



Gadkari's office says reports of Swedish firm gifting bus are false

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Plea seeks SC relief for Rohingya refugees detained in Jammu

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India and England face off in the first of the five-match T20I series

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NEARBY



BJP has lost the trust of farmers, says RLD

GAZIABAD

Rashtriya Lok Dal vice-president Jayant Chaudhary on Thursday said "those who could not see farmers sitting on the Delhi border, I could not see humanity in them". He was addressing a kisan panchayat in Bhopal village of Modinagar. "Had the BJP government been a well-wisher of farmers, they would not have imposed a penalty of ₹1 crore on farmers for stubble burning," he said.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 9

Uproar in Delhi Assembly over riots report

NEW DELHI

The first report of the Committee on Welfare of Minorities, instituted to review compensation paid to the victims of north-east Delhi riots, was presented amid a bitter debate between the ruling AAP and the Opposition BJP in the Assembly on Thursday. Cases such as those of a riot victim who lost a hand being granted ₹20,000 were brought to the panel.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

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Faith-full: Devotees waiting in a queue outside the Lingaraj Temple to offer prayers on the occasion of Maha Shivaratri festival in Bhubaneswar on Thursday. ■ BISWARANJAN ROUT

Ambani bomb scare probe reaches Delhi

Inmates in Tihar jail questioned

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

In the latest development in the Mukesh Ambani bomb scare case, the Delhi Police Special Cell has questioned several inmates in Tihar jail after they tracked the IP address of the device on which the Telegram channel 'jaishulhind' was found operating from the jail premises.

On February 25, an SUV containing 20 gelatin sticks was found outside Mr. Ambani's residence Antilia in Mumbai. The next day, a group that identified itself as 'Jaish-Ul-Hind' had claimed responsibility.

A senior police officer said the organisation was on their radar after it claimed responsibility for the blast outside

Covaxin off clinical trial mode

Indigenous vaccine cleared for emergency use, amid a surge in COVID-19 cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

India's indigenous COVID-19 vaccine Covaxin, from Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech, has been taken off the clinical trial mode and is now authorised for emergency use on a par with Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield, NITI Aayog's member (health) V.K. Paul said on Thursday.

While congratulating the scientific community on the achievement, Dr. Paul cautioned that the COVID pandemic is not over and that people should not lower their guard.

"The surge in COVID cases in Maharashtra is a serious matter. This surge has two lessons – don't take the virus for granted and if we have to remain COVID-free, then we need to follow COVID-appropriate behaviour and avail ourselves of the vaccines," Dr. Paul said at a Health Ministry press conference.

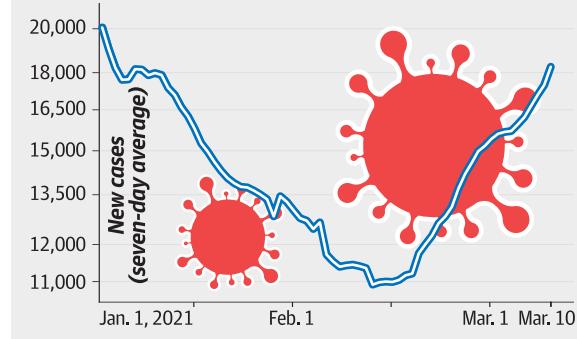
Delhi-NCR surge

He added that Delhi-NCR was also seeing a rise in COVID cases and that people need to be watchful.

Speaking about Maharashtra, Director-General of the Indian Council of Medical Research Balram Bhargava said the State had shown a worrisome trend and added that the mutant strain had not been found to be responsible for the surge in cases.

"This is related to reduced

Worrying rise | After declining to around 11,000 daily cases on average, COVID-19 infections are continuing to rise sharply since mid-February



testing, tracking, inappropriate COVID behaviour and large congregations," Dr. Bhargava said.

Eight of the top 10 districts in terms of active COVID-19 cases are in Maharashtra. Health secretary Rajesh Bhushan said Pune with 18,474 cases topped the list, followed by Nagpur (12,724), Thane (10,460), Mumbai (9,973), Bengaluru Urban (5,526), Ernakulam (5,430), Amravati (MH) (5,259), Jalgaon (5,029), Nashik (4,525) and Aurangabad (4,354).

Price lowered

Mr. Bhushan said the government "has also re-negotiated the price of the COVID-19 vaccine being bought from the Serum Institute of India (SII). The price of Covishield, developed by AstraZeneca and the Oxford University and manufactured by SII ...

ONE YEAR ON ▶ PAGE 10

60% of new cases from Maharashtra

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Maharashtra reported the highest new COVID-19 cases at 13,659 (almost 60% of the daily new cases) with the country reporting 22,854 new cases in the last 24 hours, a release issued by the Health Ministry said on Thursday. Maharashtra is followed by Kerala with 2,475 cases, while Punjab reported 1,393 new cases.

India has reported 126 deaths in the last 24 hours. Six States account for 82.54% of these deaths. Maharashtra again saw the maximum casualties at 54, followed by Punjab with 17 and Kerala with 14.

"Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu continue to report a high number of new cases. They account for 85.91% of the new cases reported in the past 24 hours," added the release.

The Ministry did not comment on Denmark, Norway and Iceland temporarily suspending the use of AstraZeneca's vaccine over concerns of patients developing post-jab blood clots.

Addressing a press conference, senior leaders of the party, including Partha Chatterjee, Saugata Roy and Subrata Bakshi, alleged that Ms. Banerjee, the only woman Chief Minister in the country, was "purposely targeted".

The Trinamool Congress leaders said the attack had occurred days after the West Bengal DGP was transferred and at a time the model

Parties spar over Mamata's injury

Opposition calls it political drama

Tomorrow from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.
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PARtha CHATTERJEE, TRINAMOOL CONGRESS LEADER

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The people of the State need to know what happened

SAMIK BHATTACHARYA, BJP SPOKESPERSON

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

A day after West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was rushed to a hospital in Kolkata after suffering injuries during her campaign in Nandigram, the Trinamool Congress leadership reiterated allegations that the party chief was targeted as part of a conspiracy.

A Trinamool parliamentary delegation of six MPs from both Houses will meet Election Commission officials in Delhi on Friday over the incident.

However, Opposition parties, including the BJP, the CPI(M)-led Left Front and the Congress, dismissed the party's allegation as baseless and termed the incident a political "drama" to gain sympathy votes.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8
MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGE 9

PM to attend first Quad Summit today

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Access to COVID-19 vaccines, cooperation on technology, and climate change are on the top of the agenda as Prime Minister Narendra Modi will join U.S. President Joseph Biden, Australian PM Scott Morrison and Japanese PM Yoshihide Suga for a virtual summit of the Quadrilateral Framework (Quad) on Friday – the first time leaders of the Indo-Pacific grouping are meeting.

The meeting is also one of Mr. Biden's first multilateral engagements, which the White House said denoted the importance of the U.S.'s cooperation with "allies and partners in the Indo Pacific".

The Quad meeting, that China has referred to as an "Indo-Pacific NATO", will be watched most closely for signals on how the grouping will deal with the challenge from Beijing's recent moves in the Pacific as well as at the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh.

Also of interest is whether the four leaders will issue a joint statement at the end of the meeting, which would be another first, as all Quad engagements thus far have come out with four separate readouts indicating differences in their positions.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Kanpur rape: three suspended for negligence

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

Three police personnel were suspended in Kanpur on Thursday after a preliminary inquiry found them culpable of negligence in the matter of the death "in an accident"

of the father of a minor girl, who was allegedly gang-raped on March 8.

DIG Kanpur Preetinder Singh said the *halka prabhar* of the Sajeti police station, the Ghatampur outpost in charge and a beat constable

were suspended for "negligence". The latter two face action for negligence in the accident in which the father died. A detailed probe would be carried out by the SP (Rural) Kanpur.

The police also arrested

one more accused, Dipu Yadav, the son of a police officer posted in Kannauj. Golu Yadav, one of the two who allegedly raped the minor, has already been arrested.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

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Inmates in Tihar jail questioned

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

In the latest development in the Mukesh Ambani bomb scare case, the Delhi Police Special Cell has questioned several inmates in Tihar jail after they tracked the IP address of the device on which the Telegram channel 'jaishulhind' was found operating from the jail premises.

On February 25, an SUV containing 20 gelatin sticks was found outside Mr. Ambani's residence Antilia in Mumbai. The next day, a group that identified itself as 'Jaish-Ul-Hind' had claimed responsibility.

