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## NEARBY



Delhi reports 183 fresh cases, highest vaccination

NEW DELHI  
The Capital witnessed 183 new COVID-19 cases over 24 hours, taking the tally to 6,34,956. A total of 8,774 healthcare workers were vaccinated in the city on Saturday, the highest single-day count till now.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

Five TMC leaders meet Amit Shah, join BJP

KOLKATA  
Five leaders of the Trinamool Congress – Rajib Banerjee, Vaishali Dalmiya, Prabir Kumar Ghosal, Partha Sarathi Chattopadhyay and Rithin Chakraborty – met Union Home Minister Amit Shah at his residence in New Delhi on Saturday and joined the BJP.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 7

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MAGAZINE ▶ 8 PAGES  
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## Proposal to stay farm laws stands: Modi

On violence during the tractor rally on Republic Day, he says the 'law must take its own course'

NISTULA HEBBAR  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said at an all-party meeting of floor leaders in Parliament that the government's proposal of suspending the implementation of three farm laws, against which farmers' unions have been protesting for months, still stood, and that any resolution of the issue "should be found through dialogue".

"We all have to think about the nation," the Prime Minister added.

The remarks came after a number of Opposition leaders, including Ghulam Nabi Azad of the Congress, Trinamool Congress's Sudeep Bandopadhyay, Shiv Sena's Vinayak Raut and Shiromani Akali Dal's Balwinder Singh Bhinder, spoke about the long agitation by farmers' unions on Delhi's borders.

Significantly, Janata Dal (U) leader R.C.P. Singh supported the government position on the laws.

"I want to reiterate what [Agriculture Minister] Narendra Singh Tomar told farmers. Mr. Tomar had said we've not reached a consensus but are giving farmers an



Expressing support: Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) leader Abhay Chautala addressing people during the farmers protest at the Delhi-U.P. border in Ghazipur on Saturday. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

offer and they may go and deliberate. He told farmers that he was just a phone call away," Mr. Modi is reported to have told the Opposition leaders during the meeting.

On the violence during the tractor rally by farmers' groups on Republic Day and the siege of the Red Fort, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi quoted Mr. Modi as stating that the "law must take its own course" with regard to the incident.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ  
NEW DELHI

Farm unions say they are open to resuming talks on the three farm laws but accuse the government of offering dialogue on the one hand while harassing farmers on the other by cutting off mobile Internet, threatening eviction and ignoring violence from locals.

With new groups of farm-

ers from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab streaming into the border protest sites again, several union leaders say they expect to be able to negotiate from a position of renewed strength.

The Union Home Ministry on Saturday ordered the suspension of Internet for two days at Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur, the three main protest sites on Delhi's bor-

ders, where thousands of farmers have been camped for over two months.

The U.P. police and local administration have attempted to evict protesters from the Ghazipur site, while residents, backed by BJP leaders, clashed with protesting farmers in Singhu on Friday.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6  
MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 2, 5 & 7

## Unions point finger at BJP for violence

The BJP on Saturday came under sharp criticism from farmer outfits and political parties, a day after violence broke out at Delhi's Singhu border during a protest reportedly by 'locals' seeking to evict agitating farmers from the site. Farmers have been protesting against the Centre's farm laws for over two months at different sites on Delhi's borders. ■ PAGE 7

## U.P. ordinance on conversion not yet received by MHA

Bills passed by States need to be cleared by Centre

VIJAITA SINGH  
NEW DELHI

The ordinance on unlawful religious conversions, promulgated by the Uttar Pradesh government last year, has not been sent to the Centre for examination, according to a reply from the Union Home Ministry to a query under the Right to Information Act (RTI).

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) examines bills passed by States that are repugnant to Central laws before they get the President's assent.

Article 213 of the Constitution, under which U.P. Ordinance was promulgated, says that the Governor shall not, without instructions from the President, promulgate any such Ordinance if a Bill would have "required the previous sanction of the President" for introduction in the State Legislature.

### Due process

▪ Home Ministry examines the Bills passed by the States that are repugnant to Central laws before they get the President's assent

▪ Not all State legislation are sent for the President's assent. Only those repugnant to Central laws, deviating from National or Central policy, or which can be challenged for legal and constitutional validity are sent

▪ Article 213 of the Constitution, under which the U.P. Ordinance was promulgated, says that the Governor shall not, without instructions from the President, promulgate any such Ordinance if a Bill would have "required the previous sanction of the President" for introduction in the State Legislature

A similar legislation passed by the Rajasthan Assembly in 2008 under the then BJP government is still pending with the MHA.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

## Ready to resume talks: farmers

Farm unions say they are open to resuming talks on the three farm laws but accuse the government of offering dialogue on the one hand while harassing farmers on the other by cutting off mobile Internet, threatening eviction and ignoring violence from locals.

The U.P. police and local administration have attempted to evict protesters from the Ghazipur site, while residents, backed by BJP leaders, clashed with protesting farmers in Singhu on Friday.

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The U.P. police and local administration have attempted to evict protesters from the Ghazipur site, while residents, backed by BJP leaders, clashed with protesting farmers in Singhu on Friday.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6  
MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 2, 5 & 7

## Fresh FIRs against Tharoor, senior scribes

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI/GURUGRAM

Delhi Police and Gurugram Police have lodged FIRs against Congress MP Shashi Tharoor and six senior journalists, including Rajdeep Sardesai and Minal Pandit, on charges of sedition, promoting enmity and criminal conspiracy, for posting "mala fide, defamatory, false and misleading" tweets accusing the Delhi police of killing a farmer during the tractor parade on Republic Day.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) Jasmeet Singh said a complaint was received at IP Estate police station. Based on the complaint, a case under Indian Penal Code Sections 153, 504, 505(1)(b), and 120B was lodged and investigation is under way, said Mr. Singh.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 2

## Truck driver who threatened Adityanath granted bail by HC

Accused said phone was misused without his knowledge

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
LUCKNOW

A truck driver jailed for allegedly threatening to kill Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was granted bail by the Allahabad High Court, which took into consideration the accused person's apology and expression of "respect and esteem" towards the Chief Minister.

The accused, Amar Pal Yadav, has been in jail since September 25, 2020. An FIR was lodged against him on charges of sedition and criminal intimidation and Section 67 of the Information Technology Act, at the Hazratganj police station here.

WhatsApp message

The counsel for the accused submitted that he had nothing to do with Mukhtar Ansari or any other criminal.

The accused claimed that while he was eating at a dhaba, some person took his mobile

on the pretext of making a call but sent the said WhatsApp message from his

phone without his knowledge.

In an affidavit submitted by the accused from jail, he stated that he did not send any SMS, was a law-abiding citizen and held the Chief Minister in high esteem. He would always abide by the law and regretted that such a message had been sent from his mobile. Considering that the accused "in unequivocal terms has apologised for his phone being misused and, showed his respect and esteem to the Chief Minister, I find it to be a fit case for grant of bail," said Justice Dinesh Kumar Singh in an order dated January 27.

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## BJP will fight T.N. election with AIADMK: Nadda

+ Party will help in T.N.'s development'

S. SUNDAR

MADRASI  
BJP national president J.P. Nadda on Saturday officially announced that the party would fight the ensuing Assembly election in Tamil Nadu with the ruling AIADMK.

Kick-starting the party's election campaign from Madurai, Mr. Nadda declared that the BJP had decided to go along with the AIADMK and other like-minded parties in the coming election.

He said the AIADMK had regional aspirations, while also assimilating national ones.

"Both [its leaders] M.G. Ramachandran and Jayalalithaa had regional aspirations while assimilating national ones," he said. The BJP will see to it that there is nationwide development, along with development for Tamil Nadu.

Past experiences show



Caught on camera: A video grab of elderly people being left on a highway in Indore on Saturday. ■ ANI

M.P. govt. sacks two employees over incident

ANUP DATTA

BHOPAL  
A team of workers of the Indore Municipal Corporation (IMC) was on Friday caught on video trying to dump homeless elders by the side of a highway.

The video, reportedly shot by a few locals and widely shared online, shows two IMC workers trying to move a man and a frail, elderly woman wrapped in filthy rags into a Corporation vehicle after opposition from villagers in Kshipra on the outskirts of Indore city. The locals protested the IMC workers' move to dump the elderly people on the highway during the chilly winter when the mercury touched 7.2 degrees Celsius the previous [Thursday] night.

The BJP government in

Indore civic staff caught trying to dump elders on highway

for proper care of the elderly," Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan tweeted.

"Inhuman treatment towards the elderly will not be tolerated at any cost. Every aged person should get respect and love. This is our culture and also human religion," he added.

Acting swiftly, Madhya Pradesh Urban Administration Minister Bhupendra Singh dismissed the two employees. However, according to reports, the IMC defended its employees, maintaining that they were actually helping the people.

IMC Additional Commissioner Abhay Rajgarkonkar claimed that the municipal employees were moving the homeless people to a night shelter.

He denied allegations that they had been dropped off on the outskirts of the city.

The State condemned the behaviour of the IMC employees. "Today, I got information about inhuman treatment of old people by Municipal Corporation employees in Indore... Two employees, including the Deputy Commissioner, responsible have been suspended. The District Collector

# Delhi, Gurugram police file FIR against Tharoor, senior scribes

They have been charged with sedition, promoting enmity, criminal conspiracy

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI/GURUGRAM

Delhi Police and Gurugram Police have lodged FIRs against Congress MP Shashi Tharoor and six senior journalists, including Rajdeep Sardesai and Mrinal Pande, on charges of sedition, promoting enmity and criminal conspiracy, for posting "malafaf, defamatory, false and misleading" tweets accusing the Delhi police of killing a farmer during the tractor parade on Republic Day.

In Delhi, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) Jasmeet Singh said a complaint was received at IP Estate police station. Based on the complaint, a case under Indian Penal Code sections 153, 504, 505(1)(b), and 120 B was lodged and investigation is underway, said Mr. Singh.

In Gurugram, the FIR was registered under Sections 120B, 124A, 153A, 153B and 505 (2) of the IPC at the Cyber Crime police station. It also names Quami Awaz's Zafar Agha and *The Caravan's* Pares Nath, Anant Nath and Vinod K. Jose.

According to the FIRs, the accused posted "instigating" tweets and circulated "fake news" regarding the violence during the tractor rally on Republic Day. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA



According to the FIRs, the accused posted "instigating" tweets and circulated "fake news" regarding the violence during the tractor rally on Republic Day. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

culated fake news falsely accusing the Delhi police of the murder of a person driving a tractor during the violence on Republic Day.

**'Well-timed conspiracy'** The FIRs claim that the accused, in a co-ordinated and well-timed conspiracy, started misinformation campaign that it was the Delhi Police that shot a protesting farmer.

"This was clearly done with an intent to engineer large-scale riots and religious tension among different

own political and personal advantage," read the FIR lodged by Gurugram Police.

The FIR filed by Delhi Police stated that the accused, through their "false, misleading and wrong" tweets "tried to imply that the death of the farmer was caused by the violence committed by Delhi Police under directions of the Central government.

The police said that tweets by the accused were retweeted by other that can "cause mutiny among the ranks of ignorant people, causing panic and violent rebellion, thereby inducing citizens to commit offences against the State or against the public tranquility".

Meanwhile, a Delhi spokesperson said on Saturday that a total of 38 cases have been registered till now in the farmers' rally incident and 84 persons have been arrested so far.

#### Reporter detained

In a late development, Mandeep Punia, a reporter contributing to *The Caravan*, was detained by the police on Saturday. Details on the reasons were awaited till the time of going to press.

## BJP 'goons' attacked farmers, claims AAP

They instigated violence, says union

ANUJ KUMAR

GAZIABAD

The Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) has lodged a complaint at Ghaziabad's Kaushambi police station against BJP MLAs Nand Kishore Gurjar and Sunil Sharma for being allegedly present at the protest site on Thursday and inciting their supporters to indulge in violence with the farmers protesting at the Ghaziabad border.

In the complaint, Digamber Singh, president of the youth section of the BKU held the MLAs responsible for beating farmers, removing their tents, and causing damage to the vehicles.

Circle Officer (Indirapuram) Anshu Jain said they were verifying the charges before registering an FIR.

Mr Gurjar had written a letter to the Home Minister on Wednesday where he described BKU national spokesperson Rakesh Tikait and other farmer leaders as "atankwadi" (terrorists).

BJP sources said the senior leadership was not happy with the conduct of the MLAs and an explanation might be sought from them.

Ranjeeta Dhami, chairman of the Loni municipality, has written a letter to CM Yogi Adityanath that Loni MLA Mr. Gurjar was working against the interest of the party. BKU media in-charge Dharmendra Malik said the Gurjar community is with the farmers and if Mr. Gurjar took the decision in his individual capacity, then the BJP should take action.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Saturday alleged that "BJP goons" attacked farmers at Singhu and Tikri borders and that they were not locals. The party further said that the BJP and the Delhi police "scripted" the violence on Republic Day.

AAP chief spokesperson Saurabh Bharadwaj claimed the BJP has suspended Internet on the borders to "hide" the truth of their "assault" on the protesting farmers.

"The police and the BJP together scripted the violence of January 26 and the days after. BJP leaders are the greatest anti-nationals and cases of sedition must

be registered against them, and the NIA should probe their leaders," he said.

The leader said that from the time the BJP government came to power there have been several protests by students, Dalits, businessmen, lawyers and now farmers.

"The BJP government plays the same script against all these protests. Whenever somebody protests against the BJP, the party calls them anti-nationals," he said.

Mr. Bharadwaj alleged that just before January 26, the BJP set up new camps near the protest sites. "The police allowed these people to set up camps and those camps were run by BJP agent Deep Sidhu," he said.

'Govt. plays same script for all protests'

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

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## Nation moving towards undeclared emergency

Journalists raise voice against criminal charges registered against colleagues

SHINJINI GHOSH  
NEW DELHI

Several journalists on Saturday gathered for a public meeting organised by the Editors Guild of India and Press Club of India to protest against sedition and other criminal charges pressed against senior journalists.

The increasing instances where scribes are being charged with sedition and under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, were indicative of the fact that the country was moving towards an undeclared emergency, senior journalists said while addressing the meet.

#### Similar intent

Referring to an incident when former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had derided journalists for putting the government's mistakes on the front pages, senior journalist T.N. Ninan said, "While there is no censorship today, the intent is similar – to harass and intimidate the me-



Journalists during a meeting at the Press Club of India in the Capital on Saturday. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

dia. It is only human to make mistakes. We can and should debate the rights and wrongs of our reportage. But is any of this sedition?"

"There is a larger purpose at work. That is why this must be fought by raising our collective voice," said Mr. Ninan.

Journalist Rajdeep Sardesai said, "Today's journalists have gotten divided. On sedition, whether you are a journalist in Kashmir or in Manipur, there should be

complete unanimity among journalists. The time has come for all of us to protest against the fact that sedition is unacceptable charge for journalists."

Several cases have been registered against Mr. Sardesai among other journalists, for their allegedly "misleading" social media posts on the Republic Day protest.

Senior advocate Sanjay Hedge said, "These days we do not have a government

which is totally wedded to the spirit of the Constitution and law. It is very curious that all these complaints target the same set of people."

Journalist Seema Mustafa, EGI president, said that the law of sedition was being used recklessly to intimidate and harass journalists.

"All those of us who have travelled and been on the field know that it is possible to make errors when you're reporting from the field and relying on eyewitnesses. But to be faced with sedition for this? This is only being done to victimise journalists against whom cases are being filed and to terrorize the ones who are in the profession," said Ms. Mustafa.

Senior journalist Shekhar Sagar said, "A journalist can make errors and if they make amends after that it should be fine. This is a signal to the media that if you don't fall in line now then we [government] can hit you with worse laws."

## 'No man's land' created at Singhu border

Area heavily guarded by police as well as farmers to ensure no 'miscreants' enter

HEMANI BHANDARI  
NEW DELHI

A day after clashes broke out between protesting farmers and alleged locals at the Singhu border, a 'no man's land' was created between the first barricade installed by the police and the first stage set up by the farmers. The locations are over 2 km apart.

The entire area is heavily guarded by both the police and farmers, ensuring no 'miscreants' enter.

Four layers of checking has been set up by the police. Any person trying to enter the area has to provide an ID. In most cases, people who weren't allowed entry were given an alternate route from inside the fields instead.

At the beginning of the protest site, farmers – including those who had been injured during clashes on Friday – holding sticks guarded the periphery and parked tractors as their own barricades tied with ropes.

#### Guarding entry points

"The police are doing their job and we are doing ours. We will ensure that no person with any wrong intention comes here. Our elders are



Barricades put up by the police at the protest site on the Singhu border on Saturday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHAKAR

guarding the entry points as they will get to know if someone is disguised as a farmer," said 38-year-old Kulvir Singh of the Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee (KMSC), from Tarn Taran, while nursing his fractured left hand.

Recalling Friday's clashes, he said that he was serving langar when 'locals' entered the site, damaged their tents and washing machines, before throwing stones.

At least 15 protesters, including a senior citizen, suffered severe injuries.

The farmers claimed that the 'locals' who had clashed with them on Friday came

back again on Saturday but were driven away.

#### Ambulances blocked

Injured farmers also alleged that security personnel weren't letting in ambulances. "We had called for an ambulance around 9 a.m. and it hasn't come till 12.30 p.m. This is inhumane," said 23-year-old Prabhjeet Singh, who suffered an injury above his right eye during the fight.

"I am alone here and my parents back home got worried but they told me to continue the struggle till we succeed," he added.

Farmers of the KMSC said

AAP leader wants Punjab govt. to keep farmers safe

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Saturday accused the BJP of suppressing the ongoing farmers' movement.

Mast Ram, 30, from Haryana's Jind, who runs a langar with at least four dishes on offer, served only pulses and rice on Saturday because he didn't get help.

"The children who helped with cleaning utensils and cutting and chopping, and the elders who would cook are not coming in out of fear. All this January 26 and 29 incidents have been done to create fear among people. The kids are telling me that their parents are scared to send them here and they don't feel safe," he said.

"We are carrying out a tractor march across the protest site at the Singhu border to show people that no one is going back and we're all here to stay till the laws are repealed," said 23-year-old Amandeep Kaur Sandhu from Moga.

On Friday and Saturday, scores of tractors came in especially from Haryana.

**Suppressing movement** "The continuous attacks on our 'annadatas' [food producers] from the last few days and the unfortunate incident that occurred at the Red Fort on January 26 has established the role of the BJP of suppressing the farmers' movement. It has also proved the intention of the BJP, that they will attack the farmers, intimidate them and create disturbance in the farmers' movement. With this, there is a clear safety and security threat to the farmers," he said, addressing a press conference.

"Delhi Police reports to the Centre government and under such circumstances, we cannot expect them to protect our farmers," he said.

## Langar services face the brunt of protests, violence

Farmers complain supplies are being stopped at several points; 'our people being kept away from site'



Volunteers prepare langar for the protesting farmers at the Singhu border in Delhi on Saturday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHAKAR

here. They still somehow manage to come," he said.

#### Lack of help

Another problem the langar sevans are facing is lack of help from nearby villages.

Mast Ram, 30, from Haryana's Jind, who runs a langar with at least four dishes on offer, served only pulses and rice on Saturday because he didn't get help.

A few protesters on Saturday also carried out a march to reassure people that protesters are here to stay.

"We are carrying out a tractor march across the protest site at the Singhu border to show people that no one is going back and we're all here to stay till the laws are repealed," said 23-year-old Amandeep Kaur Sandhu from Moga.

On Friday and Saturday, scores of tractors came in especially from Haryana.

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Palam	20	06

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**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**  
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**DU to reopen from Feb. 1 for final-year students**

**STAFF REPORTER**

NEW DELHI

Delhi University has announced that colleges will function with 100% staff strength from February 1.

"All colleges, centres and departments shall be functional and, therefore, all teaching staff must attend to their workplace with effect from February 1," read a notification dated January 29.

"Only final-year students, in small batches, are allowed to visit their respective colleges, centres and departments for their laboratory, practicals, skill, library and related activities, as per the discretion of the respective principal, director or head in line with the UGC guidelines and SOPs," it added.

The number of people vaccinated on Saturday was 82.7% of the daily target of 10,600.

The number of vaccination sites was increased from 81 to 106 on Thursday. Each site has a target of 100 healthcare workers each; total target has now increased from 8,100 to 10,600.

The government plans to increase the number of vaccination sites to 1,000 in a

phased manner.

