022, beginning March 12. Patriotic programmes will be organised as part of the initiative," a Delhi government source said.

"The government will

To focus primarily on the health and education sectors, the AAP government will add the 'Deshbhakti' head as a significant component to the budget this year

GOVERNMENT SOURCES
not only highlight the role of Delhi in India's freedom struggle, but also present its own vision of India at 100 in reference to Independence Day celebrations in 2047," the source also said.

The budget session will be held between March 8 and 16 with the budget likely to be presented on March 9.

The session will begin with tabling of economic survey report and outcome budget of the government on March 8.

The government, which had presented a budget of ₹65,000 for the previous fiscal, is likely to come out with measures to boost revenue collection that has been hit hard and dropped by 42% due to the pandemic and year-long lockdown, officials said.

The outcome budget, listing the performance and achievements of various departments and agencies of the government during the previous financial year, will be presented on the first day of the session along with the Economic Survey of Delhi, officials said.

The session will begin with the address of Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, safety norms like social distancing and use of face masks and social distancing will be strictly followed during the session, they said.

"The Question Hour is one of the most important platforms of a democratic institution," Mr. Bidhuri said.

BJP accuses Delhi govt. of bulldozing democracy

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, on Friday accused the Delhi government of bulldozing democracy and snatching away the right of MLAs by doing away with the Question Hour during the upcoming budget session of the Delhi Assembly beginning on Monday.

Terming it an assault on democracy, Mr. Bidhuri said the Question Hour was an important component of business of the Delhi Vidhan Sabha proceedings and by doing away with this critical instrument, the government was seeking to escape its responsibility of answering questions related to issues concerning the people of Delhi.

"The Question Hour is one of the most important platforms of a democratic institution," Mr. Bidhuri said.

HC upset with police over leak of chargesheet in Delhi riots case

Court asks Delhi Police Commissioner to submit affidavit

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday expressed displeasure at the Delhi Police for leak of supplementary chargesheet filed in a case related to north-east Delhi riots to the media even before cognisance was taken by the court concerned.

Justice Mukta Gupta asked the Delhi Police Commissioner to give an affidavit fixing responsibility on the person instrumental in leaking the information to the media.

'Proved allegation'
"It is a proved allegation once it comes in media. It no more remains an allegation now. You have to ascertain who has done it," the High Court said.

The Delhi Police's counsel, however, said that the contents of the supplementary chargesheet were not leaked to media by the police.



Riots broke out in north-east Delhi in February last year.

■ FILE PHOTO

the north-east Delhi riots, accusing Delhi Police of leaking his confessional statement to the media.

Advocate Siddharth Agarwal, representing Mr. Tanha, contended that portion of the supplementary chargesheet was with the media a day after it was filed before a trial court here.

The High Court has posted the case for further hearing on March 25.

On last hearing, the High Court had expressed dissatisfaction over Delhi Police's vigilance inquiry report on the allegation of leaking the confessional statement of Mr. Tanha to media.

Justice Gupta had said, "This vigilance inquiry is even worse than what they do in an ordinary inquiry in a petty theft case."

Mr. Tanha was arrested in May last year for allegedly being part of a "premeditated conspiracy" in the riots.

312 new cases reported, 27,057 vaccinated in Delhi

No. of active cases now stands at 1,779

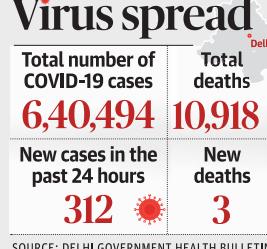
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Delhi on Friday recorded 312 new COVID-19 cases, which was the highest daily rise in the number of cases seen since January 15, when the numbers started staying below the 300 a day. The city also recorded three deaths and 312 recoveries.

A health bulletin issued by the Delhi government said that in the past 24 hours, 59,122 tests had been conducted with a positivity rate of 0.53%. Out of the total tests conducted, 36,119 were RT-PCR tests while 23,003 were rapid antigen tests.

The addition of Friday's figures takes the total number of cases in Delhi to 6,40,494 and the total number of fatalities to 10,918.

The total number of active cases in Delhi now stands at 1,779, with 863 patients currently under



home isolation. Out of the 5,709 beds available for COVID-19 patients in hospitals in the city, 599 are occupied.

A total of 27,057 beneficiaries took the COVID-19 vaccination on Friday and there were four minor adverse events following immunisation (AEFI), said a Delhi government spokesperson.

Of the total beneficiaries, 14,874 were people aged 60 and above and 2,020 were between 45 and 59 years. The rest of the people vaccinated on Friday were healthcare and frontline workers.

The survey, it said, was conducted on the parameters of quality of living set by the BJP-ruled Central government that

Be constantly vigilant against COVID-19: L-G

Baijal chairs 18th meeting of DDMA to review the pandemic situation in Delhi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Anil Baijal

to review COVID-19 situation and the ongoing vaccination drive, along with Deputy Chief Minister Manish

Sisodia and senior government officials, at Raj Niwas.

Appreciates efforts

While appreciating the efforts made by all the agencies concerned in effective controlling of COVID-19 in Delhi, Mr. Baijal emphasised the need to continue the vigilance without lowering guard and ensuring strict enforcement of COVID-19-appropriate behaviour.

"As advised by experts, it was decided to continue with the existing strategy of cluster-based surveillance, testing and genome sequencing," the L-G tweeted.

Stressed upon the need to make vaccine coverage more inclusive and equitable by way of greater outreach and focused IEC campaign, with special emphasis on marginalised/poor sections without access to digital platform," he also tweeted.

Delhi lagging in education, health, says Congress

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

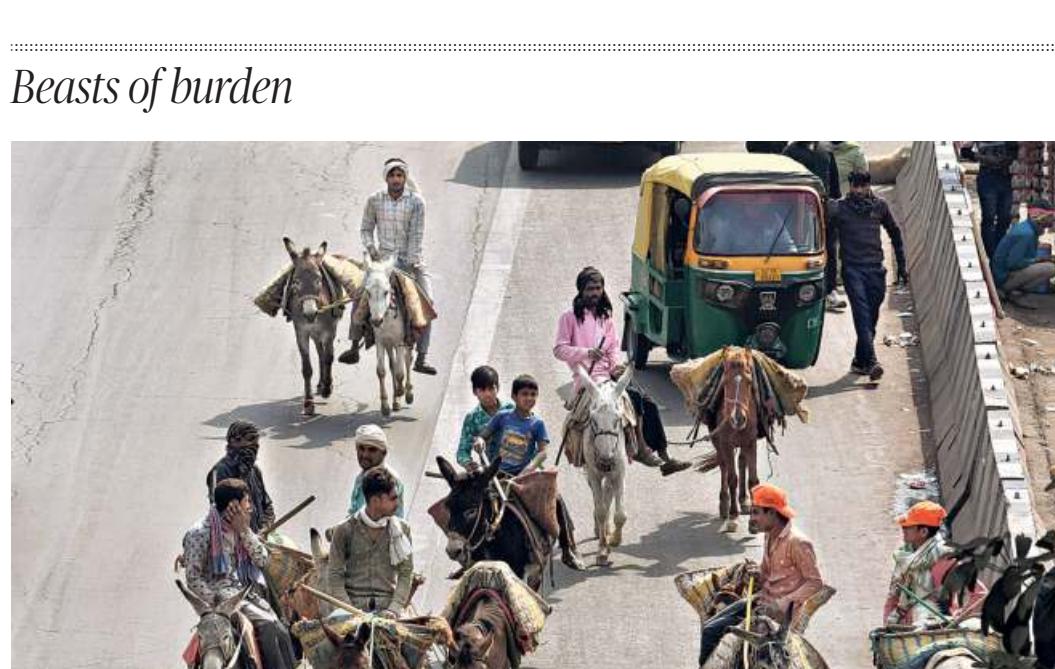
Delhi Congress on Friday said that it came as no surprise that Delhi has been ranked 35th out of 49 cities surveyed across the country in the "Ease of Living Index 2020" on the parameters of quality of living.

The survey, it said, was conducted on the parameters of quality of living set by the BJP-ruled Central government that

has called the bluff and exposed the lies of the BJP-ruled civic bodies and the AAP government, which claimed there has been development.

"Delhi has fallen in almost all the parameters, like education, health, housing, waste management, planning, pollution, safety and security, as the assessment tool evaluated the quality of life and the impact of various initiatives for urban development," the Delhi Congress said commenting on Ease of Living index released by the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry.

Leader of the Congress in the South Delhi Municipal Corporation, Abhishek Dutt, said that the survey has called the bluff of the Delhi government, which has been boasting about its so-called "model" of healthcare, education and governance.



People travelling with their donkeys in Delhi on Friday. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

'BJP govt. must rewrite school history curriculum'

French author releases book

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The government needs to change the school history curriculum in their country among Indian students, said French author Francois Gautier, speaking at the release of his book 'An Entirely New History of India' on Friday.

"There is no point in writing books like this unless the government rewrites the curriculum in schools," said Mr. Gautier. He said India had great poets and philosophers such as Kalidasa or Aurobindo, as well as great heroes and women warriors, but they are not taught in Indian

schools. "As a result, there is a lack of pride among Indians," he added.

Mr. Gautier expressed disappointment with the BJP government's performance in this area. "It is a battle, may be the second battle of Kurukshetra is happening now. Even within this government, there is no attempt to change the curriculum although it is supposed to be a right-wing pro-Hindu government. We expected so much, but it has not happened in the last seven years," he said.

His book argues that Indian history needs to be re-examined and freed from colonial biases.

Beasts of burden



People travelling with their donkeys in Delhi on Friday. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

HC asks Delhi govt. to comply with order to regulate online path labs

Put things in order or else will probably have to issue contempt notice and shut all your establishments: court

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday said it expects that the AAP government will put things in order and comply with a judicial order asking authorities to take action and regulate online pathological labs, otherwise contempt action would be initiated.

The High Court, which was hearing a plea alleging non-compliance of its

order in this regard, also sought to know from the AAP government whether its pathological laboratories and hospitals are NABL accredited.

The plea alleged non-compliance of the court's August 6, 2020 order to take action against illegal online health service aggregators operating in Delhi and to regulate online pathological labs.

"There is something

fundamentally wrong in the process. Are your own labs and hospitals NABL [National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories] accredited? It is a very fundamental question," Justice Najmi Waziri said.

Delhi government additional standing counsel Sanjoy Ghose and Urvi Mohan submitted that the government has issued a notification intimating all the labs that they have to follow the Supreme Court's order.

The apex court had on April 8, 2020 directed that COVID-19 tests must be carried out in NABL-accredited labs or any agencies approved by the WHO or ICMR.

The High Court granted time to the Delhi government to take instructions on the issue and listed the matter for further hearing

on March 12.

"I expect you to put things in order or else we will probably have to issue contempt notice and shut all your establishments. Find some solutions and put things in order in the interregnum," Justice Waziri orally observed.

Advocate Shashank Deo Sudhi, representing petitioner Rohit Jain, submitted that online pathological labs are not recogni-

nised, still they are conducting COVID-19 tests.

The High Court had earlier sought response of the Delhi government on the petition seeking initiation of contempt proceedings against the top government officials and others for alleged non-compliance of an order asking to take action and regulate online pathological labs.

Sealed tenders in prescribed format are invited by the Odisha State Medical Corporation Ltd (OSMC) from intended bidders for "Supply, installation and commissioning of Cold Chain Equipment for COVID-19, i.e. Deep Freezer and Walk-in-Cooler" of required quantity to different institutions as detailed in the enclosure "Annexure-A" which can be downloaded from the "Tenders" section of OSMC's official website, i.e. <http://osmcl.nic.in> of cost free of cost.

Bids should be properly sealed mentioning "Supply, installation and commissioning of Cold Chain Equipment for COVID-19, i.e. Deep Freezer and Walk-in-Cooler". The name of the quoted items should be clearly mentioned on the sealed envelop. The bid should be addressed to "MANAGING DIRECTOR, Odisha State Medical Corporation Ltd. (OSMC), Convent Square, Bhubaneswar – 751 007, ODISHA". The sealed quotations should reach to the above-mentioned address by Speed post/Registered post/Courier only on or before 05th April 2021 upto 11:00 AM.

No tender will be entertained after expiry of the prescribed date and time. The tenders will be opened on 05th April 2021 at 03:00 PM in the Tender Hall of OSMC, Bhubaneswar.

Note:

SEARCH FOR MISSING

General public is hereby informed that a person (depicted in the photo), **Name**: Shiv Narayan Sharma S/o Lt. Gouri Shankar Sharma R/o 1/3100, Kunj Gali, Ram Nagar, Shahdara, Delhi has been missing since 18.02.2021 from his house. In this regard a case vide DD No. 35/dated 19.02.2021 has been lodged at PS Mansarovar Park Delhi. His physical description is as under:-

Age : 77 Years, **Height**: 5'8", **Complexion** : Fair, **Face** : Round, **Built** : Normal, **Wearing** : White Colour kurta & payjama.

Any person having any information/clue about this missing person, may inform SHO, Mansarovar Park Delhi at E-mail: cic@cbi.gov.in or website: <http://cbi.nic.in>

SHO
Phone: 011-24368638, 24368641 P.S. Mansarovar Park Delhi
Fax No. 011-24368639 Shahdara Distt., Delhi
DP/374/SHD/2021 Ph. No. 011-22599374, 22599373

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED**See Section U/S 82 Cr. P.C.**

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused Ankush, S/o Kishan Lal, R/o H.No. E-5, Rameshwari Park, Pooja Colony, Loni, Ghaziabad U.P. has Committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 1045/14 U/S 498A/406/34 IPC & 3/4 DP Act, P.S. Nand Nagari, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest whereupon issued that the said Ankush cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said Ankush has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused Ankush of FIR No. 1045/14 U/S 498A/406/34 IPC & 3/4 DP Act, P.S. Nand Nagari, Delhi is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before **12.04.2021**.

By Order

Ms. Deepakshi Rana,
Metropolitan Magistrate-03,
Karkardooma Courts,
Shahdara, Delhi

DP/603/NE/2021(Court Matter)

DIRECTORATE OF AGRICULTURE, JHARKHAND, RANCHI

Krishi Bhawan, Kanke Road, Ranchi-834008

Short E-Procurement Notice (2nd call)

E-Tender Reference no.-Agri/06/2020-21 Dated:05.03.2021

1	Name of Work	Distribution of Seed Storage Bin (Seed Bin)
2	Estimated Cost (Rs.)	Rs. 300.00 Lakh
3	Time of Completion	90 days
4	Tender Form Cost	Rs. 10,000.00
5	EMD Amount	Rs. 6,00,000.00
6	Date of Publication of Tender on website	09.03.2021 at 2.00 PM
7	Document Download Period	09.03.2021 at 02.00 PM to 23.03.2021 upto 11.00 AM
8	Online Bid Submission Period	09.03.2021 at 04.00 PM to 23.03.2021 upto 11.00 AM
9	Hard Copy of Tender Documents, EMD and Tender Cost submission date	24.03.2021 upto 11.00 AM
10	Technical Bid Opening Date	24.03.2021 upto 12.00 PM
11	Date & Place of Technical Bid Opening	24.03.2021 at 12.00 PM Agriculture Directorate, Krishi Bhawan, Kanke Road, Ranchi
12	Name & Address of the Tender Inviting Authority	Nisha Oraon Singhmar, Director Agriculture, Jharkhand, Ranchi
13	Contact no. of e-procurement officer	9835345613
14	Helpline no. of e-procurement cell	0651-2233549

Further details can be seen on website-<http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in>

Director Agriculture, Jharkhand, Ranchi.

Himachal Pradesh**Public Works Department****NOTICE INVITING TENDER**

Sealed item rate tenders on form No. 6 & 8 are hereby invited by the Executive Engineer, Tauni Devi Division, HP-PWD Tauni Devi for the following works on behalf of the Governor of Himachal Pradesh from the approved and eligible Class C & D contractors enlisted in HP-PWD so as to reach in this office as per time schedule given below:-

1. Date of receipt of Applications for tender forms:-27.03.2021.upto 1.00 PM.
2. Date of issue/sale of Tender forms 27.03.2021 upto 5.00 PM
3. Date of receipt of Tender:-30.03.2021 upto 10.30 AM
4. Date of opening of Tender:-30.03.2021 at 11.00 AM.
5. A/R & M/O on various road under Chabutra Section HPPWD Sub Division Sujanpur (H.P.). (SH- P/L Patch work on Hamirpur to Sujanpur road Km.5/0 to 6/500).
6. Improvement of curves on Tauni Devi Uhal Kakkar Bajrol Jungle Beri road km. 0/0 to 30/915. (SH- Improvement of road at RD. 5/645 to 5/780).Estimated Cost:-Rs. 491049.00 Earnest Money:-Rs. 9900.00 Time- One Month.

NOTE:- The tender documents shall be issued only to those contractors/firms who fulfill the criteria and submit the documents with the application as required. Copy of Terms and condition may be obtained from Division office/Notice Board.

HP /28/20-21 HIM SUCHANA AVAM JAN SAMPAK

DBT-APSCS&T CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR BIORESOURCES AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

KIMIN, PAPUMPARE DISTRICT,
ARUNACHAL PRADESH, 79121.

No.SC(DBT)/ELMPE/92/2020-21/463 Dated 4th March, 2021

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders are invited from the reputed manufacturers / companies / authorized dealers for supply and installation of the laboratory equipment/instruments under DBT-APSCS&T Centre. For Details please visit : www.ardst.arunachal.gov.in.

Sd/-

Director Cum Member Secretary
Arunachal Pradesh State Council for
Science and Technology (APSCS&T),
ESS- Sector, Itanagar
Arunachal Pradesh- 791113

DIPR/ARN/16554-56/2020

ODISHA CONSTRUCTION CORPORATION LIMITED

(A Govt. of Odisha Undertaking)
UNIT-VIII, BHUBANESWAR
e-mail: thecctd@odishaconstruction.com
GSTIN - 21AAC02571K2ZM

e-Procurement Notice No. 38 /OCCL/2020-21 (on-line)

Type of Work :- Canal Lining with Cementitious Composite Geo Mattress

Total No. of Works :- 01 (One) No.

Period of completion :- 11 calendar months.