A senior police officer said the organisation was on their radar after it claimed responsibility for the blast outside



On alert: Police personnel stand guard outside Mukesh Ambani's residence, Antilia, in Mumbai. ■ FILE PHOTO

port, it was found that the group was operating through Tor Proxy (dark web). Upon further examination of the phone, it was found that virtual number apps along with other anonymous communication apps were being used by the target.

The investigation report further reads that it appeared that the person was using a SIM card to run Internet on the device to operate the Telegram channel @jaishulhind.

After resolving the IP address, it was found that the cell phone number was being used. After tracking the location of the number, it was found that the cell phone may have been used near or inside the Tihar jail. The jail authorities have been instructed to be vigilant and ensure no mobile phone is used on jail premises.

As per the investigation report groups. It appears that it has been created for extortion in the name of terror organisation," said the officer.

After the group claimed planting bombs outside Mr. Ambani's house, it came under the radar of the Mumbai police and their investigation also led them to Tihar.

As per the investigation re-

Woman, boyfriend held for trying to kill husband

Accused made it look like a road rage

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 41-year-old woman and her boyfriend have been arrested for allegedly hatching a conspiracy to kill her husband and make it look like an outcome of a road rage in Defence Colony area, police said on Thursday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Atul Thakur said that the accused have been identified as Babita and Rohan (23) who had allegedly planned to kill Bheem Raj.

The police received a call around 9 a.m. on Wednesday and were told that a bike rider shot at a man, who was driving a taxi in Andrews Ganj, and fled. The driver sustained injury on his neck and is undergoing treatment.

During probe, the police claimed to have examined over 100 CCTV camera footage, after which they zeroed in on the registration number and an address to Kabir Nagar. They subsequently reached the bike owner, who stated that he had sold it to one Lakhman, who had further sold it to Manish alias Rohan.

Mr. Thakur said the investi-

C The accused had also attempted to murder the victim on an earlier occasion in a park, but was unsuccessful. The conspiracy was hatched around 15 days ago at the victim's house

ATUL THAKUR
Deputy Commissioner of Police (South)

tigators then reached Rohan and arrested him followed by the arrest of Babita.

During interrogation, the police said, Rohan revealed that he and Babita had hatched a conspiracy to kill Bheem Raj because of their relationship. He had also bought a semi-automatic pistol and cartridges from a friend in Burari, the police said, adding that Babita had helped him with a sum of ₹30,000.

"The accused had also attempted to murder the victim on an earlier occasion in a park, but was unsuccessful. The conspiracy was hatched around 15 days ago at the victim's house," Mr. Thakur said.

Alleging financial irregularities by the college administration, governing body member Anil Chaudhury said: "While the principal is claiming that the Delhi government has not given money for payment of salaries, when we looked into the matter, it was very clear that the government has regularly been paying all its dues."

However, teachers, who had assembled at the press conference, claimed that facts were being distorted as the available fund was part of the students' fund which cannot be used to pay salaries.

DDU principal Hem Chand Jain also said that the available fund was part of the Student Society Fund.

"This is students' money collected under different

Governing body alleges financial irregularities by DDU administration

It says ₹22 crore available with college; teachers claim amount part of students' fund

SHIJINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI

Delhi government representatives in the governing body of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya (DDU) college on Thursday alleged that the college administration was refusing to disburse salaries to staffers despite the availability of a fund of ₹22 crore.



DUTA has gone on strike against non-payment of salaries to teaching and non-teaching staffers. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

heads. So how can I use it for paying salaries? This is against resolutions of the Executive Council passed on December 8 last year. If the college is collecting funds from students, it has to be used for students. So, it cannot be used for any other purpose.

The same rule is applicable for all colleges across the country as per norms laid down by the University Grants Commission (UGC). So how can DDU overrule this decision?" asked Mr. Jain.

At the press conference, the governing body members also alleged that the college had failed to submit the Utilisation Certificate (UC) for the

third quarter, which was required for the release of the fourth quarter grants.

Rubbishes allegations

However, Mr. Jain dismissed the allegations and said, "The UC was submitted a month ago and the same was shown to the accounts officer of the Delhi government who took cognisance of the same and said that it was sufficient for releasing the grant."

The Delhi government in a statement said that according to rules, it could pay colleges on the basis of "deficit funding", which was the total expenditure of the college, excluding the funds or revenue

of the college. "If a college has money in its account then the funding norms clearly state that the colleges have to first use that money and then any further payment can be made. The college has no right to keep it in surplus. The college cannot accumulate surplus funds, as per the financial norms of the Delhi government," it stated.

The government also said

that the 12 colleges had not submitted the UCs of previous instalments, which had delayed the release of the final instalment. It added that an investigation would be conducted into the alleged financial irregularities.

Meanwhile, the Delhi University Teachers' Association has gone on a strike to protest against the non-payment of salaries.

On Wednesday, DUTA had again written to Chief Minister demanding the release of grants for payment of salaries and dues to the teaching and non-teaching staffers.

The teachers' body has lined up a series of protests and marches over the coming week.

Labourer dies, 8 hurt during railway work

Victims fell from a height of 15-20 feet

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 20-year-old labourer died and eight others sustained injuries after they fell from a height while repairing the railway lines in east Delhi's Shakarpur on Wednesday night.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (East) Deepak Yadav said that the deceased has been identified as Shehzad, a resident of Alwar.



Police officers inspecting the accident spot in Delhi on Thursday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

The injured have been identified as Sohib (20), Kabilibhawan (22), Sudhir (38), Raghbir (22), Sonu (20), Golu (20), Anis Khan (20) and Imran (21).

The police said that a case under Section 287 (negligent conduct with respect to machinery), 337 (causing hurt by act endangering life or personal safety), 304A (causing death by negligence) of the Indian Penal Code has been registered against the contractor and further investigation is under way.

A labourer, who did not wish to be identified, said that the workers were not provided safety gear.

Plea to include mental illness in list of comorbidities

Petition seeks to frame policy to provide vaccine to homeless



STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A petition has been filed before the Delhi High Court to include severe mental illness in the list of specified comorbidities to enable getting priority COVID-19 vaccination. The plea also sought direction to frame a policy to provide COVID-19 vaccination to homeless, mentally ill per-

sons wandering on the streets.

Currently, the government has prioritised healthcare workers, front-line workers (personnel in State and Central police department, armed forces, home guard and civil defence organisa-

tion, including disaster management volunteers, municipal workers, poll officers in election-bound States), persons aged 60 and above and those aged between 45 and 59 with identified 20 comorbidities for COVID-19 vaccination.

One major group overlooked in the list of comorbidities is persons with severe mental illness, the petition said. It clarified that the 20 points of list of specified comorbidities include persons with intellectual disabilities and ones with disabilities having high support needs.

"As per The Schedule of

Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, intellectual disability and mental illness are two different things," the petition argued. It said the Schedule of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 term "intellectual disability" as a condition characterised by significant limitation both in intellectual functioning (reasoning, learning, problem solving) and in adaptive behaviour, which covers a range of every day, social and practical skills, including "specified learning disabilities" and "autism spectrum disorder".

Thousands of mentally ill persons who either don't have a valid certificate... or are homeless [not having any kind of valid ID proof with them] have been prohibited by Respondents [authorities] to participate in the vaccination drive on priority basis," the plea, which is likely to be heard on Friday, said.

Man held for supplying arms and ammunition

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 30-year-old man was arrested for allegedly supplying arms and ammunition in Delhi-NCR, the police said on Thursday.

The accused has been identified as Sanjay Kumar, a resident of Aligarh district in Uttar Pradesh, they said.

According to the police, Kumar used to procure

arms and ammunition from Madhya Pradesh for supplying in Delhi-NCR and U.P.

"On Tuesday, the police got a tip-off that Kumar would come near Inderprastha Park gate number 2 on Outer Ring Road, following which a trap was laid and the accused was apprehended around 10 p.m.," DCP (Special Cell) Pramod Singh Kushwah said.

The show must go on



Farmers continuing their protest against three farm laws, at the Singhu border on Thursday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Petition in HC seeks expansion of ambit of electric vehicles scheme

Allocate unutilised funds from FAME India Phase-II Scheme'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A petition filed before the Delhi High Court has sought direction to expand the ambit of the FAME (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles) India Phase-II scheme to the hydrogen energy infrastructure.

The petition filed by advocate Ashwini Kumar sought direction to the government to allocate a part of the unutilised funds from the FAME India Phase-II Scheme for promoting and incentivising demand for hydrogen fuel cell electric

vehicles and construction and operation of hydrogen refuelling stations.

The plea said FAME scheme has not been able to adequately utilise its budget towards adoption of electric vehicles. It said that out of a total budget of ₹700 crore for setting up charging infrastructure, only ₹20 crore have been disbursed during the period from 2019 to February 10, 2021.