Of the 10 AEFI, seven were from using Covishield and three from Covaxin.

The city is currently inoculating about 2.4 lakh healthcare workers whose names have been registered with the government and it is voluntary.

Meanwhile, the Capital witnessed 183 new COVID-19 cases in 24 hours, taking the

**AAP attacks BJP over landfills causing '₹450-crore damage' to environment**

'Completed 2.5K mohalla sabhas to expose BJP's corruption'

**STAFF REPORTER**

NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party on Saturday attacked the BJP over the landfills in the city.

Citing an IIT report, AAP said the landfills in Delhi are causing a loss of ₹450 crore to the environment.

The party also said they have completed 2,500 mohalla sabhas across the city to expose BJP's alleged corruption in the municipal corporations.

A report made by the National Environment Tribunal, Central Pollution Board and IIT-Delhi have conducted a collective scientific analysis. In the report, they

**BJP to create human chain at CP today**

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

NEW DELHI

BJP members will create a human chain at the inner circle of Connaught Place on Sunday to demand ₹26,000 crore related to an alleged scam in the Delhi Jal Board (DJB).

Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta said the party would demand an accounting of the funds through the programme. State Vice-President Sunil Yadav said the BJP's MPs, MLAs and the LoP will demand the amount from the Delhi government.

# Growing confidence, awareness drive boost vaccination

Tweaks in inoculation guidelines have made the process more flexible; senior doctors taking the jab has motivated others to follow suit

**NIKHIL M BABU**  
NEW DELHI

Less than two weeks into the COVID-19 vaccine drive, Delhi has managed to achieve 90% of its daily inoculation target and has also increased the number of vaccination sites and the daily target.

On January 16, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the vaccination drive across the country.

Only 45.5% of the expected number of healthcare workers in Delhi turned up to take the vaccine.

On January 25, the city achieved 91.5% of its daily target – the highest till now.

The spike in the number of people getting the jab is being attributed to increased confidence regarding the vaccine among healthcare workers, and changes to guidelines that make the process more flexible.

Awareness sessions and many senior doctors coming forward to take the vaccine have also made a difference, said heads of hospitals.

"On the first day, the number of healthcare workers

who came to get vaccinated was in the 20s. More workers are willing to get the vaccine now. For every vaccine, the story is the same. People want to wait and see if there are any side effects and then the numbers pick up," Medical Director of Lady Hardinge Medical College, N.N. Mathur told *The Hindu*.

Dr. Mathur said the Centre has also released posters with quotes of senior doctors, who have taken the vaccine, to instill confidence in healthcare workers.

#### Sharing the experience

"We have also asked people, who have taken the vaccine, to share their experience in our WhatsApp groups... they are doing it. We hope that more people will come forward to take the jab," he added.

Dr. Mathur said he had taken the vaccine on the first day and motivated around 4,000 healthcare workers at the hospital.

Spokesperson of Delhi government-run Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital



A healthcare worker gets the jab at Lok Nayak hospital in Delhi. ■ FILE PHOTO: SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

(RGSSH) Chhavi Gupta said they have conducted awareness sessions for their health workers.

"Their questions and doubts were addressed in these sessions. Also, many senior doctors, including me, have taken the vaccine," she added.

Apart from these, two changes in guidelines have led to an increase in the number of recipients, said

officials. Initially, each of the 81 sites here had a daily list of nearly 100 registered recipients. From January 28, the number of sites was increased to 106. This has led to the daily target being increased to 10,600 from the initial 8,100 health workers.

Earlier, only those on the list were allowed vaccination on the day. But last week, the Centre allowed healthcare workers – whose names are

not on the daily list – but registered in the CoWIN platform, to be vaccinated.

This has led to more people getting vaccinated.

On the first day, 45 people were vaccinated at RGSSH but then the numbers dropped and have now picked up again, hitting 100 on multiple days.

"Workers from other private and smaller hospitals in our district, where vaccina-

tion has not begun, have been allowed to get the jab at our hospital or at GTB. This has helped increase number of people," Dr. Gupta said.

Also, centres have been allowed to do more than 100 vaccinations if possible.

"The consent form states that the vaccine is in the trial phase and workers know that. But there is no coercion from the authorities, and it is happening as it should be done – voluntarily. It will take more time to instill confidence and many are saying that they may not take the vaccine as the cases are very low now," the member added.

#### Vaccine days

Vaccination happens four days a week – Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

In the next phase, the front-line workers, including police and teachers, will be inoculated.

About 2.4 lakh healthcare workers, whose names have been registered with the government, are being vaccinated in the first phase.

## Singh moves SC for quashing FIRs against him in U.P.

'Cases maliciously instituted to unleash political vendetta'



AAP leader Sanjay Singh

saying they have been "maliciously instituted to unleash political vendetta".

In a separate petition, Mr. Singh has also challenged

the Allahabad High Court order of January 21 by which it had refused to quash the FIR lodged in Lucknow after the August 12, 2020, press conference.

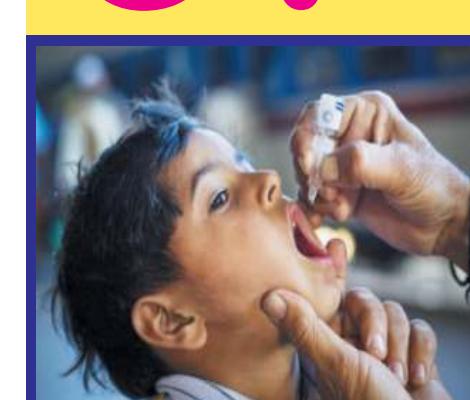
Both the petitions will be taken up for hearing by a bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan on February 2. Senior advocate Vivek Tankha is likely to appear for Singh in the matter.

Mr. Singh said after the press meet, multiple FIRs were registered against him at the instance of the BJP's members in various police stations in different districts of U.P.

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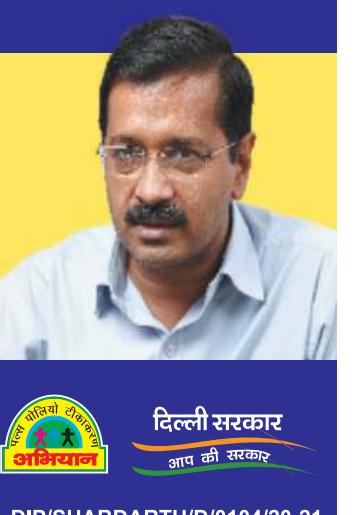


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#### Pulse Polio Immunization facts

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- Routine immunization is the key to sustaining polio free status of the country.
- Routine immunization to infants & young children is essential. It protects children from 12 serious diseases and is available free of cost at all govt. health facilities through out the year.

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Ph: 0-931133737, 0-999946748**MATRIMONIAL****BRIDEGRoOMS WANTED****INDEX OF MATRIMONIAL****BRIDEGRoOMS WANTED****BRIDES WANTED****BRIDES & GROOMS WANTED**

Classification common for Brides, Bridegroms, Brides &amp; Grooms

Assamese

Awadhi

Bengali

Bhojpuri

Bihari

Chhattisgarhi

English

Gujarati

Haryanvi

Hindi

Kannada

Kashmiri

Konkani

Malayalam

Manipuri

Marathi

Marwari

Nepali

Oriya

Parsi

Punjabi

Saurashtra

Sindhi

Tamil

Telugu

Tulu

Urdu

Advocate

Business

Defense

Doctor

Engineer

Finance/ Banking

Government/ Quasi-Govt.

IAS/ Allied Services

Information Technology

MBA/ CA/ ICWA

NRI

Cosmopolitan

Divorcee

Physically Challenged

MARRIAGE BUREAUS

WEDDING ARRANGEMENTS

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TAMIL

TELUGU

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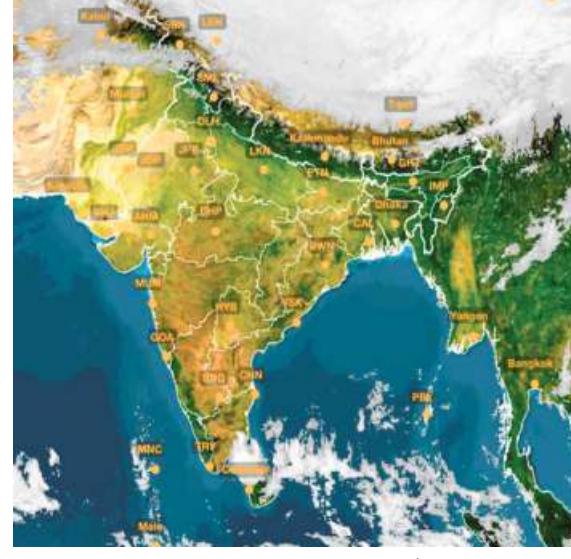
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**WEATHER WATCH**

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/MD TAKEN AT 18.30 HRS

**Forecast for Sunday:** Dense/very dense fog likely in isolated pockets over Punjab, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Sikkim, Sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Bihar and Odisha. Cold wave conditions likely in isolated pockets over Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Kutch

CITY RAIN MAX MIN CITY RAIN MAX MIN CITY RAIN MAX MIN

Agartala	—	24.0	10.3	Kozhikode	—	33.2	23.6
Ahmedabad	—	27.5	10.9	Kurnool	—	33.9	19.8
Aizawl	—	23.0	8.7	Lucknow	—	20.3	7.4
Allahabad	—	21.6	5.6	Madurai	—	32.2	23.4
Bengaluru	—	29.8	17.4	Mangaluru	—	35.2	20.9
Bhopal	—	23.7	5.2	Mumbai	—	32.9	16.0
Bhubaneswar	—	29.6	17.8	Mysuru	—	30.0	17.4
Chandigarh	—	22.1	6.6	New Delhi	—	21.5	5.4
Chennai	—	31.0	24.0	Patna	—	15.0	7.9
Coimbatore	—	31.0	21.3	Pond Blair	—	31.4	25.0
Dehradun	—	21.2	3.9	Puducherry	—	31.2	21.2
Gangtok	—	12.8	3.9	Pune	—	30.7	14.8
Goa	—	33.6	21.0	Raipur	—	4.6	26.4
Guwahati	—	27.0	11.9	Ranchi	—	22.4	8.2
Hubballi	—	31.0	18.0	Shillong	—	16.2	5.5
Hyderabad	—	31.5	19.1	Shimla	—	11.6	2.1
Imphal	—	24.0	6.9	Srinagar	—	2.0	—9.4
Jaipur	—	24.0	6.6	Thiruvananthapuram	—	33.2	23.2
Kochi	—	31.6	24.2	Tiruchi	—	1.6	31.7
Kohima	—	0.3	18.3	Vijayawada	—	31.6	20.6
Kolkata	—	23.1	14.7	Vishakhapatnam	—	30.0	23.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

**Pollutants in the air you are breathing**

Yesterday

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>x</sub>	CO	PM <sub>2.5</sub>	PM <sub>10</sub>	CODE
Ahmedabad	25	99	40	97	115	...
Bengaluru	11	.81	.36	.134	.113	...
Chennai	—	12	.27	.144	.118	...
Delhi	11	86	68	404	331	...
Hyderabad	3	40	23	.121	.119	...
Kolkata	24	.55	.333	.224	...	...
Lucknow	15	58	119	.322	.178	...
Mumbai	12	22	.37	.308	.274	...
Pune	—	144	.39	.163	.120	...
Vishakhapatnam	18	.68	.36	.193	.174	...

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

**SO<sub>2</sub>:** Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

**NO<sub>x</sub>:** Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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

**PM<sub>2.5</sub> & PM<sub>10</sub>:** Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

## Laws are not set in stone: Jayant

RLD leader challenges U.P. CM to announce panchayat polls if they are beneficial

ANUJ KUMAR  
GHAZIABAD

At the farmer panchayat in Mathura on Saturday, Rashtriya Lok Dal vice president Jayant Chaudhary said laws were not set in stone and could be changed according to the wish of the people.

He was speaking at the massive rally called by the Bharatiya Kisan Union in Bajna in solidarity with its leader Rakesh Tikait who is protesting against the farm laws at the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border for more than two months.

He asked the Uttar Pradesh government that if the laws were so beneficial to farmers, why was the panchayat election notification being delayed. "I challenge Yogiji to issue notification for panchayat elections," he said.

Addressing an assembly



Farmers at the Bharatiya Kisan Union's panchayat in Mathura on Saturday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

of around 20,000 farmers at the Morki Inter College grounds in Bajna, Mr. Chaudhary said raising voice against a law doesn't make a person anti-national. "We have a right to protest against laws that are inadequate. Had that been the case, the colonial era Land Acquisition Act would not have been changed."

The Act was changed in 2013 after Mr. Chaudhary introduced a Private Member's Bill on land acquisition in the Lok Sabha.

**Battle of ideology**  
He appealed to youngsters to participate in protests and asked the farmers to make a diary noting names of those who are not with them in

their ordeal. "Such people need to be boycotted socially. We don't have any personal issue with them. It is a battle of ideology with those who feel that today they are farmers but tomorrow they would vote as Hindus," he asserted. "As long they won't realise the damage that your vote could cause, they would keep deceiving people," he added.

After the emotional outburst of Mr. Tikait on Thursday, BKU is holding rallies in different parts of western Uttar Pradesh where the RLD cadre is also turning up in large numbers. On Sunday, a rally of different khaps has been called in Baraut tehsil of Baghpat where farmers were forcibly removed by the police earlier this week. On February 1, another rally has been called in Kandhla village of Shamli district.

## Farmers open for talks, says Tikait

BKU leader appeals to farmers to keep the protest alive at Singhu, Tikri borders

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GHAZIABAD

Responding to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal that he was just a phone call away, BKU leader Rakesh Tikait said that farmers were open for talks as dialogue was the only way to resolve the crisis. "We want to bring the talks back on track and resolve the issue. We hope to have a timeline for talks in the coming days," he said.

Mr. Tikait said he believed in the Constitution and would follow the due process in the cases that have been filed against him. Mr. Tikait was named along with other farmer leaders in the FIRs filed by the Delhi Police in connection with the violent incidents that took place in the Capital on Republic Day.



Women with water in earthen pots arriving at the Ghazipur protest site on Saturday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

He appealed to the farmers of Haryana and Punjab to keep the protest alive at the Singhu and Tikri border. Mr. Tikait criticised the MHA order to suspend internet at the protest sites.

BKU spokesperson Dharmendra Malik said water supply has been restored by the Ghaziabad administration, but the internet speed

remained dismal through the day.

Meanwhile, the flow of the farmers at the Ghazipur border refused to ebb on Saturday. Two dozen women from Shamli came to the protest site holding water in earthen pots on their head. On Thursday, after the administration cut the water supply to the protest site, Mr. Tikait had said he would drink water only from his village.

On Friday evening, Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad reached the site and described Mr. Tikait as his elder brother.

Earlier addressing the farmers, Mr. Tikait said he didn't cry on Thursday. "Tikait didn't cry and will not cry. It could be water of the fields," he said metaphorically.

## Cong. MLA disqualified after conviction in case

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

Congress MLA from Haryana's Kalka constituency Pradeep Chaudhary stands disqualified from January 14, after his conviction by a Himachal Pradesh court in an assault, rioting case.

Haryana Assembly Speaker Gian Chand Gupta on Saturday said a notification in this regard has been issued by the Assembly secretariat.

"Consequent upon the conviction of Pradeep Chaudhary, MLA, by the court of Justice Kumar, Judicial Magistrate 1st Class, Nalagarh, District Solan...Shri Pradeep Chaudhary, stands disqualified from the membership of Haryana Vidhan Sabha from the date of his conviction, ie January 14, 2021. And accordingly one Assembly seat has fallen vacant," read the notification.

Now, the Congress has a strength of 30 MLAs in the 90-member State Assembly.

## Odisha all set to begin 'unlocking' process

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government on Saturday allowed the reopening of Anganwadi centres from February 1 and gatherings of up to 500 people with strict adherence to safety guidelines, a notification said.

The State government asked the School and Mass Education Department to take a decision on the date of reopening of schools for Classes 9 to 12. The administration also allowed the functioning of cinema halls as per the SOPs issued by the Central and State governments.

Social, religious, political, sports, entertainment, academic and cultural gatherings of up to 500 people will also be allowed, it said.

## Amarinder hits out at BJP over 'background' remark

'What do they know of Army honour?'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

Terming the BJP leader Tarun Chugh's remarks on his 'Army background' reprehensible, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Saturday asked, "What does the BJP or its leadership know of Army honour or the grace of the national flag in which the bodies of our Punjabi brothers come wrapped from the borders every second day?"

"We, in Punjab, know the pain of seeing the bodies of our sons and brothers, wrapped in the national flag," he said. He added that BJP has no empathy or sensitivity towards the soldiers losing their lives to protect India's honour and integrity. "Neither Mr. Chugh nor his party could relate to the anguish of those very soldiers

on seeing their farmer fathers and brothers being beaten up and tear-gassed while fighting for their rights."

"What was wrong in my statement that 'maligning the farmers could cause the morale of the armed forces to go down'? How does that amount to insulting the Republic Day grace and my own Army background," he asked, accusing Mr. Chugh of misleading the people. "What happened to the grace of the R-day when the Central government, which the BJP leads, trampled over the federal and Constitutional rights of the States to unilaterally bring in the farm Ordinances? Where is the grace in letting the poor farmers shiver out in the cold on the roads, with many of them dying out there," he said.

## BJP trying to suppress farmers' voice: Selja

'It is bent on branding them as traitors'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

Accusing the Bharatiya Janata Party of adopting dirty tricks to suppress the farmers' voice and their ongoing agitation against the new farm laws, Haryana Congress president Kumari Selja said on Saturday that BJP was hell-bent on branding farmers as traitors. "The agitation started, attempts were made by BJP to discredit the movement.

"The agitating farmers are being threatened and intimidated by the police administration at the behest of BJP. False cases are being filed against the farmers," she alleged.

Congress general secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala demanded that mobile internet services be restored immediately. "Suspension of mobile internet is a conspiracy to subvert the ongoing farmers' agitation."

## OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

### DEATH

#### 15TH DAY REMEMBRANCE

Smt. VALSALA RAJENDRAN

02-07-1943 - 17-01-2021

Our dearest mother left for her heavenly abode to reunite with our late father Shri. Rajendar Balakishan Nair. She was 77 years young and will always be remembered for her beautiful charming smile making her dear to everyone. With her radiant personality she was an excellent cook, a good homemaker and a caring mother and above all a wife that kept us together. She had this zest for life and was always gone to travelling and making friends regardless of age.

We believe Bhagwati herself received her favorite child at the gates of Sorga. The party has begun in the heavens with Amma showcasing her extraordinary culinary skills; serving our father and his friends the best of delicacies which only she could make.

To our dearest beautiful, dedicated, loving and darling Amma and Akshay, we all love you and you will always live in our hearts forever.

Deepak, Rakhi, Nilah, Kumud, Jyoti, Abhinav, Suseela, Anusya, Manoj, Supriya, Dhruv and all her dear friends and relatives

### IN MEMORIAM

## FROM PAGE ONE

## Proposal to stay farm laws stands, says PM

He also condemned in strong words the desecration of a statue of Mahatma Gandhi in America, saying that all must reflect on what was being spread about in the country.

Political leaders, however, have insisted on a separate discussion on farmers issues, especially the three laws.

In a meeting held by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Friday, the same demand was kept but leaders were told that they could raise these issues during the debate on the Motion of thanks to the President for his address to both Houses of Parliament set to be initiated after the Budget is tabled.

## Ready to resume talks, say farmers

"It is the government which has attempted to derail the debate by inciting violence and communalising the issue," said Kavitha Kuruganti of the Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch.

The government says it

wants a dialogue, but it is trying to weaken the farmers in so many ways, cutting off our communications, our water and power, setting up local people against us. We have to deal with that first," Ms Kuruganti said adding that union leaders have not had meetings about resumption of talks because they have been preoccupied with these urgent matters.

"We have never closed the door on talks. We have come all the way to Delhi in order to talk to the government," she said.

## MHA yet to receive U.P. conversion ordinance

It is yet to receive the President's nod as the MHA found that it deviated from national policy and sought clarification from the State.

The MHA sends State bills for inter-ministerial consultation before they get the President's nod, only in the following circumstances – when it has repugnancy with Central laws, deviates from national or central policy and when it can be challenged for legal and constitutional validity.