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Amount put to Tender (Approx.) (Rs. in Lakhs)	Bid Security (In Rs.)	Availability of Tender (On-line)	Submission of Tender (On-line)
Managing Director, OCC Ltd., Bhubaneswar	OCCP-DGP/06/2020-21	3980.13 Lakhs	39,81,000.00	09.03.2021, 10.00 A.M to 23.03.2021, 5.30 PM	09.03.2021, 10.00 A.M to 23.03.2021, 5.30 PM

Date of opening of the Technical Bid: 24.03.2021, 12.00 Noon

Further detail can be seen from the Govt. website (www.tendersodisha.gov.in)

Managing Director

OIPR-34120/11/0012/2021

**ODISHA PISCICULTURE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LIMITED**

(A Government of Odisha undertaking)

D-Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar-751012 ; E-mail id-mdopdc@rediffmail.com

Tender call notice for supply of Fishing Yarns / Twines in bobbins / cheeses

Tender call notice 172 / Date : 04/03/2021

The tender call notice are hereby invited in sealed tenders from the registered reputed manufacturers / Authorised dealers for supply of **nylon monofilament fishing net / twine / Nylon multifilament net yarn and high density polyethylene monofilament twine (HDPE)** for the year 2021-22 . All the tenders can be submitted through registered post/ speed post/ courier/in person to **Managing Director, Odisha Pisciculture Development Corporation, D-Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar-751012 or on before 05.04.2021 at 2.00PM**. The authority reserves the right to alter the date of opening or cancel the tender without assigning any reason thereof. The details of tender can be downloaded from our website www.opdcitd.in and in odishafisheries.nic.in

CAD-1448

General Manager

OIPR-01044/11/0003/2021

ASPIRE IAS**INTERVIEW GUIDANCE PROGRAMME****UPSC 2020-21****BOOK YOUR FREE SESSION****6TH MARCH****CONDUCTED BY****DIRECTOR SIR & BUREAUCRATS****FOR ADMISSION****WWW.ASPIREIAS.COM****Call/WhatsApp****8010068998, 8087266652****Contact Director Sir****a.kumar.ias@gmail.com****Dr. LAKSHMAIAH'S IAS****No 6, 1st Floor, Old Rajender Nagar, Karol Bagh,****New Delhi-60. Call: 9052265819****AIR-1****Batch starts on 15th March at 2pm****60 hours, 15 days @4hrs/day****15 full length tests on exclusive current affairs****Both offline & online****Rs.5000/- only****Highlights of 15 days programme****Dr. Lakshmaiah's IAS****www.dr-lakshmaiah-ias.com****DESIGN TO EXCEL****REAL ESTATE****First Floor Flat for Sale in R-Pocket****lalish Garden Delhi Contact****8130824573****PUBLIC NOTICE****NOTICE****is hereby given that AMARDEEP****SINGH Gal. No.1 of Plot No.76, area****measuring 50'x 100' yds. Khevali****Block 17, Sector 10, Mohan Nagar, Bhopal****is available for sale.****Property is located near****Shivaji Park, Bhopal.****For more details contact****Mr. Arun Kumar, 9891111111****or Mr. Arun Kumar,**

ASSEMBLY POLLS

DELI THE HINDU | SATURDAY, MARCH 6, 2021

Mahanta's exclusion from list revives AGP faction

The AGP (P) may join grand alliance

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The exclusion of former Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta from the Assam Gana Parishad's list of candidates has led to the revival of a faction that may join the Congress-led *Mahajot* or grand alliance in poll-bound Assam.

Mr. Mahanta has held the Barhampur Assembly constituency in central Assam since 1991. But his name did not figure among the AGP candidates after the seat-sharing agreement with major partner Bharatiya Janata Party was sealed in New Delhi on Thursday.

The former Chief Minister, who had been undergoing treatment at AIIMS in

New Delhi till Thursday, has not joined the revived AGP-Pragatishil (AGP-P).

But his loyalists hope he "will take the right decision" after returning to Assam and "give a befitting reply to the snub" by AGP-BJP.

"The BJP entered Assam holding the hands of Mahanta *dangoria* (honorary equivalent to *ji* in Assamese) because former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee requested him to. But the BJP betrayed him and clipped his wings after coming to power simply because he has been against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act," AGP-P general secretary Pranab Goswami said on Friday.

TMC leaders break down over being dropped

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA

Several Trinamool Congress leaders voiced their anguish against the party after they were denied nomination for the West Bengal Assembly elections with protests being held at a few places.

Four-time Satgachia MLA Sonali Guha, once a close associate of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, burst into tears after learning that she was denied a ticket this time.

"May God give Mamata di-di good sense and counsel, I have been with her from the beginning," said Ms. Guha, the former Deputy Speaker of the Assembly.

Former TMC MLA Arabul Islam, a strongman from

Bhangar in South 24 Parganas district, broke down in tears as he said that those who have loved the party have been ignored. "I will do whatever the local people want me to do," he said about his future plans, as some of his supporters burnt tyres and put up roadblocks in the area in protest.

Supporters of Rafiqur Rahaman, the sitting TMC MLA of Amdanga in North 24 Parganas, blocked the highway after his name did not appear in the list. A section of the party's Siliguri leadership also took exception to Omprakash Mishra, a Kolkata resident, being made a candidate from the north Bengal town.

How?

■ We have the support of the people including Mus-

Does an unprecedented electoral contest involving three alliances, one led by the BJP, worry you?

■ Absolutely not. The alliance of regional parties Assam Jatiya Parishad and Rajo Dal hardly has a mass base and are flogging issues that no longer concern the people. In 2016, we had little or no presence in the seats that rivals-turned-allies Congress and All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) won. The Congress-AIUDF grand alliance may help us gain a few seats from the Muslim areas they claim to have a hold on.

How?

■ We have the support of the people including Mus-

lims who have been equal beneficiaries of the developmental schemes. For instance, 2.8 lakh of the 7 lakh beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Awaj Yojana are Muslims. Besides, analysis of the 2016 State and 2019 Lok Sabha polls shows our candidates and those of our allies got a sizeable chunk of Muslim votes in minority areas. Muslims in Assam did not suffer violence in the last 5 years unlike during the Congress reign.

Their mindset is changing as was evident from the by-elections to the Muslim-majority Jania Assembly seat where we got 15,000 votes. We could barely manage 5,000 earlier.

Will the anti-CAA sentiments whipped up in the Assamese-dominated areas by the AJP-RD and Mahajot be a challenge for you?

■ The CAA is a non-issue. The Congress has illusions about it being relevant while the AJP-RD believes it can garner some emotional votes.

The latter can manage 4-5% votes at best. That the RD is the party of (jailed peasants' rights activist) Akhil Gogoi, who had in 2016 asked people to vote for Congress, will help us. Had CAA been a factor, the BJP would not have won the panchayat polls after the first wave of protests. We won 100% seats in Assamese-dominated Assembly segments such as Patachar-

district administration, which had imposed a week-long lockdown, relaxed regulations, but directed all shops to function between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m.

In north Maharashtra, Nashik reported over 550 cases to take its tally to 1,30,434, of which 2,840 were active. A single death took the toll to 2,070. Neighbouring Jalgaon saw 550 new cases and five deaths as its tally reached 62,274, of which 3,606 are active. Its death toll has reached 1,516.

While cases rose in Ratnawada, only the 'sugar belt' districts of western Maharashtra saw a dip in cases. Satara reported 214 new cases as its tally rose to 59,473, of which 1,610 are active. A single fatality took its total death toll to 1,848.

Sangli reported 34 cases and no deaths as the district's tally reached 51,442, of which only 530 are active.

Kolhapur reported 23 cases and one death as its total case tally reached 49,887, of which just 441 are active, while its toll reached 1,681.

A total of 4,10,411 people across the State are in home quarantine and 4,203 are in institutional quarantine.



Braving the heat: Senior citizens wait outside a vaccination centre in Goregaon on Friday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Of 1,66,86,880 laboratory samples tested thus far, 21,98,399 have returned positive

DR. PRADEEP AWATE
State Surveillance Officer

than 1,800 cases to take its total case tally to 4,17,237. As per the State Health Department figures, five more deaths were reported as the toll reached 8,080. However, district authorities said the toll has reached 9,286, while the active case tally surged past 12,000 to reach 12,699.

Cases continued to mount in Amravati district, which reported nearly 700 cases, taking its total tally to 3,31,020, of which 9,055 are active. Three deaths took the city's death toll to 11,495.

Mumbai reported 1,174 new cases, taking its total tally to 1,57,575, of which 11,552 are currently active. Two deaths were recorded as the total death toll rose to 3,537.

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New space

ISRO must take advantage of the market opportunities from space applications

With the launch of Brazil's Amazonia-1 satellite last week from Sriharikota, a new chapter has begun in India's space history. The satellite, a 637-kilogram entity, was the first dedicated commercial mission of NewSpace India Limited, a two-year-old commercial arm of the Department of Space. This is not the first time that NSIL has organised a launch of foreign satellites aboard an Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) launch vehicle. The organisation has had launches last November as well as in December 2019. However, the primary satellites aboard both these missions were Indian satellites – the RISAT-2BRI and the EOS-01 – with smaller satellites from several other countries, as well as India, piggybacking on them. The Amazonia mission also saw 18 other satellites being launched and was the first fully commercial mission. India has so far launched 342 foreign satellites from 34 countries using its Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle platform and many of them have involved ISRO's first commercial entity, the Antrix Corporation. There is still confusion on how exactly the responsibilities of NSIL differ from those of Antrix. But with the formation of the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Center (IN-SPACe) – a regulatory agency – as well as plans of an independent tribunal to adjudicate disputes among private space entities, there is a potential explosion of market opportunities from space applications on the anvil. Though the private sector plays a major role in developing launch and satellite infrastructure for ISRO, there are now several companies that offer myriad services. Many of these companies want to launch their own satellites, of varying dimensions, and the experience with ISRO has not been smooth always. The most conspicuous has been the controversy involving Devas Multimedia, to which the Government of India owes nearly \$1.2 billion going by an order of a tribunal of the International Chamber of Commerce and upheld by a United States federal court last year. NSIL, it is said, is also a move by India's space establishment to insulate the prospects of the space industry in India from repercussions of the Devas-Antrix imbroglio.

Much like unfettered access to the Internet has spawned industries that were inconceivable, similarly, space applications and mapping have barely scratched the surface in terms of the opportunities that they can create. NSIL has a broad ambit and will be involved in collaborations spanning from launches to new space-related industries. NSIL is also expected to be more than just a marketer of ISRO's technologies; it is to find newer business opportunities and expand the sector itself. NSIL must endeavour to not be another Antrix but be continuously in start-up mode. It must conceive of ways to aid space start-ups reach out to rural India and facilitate more recruits from India's young to facilitate careers in space applications and sciences. It must see itself both as an Indian ambassador and disruptor in the space arena.

Tactical retreat

Sasikala's withdrawal from politics might help narrow the gap in TN's electoral contest

As elections approach, drama and excitement will be a constant feature in the conduct of politics. In December last, it was veteran actor Rajini-kanth who provided the theatrics to the political situation in Tamil Nadu by announcing his entry, and then his exit. Now, with the Assembly election hardly a month away, V.K. Sasikala, former interim general secretary of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and aide of former Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, surprised many by declaring that she would step aside from politics. After mobilising her supporters and making a political show of her return to the State on serving out her jail term in Bengaluru, she issued an appeal to the "true followers" of Jayalalithaa to "remain united, act wisely and work hard" during the Assembly election to prevent the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) from capturing power again. There is no clarity over what prompted her to make such an announcement when it was expected that she would play an active political role, going by her observations in the last one month. But regardless of her motives, the latest statement can be viewed as a tactical retreat on her part so that the ruling AIADMK does not suffer any disadvantage in the elections. Although her nephew, T.T.V. Dhinakaran, who heads the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK), is still hoping to lead a coalition of his own, her statement is a shot in the arm for the AIADMK, which is trying to ward off the challenge from the principal opposition, the DMK. It has also laid to rest, for the time being, the debate over the possibility of her return to the AIADMK, which was reported to have turned down a suggestion from its ally, the Bharatiya Janata Party, on the matter.

What the ruling party expects now is that the AMMK's support base in the central and southern parts of the State will come back to it and help the party win the Assembly elections. There is expectation that the gap between the AIADMK-led front and the DMK-led coalition will narrow down, especially if some of the loyalists in the Sasikala camp are accommodated during distribution of the tickets by the AIADMK. But, elections rarely turn on any one factor, and certainly not on the limited support base of the breakaway group of Ms. Sasikala. On test will be the performance of Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami in the last four years. Personality-based politics has taken a back seat this election with the passing of M. Karunanidhi of the DMK and Jayalalithaa of the AIADMK. Performance and promises are, therefore, more likely to dominate the campaign.

Patching the gaps in India's cybersecurity

Doctrinal clarity and institutional coherence are essential for a robust cybersecurity posture



PRANESH PRAKASH &
ARINDRAJIT BASU

On Sunday, February 28, there was a sensational report in *The New York Times*, "China appears to warn India: push too hard and the lights could go out" (<https://tinyurl.com/3c8wzqN>), based on investigations by a United States-based cybersecurity firm. It raised the possibility that the power outage in Mumbai, on October 13, 2020, could have been the result of an attack by a Chinese state-sponsored group. Maharashtra's Home Minister acknowledged that a report by the Maharashtra Cyber Cell showed that the grid failure was potentially the result of "cyber sabotage". Meanwhile, the Union Power Ministry denied that the grid failure was linked to any cybersecurity incident, and blamed human error for it. We cannot say who is right since not enough information is available in the public domain. And therein lies the rub.

While Maharashtra's Home Minister has promised to table the report in the Assembly, this would be the first time, to our knowledge, that a cybersecurity incident has been discussed this openly by government officials.

India has been a target earlier
India has been attacked by suspected Chinese state-sponsored groups multiple times in the past. In 2009, a suspected cyber espionage network dubbed GhostNet was found to be targeting, amongst others, the Tibetan government in exile in India, and many Indian embassies. By pursuing the leads from that discovery, researchers found what they dubbed the Shadow Network, a vast cyberespionage operation which extensively targeted Indian entities, including military establishments, news publications, and even the National Security Council Secretariat itself, with

clear evidence that confidential documents had been accessed by the attackers. In response to a question raised in Parliament, the then Minister Sachin Pilot noted an investigation was under way (<https://bit.ly/3uXTLAr>). There were a number of subsequent attacks that targeted India, including Stuxnet, which had also taken down nuclear reactors in Iran; Stuxnet, which targeted not just government but also private entities including a firm that provided tech support to the National Stock Exchange; and Dtrack which first targeted Indian banks, and later the Kudankulam nuclear power plant (Tamil Nadu) in 2019. However, neither the report from the Shadow Network investigation, nor any other, has ever been tabled in Parliament, nor even a redacted version made public. Even when parliamentarians have raised serious questions, the government's responses have only been perfunctory. Appraising lawmakers of the scale and depth of the damage wrought is critical to enabling meaningful public discussions and crafting a robust response. Further, doing so will enable the government to be able to own the narrative around these incidents.

On a side note, while there is much evidence to show that Chinese state-sponsored groups were responsible for many of these attacks, Chinese cybersecurity agencies have also helped the security community in dismantling the infrastructure behind some of these attacks. And it must also be remembered that documents released by WikiLeaks show that groups such as the Central Intelligence Agency's UMBRAGE project have advanced capabilities of misdirecting attribution to another nation-state ("false flag attacks") by leaving behind false "fingerprints" for investigators to find. Given this, questions of attribution are always murky when it comes to cyber attacks – necessitating a robust institutional posture and political acumen in publicly dealing with these issues.

Institutional security
Over the past two decades, India has made a significant effort at



crafting institutional machinery focusing on cyber resilience spanning several government entities. The Prime Minister's Office includes within it several cyber portfolios. Among these are the National Security Council, usually chaired by the National Security Adviser (NSA), and plays a key role in shaping India's cyber policy ecosystem. The NSA also chairs the National Information Board, which is meant to be the apex body for cross-ministry coordination on cybersecurity policymaking. The National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre established under the National Technical Research Organisation in January 2014 was mandated to facilitate the protection of critical information infrastructure. In 2015, the Prime Minister established the office of the National Cyber Security Coordinator who advises the Prime Minister on strategic cybersecurity issues.

India's Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), which is the nodal entity responding to various cybersecurity threats to non-critical infrastructure comes under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY). The Ministry of Defence has recently upgraded the Defence Information Assurance and Research Agency to establish the Defence Cyber Agency, a tri-service command of the Indian armed forces to coordinate and control joint cyber operations, and craft India's cyber doctrine. Finally, the Ministry of Home Affairs oversees multiple similarly-named "coordination centres" that focus on law enforcement efforts to address cybercrime, espionage and terrorism, while the Ministry of External Affairs coordinates India's

cyber diplomacy push – both bilaterally with other countries, and at international fora like the United Nations.

This institutional framework, while seeking to create an 'all of government' approach to countering and mitigating cybersecurity threats at the national level, has also resulted in concerns around effective coordination, overlapping responsibilities and lack of clear institutional boundaries and accountability. This needs to be clarified in India's National Cyber Security Strategy, which has been drafted by the NSC – a much-needed update to the National Cyber Security Policy 2013 – but is yet to be released. Ensuring coherence and coordination between these different actors should be its primary goal.

Doctrine on cyber conflicts

India is also yet to clearly articulate a doctrine that holistically captures its approach to cyber conflict, either for conducting offensive cyber operations, or the extent and scope of countermeasures against cyber attacks. While reports indicate that India too engages in targeted cyber-attacks, the rules of engagement for that are unclear. This is unlike India's approach to other global security regimes. For example, the 'No First Use' nuclear posture has been critical in preventing a nuclear armageddon in a region fraught by political and military tensions, and continues to further India's global reputation as a responsible nuclear state.

Is it fair to argue that 'cyber' is different? Could secrecy and ambiguity surrounding a nation's doctrine and capabilities provide a tactical advantage when engaging in cyber operations? This is hardly the case in today's increasingly unstable geopolitical scenario. The existing asymmetry in capabilities does not currently favour India. The absence of a credible cyber deterrence strategy means that states and non-state actors alike remain incentivised to undertake low-scale cyber operations for a variety of purposes – espionage, cyber crime, and even the disruption of critical information

infrastructure.

Define the red lines

The same argument must be made for India's contribution to global regimes crafting norms for responsible state behaviour in cyberspace. India has been an active participant at processes within the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly dealing with issues of disarmament and international security. While the Indian delegation has made public some of their intervention, India's long-term strategic thinking on core issues of debate at these forums remains relatively unknown, barring a few statements by public officials, including Shivshankar Menon and Arvind Gupta. A key opportunity herein is a precise articulation of how international law applies to cyberspace, which could mould the global governance debate to further India's strategic interests and capabilities. In particular, this should include positioning on not just non-binding norms but also legal obligations on 'red lines' with respect to cyberspace-targets that should be considered illegitimate due to their significance for human life, such as health-care systems, electricity grids, water supply, and financial systems.

Clearer strategy and greater transparency are the need of the hour to improve India's cybersecurity posture. To better detect and counter threats from both state actors and their proxies as well as online criminals, improved coordination is needed between the government and the private sector, as well as within the government itself – and at the national and State levels. A clear public posture on cyber defence and warfare boosts citizen confidence, helps build trust among allies, and clearly signals intent to potential adversaries, thus enabling a more stable and secure cyber ecosystem.

Pranesh Prakash was a co-founder of the Centre for Internet and Society, and is an affiliated fellow at Yale Law School's Information Society Project. Arindrajit Basu is Research Lead at the Centre for Internet and Society

The Kremlin's buzzword now is Russia looking East

The Greater Europe concept has gone, with the emphasis on Russia's sovereignty and independence



KRISHNAN SRINIVASAN

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov declared last month that although the European Union (EU) was Russia's biggest trading and investment partner, Moscow was "ready to break ties" with the EU after criticism of the jailing of Opposition figure Alexei Navalny.

He added that Russia worked with the EU in only a few areas, dealings with the EU were "sporadic" and related mainly to energy and foreign policy issues such as Syria and Iran. The Kremlin later mitigated the Minister's comments, denying that severance of diplomatic contacts was imminent, though such steps might be considered in response to EU sanctions affecting sensitive areas of the economy.

Idea of a common home
A Swedish soldier in the 18th century, Philipp-Johann von Strahlenberg, defined the Ural Mountains as the border between Russia and Europe, a view warmly endorsed by Russians associated with Tsar Peter the Great's westernisation

programme. In 1962, French President Charles de Gaulle proposed "a Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals", the idea of a common European home echoed later by Soviet leaders Leonid Brezhnev and Mikhail Gorbachev. President Boris Yeltsin (1991-99) pursued this concept, but his commitment to refashion Russia after the European model failed to result in the inclusion of Russia in European security or political architecture or the removal of Cold War tensions. Instead, Moscow's embrace of liberalism legitimised sovereign inequality, with the EU lecturing Russia on liberal norms and assuming a role to influence Russia's domestic affairs, though treating Russian influence beyond its borders as illegitimate and 'meddling'.

The EU's attitude was never sustainable since it rested on sovereign inequality. Democracy was advanced when the West assumed the right to promote liberal values in Russian civil society and shape its political opposition, but democracy was under attack whenever Russia attempted to influence the West. Moscow held the contrary view; that power and values could not be decoupled; and refusal to include Russia in European institutions such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the EU continued the structures of the Cold War, and consolidated



the opposing Russian and European basic security interests.