"In the fight to reduce the dependence of India's transport sector on imported oil and gas, it is paramount that the government supports and incentivises alter-

nate fuel technologies, such as hydrogen-powered fuel cell electric vehicles, which can be effectively used in both long-distance heavy transport and for passenger vehicles," the plea said.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced a National Hydrogen Energy Mission [NHEM] during his speech in December 2020 and the Finance Minister during her budget speech in February 2021 also mentioned the NHEM. However, till date, no details of the mission have been made publicly available," it added.

Man killed in celebratory firing at brother's birthday party in Dwarka

None arrested; nine empty cartridges recovered from spot

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 36-year-old man was killed in an alleged case of accidental firing during the celebration of his brother's birthday in Dwarka's Najafgarh in the early hours of Thursday, the police said.

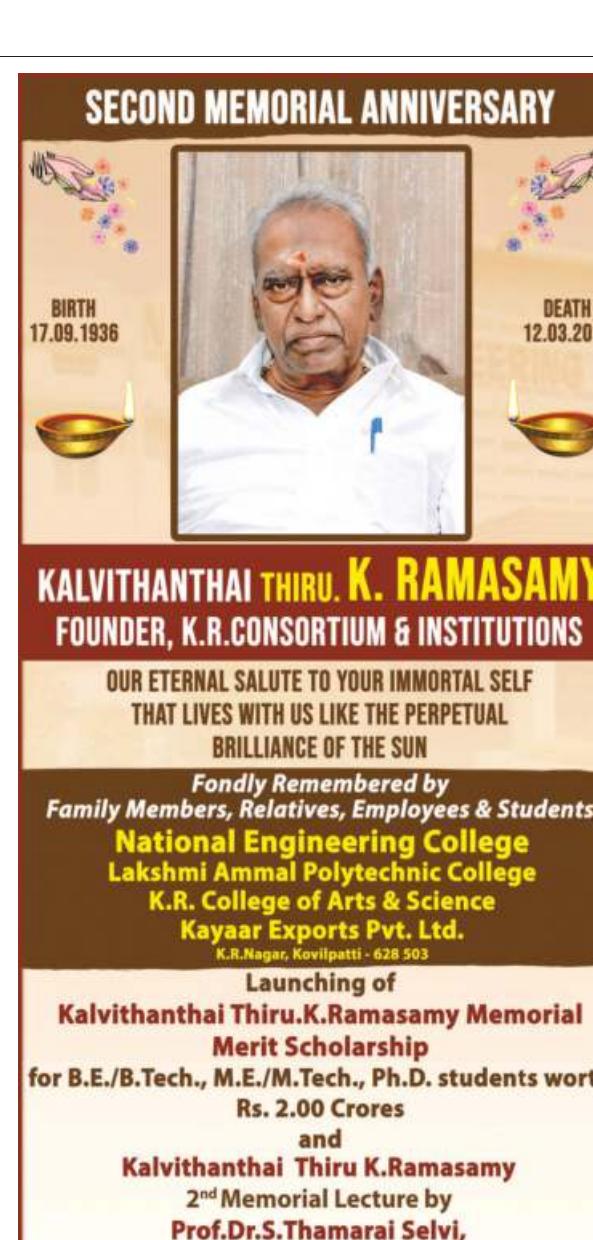
No arrest has been made in the case so far. The police said that it appears to be a case of celebratory firing.

They said that the victim has been identified as Anuj Sharma, a resident of Uttam

Nagar, and the accused has been identified as his friend, Naveen.

The police said that they received a call at 12.58 a.m. from a private hospital and were informed that a man with a bullet injury was brought to the hospital dead," a senior police officer said, adding that nine empty

cartridges have been recovered from the spot. "A case has been registered and teams are looking for the accused," the officer added.



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Brief Tender Notice

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3. Date of Opening of bid : Dated 30.03.2021 @ 11.00
At office of Superintending Engineer (Elecct.), Pune Regional Circle, P.W.D. Date Bunglow, Government Milk Scheme Premises, Kirkee Pune - 411003

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RISE 06:10 SET 17:32
SATURDAY, MAR. 13
RISE 06:33 SET 18:29
RISE 06:43 SET 18:28
SUNDAY, MAR. 14
RISE 06:21 SET 18:29
RISE 07:15 SET 19:22

Delhi Weather	max min
Delhi City	35 17
Safdarjung	35 17
Palam	34 19

Delhi Pilm Today
34°C One or two spell of rain and thunderstorm with gusty winds likely at some places. Hail storm may be a chance in pockets.

Delhi Pilm Tomorrow
33°C A cool misty/hazy morning and warm day likely. Light winds and partly cloudy sky expected.

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IN BRIEF**Raghav Chadha tests COVID-19 positive**

NEW DELHI
A total of 29,441 beneficiaries took the COVID-19 vaccination in the city on Thursday, said a Delhi government spokesperson. Also, 409 new cases were reported, the highest single-day rise in nearly two months, while the positivity rate rose to 0.59%. Meanwhile, AAP MLA Raghav Chadha said that he has tested positive for COVID-19.

BJP protests against 'humiliation' of women

NEW DELHI
The Delhi BJP on Thursday protested against the alleged humiliation of women in Haryana by the Congress. A demonstration was held at the Congress headquarters here by Delhi BJP leaders – Ashok Goel Devraha and Yogita Singh – in objection to former Haryana CM Bhupinder Singh Hooda sitting on a tractor being pulled by women legislators on Women's Day.

City records hottest day so far this year

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI
The national capital recorded a maximum temperature of 35.2°C Celsius on Thursday, six notches above normal and the highest so far this year, the India Meteorological Department said.

The minimum temperature settled at 17.2°C Celsius, three notches above normal. Light rain, hail and gusty winds are likely towards the night, the IMD said. The mercury is expected to settle around 35°C Celsius for the next three to four days, it said.

Delhi's air quality was recorded in the 'poor' category. The 24-hour average air quality index was 242, according to the Central Pollution Control Board.

Uproar in Assembly over remarks on riots

Amanatullah Khan accuses BJP of orchestrating violence; Bidhuri calls allegations completely baseless

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI



The first report on compensation to riot victims was presented in the Delhi Assembly on Thursday. ■ FILE PHOTO

The first report of the Committee on Welfare of Minorities, instituted to review compensation paid to the victims of north-east Delhi riots, was presented amid a bitter debate between the ruling AAP and Opposition BJP in the Delhi Assembly here on Thursday.

Cases such as those of a riot victim who lost a hand and two fingers of the other being granted ₹20,000 – the amount sanctioned for a minor injury – and that of a shopkeeper who lost sight in one eye after being assaulted by a mob being wrongly categorised as a case of major injury instead of permanent incapacity were brought to the committee.

These were among 218 cases which sought reassessment, the committee observed in its report, which was hampered by the COVID-19 lockdown. As a result, in Mustafabad, local legislator Haji Yunus had to make physical visits for the reas-

essment of each case, the report stated.

Form new teams

The panel has recommended creation of new teams comprising officials from the Divisional Commissioner office, the Delhi Waqf Board and the MLAs of affected constituencies to conduct physical surveys of such cases.

It has also recommended that the process of filing compensation forms should be resumed for those who could not file claims last

year.

The Delhi government had so far distributed ₹27.19 crore as compensation to riot victims under various categories, said AAP Okhla MLA and chairperson of the committee Amanatullah Khan. The riots in February 2020, Mr. Khan alleged, were orchestrated by the "Opposition BJP and its members, including Ragini Tiwari, Kapil Mishra, Anurag Thakur and Parvesh Verma."

The reference to the BJP, which triggered pandemonium in the House was later ex-

punged at the insistence of Leader of the Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri. "The allegations levelled against the party and its leaders are completely baseless," Mr. Bidhuri said.

"I have videos as proof. No action has been taken against them [political leaders] so far," Mr. Khan alleged. He also questioned the Delhi police's investigation, accusing the force of being excessive in dealing with the alleged perpetrators of violence.

Blame police

"As many as 750 FIRs were registered, but the Delhi police refused to share them with us. Their reluctance to share information seriously hampered the functioning of the committee. We came across five FIRs where the content was the same and only the names of the accused were different," Mr. Khan stated.

"On whose directions did the police book people sitting on a protest against the

CAA & NRC under UAPA and didn't invoke the same law against perpetrators of violence and political leaders who instigated the riots?" he asked.