The controversial ordinance – the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020, – was promulgated in November and so

far more than 90 people, most of them Muslims, have been booked.

*The Hindu* had filed two RTI enquiries to know the status of the recently promulgated U.P. ordinance and the similar Rajasthan Dharm Swatantraya Bill 2008.

To a question on whether the U.P. Governor had sent a copy of the U.P. Ordinance to the MHA and if the Ministry had examined it, the MHA replied, "It is informed that Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020, has not been received in our office, hence no information can be provided."

## Civic staff caught trying to dump elders on highway

The Congress, launched a scathing attack on the BJP government. "In the name of cleanliness, officials of the Indore Municipal Corporation left the elderly in the cold. What can the poor officials do... they are working according to the ideology of the BJP, which has left out many elderly leaders..."

## Gujarat polls: norms issued on campaign

## Masks, sanitisers must in rallies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
AHMEDABAD

The Gujarat State Election Commission has issued guidelines for campaigning for local municipal corporation, municipality, district and taluka panchayat elections to be held in two phases in February.

According to the guidelines for local self-governance and panchayati raj institutions' elections, only five persons should conduct door-to-door campaigning while social distancing norms must be followed during rallies and meetings.

The parties must adhere to COVID-19 measures like masks and arrange sanitizers for crowds.

The Commission has made it mandatory for the parties to seek prior permission of nodal officers for organising a rally or meeting. It has also announced model code of conduct.

The BJP and the Congress are set to announce candidates next week. There are 48 wards in Ahmedabad city and each ward has four councillors. The ruling BJP has dominated all municipal corporations since 2005.

## At 97, Achuthanandan signals withdrawal from active politics

CPI(M) veteran will quit as Administrative Reforms Commission chief today

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Veteran Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader V.S. Achuthanandan has signalled that he is withdrawing from public life.

In a statement here on Saturday, the 97-year-old former Kerala Chief Minister said he could not continue as chairman of the Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) due to health reasons. A brain bleed had compelled him to follow a strict regimen. Doctors have severely restricted his activities. He found it hard-pressed to hold meetings or attend discussions.

"In the current circumstance, I have informed the government that I am resigning as commission chairper-



V.S. Achuthanandan cited health reasons for the move.

son with effect from January 31," he said.

Mr. Achuthanandan had relinquished his official residence last month and moved to his son's house in the capital. He is the incumbent MLA of the Malampuzha constituency in Palakkad. He has represented the Assem-

ly segment since 2001.

Mr. Achuthanandan recapped his work in the commission. (The ARC had submitted 11 reports to the government and two more were in the works). The detailed reports were the fruits of the joint effort of hundreds of persons. He expressed his gratitude to those who had cooperated with the commission and facilitated its work.

#### Follow-up action

Subsequent government action on the commission's recommendations would determine the value of the public money used up by the forum. "I expect it [follow-up measures on the part of the government] will happen," he said.

Mr. Achuthanandan is likely to maintain a small office. He had pared down his public appearances since early 2019.

Mr. Achuthanandan, who rarely missed an opportunity to react to social issues and political developments, seemed to recede slowly from public life. He had made a brief public appearance to endorse V.K. Prasanth of the CPI(M) from Vattiyarkavu seat for the Assembly by-election in 2019.

Mr. Achuthanandan was the Left Democratic Front's star election campaigner for long. His lilting oratory speckled with biting political satire drew huge crowds. However, it is unlikely that he will fire up the coming election scene as in the past.



Quite a turnout: People waiting to file nominations for the panchayat elections at Prasadampadu in A.P. ■ V. RAJU

## Unanimous polls are not democratic: SEC

Elections should be free and fair'

STAFF REPORTER  
KADAPA

Enforcing unanimous elections in panchayats is nothing but an attempt to stifle the voice of the Backward Classes and the spirit of social justice, Andhra Pradesh State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar has said.

Addressing the media after paying tributes to Mahatma Gandhi on his death anniversary here on Saturday, Mr. Ramesh Kumar said the percentage of unanimous elections had come down to 20 in 2013 from 30 earlier. "In the ensuing elections, the figure should come down further, signalling the victory of democracy," he said.

The powers that be had, in their "last attempt," tried to stop the election process by filing over 10 writ petitions in the High Court, he said. It was a "happy moment" for him as the court stood by the Constitution and the State Election Commission was correct, the attempts to discourage and demoralise the election process are unconstitutional and ridiculous," Mr. Ramesh Kumar said.

"When 'unanimous election' is a far cry in the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections, why should it be enforced in the panchayat elections?" he asked.

Free and fair elections, away from intimidation, would give ample scope to the downtrodden sections, make them a part of the governance, he observed.

"The forces that pitch for

+ unanimous election will be grounded. Shadow parties

will be after those who go hunting for candidates filing their nominations," Mr. Ramesh Kumar said.

## Looking up to Bapu



Floral tributes: Doctors and police personnel paying tributes to Mahatma Gandhi at Bapu Ghat in Hyderabad on Saturday, the 73rd death anniversary of the Father of the Nation. ■ NAGARA GOPAL

## Karnataka govt. to set up 2 cow shelters in every taluk

Illegal transportation of cattle has to stop, says Minister

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
HASSAN

The Karnataka government plans to set up two goshalas in every taluk to ensure that "not a single cow goes to slaughterhouse", Prabhu Chavan, Minister for Animal Husbandry, has said.

Officials of the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department, the police, and various district administrations should do everything necessary to stop illegal transportation of cattle, he said at a meeting in Hassan.

The government had promulgated a strong ordinance prohibiting the slaughter of cattle and it had to be implemented effectively.

"A stronger law to stop the

slaughter of cattle was part of the BJP agenda. The new law has stringent punishment for those who violated it. In the earlier version, the penalty was only ₹1,000. Now it has been increased to up to ₹3 lakh. Earlier, imprisonment was only for six months. Now, offenders can be imprisoned for up to seven years."

On distressed farmers abandoning male calves

since they cannot sell them, the Minister said such cattle would be sent to goshalas. At present, there are 159 goshalas across the State. "I have instructed the revenue officers to identify land for setting up more goshalas," he said.

Slaughter of buffaloes aged over 13 was allowed in the anti-cow slaughter law for the benefit of people who eat beef and to feed animals in zoos, Mr. Chavan said.

Slaughter of buffaloes was allowed in the law that existed since 1964, though the age limit was 12 then. "Now, the slaughtering of a buffalo is also not as easy. Veterinarians concerned have to issue certificates," he said.

## Kerala journalists move SC for Kappan's bail

His mother is in a critical condition'

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Kerala Union of Working Journalists (KUWJ) on Saturday moved the Supreme Court for grant of interim bail to its secretary, Sidhique Kappan, who is charged under the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and detained in a Uttar Pradesh jail.

In its plea, the journalists' union said the health of Mr. Kappan's 90-year-old mother in Kerala has deteriorated. She was in hospital in a very critical condition. The union urged the top court to grant Mr. Kappan bail for five days to visit his mother.

Recently, a Bench led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde had not objected

to Mr. Kappan meeting his mother on video call. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta had assured the court that arrangements would be made.

The union said the jail authorities had arranged a 10-minute video call for Kappan with his mother on January 28. But, the application said, Mr. Kappan's mother did not respond or look at the screen during the video call.

The union said, earlier, before she lost consciousness, she had asked to see her son as a "last wish".

Mr. Kappan was arrested in October last year. He was detained while travelling with some others to Hathras district in U.P. where a Dalit girl had been gangraped and murdered.

## IN BRIEF



IndiGo to operate flights to 3 cities from Kurnool

KURNool  
IndiGo will begin operations to three southern cities from Andhra Pradesh's Kurnool Airport under the 'Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik' (UDAN) scheme from March 28.

IndiGo, in a release, said it would operate flights between Kurnool and Bengaluru, Visakhapatnam and Chennai under the regional connectivity scheme. The airport had received the DGCA approval on January 15.

Four more arrested in loan app case

HYDERABAD  
Continuing their probe into financial irregularities by app-based instant loan companies, the Hyderabad Cyber Crime police arrested four more persons from Bengaluru. The accused are Nirjanan Umaphy, director of WaterElephant Financial Services Pvt Ltd. and Beadwallet Technologies Pvt. Ltd.; Yeshi Gyatso, director of Beadwallet; Nyichak Dhondup and Usha BM of WaterElephant. They operated at least 19 instant loan apps.

Two pairs of race oxen found dead in A.P.

KAKINADA  
Two pairs of oxen that bagged many prizes in State and district-level competitions were found dead under mysterious circumstances at a dairy unit in Samarlakota town in Andhra Pradesh's East Godavari district on Saturday. One pair won the race held at Kaikaluru in Krishna district on Friday. The approximate cost of the two pairs of race oxen is said to be around ₹35 lakh.

## Mushrooming resorts threaten the calm in Wayanad

Influx of tourists into remote forest villages has disrupted the life of tribal communities

E.M. MANOJ  
KALPETA

Mushrooming private resorts and homestays on the forest fringes in

Wayanad in Kerala not only flout government rules, they also threaten the tranquillity of highly vulnerable tribal communities inside the forest.

Residents of the Chookalikkuni Kattunayakka hamlet and Kumizhy Paniya hamlet inside the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary complained that the increasing number of resorts and homestays inside the hamlets were posing a threat to the tribal

people and wildlife. Chandrika of Chookalikkuni said both the hamlets were surrounded by forests and 130 families – 110 tribal families and 20 families of Wayanadan Chetty families – lived there. "As many as 13 private resorts, including one owned by a former Deputy Superintendent of Police, are functioning in the hamlet, flouting all norms. They have not even obtained licences from the gram panchayat authorities," Ms. Chandrika said.

"Though we had submitted grievances

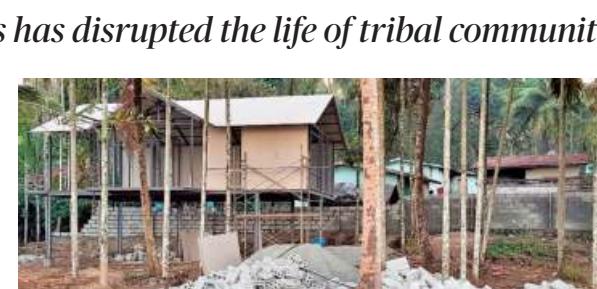
against the resorts to the departments concerned, they are yet to take any steps to stop it," Sheeba of the Kumizhy tribal settlement said.

As per the Forest Rights Act, a road connecting the hamlets with outer world was permitted only for the

use of residents. But resort owners are misusing it for private purposes, N. Badusha, president, Wayanad Prakriti Samrakshana Samiti, said.

Often the tourists provoke elephants and spotted deer in the adjacent forest for taking photographs, he said.

With tourists walking into tribal villages at all times, holding late night parties and camp fires, unrestricted consumption of alcohol which also finds its way to the tribal people, apart from diesel generators that function round the clock pose threat to the forest dwellers and the wildlife.



Encroaching forests: A resort being built at the Kumizhy tribal settlement in the Wayanad sanctuary. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

# Unions point finger at BJP for violence

Govt. trying to defame agitation, says BKU leader

VIKAS VASUDEVA

CHANDIGARH

The BJP on Saturday came under sharp criticism from farmer outfits and political parties, a day after violence broke out at Delhi's Singhu border during a protest reportedly by 'locals' seeking to evict agitating farmers from the protest site. Farmers have been protesting against the Centre's farm laws for over two months at different sites on Delhi's borders.

Bharatiya Kisan Union (Rajewal) president Balbir Singh on Saturday blamed the BJP and the RSS for the stone-pelting incident on farmers at the Singhu border site. He also accused the Centre of attempting to provoke farmers in a bid to trigger violence at the protest sites.

"The stone pelting at Singhu border was also conspiracy of the BJP-led government. The government is making all kind of efforts to defame the ongoing agitation by misleading people



**Staying put:** A farmer raising his hands during the protest against the new farm laws at the Singhu border in Delhi on Saturday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

through false propaganda," said Mr. Singh, addressing a press conference in Chandigarh.

Mr. Singh said farmers' outfits were not averse to talks with the Centre and whenever an invitation is extended, they will go for talks.

"When a proposal (from the government) will come then we will talk; we don't walk away from talks," he said.

Stating that the agitation

has recovered from the January 26 episode, Mr. Singh said people in huge numbers have started to come to the protest sites near Delhi borders.

Former BJP ally Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) demanded that the Central government launch criminal proceedings against all those who were

than and Uttarakhand are reaching the protest sites to ensure that the agitation doesn't lose the momentum," said Mr. Singh. He added that in the next two-three days, hopefully by February 2, people in record numbers will reach the sites.

Mr. Majithia said no concrete action had been taken against Deep Sidhu and Lakh Sidana, who he alleged had jointly played into the hands of the central government on the Republic Day during the Red Fort incident.

Aam Aadmi Party also accused the BJP of suppressing the ongoing farmers' movement on Delhi borders and demanded that the Punjab government provide police protection to the struggling farmers.

## Gehlot urges PM to hold talks with farmers

Rajasthan CM also condemns the violence at Red Fort and elsewhere

MOHAMMED IQBAL

JAIPUR

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Saturday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to hold "direct talks" with the farmers protesting against the Centre's agriculture sector laws in order to resolve the issue in the aftermath of the violence in Delhi on Republic Day.

Mr. Gehlot expressed concern over the stalemate, while condemning the violence at Red Fort and elsewhere.

Speaking to reporters at an event marking the launch of a health insurance scheme here, Mr. Gehlot said

**C** There is nothing wrong with changing the decisions. Such situations do arise in a democracy... It should not be made a prestige point

ASHOK GEHLOT

the NDA government still had an opportunity to correct its stance and reverse the decision on the controversial farm legislations.

"There is nothing wrong with changing the decisions. Such situations do arise in a democracy... It should not

## India should rise to challenges, says PM

NISTULA HEBBAR

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi told National Democratic Alliance (NDA) constituents that India needed to rise to the challenges posed by the new world order shaped by the pandemic, but the shadow of the bitter falling out between NDA parties – the Janata Dal (U) and the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) – during the Bihar Assembly elections loomed large over the grouping at its first meeting this parliamentary session.

The Janata Dal (U), with whom the BJP is in alliance in Bihar objected to LJP leader Chirag Paswan being invited for the customary meet of the NDA that takes place at the beginning of Parliament session.

"After the pandemic, a new world order is about to



take shape, and India has a big role to play in the emerging new world order. This decade is a very important one, just like the decade after the Second World War. Unlike earlier, we are not going to be mere spectators. We will rise to the occasion based on our traditions and ideals of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family)," Mr. Modi said at the meeting.

## 5 Trinamool leaders meet Shah, join BJP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

Five leaders of Trinamool Congress, which includes three MLAs, on Saturday left for New Delhi and met Union Home Minister Amit Shah at his residence and joined the Bharatiya Janata Party.

The list includes former Forest Minister Rajib Bannerjee, MLA from Bally Vaishali Dalmiya and MLA from Uttarpara Prabir Kumar Ghosal. While Mr. Bannerjee has resigned as an MLA and from the State's Cabinet, the Trinamool Congress has suspended Vaishali Dalmiya. The other two leaders are former Mayor of Howrah Municipal Corporation Rathin Chakraborty and former MLA from Ranaghat Parshuram Chattopadhyay.

The file on Justice Ganediwala will now be placed before the Collegium for a decision on her tenure as Additional Judge.

**Controversial judgments**  
Justice Ganediwala's judgments had raised objections within the judiciary itself, a source said.

The Collegium had re-

## CJI writes to govt. on HC judge's appointment

### He withdraws SC's recommendation

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde wrote to the government withdrawing the Supreme Court Collegium's recommendation to appoint Justice P.V. Ganediwala, an Additional Judge of the Bombay High Court, as Permanent Judge, following her controversial decisions in two sexual assault cases.

The file on Justice Ganediwala will now be placed before the Collegium for a decision on her tenure as Additional Judge.

**Controversial judgments**  
Justice Ganediwala's judgments had raised objections within the judiciary itself, a source said.

The Collegium had re-

commended her appointment as Permanent Judge only on January 20.

On January 27, a Bench led by Chief Justice Bobde stayed one of the two judgments, which said that groping a minor over her clothes does not amount to sexual assault under the POCSO Act. The stay came on an urgent oral mentioning made by Attorney General K.K. Venugopal, who said the judgment would set a dangerous precedent and cripple the very intention of the POCSO law to protect children from sexual offenders.

The second judgment by Justice Ganediwala concluded that holding hands with a five-year-old girl and unzipping the trousers did not amount to "sexual assault" under the POCSO Act.

## Pulse polio programme launched

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

President Ram Nath Kovind launched the pulse polio programme for 2021 on Saturday by administering polio drops to children less than five years of age at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

The President and First Lady Savita Kovind administered polio drops to children on the eve of the Polio National Immunization Day, which is observed on January 31, 2021.

Around 17 crore children of less than five years of age will be given polio drops as part of the drive of the government to sustain polio-free status of the country.

## KERALA STATE TRANSPORT PROJECT / PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT GOVERNMENT OF KERALA

Extension of INVITATIONS FOR BIDS (IFB) / Tender Notice

E-Procurement Notice (Item Rate Contract), following Two Envelope Bidding Process

NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING

Dated: 30.01.2021

KFW Project No. 43894

BMZ No. 201865286

1. The Government of India has received financing as German Financial Cooperation with India Climate – Resilient Reconstruction after Flooding in Kerala (Loan) from the KFW Bank towards the cost of rebuilding climate resilient infrastructures in Kerala and Government of Kerala (GoK) intends to apply a part of the funds to cover eligible payments under the contract for construction of works as detailed below.

2. Bidding will be conducted through bidding procedures as per the KFW Bank & GoK guidelines. Bidding is open to all eligible bidders as defined in the KFW Bank's Guidelines for the Procurement of Consulting Services, Works, Goods, and Non-Consulting Services in Financial Cooperation with Partner Countries.

3. The Project Director, Kerala State Transport Project, Public Works Department, Government of Kerala, invited online bids vide tender notice dated 25.09.2020, through admeasurement (Item Rate) mode of execution for the construction of works detailed below:

4. The publish date was extended to 1st week of December onwards vide extension notice dated 05.11.2020.

5. The publish date is hereby further extended to 01.02.2021. The complete bid document may be viewed/downloaded from the e-procurement portal of Kerala Government <https://etenders.kerala.gov.in>, from 01.02.2021 to 18.03.2021 (upto 15.00 hrs IST). Bids received online shall be opened on 18.03.2021 (at 15.30 hrs. IST).

6. Bids received through any other mode shall not be entertained. However, EMD, tender fee, Power of Attorney, joint bidding agreement, etc. need to be submitted physically by the Bidder. Please note that the Authority reserves the right to accept or reject all or any of the bids without assigning any reason whatsoever.

7. A pre-bid meeting will be held on 25-02-2021 at 11:00 am at the office of Project Director, Kerala State Transport Project (KSTP) to clarify the issues and to answer questions on any matter that may be raised at that stage as stated in ITB Clause 7 of Instructions to Bidders of the bidding document. Bidders are advised to download the bidding document prior to the pre-bid meeting in order for bidders to have a good understanding of the scope of work under this contract for discussion and clarification at the pre-bid meeting. In case of lockdown, pre-bid meeting may be held via video conference. In such a case, the bidders will be informed in timely manner.

8. The address for communication is as under:

Project Director, Kerala State Transport Project, Project Management Team, T.C.11/339, SreeBala Building, Keston Road, Nanthancode, Kowdiar P.O., Thiruvananthapuram-695003, [www.kstp.org.in](http://www.kstp.org.in), e-mail: [pdkstp@gmail.com](mailto:pdkstp@gmail.com), [cepmkstp@gmail.com](mailto:cepmkstp@gmail.com) (Sd/-) Project Director, KSTP

## China is still largest source of critical imports for India

Multi-pronged strategy planned to reduce dependence

ANANTH KRISHNAN

China still remains the largest source of critical imports for India, from mobile phone components to pharmaceutical ingredients, and India is working on a multi-pronged strategy to reduce this reliance, which is a bigger concern than the imbalance in trade.

"Delhi police personnel as well as 'goons' of the BJP were involved in state terrorism by attacking the farmer camp at the Singhu border, besides beating up Sikh youth mercilessly and insulting their articles of faith," alleged senior SAD leader and former minister Bikram Singh Majithia, adding that cases should be registered against police personnel and others.