Where Europe went wrong
Europe's mistake in dealing with Russia after the re-unification of Germany in 1990 was in expecting it to westernise unilaterally. This ignored Gorbachev's warning that "the states of Europe belong to different social systems; recognition of this fact and respect for the sovereign right of each people to choose their social system... are the most important prerequisites." After its transitory revival in the 1990s, the objective of a common European home remains as unrealisable as ever. On the contrary, it seems that after 300 years, Russia will end its West-oriented approach although Europe and the United States have yet to acknowledge this historic shift.

The West's support for the 2014 Ukraine uprising, and the NATO and EU's relentless forward policy

in States bordering Russia are intensely resented in Moscow, and the EU's claim to a monopoly of European values and identity fuels this animosity. The Kremlin's Greater Europe concept has now been replaced by the more feasible Greater Eurasia Initiative, with Russia looking East for economic connectivity and institutional integration. The current emphasis is on Russia's sovereignty and independence, the idea of a unified European civilisation replaced by competition in values, and instead of closer collaboration with Europe, the Russian and European integration initiatives will go their separate ways.

The Russian liberals

Ever since the French Revolution, the Napoleonic period and the Decembrist revolt against the Tsar, Russia has been suspicious about liberal political movements, thereby obliging Russian liberals to identify with foreign counterparts and appearing as a fifth column. Upon Russia's humiliation in its war with Japan in 1905, Russian liberals sent messages congratulating the Japanese Emperor, and used the hardships of the First World War to delegitimise the authority of the Tsar, although it was the Bolsheviks who seized power in the ensuing chaos. Russia's exclusion from post-Cold War Europe revived its distrust of dom-

estic liberals, who draw encouragement from western support for colour revolutions and anticipate regime change during every street protest in Russia. U.S. President Biden, after pledging to pursue values-based diplomacy, now adopts Washington's tried-and-failed toolkit of sanctions and use of force.

The Moscow visit by the EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell that provoked Mr. Lavrov's outburst demonstrates that efforts to reset relations are compromised when mutual expectations about the form and nature of ties are far apart. Moscow rejects EU efforts to intervene in its domestic affairs while the EU feels disrespected and rebuffed. Russia is transitioning from Greater Europe to Greater Eurasia, and diplomatic disengagement may be expedient until the new reality is understood. Paradoxically, Russia's emphasis on Greater Eurasia might improve the climate for Russian liberals, because a responsible liberal presence in the Russian political system is necessary, and could come about by decoupling liberalism from great power competition.

India, under ever-closer international scrutiny over its human rights abuses, should scrutinise the EU-Russia stand-off and draw the relevant conclusions.

Krishnan Srinivasan is a former Foreign Secretary

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

A retreat

V.K. Sasikala, the aide of former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, has made a shrewd move in withdrawing from politics, which is only temporary. Nobody really empathised with her when she was sent to jail. Her return to the State after serving a sentence for corruption has not evoked any natural response.

Ms. Sasikala must have realised that with the anti-incumbency factor against the AIADMK and its alliance with the BJP, the chances of the AIADMK returning to power were slim.

Therefore, she did not want to add to the confusion and make that alliance weaker by entering the fray and thereby improving the chances of the DMK. Barring money power, she did not bring anything else to the table. She is perhaps waiting for the elections to be over so that she can make a bid for the AIADMK.

N.G.R. PRASAD,
Chennai

Job quota rule

The Haryana government's decision to reserve 75% of private sector jobs that pay less than ₹50,000 per

month for candidates from the State is retrograde, inward-looking and defies logic. First, it does not promote competition. This protection is not in consonance with World Trade Organization laws which are anti-protective. What will happen if every State enacts such laws? If every State decides to follow suit, they would become islands, working in isolation. Therefore, this policy goes against national integration as enshrined in the Constitution.

A.V. NARAYANAN,
Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu

■ The Haryana government's puerile step is bereft of any merit and is just a case of appeasement politics. It is a tacit admission of a failure to create jobs for youth. This will have dire ramifications: industries could now think of ways to evade such ridiculous steps. Second, in a country where much of the workforce is already unemployed on account of a lack of crucial and necessary skills, the unemployability quotient will rise further as the prospective employees will become complacent. Third, private companies could face huge losses if they have to

cough up wages for unproductive staff.

DEEPAK SINGHAL,
Noida, Uttar Pradesh

Communication plan

The suggestions made by a Group of Ministers in the present government to stem the negative narrative seem to do more harm than good (Inside pages, "GoM suggests steps to stem 'negative narrative,'" March 5). Encouraging a favourable voice to make it audible without ascertaining its merits is as good as curbing genuine and adverse opinion. The specific steps such as roping in

unemployed journalists who were supportive of the government, engaging with the schools of journalism, and even direct action against those writing against the government would only cause freedom of speech and expression – already at stake due to the recent events – to deteriorate further. As what a 'false narrative' is not clearly defined, steps such as these only make media platforms more subjective, which is against media ethics of objectivity.

BITRA RAGHUVEER,
Mangalagiri, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh

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ASSEMBLY POLLS

DEHLI THE HINDU | SATURDAY, MARCH 6, 2021

SWOT ANALYSIS

No titans to skipper, but not any ship in storm

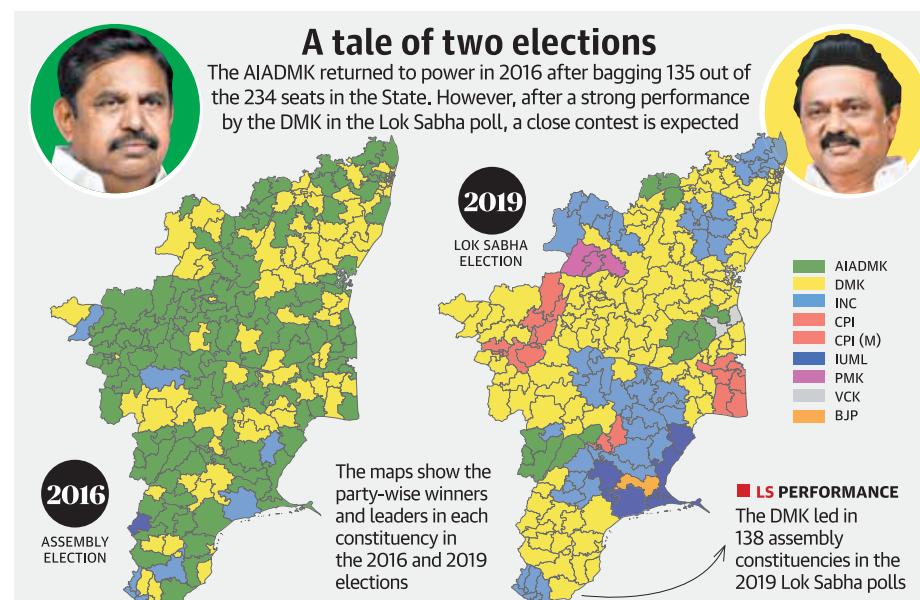
The ruling AIADMK and the DMK in T.N. don't have Jayalalithaa or Karunanidhi to lead them, but they are ready for battle

T. RAMAKRISHNAN

Tamil Nadu, known for its Dravidian duopoly, is facing an electoral battle between the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) without their stalwarts, Jayalalitha and Karunanidhi, respectively. And a new dimension is the aggressive efforts by the BJP to make inroads into the State's politics.

There are players too in the fray such as the Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) of actor Kamal Haasan, the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) led by T.T.V. Dhinakaran and Naam Tamizhar Katchi (NTK) of Seeman.

They, however, are likely to occupy a portion of the space available for formations other than those led by the two major parties. In the 2016 Assembly election, the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), the six-party Makkal Nala Kootani (People's Welfare Front), the BJP and the NTK together netted 15.3% of the votes polled. With V.K. Sasikala, Mr. Dhinakaran's aunt and aide of Jayalalithaa, opt-



ing to step aside from active politics, his three-year-old party, which secured a vote share of 5.25% in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, appeared to have suffered a setback.

Unlike in 2016, the AIADMK is contesting as the dominant constituent of a multi-party coalition.

After Jayalalithaa's death in

December 2016, the AIADMK gravitated towards the BJP, with which she maintained a respectable distance between 2014 and 2016. The two parties, along with others such as the PMK and the Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK), went to the 2019 Lok Sabha election together and met with disastrous results. The alliance got

only one seat. The "anti-Modi" factor was cited as a major reason for the debacle.

The composition of the AIADMK-led front now may undergo changes with the ruling party's talks with the DMDK having failed to yield any tangible result. As of now, the seat-sharing process has been completed only with the PMK, which has

been allotted 23 seats. Though the seat-sharing arrangement with the BJP has not yet been finalised, the AIADMK is expected to give nearly 25 seats.

Palaniswami factor

There is a grudging acknowledgement among Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswami's critics that he has made use of the COVID-19 pandemic to showcase himself as an able administrator, though all the hard work has been, according to the critics, done by the officials. Positioning himself as a farmer, he has taken several steps to win over rural voters. The waiver of crop loans totalling ₹12,110.75 crore from cooperative institutions was among the policy announcements made a few weeks prior to the announcement of the election dates.

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi's recent visits to the State should help in consolidating the DMK's support base. The party has not completed seat-sharing.

What is keenly watched is whether there will be a "spoiler", just as the Makkal Nala Kootani did for the DMK last time.

34.73%
increase in the number of polling stations in Tamil Nadu in 2021 compared to 2016. The State will have 88,936 stations this election

31.65%
increase in the number of polling stations in West Bengal in 2021 compared to 2016. The State will have 1,01,916 stations this election

MAMATA BANERJEE
Chief Minister, West Bengal

P 7

POLL POURRI



A file photo of BJP workers participating in a function held in Kochi. ■ THULASI KAKKAT

Flip-flop on CM candidate

Politicians are often forced to retract their statements and come election time, even more so. Barely a day after Kerala State BJP president K. Surendran proposed technocrat E. Sreedharan as the party's chief ministerial candidate, he retracted his statement. Mr. Surendran said that though the people of Kerala wanted Mr. Sreedharan as Chief Minister, it was up to the BJP national leadership to take a decision. Similarly, hours after he had expressed willingness to contest on CPI(M) ticket from Kozhikode North segment, filmmaker Ranjith backed out, saying he preferred to support the sitting MLA, A. Pradeepkumar. Law Minister A.K. Balan, who had advised reporters to wait for the CPI(M)'s decision on fielding his wife P.K. Jameela as the party nominee in the Tarur Assembly segment, blamed the media for reporting an issue that was never on the table. On Friday, the party State committee seriously considered Ms. Jameela's name.

Can settle for fewer seats: Ajmal

All India United Democratic Front chief Maulana Badruddin Ajmal on Friday said seat-sharing was not an issue for his party. He said his party can sacrifice a few seats if it serves the sole purpose of defeating the BJP. "We are working to adjust with our allies because what matters is our one-point programme of ensuring that the BJP cannot retain power and implement the CAA," he said.

A party going hither and thither

Perhaps no political party has undergone changes as the Kerala unit of the Loktantrik Janata Dal (LJD) has in recent times. Since its departure from the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front in 2009, the party led by the late M.P. Veerendra Kumar was the face of the Janata Dal (Secular) in the State. Subsequently it was named the Socialist Janata (Democratic). Later, it merged with the Janata Dal (United) to join the Congress-led United Democratic Front. When the JD(U) aligned with the BJP at the national level, the State unit was called the LJD and then again switched coalition loyalties. A merger between the LJD and the JD(S) has been on the cards for long. But a faction is not happy with the idea. The party, now led by M.V. Shreyams Kumar (in photo), was waiting for its national unit to merge with the RJD. But since that has gone awry, many leaders are thinking of taking the State unit to the Samajwadi Party.

'A smiley election'

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who is facing one of the toughest elections, has called the 2021 Assembly polls a "smiley election". Asked whether she is faced with difficulties, Ms. Banerjee told journalists, "No, it's a soft election. It is a smiley election. You all will smile on May 2." Moments after announcing the party's candidates, the Chief Minister also raised the slogan "Khela Hobe (games will be played)". "I was the first to raise it," she claimed, adding another phrase to the slogan to make it "Khela Hobe, Jita Hobe (games will be played and we will win)".

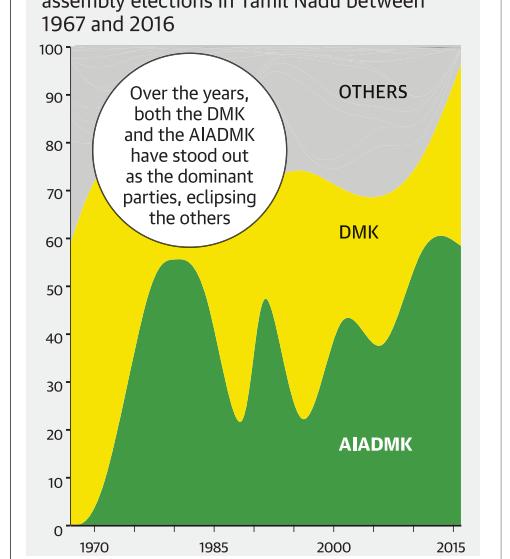
One election, two manifestos

In the 2021 West Bengal Assembly election, the Left parties will have two manifestos. One will be a joint manifesto of the 'Sanyukt Morcha' (the Left, Congress and the Indian Secular Front) and the other of the Left parties. Left Front Chairperson and CPI(M) Polit Bureau member Biman Bose, who also announced the candidates list for the alliance for the first two phases, said the two manifestos will not contradict each other.

DATA BYTE

T.N. duopoly

The chart shows the overall seat share (%) of the AIADMK, the DMK and others in the assembly elections in Tamil Nadu between 1967 and 2016



Campaign stop



Voter vibrancy: Congress supporters at an election rally in Tezpur of Sonitpur district of Assam. ■ RITU RAJ KONWAR

INTERVIEW | DEREK O'BRIEN

'Trinamool will form Bengal government on May 2'

Good governance of the last decade will ensure a third term for Mamata Banerjee, says party leader

SOBHANA K. NAIR

Ahead of the West Bengal Assembly election, Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien speaks on a resurgent Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the communal charge against the Trinamool, and the exodus of leaders to the BJP

Why is the Trinamool Congress protesting against the eight phases of elections in West Bengal, considering the last time around, too, the polls were held over seven phases?

Since Independence, has any State election been held over eight phases? The party with truckloads of money obviously prefers fighting the polls over 33 days. All the institutions are under the BJP's control. Integrity surrendered, now just supine and grovel to please. These elections are not a fight for Trinamool or Mamata Banerjee alone, this is fight for the Constitution of India. Those who believe in the Constitution, as it was enshrined, have to stand up now and be counted.

Consider what we are up against. In 33 days, eight phases, the 'tourist gang' will bring 24 Union Ministers, six Chief Ministers, their faithful allies, the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation), the ED (Enforcement Directorate), plus money power, government machinery, and a large

pliant media. On the other hand, what do we have? A woman who has worked hard for the people of Bengal for 10 years, touching lives. For three decades before her stint as CM, she has been committed to people's issues. Who was the first to call demonetisation a disaster? Who fought for land rights? For farmers? For the oppressed?

By the way, what is U.P. CM Ajay Bishnoi – yes, that's his name – doing campaigning in West Bengal when law and order is in a shambles in his own State? The BJP is trying to divide this nation and if we don't stop them, they will rewrite the idea of India.

Also, let me ask, who is their chief ministerial candidate? When I last checked, Narendra Modi and Amit Shah were not on the list of MLA candidates!

You claim that it is an unfair battle, that the Trinamool is outnumbered in terms of artillery and money power by the BJP. At the same time, your campaign manager Prashant Kishore has been going all out claiming that the party is returning to power. How do you arrive at such conclusions?

The people of Bengal give us the confidence. It's the 'tourist gang' versus Mamata Banerjee. That's the choice

The Trinamool has been accused of unleashing political violence in the State ahead of the election. How do you react to the charge?

Bunkum. This is a totally false narrative that the Modi-Shah spin machine have been building for the last six months to suit their campaign. They have been feeding this to the media they intimidate to control. I would humbly urge real journalists to come here and report the facts from the ground. We challenge the BJP to come and debate the real issues with us – health, education, agriculture, jobs, social schemes for the marginalised, the economy, rising unemployment.

The Left has accused the Trinamool of facilitating the BJP's entry into Bengal, with the entire Trinamool campaign designed to target it. So aren't you yourself placing them on the prime perch?

Trinamool government 3.0 on May 2. The question is

■ The Left-Congress alliance will not win half a dozen seats in Bengal. They too have tied up with communal forces and also have a tacit understanding with BJP on the ground.

But why a BJP-centric campaign?

■ Ours is a people-driven campaign – good governance; touching lives; our deep understanding of Bengal. But yes, the BJP is going to be the principal Opposition party in Bengal. So we have to expose them, their track record in other States. Who do you want us to attack? AIADMK (All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam)? NCP (Nationalist Congress Party)? RJD (Rashtriya Janata Dal)?

Mamata Banerjee in many public meetings has been heard asking voters to not waste votes on the Left-Congress alliance. Is the Trinamool worried that the alliance could play spoilsport?

■ We are quietly confident. We are focused on our positive campaign. We will see a Trinamool government 3.0 on May 2. The question is

not whether we will win the election, the question is how good the margin is. That is what we are playing for.

The Trinamool has been accused of being communal, of following an appeasement policy. Furfura Sharif's chief patron Abbas Siddiqui, among others, has said that the Trinamool government believes in giving alms to Muslims and not their rights. How do you react?

■ Yes, of course the Trinamool apes people. We appease women, children, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, migrant workers. The sad part is, people need to come here, travel [to] the interiors to see the truth. This 'tourist gang' has come here to ask for votes, while we have been touching lives for 10 years here.

There has been an exodus of Trinamool leaders to the BJP. The latest to go was Dinesh Trivedi, who said that the party is no longer under the control of Mamata Banerjee and, instead, a select few are running it. How do you react?

■ Great people talk about ideas. Good people talk about issues. Small people talk about other people.

FROM PAGE ONE

'Currency smuggling was at CM's behest'

Besides Swapna Suresh, P.S. Sarith and M. Sivasankar, former Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, are accused in the case.

Sumit Kumar, Commissioner of Customs (Preventive), Kochi, submitted in a statement that Swapna had also made a "shocking revelation" of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's close connection with the previous Consul General of UAE and the illegal monetary transactions.

The statement was filed in response to a petition filed by the State government challenging certain remarks in the order of the Ernakulam Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate (Economic Offences) Court, providing security to Swapna, now housed at the women's Prison and Correctional Home, Attakulangara, Thiruvananthapuram.

The Customs Commissioner pointed out that Swapna had made the revelations about the Chief Minister, the Assembly Speaker and three Ministers in the State cabinet.

She had also revealed the involvement of high-profile persons and the kickbacks received by them from various deals. She was aware of all these transactions and was a witness to them as she was well versed in Arabic and had acted as translator in these deals, the Commissioner alleged.

The role of Sivasankar in

acting as a link between the high profile politicians of Kerala and the UAE Consulate officials, as well as some others, and in coordinating the illegal financial dealings under the cover of various activities and projects of the government was also allegedly revealed by her.

These remarks were made in the confidential statements given before the magistrate court.

The Customs further submitted that the apprehension of Swapna regarding her safety in prison and threat to her life was perfectly justified and she could not be found fault in seeking protection as the facts disclosed were highly sensitive.

The government in its petition pointed out that the observation of the magistrate court that there was absolutely no ground to disbelieve the version of Swapna was bad, as it had been made without seeking a report from the Director-General of Prisons.

The magistrate's court had also observed that "she is found to be worried as she is being sent to the very same prison where she is likely to be threatened and tortured again."