Delay due to lockdown

The pendency of the applications, the committee stated, was mainly due to imposition of the lockdown soon after the riots and incomplete verification of the damages as the additional Sub-Divisional Magistrates (SDM) deployed in the district were relieved back to their original place of posting.

"When the whole world was applauding the role of India, its scientists and leadership not only in its fight against COVID-19 but also for developing vaccines, the Delhi government was playing petty politics by not allowing the BJP-sponsored resolution for congratulating scientists and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for successfully leading India in its battle against the virus," Mr. Bidhuri said.

Govt. notifies land use change for BJP office

With DDA's nod, project can now begin

DAMINI NATH
JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI

The Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry on Wednesday notified the change in land use for a plot on Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg for the proposed office of the Delhi BJP unit, paving the way for the project to start.

When asked for comment on the possible date of its construction, a senior Delhi BJP leader said it is likely to come into use by 2021-end.

While the Centre had allotted the land to the Delhi BJP for its office earlier, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) had on November 3, 2015, started the process for changing the land use of the 809 square metres plot from "residential nursery school" to "public and semi-public facilities" in the Master Plan of Delhi-2021.

According to party sources, while the built-up area of the new office would be slightly more than its cur-

rent office on Pandit Pant Marg, the new one would, however, be slightly smaller in overall area compared to its current State headquarters.

The DDA had called for suggestions and objections for a period of 30 days and one such submission was received, according to the Ministry's notification on Wednesday.

"Whereas, one objection/suggestion received with regard to the proposed modification have been considered by the Board of Enquiry and Hearing, set up by the Delhi Development Authority and also approved at the meeting of the Delhi Development Authority. Whereas, the Central government have after carefully considering all aspects of the matter, decided to modify the Master Plan for Delhi-2021/ Zonal Development Plan of Zone-D. 4. [sic]," the notification read.

The DDA had approved the change on February 10.

AAP, BJP spar over free pilgrimage to Ayodhya

BJP's opposition to Kejriwal govt's scheme is beyond comprehension: Bharadwaj

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI
The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Thursday attacked the BJP and the Congress for allegedly opposing the Delhi government's decision for free pilgrimage to Ram Temple in Ayodhya once it's completed.



Saurabh Bharadwaj

Party upset
"BJP's opposition to the Kejriwal government's announcement of free travel to Ram Janmabhoomi for the senior citizens of Delhi is beyond comprehension. We used to think that at least some people in the BJP will praise the pilgrimage scheme but the party has become upset with this announcement," said AAP chief spokesperson

Saurabh Bharadwaj.

He said that the Congress spokesperson had described the pilgrimage scheme as "unrealistic dreams", while many people from his area and Assembly constituency have participated in pilgrim-

age.
"Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced the Delhi government's decision to send elderly citizens of Delhi for a pilgrimage to Ayodhya, free of cost. I used to believe that the BJP had some people who are genuine devotees of Lord Rama and would, by that logic, welcome the step proposed by the CM today. I was however proven wrong," Mr. Bharadwaj said.

"The BJP has opposed this move. My question is to Delhi BJP chief Adesh Gupta: why the opposition? Have you not taken your parents on pilgrimage? If not, please tell us or tell Arvind Kejriwal. The government of Del-

hi will take them. They are like our parents," he added.

Oppn. criticism

Reacting to it, Delhi BJP spokesperson Harish Khurana asked how many pilgrimages or places of religious significance, the Delhi government was able to deliver to citizens since the scheme was launched.

"Bharadwaj doesn't even know the names of the places that Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta has taken his own parents for pilgrimage.

Since the Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh elections are round the corner, these people have suddenly remembered Lord Ram," Mr. Khurana said.

Jail staffers vaccinated, but 650 inmates await their shot

Inoculation process has been delayed despite requests to govt.

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

Even as the vaccination of around 2,000 jail staffers is to be completed, authorities are trying to figure out how to get the 650 inmates of Delhi Prisons, comprising Tihar, Rohini and Mandoli jails, vaccinated.

A senior Tihar jail official said there are around 350 inmates above 60 years of age and around 300 above 45 years with comorbidities. They had sent the list of inmates to the Delhi government for further process. But a decision is pending.

"We have shared the list of inmates to be vaccinated but it has been delayed in the absence of registration process. We are exploring the process to get them registered as the inmates can't be taken out for vaccination and can't access mobile phone to register themselves on the vaccination portal. We held a meeting with senior officers and it will be done at the earliest," said the official.

Director General (Prisons) Sandeep Goel said that at present there is only a single COVID-19 case among the inmates. They are strictly following social distancing and other guidelines. "All the jail staffers and security personnel are getting vaccinated and the target has been almost achieved," said Mr. Goel. After the completion of process formalities, the vaccination of inmates will begin, he added.

"A total of 1,184 prisoners were given emergency parole during the pandemic. It ended on March 6. As per the instructions, all of them have to report back. Except 200 inmates, rests of them have returned. They are contacting them and asking them to report back at the earliest," said the Mr. Goel.

Virus tally
A total of 293 prisons staffers have contracted the infection till date, and all of them have recovered. Also, 120 inmates have tested positive for the virus so far and all have recovered except the two who died and one who is under treatment.

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NEW DELHI

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RAIPUR (CHHATTISGARH)
on Sunday, the 21st March 2021
at Pandit Dindayal Upadhyay Auditorium, Raipur (Chhattisgarh)

RAI SONPAT (HARYANA)
on Saturday, the 24th April 2021
at Motilal Nehru School of Sports, Rai, Sonpat (Haryana)

Activities to celebrate 75th I-Day to begin today

Govt. to organise year-long programmes

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI
The Delhi government will begin year-long activities to celebrate 75 years of Independence with an event at Central Park in Connaught Place here on Friday.

Though all Delhites are invited, entry to the event will be limited to maintain COVID-19 guidelines, the Delhi government said.

"Heartiest congratulations to all on the 75th anniversary of India's Independence. Let's create an India which is inspired by the dreams of our freedom fighters and martyrs, and is inspired by the principles of Ram Rajya

Let's create an India which is inspired by the dreams of our freedom fighters and martyrs, and is inspired by the principles of Ram Rajya

event marking year-long activities that will continue as part of celebrations. Streets will come alive with performances hosted in collaboration with the Art and Culture Department, the government said.

The year will witness multiple events, highlighting the city's role in the freedom movement and its journey in the last 75 years.

L-G reviews 'Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav' plans

Form committee to oversee events'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI
Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal on Thursday reviewed the preparedness of programmes and events to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Independence as 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' here.

Mr. Baijal advised the Chief Secretary to expediently constitute the State-level committee to plan and oversee the smooth implementation of events.

According to Raj Niwas, the L-G stressed on highlighting the contributions of unsung heroes, associated with Delhi, in the freedom movement and to spread awareness about the various locations in the city associated with the

movement.

He advised participation of eminent citizens from all walks of life, identification of themes and locations and preparation of calendar of events for the coming 75 weeks and instructed to ensure strict compliance of COVID-19 norms while organising the events.

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Pollution level improves in Rourkela, action plan revised

STAFF REPORTER
BHUJANESWAR

Residents of industrial town of Rourkela, where activities were advised to be restricted on account of deterioration

in air quality on Wednesday, heaved a sigh of relief following minor improvement in Air Quality Index (AQI) on Thursday.

The Odisha State Pollu-

tion Control Board (OSPCB) had observed the AQI going above 500 points due to high concentration of particulate matter (PM10) on March 8.

"The AQI of March 10 was 342, which means air quality has improved. We have revised the emergency action plan. Now, we have told civil administration that there is

no need to shut down educational institutes and stop construction and railway loading activities," said P. K. Mohapatra, regional officer of OSPCB.

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH

नैनं छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः।

न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः॥

Srimad Bhagavad Gita Chapter 2, Text 23



Shri K. Sundaramurthy Iyer
(9th October 1935 – 4th March 2021)

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S.Shiv Kumar & S.Vijaya (Son & Daughter-in-Law)

S.Hemawati & A.Santhana Krishnan (Daughter & Son-in-Law)

Shivani, Aaditya, Harishankar (Krishna)

& Suprada (Grandchildren)

All relatives and Friends

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PUBLIC NOTICE

PUBLIC NOTICE

My client Mr. Lalit Kumar & Ms. Raji Ram are availing housing loan from LICHLI, Kaushambi Ghaziabad to Purchase the Freehold Residential House No. 11/51-E area 100 sq. mtr. situated at Sector-3 in T.H.A. Rajender Nagar in Distt. Ghaziabad, from Ms. Santosh Kumar who is the owner of said property. On 04.07.2006 as per document no. 435 in her favour, Ms. Santosh Kumar has lost and misplaced the original Sale Deed regd. on 04.07.2005 as per Document No. 6447 and regarding which a police complaint has also been filed on 04.07.2006. If anybody finds any misplaced Original document, the same may be returned to the LIC Housing Finance Ltd., Kaushambi Ghaziabad, if anybody misses the same, the same shall be at his/her own risk. If anybody has any claim, right, interest in the said flat shall file a suit within 15 days of the date of undersigned on Telephone No. 0120-4164364, 9891119162 & 9891119161 as applicant is mortgaging the above property to LIC Housing Finance Ltd.