"Also, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh should register appropriate cases against them and take follow up action," he added at another press conference in Chandigarh.

Mr. Majithia said no concrete action had been taken against Deep Sidhu and Lakh Sidana, who he alleged had jointly played into the hands of the central government on the Republic Day during the Red Fort incident.

"The trade deficit is not in dollars, it is in overdependence," said Sanjay Chadha, Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, speaking at the All India Conference of China Studies (AICCS), organised by the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) Delhi and Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT-M).

"A mobile phone requires 85% content coming from one country. If China were to stop the active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) for penicillin, we would not be able to produce it in this country. When somebody controls your production, that is a sentiment which raises concern."

### PLI scheme

Mr. Chadha said that India was working on a multi-pronged strategy to reduce this dependence, ranging from the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme to boost domestic manufacturing, a global effort involving India's foreign missions to find alternatives to China, and the use of free trade agreements (FTAs) with other trading partners.

COVID-19 had helped accelerate this change. When production in China was hit early in 2020, although its economy would recover by the summer and become the only major economy to



**Key supplier:** India's pharmaceuticals and electronics sectors are hugely dependent on China. ■ FILE PHOTO

avoid contraction last year, India shared with its foreign missions lists of items critically dependent on China, following which the missions linked up with suppliers in their countries.

Mr. Chadha, however, sounded a note of caution, suggesting this process was at the beginning, not the end. "We have to keep in mind China is still our largest source of imports for critical items," he said, "and our pharmaceuticals and electronics sectors are huge and dependent on China."

What offered opportunities for India was the push from many countries to not necessarily relocate from China - which still remains integral to global supply chains - but to diversify, with future capacity expansion up for grabs. The PLI scheme is hoping to capture that diversification.

If 85% of my components [for mobile phones] is dependent on one country, should I not have a production linked incentive to have the big companies come here? We have seen Apple start manufacturing in India. The PLI is going to accelerate that investment."

Mr. Chadha said this was "not so much a China obsession as it is to try and make

## Two Hizb militants 'motivated' to surrender

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
SRINAGAR

Two Hizb-ul-Mujahideen militants were "motivated" to surrender during a raging encounter in south Kashmir's Pulwama, as part of a new strategy adopted by the security forces towards local militants. The militants were encircled by a joint team of the security forces, including

the Army and the police, on Friday in Lehal village of Pulwama. The militants initially engaged the search party in a gunfight, which left one of them injured.

"Due to repeated surren-

der appeals, which lasted for

seven hours, both the terro-

rists surrendered and laid

down their arms," the police said.

LOOK OUT NOTICE					
Umasankar, age 56, S/o. Parameswaran Nair, Sreesailam, Malayalamthil Veettil, now residing at Savny Veettil, Pazhavu Village, Alappuzha Municipality who is the accused in 656/2020 U/s 376(2)(f),(n),(i), 323 & 506(i) IPC, 3(a) R/W 4.5(l)(m)(n) R/W 6, 11 (iii) R/W 12 of POCSO Act 2012 & 75 of JJ Act of Pulinkunnu Police Station, he is absconding after the commission of the crime. If any clue or information is obtained about him that may be intimated immediately to Pulinkunnu Station SHO, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Alappuzha, District Police Chief, Alappuzha, Inspector of Police Pulinkunnu PS					
Name : Umasankar Nair Address : S/o. Parameswaran Nair, Sreesailam, Malayalamthil Veettil, now residing at Savny Veettil, Pazhavu Village, Alappuzha Municipality who is the accused in 656/2020 U/s 376(2)(f),(n),(i), 323 & 506(i) IPC, 3(a) R/W 4.5(l)(m)(n) R/W 6, 11 (iii) R/W 12 of POCSO Act 2012 & 75 of JJ Act of Pulinkunnu Police Station, he is absconding after the commission of the crime. If any clue or information is obtained about him that may be intimated immediately to Pulinkunnu Station SHO, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Alappuzha, District Police Chief, Alappuzha, Inspector of Police Pulinkunnu PS					
Mobile No.: 9497987061 Email					

## INTERVIEW | RON MALKA

# 'We raised level of alert near the embassy'

Blast is being looked at as a terrorist attack and investigation is on, says Israeli Ambassador to India

SUHASINI HAIDAR  
NEW DELHI

The Israeli embassy was on a higher level of alert in the past few weeks after reprisal threats from the Iranian leadership over the killings of General Qasim Soleimani (in January 2020) and senior nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, says Israeli Ambassador to India Ron Malka, a day after an improvised explosive device (IED) went off a few metres away from its embassy in Delhi. The police are yet to confirm any leads they are following, but the Ambassador says the blast is being treated as a terrorist attack that could be connected to a previous attack in 2012 that was suspected to be linked to an Iranian group. The Iranian embassy did not respond to the comments.

**What kind of impact did the IED blast have on the embassy and what can you share about the investigation thus far?**

Well, fortunately, the embassy property was not harmed, the only damage was to a few cars that were parked on the road. The assumption as of now is that it is a terrorist attack, targeting the Israeli embassy in New Delhi. That's a strong assumption as of now.

We still don't know who is behind this attack. So, we're



**C** We are not surprised. We know that our enemy sees us as targets

just collecting all the pieces of information and the evidence that we have at the scene, trying to understand who is behind this attack.

Israeli embassy officials were targeted in 2012. Is there any sense that this could be related with that attack?

It is an option. Of course, we are also investigating this, this option to see if there are any dots that we need to investigate and to explore.

Are you saying that the

relationship between India and Israel could have also been the target?

Yes, might be state or non-state actors that might not like relations between Israel and India and see it as a threat. If that's the case, maybe this is one of their incentives for this evil, cowardly attack. But incidents like this make the relationship only stronger.

The Minister of External Affairs, the Foreign Secretary, the NSA all called just to offer their support and assistance and to give assurances that they're going to take all the steps needed to protect Israeli representatives in India and to fulfil this investigation properly.

Was there any discussion about a possible joint investigation?

Whatever value we can add to this investigation, whether it's [counter-terrorism] experience, informa-

tion and practices... I'm sure that Israel and India know how to work together. Look, we as Israeli diplomats are always very well prepared. We are not surprised. We know that our enemy sees us as targets. So, on a regular basis, we have very high levels of security. Especially in the last few weeks, we raised the level of alert. So, we are not surprised [by the attack].

Was the high level of alert related to specific intelligence you received?

See, you don't need an intelligence input to see that there were threats in the last few weeks over the assassination of (General) Soleimani and (nuclear scientist) Fakhrizadeh, just to mention, and other operations in Syria... Some organisations and countries blame Israel for these and threatened that they are going to retaliate and say they will make Israel pay. So, we raised the level of alert.

# Letter found at blast site leaves investigators puzzled

It mentions organisations not heard of before, say police

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The letter found at the site of the blast near the Israeli embassy in New Delhi mentions two organisations that have left investigators puzzled, sources said on Saturday.

A senior police officer said the organisations have not been heard of before. A screenshot mentions "Jaishul-Hind" taking responsibility for the Friday blast, a few kilometres from Vijay Chowk where the Beating Retreat ceremony was under way.

Addressed to the Israeli Ambassador, the letter also makes a threat and calls the explosion a 'trailer'. It names two "Iranian martyrs", Qasim Soleimani and Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

On Saturday, a team of Delhi police's Special Cell visited the site. A crime team consisting of forensic experts have also collected samples that will ascertain



Hunt for clues: National Security Guards inspecting the blast site near the Israeli Embassy in New Delhi on Saturday. ■ AP

the chemical composition in the low-intensity improvised explosive device (IED).

Ball bearings were found scattered and the impact was felt in a radius of 20-25 metres. Glass panes of three vehicles were damaged, though no injuries were reported. Security has been increased at the embassy.

Investigators probing the

minor blast have not come across "anything concrete" yet as most of the CCTV cameras near the site were "non-functional", police sources said.

Earlier, footage retrieved from CCTV cameras showed a vehicle moving suspiciously near the embassy just before the explosion, sources said.

(With inputs from PTI)

## IN BRIEF



Send ASI team to study Ekamra Kshetra: Pradhan

BHUBANESWAR  
Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Saturday urged the Centre to send an Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) team to carry out a detailed study and excavation at the "Ekamra Kshetra". His letter to the Union Minister of State for Culture comes two days after the ASI unearthed a stone structure in the old town of Bhubaneswar. PTI

## Villagers in Uttarakhand want leopard killed

PITHORAGARH  
The residents of the Devalthal area in the Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand, where three women were killed in quick succession by a leopard recently, held a demonstration on Saturday demanding that the Forest department hunt down the big cat. They have also sought a government job for the kin of the deceased. PTI

## Businessman held in AgustaWestland case

NEW DELHI  
The Enforcement Directorate has arrested a businessman, Anoop Gupta, in connection with the AgustaWestland case. The accused was produced before a special court that sent him to five-day ED custody. The agency has said that €70 million were routed through a web of entities and Mr. Gupta was the director of an intermediary firm.

## Reject Stan Swamy's bail plea, says NIA

He tried to dispose of evidence

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Saturday alleged that Father Stan Swamy, accused in the Bhima Koregaon violence case, was actually accomplishing the agenda of Communist Party of India (Maoist) under the pretence of voicing concerns of the tribal community. It said that his bail plea must be rejected.

Fr. Swamy, 83, currently at Taljora Central Jail, was arrested from Ranchi on October 9, 2020 and was sent to judicial custody. He is charged under several sections of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

Special public prosecutor Prakash Shetty, appearing for the central agency, argued that during the investigation it was established that Fr. Swamy was a staunch supporter of the activities of organisations such as Vishwanath Virodhi Jan Vikas Andolan and People's Union for Civil Liberties, which were "working as frontal organisations of CPI (Maoist)".

Mr. Shetty said the bail plea must be rejected because NIA has found that a large amount of money was received by Fr. Swamy and was also disbursed. So the agency needed to investigate the same.

Fr. Swamy is seeking bail on the grounds that the prosecution has failed to establish how he has taken part or committed or incited the commission of any unlawful activity. Hence, Section 13 (punishment for unlawful activities) of UAPA cannot be applied. The prosecution has not brought anything on record to suggest that Fr. Swamy was involved in any kind of terrorist act.



Stan Swamy

He also contended that, "Under the pretence of voicing the concerns of the tribal community, the accused is actually accomplishing the agenda of CPI (Maoist). The ghastly truth is that in the name of social causes, Fr. Swamy and the co-accused are actually working to achieve goals of the CPI (Maoist)."

Mr. Shetty said the bail plea must be rejected because NIA has found that a large amount of money was received by Fr. Swamy and was also disbursed. So the agency needed to investigate the same.

Arguing for the fourth day in a row, Mr. Shetty said Fr. Swamy had tried to dispose of evidence by deleting files showing his involvement in activities of the CPI (Maoist) and that the NIA had recovered those files. The act of deleting the files showed his intention was to try to escape justice, Mr. Shetty charged.

## '7% of those aged 10 years or older exposed to virus by August 2020'

Sero-survey says the figures were higher in urban slums compared to rural areas

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Approximately one in 15 individuals aged 10 years or older in India is likely to have gone through a SARS-CoV-2 infection by August 18, 2020, according to the findings of a survey published in the *Lancet Global Health*.

Adult sero-prevalence increased approximately tenfold between May and August, 2020, said the survey that was funded by the Indian Council of Medical Research. The study, titled 'SARS-CoV-2 antibody seroprevalence in India, August–September 2020', found that sero-prevalence was highest in urban slums.

The survey added that the lower infection-to-case ratio in August than in May reflected a substantial increase in testing across the country. Serum samples were collected from 29,082 individuals from 15,613 households between August 18–September 20, 2020.

The findings noted that the second nationwide serosurvey indicated that nearly 7% of India's population aged 10 years or older had been exposed to SARS-CoV-2 infection by August, 2020, with an estimated 74 million infections. Sero-prevalence did not differ by age group or sex, but was higher in urban areas, especially in the slums, when compared to rural areas.

**Positivity rate** | The highest seroprevalence was observed among participants aged between 45 and 60 (11.4%) while the lowest (9%) was for those aged between 10 and 17

Age (years)	Participants tested	Seropositive participants	Seroprevalence (%)
10-17	3,021	271	9.0
18-44	16,663	1,820	10.9
45-60	6,630	753	11.4
>60	2,768	291	10.5
All	29,082	3,135	10.8

**Antibody check:** Health workers taking a blood sample for a serological survey in north Delhi's Adarsh Nagar in September last year. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

## Active caseload drops to less than 1.7 lakh

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The country's total active COVID-19 caseload dropped to less than 1.7 lakh (1,69,824) on Saturday. It comprises 1.58% of India's total positive cases.

Nine States/UTs (Union Territories) had a higher weekly positivity rate than the national average. Kerala recorded the highest, with 12.20%, followed by Chhattisgarh (7.30%), Goa (4.40%), Maharashtra (4.30%) and Chandigarh (2.50%), a release issued by the Union Health Ministry said.

Twenty-seven States/UTs had a weekly positivity rate less than the national average. "India's recovery rate has reached nearly 97%

(96.98%) and is among the highest globally, with more than 1.04 crore people having recovered so far. Also 14,808 patients have recovered and got discharged in the last 24 hours," the release stated.

As per the data, Kerala reported the maximum number of single-day recoveries (6,398) in the past 24 hours, followed by Maharashtra (2,613) and Karnataka (607). The Health Secretary pointed that the vaccine is available in sufficient quantities and technical glitches on CoWIN have now been resolved. "The States/UTs have been advised to ensure that regular review meetings of the State, district and block task force are held to assess the emerging challenges, understand the ground issues and promptly address them," said the Ministry. It said the State Health Secretaries have also been asked to analyse the daily variation in the number of average vaccinations and take steps to increase them.

Data released by the Ministry said the cumulative number of healthcare workers vaccinated stands at 37,06,157 as per the provisional report. While 68,830 sessions have been held so far, 5,143 sessions were held till 7 p.m. on Saturday.

## Gandhi statue vandalised in California

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
WASHINGTON/NEW DELHI

Miscreants have vandalised, broken and ripped from the base a statue of Mahatma Gandhi in a park in California, evoking a strong response from India which sought a thorough investigation and appropriate action against those responsible for the "despicable act".

The 6-ft tall, 294 kg bronze statue, in the Central Park of the City of Davis in Northern California, appeared to have been sawed off at the ankles and half its face was severed and missing, local daily *Davis Enterprise* reported.

In New Delhi, the Ministry of External Affairs said the U.S. Department of State has conveyed that the act is unacceptable. The Indian government has expressed the hope that the perpetrators would be brought to justice as quickly as possible.

## Congress-led alliance targets 100 seats in Assam election

BJP has already launched mission to win the same number

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

After the BJP, the Congress is looking at a win in at least 100 seats in the coming Assembly elections in Assam.

Elections to the 126-member House is expected to be over by May.

"We had initially set our sights on 80 seats. But after forming a grand alliance, we are confident of winning at least 100," State Congress president Ripun Bora said.

The Congress had cobled up an alliance with the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) led by perfume baron and MP Badrudin Ajmal, the regional Anchalik Gana Morcha and three Left parties - the Communist Party of India, the CPI (Marxist) and CPI (Marxist-Leninist) - more than a week ago.

"We will definitely win more than the number the BJP thinks it can win," Lok Sabha member Gaurav Gogoi said.

**C** We will definitely win more than the number the BJP thinks it can win

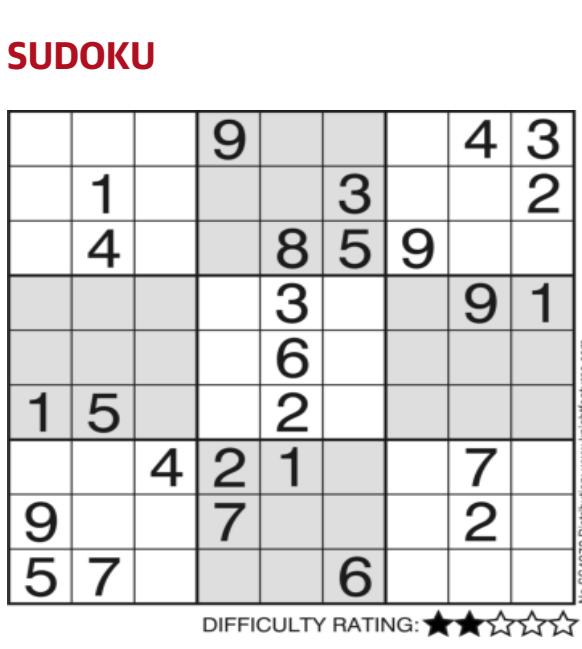
**G**AURAV GOGOI  
Lok Sabha MP

BJP thinks it can win," Lok Sabha member Gaurav Gogoi said.

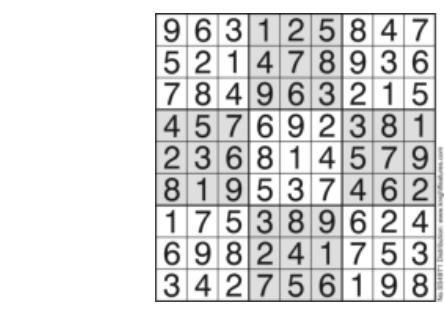
The BJP in 2020 launched 'Mission 100+', eyeing at least 16 seats more than 'Mission 84' that it had planned for its three-party alliance ahead of the 2016 polls.

The BJP is expected to replace one of its regional allies, the Bodoland People's Front, with the United People's Party Liberal. There is no such plan for the other ally, the Asom Gana Parishad. State Finance and Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the Congress was being overconfident. "They will win a century of seats only in Bangladesh," he said at a party event in western Assam's Chirang on January 29. The mention of Bangladesh is seen as a barb aimed at the Congress for partnering with the AIUDF, a party that has won mostly in the Bengal-origin Muslim belts of Assam since its first Assembly elections in 2006.

## SUDOKU



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku



## States told to boost vaccine coverage

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan on Saturday reviewed the status of COVID-19 vaccination with officials of States/UTs through a video conference. He said while some States and UTs have more than 50% coverage, "all are advised to improve the percentage coverage of vaccinated beneficiaries as there are many States and UTs that need to improve their performance on this parameter".

The Health Secretary pointed that the vaccine is available in sufficient quantities and technical glitches on CoWIN have now been resolved. "The States/UTs have been advised to ensure that regular review meetings of the State, district and block task force are held to assess the emerging challenges, understand the ground issues and promptly address them," said the Ministry. It said the State Health Secretaries have also been asked to analyse the daily variation in the number of average vaccinations and take steps to increase them.

Data released by the Ministry said the cumulative number of healthcare workers vaccinated stands at 37,06,157 as per the provisional report. While 68,830 sessions have been held so far, 5,143 sessions were held till 7 p.m. on Saturday.

An internal survey of the Congress, meanwhile, has projected a fairly grim picture for the party across 4

## U.S. group urges India not to tighten e-com rules

REUTERS  
NEW DELHI

A U.S. lobby group that represents firms including Amazon.com and Walmart has urged India not to tighten foreign investment rules for e-commerce companies again, according to a letter seen by Reuters.

India is considering revising the rules after traders in the country accused Amazon's Indian division and Walmart's Flipkart of creating complex structures to bypass investment regulations, Reuters reported this month. The U.S. firms deny any wrongdoing.

India allows foreign e-commerce players to operate as only a marketplace but local traders say the U.S. giants promote select sellers and offer deep discounts, which hurts business for smaller local retailers. In 2018, India changed its foreign direct investment rules to deter foreign firms offering products from sellers in which they have an equity stake.

The Centre is now considering tightening those rules again to include sellers in which a foreign e-commerce firm holds indirect stake through its parent, Reuters reported.

### Letter by USIBC

Citing the Reuters story in a January 28 letter, the U.S.-India Business Council, part of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, urged the Indian government not to make any more material restrictive changes to e-commerce investment rules. "Any further changes in FDI rules would limit e-commerce firms from leveraging their scale," USIBC said in the letter seen by Reuters.

# Govt. plans law to ban bitcoin, set up official digital currency

SC had in March overturned RBI's diktat to FIs not to deal in virtual currency

REUTERS  
MUMBAI

India plans to introduce a law to ban private cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin and put in place a framework for an official digital currency to be issued by the central bank, according to a legislative agenda listed by the government.

The law will "create a facilitative framework for creation of the official digital currency to be issued by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)," the agenda, published on the lower house website on Friday, showed.