The government said that no such incident of threatening happened in the jail. These observations would affect the credibility and bona fide of the jail department, the government petition added.

Ready to hand over Amaravati case to CBI: A.P.

Will not take coercive action against persons named in FIR on illegal purchase of land, govt. tells SC

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Andhra Pradesh government orally stated in the Supreme Court on Friday that it would not take any coercive action against persons named in an FIR concerning the "illegal purchase" of land in Amaravati and was further willing to hand over the case to the CBI for a court-monitored investigation.

The statement was made before a Bench led by Justice Ashok Bhushan by senior advocate Rajeev Dhavan, appearing for Andhra Pradesh.

The top court was hearing an appeal filed by the Andhra Pradesh government against a High Court stay on investigation into the FIR that named former Advocate General Dammalapati Srinivas and others, including re-

lates of a sitting Supreme Court judge.

The FIR shows offences under the Prevention of Corruption Act, criminal breach of trust and cheating under the Indian Penal Code. The allegations include abuse of official positions in the State, sharing of privileged information and causing loss to the public exchequer during the previous Telugu Desam Party (TDP) regime.

The High Court had stayed the investigation and barred the State from taking any coercive action against the persons named in the FIR. "We are willing to assure the respondents that no coercive action will be taken. Let the investigation be monitored by court. Let it be investigated by the CBI..." Mr. Dhavan said in court.

In fact, the State requested the Centre on March 23 last to initiate a CBI investigation into the FIR.

The court said it would consider the statement and adjourned the case to April 7.

The Bench also adjourned another appeal filed by the Andhra government against

ment, the CPI(M) said the LDF's governance record and its progressive agenda had resonated among voters.

Leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala said the ED's case against the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board [citing violation of foreign exchange norms in its sale of bonds overseas] and the Customs' sworn statement had validated the Congress-led United Democratic Front's charges against the government. Congress State chief president Mullappally Ramachandran termed the charges grave.

In a play on LDF's election slogan, BJP State president K. Surendran said Mr. Vijayan and his enablers in the government would "surely end up in prison and not in government". Sabre-rattling by the CPI(M) would not deter the Central law enforcement from pursuing the ends of justice, he said.

crime, which involves a well-crafted money-laundering network.

In response, senior advocate Jaydeep Gupta, for Mr. Sivasankar, said the case against his client was "harsh". "They are just going after this man. It is a harsh case," Mr. Gupta said.

The Supreme Court listed the case after six weeks.

Mr. Sivasankar was arrested on October 28.

The case pertains to the smuggling of gold in Kerala through diplomatic channels. It had come to light after 30 kg gold worth ₹14.82 crore smuggled in a consignment camouflaged as diplomatic baggage was busted by the Customs in Thiruvananthapuram on July 5, 2019.

IN BRIEF



Jagan launches 'AP Fact Check' website

VIJAYAWADA
Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Friday launched 'AP Fact Check' website and Twitter account which are intended to counter the "fake news being spread against the government by some interests". The State would tackle malicious content through these platforms duly backed by evidence, he said.

Red sanders logs worth ₹3 cr. seized in Chittoor

CHITTOOR
A total of 2.5 tonnes of red sanders logs, worth ₹3 crore in the international market, were seized from a forest location in KVBM Puram mandal in Andhra Pradesh's Chittoor district on Friday. The joint operation was conducted by the Puttur sub-division police and Red Sanders Task Force personnel. Two persons were arrested.

Muthoot Group chairman passes away in Delhi

PATHANAMTHITTA
M.G. George Muthoot, chairman of the Muthoot Group and former lay secretary of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, died in New Delhi on Friday. He was 71. He was listed as the 26th richest person in India by the Forbes Magazine in 2020. He is survived by wife, Sara George Muthoot, and two sons, George M. George and Alexander George.

'Permission for Thrissur Pooram will be sought'

THRISSUR
Special permission will be sought from the government for holding Thrissur Pooram (on April 23) by limiting the participation of the public in view of COVID-19. District Collector S. Shanavas said on Friday. A report on conducting the festival, including details on rituals, number of elephants to be paraded, would be submitted to the government.

Rallies mark bandh against move to privatisate steel plant

All major parties, except BJP, join protest

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
VISHAKHAPATNAM

The Andhra Pradesh bandh called against the Union government's move to privatise Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) evoked widespread support in the city and district on Friday, though banks and supermarkets remain open.

The bandh call was given by trade unions, political parties barring the BJP, and people's organisations under the banner of Visakha Ukkai Parirakshanata Committee.

With the YSRCP government extending support to the bandh, APSRTC buses were confined to the depots.



In one voice: YSRCP MP V. Vijayasai Reddy and Ministers leading a protest in Visakhapatnam on Friday. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

The roads wore a deserted look.

Educational institutions declared a holiday in advance. Autorickshaws too did not ply.

The Left parties and people's organisations took out a ral-

ly on the National Highway near Maddilapalem and stopped private buses.

The impact of the shutdown was greater in Kurmannapalem, Gajuwaka, Malkapuram and the industrial area of the city with workers opting for mass leave.

"The people of Kerala surely want to have a government led by personalities like Mr. Sreedharan which will take the State out of this unending cycle of corruption and stagnation. A final decision on this, however, has come from the national leadership of the party," said Mr. Surendran in Konni. He accused the media of taking his statement out of context.

During his Vijay Yatra on Thursday, he said the party decided to make Mr. Sreedharan its CM candidate. The statement, however, seems to have irritated the Central leadership as the party has not addressed the same issue in other poll-bound States.

Later, MoS for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan said Mr. Surendran was just stating the people's wish.

SC seeks Sivasankar's response against bail

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday sought a response from M. Sivasankar, former Principal Secretary to Kerala Chief Minister, to an appeal filed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) against Kerala High Court's decision to grant him bail in the gold smuggling case.

A Bench led by Justice Ashok Bhushan, however, did not stay the High Court order, saying the "man is already out on bail". "We are not putting you [Sivasankar] inside, we are only issuing notice. There is no need for a stay [of the HC order]. He is already out," Justice Bhushan remarked.

Additional Solicitor General S.V. Raju, for the ED, submitted that Mr. Sivasankar was "neck-deep" into the

Pochampally rainbow woven into six yards

Boga Balaiah has worked with 121 hues and an equal number of motifs



Magic touch: Boga Balaiah worked on the sari for two years.

SWATHI VADLAMUDI
HYDERABAD

Boga Balaiah, a traditional handloom weaver from Pochampally village in Telangana's Yadadri Bhuvanagiri district, has put the colour wheel to shame with his effort in creating a sari.

He has woven magic with an amazing 121 hues and an equal number of motifs to embellish the sari he has created after two years of strenuous work.

With the ikat-dyed mercerised cotton sari, which holds one motif in each box of separate shade as part of the design, Mr.

Balaiah is aiming for a national award from the Ministry of Textiles. The 61-year-old says it had been his dream for 10 years to create such a sari. "I could not spare time owing to my financial expediencies and family responsibilities. Now that my children are settled in their own jobs, I can give shape to my dream."

He used 12 eco-friendly colours each in warp and weft, namely, green, golden yellow, blue, brown, parrot green, grey, orange, Ananda (a shade in blue), lemon yellow and Rani Pink (fuchsia), which gave the sari its 121 shades.

Karnataka may modify entry restrictions

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

The State government on Friday told the Karnataka High Court that it was contemplating modifying the guideline imposing restrictions on people entering from Kerala by road.

This submission was made by the government counsel before a Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Abhay Shreenivas Oka and Justice S. Vishwajith Shetty during the hearing of a PIL petition filed by B. Subbayya Rai, a Mangalore-based advocate.

The petitioner had complained that 23 out of a total 27 roads connecting the two

States are closed in view of the increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in Kerala though there is no travel restriction between the States in the guidelines issued under the Disaster Management Act by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Counsel for the Centre told the Bench that the MHA's guideline removing all restriction on travel between the States is in force as notified in January 2021 and the States have to keep the roads open.

As the government counsel sought time to inform the court on modification, the Bench adjourned hearing till March 9.

Mamata to contest from Nandigram



Mamata Banerjee announcing the candidates for the Assembly election, in Kolkata on Friday. ■ PTI

Former Indian cricketer Manoj Tiwari will contest from Shibpur Assembly seat in Howrah district and film-maker Raj Chakraborty from Barrackpore. Ms. Banerjee thanked

Have faith in integrity of DEC, says EC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission of India on Friday expressed full faith in the integrity and fairness of Deputy Election Commissioner Sudeep Jain, who is in charge of the West Bengal Assembly poll at its headquarters, in the wake of media reports about a Trinamool Congress MP's complaint demanding his removal.

The MP had sent the letter to the West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer, a copy of which was forwarded to the EC.

In a statement, the EC said all its DECs and other officials posted at its headquarters and those working in the field were "discharging their duties strictly as per the Constitution of India and the various extant rules regarding the conduct of elections. There could be an odd exception, in which case EC takes corrective action immediately."

Disengagement key for progress in ties'

De-escalation in Eastern Ladakh alone will lead to the restoration of peace and tranquility, says MEA

ANANTH KRISHNAN



Positive move: A file photo of Chinese troops disengaging from the banks of the Pangong lake. ■ PTI

India expects China to work with it to ensure complete disengagement "at the earliest" along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), which was key to restoring the relationship, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Friday.

The Foreign Ministers of both countries, S. Jaishankar and Wang Yi, in a phone call on February 25 reviewed the status of disengagement, which has been completed on the north and south banks of Pangong lake and is in progress in other areas along the LAC. Both Ministers also agreed to establish a hotline.

It was India's "expectation that the Chinese side will work with us, both through the WMCC [Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on border affairs] and Senior Commanders' meetings, to ensure that disengagement in the remaining areas is completed at the earliest," MEA spokes-

person Anurag Srivastava said. "This would allow both sides to consider de-escalation of forces in Eastern Ladakh as that alone will lead to the restoration of peace and tranquility and provide conditions for progress in our bilateral relationship," he noted.

The senior military commanders in their last meeting on February 20 noted "the disengagement in the Pangong lake area was a significant step forward and it provided a good basis for the

resolution of other remaining issues along the LAC", he stated.

Since the meeting, there has been no official word so far on the progress of disengagement in the Gogra-Hot Springs area and in Demchok. There are also long-persisting tensions involving the blocking of patrols in the Depsang plains, which Indian officials have said predated the current crisis.

On Friday, India's Ambassador to China Vikram Misri conveyed a similar message to their normal positions in

Beijing to Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Luo Zhaojun, emphasising that "maintaining peace and tranquility in border areas had always been the basis for development of bilateral relations." He also raised "outstanding consular issues pertaining to Indian nationals", the Indian Embassy in Beijing said.

Mr. Jaishankar had, in the phone call, underlined the message that both sides "have always agreed that maintenance of peace and tranquility in the border areas was an essential basis for the development of bilateral relations" and "a prolongation of the existing situation was not in the interest of either side."

A MEA statement after the phone call noted India's view that restoring normalcy to the broader relationship would first require complete disengagement and then de-escalation. Troops on both sides remain present in large numbers in depth areas and have not yet returned to their normal positions in

peacetime. "It was necessary to disengage at all friction points in order to contemplate de-escalation of forces in this sector," the statement said. "That alone will lead to the restoration of peace and tranquility and provide conditions for progress of our bilateral relationship."

China's position

China has conveyed a different position on restoration of ties, and called on India to put the border dispute in a "proper" position. "While that the two countries have boundary disputes is an objective fact, which should be taken seriously, it is not the whole of China-India relations, and it should be put at a proper place in the overall bilateral relations," Mr. Wang told Mr. Jaishankar according to a statement from Beijing. It added that "there has been some wavering and backpedalling in India's China policy" because of which "practical cooperation between the two countries has been affected."

Farm laws an internal matter of India: envoy

'Incidents here have ripples in the U.K.'

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Maintaining that the new agricultural laws are an "internal matter" of India, new U.K. High Commissioner to India Alexander Ellis on Friday said the debate in the British House of Commons set for Monday was part of issues linked to India that were quite "regularly debated."



C The debate in the British House is part of issues linked to India that are regularly debated

ALEXANDER ELLIS
U.K. High Commissioner to India

ders. During the Foreign Minister's call, both leaders also spoke about the U.K.'s upcoming "strategic review" on its Indo-Pacific policy as well as preparations ahead of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's visit, that is expected in the "coming months," according to Mr. Ellis.

One of the highlights of the visit is the possible beginning of India-U.K. Free Trade agreement negotiations, which Mr. Johnson is understood to be keen to announce post-Brexit, even before Prime Minister Narendra Modi travels to Portugal in May for an EU-India summit. Mr. Johnson's earlier planned visit for Republic Day in January had to be put off, and he will also receive Mr. Modi in June as India is a special invitee along with Australia and South Korea to the G-7 summit of the world's biggest economies.

Mr. Ellis said he hoped for a "swift resolution" of the dispute between the Indian government and the British company Cairn Energy that won an arbitration settlement of \$1.2 billion from India.

BJP denies ticket to 11 MLAs in Assam

Party names 70 candidates for first and second phases of Assam polls

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

The Bharatiya Janata Party has denied ticket to 11 sitting MLAs, including a Minister, and fielded two Congress defectors, who served as Cabinet Ministers in the Tarun Gogoi government.

The BJP also rewarded Rajya Sabha member Biswajit Daimary, who defected from former ally Bodoland People's Front, with the Panery seat and changed the constituency of its State unit president Ranjeet Kumar Dass from Sorbhog to Patacharuk-

chi. The party announced the names of 70 candidates for the first and second phases of the Assam election.

The sitting MLAs who have been shown the door are Hills Area Development Minister Sum Ronghang (Diphu seat), Rituparna Barua (Lahowal), Amar Chand Jain (Katigorah), Ashok Sarma (Nalbari), Joyaram Engleng (Howrahgat), Mansing Rongpi (Baithalangso), B.B. Hager (Haflong), Dilip Paul (Silchar), Kishore Nath (Barkhola), Debananda Hazarika (Bihpuria) and Naban-

ita Handique (Sonari).

In Mr. Ronghang's place, the BJP fielded Bidya Sing Engleng. The BJP switched its Chabua MLA to Lahowal to end Mr. Barua's run. The party similarly replaced Mr. Ashok Sarma with Jayanta Malla Barua, a former Congress MLA in the Nalbari seat. In Howrahgat, the BJP fielded Dorsing Ronghang, who switched over from the Left Front a few years ago.

The BJP favoured Roop Singh Teran for the Baithalangso seat and Nandita Garlosa for the Haflong seat. In

Bihpuria and Sonari seats, the party fielded Amiyo Bhuyan and Dharmeswar Konwar, in place of Mr. Debananda Hazarika and Nabani Handique.

Three MLAs from the Barak Valley were also replaced. While Mr. Dilip Paul found his Silchar seat given to businessman Dipayan Chakraborty, former RSS functionary Amalendu Das was preferred over Mr. Kishore Nath for the Barkhola seat. The third MLA to miss the bus was Mr. Amar Chand Jain.

Left-Cong.-ISF alliance announce candidates

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Taking their Sanyukta Morcha (United Front) alliance further, the Left, Congress and the Indian Secular Front on Friday announced candidates for the 60 seats which will go to polls in the first two phases of West Bengal Assembly elections.

Chairperson Biman Bose announced candidates for about 37 seats to be contested by the Left Front. The Congress will contest in 11 seats and the ISF in five seats. In seven seats the al-

liance has not been able to announce candidates. The Nandigram seat is among the constituencies for which the "Sanyukt Morcha" has not announced candidates so far. The Congress and the ISF will announce candidates from their respective party offices.

Of the 37 seats of the Left Front, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) will contest in 28 seats.

The Left Front may contest in 165 seats, the Congress will contest in 92 and the ISF may get 37 seats.

+ 'G-23 ready to campaign for Assembly polls'

Ghulam Nabi Azad hints at climb down by dissenting Congress leaders

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A week after the show of strength in Jammu by a section of the group of 23 dissenters (G-23) from the Congress, senior party leader Ghulam Nabi Azad on Friday struck a conciliatory note by stating that he and his colleagues were willing to campaign for the upcoming Assembly elections in Assam, Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

"For the next two months, our priority would be the

election and try and work for a Congress win," Mr. Azad told reporters at an informal meeting at his residence. "My colleagues and I will be campaigning wherever the party or any candidate ask us to campaign."

The former Leader of the Opposition's comment is significant as the public meeting in Jammu on February 27 had raised uncomfortable questions, especially when the Congress was in the middle of Assembly elections.

Mr. Azad's comment will

now put to rest speculation that G-23 were planning more Jammu-like meets in Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, three north Indian States where the Congress is in direct contest with the BJP, while Assembly elections are on.

Mr. Azad's comments appreciating Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "humble" roots and an outright attack by Anand Sharma on Congress' alliance with Abbas Siddiqui-led Indian Secular Front in West Bengal has sparked an open war of words between Mr. Sharma and Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury.

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Ghulam Nabi Azad

IN BRIEF



Mehbooba summoned in money laundering case

SRINAGAR Former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti was on Friday summoned by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case. According to the ED notice, Ms. Mufti is directed "to appear before the ED on March 15 at 11.30 a.m." Ms. Mufti tweeted, "The Government of India's tactics to intimidate and browbeat political opponents to make them toe their line has become tediously predictable."

Women's studies group for UGC grant extension

NEW DELHI The Indian Association of Women's Studies (IAWS) have written to the UGC requesting for extension of its grant period beyond March 31, 2021, for the 163 Women Study Centres (WSC) across various colleges and universities in the country. The association complained of erratic funding and unconscionable delays in reimbursement.

Assam farmer gets jail term for killing elephant

GUWAHATI A court in western Assam's Baksa district has sentenced a farmer to three years and three months in prison in connection with the death of an elephant. The court also prescribed ₹10,000 as fine and imprisonment for a further two months in case of default. The elephant, an adult female, died on August 28, 2018, after it got entangled in the wire that farmer Ranjan Singh had illegally installed around his paddy field.

Registration Certificate to be available online

NEW DELHI Driving License and Certificate of Registration for vehicles can now be sought online, without the need to visit an RTO, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has announced. These are among a total of 18 new services that will be made available online with Aadhaar-based verification.

Rise in COVID-19 cases in six States, says Health Ministry

Maharashtra reports 8,998 fresh infections

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

No new COVID-19 fatalities have been reported in 18 States and Union Territories in the 24 hours up to 8 a.m. on Friday but Maharashtra, Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi have seen a steep rise in new cases during that time, the Health Ministry said on Friday.

Maharashtra saw the highest number of casualties (60), followed by Punjab with 15 fatalities. Kerala reported 14 deaths.

The Ministry said the six States reported high number of new cases. It said 84.44% of the new cases reported in the 24 hours (16,838) were



Precautions in place: Surveillance and sample testing has been increased across the country. ■ AFP

[1,76,319]. Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have shown a reduction in the active cases in the last 24 hours," said the Ministry.

Twenty States/Union Territories have less than 1,000 active cases while Arunachal

Pradesh reported only 2 active cases. The cumulative doses of COVID19 vaccine administered in the country crossed 1.90 crore on Friday, the release said. A total of 10,34,672 vaccine doses were given on Friday.

Prioritise the elderly, SC tells private hospitals

Earlier order was for govt. facilities

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has directed that private hospitals should give priority to senior citizens in admission.

On August 4 last, the court declared that government hospitals should give priority to elderly people as they are vulnerable to COVID-19 virus.

On Thursday, senior advocate and former Union Law Minister Ashwani Kumar urged a Bench led by Ashok Bhushan to extend the August 4 order to private hospitals too. The court agreed with Mr. Kumar, saying private hospitals catered to most of the population in the country.

"We direct that priority with reference to admission contemplated in order dated August 4 2020 to the elderly people should also be given in private hospitals," the court ordered.