S.C. Varshney (LICHLI Panel Advocate) R-14/17, Raj Nagar, Ghaziabad-201002

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REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL THROUGH E-TENDER (RFP) Notice No. RLDA/RFP/CD-09/CRD-01 Dated 26.02.2021 (26.02.2021)

GRANT OF LEASE FOR 32011 SON (APPROX.) RAILWAY LAND FOR 99 YEARS FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT WITH CONSTRUCTION OF RAILWAY TRANSIT SUITES AT RAMGARH TAHL COLONY & RAILWAY QUARTERS AT BAULIYA COLONY, GORAKHPUR

Land Approx. Area of FAR Bid Reserve Site (To be leased) Security Price

Ramgarh Tal Railway Colony Gorakhpur 32011 Son 1.50 R. 1.00 Crore Rs. 75.10 Crore

ONLINE PRE-BID MEETING ON WEBEX : 16th March 2021 At 11:00 HRS

(Online) Pre-bid meeting details to be obtained from General Manager/Project-3)

Last Date of Submission of E-bid Online: 04.05.2021 UPTO 15.00 HRS

For further details of the project, please visit our website www.rlda.indianrailways.gov.in or on e-procurement Portal www.tenderwizard.com/RLDA Under the heading e-tender

For any clarifications, please contact:-

Dy. General Manager/Project-3 : Chief Project Manager/Lucknow : Manager/Lucknow : Consultant - Mr. Alok Sinha

M: 98189 77221 M: 97948 83300 M: 94503 80457 M: 98182 0862

mgrproject3@rlda.nic.in cpmr@rlda.nic.in mngrdalko@gmail.com alok.sinha@jfrank.com

Note: Any Corrigendum or Addendum shall be published only on RLDA's Website DGM/Tender. (H) 7703918078

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED



Nazbi

General Public is hereby informed that one girl Namely: Nazbi, D/o Shahid Hussain, R/o: H.No. K-329, Sunder Nagri, Delhi has been missing/ kidnapped since 01.02.2021 from her house from the area of P.S. Nand Nagri, Delhi In this regard a case vide FIR No. 11/32/1 Us/ 365 IPC dated 11.02.2021 has been registered at P.S. Nand Nagri, Delhi. The description of the missing/ kidnapped girl is as under: Age: About 18 years, Face: Round, Complexion: Wheatish, Built: Normal, Wearing: Yellow colour suit-salwar, black colour jarsi and slipper in feet. Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the girl but no clue has come to light so far. Any person having any information or clue about this girl kindly inform to the following.

Website: <http://cbi.nic.in>

E-mail Id - cic@cbi.gov.in

Ph: 011-24368638, 24368641

Fax No. 011-24368639 P.O. Nand Nagri, Delhi Ph.: 011-22137761, 8750870733

SEARCH FOR MISSING

Rama

General Public is hereby informed that one female namely Rama Wo Sita Ram R/o N-62/74 Jhuggi Patrachar Timarpur, Delhi has been missing from the area of PS Timarpur, Delhi since 18.01.2021. In this regard a DD No. 42A, Dated 19.01.2021 has been registered at PS, Timarpur, Delhi.

The description of missing female is as under:

Name : Rama, Husband's Name : Sita Ram, Age : 19 years, Height : 5'1", Face : Round, Complexion : Wheatish, Built : Thin, Wearing: White colour frok Suit & White Colour Pajami & Jooti in feet.

If anyone having any clue/information, kindly inform the undersigned.

Website : <http://cbi.nic.in>

e-mail : cic@cbi.gov.in

Ph: 011-23014046 (Direct)

2301529 & 2301521 Extn.-210

Fax: 011-2301134

DP/991/N/2021

SHO

P.S., Timarpur, Delhi

Ph. : 011-23812734, 8750870129

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR

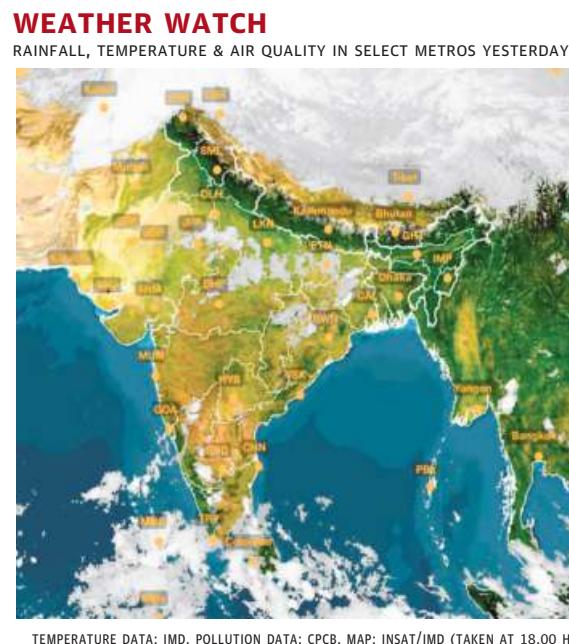
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER QUALITY CONTROL & PROCUREMENT

DIVISION, HMT, SRINAGAR

Dates- Corrigendum-I

Subject: - Extension of dates for SUPPLY OF CRM (CERTIFIED REFERENCE MATERIAL) FOR NABL ACCREDITATION OF TEN DISTRICT LEVEL WATER TESTING LABORATORIES OF KASHMIR PHE JAL SHAKTI DEPARTMENT

Ref: 1. This office NIT No: PHE/QC&PD/43/2020-21/e-Tender Dated: 02-03-



Forecast for Friday: Thunderstorm with lightning/hail/gusty winds likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit-Baltistan, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha, Kerala and Mahe

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...-32.3...	22.2	...	Kozhikode	18.3...	32.4...	23.4
Ahmedabad	...-37.2...	18.7	...	Kurnool	...-38.1...	22.3	...
Aizawl	...-26.7...	11.7	...	Lucknow	...-35.0...	19.2	...
Allahabad	...-36.3...	19.0	...	Madurai	...-35.4...	23.5	...
Bengaluru	...-33.4...	20.3	...	Mangaluru	...-32.9...	22.4	...
Bhopal	...-35.3...	18.4	...	Mumbai	...-31.7...	22.4	...
Bhubaneswar	...-35.8...	24.0	...	Mysuru	...-33.8...	20.0	...
Chandigarh	...-33.0...	15.7	...	New Delhi	...-35.2...	17.2	...
Chennai	...-34.0...	24.0	...	Patna	...-34.2...	20.6	...
Coimbatore	...-34.6...	23.2	...	Pond Blair	...-31.4...	23.6	...
Dehradun	...-32.6...	14.8	...	Puducherry	...-33.4...	23.6	...
Gangtok	14.8...	18.0...	9.5	Pune	...-37.0...	18.5	...
Goa	...-33.1...	24.6	...	Raipur	...-35.5...	22.4	...
Guwahati	24.2...	30.0...	17.0	Ranchi	...-35.6...	19.2	...
Hubballi	...-34.0...	20.0	...	Shillong	4.8...	21.6...	11.0
Hyderabad	...-36.4...	19.8	...	Shimla	...-20.8...	10.0	...
Imphal	1...	30.0...	10.8	Srinagar	15.7...	8.6...	6.8
Jaipur	...-34.2...	19.6	...	Thiruvananthapuram	17.8...	34.0...	24.0
Kochi	0.2...	32.2...	24.4	Tiruchi	31.2...	35.2...	23.2
Kohima	...-23.2...	10.2	...	Vijayawada	...-35.4...	23.6	...
Kolkata	...-32.8...	24.6	...	Visakhapatnam	...-30.6...	25.2	...