The legislation, listed for debate in the current Parliamentary session, seeks "to prohibit all private cryptocurrencies in India, however, it allows for certain exceptions to promote the



**First mover:** No major economy has taken the drastic step of placing a blanket ban on owning cryptocurrencies. ■ AFP

underlying technology of cryptocurrency and its uses," the government said.

**Panel mooted a ban**  
In mid-2019, a government panel recommended banning all private cryptocurrencies, with a jail term of up to 10 years and heavy fines

for anyone dealing in digital currencies.

The panel had, however, asked the government to consider the introduction of an official government-backed digital currency, to function like bank notes, through the RBI.

The central bank had in

April 2018 ordered financial institutions to break off all ties with individuals or businesses dealing in virtual currencies such as bitcoin within three months.

### Court intervention

However, in March 2020, the Supreme Court allowed banks to handle cryptocurrency transactions from exchanges and traders, overturning a ban that had dealt the thriving industry a blow.

Governments around the world have been looking into ways to regulate cryptocurrencies but no major economy has taken the drastic step of placing a blanket ban on owning them, even though concerns have been raised about the misuse of consumer data and its possible impact on the financial system.

## L&T Finance rights issue to open on Feb. 1

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

L&T Finance Holdings Ltd. said its ₹2,998.61-crore rights issue will open on February 1.

The company will issue up to 46,13,25,021 equity shares for cash at a price of ₹65 each (including premium of ₹55) to equity shareholders in the ratio of 17 shares for every 74 shares held on the record date of January 22.

"The funds raised will be used to repay certain commercial papers issued by the company, infusion of funds in the subsidiary, for repayment of certain commercial papers issued by such subsidiary, redemption of preference shares issued by the company and for general corporate purposes," the company said.

The issue will close on February 15.

# ICICI Bank Q3 net rises 19% despite higher provisions

Lender changes provisioning policy

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

ICICI Bank reported a 19% rise in net profit to ₹4,940 crore in the third quarter ended December 31, from a year earlier, despite higher provisioning for bad loans.

Core operating profit grew 15% to ₹8,054 crore, while net interest income increased 16% to ₹9,912 crore.

"We see optimism in the economy," Sandeep Batra, executive director, ICICI Bank, said in a conference call. "We are in a good position to capitalise. We are now more confident."

He said the continued pickup in economic activity and tailwinds from the festive season reflected in an increase in disbursements across retail products.

Mortgage disbursements reached an all-time monthly high in December. Total deposits climbed 22% to ₹874,348 crore, domestic loans grew 13% and retail loans rose 15% year-on-year.

Disbursements of auto loans crossed pre-Covid levels in December and credit card spending also reached

With more than 80% of its branches located in rural and semi-urban areas and towns, the company can capitalise on the uptick in rural demand, it added.

**Vehicle financing**  
As 73% of its business portfolio comprises vehicle financing, CIFCL would continue to focus on financing light commercial vehicles (LCVs), passenger vehicles and two-wheelers. Tractor financing

preme Court. During the quarter, the bank changed its provisioning policy on non-performing assets to make it more 'conservative'.

The contingency provision made on a prudent basis for loans overdue for more than 90 days at December 31, but not classified as non-performing assets to the Supreme Court's interim order, also reflected the revised policy, it said in a regulatory filing.

"The change in policy resulted in higher provision on advances amounting to ₹2,096 crore during the quarter for aligning provisions on the outstanding loans to the revised policy," the lender said.

Gross additions to NPAs were ₹471 crore. Recoveries and upgrades, excluding write-offs from non-performing loans were ₹1,776 crore. The net NPA ratio was 0.63% as on December 31.

Loans amounting to ₹8,280 crore – compared with ₹1,410 crore on September 30 – were not classified as non-performing following the interim order of the apex court.

On a proforma basis, the net NPA ratio was 1.26% compared with 1.12% on September 30. The provision coverage ratio stood at 77.6%, the bank said.

## SAIL net surges fourfold on higher income

Total income jumps to ₹19,997 crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

State-owned steel maker SAIL has reported a consolidated net profit of ₹1,468 crore in the quarter to December, mainly on account of higher income.

The company had a net loss of ₹343.6 crore during the same quarter a year ago, the Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) said in a filing.

During October-December, the total income jumped to ₹19,997.3 crore from ₹16,714.9 crore in the year-earlier period.

Its total expenses stood at ₹16,406.8 crore compared to ₹17,312.6 crore a year ago.



SAIL Chairman Soma Mondal said, "SAIL has shown overall improvement during the current financial year despite all the challenges. The company has geared up to service the rising steel demand in the market as soon as the gradual opening of lockdown started."

## Rural uptick prompts Chola to focus on tractor finance

Firm views good monsoon, bountiful harvest as positives

N. ANAND  
CHENNAI

Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Co. Ltd. (CIFCL), the Murugappa Group's financial services arm, plans to maintain a strong focus on the rural economy by stepping up financing for tractors.

The NBFC's move follows faster recovery of the rural sector and a good Rabi harvest. CIFCL is banking on the good monsoon, higher cropping and government support to impart a positive growth trajectory to the tractor industry, which it ex-

pects will post 10% to 15% growth in the current fiscal, it said in an investor presentation.

With more than 80% of its branches located in rural and semi-urban areas and towns, the company can capitalise on the uptick in rural demand, it added.

**Vehicle financing**  
As 73% of its business portfolio comprises vehicle financing, CIFCL would continue to focus on financing light commercial vehicles (LCVs), passenger vehicles and two-wheelers. Tractor financing

represents 10% of the total portfolio, vehicles 27%, LCVs 35%, cars 10% and two and three-wheelers 5% among others, the company said in its presentation.

On LCV financing, it said the uptick in demand would help CIFCL garner increased market share owing to its presence in rural areas.

Stating that disbursements were expected to pick up in the fourth quarter with revival of MSME business activities across India, the company said the primary focus would be on tier 2, 3 and 4 cities.

### INTERVIEW | N. VENU

## 'Electricity will be the backbone of our entire energy system'

Renewables spur change: Hitachi ABB Power Grids India MD

LALATENDU MISHRA

**EVs will be one of the biggest growth drivers spurring electrification in the country**

for utilities but also for customers. Besides, an efficient grid will allow faster restoration of power outages and support better integration of large-scale renewable energy sources, bringing environmental benefits.

### What is the way ahead?

■ Every penny that goes into the system now needs to be future ready. That means, if you invest one dollar in an asset today, you must think about how this asset will serve you in the long term. That means taking care of your grid's future aspects such as digitalisation, optimisation at the time of buying itself.

### What are the challenges?

■ Regulation is one challenge for digitalisation. The second challenge is availability of technology and the right skill sets. We must also consider the environmental costs as we strive to achieve carbon neutrality.

We need to have very clear, holistic ways of investment as well.

### What are the benefits of an efficient grid?

■ The main benefits are reliability and flexibility. Today, so much renewable energy is getting added that there has to be predictability in generation and supply. Say, the government is now planning to put 7.5 GW of solar capacity in Leh, Kargil. What would happen when suddenly there is a cloud for a few minutes? The

How has COVID-19 enabled faster transformation in the sector?

■ COVID-19 has directed everyone to look at sustainability, the way society is working, from a carbon-neutral lens. The whole power ecosystem is adapting. We are now talking about 3Ds: decentralisation, de-carbonisation, digitalisation on the whole. COVID-19 brought about an increased utilisation of digital technologies, remote technologies in particular.

Take us for example, we went for remote commissioning of projects which was unheard of previously. We commissioned a large substation without any of our people going to the site; even the client was not present physically.

### Shree Cements profit doubles to ₹632 crore

## Happiest Minds buys U.S.'s Pimcore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Happiest Minds Technologies Ltd. will acquire U.S.-based Pimcore Global Services for \$8.25 million (about ₹60 crore).

Houston-based Pimcore Global Services is a digital e-commerce and data management solutions company.

"Happiest Minds Technologies Ltd. has concluded and signed definitive agreements to acquire 100% ownership interest of PGS Inc. (doing business as Pimcore Global Services) for a consideration of \$8.25 million," Happiest Minds said in a regulatory filing late Friday night.

Revenues of PGS for the fiscal ending December 31 were at \$10.6 million and Happiest Minds counts PGS amongst its list of \$2 million-plus customers.

What is the way ahead?

■ Shree Cements on Saturday posted a more than twofold jump in consolidated net profit to ₹631.6 crore for the third quarter ended December 31.

It had reported a net profit of ₹31.8 crore in the October-December period a year earlier. Shree Cements said in a filing.

Revenue from operations rose 12.6% to ₹3,541.4 crore during the quarter under review as against ₹3,146 crore in the year-earlier period.

Total expenses were ₹2,797.2 crore compared with ₹2,801.9 crore. Shree Cements also said its board had reappointed Hari Mohan Bangur as MD for a further period of five years.



**THE HINDU BUDGET COVERAGE**  
1<sup>st</sup> February 2021

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Sandeep Batra

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## SNAPSHOTS



**Maternal gift**  
A mother's COVID-19 antibodies can cross the placenta, potentially playing a role in protecting her foetus from infection, researchers reported in a recent issue of the journal *JAMA Pediatrics*. Among the 83 cases of women studied who had COVID-19 antibodies when they gave birth, 72 of the newborns also had antibodies but no evidence of direct infection of COVID-19.



**Dino babies**  
Scientists have found embryonic remains from the group of ferocious meat-eating dinosaurs that includes *T. rex* - fossilised jaw and claw bones that show these record-size babies looked a lot like adults and were 'born ready' to hunt. The fossils represented two species from the group called tyrannosaurs, the apex predators in Asia and North America during the Cretaceous Period.

# Reneging on the 'no-profit pledge' to supply Oxford vaccine

Oxford University and AstraZeneca committed on multiple occasions to supply the vaccine on a not-for-profit basis

R. PRASAD

"Our no-profit pledge and commitment to broad, equitable and timely access means it will be affordable and globally available," he said.

On December 30, the day the vaccine was approved for emergency use in the U.K., AstraZeneca reassured that it was working to "ensure broad and equitable access to the vaccine at no profit for the duration of the pandemic".

However, as early as October last year, it became clear that AstraZeneca's no-profit pledge came with riders.

In an agreement with the Brazilian public research body Fiocruz, AstraZeneca walked back on its promise when the company said it has "right under contract to declare pandemic over by July 2021".

This promise was repeated on multiple occasions by both Oxford University and AstraZeneca. On November 23, when the interim results of the phase-3 trials were announced, Oxford University in a release went a step further to point out the duration to which the vaccines would be made available at cost. "A key element of Oxford's partnership with AstraZeneca is the joint commitment to provide the vaccine on a not-for-profit basis for the duration of the pandemic across the world, and in perpetuity to low- and middle-income countries," the release said.

The same day, Pascal Soriot, CEO of AstraZeneca reiterated his commitment to make the vaccines available at cost.

As per the agreement, AstraZeneca will produce 100 million doses worth \$300 million for Fiocruz till July 2021 when the "definitive pact" will end.

According to the *Financial Times*, the company can extend the agreement beyond July 2021 but only in "good faith" and if it considers that COVID-19 pandemic is not over.

Answering how it would determine the end of the pandemic, Mr. Soriot said the company would seek "expert guidance, including from global organisations, as to when we can say that the pandemic is behind us."

Incidentally, in early June, AstraZeneca had reached a \$75 million agreement with CEPi and Gavi to support the manufacturing, procurement and distribution of 300 million doses of the vaccine.

AstraZeneca is not alone in reneging on the promise



**With riders:** In an agreement with the Brazilian public research body Fiocruz, AstraZeneca walked back on its promise when the company said it has 'right under contract to declare pandemic over by July 2021'. ■ GETTY IMAGES

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AstraZeneca is not alone in reneging on the promise

made. The Pune-based Serum Institute has signed an initial deal to sell 11 million of the shots to the Indian government for ₹200 (about \$2.74) per dose. "We are giving it at a very special price of ₹200 for the first hundred million doses. Then there will be tendering and then different prices will be available," Adar Poonawalla, CEO of Serum told NDTV. When the government permits the company to sell the vaccines in the private market, the vaccines will be priced at Rs.1,000 per dose, he added.

"I think we should ask that

all companies make a commitment to access. Cost of goods plus certain percentage, rather than something that is five times the cost of goods," Professor of Microbiology at CMC Vellore Dr. Gagandeep Kang said during a webinar organised by the Indian Scientists' Response to COVID-19 (ISRC). "I think transparency of cost of making a vaccine is essential during a pandemic, and then price it as cost of goods plus 10-20% and no more than that until the pandemic is over."

She also cited an instance

of \$3 per dose, a price enabled by investments made by CEPi, the Gates Foundation and SII."

Most importantly, ICMR is a co-sponsor of the phase-1 and phase-2 trials carried out in India and met the trial expenses of some of the trial sites, says Dr. Samiran Panda of ICMR.

## Other countries

Despite the agreements to sell vaccines at cost, it comes to light that Serum has begun selling vaccines to other countries at fairly high prices. In the case of Bangladesh, the vaccines have been priced at \$4 a dose, about 47% more than what India pays for the vaccines, Reuters reported.

In the case of South Africa, Serum will be supplying vaccines at \$5.25 a dose, which is much higher than the price under the African Union agreement for Covishield, and also what the European countries have agreed to pay AstraZeneca. Ironically, South Africa was the third country where AstraZeneca had conducted the phase-3 trials, the data of which were used by the Indian regulator to grant restricted use approval to Covishield. Serum's supply of three million doses to Saudi Arabia is also priced at \$5.25 a dose.

## Tropical cyclones move closer to land except for Atlantic hurricanes

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tropical cyclones across the globe, except Atlantic hurricanes, are moving closer to land in recent decades, a new study found.

Tropical cyclones generally have been moving westward by about 30 kilometres per decade since 1982, putting them closer to land and making them more dangerous, a study published in *Science* said. Each decade since the 1980s, an additional two cyclones have come within 200 kilometres of land, the study said.

### Ominous trends

Researchers do not quite know why this is happening, but it adds to other ominous trends in cyclone activity. Past studies have found that the most intense storms are getting stronger and storms in general are getting wetter, shifting poleward, moving slower and are keeping their power longer after hitting land. But while the new study found storms are getting

closer to land, researchers still haven't seen a significant increase in landfalls, which "is still a puzzle," said study lead author Shuai Wang, a cyclone scientist at Imperial College in London.

### Atlantic zone

It's mysterious that, unlike other areas, the Atlantic hurricane basin didn't show any significant westward shift, but that could be because the Atlantic hurricane zone is more closely surrounded by continents, Wang said. The busiest tropical cyclone basin is in the western Pacific, where there are the most landfalls and the shift westward is twice as big as the global average.

Wang and his colleagues are still trying to figure out why this westward shift is happening. Storms generally move east to west because of trade winds in the tropics, so a greater westward shift usually puts them closer to where the land is, Wang said. Storms that form just west of land, such as in the

Pacific off the California and Mexican coasts, are usually moving away from land already, so this shift doesn't spare more land. Changes in atmospheric currents that steer storms tend to be pushing cyclones farther west, but why is still an open question, Wang said. He said it could be only partly explained by some natural long-term climate cycles.

### Other factors

Other shifts in atmospheric patterns have been connected to human-caused climate change and that's a possible factor in the shift but not something researchers can prove yet, he said.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology hurricane expert Kerry Emanuel said the study is plausible, especially since scientists have already seen a shift of storms more toward the north and south poles, but it raises questions that require follow up, especially why no corresponding increase in landfalls has been found.

## How neutrinos aid in the death of massive stars

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

Many stars, towards the end of their lifetimes, form supernovas - massive explosions that send their outer layers shooting into the surrounding space. Most of the energy of the supernova is carried away by neutrinos - tiny particles with no charge and which interact weakly with matter. Researching the mechanisms of the so-called Type II supernovas, a team from IIT Guwahati has come up with new insights into the part played by neutrinos in this dramatic death of massive stars. The collaboration includes astrophysicists from Max Planck Institute, Munich, Germany; Northwestern University, Illinois and University of California, Berkeley, in the U.S.

### Fate of the star

All stars burn nuclear fuel in their cores to produce energy. The heat generates internal pressure which pushes outwards and prevents the star from collapsing inward due to the action of gravity on its own mass. But when



**Weak but significant:** Most of the energy of the supernova is carried away by neutrinos. ■ GETTY IMAGES

the star ages and runs out of fuel to burn, it starts to cool inside. This causes a lowering of its internal pressure and therefore the force of gravity wins; the star starts to collapse inwards. This builds up shock waves because it happens very suddenly, and the shock wave sends the outer material of the star flying. This is what is perceived as a supernova. This happens in very massive stars.

In stars that are more than eight times as massive as the Sun, the supernova is accompanied by a collapsing of the inner material of the dying star - this is also known as core collapse supernova or Type II supernova. The collapsing core may form a black hole or a neutron star, according to its mass. "Our work is on these core-collapse events of type II supernovae," says Sovan Chakraborty of the physics department of IIT Guwahati, in an email to *The Hindu*.

### Three flavours

Neutrinos come in three 'flavours', another name for 'types', and each flavour is associated with a light elementary particle. For instance, the electron-neutrino is associated with the electron; the muon-neutrino with the muon and the tau-

neutrino with the tau particle.

As they spew out of the raging supernova, the neutrinos can change from one flavour to another in a process known as neutrino oscillations. As Dr. Chakraborty explains, due to the high density and energy of the supernova, several interesting features emerge as this is a nonlinear phenomenon: "This [phenomenon] may generate neutrino oscillations happening simultaneously over different energies (unlike normal neutrino oscillation), termed collective neutrino oscillation. The oscillation result may dramatically change when one allows the evolution with the angular asymmetry, the oscillations can happen at a nanosecond time scale, termed fast oscillation."

Models of this process, dubbed the effective two-flavour models, have only taken into account the asymmetry between electron neutrino and the corresponding antineutrino. In a paper published in *Physical Review Letters*, the researchers from IIT Guwahati claim

that a three-flavour model is needed to predict well the dynamics of the supernova.

### Fast oscillations

The fast oscillations are important because the researchers find that these can decide the flavour information of the supernova neutrinos.

So far, this has not been done, and models have only kept terms involving a neutrino and its corresponding anti-neutrino. "We find that fast nonlinear oscillations of neutrinos are sensitive to three flavours, and neglecting the third flavour may yield the wrong answer," says Dr. Chakraborty. "Thus, the presence of ...[asymmetry between] the muon neutrinos and antineutrinos will be crucial for the neutrino oscillations, in turn influencing the supernova mechanism."

Understanding this is important when one wants to measure the influence of neutrinos and their oscillations on supernova mechanism and heavy element synthesis in stellar environments.

## COVID-19 pandemic: is it a decline after the peak?

The weekly number of cases worldwide show that the pandemic has begun to decline

M. S. SESHADRI  
T. JACOB JOHN

The COVID-19 pandemic that originated in China presumably in September of 2019, took the world by storm in 2020, wreaking havoc on global health and economy. Each country responded to the pandemic in its own way.

The importations of the coronavirus were early and more numerous in countries with heavy travel to and from China, Italy, for example. Such countries were surprised with early start and rapid spread of the epidemic, overwhelming even their well-organised and robust healthcare systems.

The test-treat-trace-isolate policy of the Western world, and non-pharmacological personal protective measures - cough etiquette, mask wearing, maintaining physical distance and hand washing with varying degrees of acceptance - were able to flatten the initial wave of the epidemic curve. However, the virus was too infectious; the emergent variants even more so. Premature relaxation of curbs on assembly and personal protective measures led to resurgence of infections and larger second waves during the last quarter of 2020, spilling over to January 2021.

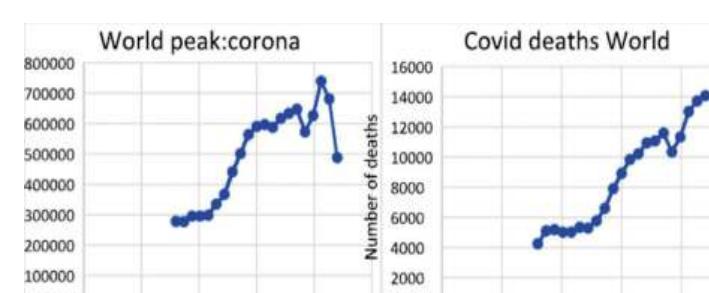
Countries which adopted universal mask-wearing and provided easy access for PCR testing for infec-

tion - such as Taiwan and South Korea, escaped with fewer cases and fewer deaths compared to many others. The socio-cultural-cum-political situations in countries like the U.S. and the U.K. led to public resistance to accept restrictions of personal freedom with consequent aggravation of the epidemics. However, for the last four months, all countries were eagerly waiting for a respite - by way of decline of the epidemic, which had to follow a peak. We believe the peak is just past, good tidings to the worst affected countries.