Mr. Kumar had approached the court, during

the peak of the pandemic period, highlighting the need for providing care, support and priority medical treatment for senior citizens, especially those who live alone during the pandemic.

On August 4, the court ordered the States to respond promptly to the needs of senior citizens and ensure they do not suffer financially during COVID-19. It also directed that the elderly should get their pension on time.

"All old-age people who are eligible for pension should be regularly paid pension and those identified older people should be provided necessary medicines, masks, sanitizers and other essential goods by respective States. Further, as and when any individual request is made, the same shall be attended to by the administration with all promptness," the court had ordered.

Mr. Kumar had approached the court, during

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India's resolute response on the borders helped in positive and peaceful resolution of certain significant issues, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Friday. He also talked of the courage displayed by soldiers during the recent stand-off in Eastern Ladakh, after addressing the ongoing annual Combined Commanders Conference (CCC) of the three Services at Kevadia in Gujarat.

While an agreement on the second phase of disengagement between India and China is awaited, last week, the Armies of India and Pakistan reaffirmed their commitment to the 2003 ceasefire and agreed for strict observance of all agreements, understandings and cease-fire along the Line of Control (LoC) and other areas.

Mr. Singh said on Twitter that he spoke on a wide range of issues pertaining to the defence and security of

Plea to step up vaccinations

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday asked a healthcare provider from Tamil Nadu to make a representation before the Health Ministry to ramp up the vaccination drive. A Bench led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde urged the Ministry to consider the representation by Dr. S. Gurushankar "as expeditiously as possible".

Pradesh reported only 2 active cases. The cumulative doses of COVID19 vaccine administered in the country crossed 1.90 crore on Friday, the release said. A total of 10,34,672 vaccine doses were given on Friday.

More Myanmar nationals take refuge in Mizoram

Standard operating procedure issued to identify refugees

C The report I have is that 15 people took refuge in Champhai district and eight in Serchhip district

C. LALROSANGA
Lok Sabha member

The Hindu on Friday. Mr. Lalrosanga also said the Mizoram government has issued a standard operating procedure for the identification of the refugees.

Residents of border areas in Champai district said people from across the border have been trickling in after crossing river Tiau that runs along a long stretch of Mizoram's 404 km border with Myanmar.

"More than 100 people must have come in and more are desperate to come. We are trying to help them on humanitarian grounds

after following the guidelines of the local authorities," Rama, president of Farkawn village council, said.

Farkawn is in Champai district and close to the border with Myanmar. Villagers there said Assam Rifles personnel have prevented some 80 Myanmar nationals from entering.

"We are following the normal procedure since we do not have any instructions from either our seniors or the government of India," an Assam Rifles officer said.

Champai's Deputy Commissioner Maria C.T. Zuali had in a notification earlier said those who are in danger of persecution from the Myanmar military junta, would be regarded as refugees and should be provided shelter and protection.

Panel led by Modi set up for 75th I-Day

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Friday set up a high-level committee for planning the commemoration of the 75th year of Independence in 2022, the Union Culture Ministry said in a statement.

The Ministry notified the formation of the 259-member national committee, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Friday.

Earlier, the government had set up an implementation committee chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and a committee of secretaries for the purpose.

"The national committee includes dignitaries and eminent citizens from all walks of life. The committee will provide policy direction and guidelines for formulation of programmes for the commemoration of 75th anniversary of Indian Independence, at the national and international levels," the Ministry said.

Armed forces now more resolute

Rajnath Singh says India's ability to secure territorial integrity has grown



Action plans: Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh at the Combined Commanders' Conference on Friday. ■ PTI

the past, the scope of the conference this year has been expanded to make it a multi-layered, interactive, informal and informed event with the added participation of about 30 officers and soldiers of various ranks from the three Services," a statement from the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) said.

"This is a step taken in right direction," Mr. Singh said. The DMA said that the two Vivechana sessions held over the day in the presence of Mr. Singh deliberated the "ongoing modernisation of armed forces especially focussing on creation of integrated theatre commands and infusion of modern technology."

India has nurtured close relations and partnerships with like-minded countries to further the common security interests. We are committed to protecting the territorial integrity and ensure peace in the region," Mr. Singh asserted.

creasing jointness in the armed forces, saying the optimal utilisation of resources and rationalisation of manpower held the key to jointness and better coordination between the forces.

PM's address
The three-day conference began on Thursday and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to chair and address the valedictory session on Saturday.

"In a major change from

Technology for air-to-air missiles tested

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on Friday successfully carried out a flight demonstration based on Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) technology from Integrated Test Range Chandipur off the Odisha coast.

"Successful demonstration of SFDR technology has provided DRDO with a technological advantage, which will enable it to develop long range air-to-air missiles," a DRDO statement said, adding that only a few countries had the technology.

Speaking to reporters at an interaction in Indian Women's Press Corps on Friday, Ms. Sitharaman said, "I am concerned about a group which does not get the Indian map correct. And this body as per its website says it is an independent body. It

Nirmala dismisses report on human rights issues

She says think tank has not even got India's map correct

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman lashed out at the U.S. think tank Freedom House – which has downgraded India's status from "free" to "partly free" – accusing the body of not even getting the "Indian map" correct. The Information and Broadcasting Ministry on behalf of the government also issued a statement calling the report "misleading, incorrect and misplaced".

Speaking to reporters at an interaction in Indian Women's Press Corps on Friday, Ms. Sitharaman said, "I am concerned about a group which does not get the Indian map correct. And this body as per its website says it is an independent body. It

doesnt't have the wherewithal to understand what is the sovereign territorial map of India and in a country as diverse as India they have gone into freedom of religion and everything."

"How do I take you seriously on matters which are so intrinsic to a multi-diverse country, where religions of ancient days have lived together for centuries?"

NIRMALA SITHARAMAN
Finance Minister

get your act to talk about my country and its freedoms," Ms. Sitharaman said.

The Information and Broadcasting Ministry, in a statement said, that the think tank's "Democracy under siege" is misleading, incorrect and misplaced.

The statement pointed out that there are many States, which have non-BJP governments, elected through a free and fair process.

Quad to hold leadership summit

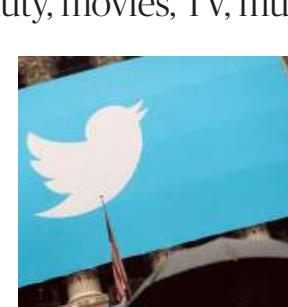
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Leaders of Australia, India, Japan and the United States will soon meet virtually for the first ever summit under the quadrilateral security arrangement, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has said. Speaking to reporters in Sydney on Friday, Mr. Morrison said the four-power security dialogue was "central" to the U.S. and the Australian point of view of the Indo-Pacific region.

In his comments, Mr. Morrison said that he had discussed the summit among the leaders of the "Quad" countries in recent telephone conversations.

Survey finds what women tweet

Fashion, books, beauty, movies, TV, music, food, technology are major themes



Twitter is also a platform for online activism.

that one of the main reasons (24.9%) women use its service is to pursue their interests and passions. Within this category are those who

seek content on fashion (30%), books (28%), beauty (25%), movies and TV (21%), music (18%), food (18%), technology (17%), art (17%) and sports (14%).

As much as 20.8% of women use Twitter to stay informed on local and international news, while 14.5% engage in celebratory moments, both personal and professional. As much as 11.7% of women are using the platform to connect with virtual communities and network. These women are coming together with hashtags such as #WomenInScience, #WomenInTech, #WomenInMarketing, and

#GirlGamers. 8.7% women tweet to bring about a social change through online campaigns.

"We commissioned this research to build our understanding about women on Twitter and were inspired by the results. These insights show us that Twitter is for every woman. Their communities and conversations highlight the uniqueness and diversity of the service. Access to a free and open Internet has made it possible for everyone to express themselves freely without barriers," said Manish Maheshwari, managing director at Twitter India.

Bar Council resolution is to intimidate me: Brinda Karat

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Reacting to the resolution passed against her by the Bar Council of India, CPI(M) Polit Bureau member Brinda Karat said it was an attempt to intimidate her.

The Bar Council, in a resolution adopted during a meeting, had termed the letter written by Ms. Karat to Chief Justice of India (CJI) Justice S.A. Bobde on the remarks he had made on

rape cases as a "malicious attack" on the judiciary.

The resolution said that freedom of speech and expression cannot be stretched to the extent of "maligning and weakening" the institution.

Ms. Karat said in a letter that the resolution made petty and personal allegations against her but she did not want to respond to them.

She pointed out that the

CJI's comments, which she said were widely reported, had not been contradicted by the council.

The council had pointed out that the comments were not part of the judgement and thus legally irrelevant. Ms. Karat said, "Whether or not the comments form part of the judgement is irrelevant. The fact that such comments were made and reported have their own impact on society at large."

CM YK

AN-ND-E



Instapick

On Site: Bikaner House in New Delhi is the location for an ongoing collaborative project by four leading galleries – Chemould Prescott Road, Experimenter, Nature Morte and Vadhera Art Gallery. Forty artists, including conceptual artist Mithu Sen, are showcasing their work through solo shows, curated group exhibitions and more. Till March 9. @chemouldprescotroad



Talking point

Eternal Sunshine Productions: More producers, better content? Following in the footsteps of Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Anushka Sharma, actor Alia Bhatt has launched her own production house, Eternal Sunshine Productions. First up is *Darlings*, in association with Shah Rukh and Gauri Khan's Red Chillies Entertainment, starring Shefali Shah, Vijay Varma and Roshan Mathew.

Pick of the week

Concerts, stand-up and other online events you just can't miss.



Textiles through art

Fibre of our lives is a group show of senior **contemporary artists** curated by Pranamita Borgohain that brings in different perspectives of **usage of fabric** or thread to demonstrate the vitality of the medium. Ankon Mitra, Gopika Nath, Jagannath Panda and Subodh Kerkar have showcased their finest works exploring the connotations and facades of textiles, the versatility of weaving and embroidery techniques. At **Gallery Art Positive**, F-213/B, Old MB Road, Lado Sarai, Delhi, till April 5. Monday to Saturday, 11 am to 7 pm.

The Antarctica sojourn

A **photographic journey** to Antarctica with kidney transplant surgeon, hypnotist, cricket commentator, and wildlife photographer **Dr. Ajit K. Huigol**, is available online till March 14. Visit www.iicdelhi.in. The exhibition titled **'Antarctica – The Last frontier'** is a collection of photographs of penguins, seals, icebergs, early explorers and other wonders taken by Huigol during his month's stay on the iconic landscape, characterized by high winds, rain, snow, ice and cold temperatures.

Break into song

Tired of listening to someone else's songs? Learn concepts such as writing lyrics to a beat from indie artiste **Raghav Meattle**, who has been helping aspiring musicians through The Conemunity, a platform he started last year. On March 6 at 5 pm, ₹399 on insider.in. Theatre personality **Raell Padamsee's ACE Productions** presents **Sherlock Holmes**, a workshop plus play. Participants will hone their acting skills, while looking for clues. For ages 10 to 13. Saturdays, March 6 to May 22. ₹4,800. On bookmyshow.com

The royal interview

Prince Harry and **Meghan Markle** tell their side of the story in a "no subject is off limits" interview with media mogul **Oprah Winfrey**, airing on March 7. In sneak peeks, the Prince is seen talking about his mother, the late Princess Diana, and the pressures she faced alone. Earlier in the week, he had some fun on **The Late Late Show with James Corden**, sipping tea on a tour bus (the tea trolley crashes at one point!), visiting **The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air** house and thrashing Corden in a military style obstacle course.

Lacoste x Ricky Regal

French brand **Lacoste**, which has introduced the Loop Polo made out of 30% recycled cotton, has collaborated with singer **Bruno Mars** for his first clothing line. Mars channeled his designer alter ego, **Ricky Regal**, for the capsule collection which features tracksuits, polo shirts, and pants in bold colours. Closer home, designer **Tarun Tahiliani** has partnered with **Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Ltd**. Plans are underway to introduce contemporary men's ethnic wear later this year and to operate 250 stores in five years.

Mentoring designers

Apply to the largest sustainable design competition – the **Redress Design Award**. The winner will join the Timberland brand for a collaboration. Those with less than four years' professional experience can apply till March 15. Visit redressdesignaward.com. Elsewhere, the **Fashion Forward Fellowship**, presented by The ReFashion Hub and non-profit YWater, has eight designers chosen from 56 applicants learning from 13 mentors over five weeks. The winner will receive ₹1 lakh to bring their collection to life. ywater.org

The Tatty Bao's Asian recipes and cocktails are back in Delhi after a hiatus with a unique **Pop-Up menu** for a month. Get the special curvy-up fatty menu home delivered through Swiggy or Zomato. Or enjoy the street foods of asian countries at The Monkey Bar, Vasant Kunj. On **till March 28**, The festival offers Malacca Nyonya sweet and curry laksa with seafood, the Javanese sayur lodeh with vegetables and the pork humba. Available daily from 1 pm, to 11 pm. Meal for two costs between ₹1,600 to ₹2,200

Booking a liveaboard trip?

■ ON AGE RESTRICTIONS: "Age does not matter," says Reddy, adding, "As long as you are healthy, you can dive. But you need to complete the open-water diving certification if you want to

do a liveaboard trip."

■ IF YOU ARE A BEGINNER: "The Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) allows you to do it if you are an open-water diver. But do at least 15-20 dives before you do a liveaboard,"

advises Chengappa.

■ THE SCHEDULE: Typically seven days with about 17-20 dives

the staff," says Reddy.

■ COST: A weeklong liveaboard diving trip, which includes food and accommodation, would cost between ₹75,000 and ₹30,000, estimates Reddy

across different spots.

■ PANDEMIC SAFETY: "You have to do the RT-PCR test before you start and before your return. Once you step out of the airport, you go straight to your boat. And all the people in the boat are tested, including

the sea is like the sky in some

ways, he explains, adding, "Most of my training would be underwater because it simulates the microgravity environment. When you are on land, you know nothing can harm you. But it's not the case under the ocean; you surrender to it and what you see is something surreal".

An aspiring astronaut, he is among the few people selected for Project PoSSUM, a NASA-supported suborbital research programme to study global climate. It requires the participants to have scuba-diving experience. What he shares with me is from the Maldives – in Maaya Thila, considered one of the world's best dive sites.

The sea is like the sky in some ways, he explains, adding, "Most of my training would be underwater because it simulates the microgravity environment. When you are on land, you know nothing can harm you. But it's not the case under the ocean; you surrender to it and what you see is something surreal".

Lockdown destination

The Maldives, one of the world's best diving destinations, has of late been luring scores of Indians to its shores. According to the Indian High Commission in Maldives, 62,905 Indian tourists holidayed there in 2020. It accounted for 11.3% of the island country's total

YARN IT!

Happy Women's (36-hour) Day

It is that time of the year. For performance appraisals, what else?

JANE DE SUZA

Describe your growth in the last year

● Exponentially, Sir, but then I'm not sure that you're interested in the three extra arms I grew. To scrub off a stain while typing a mail while negotiating with a client while unclogging the sink while rinsing the dog's paws of peanut butter. Now that I have also to send in my replies to this performance review (not meeting deadlines for personal reasons is such a 'typically female' excuse), I've just noticed a sixth arm beginning to sprout.

To what extent have you performed your role?

● I have performed seven people's roles during the last year – plumber, cook – oh yes, no excuses! I shouldn't mention my colleague who attended his son's PTA (note how inspiring it is that modern men share the parenting load!) leaving

me to do his spreadsheets. So let's make that eight.

How have you adjusted to working from home?

● To politely rephrase this question, it is working AT home, and women have always been doing it. Remember how adorable (such a hands-on dad!) the VP was called when his child waddled in and flung herself at the screen, till an efficient woman peeled her away? We women, however, have invisible children. It is our special skill. How could we ever afford to leave a call for a screaming baby choking on a building block?



How disorganised and unprofessional that would be! The efficient women who peel kids away from other people's screens, you see, is termed) about my last year. I would also love to improve my home office, which moves from kitchen counter to hanging-off-balcony to bathroom pot.

What are your areas of improvement for the coming year?

● To improve my communication skills, to appropriately communicate (and not whine, as these responses will be

termed) about my last year. I would also love to improve my home office, which moves from kitchen counter to hanging-off-balcony to bathroom pot.

Have you learnt any new skills in this period?

● To apologise for my red eyes after working on the presentation all night, to take calls when I'm cooking dinner, to promise to be 'on it' and send a mail while the *sabzi* burns. To look highly pleased at some mansplaining by someone watching a match on the call. To pretend the ridiculous targets are most achievable. To realise that none of these responses will ever make it officially into my review form.

Is there anything you would like to add?

● Please overlook the blank responses in this form, as I've deleted all the answers so as not to be called unprofessional. Thank you for not firing me, and imposing a 30% payout instead. I am full of support for the organisation's challenges at this tough time, and totally understand that the organisation does not support mine. Thank you for giving my male colleague the promotion instead, for his full-time commitment to the job. Be assured I will work night and day from now on. After all, who needs to sleep?!

Where Jane De Suza, author of *Flyaway Boy*, pokes her nose into our perfect lives.

Diving breaks in the Maldives

PRAVEEN SUDEVAN

Manu Nair felt like he was in a different world. For a while, it was all blue; a dark, surreal blue. He could see nothing else and everything happened in slow motion. Then the translucent beings emerged from this deep-blue darkness – slow-moving whale sharks, dancing Manta rays, small fish schools, varicoloured coral reefs.

"It was..." pauses Nair, searching for the right word, before settling on "magical".

An aspiring astronaut, he is among the few people selected for Project PoSSUM, a NASA-supported suborbital research programme to study global climate. It requires the participants to have scuba-diving experience. What he shares with me is from the Maldives – in Maaya Thila, considered one of the world's best dive sites. The sea is like the sky in some

ways, he explains, adding, "Most of my training would be underwater because it simulates the microgravity environment. When you are on land, you know nothing can harm you. But it's not the case under the ocean; you surrender to it and what you see is something surreal".

Lockdown destination

The Maldives, one of the world's best diving destinations, has of late been luring scores of Indians to its shores. According to the Indian High Commission in Maldives, 62,905 Indian tourists holidayed there in 2020. It accounted for 11.3% of the island country's total

tourism market share – the most by any country.

The air travel bubble (enabling the free flow of international flights) that India shares with Maldives, the three-hour flight time, and the tourist visa on arrival are some of its attractions.

"Maldives has not decimated its fish population. There are no large waves and the clarity [under water] is very good. Because you are in an atoll [a ring-shaped reef], you are not hit by the ocean," explains Nitish Chengappa. He first visited archipelagic state in 2002 along with his brother, TV host Nikhil Chinapa. In 2015, they set up Fleetfoot Adventures in Bengaluru, which organises diving trips to the Maldives and Egypt among other locations, adding that they have taken over 250 clients every year to the Maldives since then.

(From far left) A diver takes in the magic, a group taken to the Maldives by Fleetfoot Adventures and (below) Karina Aggarwal ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

luru, which organises diving trips to the Maldives and Egypt among other locations, adding that they have taken over 250 clients every year to the Maldives since then.

2020, however, was a different story due to the pandemic. There were no trips from March to November but things are slowly picking up, says Chengappa, who has made four trips since November and gets several hundred enquiries every month.

"The Maldives spoils you. In other locations, you might not get to see the magnificent creatures like the sharks, mantas and eagle rays. But here you see them all the time," says beverage expert Karina Aggarwal (@Gigglewater411) who made her second liveaboard trip there with a group of 10 people last

month. A regular diver for the last six years with 120 dives across several spots, including in the Andamans, Thailand, and Philippines, hers was a 40m liveaboard vessel with air-conditioned suites and open-air dining.

For serious divers

The liveaboard diving trips – you stay on a vessel for one or more nights, going from one dive site to another – are best suited for serious divers, says another regular, Anees Adenwala, the director of Mumbai-based Orca Dive Club.