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE
Ahmedabad	53	105	47	167	201	■■■■■
Bengaluru	.6	.30	.20	.46	.55	■■■■■
Chennai	17	.17	.45	.28	.38	■■■■■
Delhi	24	.83	.30	.28	.328	■■■■■
Hyderabad	.5	.91	.35	.166	.115	■■■■■
Kolkata	12	.20	.32	.94	.98	■■■■■
Lucknow	15	.37	.44	.321	.285	■■■■■
Mumbai	.58	.78	.9	.110	.150	■■■■■
Pune	..-101	.57	.127	.104	.23	■■■■■
Visakhapatnam	10	.45	.49	.33	.83	■■■■■

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

SO₂: 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_x: 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_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m. p.m. Vatva, Gujarat recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 318 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh recorded a healthy AQI score of 23

Protests erupt across Maharashtra as govt. postpones MPSC exam

Fresh dates will be announced soon: CM

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

The Maharashtra government's decision to postpone the Maharashtra Public Service Commission (MPSC) exams in the wake of rising COVID-19 cases sparked protests across the State on Thursday, with aspirants taking to the streets in Pune, Aurangabad and other cities even as Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said that fresh dates would be announced on Friday.

"This postponement is not for two or three months, but merely for a few days. I have directed MPSC officials to end this confusion and announce the new exam date on Friday. The exams will be held within eight days of the new schedule," said Mr. Thackeray.

During these protests, agitators unfortunately threw social distancing and pandemic norms to the winds.

In damage control mode, the Chief Minister said that the alarming case surge had compelled a majority of the administrative staff to be deployed in combating the renewed pandemic wave.

"Before Deepavali last year, when we had announced the MPSC exam dates [to be held on March 14], I had promised that it would not be postponed again... While I completely sympathise with the feelings of students, we have been forced to push it because of the COVID-19 situation and the fact that a lot of government officials who were to be deployed in various capacities during the conduct of the exams, be it collecting papers or supervision, are engaged in combating the

pandemic," he said. Mr. Thackeray stressed that the soaring cases had made it imperative to get these officials tested before they were deployed for exam duties.

"We cannot play with the health of the students. So, it is vital to ensure whether or not these officials are negative. Students should not be in any doubt that whether officials in the room, who are handing out the question papers, are COVID-19 positive or not," the Chief Minister said. The case spike had also posed the problem of exam centres being in containment zones, said Mr. Thackeray.

"I have no intention of playing either with the emotions of students nor with their health. The dates will be announced tomorrow. So, I appeal to you all to drop this worry. There will be no problem regarding the age limit of students. I apologise for this inconvenience [of postponement]," Mr. Thackeray said.

In a thinly veiled rebuke to the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), he urged students not let others fire a political gun over their shoulders.

The State government's decision provoked sharp criticism not only from the Opposition BJP, but also from rulling Mahavikas Aghadi (MVA) leaders, notably among the Congress.

Senior Congressman Prithviraj Chavan termed the move to postpone the exams as being "grossly unfair" on the students, while Maharashtra Youth Congress president Satyajeet Tambe called the decision "unjust" and inimical to students.

Officer Dr. Pradeep Awate said, adding that the State's case fatality had incrementally dipped to 2.32%.

Pune district continued to see ever-increasing surges, reporting an alarming spike of more than 2,800 new cases – the highest in the State in any district – to take its total case tally to 4,29,973. As per the State Health Department figures, nine deaths were reported as the death count rose to 8,114. However, as per the district authorities, the active case tally has surged past 15,700.

Mumbai city recorded 1,509 new cases, taking its total tally to 3,38,643 of whom, 10,563 are active. Four fatalities took the city's toll to 11,519. Nagpur district in Vidarbha, which goes under a lockdown on March 15, registered a record single-day surge of more than 2,100 cases.

case tally has reached 22,66,374, the cumulative recoveries stand at 21,06,400.

"Of a total 1,72,13,312 laboratory samples tested thus far, 22,66,374 (with the case positivity rate down to 13.17%) have returned positive with over 98,000 samples being tested in the last 24 hours," State Surveillance

Three delivery boys held for stealing cooking gas

25 cylinders, nozzle pipes, vehicle seized

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

Actor Kangana Ranaut has approached a sessions court here challenging a bailable warrant issued by a magistrate in a defamation complaint filed against her by lyricist Javed Akhtar.

The accused would fill two-three kg of gas in an empty cylinder and then stamp it with a duplicate seal to sell it to customers.

The police seized 25 cylinders – 15 of which were filled for domestic use, eight were empty, and two were partially filled – nozzle pipes, and a Mahindra Maximo Tempo from the possession of the accused.

Magistrate R.R. Khanhad earlier issued a summons to him in February.

As the actor failed to appear, the court issued a bailable warrant against him and posted the matter for hearing on March 26.

Ms. Ranaut was at liberty to approach a higher court

to challenge the summons but she could not evade appearance before his court, the magistrate said.

Earlier, the police had submitted a report on Mr. Akhtar's complaint, saying an offence of defamation was prima facie made out against Ms. Ranaut.

Mr. Akhtar has accused the actor of making false statements about him and damaging his reputation when she spoke about a 'co-terrie' in Bollywood in the aftermath of Sushant Singh Rajput's death last June.

Ms. Kangana's lawyer Rizwan Siddiquee said her plea in the sessions court would be heard on Monday.

The summons itself was issued without complying with the Code of Criminal Procedure as four witnesses named by Mr. Akhtar in his complaint had not been examined on oath, he said.

Police constable Bhauhahe Holgir from Sampda

As cases spike, Uddhav warns of lockdown in more parts of State

CM, wife given a dose of Covaxin; three-day janata curfew begins in Jalgaon district

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

With Maharashtra reporting alarming case surges, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Thursday warned of lockdown in more parts of the State and said that a decision would be taken in the next couple of days.

The Chief Minister also said the situation had not yet slipped out of control.

Mr. Thackeray's statement came even as his Mahavikas Aghadi government announced the imposition of a seven-day lockdown in Nagpur district in the Vidarbha region from March 15.

"In the coming days, we may have to impose lockdown in some more areas if rules are not strictly followed. We will take this decision in the next couple of days," said Mr. Thackeray, after being administered his first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at JJ Hospital.

He and his wife Rashmi were given a dose of Bharat Biotech's Covaxin.

The Chief Minister exhorted people to strictly adhere to



Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray receiving the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine in Mumbai on Thursday. •PTI

pandemic regulations – social distancing, wearing mask, and avoiding unnecessary travel.

He dispelled rumours pertaining to adverse after-effects of the vaccine, reassuring citizens that there was no need to fear or to be in any confusion about it.

The State's active case tally has soared to nearly one lakh from less than 40,000 a fortnight ago.

Nagpur district has been reporting a daily average case surge of more than 1,200 cases for the last few days, climaxing with a record single-day jump of more than 1,800 new cases on Wednesday. The district has nearly 13,000 active cases and has recorded more than 3,500 fatalities.

A three-day janata curfew beginning Thursday has been imposed in Jalgaon district in north Maharashtra while district authorities in Jalna in the Marathwada region have decreed all bars and permit rooms shut over the next week in the wake of rising cases.

PUBLIC NOTICE REQUEST FOR PUBLIC RESPONSE

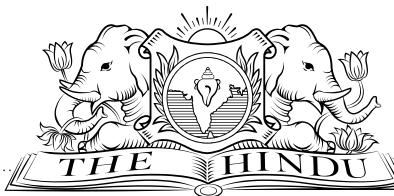
Petition for Approval of True-up of FY 2019-20, Aggregate Revenue Requirement (ARR) for 2020-21 along with ARR and Determination of Tariff for FY 2021-22

1. New Delhi Municipal Council (hereinafter referred to as "NDMC") has filed Petition before the Hon'ble Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (hereinafter referred to as "Commission") for True-up of FY 2019-20, ARR for 2020-21 and ARR & Determination of Tariff for FY 2021-22 on 30th January/1st February 2021 under the provisions of the Electricity Act, 2003, Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (Business Plan) Regulations, 2017, Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (Business Plan) Regulations, 2019 and the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (Terms and Conditions for Determination of Tariff) Regulations, 2017 notified vide notification dated 31st January, 2017. Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission has admitted the Petition vide Order dated 19/02/2021.
2. The salient features of Petition are provided below:

Table 1: Summary of ARR and Revenue for NDMC at existing Retail Supply Tariff

S. No.	Particulars	Units	FY 2019-20	FY 2021-22

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Frontier politics

Identity issues have taken centrestage in the Assembly election in Assam

The BJP's rise to power in Assam in 2016 was remarkable, and the party has set an even higher goal this time, to win 100 of the 126 Assembly seats along with its allies, the Asom Gana Parishad, United People's Party Liberal and the Rabha Joutha Mancha. The electoral landscape is significantly different this time, with rearranged alliances and the emergence of new issues such as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA). Going by 2016 figures, the Mahajot of parties including the Congress, the All India United Democratic Front, and the Bodoland People's Front has 48.81% share of the votes. The combined vote share of the Congress and AIUDF was higher in 17 seats the BJP had won last time. An alliance of regional parties, the Assam Jatiya Parishad and Akhil Gogoi's Rajoij Dal, both formed six months ago following the anti-CAA movement, could make the contest triangular, at least in the eastern parts. The Congress is facing a leadership vacuum and tussle at the same time; and the BJP has to reconcile with the friction arising out of the fact that its most effective and popular leader is Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, a former Congressman. The BJP claims Assam saw fast-paced development and there is no noticeable anti-incumbency. The outcome will be determined by other issues, and particularly identity questions that have become more fraught this time.