### Composite structure

The pandemic is a composite of epidemics in all countries, hence a statistical construct, not reflecting any country-specific epidemic; some countries like India peaked earlier, some like Indonesia and Portugal may see a later epidemic peak, but this will not influence the world peak. The weekly number of cases world-wide, available in the Worldometer website, show that the pandemic has begun to decline as shown in the graph.

The graph tells us that the global peak occurred around January 10, with decline in the ensuing 2 weeks. The weekly number of deaths are still on the ascent. This is expected in view of the four-week delay between infection and death. Therefore, vaccination has so far not contributed to the decline of the epidemic in any country.





## Google exit threat

Why is the search engine giant irked with the Australian government's proposed law on payments?

SRIRAM SRINIVASAN

**The story so far:** Australia is working on a law that seeks to make Internet platforms Google and Facebook pay news media companies for displaying their content as well as linking to their content. Following the publication of its draft, last year, Facebook said such a law could force it to block Australian news content on its feed. Last week, just over a month after Australia introduced the legislation in Parliament, Google said it will shut down its search engine there if the law becomes a reality, prompting Prime Minister Scott Morrison to say, "We don't respond to threats."

### What is the basis for this law?

The broad idea has been around for a few years now. In its 2019 report, Digital Platforms Inquiry, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), the country's competition regulator, noted that there was a fundamental imbalance in the power between news media and internet platforms. Specifically mentioning Google and Facebook, the report said these platforms had "substantial bargaining power in relation to many news media businesses."

Very few platforms have the billion-plus-user base or the financial strength of a Google or Facebook. On the other side are millions of individual publishers, none close to being any match for the scale of the top tech platforms.

It also highlighted that media regulation hardly applied to platforms, though they have been increasingly playing much the same role as the media. The last two decades have also seen the tremendous rise of the platforms and sharp decline of the traditional news media, which forms the context in the report.

The Australian government, reportedly sensing how important it was to have a strong and independent media environment in a democracy, asked the ACCC to come up with a draft code, which it did last July. After some changes, the

**What is being proposed in the new law is a mandatory mechanism, under which news media companies will get to negotiate with Google and Facebook regarding payment for their content**

**How does the Bill seek to correct the imbalance?** What is being proposed is a mandatory mechanism, under which news media companies will get to negotiate with Facebook and Google regarding payment for their content. If parties - digital platforms and news media - cannot arrive at a negotiated agreement about remuneration, an arbitral panel "will select between two final offers made by the bargaining parties." Further, the Bill provides for a 14-day notice that platforms need to give publishers regarding any change in their algorithms. This is important because changes in platform algorithms have a significant impact on the referral traffic that publishers receive, and consequently affects their business.

### Isn't this a drastic departure from how platforms have worked with publishers?

Yes. This is one of those rare interventions by a government in publisher-platform relationships. Platforms perform an important function in a digital world that is filled with an unimaginably huge amount of content and information, and into which there is an unceasing flow of new content every second. They help users discover content in this vast information heap, either by way of search or via a friend's feed, for instance. This is also why publishers need platforms. For many news publications, even well-established ones, Google and Facebook are the source of much of their traffic.

Publications often worry about faring well on Google and Facebook. They also worry about keeping pace with algorithmic changes. But the publisher-platform relationship has rarely ever been about money. It has almost always been about tools and strategies for publishers to fare well on the platforms.

### What is Google's stand?

Google is not just against the idea of paying for the links but is also critical of the proposals on arbitration and algorithmic changes. In its blog, Google has said: "Right now, no website or search engine in Australia pays to connect people to other sites through links... The Code undermines one of the key principles of the open internet people use every day." Further, it does not agree to the allegation that it is responsible for the decline in newspaper revenue.

Shutting down its search engine in Australia is a real option because Google has taken such a step in the past. In 2014, Google shut its News Service in Spain, when the government introduced a law to make it pay a licence fee to use news content. Google shut down its Chinese search engine in 2010. In France, it has been forced by law to strike deals with publishers. The EU copyright rules, which France has given force to, "allow publishers to demand a fee from online platforms showing extracts of their news," says a Reuters report. It isn't clear on what basis the remuneration has been calculated.

Google has proposed a different solution. It goes by the name, Google News Showcase, a licensing arrangement with publishers across the world, toward which it plans to spend \$1 billion globally in the next three years.

# Testing vaccines against SARS-CoV-2 variants

Can mutations undercut the efficacy of vaccines? What are the latest studies showing?

JACOB KOSHY

**The story so far:** Bharat Biotech, the makers of Covaxin, and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) reported results of a study that showed the vaccine appeared to be working against B.1.1.7, better known as the U.K. variant or a new variant of SARS-CoV-2. Pfizer and Moderna, whose vaccines have been approved after demonstrating efficacy, have also undertaken studies to check if their vaccines are effective against new variants.

### Why and how are such studies done?

Covaxin, among the two vaccines being used to inoculate Indian health-care workers – the other being Covishield – was still in clinical trial mode when it was approved for restricted emergency use. Among the reasons advocated by the government for doing so was the possible infection by mutant strains, like the

U.K. variant. The B.1.1.7 variant, with many mutations, some in the spike protein, was linked to a sharp spike in coronavirus cases in the United Kingdom and many other countries. In India, the variant has been confirmed in 165 people (January 28), all with a travel history to the U.K. Another variant,

B.1.351, first identified in South Africa, has been reported from several countries. With most vaccines targeting the spike protein, a variant with mutations that helps SARS-CoV-2 evade the immune system could defeat their purpose. One way to find out the ability of a specific antibody to neutralise a virus is through a serological test

The latest Covaxin study clarifies that it is a promising candidate to be tested in large trials. Vaccine efficacy can only be done via a phase-3 trial that compares it in different sets of the population



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

called the Plaque Reduction Neutralisation Test (PRNT).

Blood serum, that contains antibodies, is taken from people who have been infected or have been vaccinated. This antibody soup is diluted and mixed with the virus and evaluated in customised plates to see the extent to which neutralising antibodies were successful in containing the virus spread. To check the antibodies' capabilities against mutant variants, scientists at the National Institute of Virology, Pune, used antibodies obtained from people who had been vaccinated in the Covaxin trials and tested them against virus extracted from those infected with the U.K. strain and another un-named strain, hCoV27 19/India/2020QIII, reportedly a strain with provenance from Iran.

### What did the study find?

The objective of PRNT is to find out the antibodies needed to reduce a given amount of virus by a fixed

proportion. What emerged was that irrespective of the SARS-CoV-2 strain tested, roughly the same number of antibodies were needed to kill the virus. This implies that Covaxin generated antibodies that were as effective against the mutant U.K. variant as the virus used to make the vaccine. Tests by Pfizer and Moderna had found similar results, though there has been no such test reported on the AstraZeneca Covishield vaccine.

### What does it imply?

The latest study attests to the fact that Covaxin is a promising candidate to be tested in large trials. A laboratory study that quantifies the antibodies generated against a virus does not correlate with a vaccine's efficacy or effectiveness in the field. That can only be done via a phase-3 trial that compares it in different sets of the population. A limitation of the Covaxin study, which has not been peer reviewed, is that it does not discuss other important aspects. For instance, an important mutation in the South African variant, called E484K, has been found to help the virus evade detection.

### How long does antibody protection last?

There is considerable uncertainty if antibody protection can last over six months. It is not clear whether a mutant can evade lower concentrations of antibodies. The promoters of Covaxin and scientists at the ICMR say the strength of a vaccine lies in it being a whole-inactivated virus – that means a larger surface area of the virus is visible to the immune system and thereby a wider range of antibodies are produced. However, the evidence so far is that antibodies from all vaccines are largely targeted at the spike protein, or the operative region where the virus binds to the cell; therefore, more does not necessarily mean better.

### What remains to be tested?

A challenge governing all vaccines is that it must induce a calibrated response from the immune system – just enough so that antibodies guard against a future, actual infection and not so much that too many weakly neutralising antibodies (aiding a condition called antibody-dependent enhancement) are produced.

## Who should not take COVID-19 vaccines?

What is the Health Ministry advisory on children, pregnant women and those on blood thinners?

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN

**The story so far:** On January 14, two days before India began the massive inoculation drive for COVID-19, the Health Ministry released a note on precautions and contradictions for the vaccines cleared so far, Covishield and Covaxin. Both India-made vaccines had emergency use approval and one of the points the circular clarified is that shots are to be given only to those 18 years and above.

### What are the other specifications?

The Health Ministry note (<https://bit.ly/3oB04p8>) said there should ideally be a gap of at least 14 days between a COVID-19 vaccine shot and other vaccines. It said it was not permitted to interchange the COVID-19 vaccines: under the two-dose regime the second dose should be of the same vaccine which was administered the first time around. Further, the vaccines should be administered with caution in persons with a history of any bleeding or coagulation disorder (clotting factor deficiency, coagulopathy or platelet disorder).

While the existing fact sheets of both companies indicate that people on blood thinners should "inform their health-care provider" (Covishield, <https://bit.ly/2MBYQ4H>) or that "it is not advisable to take the vaccine in this condition" (Covaxin, <https://bit.ly/3cnRVBY>), the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Director-General Balram Bhargava on Thursday at a Health Ministry press conference said the vaccine is safe for people on



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

blood thinners. He said both the manufacturers of the vaccines had approached the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) for revision of this contraindication on their fact sheets.

Dr. Bhargava said, "Blood thinners are of two categories – antiplatelets and anticoagulants. For those on antiplatelets like aspirin the vaccine causes no problem but with those on anti-coagulants in these patients the tendency to bleed is much higher. This is also a relative contraindication and the anticoagulant can be stopped a day or two before administering the vaccine."

The Health Ministry has advised special precaution for vaccine use in persons with a history of any bleeding coagulation disorder and added that other vaccine-specific

contraindications may apply as new information becomes available.

### Should pregnant women take it?

The Health Ministry advisory says pregnant and lactating women should not be given either vaccine for now. Pregnant and lactating women have not been part of any COVID-19 vaccine trial so far, it said.

People who have an allergic reaction to the first dose of the vaccine, immediate or delayed, should not take the second dose. For those who develop an allergy or other symptoms, the second dose can be taken in four to eight weeks after recovery. This includes persons with active symptoms with SARS-CoV-2 infection and others acutely unwell. Also SARS-CoV-2 patients who have been given the anti-SARS-CoV-2 monoclonal antibodies or convalescent plasma have been advised a deferral.

The Health Ministry has said that other vaccine-specific contraindications may apply as new information becomes available

### What about people who are ill?

For acutely ill or hospitalised patients due to any illness, vaccination can be deferred for four to eight weeks after recovery. Covaxin in its fact sheet specifies that beneficiaries should inform vaccination providers before getting the vaccine if they are on regular medication for any illness. Covishield notes that people who are allergic to any of the ingredients specified in the vaccine should not take it. It says if a beneficiary has a serious adverse reaction to the first dose he should stop the process.

## What does 'green tax' mean for vehicle owners?

Will the government proposal help to achieve the clean air objective? When is it scheduled to come into force?

G. ANANTHAKRISHNAN

**The story so far:** Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari has announced his Ministry's approval of a 'green tax' on vehicles of specified vintage, as a means of dissuading people from using polluting vehicles. Among the major features of the measure is a 10%-25% additional green tax on the road tax payable by commercial transport vehicles that are older than eight years at the time of fitness certification renewal, and for personal vehicles after 15 years. The policy provides exemptions for tractors, harvesters and tillers used in farms, hybrid, electric, ethanol, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and compressed natural gas (CNG)-powered vehicles, and a lower green tax for public transport vehicles such as buses; conversely, a higher additional 50% of road tax is proposed for vehicles in highly polluted cities, as well as differential tax based on fuel and vehicle type, such as diesel. Vehicles of government departments and public sector units that are older than 15 years are to be deregistered and scrapped. Green tax funds are to be kept in a separate account to help States measure pollution and tackle it. State governments must now comment on the proposal. The policy is scheduled to come into force on April 1, 2022 (<https://bit.ly/3pCcNSA>).

### Does scrapping old vehicles carry big benefits?

India has been working on a scrappage policy for years that could, on the one hand, give a boost to the automobile industry and related businesses by stimulating demand, and lead to recovery of steel, aluminium, plastic and so on for recycling, on the other. Newer vehicles conforming to stricter emissions and fuel efficiency standards are more environment-friendly, and have modern safety features. In 2016, India notified the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) Standard for passenger vehicles to boost efficiency. Those with not more than nine seats and weighing less than 3,500 kg were covered from April 1, 2017. The average fuel consumption standard is given by the Power Ministry's Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) as less than 5.49 litres per 100 km (<https://bit.ly/3acj34k>). A second round of tighter efficiency norms is scheduled for 2022. Separate standards for light, medium and heavy commercial



vehicles exist. CAFE also regulates CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, while other pollutants such as carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen and sulphur are covered by Bharat Stage fuel standards. The benefits from vehicle replacements can be gauged from Transport Ministry data: commercial vehicles making up 5% of the vehicle fleet but contribute an estimated 65-70% of total vehicular pollution.

The Centre provided funds under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) to State governments to augment bus fleets, and help the recession-hit bus industry in 2009. Globally, accelerated vehicle replacement schemes have been used in several countries. The most notable were those in Europe, besides the high-profile, \$3 billion "Cash for Clunkers" or CARS (or Car Allowance Rebate System) programme in the U.S. after the 2008 recession. The official evaluation of the U.S. scheme was that it led to an average mileage efficiency increase of 58%, and upgraded vehicles generally were high on environmental benefits such as lower air pollution. Some critics say the U.S. scheme was

not carefully targeted to primarily help those who could not afford a replacement. The BEE estimates that higher efficiency norms could result in a fuel use reduction of 22.97 million tons by 2025 in India.

### Is the proposed policy for scrappage workable?

In 2015, as the Transport Ministry was drafting it, Mr. Gadkari said the idea was

to give a certificate to owners selling off old vehicles of specified age, which could be redeemed for a discount of ₹30,000 to ₹50,000 for new passenger vehicles. For a commercial vehicle, the benefits including taxes would be an estimated ₹1.5 lakh. This idea did not progress, however, and among those who expressed reservations on high costs was NITI Aayog. The Aayog was concerned that some sections may not be in a position to retire old vehicles because of the high capital cost. The proposals in earlier drafts also envisaged tax discounts for those who exchanged old motors for new ones. The present initiative, however, has the limited objective of nudging the owners of older vehicles to sell them off rather than pay a green tax penalty. Without sufficient incentive or penalty, and careful targeting of vehicles with knowledge of their condition, a tax penalty could be less of a disincentive to commercial vehicle owners, since the tax would be far lower than its resale value and earnings potential; there would be no compulsion to retire it. Continued operation of the vehicles would defeat the clean air objective and bring no cheer to the automobile industry.

### What are the options available to tweak the policy?

For a clean-up, commercial transport vehicles are of highest concern: on fuel efficiency, emissions and safety. The Centre could offer a green new deal with financial options such as loans and grants to smaller operators to scrap their junk vehicles, while escalating the green tax annually to achieve the nudge effect. A second stimulus to bus companies could help green the fleet and cut pollution.

Small operators such as autorickshaws could be offered low-interest loans, particularly to move to electric vehicles.

**ASAD DURRANI**

# The spymaster who touched a 'raw' nerve

Pakistan's Defence Ministry says the former ISI chief has been 'affiliated' with hostile elements, including India's intelligence agency

AMIT BARUAH

**T**he first and only encounter this reporter had with Mohammad Asad Durrani, a former chief of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate, currently facing the ire of his own Army establishment, was at the sprawling residence of an Indian diplomat in Islamabad. Lt. Gen. Durrani (retd), who served as the ISI chief in 1990-92, had returned from a stint as the country's Ambassador to Germany (1994-97). At the reception, the former spymaster seemed reluctant to talk.

In 2000, Gen. Pervez Musharraf sent him as Pakistan's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, possibly one of four key assignments for Rawalpindi/Islamabad. In short, Gen. Durrani was a pillar of the Pakistani establishment. For Indians, Gen. Durrani has been in the news because he co-authored along with A.S. Dulat, a former Research & Analysis Wing (R&AW) chief, and journalist Aditya Sinha a book, *Spy Chronicles - RAW, ISI and the Illusion of Peace in 2018*. But it landed him in trouble in Pakistan.

On May 28, 2018, the Pakistani Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Directorate announced on Twitter: "Lt. Gen. Asad Durrani, Retired was called at GHQ today to explain his position on recently launched book 'Spy Chronicles'. A formal Court of Inquiry headed by a serving Lt. Gen. has been ordered to probe the matter in detail. Competent authority approached to place his name on ECL." The ECL, or the Exit Con-

trol List, was a list of persons prohibited from leaving the country that is usually reserved for out-of-favour politicians, criminals and other sundry offenders.

Born in Rawalpindi on February 7, 1941, Gen. Durrani joined the Pakistani Army in 1959. According to a short biography on the ISI website,

**The book Durrani co-wrote with A.S. Dulat contained certain contents concerning national security, and is in contravention of the Official Secrets Acts,' says Pakistan**

"during his 34 years with the Army, he served in a number of command, staff and instructional appointments", and took part in the Indo-Pakistani wars of 1965 and 1971. Besides heading the ISI, Gen. Durrani, a graduate from the General Staff Academy, Germany, had held posts such as Director General of Military Intelligence; Inspector General, Training and Evaluation at General Headquarters (GHQ); and Commandant, National Defense College

**■ The Pakistan establishment turned against him after he co-authored a book with a former Indian RAW chief, and raised criticism against his country's leadership**

the High Court that *The Spy Chronicles* contained "certain contents [sic] concerning [the] national security of Pakistan, being in contravention of the provisions of the Official Secrets Acts, 1923".

"It is further highlighted that there are [a] number of such publications on the way, supported by hostile elements which contain content to create misperception, confusions, [sic] question marks against the top leadership circles at country level and to target the common people," the Defence Ministry stated.

So, what was earlier an inuendo is now out in the open. It's clear that the Pakistani establishment can't tolerate the "collaboration" of even retired spymasters on book projects. Both Gen. Durrani and Mr. Dulat are experienced practitioners of the game – much too embedded in the narrative of their own State to give anything away even to sell their book.

The Defence Ministry, in its reply, has also given away a key reason about why Gen. Durrani was placed on the ECL: the former spymaster was raising questions about the "top leadership" of the country. That's possibly the nub of the issue – that Gen. Durrani has rubbed some very important people in Pakistan the wrong way.