Typically, they are a week long and comprise three dives a day. "You can even sail from Male to the southernmost island called Gan, discover the entire chain of dive sites and atolls. Or you can just be in a resort with great food and a bit of diving and other water sports," he says.

Since the boats have a capacity of 20 passengers, Chengappa reckons liveaboard trips are best enjoyed when you go with a familiar group. "It is very important that you put together a socially compatible bunch. Because you're going to be spending six nights together," he says.

Budgets for all seasons

Can't afford a luxury resort? There are guest houses run by the locals.

"You can spend \$2,000 a night. Or just \$80 a night with bed and breakfast," explains another regular, Adenwala. Diving is also cheaper if you know your way around.

"An open-water diver's course costs \$800 at a resort, whereas it is about \$450 on a local island," says Madhava Reddy whose Planet Scuba India in Bengaluru offers diving courses. He recently visited the Maldives with a contingent of 20 divers. And one of the divers was Project PoSSUM's Nair.

Most wanted atolls

Laamu Atoll: Star Wars alert. Some of the scenes from *Rogue One* were reportedly shot here. The strong currents attract sharks, rays and tuna to hunt the smaller and abundant reef fish.

Huvadhu Atoll: The topography of the ocean floor here is quite diverse.

Addu Atoll: During WW2, this was the site of a secret British naval base.

CM YK

A N D - N D E

In Bhatt's kingdom

The actor joins director Alankrita Srivastava to talk about exploring sisterhood and sensuality in their new show, *Bombay Begums*

KARISHMA UPADHYAY

Years ago, director Alankrita Srivastava's mother, an IIM (Ahmedabad) graduate, told her that there were only four women in her batch and none of them pursued a 'full-fledged corporate career'. This got the 41-year-old thinking about women and ambition. Somewhere along the way, this crystallised into an idea that is now Netflix India's latest offering, *Bombay Begums*. Set in the high stakes world of banking and finance, the story follows Rani (Pooja Bhatt), Fatima (Shahana Goswami), Ayesha (Plabita Borthakur), Lily (Amruta Subhash) and Shai (Aadhyaa Anand), whose circumstances are different but whose lives are interconnected.

As in her earlier work, Srivastava has trained her lens to examine the 'complex inner lives of women'. 'Ever since the economy opened up in India there were many more women in the corporate workforce, but they have always had to do a balancing act. There's this pressure of having a perfect life – being great in your family life,



managing your home, and excelling at work,' says the filmmaker. Of the five women, Lily's character is the only one that seems to be an outlier of sorts. 'Lily was the last character I thought of and she came in because I felt this world was too sanitised. I felt like I needed someone from another world – to juxtapose them and see what one arrives at,' she adds.

Female body as subtext

Along with a cameo in the eminently forgettable *Sadak 2* (2020), *Bombay Begums* marks Bhattacharya's return to the front of the camera after a gap of 21 years. Her character, the CEO of a bank and a stepmother of two, is unlike anything she's played before. 'Alankrita was very clear that this character is a combination of power, strength and great vulnerability. What she said to me is that real power does not scream. While Rani is

Room for men

Just because the show revolves around women doesn't mean that their male counterparts, played by Danish Husain, Vivek Gomber, Manish Chaudhari, Imaad Shah and Rahul Bose are just on the periphery. 'The men in *Bombay Begums* are pretty cool. They're not caricatures. Naushad is such a liberated husband in so many ways. What a wonderful boyfriend Ron is! Shahana and Vivek have such great chemistry and they're so different in *Bombay Begums* than what they were like together in *A Suitable Boy*. And Rahul Bose's character Mahesh loves Rani but just not in the way that she feels about him. And she's also in a way pathetically using that relationship to feel young, to draw off him and be reminded of her youth and feeling desirable,' says Bhatt.

• ANIRUDDH KOTHARI/NETFLIX



quite over-the-top in that she's perfectly turned out, with not a strand of hair out of place, even at home, that's her shield. Yet, her body is falling apart,' says the actor. The female body and its transformations is a subtext that Srivastava explores with each of the five characters.

For Bhattacharya, the level of detailing that went into making the show is a sign of how storytelling is changing. 'When I walked into the cabin that was created for my character and stood behind that desk, I felt this sense of power that made me feel like this was my kingdom. It was created with every prop that was there; everything was thought through. Even the artwork that Shai is doing, for example, is so detailed. There were so many such little things that the audience will never really see but it adds so much in terms of authenticity to an actor's performance.' A pleasantly surprising Easter egg thrown into the mix is how each of the show's six episodes have been named. 'They are named after all the books by and about women that I love. They have all had some kind of

impact on me,' shares Srivastava.

Chasing complexities

While Srivastava was a part of the writing team of the much-acclaimed Amazon Prime show *Made in Heaven*, she has created, co-written (with Iti Agarwal and Bornila Chatterjee) and co-directed (with Chatterjee) *Bombay Begums*. Her filmography – *Turning 30*, *Lipstick Under My Burkha* and *Dolly Kitty Aur Woh Chamakte Sitare* – is testament to exactly the kind of stories she is interested in telling.

'I don't want to make films for the heck of making films. These are the stories I'm drawn to and the characters and worlds I want to explore,' she says, adding, 'I don't want to say that I'll never make a film with a male protagonist – I am doing *Made in Heaven*. But again, one of the lead characters there is a woman and the other a gay man. I think I'm interested in people who don't have it all. Somehow I have nothing to say or examine about an upper-caste, cis-gender man. Right now I'm very happy to work on more stories about women, their thoughts, their lives and their complexities.'



(Clockwise from left)
Pooja Bhatt,
still from the
show, and
director
Alankrita
Srivastava
■ SPECIAL
ARRANGEMENT



(Top) Kshitija Mruthyunjaya with the weavers, and (Left) Mala wearing the Parijataamu sari, named after her favourite flower.

The Registry of Sarees, founded by entrepreneur and perfumer Ahalya Matthan, for her MA Design thesis, just when the Bengaluru-based research and curatorial platform was looking for someone to spearhead the revival of the traditionally minimal Kodiyalu sari. Discussions with the weavers – and a collaboration with Shrenius Trust, an outfit that empowers artisanal communities through skill development and digital opportunities – has since seen a reclamation of the Padmashali identity.

Of legends and looms

Having an architect at the helm has made a difference. Mruthyunjaya not only looked at reviving the textiles, but also the basic infrastructure needs and systems. 'We approached the project in a 360° way. For example, spatially, can the weaver's chair convert into a flat surface? They spend 10 hours a day doing physical labour and often complain of a backache,' she says.

Long conversations with master weavers Lakshmannraav and Sridhar revealed the storytelling behind their weaves. The Padmashali believe they are descendants of Bhavana – a *rishi* (sage) who built a loom from his body parts and wove clothes for the gods from lotus threads that emerged from Lord Vishnu's navel. So, for the first collection, Hosa Arambha (new beginning in Telugu), Mruthyunjaya took them back to their roots. Each of the seven new motifs created – such as the *yagna* (fire), *magam* (loom), and *kamalam* (lotus stem) – is derived from the legend.

The collection features saris in indigo blue, madder red and conch shell white, with a plain body and intricately-woven motifs on its thin *pallu*. And each one is named after the flowers found in the village, such as Mallige (jasmine), Mandara (hibiscus) and Parijataamu (night flowering jasmine). Each of the 110 saris has a QR code woven into it, and when a buyer scans it, it pulls up all the information about the weaver, thus 'initiating a conversation'.

Sisal stories

The face of the campaign is Sridhar's wife Mala, along with dancer and actor Rukmini Vijayakumar. Mruthyunjaya echoes the sentiments of all revivalists: 'Weavers don't need sympathy, they need their craft and skill to be celebrated.'

Plenty of challenges still remain. In the next phase, they hope to strengthen the ecosystem: increase the number of looms, invite more weavers and spinners to come back to the community, reinstate natural dyeing units (currently they use azo-free dyes), and introduce Ambar Charkha yarn (to replace the mill-made ones presently sourced from Salem).

Most importantly, there will also be a renewed research commitment to sisal. The plant grows abundantly locally and, besides providing fibre for the fabric, it can be used to build a new kind of loom – one with more comfortable seats, bottle holders, and hooks to hang the weavers' shirts. It is still a long ride into the future, but one that Mruthyunjaya and the weavers are looking forward to.

Saris between ₹5,998 and ₹7,140 on yali.store



Kodiyalu's weave architects

When Bengaluru's The Registry of Sarees and a postgraduate in regenerative architecture created the revival project, Hosa Arambha

VINITA MAKHJA

The story of the Padmashali community of Kodiyalu, the weaving village in Karnataka's Mandya district, isn't too different from many others in India. Once patronised by royals (it is believed that in the 1750s, Tipu Sultan invited them over from

Andhra Pradesh), their hand-woven craft had given way to the lure of power looms, until only around four of the 400 families worked with hand looms. Then Kshitija Mruthyunjaya visited them early last year. The architecture student (of Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti, Milan, Italy) had reached out to

FOOD SPOT

All things lime and lemony

Azuma Kara is the new address for Oriental meals in South Delhi



RAHUL VERMA

I don't have a green thumb, but there is one plant on my balcony I have taken good care of – and that's my potted lemongrass. The stalks are green and tall, and wave out to me cheerily when I am anywhere around it. I get its fragrance, and look at the plant a bit sorrowfully. I am sorry, but one day you are going to get added to my soup, to tell the plant.

And when it does, it will greatly enhance the flavour of the soup – just like the lemongrass that gave zest to the tom yum soup I had a few days ago. The soup had been tempered with Thai herbs, and the presence of lemongrass in it was unmistakable. I scooped out the small shrimps in the broth and, with that, started quite a memorable Oriental meal delivered by a new outlet called Azuma Kara. Based in Shahpur Jat, it delivers food with the help of Swiggy and Zomato, and its own delivery service. It is open every day of the week, from 12pm to 12am (Ph no: +917827906772)

I opened the elegantly designed menu card on the net, and found that it had some of my fa-



Prawn kaffir lime dimsum;
Char Sui Bao; Pad Thai

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



I am a green curry fan, and enjoyed it thoroughly. The chicken had soaked in the tastes and aromas of the herbs – especially the lemongrass – and I had it with some sticky rice and vegetable pad Thai. The icing was the lemongrass tiramisu – the herb gave the soft and cheesy dessert a delicious kick and aftertaste.

The menu is an interesting one, and I am not surprised, for the chef at Azuma Kara was earlier at Blue Ginger, known for its Vietnamese cuisine, in Taj Palace. It has Vietnamese summer rolls on the menu, and the soup list includes cauliflower miso soup and Thai coconut soup (both ₹350). On the sushi list are rolls with mango and avocado, salmon and tuna (₹ 460-890). Among the interesting dishes are its one-meal bowls – spicy rice poke bowl (₹ 690), tofu poke bowl (₹ 620), massaman pork curry with sticky rice and Asian greens (₹ 840) and Peruvian potatoes, wild mushroom and winter truffles (₹ 940).

But I was happy with my dishes. In these troubled times, it was nice to get the old familiar fragrance of Thai herbs in my food. The lemongrass plant in the pot – still intact – seemed happy as well. It gave me a whiff of its heady scent when I stepped out to the balcony the next morning.

(The writer is a seasoned food critic)



A ND-ND

China targets 6% growth, tech supremacy

Legislature is likely to approve a new five-year plan and an overhaul of Hong Kong's electoral system

ANANTH KRISHNAN

China's government on Friday announced a 6% growth target for 2021 and unveiled a five-year plan and vision for 2035 that aims to expand the country's global footprint as a major technology power.

The plans, unveiled at the start of the annual week-long convening of the Communist Party-controlled legislature, the National People's Congress (NPC), outlined a push for China to consolidate the positions of its supply chains in key strategic industries, amid a push from some countries towards decoupling, and to significantly increase China's spending on research and development (R&D) to achieve self-reliance in key high-tech sectors.

Chinese Premier and second-ranked leader Li Keqiang presented the draft government work report for the year and the draft outlines of the 14th five-year



Big plans: Delegates applaud as President Xi Jinping arrives for the opening ceremony of the NPC in Beijing. ■ AFP

plan (2021-25) and long-range objectives for 2035 to the NPC, which will approve the documents over the next week. The NPC is also expected to approve a major overhaul of Hong Kong's electoral system that will see a diminishing share for directly elected legislative seats, dealing a blow to pro-democracy parties and strengthening Beijing's control.

Mr. Li outlined as two major economic targets for 2021 a GDP growth of "over 6%" and the creation of over 11 million new urban jobs. China last year did not announce a growth target amidst the pandemic. The figure, he said, had "taken into account the recovery of economic activity".

The five-year plan (FYP) for 2025 for the first time did not mention annual growth targets, instead announcing an ambitious annual target to increase R&D spending "by more than 7% per year". The NPC will also approve a plan for "long range objec-

tives through the year 2035". President Xi Jinping said last year the country could double its GDP by 2035, pushing China towards becoming a \$30 trillion economy. While there is no official target to do so, that would require 4.5% growth annually.

'Self-reliance'

Both plans have emphasised self-reliance and a focus on high-tech growth. The FYP said China "will take self-reliance in science and technology as strategic underpinning for national development" and "will focus on the development of strategic emerging industries including information technology, biotech and new energy".

Besides the economic plans, the NPC this week is also expected to approve sweeping new changes to Hong Kong's electoral system. Mr. Li on Friday said China "will resolutely guard against and deter external forces' interference". A draft

decision on "improving" Hong Kong's electoral system was submitted on Friday to the NPC. The plan is likely to bestow greater powers on the largely Beijing-nominated 1,200-member Election Committee that chooses Hong Kong's Chief Executive. A push for universal suffrage and to directly choose the Chief Executive was among the demands of the 2019 protests.

Hong Kong only directly votes for half of its 70 Legislative Council members. Under the new plan, Hong Kong media reported, the size of the council could be increased to 90 with the additional members chosen by the Election Committee.

This would decrease the proportion of directly elected members and further dilute the presence of pro-democracy parties. On account of the changes, September's polls in Hong Kong, which were delayed last year because of pandemic, could be further pushed to 2022.

China's defence budget to cross \$200 billion

The 6.8% hike is only a slight raise from the 6.6% increase announced in 2020 amid the pandemic

ANANTH KRISHNAN

China's defence budget will for the first time cross \$200 billion with the government on Friday announcing a 6.8% hike in defence spending for 2021.

The announcement was made at the start of the week-long session of the National People's Congress (NPC), the Communist Party-controlled legislature, in Beijing.

The hike is only a slight raise from the 6.6% increase announced in 2020 amid the pandemic, which was the lowest increase in many

years. The defence budget saw double-digit increases until 2015, and was hiked 7.5% in 2019.

The budget for 2021 was announced as 1.35 trillion yuan (\$209 billion), up from 1.27 trillion Yuan (\$179 billion) last year. This will take China's defence spending to more than four times India's \$49.75 billion budget, not including pensions. India's budget last month announced a modest 1.48% hike in total defence spending to ₹4.78 lakh crore (\$65.7 billion) including pensions, or ₹3.62 lakh crore (\$49.75 billion) minus pensions. In-

dia also announced a record 18.5% increase in capital outlay to ₹1.35 lakh crore (\$18.4 billion).

In China, spending on pensions is not entirely from the defence budget, as it is also shared by the Ministry of Civil Affairs and provincial (state) governments, although part of the budget's personnel allocation goes towards pensions. China also spends less than India on import acquisitions, and its outlay on capital is harder to ascertain considering the defence budget does not fully account the military spends by China's vast mili-

tary industries, most of which are state-controlled.

China's defence spending has in recent years evolved to reflect its on-going modernisation of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), with a shift away from the traditionally dominant army and a greater share going to the PLA Navy, the Rocket Force which is in charge of missiles, and the Strategic Support Force, which includes cyber warfare.

This year, China will launch its third aircraft carrier, which will be its second homegrown one. The PLA Navy in 2019 unveiled its first

homegrown aircraft carrier, and two more are under construction.

Premier Li Keqiang said the Communist Party would, targeting its goals for the PLA's centenary in 2027, "continue to enhance the political loyalty of the armed forces, strengthen them through reform, science and technology and the training of capable personnel, and run them in accordance with the law." China has also announced a target for the PLA to complete its modernisation by 2050, by when it hopes its military will be "world class".



Engineers and students taking part in a protest in Mandalay. ■ AFP

deadliest day of the crackdown so far on Wednesday, when the UN said at least 38 people were killed as graphic images showed security forces firing into crowds and bloodied bodies dragged away.

Despite an increasingly brutal crackdown by the military authorities that has seen more than 50 people killed, protesters took to the streets again in towns around the country to denounce the February 1 coup.

The violence has brought condemnation from around the world, with the UN rights chief demanding the junta "stop murdering and jailing protesters", and the Security Council is set to discuss the crisis later Friday.

But despite the mounting international pressure, the Generals have shown no sign of heeding calls for restraint.

In Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest city, hundreds of engineers took to the streets crying "Free our leader" in reference to ousted State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, detained by the military since the first night of the coup.

The killing follows the

YouTube removes five junta-run TV channels

BANGKOK YouTube has removed five channels run by Myanmar's military for violating its community guidelines and terms of service. The company said on Friday that it terminated channels of Myawaddy Media, MRTV, WD Online Broadcasting, MWD Variety and MWD Myanmar. Earlier, Facebook had removed all military-linked pages. ■ AP

a "global arms embargo" on the country as well as an International Criminal Court probe into alleged atrocities.

In New York, there was a fresh twist in the saga of Myanmar's representative to the UN.

The newly appointed Ambassador resigned, saying his predecessor – sacked by the junta after dramatically condemning their seizure of power in a speech to the UN General Assembly – was still the legitimate envoy.

Ms. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won November elections by a landslide, but the military insisted the polls were rigged as a justification for seizing power.

More bloodshed in Myanmar as UNSC set to meet on crisis

HRC chief asks junta to 'stop murdering and jailing protesters'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE YANGON

A protester was shot dead in Myanmar on Friday in the latest round of bloodletting at anti-coup demonstrations, as the UN Security Council prepared to meet on the escalating crisis.

Despite an increasingly brutal crackdown by the military authorities that has seen more than 50 people killed, protesters took to the streets again in towns around the country to denounce the February 1 coup.

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Plane hijacking thwarted: Iran

ASSOCIATED PRESS TEHRAN

ern city of Ahvaz to the northwestern city of Mashhad, the Guard said.

The Guard's announcement did not identify the hijacker, saying only the hijacker sought to divert the flight to the "southern shores of the Persian Gulf."

That description would include the countries of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, three nations long sus-

picious of Iran's intentions

in the wider region.

It said the Iran Air flight made an emergency landing in the central Iranian city of Isfahan, and no one was injured in the incident. It wasn't immediately clear if the hijacker had been armed during the attempt.

Iranian domestic flights reportedly carry armed air marshals from the Guard to disrupt any attempted attack or hijacking.

India reaffirms Lanka defence ties

4 Sarang Advance Light Helicopters and fighter jets took part in the SLAF event

MEERA SRINIVASAN COLOMBO

With the participation of the Indian Air Force Chief and 23 aircraft in the three-day event in Colombo to mark the 70th anniversary of the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF), India sought to reaffirm its strong defence cooperation with Sri Lanka. The last time Indian aircraft took part in such an event was in 2001, on the occasion of the SLAF's 50th year, according to Captain Vikas Sood, Defence Adviser at the Indian High Commission.

A team of 4 Sarang Advance Light Helicopters, Surya Kiran (Hawks), Tejas Fighter Aircraft, Tejas Trainer and the Dornier Maritime Patrol Aircraft from India were in Sri Lanka this week, to participate in a fly past

and acrobatic display event with the SLAF, held by Colombo's seafront. Air Chief Marshal Rakesh Kumar Singh Bhadauri called on Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, and met senior defence officials.