Regional variations in political trends are sharp, and the BJP's attempt is to construct a Hindu identity that subsumes ethnic and linguistic ones. Mr. Sarma has been targeting Muslims in his rhetoric. The CAA, along with the National Register of Citizens, got the religious fault line intertwined with the ethnic one, denying the BJP any clear advantage. The fear of illegal migrants overrunning indigenous populations has been a perennial issue; but this time, the focus has shifted from migrant "Bangladeshi" Muslims to "Bangladeshi" Hindus, whose side the BJP sought to take through the new citizenship regime. The party is now trying to underplay the CAA as an electoral issue, but the other two alliances are trying to keep the focus on it, and put the BJP on the back foot among the indigenous population. The issue is also a red flag for a majority of Muslims, who constitute 34% of Assam's population. The BJP has been trying to mobilise sentiments around the encroachment by 'Bangladeshis' of forests and swathes of land belonging to Vaishnav monasteries. Floods that wash away farmland and dwelling areas, and the distress among plantation workers – a voting block, particularly in 45 seats in eastern and southern Assam – are also campaign issues. Sadly, such material questions are only secondary in a campaign overwhelmed by identity issues.

Scope for scandal

Omnibus orders restraining media should not end up as a tool of harassment

It is quite regrettable that politicians are often hit by scandals arising from leaked footage purportedly showing them in intimate proximity with women. The latest episode involves former Karnataka Minister Ramesh Jarkiholi, who resigned in the wake of visuals allegedly showing him in such a situation. Speculation about the existence of more such compact discs that could surface in the media has resulted in a lawyer and BJP member obtaining an interim High Court order, that media organisations should abide strictly by the Programme Code prescribed under the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act. About 70 media organisations, including television channels, social media platforms, digital media outlets and newspapers have been arrayed as respondents. The order is unexceptionable. The broadcast media are expected to conform to the Code. However, when such an omnibus order is passed, it could become a tool of harassment. Under the Act, district magistrates, sub-divisional magistrates and police commissioners are the 'authorised officers' to ensure that the Programme Code is not breached. The Bengaluru Police Commissioner has also issued an order prohibiting the broadcasting of anything that breaches the Code. The Code, which is part of the Cable Television Network Rules, is widely worded. For instance, anything that offends good taste or decency, or amounts to criticism of friendly countries, are violations. It also considers defamation, half-truths and innuendo as potential violations. In the absence of judicial orders, it may be unsafe to leave such matters to the discretion of the 'authorised officer'.

A key consideration to decide on the content of any broadcast that may be controversial is whether it touches upon any public interest. In this case, it is not merely the private moment of a serving Minister, but his public conduct that is under scrutiny – for the allegation is that he had promised a job to a woman in exchange for sexual favours. That he and others said to be contemplating preventive legal action against the future release of such footage were defectors who brought about the fall of the JD(S)-Congress government not long ago, would impart the episode with a deeper cause for a thorough investigation. Of course, in the absence of any complaint from the woman, or even any knowledge about her, it is difficult to prove any wrongdoing. And not even public interest can justify a flagrant breach of privacy of anyone, or the depiction of women in a derogatory manner. But sections of the media may have considered that there is enough public interest to draw attention to the footage, even if they had no intention to air it. The onus is on media outlets to show discretion in dealing with such 'leaks'. Greater discretion may be warranted for political leaders, especially those with a record of political dishonesty, for it is difficult to blame the public if they expect the worst of them.

Politics apart, troubles aplenty for Kerala

Challenges await the new government in areas such as development, health and harmony



RAJAN GURUKKAL

Kerala faces several serious challenges, which political parties seldom focus on as objects of resolution and include in their propaganda. Coming together under two coalitions in the State – the Left Democratic Front and the United Democratic Front – these political parties attribute issues of misrule, financial corruption, and nepotism against each other. While the ruling Front puts up proof of achievements in development and people's welfare, the Opposition brings up charges of financial corruption and development failures against the ruling Front. Probing rarely, any of the genuine challenges (often due to their own conflicting interests and goals within the front), the Opposition creates a politically disengaging environment. I would like to briefly focus on some of the crucial political challenges awaiting the new government.

Sustenance of social security
Compared to the other States, Kerala has been concerned about the development consequences and is committed to resolving them by combining growth with equity. Severely hit by the severe cyclonic storm Ockhi in 2017, floods in 2018 and 2019, and the novel coronavirus pandemic lockdown now, Kerala's growth rates that were above the national rates are currently under downward pressure. Inflation hovers around 8%, worsening the situation. But the State provided commodities at fair prices through cooperatives such as SupplyCo (Kerala State Civil Supplies Corporation) and ConsumerFed (State Cooperatives Consumers' Federation). Likewise, it could tide over the crisis of the pandemic lockdown by ensuring food security through its extensive Public Distribution System network. With a governmental restructuring of the economy into an equitable alternative for extending goods, services

and credit to people, it could reverse the capitalist redistributive functions. Similarly, the long-term sustenance of the State's health sector is a big task. It must be noted that the State's health sector has been globally celebrated for retaining gains in indices such as high life expectancy, infant mortality rate, birth rate, and death rate, for containing the Nipah viral outbreak in 2018 and 2019, and COVID-19 now and has already been transformed through the Aardram mission, the State Health Insurance Agency 2020, and the Karunya Arogya Suraksha Padhathi 2020 besides multiple health insurance schemes.

Building an ecologically sustainable and resilient New Kerala is a big problem too. Projects such as the GAIL pipeline and City Gas are praiseworthy. Transport infrastructure development through the construction of roads, bypasses and highways is great. So does the expansion of the Kerala Highway Research Institute as a Centre of Excellence for innovation in design, construction, maintenance, quality assurance, and safety of roads. Making all this effort towards rapid urbanisation (which involves land diversion, wetland reclamation, and deforestation) to be environmentally sustainable is too difficult. It should go well with the State's move to invest tremendously in agriculture, livestock, fisheries, forestry, and the traditional industries. A major engagement is the opening up of ecologically sustainable alternative development paths leading to systemic change in the economy. Adding to this, climate change-induced disasters (though they hardly ever spread panic unlike the pandemic), need special emphasis to make sure that planners do not overlook them in future development.

Knowledge economy
With the distinct understanding that investment in knowledge and human capital guarantees long-run development, Budget 2021-22 leapfrogs into the knowledge economy. It is for the first time in the country that a State Budget has recognised new knowledge, a crucial non-finite resource and demo-



cratisation of its benefits, as the key driver to future productivity-growth and equitable social development. It quite realistically envisages various schemes for boosting accumulation of knowledge-based capital through higher education institutions and provides for the growth of hi-tech industries, innovative start-ups, expansion of the service sector, and the opening up of avenues of self-employment. Universities are called upon to fill their curricula with the latest science-tech hybrid fields of knowledge as current in the developed world. Indeed, it is important that higher education institutions develop the necessary competency to create and transact new knowledge for the growth of the State's intellectual property.

However, people, who generally glorify the knowledge economy, seldom realise the fact that it is techno-capitalism, the latest version of capitalism dependent on technology and science, for the production and exchange of marketable knowledge. Organised into corporates, capitalists have globally established huge research centres for the generation of knowledge in various science-tech hybrid fields, which as intellectual property and patents (intangible assets), have unimaginable rates of exchange value. Deploying thousands of youth they confiscate their intellectual property by cleverly blurring the actual relationship with its author through the phenomenon called fetishism of both the commodity and capital. But the struggle lies in gaining precedence of critical knowledge over the production, consumption and exchange of marketable knowledge. An uncritical promotion of the knowledge society means only augmentation of knowledge-con-

suming people, who only buy it rather than creating it. The call has to be understood as an opposite political response to the fast developing techno-capitalist global economy that demands that youth acquire innovative expertise and rare work-space skills in science-tech hybrid fields.