**Osama bin Laden raid**  
In a December 2020 interview to BBC Urdu, Gen. Durrani candidly admitted that the Pakistani Army does interfere in politics – something that is well known but rarely admitted in public by even retired pillars of the Pakistani establishment. Point-

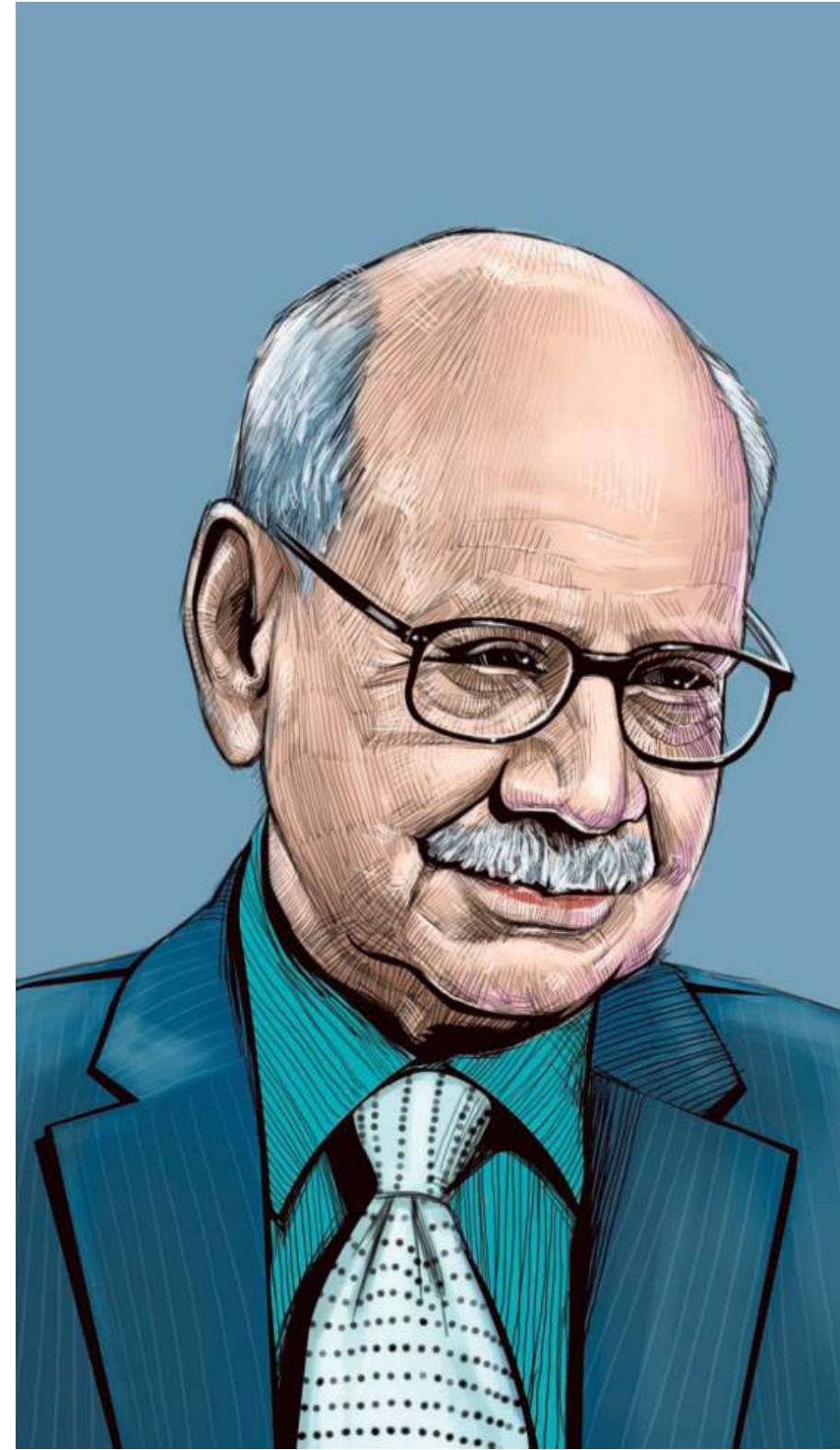


ILLUSTRATION: R.RAJESH

ing to the public perception about the Army's interference in domestic politics, Gen. Durrani said: "Even if they [the Army] are not there, it appears that they play a role." Raising questions about the current leadership of the country, he said their credibility was in question – they tend to go back on everything. "I have touched a raw nerve," he said, tongue firmly in cheek.

Gen. Durrani added that many retired officers had written books without permission, but it was he who had been targeted by the Army establishment.

He is also aware that he ruffled many feathers when he told Al Jazeera in 2015 that it was more probable that the ISI knew about Osama Bin Laden's presence in Abbottabad. "I cannot say exactly what happened but... it is quite possible that they [the ISI] did not know but it was

more probable that they did." Gen. Durrani also stated in the interview that Bin Laden was handed over to the Americans in exchange for an agreement on "how to bring the Afghan problem to an end". Bin Laden was killed in a May 2011 operation in Abbottabad by American special forces acting on their own.

On whether Bin Laden's hideout in Abbottabad was an ISI safe house, Gen. Durrani

responded: "If the ISI was doing that, then I would say they were doing a good job. And if they revealed his location, they again probably did what was required to be done."

It will be interesting to see how the Islamabad High Court will rule on Gen. Durrani's request to get himself off the ECL, but the fact is that he is clearly out of favour with the current establishment and Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa. Any observer of the Pakistani scene will be aware that the Army has a mysterious way of managing court verdicts without seeming to have done so. The Court's ruling will be closely watched.

**Violence in Kashmir**

From an Indian perspective, Gen. Durrani was the ISI chief at the time when Pakistan unleashed one of the worst mayhem possible in Jammu & Kashmir – kidnappings and killings were rampant and a whole array of terrorist outfits were created and fostered by the ISI. It is also true that his co-author of *The Spy Chronicles*, A.S. Dulat, was in the Indian Intelligence Bureau at a time when the IB was trying to blunt the militancy that was being exported to India by the ISI in Jammu & Kashmir.

The fact is that the Pakistani establishment has a thin skin when it comes to statements that deviate from the "line" to be taken on television talk shows and newspaper articles.

Track two dialogues serve the purpose of bringing foes to the same table. Even behind closed doors, this type of dialogue generates much noise and disagreement between Indians and Pakistanis and is often moderated by Americans or Europeans.

Still, it is a meeting point to at least hear the other perspective directly. It becomes all the more important at a time when the last time an Indian Prime Minister met his Pakistani counterpart was more than five years ago – when Narendra Modi arrived almost unannounced at Nawaz Sharif's massive Raiwind home on Christmas Day in 2015.

Retired spies may be collaborating, but their governments are not.

**WALLSTREETBETS**

# Disruptors on the money street

A Reddit community goes after a powerful hedge fund in the financial market

SRIRAM SRINIVASAN

**A** week ago, not many outside the world of investing would have even heard of a Reddit community called WallStreetBets. In the last few days, however, the community's giant-killing act of almost toppling a successful hedge fund and subsequently disrupting normalcy in Wall Street has ensured that it can't be that obscure any more.

It is being talked about all over the Internet, and cheered by those who see it as a typical David Vs Goliath story, one in which the underdog takes on a strong and powerful rival and thrives. Others see true democracy in action. And those in the conventional investing world worry about the entry of a new complication in matters of money-making. Amid all this attention and adulation, the community has added close to 5 million members in just a few days.

WallStreetBets' overnight leap to stardom cannot be explained without talking about who or what its brand new admirers consider to be the Goliath in this story: a New York hedge fund called Melvin Capital. What Melvin Capital did was what hedge funds usually do – take short positions in stocks using a lot of borrowed money. A short position is essentially a bet on the price of a stock going down. Investors who take such positions do so by selling borrowed



stock at the prevailing market price. The logic is: when the price falls, they can buy it at lower price, thereby making a profit. They would then be able to return the stock to those who owned it in the first place.

But what if the price doesn't fall but, instead, climbs and keeps climbing? That means trouble. And that's precisely the situation Melvin Capital was forced to face when a bunch of retail investors in WallStreetBets decided, for some reason, to go after its short positions in a company called GameStop, a video game and consumer electronics retailer based in Grapevine, Texas.

Their heavy buying of the GameStop stock not just caused its price to rise, against Melvin Capital's expectations, but the latter found it difficult to cover its short positions, which it had to via the purchase of increasingly expensive stock, as the buying continued.

The hedge fund, after suffering heavily, closed its position in GameStop. It also got a lifeline of \$2.75 billion from two other funds. It survives. There is no apparent reason to believe that the WallStreetBets had a specific dislike for Melvin Capital or, for that matter, affection for GameStop. But many members have recalled their painful memories of dealing with the economic troubles in 2008, something that they blame Wall Street for. One such message, addressing Melvin Capital, said, "You stand for everything that I hated during that time."

WallStreetBets was started in 2012 by Jaime Rogozinski, a 39-year-old consultant in Mexico. His idea was to have "a place where sophisticated investors could swap tips about high-risk, high-reward short-term trading strategies," says a 2018 article in Money.com. By this time, the investing ecosystem was starting to hear about this unorthodox community of retail investors.

Mr. Rogozinski himself had downplayed the role of his community as a source of business intelligence in an interview last year. He said, "Financial ideas? Perhaps. People look for them everywhere and WSB (WallStreetBets) is an extremely entertaining forum, so it's entirely possible that people go for the entertainment and walk away with financial ideas."

WallStreetBets has already given plenty of ideas to disruptors and plenty of worries to the establishment.

This retailer has certainly seen better times. That is more or less the import of analyst reports about GameStop in recent months. As customer attitudes have shifted in buying digital media online, GameStop has suddenly found itself on the losing side of history," one analyst wrote in December 2020. For much of 2020, its stock was trading at well below \$10.

**Out of sync**

But as the WallStreetBets-Melvin Capital drama reached its climax in the latter half of January, the stock reached \$325 (the price at which it closed on January 29), which is completely out of sync with the fundamentals of the company, if the analysts are to be believed. But, as a Twitter user put it, GameStop is "just a piece of rope" in the tug of war between WallStreetBets and Melvin Capital.

The hedge fund, after suffering heavily, closed its position in GameStop. It also

**RAKESH TIKAIT**

# The constable-turned-crusader

The farmer union leader vows unity of protesters after the Republic Day events

ANUJ KUMAR

**F**or months, government spokespersons and a section of the media were looking for a leader among the consortium of more than three dozen farmer unions protesting against the farm laws. On the night of January 28, they finally found one in Rakesh Tikait, the national spokesperson of the Bhartiya Kisan Union, who broke down before the media, alleging that there's a "conspiracy against farmers".

His critics might call his emotional outburst a smart political move but Rakesh Tikait, the second son of Mahendra Singh Tikait, the mercurial farmer leader who revived the BKU in the late 1980s with a string of dramatic protests in Muzaffarnagar and Meerut against the then Congress government, provided a new spark with his tears and tenacity to the dying embers at the Ghazipur border protest site. Till January 28, the BKU was just playing a supporting role at Singhu and Tikri.

In fact, when Mr. Tikait first emerged at the U.P. Gate on Ghazipur border on December 28 with scores of his supporters, the impression was that he would be used by the ruling party as a bulwark to keep the restive Punjab and Haryana farmers in check. Even those in the All India Kisan Sangharsh Committee took time to believe his commitment.

WallStreetBets has already given plenty of ideas to disruptors and plenty of worries to the establishment.

After the dramatic turns of events on Thursday, the



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH RAVIKUMAR

Ghazipur border became the gravitational centre pulling in support. And the 51-year-old constable-turned-farmer leader emerged as an unlikely hero.

Media savvy all along, he maintained that he voted for the BJP but the party didn't live up to its promises. In the early days of the protest, his concerns were as much about pending payment of sugarcane crop, rising prices of diesel and electricity as the farm laws. "The government is looking to privatise agriculture and is looking at farmers just as labour," he told *The Hindu* in early December.

In fact, when Mr. Tikait first emerged at the U.P. Gate on Ghazipur border on December 28 with scores of his supporters, the impression was that he would be used by the ruling party as a bulwark to keep the restive Punjab and Haryana farmers in check. Even those in the All India Kisan Sangharsh Committee took time to believe his commitment.

The local BJP leaders and Ghaziabad administration failed to realise that their political clout might have reduced but the status of Mahendra Singh Tikait and Chaudhary Charan Singh

clans remains intact in western U.P. The ties between the two families had become tenuous after the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, but on Thursday, Ajit Singh, Charan Singh's son and leader of the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), was the first one to call Mr. Tikait to say that he is there for the farm leader.

**Support pours in**  
Mr. Tikait's breakdown video, along with a tweet of support by RLD vice-president Jayant Chaudhary, spread like wildfire in the sugarcane belt of U.P., Haryana and Rajasthan. His tears were seen as an insult to the farmer's dignity and a huge crowd turned up for a farmers' 'Mahapanchayat' called by the BKU in Muzaffarnagar and Mathura.

More importantly, it bolstered his position as an undisputed leader of farmers in western Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. After his rival V.M. Singh of the Rashtriya Kisan Mazdoor San-

gathan left the protest site on Wednesday, holding Mr. Tikait responsible for the Republic Day incidents, Mr. Tikait warned against using the incident to tarnish the Sikh community. "We rushed to Ghazipur once we heard his outburst. He is our sole leader now," said Sewak Singh Siddhu, a prominent farmer from Udhampur, Jammu and Kashmir. Shaheed Hussain, a farmer from Bulandshahr, who reached the protest site to offer water to Mr. Tikait, saw hope in the revival of the Jat-Muslim amity that marked the region before the Muzaffarnagar riots. Interestingly, it was after the riots that the Tikait brothers, Rakesh and Naresh, gradually tilted towards the BJP.

Senior BJP leader Rajnath Singh had supported Rakesh Tikait during his protest against the Congress government ahead of the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. However, Mr. Tikait didn't completely burn his bridges with Ajit Singh. He fought the 2014 election on the RLD ticket from Amroha, finishing fourth.

Rajiv Singh, a veteran BKU hand, who has worked closely with the Tikait brothers, says though the pagdi of Baba Tikait passed on to the elder brother, it is Rakesh Tikait who is the true inheritor of his father's legacy. "While Naresh limited himself to Muzaffarnagar, the more astute Rakesh accompanied his father to the protest sites. Police detention and jail are not new to him."

# Biden govt. will build on the Quad: NSA

Sullivan describes the forum and the Abraham Accords as Trump administration's positive actions

SRI RAM LAKSHMAN

The new U.S. National Security Adviser (NSA), Jake Sullivan, has said the Biden administration would like to carry forward the work of the Donald Trump administration in strengthening the Quad grouping – India, the U.S., Japan and Australia.

His comments will bring some measure of clarity to discussions on the level of priority the new administration will assign the Indo-Pacific, which had been elevated by the Trump administration as a foreign policy priority, mostly as a reaction to China's growing assertiveness.

"I think we really want to carry forward and build on that format, that mechanism which we see as fundamental a foundation upon which to build substantial American policy in the Indo-Pacific region," Mr. Sullivan said at a webcast discussion, 'Passing the Baton', organised by the U.S. Institute for Peace.

The discussion between Mr. Sullivan and his predecessor Robert O'Brien was moderated by Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State from the George W. Bush administration.



A step forward: A file photo of National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan participating in an event in Wilmington. ■ AFP

Mr. Sullivan described the Quad and the Abraham Accords – deals signed in 2020 to normalise relations between Israel and certain West Asian and North African countries – as examples of Trump administration's actions that were positive and ones the Biden administration would build on.

#### Iran nuclear deal

Earlier in the discussion, Mr. O'Brien had said the Quad "may be the most important relationship" the U.S. has established since NATO and an example of working with allies to confront China.

Mr. Sullivan, however,

said Mr. Trump and Mr. Biden had some "real differences" in their approach to the relationship with Iran.

"It starts from a sober analysis of the state of affairs, which is that Iran's nuclear programme has advanced dramatically over the course of the past couple of years, they are significantly closer to a nuclear weapon than they were when the previous administration withdrew from the JCPOA [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or the 'Iran deal'], he said.

On Afghanistan, Mr. Sullivan said that the Biden administration would take decisions on the withdrawal of

the remaining 2,500 American troops by May 1 from the country, based on whether the Taliban were fulfilling their end of a U.S.-Taliban agreement from February last year.

"So, what we're doing right now is taking a hard look at the extent to which the Taliban are, in fact, complying with those three conditions and in that context, we will make decisions about our force posture and our diplomatic strategy going forward," he said.

Mr. Sullivan said three conditions in the agreement were of particular importance: the Taliban cutting ties with terror groups including al-Qaeda, reduction in violence, and third, the Taliban participating "in a real way, not a fake way, in negotiations with the Afghan government."

#### China challenge

The former and current NSAs also differed in their characterisation of the top challenges facing the U.S. "A very assertive, rising China" was the biggest challenge to the U.S., according to Mr. O'Brien.

Iran, Russia and less high-

profile challenges like cartels and transnational crime were some of the others.

For Mr. Sullivan, the most pressing challenge was the turmoil within the U.S. itself.

"It occurs to me something that Joe Biden has really reinforced for us, which is that foreign policy is domestic policy and domestic policy is foreign policy. And at the end of the day, right now, the most profound national security challenge facing the United States is getting our own house in order, is domestic renewal," Mr. Sullivan said.

He described COVID-19, the economic crisis and "acute threats to our basic constitutional republic and 'deep divisions' as domestic challenges facing the country.

Investing in allies and re-establishing America's place in multilateral forums like the World Health Organization and Paris Climate Accord were the next priority. Then the U.S. would be in a position to effectively deal with the "China challenge", the climate crisis, the current and future pandemics and so forth, Mr. Sullivan said.

Tensions ramped up on Tuesday when a military spokesman refused to rule out the possibility of a coup.

A day later, Army chief General Min Aung Hlaing – arguably the most powerful person in Myanmar – said revoking the 2008 Constitution could be "necessary" under certain circumstances.

His comments – translated into English and published in Army-run *Myawaddy* newspaper – sent shockwaves through the na-

cent democracy, only a decade out of the grips of a 49-year military junta.

On Saturday, the Army released a statement claiming its commander-in-chief had been misunderstood, though the statement did not directly address fears of an imminent coup.

"Other organisations and media misinterpreted the commander-in-chief's speech and framed it from their point of view," said the statement.

"Tatmadaw is abiding by the current Constitution... and will perform within the law by defending it," it added, referring to the Army by its official Burmese name.



General Min Aung Hlaing

The last time the country saw its Constitution revoked was in 1988, when the military reinstated a junta after a popular uprising.

The General's comments on the Constitution drew alarm from more than a dozen foreign missions and the UN, while smaller political parties called for a resolution between Ms. Suu Kyi and the military.

#### Voter fraud charges

The country's highest Buddhist authority even stepped in, with the senior monks of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka issuing a statement late on Friday calling for negotiations to prevail "instead of heated arguments".

The military is alleging 10 million cases of voter fraud in November's polls, and is demanding the Election Commission release the electoral roll for cross-checking.

The Election Commission has denied fraud, though it has conceded that there were "flaws" in the lists of voters.

## China's Hualong One nuclear reactor gets going

ASSOCIATED PRESS BEIJING

China National Nuclear Corporation said its first nuclear power unit that uses Hualong One, a third-generation reactor, started commercial operations on Saturday.

The reactor, located in Fuqing city in China's southeastern Fujian province, was designed to have a 60-year lifespan, with its core equipment domestically produced. Each unit of the Hualong No. 1 has a capacity

of 1.161 million kilowatts and can meet the annual domestic electricity demand of 1 million people in moderately developed countries, according to CNNC.

"With Hualong One online, China is now at the forefront of third-generation nuclear technology in the world, alongside countries like the U.S., France and Russia," said CNNC President Yu Jianfeng.

A second Hualong One unit is due to be completed later this year.

## Fix accountability in Daniel Pearl murder case: U.S.

Blinken speaks to Qureshi about U.S. concerns over acquittal of killers



Antony Blinken

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA WASHINGTON/ISLAMABAD

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has spoken over phone with Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and discussed the accountability of convicted terrorists responsible for the brutal murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl, according to the State Department.

Pearl, the 38-year-old South Asia bureau chief for

*The Wall Street Journal*, was abducted and beheaded while he was in Pakistan investigating a story in 2002 on the links between the country's powerful spy agency ISI and al-Qaeda.

State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said on Friday that Mr. Blinken reinforced America's concern over Pakistan Supreme Court's ruling acquitting Pearl's killers.

"Blinken and Qureshi dis-

said in a readout of the call.

In addition, Mr. Blinken and Qureshi discussed the importance of continued U.S.-Pakistan cooperation on the Afghan peace process, support for regional stability, and the potential to expand our trade and commercial ties, Mr. Price said.

The Pakistani Foreign Office said in a statement that the two leaders discussed "recent developments in the Daniel Pearl case" and Mr. Qureshi "underscored that it was important and in the mutual interest that justice is served through legal means."

Mr. Qureshi congratulated Secretary Blinken on assuming his office, underscoring Pakistan's commitment to forging a comprehensive partnership with the U.S. based on the convergence of interests on a whole range of issues, it said.

Mr. Qureshi told Mr. Blinken that peace in Afghanistan through a negotiated political settlement was one of the fundamental convergences between the two countries.

He said it was essential to have a reduction in violence leading to the ceasefire.

## No curbs on vaccine supply to N. Ireland: EU

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE BRUSSELS

The European Union on Friday backtracked on a threat to restrict exports of coronavirus shots to Northern Ireland in its growing row with Britain.

British-Swedish firm AstraZeneca has said it can only deliver a fraction of its vaccine doses promised to the EU and Britain because of production problems, but both sides are demanding their pledges are met.

The EU threatened to res-

trict vaccine exports to Northern Ireland by overriding part of the Brexit deal with Britain that allowed the free flow of goods over the Irish border, but backed down after British Prime Minister Boris Johnson voiced "grave concern" over the potential impact from the decision.