"The engagement was very positive, we look forward to building on our strong ties," Captain Sood said.

During Sri Lanka's over three decade-civil war, India has played a crucial role, politically and at times, using its military. While the controversial Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) presence here, and 'Operation Poomala' of 1987 – when the Indian Air Force dropped food supplies in Jaffna – drew criticism from sections, the Indian military's "support" has been repeatedly acknow-

ledged by Sri Lanka's national leaders.

In Sri Lanka's post-war era, Indo-Lanka military partnership has focused mostly on training and capacity building. According to Captain Sood, about 1,200 Sri Lankan military personnel are trained in India every year. "That is about 50% of the total training we offer, and shows the priority we accord to Sri Lanka," he said, adding that Sri Lanka had "huge potential" to contribute to regional security.

Fire-fighting operation
Last year, Indian Navy and Coast Guard personnel helped the Sri Lankan Navy in a crucial fire-fighting operation, when an oil tanker went up in flames, off the island's east coast. Further, Sri

Lanka's strategic location makes it a crucial partner for all countries in the region. Pakistan's Air Chief Marshal Mujahid Anwar Khan was also in Sri Lanka to attend the 70th year celebrations. "This visit signifies the strong bond and friendship between the two countries and their Armed Forces," the Pakistani mission here said. Over the years, Sri Lanka is known to have maintained strong military ties with several partners in the region and beyond.

Domestically, its defence sector is accorded high priority by all governments.

A decade after the war, Sri Lanka allocates one of the biggest chunks of its annual budget to the defence sector – an estimated LKR 23,250 million for the year 2021.

World is no closer to answer on virus origins'

All possibilities are on the table: official

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE REUTERS SHANGHAI

Despite a high-profile visit to China by a team of international experts in January, the world is no closer to knowing the origins of COVID-19, according to one of the authors of an open letter calling for a new investigation into the pandemic.

"At this point we are no further advanced than we were a year ago," said Nikolai Petrovsky, an expert in vaccines at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, and one of 26 global experts who signed the open letter, published on Thursday.

The WHO mission to Wuhan, where the coronavirus was first identified, has come under fire, with critics accusing the WHO of relying too much on Chinese field

work and data. Team members also said China was reluctant to share vital data that could show COVID-19 was circulating months earlier than first recognised.

The open letter said the WHO mission "did not have the mandate, the independence, or the necessary access to carry out a full and unrestricted investigation" into all theories about the origins of COVID-19. "All possibilities remain on the table and I have yet to see a single piece of independent scientific data that rules out any of them," he said.

Meanwhile, WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the team is "working on its final report, as well as summary reports, which we understand will be issued in the week of the 15th of March."



New hope: Iraq PM Mustafa al-Kadhimi, right, receiving Pope Francis upon his arrival in Baghdad. ■ AFP

On Iraq trip, Pope urges end to violence

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE BAGHDAD

Pope Francis called for an end to extremism and violence in his opening address on Friday on the first-ever papal visit to Iraq, a country long scarred by war.

The 84-year-old is making a "long-awaited" trip to comfort one of the world's oldest Christian communities, while also deepening

his dialogue with Muslims. "May there be an end to acts of violence and extremism, factions and intolerance!" urged the pontiff in a stirring address.

The Pope was greeted by Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi upon landing in Baghdad. He later met with President Barham Saleh, as well as other government and religious figures.

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MARKET WATCH

	50-3-2021	% CHANGE
Sensex	50,405	-0.87
US Dollar	73.02	-0.26
Gold	43,887	-1.09
Brent oil	68.90	-5.45

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	748.95	-3.50
Asian Paints	2387.10	-30.00
Axis Bank	730.75	-6.05
Bajaj Auto	3852.85	-26.20
Bajaj Finserv	9958.10	-171.85
Bajaj Finance	5444.90	-41.00
Bharti Airtel	532.80	-6.20
BPCL	461.80	-2.10
Britannia Ind	3491.75	-10.15
Cipla	805.15	-1.60
Coal India	151.10	-0.95
Divis Lab	3496.90	-56.55
D Dr Reddy's Lab	4492.50	-82.55
Eicher Motors	2587.75	-5.45
GAIL (India)	147.15	2.70
Grasim Ind	1339.35	-11.05
HCL Tech.	941.50	-16.50
HDPC	2542.90	-39.05
HDPC Bank	1530.00	-22.05
HDPC Life	717.25	-3.25
Hero MotoCorp	3461.70	-41.85
Hindalco	337.85	-11.60
Hind Unilever	2201.10	4.20
ICICI Bank	609.45	-11.30
IndusInd Bank	1039.90	-52.05
Infosys	1316.70	-13.65
Indian Oil Corp	101.45	0.00
ITC	208.55	-1.15
JSW Steel	406.40	-7.70
Kotak Bank	1922.50	24.80
L&T	1463.55	0.95
M&M	840.40	-4.85
Maruti Suzuki	7249.00	117.40
Nestle India Ltd.	16782.90	121.10
NTPC	108.70	-2.10
ONGC	114.95	2.25
PowerGrid Corp	220.25	-4.90
Reliance Ind	2178.70	2.85
SBI Life	903.55	-12.35
State Bank	383.65	-12.00
Shree Cement	27848.60	-828.00
Sun Pharma	611.20	-7.75
Tata Motors	325.15	-14.05
Tata Steel	733.30	-24.65
TCS	3008.05	-61.65
Tech Mahindra	959.70	-8.35
Titan	1474.20	3.70
UltraTech Cement	6810.10	34.75
UPL	591.55	-23.90
Wipro	420.85	-17.95

EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on March 05

CURRENCY TT BUY TT SELL

US Dollar... 72.81 73.13

Euro... 86.93 87.31

British Pound... 100.66 101.11

Japanese Yen (100)... 67.19 67.48

Chinese Yuan... 11.22 11.27

Swiss Franc... 78.49 78.84

Singapore Dollar... 54.29 54.54

Canadian Dollar... 57.33 57.58

Malaysian Ringgit... 17.86 17.96

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



ICICI Bank cuts home loan rate to 6.7%

MUMBAI
ICICI Bank on Friday cut interest rate on home loans to 6.7%, at par with market leader SBI, as part of a limited period offer. The lender said the interest rate offering, valid till March 31, is the lowest in a decade. Over the last week, there have been similar announcements by lenders on interest rates which were at 16-year-low at the systemic level. PTI

Xiaomi to sell Redmi smart TVs in India

NEW DELHI
Chinese tech major Xiaomi will soon introduce smart TVs under the 'Redmi' brand in India as it looks to further expand its position in the burgeoning smart TV segment in the country. Speaking to PTI, Xiaomi India category lead (smart TV) Eshwar Nitalkar said, "We have grown with the market and sold over five million smart TVs." PTI

SPORT

Shikha not dropped: Harmanpreet

'You need to give chance to other players'

CRICKET

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

LUCKNOW
The Indian women's ODI vice-captain Harmanpreet Kaur on Friday said it was a "tough call" to leave veteran pacer Shikha Pandey out of the upcoming limited-overs series against South Africa and insisted that she has not been dropped for good.

Indian women will play five ODIs and three T20Is against South Africa, starting here on Sunday.

Shikha's omission created quite a flutter. She was the India's second highest wicket-taker in its previous assignment - the T20 World Cup.

"She is not dropped... sometimes you need to take

'OPEC+ move to hit recovery'

Oil producers' decision to extend output cuts may hurt some economies: India

REUTERS

NEW DELHI

India, the world's third-biggest oil importer, on Friday said the decision by major producers to continue with output cuts as prices move higher could threaten the consumption-led-recovery in some countries.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies, a group known as OPEC+, agreed on Thursday not to increase supply in April as they await a more substantial recovery in demand amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Crude prices rose after the announcement and are up 33% this year.

Brent crude futures for May on Friday rose to \$67.44 a barrel, and are on track for an almost 2% gain this week.

"As one of the largest



Speed bump: India's heavily-taxed retail fuel prices have touched record highs threatening the recovery. ■ K. V. S. GIRI

crude-consuming countries, India is concerned that such actions by producing countries have the potential to undermine consumption-led recovery and more so hurt consumers, especially in our price-sensitive market," Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan told Reuters.

India, hit hard by the soaring

Rising oil prices are posing fiscal challenges for India, where heavily-taxed retail fuel prices have touched record highs, threatening the demand-driven recovery.

India imports about 84% of its oil and relies on West Asian supplies to meet over three-fifths of its demand.

Use oil bought cheaply'

Responding to India's repeated request for an increase in output, Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman responded on Thursday by saying India should start using oil it bought cheaply during the price collapse last year.

"We will continue to work with each other... avoidance of volatility will help both producers and consumers," the Saudi minister said.

"We will continue to work with each other... avoidance of volatility will help both producers and consumers," the Saudi minister said.

U.S. job growth blows past expectations

REUTERS

WASHINGTON

The U.S. economy created more jobs than expected in February as falling new COVID-19 cases and additional pandemic relief money from the government boosted hiring at restaurants, putting the labour market recovery back on firmer footing.

The Labor Department's employment report showed at least 4.1 million Americans have been out of work for more than six months. Non-farm payrolls surged by 3,79,000 jobs last month after rising 1,66,000 in January. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast February payrolls rising by 1,82,000.

Auto sector for incentives to OEMs, parts makers

'Schemes should not hurt exporters'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI



The auto sector on Friday pitched for incentives to encourage domestic value-addition to leverage on the \$25-billion import substitution opportunity, cautioning that such schemes should not 'cannibalise' the existing exporters by incentivising new players.

The representation was made during a webinar on production linked incentive (PLI) schemes. Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) president Kenichi Ayukawa and CII Manufacturing Council chairperson Baba Kalyani noted that there was a need to incentivise, encourage

PLI plan will lead to output of \$520 bn: PM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, introduced by the government for about 13 sectors, will lead to production worth \$520 billion in the country over the next five years.

He added the government was also working towards enhancing ease of doing business as well as reducing the compliance burden for the industry as he believed government interference in everything created more problems than solutions.

The industry recommended that investments in technology development, R&D and innovation should be incentivised along with a need for long-term, stable, mutually agreed technology and a regulatory roadmap to encourage localisation.

Concor set to source containers locally: CMD

It now imports 8,000 units from China



'A ban may hit hundreds of techies, crypto entrepreneurs'



bitcoins) constituting 10-15% of the global user base.

Many entrepreneurs have already built their businesses around cryptocurrency and also hundreds of techies are deployed in building the required software platforms and trading infrastructure for crypto exchanges.

India has more than 10 million buyers and sellers of cryptocurrency (mostly in

clarity whatsoever about what the government is planning," IAMAI said.

"If the government has plans to ban crypto, why does it require a bill when it can be done through an executive order," it asked.

"There are hundreds of software developers working on blockchain projects in India using crypto," Nishith Desai, founder, Nishith Desai Associates, said. "Besides, there are skilled graduates from technology institutes supported by well-known venture capital funds who are in the space," he said.

"Also, lakhs of people have made legitimate investments in crypto. To deprive them of opportunities may have constitutional issues," Mr. Desai added.

ECLGS helps push MSME loan growth'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

The emergency credit line guarantee scheme (ECLGS) has helped in the credit growth for small businesses, aiding an index of growth in loans for the crucial sector ending a notch higher at the end of the September quarter.

However, because of the special asset-quality recognition dispensations like the moratoriums and then the Supreme Court-decided standstill, the 'strength index' for the MSMEs will get clearer in the next few months, TransUnion CIBIL and SIDBI, who prepare the index, said. The latest MSME Credit Health Index indicates credit growth has accelerated, as the overall growth index inched up to 114 points, a three-point rise from 111 in June.

Shikha not dropped: Harmanpreet

Consumption drag likely: UBS unit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

Households have lost a whopping ₹13 lakh crore of their incomes from the pandemic-induced job losses, according to a report that also warns of the economy losing momentum by mid-2021 on a likely slowdown in consumption demand that has propped the economy in recent months.

'Could slow by mid-2021' Describing the growth momentum seen in the second and third quarters of FY21 as a positive surprise, economists at UBS Securities India led by Tanveer Gupta Jain said the economy could slow by mid-2021 as households that lost incomes during the pandemic to the tune of ₹13 lakh crore could drag consumption with a

lag.

In the second quarter of the current financial year, the GDP contraction narrowed to 7.5%, while in Q3, it grew 40 basis points (bps).

Given this, sustainability of the recovery seen in the second and third quarters and also the growth outlook are dependent on the revival in new investment intentions and easing of financial sector stress.

Proceeds would be utilised to augment tier 1 capital base to meet future capital requirements.

"We don't understand what is so secretive about this bill that is in the making," the industry body said.

"What makes it more strange is, not a single ecosystem player, industry representative or members of the public were consulted before its draft was prepared," IAMAI added.

India has more than 10 million buyers and sellers of

cryptocurrency (mostly in

bitcoins) constituting 10-15% of the global user base.

Many entrepreneurs have

already built their busi-

nesses around crypto-

currency and also hun-

Unstoppable Pant, immovable Washington seize the moment

Wicketkeeper (101) and all-rounder (60 batting) drag India, tottering at 146 for six, to strong position after Anderson, Stokes and Leach threaten in day's first half

ENGLAND IN INDIA

AMOL KARHADKAR
AHMEDABAD
James Anderson and Ben Stokes bowled their hearts out to push India onto the back foot. But Rishabh Pant's methodical madness and Washington Sundar's calm class changed the complexion of the fourth and final Test, India finishing the second day with a lead of 89 runs.

Thanks to the 113-run association for the seventh wicket between the pair on Friday, India breezed past England's first-innings total of 205. With Axar Patel lending support to Washington (60 batting) after Pant's dismissal for 101, India went to stumps at 294 for seven.

When Washington had walked out to join Pant 25 minutes before tea, India was tottering at 146 for six. They relied on their defence and rotated the strike till almost an hour after tea.

The waiting game

Pant waited for the England attack, which had entered the game a bowler short, to lose its zing. Once India had trudged close to England's total and with the new ball imminent, Pant switched gears flawlessly. It started

with two fours in three balls off Stokes to help India level the scores and the next over saw him repeat the dose against Joe Root's part-time off-spin.

By the time James Anderson – who till then had conceded just 19 runs off his 17 overs – ran in with the second red cherry, India had reached to a lead of 18 runs. The next passage of play saw the pendulum swing strongly in India's favour.

Pant welcomed Anderson with a lofted off-drive and a swat through the covers off the first two deliveries. The first ball of the next over saw Pant despatching Stokes through mid-wicket from outside off. While Pant was taking calculated risks, Washington crunched two more boundaries in the over, his cut through point being the highlight.

Reverse-ramp

Pant's improvisation reached its peak when he reverse-ramped Anderson for a four over slips to enter the 90s. It was fitting then that he sent Root packing over the mid-wicket fence in the next over to raise his bat for a memorable hundred – his first at home and third overall. After being patient for his first 50 (82 balls), Pant took just 33



To each his own: Pant and Washington employed contrasting methods while bailing India out of trouble. ■ AFP

balls for his second.

Despite Root latching on to a sharp chance in the 85th over to end Pant's onslaught and give Anderson a reason to smile, Washington not on-

ly passed his fifty but also ensured along with Axar that England's bowlers will continue to face the heat on the third morning.

For the better part of the



day, however, England was in control as Anderson, Stokes and Jack Leach bowled tight lines. While Leach accounted for Cheteshwar Pujara for the fourth time in

the series, captain Virat Kohli fiddled at a short-ball from Stokes to nick behind.

At 40 for three, the onus was on Rohit Sharma and Ajinkya Rahane to resurrect

In my opinion, it was one of his finest knocks as it came under pressure. We weren't in a good position when he came in to bat and we saw a few sides of his batting today. He was cautious at the beginning and then flourished the way we know him.

ROHIT

on Pant

Pant has his own style of batting. Of course there have been messages from the team management as to how he needs to approach his innings, but he has his own style.

ROHIT

When a guy is striking as well as he [Pant] has been this series, it is pretty daunting to have him come in at six and score the way he does.

JEETAN PATEL

England's spin bowling coach

SCOREBOARD

ENGLAND – 1ST INNINGS

205

INDIA – 1ST INNINGS

Shubman Gill lbw b Anderson 0 (3b), Rohit Sharma lbw b Stokes 49 (144b, 7x4), Cheteshwar Pujara lbw b Leach 17 (66b, 1x4), Virat Kohli c Foakes b Stokes 0 (8b), Ajinkya Rahane c Stokes b Anderson 27 (45b, 4x4), Rishabh Pant c Root b Anderson 101 (118b, 13x4, 2x6), R. Ashwin c Pope b Leach 13 (32b, 2x4), Washington Sundar (batting) 60 (117b, 8x4), Axar Patel (batting) 11 (34b, 2x4); Extras (b-8, lb-5, nb-3); 16; Total (for seven wkts. in 94 overs): 294.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-0 (Gill, 0.3 overs), 2-40 (Pujara, 23.6), 3-41 (Kohli, 26.4), 4-80 (Rahane, 37.5), 5-121 (Rohit, 49.6), 6-146 (Ashwin, 58.1), 7-259 (Pant, 84.1).

ENGLAND BOWLING

Anderson 20-11-40-3, Stokes 22-6-73-2, Leach 23-5-66-2, Bess 15-1-56-0, Root 14-1-46-0.

derson that pitched in the perfect corridor.

When Rohit (49) couldn't tackle Stokes' reverse-swing an hour after lunch and R. Ashwin fell to a soft dismissal not long afterwards, India was in a real spot of bother. But Pant and Washington ensured the home camp was full of smiles at the end of the day.

Coach Snesarev passes away

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT KOCHI

Nikolai Snesarev, who virtually changed the distance running scene in the country, passed away at the NIS Patiala on Friday. The 72-year-old Belarusian landed in the country a few days ago to train 3000m steeple-chaser Avinash Sable.

"We are stunned by the news that coach Nikolai was found dead in his room today. We will cherish his long association with Indian athletics and will miss him," said AFI president Adille Sumariwalla.

"He insisted that athletes never touch any medicines while training with him, imposing a blanket ban."

Nagal loses to Ramos-Vinolas

SPORTS REPORTER BENGALURU

Sumit Nagal's challenge at the Argentina Open ATP 250 ended with a tight 6-4, 2-6, 5-7 quarterfinal loss to Spain's Albert Ramos-Vinolas in Buenos Aires on Friday. The Indian clawed his way back from 2-5 down in the deciding set and even held a break point on the Ramos-Vinolas serve at 5-5, but couldn't capitalise.

'All I wanted was not to look like a fool'

Sunil Gavaskar tells the origin story of one of Test cricket's greatest careers

50 YEARS AGO

AMOL KARHADKAR

AHMEDABAD

With a twinkle in his eye, legendary opener Sunil Gavaskar walked down memory lane, reminiscing about his debut Test, which began 50 years ago on this day at Port of Spain.

Excerpts:

You missed the first Test due to a well-documented tooth infection. Do you remember when you learnt you would be in the XI in Port of Spain? I was told on the eve of the match that I would be playing. My form leading up to that – after the first Test, there were three First Class games – was good, so clearly I knew that with the form I was in and the fact that they were looking for another opener, I had a chance to play. Then of course, my captain Ajit Wadekar said that I was going to make my debut the next day. That particular evening was very special. I was excited, elated, nervous, anxious because we were playing against Sir Garfield Sobers' team. All those emotions were running through my mind, but luckily, we fielded first and I got the opportunity to wear my cap. At that stage, I



What a start! Gavaskar, who made his debut on March 6, 1971, against the West Indies, scored 774 runs in four Tests, including a double hundred and three centuries. ■ THE HINDU ARCHIVES

used to bat bareheaded, that's what I had got used to from school level. The fact that I got to wear my India cap when we fielded was a big moment.

You played a key role, scoring 65 in the first innings and an unbeaten 67 in the chase. Can you recall one or two vivid moments that have stayed with you?