The European Commission will "ensure that the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol is unaffected", the EU commissioner said in a statement late on Friday.

The EU threatened to res-

## U.S. issues new mandate on wearing mask

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE WASHINGTON

Travellers on aeroplanes and public transportation, like buses and subways, will be required to wear face masks starting next week to curb the spread of COVID-19.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a mask-wearing rule late on Friday that builds on an order announced January 21 by President Joe Biden.

The European Union on Friday issued a mask-wearing rule late on Friday that builds on an order announced January 21 by President Joe Biden.

Refugees have crossed into Cameroon, Chad and the Republic of Congo

which President Faustin-Archange Touadera was declared the winner.

"Refugees have told UNHCR that they fled in panic when they heard gunshots, leaving their belongings behind," spokesman Boris Cheshirkov told journalists in Geneva.

About 92,000 refugees have reached DRC and more than 13,000 have crossed into Cameroon, Chad and the Republic of Congo. The rest are displaced inside the Central African Republic.

The CAR Army, backed by U.N., Russian and Rwandan troops, has been battling rebels that are seeking to overturn a December 27 vote, in



Humanitarian crisis: A UN peacekeeper patrolling a road near Damara, where skirmishes took place on January 23. ■ AFP

## Jesus does it for City



Winning moment: Gabriel Jesus' early strike settled the issue for Manchester City. ■ AP

### EURO LEAGUES

REUTERS MANCHESTER

A ninth-minute goal from Gabriel Jesus gave Manchester City a 1-0 win over Sheffield United on Saturday.

#### Important results: Premier League

Everton 0 lost to Newcastle 2 (Wilson 73, 90); Crystal Palace 1 (Eze 60) bt Wolves 0; Man City 1 (Jesus 9) bt Sheffield United 0; West Brom 2 (Bartley 47, Pereira 66) drew with Fulham 2 (Reid 10, Cavaleiro 77).

Serie A: Bologna 1 (Poli 81) lost to AC Milan 2 (Rebic 26, Kessie 55-pen); LaLiga: Eibar 0 lost to Sevil-

la 2 (Ocampos 28-pen, Jordan 55), Real Madrid 1 (Asensio 13) lost to Levante 2 (Morales 32, Roger 78).

Bundesliga: Bayern Munich 4 (Boateng 32, Muller 43, Lewandowski 57, Gnabry 63) bt Hoffenheim 1 (Kramaric 44).

Borussia Dortmund 3 (Delaney 26, Sancho 63, Uduokhai 75-og) bt Augsburg 1 (Hahn 10); Eintracht Frankfurt 3 (Silva 67, 90+, Hinteregger 84) bt Hertha Berlin 1 (Piatek 66).

Union Berlin 1 (Knoche 31) drew with Borussia M'gladbach 1 (Plewa 59); Werder Bremen 1 (Mohwald 77) drew with Schalke 1 (Mascarell 38).

Serie A: Bologna 1 (Poli 81)

lost to AC Milan 2 (Rebic 26,

Kessie 55-pen); LaLiga: Eibar 0 lost to Sevil-

la 2 (Ribery 67).

## RACING Lombardy should score over her rivals in the HRC Golconda Oaks

HYDERABAD: L.V.R. Deshmukh's Lombardy, who has won four of her five starts including the Hyderabad 1000 Guineas, should score over her rivals in the HRC Golconda Oaks (Gr. 2), the stellar attraction of Sunday's (Jan. 31) races. There will be no false starts.

1 TRADE FAIR PLATE (DIV. I) 1,400m, rated up to 25 (Cat. II), 10.0 p.m.: 1. Blue Valentine (I) Trevor 60, 2. Densisus Dream (9d) Ismail 60, 3. Lightning Fairy (2) Mukesh Kumar 60, 4. N.R.I Flame (5) Akshay Kumar 60, 5. Hashtag (4) C. Umesh 59, 6. Sun Dancer (8) Suraj Narredu 59, 7. Moka (6) Kuldeep Singh 57, 8. Ice Berry (7) Nakhat Singh 56, 9. Kintusugi (10) Ajeeth Kumar 56, 10. Moment Of Silence (Ex: Vijays Maestro) (3) A. Vikrant 53.

1. SUN DANCER, 2. BLUE VALENTINE, 3. N.R.I FLAME

2 NEXT MOVE PLATE (I,200m, (Terms) Maiden, 3-y-o only (Cat. II), 145: 1. First In Line (9) R. Laxminikanth 56, 2. General Attalant (5) C. Umesh 56, 3. Gregor Clegrave (II) Ashish Asbar 56, 4. Master (II) Nakhat Singh 56, 5. Proud (3) Trevor 56, 6. Siyavash (4) Suraj Narredu 56, 7. Solar Eclipse (7) Chouhan 56, 8. Watch My Stride (I) Akshay Kumar 56, 9. Angel Wings (4) R. Manish 54, 10. Georgia Peach (10) Koushik 54, 5, 11. Good Tidings (13) Neeraj 54, 5, 12. Limoncello (12) Zervan 54, 5. 1. ART IN MOTION, 2. AUGENSTERN, 3. APPENZELLE

3 MUSICAL MORN PLATE (I,400m), (Terms) 4-y-o & upward (Cat. II), 2:20: 1. Pontius Pilate (II) Deepak Singh 60, 2. Warrior Supreme (3) A.A. Vikrant 60, 3. Her Legacy (I) Suraj Narredu 57, 5, 4. Rapid Fire (4) Ajeeth Kumar 57, 6. Conscious Gift (6) Zeravan 57, 7. 6. Conscious Gift (6) Zeravan 57, 8. 7. Wah Ms Zar (II) Mukesh Kumar 56, 8. King Maker (10) Surya Prakash 55, 9. Days Of Reckoning (12) Neeraj 57, 10. Big Brave (9) Gopal Singh 57, 5, 11. Champion Bull (4) P. Gaddam 57, 5, 8. Galloping Gangster (10) Suraj Narredu 57, 9. Destined Dynamite (3) Ajeeth Kumar 54, 5 and 10. N.R.I Super King (Ex: Super Dart) (2) Ashish Asbar 54, 5.

1. PONTIUS PILATE, 2. NAYADEEP, 3. WATCH MY STRIDE

4 COMMON LAND PLATE (DIV. I) 1,100m, rated up to 20 to 45 (Cat. III), 2:55: 1. Amyra (13) Suraj Narredu 60, 2. Mehrzad (3) P. Gaddam 59, 3. Gusty Note (7) A.A. Vikrant 56, 4. 5. 4. Immortality (4) Chouhan 57, 5. Lake Tahoe (7) Suraj Narredu 57, 6. Lombardy (II) Trevor 57, 7. Luminous (9) Sandesh 57, 8. Moon River (2) Parmar 57, 9. Queen Daenerys (5) Mukesh Kumar 57, 10. Sweet Melody (10) Nakhat Singh 57 and 11. Violin (6) Srirath 50, 5.

5. HER LEGACY, 2. HOUSE OF DIA-MONDS, 3. CONSCIOUS GIFT

## TV PICKS

**Mushtaq Ali Trophy:** Star Sports 1 (SD & HD), 7 p.m.  
**ISL:** Star Sports 2 & 3 (SD & HD), 5 p.m. & 7.30 p.m.  
**BWF World Tour Finals:** Star Sports 2HD & 3, 11.30 a.m.  
**Premier League:** SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 5.30 p.m., 7.30 p.m., 10 p.m. & 12.45 a.m. (Monday)  
**Serie A:** Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 5 p.m., 7.30 p.m., 10.30 p.m. & 1.15 a.m. (Monday)

## IN BRIEF



## Jazz on a roll with 11th straight win

Bojan Bogdanovic put his stamp on a season-high 32-point performance with seven three-pointers as Utah Jazz claimed its 11th straight win by cruising to a 120-101 victory over Dallas Mavericks on Friday. **Other results:** Orlando Magic 90 lost to LA Clippers 116; San Antonio Spurs 119 bt Denver Nuggets 109; Toronto Raptors 124 lost to Sacramento Kings 126; Minnesota Timberwolves 94 lost to Philadelphia 76ers 118.

## Hasan and Yasir in Bangladesh squad

CHITTAGONG  
Bangladesh on Saturday named uncapped fast bowler Hasan Mahmud and batsman Yasir Ali in the 18-man squad for two Tests against West Indies starting on February 3. Shakib Al Hasan was also included in the squad. AFP

## Real Kashmir, Gokulam in goalless draw

**SPORTS BUREAU**  
KOLKATA  
Gokulam Kerala FC held Real Kashmir FC to a goalless draw in the I-League match at the Kalyani Stadium here on Saturday.

Gokulam tallied seven points from two wins and draw in five matches to stay in contention for the championship round slot. Real Kashmir has six points from four matches.

**The results:** Aizawl 2 (P.C. Lalidipu 37, M.C. Malsawma 56) bt Neroca 1 (Emmanuel Garcia 49); Gokulam Kerala 0 drew with Real Kashmir 0.

## A game-changer with a need for speed

Jos Buttler is ready for the challenge of taking on India's 'strength and depth'



**Foot on the pedal:** Jos Buttler doesn't believe in half measures when it comes to scoring runs. ■ GETTY IMAGES

## ENGLAND IN INDIA

S. DINAKAR  
CHENNAI

If Jos Buttler had not become a cricketer, he would have been a motor racing great – high on octane, sharp on the bends and fast on the straights.

The man with quick hands and reflexes loves speed; with the bat it means scoring quickly, altering opposition plans and scattering the field.

**No hanging around**  
Just the other day, at Galle, the 30-year-old wicketkeeper-batsman walked in with England on a shaky 89 for four chasing 164 on a surface offering considerable turn.

And soon, Buttler was doing what he knew best, stepping on the accelerator as England zoomed past the finish line.

He was light on his feet, swept and reverse-swept

with the instincts of an adventurer to settle the issue with a 48-ball unbeaten 46.

It's a pity that, with the situation arising out of player quarantine and bio-bubbles and the strain it can put on cricketers, this game-changer will be seen only in the first Test against India.

He will subsequently travel back home and return for the white-ball series.

**The bubble factor**  
In a virtual media interaction on Saturday, Buttler said,

"Rotating players in and out of the series, at times there is frustration because you want to see the best players on show at all times. But it is just not possible looking at the time spent in the bubble."

Buttler was aware beating India in India was a "huge challenge" and added,

"Spending time in India helps you understand the magnitude of the game here."

The Englishman felt India defeating Australia Down Under in a Test series, without several of its best players, showed its "strength and depth."

Batting big in the first innings was a key aspect of winning in India, he said.

"When the ball swings in England, a first innings total of 300 could be enough. But on a fantastic wicket in India, you may need to make 600 in the first innings."

## Brilliant skipper

Buttler hailed skipper Joe Root's efforts of 228 and 186 in Sri Lanka and said, "He was a fantastic example for us. He has always had a brilliant game against spin."

Buttler named fast-bowler Jofra Archer as the X-factor in the series.

Buttler, too, would be an X factor, if only for one Test. He turns on the ignition and the engine roars to life.

## 'Class of 2012 one of the best England sides'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
CHENNAI

batsman Jos Buttler.

"That was one of the best England teams that we have ever had, quite a few amazing players.

"This side is in a little bit of a different stage in terms of journey, but certainly getting towards that point," said Buttler.

## Up and running



**Hitting their straps:** Ben Stokes and Jofra Archer training on Saturday, after completing six days of quarantine, even as their teammates cleared their second COVID-19 tests. ■ ECB

## Gritty Gill sets the pace

RAYAN ROZARIO  
COIMBATORE

JK Tyre's star driver Gaurav Gill (co-driver Musa Sheriff) was happy that he finally had a car that could match his speed. However, an electrical issue almost cut short his joy before he managed to stay on course and emerge the leader on the opening day of the FMSCI INRC Rally of Coimbatore on Saturday.

Gill's teammate Amitrajit Ghosh (Ashwin Naik) even managed an eight-second lead over him in the third stage, but his car let him down in the fourth.

That was enough for Dr. Bikku Babu (Bonny Thomas), the INRC 2 driver, to jump to the second spot.



**Experience to the fore:** Gill's driving skills kept him ahead though he faced electrical issues. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

## Chirag and Shruti win again

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GURUGRAM

Shruti Ahlawat cruised to a 6-0, 6-4 victory over wild card Anjali Rathi in the girls final of the ITF grade-4 junior tennis tournament at the Tennis Project, Baliawas, on Saturday.

It was the second successive title for the 14-year-old Shruti, coached by Pundreek Chaturvedi, in her first two tournaments of the international under-18 circuit.

Chirag Duhan also won the boys title, the way he had done last week, even though he got a better fight from top seed Nishant Dabas this time around.

The fifth-seeded Chirag prevailed 7-6(3), 6-2. The 17-year-old, trained by coach



**The results (finals):**  
Boys: Chirag Duhan bt Nishant Dabas 7-6(3), 6-2; Girls: Shruti Ahlawat bt Anjali Rathi 6-0, 6-4.

Gaurav Sharma, had dropped only one set in the tournament on way to his second successive title.

## Sonam does the 'trick' over Sakshi

Retains National title, gets closer to Olympic dream

## WRESTLING

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
AGRA

Sonam Malik made it three-in-three in her face-offs with Sakshi Malik on Saturday to not only reiterate her top position in the 62kg but also move closer to the Olympic dream on day one of the 23rd Women's Wrestling National Championships here.

Representing Haryana, the 18-year-old Sonam beat Sakshi, India's maiden women's wrestling Olympic medalist, 7-5 to retain the national title. It was her third win over the senior pro-

in as many meetings since last year, proving the previous ones were no fluke and signifying a passing of baton, as it were.

Sonam had first caused a flutter when she beat Sakshi at the selection trials for the Rome Rankings Series and Asian Championships last year but failed to win a medal in either. She then pinned Sakshi at the selection trials for the Olympic Qualifiers in February 2020 before the latter was postponed.

Always a slow starter, Sonam beat Manisha 3-2 in the quarterfinals, thrashed Bha-

gyashree 11-0 in the semifinals and was in her elements by the time she got on the mat for the final. While Sakshi scored early points, Sonam played the waiting game to perfection.

**The results:** 50kg: 1. Minakshi (Har), 2. Henny Kumari (Har), 3. Swati Shinde (Mah) and Kirti (Del); 55kg: 1. Anju (Har), 2. Bunty (Del), 3. Indu Tomar (UP) and Sushma Shokeen (Del); 57kg: 1. Anshu (Har), 2. Lalita (RSPB), 3. Raman Yadav (MP) and Mansi (Har); 62kg: 1. Sonam (Har), 2. Sakshi Malik (RSPB), 3. Pushpa (MP) and Manisha (Har); 72kg: 1. Pinki (RSPB), 2. Naina (Har), 3. Priyanka (UP) and Kavita (RSPB).

## NEW DELHI LOCALS

## Dubey Academy meets Sonnet

Four wickets by Mayank Janghu, three by Shubham Lamba and an unbeaten 96 by Samant Jakhar saw SN Dubey Academy beat Young Star Academy by seven wickets to enter the final of the seventh S.N. Dubey under-16 tournament. Aman Chaudhary picked up four wickets as Sonnet scraped past Uttarakhand Boys by one wicket.

**The scores:** YSA 189 in 39.2 overs (Swastik Chhikara 62, Mayank Janghu 4/41, Shubham Lamba 3/28) lost to SND Academy 192/3 in 29.2 overs (Samant Jakhar 96 n.o.). Uttarakhand Boys 152 in 38 overs (Tarun Bisht 46, Ankit Kumar 34, Aman Chaudhary 4/26) lost to Sonnet 153/9 in

39.1 overs (Kavya Gupta 42).

## Yash scores century

Yash Adhana scored a century and Ansh Saini took three wickets as Ravinder Phagna Academy beat Airliner Academy by seven wickets in the Bal Bhawan Premier League.

**The scores:** Airliner Academy 183/8 in 35 overs (Granth Mehta 62, Ansh Saini 3/11) lost to RPA 184/3 in 27.3 overs (Yash Adhana 103, Sameer Khan 44 n.o.).

**Good knock by Anuj**  
Anuj Negi (78) helped Crescent CA beat Suryavanshi CF by 101 runs in the Marathon League.

**The scores:** Crescent Academy 224 in 30 overs (Anuj Negi 78, Arnav Rana 54) bt Suryavanshi Foundation 121 in 23.3 overs (Naman Mittal 41).

## Panwar and Chaudhary shine

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Olympian Kynan Chenai was consistently top class as he shot 145 out of 150 in six rounds of trap. He beat Nasar Meqdad of Kuwait by one point. Prithviraj Tondaiman shot 143 but missed a medal.

Rajeswari Kumari, Shreyasi Singh and Manisha Keer swept the medals in women's trap.

**The results:** Men: 10m air rifle: 1. Divyansh Singh Panwar 632.4; 2. Arjun Babuta 630.1; 3. Deepak 628.8.

**10m air pistol:** 1. Saurabh Chaudhary 588; 2. Foroughi Javad (Iri) 587; 3. Sarabot Singh 582; 4. Abhishek Verma 581.

**Skeet:** 1. Meng-Yuan Li (Tpe) 147; 2. Saudi Habib (Kuw) 146; 3. Tammar Alwatt (Brn) 145; 10. Parinaz Dhaliali 133; 11. Kartiki Singh Shaktawat 130.

**Trap:** 1. Rajeshwari Kumari 138; 2. Shreyasi Singh 138; 3. Manisha Keer 136.

Naser Meqdad (Kuw) 144; 3. Abdul Rahman Alfaheen (Kuw) 143; 4. Prithviraj Tondaiman 143; 9. Lakshay Sheoran 140.

**Women: 10m air rifle:** 1. Enkhmaa Erdenechuluun (Mgl) 629.7; 2. Yelizaveta Bezrukova (Kaz) 629.5; 3. Shiori Hirata (Jpn) 629.0; 4. Elavenil Valarivan 629.0; 9. Apurvi Chandela 624.4; 16. Anjum Moudgil 622.5.

**10m air pistol:** 1. Rostamiany Haniyeh (Iri) 580; 2. Sebghatolahi Golmoush (Iri) 579; 3. Manu Bhaker 578; 8. Yashaswini Singh Deswal 572; 21. Annu Raj Singh 560.

**Skeet:** 1. Meng-Yuan Li (Tpe) 147; 2. Saudi Habib (Kuw) 146; 3. Tammar Alwatt (Brn) 145; 10. Parinaz Dhaliali 133; 11. Kartiki Singh Shaktawat 130.

**Trap:** 1. Rajeshwari Kumari 138; 2. Shreyasi Singh 138; 3. Manisha Keer 136.

## Sonam does the 'trick' over Sakshi

Retains National title, gets closer to Olympic dream

## NEUFC does the double over Mumbai City FC

Deshorn Brown's predatory instincts to the fore as he scores a brace



**Slamming home:** Deshorn Brown shoots past the Mumbai City defenders for his second goal. ■ SPORTZPICS/ISL

## ISL 2020-21

SPORTS BUREAU

Deshorn Brown's first-half brace powered North-East United FC (NEUFC) to a 2-1 win over Mumbai City (MCFC) and helped complete a double over the ISL leader in Bambolim on Saturday.

Substitute Adam le Fonds struck a late goal but Mumbai needed to avoid defeat to break FC Goa's 12-game unbeaten run but was undone by NEUFC's blitz in the opening ten minutes.

Since Khalid Jamil took ov-

er, NEUFC has now won three successive games after having gone without a win in seven to lift the side to fourth from seventh on the points table.

On-loan signing Brown displayed his striker's instinct to pounce on the early chances. In the sixth minute, right-back Nim Dorjee swung in an inviting cross to the back post, where an unmarked Brown smashed in a volley past Amrinder Singh.

Three minutes later, Brown doubled the lead when he fired into the roof of the net from close range after the ball ricocheted off

Luis Machado's thighs from a corner kick. Brown had the chance to complete his hat-trick but miscued his shot after being set up by a superb cross from the left by Provat Lakra.

In the second half, Le Fonds' inspired volley from a half-chance ended his five-game goal drought and provided Mumbai a lifeline but NEUFC hung on.

**The result:** Mumbai City FC 1 (Adam le Fonds 85) lost to North-East United FC (Deshorn Brown 6).

**Sunday's matches:** HFC vs C