One vivid memory [is] Salim Durani getting Clive Lloyd caught at short mid-wicket by Wadekar. In fact, Salim uncle, as I call him, insisted on being given the ball by Wadekar. He said, "Mujhe de do, mujhe de do (give me

the ball)". And sure enough, he got the wicket of Lloyd and the next ball he cleanly bowled Sir Garfield Sobers in the West Indies' second innings. The game turned around from there because both these great batsmen would have taken the game away from us.

And of course, hitting the winning runs. It was a googly from Arthur Barrett and I remember hitting it over midwicket for a boundary for the winning runs.

Once the primary objective of playing for India had been

achieved, did you at any point during that game set a target for yourself?

No. Look, my career had gone step by step at school and university level, but at the First Class level, I played for Mumbai but I didn't play for West Zone in the Duleep Trophy because the selection committee didn't pick me. Then I was picked straight into the Indian team. I had missed that one step, so I was just a little bit nervous. To be honest, all I wanted at that stage was not to look like a fool on the cricket field at the Test level. That's all I wanted.

Sindhu, Srikanth in last four

SWISS OPEN

ANI

BASEL

P.V. Sindhu, seeded second, overcame the fifth-seeded Thai Busanan Ongbamrungphan 21-16, 23-21 in 59 minutes to make the last four at the Swiss Open on Friday.

The fourth-seeded K. Srikanth advanced to the men's

semifinals defeating sixth seed Kantaphon Wangcharoen 21-19, 21-12 in a 55-minute battle to reach the semifinals.

Other results (quarterfinals):

Men: Zii Jia Lee (Mas) bt B. Sai Praneeth 21-14, 21-17; Kunlavut Vitidsarn (Tha) bt Ajay Jayaram 21-9, 21-6.

Mixed doubles: Tan Kian Meng & Lai Pei Jing (Mas) bt Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty 21-19, 21-16.

Sin and Teo Ee Yi 21-12, 21-19, 21-12 in a 55-minute battle to reach the semifinals.

Swiss Open

Men: Zii Jia Lee (Mas) bt B. Sai Praneeth 21-14, 21-17; Kunlavut Vitidsarn (Tha) bt Ajay Jayaram 21-9, 21-6.

Mixed doubles: Tan Kian Meng & Lai Pei Jing (Mas) bt Satwiksairaj Rankireddy & Ashwini Ponappa 21-17, 16-21, 21-18.

ISL 2020-21

SPORTS BUREAU

FC Goa and Mumbai City FC played out an exciting 2-2 draw in the first leg of their 2020-21 Indian Super League semifinal fixture at the Fatorda Stadium in Margao on Friday.

Saviour Gama gave Goa the lead for the second time on the night via a brilliant solo effort. He got the ball on the left flank, sprinted towards goal and unleashed a shot from the edge of the box to beat Amrinder Singh.

However, just three minutes later, Mourtada Fall equalised for Mumbai City off a brilliant header, thanks to Jorge Ortiz inside the box and the referee immediately pointed to the spot. Igor Angulo converted the penalty.

Later, Fall escaped a straight red card after a dangerous tackle on Princen Rebello during the se-



Pouncing on it: Mourtada Fall headed home Mumbai City's second goal in the semifinal against Goa. ■ SPORTSPICS/ISL

cond-half stoppage-time much to the fury of manager Juan Ferrando in the Goa dugout.

The second leg will happen at the GMC Stadium in Bambolim on March 8, Monday.

The result: FC Goa 2 (Angulo 20-pen, Gama 59) drew with Mumbai City FC 2 (Boumous 38, Fal 62).

Saturday's match: Second semifinal, first leg: NEUFC vs ATK Mohun Bagan, 7.30 p.m.

FAITH

Communion with devotees

Throughout the Bhagavata Purana, it is shown that close communion with the devotees of the Lord is far more valuable in engendering a strong devotional experience in the devotees. The Rudra Gita section in the Bhagavata Purana comprises Siva's instruction to the sons of Prachina Barhis, who are together known as Prachetas. They proceed westwards towards the sea to engage in penance and worship of Hari. Siva is pleased with their penance and blesses them with this mantra that sings the praises of the Lord as much as of His devotees, pointed out Sri R. Krishnamurthy Sastrigal in a discourse.

As a great Vishnu devotee, Siva holds other such devotees close to his heart and shares his God experience with them in this hymn. Even those engaged in righteous conduct and duties can perhaps attain the position enjoyed by him or Brahma. But a devotee of Vishnu attains His abode directly. The Lord is the subtle and eternal truth pervading the entire universe. He rules the entire universe. He is also the sole ruler of the mind, senses and the heart and dwells in the pure heart. Siva teaches the way to attain single minded devotion to the Lord by propitiating His charming form and auspicious qualities. Devotees of Vishnu perceive His presence everywhere and remain with His thoughts just as iron filings get attracted to the magnet. Association with such devotees helps one to be immersed in the ocean of the Lord's auspicious attributes.

Just as the dip in waters of sacred rivers, it is most efficacious in purifying one's heart and mind. By God's grace, those who contemplate on His gunas, come to see clearly that objects of the world are sweet at the beginning but will bring disaster by and by. They try to overcome this delusion.

TH CROSSWORD + 13188

(set by Vulcan)

Stay on the grid.
Solve crosswords online.

@ <https://qrq.page.link/jjpTn>



- ACROSS**
- It is an ordeal poorly justified (12)
 - Browse one table (7)
 - Comes forward and expands (5,2)
 - Charge everyone, say, at the start of event (6)
 - Something neglected in old assignment (8)
 - Fix and treat stain with care (9)
 - Open extra time (5)
- DOWN**
- An appeal to wipe the floor with, say, synthetic fabric (7)
 - First month in this Russian region – captivating (9)
 - Died after having been born in poverty (4)
 - Frantic use of stimulant before the end of deadline (4-6)
 - Details of pressure in 2 seconds (5)
 - Predetermine a standard time to eat outside (7)
 - A small damage to a capital city (6)
 - Instrument that's long in a way (6)
 - An old nation's exotic city (3,7)
 - Attentive old British employee (9)
 - Speaker's offensive line (6)
 - Continual struggle in desert heat (3,4)
 - Pasta with very garlicky sauce containing a bit of ricotta on top (7)
 - It's miserable when married and obviously not independent (6)
 - Suit with tie (5)
 - Only individual, say (4)

Bedi out of ICU

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Former India captain Bishan Singh Bedi, who underwent surgery to remove a blood clot in his brain a few days ago, has been shifted to a private room from the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and is doing well, according to a source close to him.

"He (Bedi) was shifted to a private room yesterday. He is fine now. They (doctors) will monitor him for a few more days," the source told PTI.

Bedi had undergone bypass surgery at the hospital last month after he complained of heart problems. He underwent the procedure to remove the blood clot after the bypass surgery.

TV PICKS

India vs England: 4th Test, Star Sports 1 (SD & HD), 9.30 a.m.

Premier League: SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 6 p.m., 8.30 p.m., 11 p.m. & 1.30 a.m. (Sunday)

Serie A: Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m., 10.30 p.m., 1.15 a.m. (Sunday)

ISL: Semifinal, Star Sports 1, 2 & 3 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.

ATP 250: Argentina Open, Eurosport (SD & HD), 8.30 p.m.

Swiss Open badminton: Star Sports 2 & 3 (SD & HD), 3.30 p.m.

FIH Pro League: SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 6.30 p.m.

IN BRIEF



Mclroy, Conners ahead; Lahiri lies tied 43rd

MIAMI
Four-time Major winner Rory McIlroy fired a six-under 66 to share the lead with Canada's Corey Conners in the USPGA Arnold Palmer Invitational on Thursday. One stroke behind is reigning US Open champion Bryson DeChambeau. Anirban Lahiri returned an even par 72 to tie tied 43rd. AFP

Prajnesh gets past Duckworth

SPORTS BUREAU
NEW DELHI

Prajnesh Gunnswaran defeated James Duckworth 6-4, 2-6, 7-6(1) in the quarterfinals of the \$156,240 Challenger tennis tournament in Nur Sultan, Kazakhstan, on Friday.

In the semifinals, Prajnesh will meet Tomas Machac of the Czech Republic who knocked out top seed Soonwoo Kwon of Korea. **The results:**

\$156,240 Challenger, Nur Sultan, Kazakhstan: Singles (quarterfinals): Prajnesh Gunnswaran bt James Duckworth (Aus) 6-4, 2-6, 7-6(1).

\$15,000 ITF men, Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt: Singles (quarterfinals): Sasikumar Mukund bt Martins Podzus (Lat) 6-3, 6-1.

Maruri sisters triumph

SPORTS BUREAU
CHANDIGARH

The Maruri sisters, Reshma and Suhitha, outplayed the Belgians Flo Helsen and Mirthe Moens 6-0, 6-2 to capture the girls' doubles title in the ITF grade-4 junior tennis tournament at the CLTA Complex on Friday.

In the boys' doubles final, top seeds Nishant Dabas and Chirag Duhan beat Bushan Haobam and Yuvan Nandal in straight sets. **The results (doubles, finals):**

Boys: Nishant Dabas & Chirag Duhan bt Bushan Haobam & Yuvan Nandal 6-3, 6-4.

Girls: Reshma Maruri & Suhitha Maruri bt Flo Helsen & Mirthe Moens (Bel) 6-0, 6-2.

Neeraj betters National record

Tops world list; Annu Rani and Avinash Sable catch the eye with their show

IPC-3

SPORTS BUREAU
PATIALA

Neeraj Chopra, the brightest prospect to bring India's first-ever Olympic medal in athletics, proved that he is right on track for Tokyo by bettering his own javelin throw National record in the Indian Grand Prix-3 on Friday.

The 23-year-old's 88.07m in his season-opener bettered his previous best – the 2018 Asian Games gold-winning throw – by a centimetre. The effort also carried Chopra, who had three throws above 83m, to the top of this year's world list.

And for the first time, the top three – Shivpal Singh (silver) and the 20-year-old Sahil Silwal – went over 80m in an Indian competition.

The consistent Annu Rani, the Asian silver medallist, was also impressive in the women's event, coming close to 62m twice before winning with 61.98m.

Meanwhile, Avinash Sable was just three seconds off his National record in the 3000m steeplechase while shot putter Tajinderpal Singh Toor came up with a



Phenom: Neeraj Chopra showcased his prowess with a record-breaking throw. ■ TWITTER/TOTAL SPORTS CHANNEL

20m-plus throw.

Amoj improves time

Amoj Jacob improved his 400m personal best for the second successive week, bringing it down to 45.70s. M.R. Poovamma, the women's 400m champion, finished with a double, taking the 800m gold also.

Hima Das, the only runner

in the women's 100m, clocked a personal best 11.67s.

The results: Men: **200m:** 1. Muhammed Anas 21.48s, 2. Akshay Prakash 22.04, 3. Rahul Kadamb 22.04; **400m:** 1. Amoj Jacob 45.70s, 2. Sarthak Bhamari 47.11, 3. Jashanjeet Singh 47.59; **800m:** 1. Nikesh Rathod 1:53.94s, 2. Parveen Boora 1:55.03, 3. Arjan Khokhar 1:56.10; **5000m:** 1. Kailesh Ku-

mar 20:19.84s; **400m Hurdles:** A. Dharun 51.04s, 2. Aftab Alam 51.60, 3. Joravar Singh 55.83; **3000m steeplechase:** 1. Avinash Sable 8:24.40s, 2. Naiven Dagar 8:56.36, 3. Balkishan 9:06.69.

Long jump: 1. M. Sreeshankar 7.91m, 2. Yugant Singh 7.68, 3. Muhammed Anees 7.60; **Triple jump:** 1. Eldhoose Paul 15.80m, 2. Kamal Raj 15.67, 3. Punit Sharma; **Shot put:** 1. Tajinderpal Singh 20.09m, 2. Devinder Singh 18.24, 3. Sahib Singh 17.52; **Javelin throw:** 1. Neeraj Chopra 88.07m (NR, Old: 88.06m, self, 2018), 2. Shival Singh 81.63, 3. Sahil Silwal 80.65.

Women: **100m:** Hima Das 11.67s; **400m:** 1. M.R. Poovamma 54.11s, 2. Subha Venkatesan 55.11, 3. V.K. Salini 56.50; **800m:** 1. M.R. Poovamma 2:08.60s, 2. Uravashi 2:18.06, 3. Sukhwant Kaur 2:18.41; **5000m:** 1. Parul Chaudhary 15:48.49, 2. Ruby Kashyap 18:23.79; **3000m steeplechase:** 1. Chinta Yadav 10:27.06s, 2. Sapna Kishan 13:09.92.

Long jump: 1. Mareena George 5.97m, 2. Shiwangi Dubey 5.76, 3. Sowmya Murugan 5.51; **Javelin throw:** 1. Annu Rani 61.98m, 2. Sanjana Choudhary 52.54, 3. Sharmila Kumari 50.77; **Shot put:** 1. Shristi Vig 16.06m, 2. Kachnar Chaudhary 14.41, 3. Tunlai Narzary 14.07.

New Nordic javelin did the trick

STAN RAYAN
KOCHE

This was a season-opener and the winds were not helpful but javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra still managed to break his National record in the Indian Grand Prix on Friday.

"I was expecting something like 85-86m. The crosswinds disturbed me but I got one good throw with the (new) Nordic javelin," said Neeraj. "I'm planning to try the Nordic more in competitions."

This is probably the first time Neeraj had found success with the Nordic. He had been throwing with the Nemeth javelin in competitions earlier.

He said his target is to go over 90m this season and after the Federation Cup in Patiala (March 15-18), the plan is to try and compete in the Diamond League.

Adille Sumariwalla, the AFI president, said he was trying to send the javelin throwers to Europe for training before the Olympics. "We are talking to our counterparts in countries like Finland and Poland to see which part is safer," said Sumariwalla.

Aussies force series-decider Finch now highest Aussie T20 run-getter



Sheet anchor: Finch laid the foundation for Australia's win. ■ AFP

AUSTRALIA IN NZ

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WELLINGTON

Australia crushed New Zealand by 50 runs in a low-scoring fourth T20I here on Friday to level the series 2-2.

The result sets up a winner-takes-all blockbuster at the same venue on Sunday, with Australia in red-hot form after struggling early in the series.

Australia scored 156 for six in its 20 overs after electing to bat. In reply, New Zealand was all out for 106 in 18.5 overs.

Captain Aaron Finch anchored the innings with a gritty 79, making him Aus-

tralia's most prolific T20I run-scorer on 2,310, ahead of David Warner's 2,265.

Finch chiselled out his 14th T20 half-century off 55 balls before cutting loose with four sixes in the final over, in which Kyle Jamieson conceded 26 runs.

The Black Caps made a slow start, with openers Martin Guptill and Tim Seifert managing just one boundary apiece in the opening three overs.

The scores: Australia 156/6 in 20 overs (A. Finch 79) bt New Zealand 106 in 18.5 overs (K. Jamieson 30; K. Richardson 3/19).

DELHI ROUND-UP

All-round show by Dahiya and Kasana

Baba Haridas Academy will take on Ravindra Phagna Academy in the final of the 1st Hiltary Delhi Capitals junior league (under-14)

tournament on Friday.

In the semifinal, on Friday, Gorish Dahiya (61 runs & 4/24) and Saksham Sharma (83) guided Baba Haridas Academy to a 175-run win over Wonders Club, Noida.

In the other semifinal, Player-of-the-Match Dharmendra Kasana (31 and 3/42) showed the way for Ravindra Phagna Academy to a 29-run win over Sonnet Club.

The scores: Baba Haridas Academy 255/7 in 40 overs (Saksham Sharma 83, Gorish Dahiya 61 n.o., Dweep Gahlot 48) bt Wonders Club, Noida 80 in 21 overs (Saksham Sharma 31, Aditya Gautam 28, Girish Dahiya 4/24). Ravindra Phagna Academy 187/6 om 40 overs (Gurtej Sindhu 32, Anshul Yadav 32, Dharmendra Kasana 31 and 3/42) showed the way for Ravindra Phagna Academy to a 29-run win over Sonnet Club.

The results: Premier League: Fulham 0 lost to Tottenham 1 (Tosin 19-09); Liverpool 0 lost to Chelsea 1 (Mount 42); West Brom 0 lost to Everton 1 (Richarlison 65).

Serie A: Parma 1 (Hernani 71) lost to Inter Milan 2 (Sanchez 54, 62).

Mary Kom settles for bronze

BOXING

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Six-time world champion M.C. Mary Kom (51kg) settled for bronze in the 35th Boxam International Boxing Tournament in Castellon, Spain after going down to American Virginia Fuchs in an intensely-contested semifinal on Friday.

The 37-year-old Olympics-

bound star lost in a split decision after an exhausting contest that was also messy in equal measure.

Earlier, Olympic-bound male boxers Satish Kumar (+91kg) and Ashish Kumar (75kg) entered the semifinals along with Sumit Sangwan (81kg).

Sumit also triumphed 4-1, over Mohor El Ziad of Belgium. Vikas Krishan out-punched the 2012 London Olympic Games bronze medalist Vicenzo Mangiacapre to progress into the men's 69kg semifinals.

Satish, the first super heavyweight from the country to qualify for the Olympics, defeated Denmark's Givskov Nielsen 5-0 in his last-eight



Energy sapping: It took Pia Lovric three hours and 13 minutes to get the better of Jennifer Luikhama. ■ KAMESH SRINIVASAN

better partners Irina Khromacheva of Russia and second seed Miriam Bianca Bulgari of Romania engaged in a no holds barred fight. Irina pulled through after losing the first set. The duo, seeded No. 1, gave a walkover to Lovric and Nagy in the doubles semifinals.

Sowjanya Bavissetti and Prarthana Thombare were given a scare by the young pair of Yubarani Banerjee and Vaidehi Chaudhari before experience won in the

end, 10-8 in the super tie-break.

The results: **Singles: Quarterfinals:** Pia Lovric (Slo) bt Jennifer Luikhama 7-5, 5-7, 7-5; Zeel Desai bt Humera Baharmus 6-4, 4-6, 6-3; Adrienn Nagy (Hung) bt Rutuja Bhosale 6-1, 3-6, 6-2; Irina Khromacheva (Rus) bt Miriam Bianca Bulgari (Rou) 1-6, 6-2, 6-3.

Doubles: **Finals:** Lovric & Nagy w/o Bulgari & Khromacheva; Sowjanya Bavissetti & Prarthana Thombare bt Yubarani Banerjee & Vaidehi Chaudhari 7-6(7), 3-6, [10-8].

Five straight home defeats for the first time in the club's 128-year history. More than 10 hours since a goal from open play at Anfield.

The stadium that was once a fortress for Liverpool is the now the scene of a scarcely believable implosion by the soon-to-be-deposed English champion.

Liverpool's 1-0 loss to Chelsea on Thursday continued a staggering run of home form that came after

Jurgen Klopp's team went 68 games in a row unbeaten at Anfield.

Liverpool only managed one effort on goal against Chelsea. Mohamed Salah was substituted after barely an hour; Sadio Mane and Roberto Firmino barely threatened either.

Mason Mount scored the winner in the 42nd minute, cutting in from the left and curling home from the edge of the area for a goal that sent Chelsea into the top four and dropped Liverpool to seventh. It was Chelsea's first win at Anfield since 2014.

Alexis Sanchez scored twice to help Inter Milan win 2-1 at relegation-threatened Parma on Thursday to open up a six-point gap at the top of Serie A.

Romelu Lukaku had a hand in both Inter goals in the second half before Hernane pulled one back for Parma.

The results:

Premier League: Fulham 0 lost to Tottenham 1 (Tosin 19-09); Liverpool 0 lost to Chelsea 1 (Mount 42); West Brom 0 lost to Everton 1 (Richarlison 65).

Serie A: Parma 1 (H