Decline of democracy

The decline of democracy and secularism and the rise of communalism (a global and national threat), pose a big question to the state polity. In India, caste divisiveness adds to this degenerative process which involves the loss of the foundational spirit of the country's Constitution and the political quality of the citizenry. Communal beliefs feigning to be traditional knowledge find a place in all national policy papers including the Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy document. Traditional beliefs are being distinguished as indigenous science, without knowing that science is universal unlike beliefs, and which always improves itself through scientific proof. Beliefs obfuscate independent inquiries, undermine the credibility of research establishments, and curb the curiosity of youth.

Kerala has been untiringly opposing communal obscurantism and fascism to champion the cause of secularism and democracy. But in recent times, the play of deadly sentiments, false identities, and obscurantism has set in, thereby harming humanism and scientific temper. A State that awe-inspiringly demonstrated oneness during the recent crises of floods and disease in the sharing of prayer halls and worship spaces across religions soon showed the face of divisiveness too. An upper caste identity crisis and patriarchal prejudices spread obscurantism to block the entry of women to Sabarimala and the casteist organisation could misuse the sentiments for political gains. Similarly, obscurantism of two rival Christian factions could block the implementation of a Supreme Court order using the threat of religious strife. Kerala's polity is increasingly facing an impairment of democracy and secularism as an ever-in-

tensifying threat due to politicians nibbling at the jigs of votes on the angers of religious and caste heads.

Confronting global economy

Like any other State in India, a major political problem before Kerala lies in addressing the local consequences of the global economy that reaches everywhere in search of cheap labour, low tax, and a least regulatory environment. Its reckless accessing of natural resources through networks of worldwide communication, decentralised extraction, production, and exchange affects life even in the recesses of villages. Any local situation today owes its stress to the global process that makes the national economy fragmented and entangled in the process of world economic development. Developmental consequences range from a loss of employment and livelihoods, forced displacement and relocations, health hazards and disabilities and even suicides and democides. Indirect developmental consequences by way of ecological destruction, climate change, and natural disasters affect people in the same way too.

Making the government through the process of electoral contests is hugely expensive for the nation as well as political parties. Most parties generate income through questionable means when they are in power, for what they mobilise from the clientele is insufficient in managing the electorates. A transnational class that manages the global economy decides which coalition should constitute the government, be it national or regional, and for what priority. They manage it through a mutual relationship of exchange – exchange of money for access to natural resources under the control of state power to enhance capital gains. This is inevitably an exchange at the expense of social justice, democracy and environment. How to confront the global economy through a feasible type of upheaval is a huge challenge for a genuine democratic government.

Rajan Gurukkal is Vice Chairman, Kerala State Higher Education Council

Working towards climate justice in a non-ideal world

New Delhi has to leverage its green commitment to ensure carbon and policy space for its developmental aspirations



MANJEET SINGH PURI

The election of Joe Biden as U.S. President has catapulted climate change to the top of the global agenda, allowing him to keep his promise to "lead a major diplomatic push" to increase global climate ambition. This also works well for him in rebuilding the trans-Atlantic alliance apart from keeping at bay the domestic fissures from a tenuous hold of the Democrats in the U.S. Congress while being resolute on climate change. It is also in line with the legacy ambitions of his team, led by former U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry (and now Special Presidential Envoy for Climate), with many of them being old climate warriors, some even from the days of the U.S. President, Bill Clinton.

The U.S.'s moves

Interestingly, the U.S. is not just striding back to the Obama signature achievement of the Paris Accord with its voluntary commitments but also to the Bush days. This is, perhaps, best evidenced by the presidential call to reconvene the Major Economies Forum (MEF) starting with a Leaders' Climate Summit in April this year.

The MEF, which was first convened in March 2009, originated in the Bush-era U.S. efforts to rope

in major emitters.

It was also to push a way forward on climate change without heed to the principle of differentiated responsibilities and recognition of historical responsibilities, which are rightly hallowed principles of the climate discourse given the decades of staying power of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere. The serious unwillingness of emerging economies to be labelled "major emitters" saw the meeting retitled "Major Economies Meeting" given the clear link between GDP and GHG. While the meeting's purpose was not hidden, the retitling provided a feel-good and one from which retraction was not possible for the emerging economies.

Stern message, border levies

This time the push appears to have come to shove, with all countries being told to commit to net zero (GHG emissions) by 2050 with credible plans to ensure meeting this domestic target. Indeed, the Chinese, who positioned themselves as reaching there by 2060, have been sternly told to be there a decade earlier.

Taking a cue from the new U.S. Administration, the UN Secretary-General has even called on countries to declare national climate emergencies apart from building a coalition for a carbon-neutral world by 2050. As of today, countries representing around 65% of global CO₂ emissions have already agreed to this. The UN Secretary-General would like this figure to reach 90% within 2021.



These plans and their implementation will, undoubtedly, be subject to international reviews and verification. Not said as yet, but non-compliance may not be just naming and shaming. Historical responsibilities and differentiation, obviously, have no place in this discourse; but neither does the level of development. India, with its huge population and now one of the world's largest economies, can easily be in the cross-hairs of such a discourse no matter its extraordinarily small carbon footprint in per capita terms and huge development imperatives.

Adding to the challenges of this proposed global goal is the distinct possibility of the EU imposing carbon border levies on those who do not take on high carbon cut-down targets and do so unilaterally if there is no global agreement. While as of now the U.S. Administration appears ambivalent on these border levies, the possibility of their coming around cannot be ruled out. In such a scenario, World Trade Organization rules that presently exclude the use of tariffs on environmental grounds

will certainly get modified.

A fund pay-in idea

The issue of money, especially the lack of it, is a perennial one in the climate discourse. In this context, Raghuram Rajan has recently put forward a proposal for India to consider – it calls on countries to pay into a global fund amounts based on their carbon emissions over and above the global per capita average of five tons. This obviously disincentives coal in a big way while incentivising renewables. Those above the global average would pay, while those below would receive the monies. While this would suggest a certain equity, it may be unacceptable to the developed countries even though Mr. Rajan has gone along with the drumbeat to forget historical responsibility.

As far as India is concerned, for starters such a proposal may appear attractive as India today has per capita CO₂ emission of only 2 tons and is a global record setter in pushing renewables. But will real politics allow a major economy to benefit from such fund flows or indeed even be the recipient of any form of concessional climate finance? Unlikely.

Moreover, the long-term implications of such a proposal in a setting of a sharply growing economy and reliance on coal-produced electricity for several decades require examination in detail, quite apart from factoring in the twists and turns that negotiations could give to such an idea. And then, of course, there are alternatives such

as emission trading.

Furthermore, the proposal focuses on current and future emissions, and in keeping with the contract and converge approach, allows practical considerations to trump fairness by not only giving a short shrift to historical responsibility but also denying priority access to the remaining carbon space for developing countries. In that sense, it double penalises them while giving developed countries a certain free pass. Here it bears noting that more than 75% of the carbon space available to humankind to keep global temperature rises to 1.5°C has already been taken up by the developed world and China.

Climate negotiations are not just about the environment and human well-being or even energy, but are also about global governance, and will henceforth be pursued with a vigour which requires India to carefully calibrate its approach including on the economic and political fronts. Climate justice is an imperative for India, which needs to leverage its green and pro-nature commitment to ensure carbon and policy space for its developmental and global aspirations. India's diplomatic and negotiating efforts must be quickly geared to that end.

Manjeet Singh Puri is a former Ambassador and Lead Negotiator at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. He is also Distinguished Fellow, TERI, the Energy and Resources Institute. The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

CM injured
While the Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was quick to attribute her injuries to a conspiracy, many of the other political parties have dismissed it as a stunt, betraying a total lack of sensitivity. Such reactions are in absolutely poor taste and only reflect how low the political discourse has become.
S.K. CHOWDHURY,
Bengaluru

Need-based PDS
Undoubtedly, there are irregularities in the Public Distribution System (Editorial page, March 11). Currently, those once tagged with a BPL mark or included in the Annapurna category avail governmental benefits without constraints. Periodical authentication of the income of such beneficiaries is crucial. Similarly, obtaining

appropriate declarations from cardholders should be made mandatory to eliminate corruption. The current system of providing 35kg of free food grains per Annapurna card holder without considering the actual numbers listed in the card is absurd and unjustifiable. A two-member family hardly needs around 15 kg of food grain in a month. Above all, the entire information

should always be in the public domain through computer networks.
THOMAS K.M.,
Muvattupuzha, Kerala

In Tamil Nadu, while rice is given free of cost to all categories, the issue is whether households above the poverty line prefer using food grains provided in fair price shops. Definitely not. This is because there are times when the food grains

provided are of poor quality. There are instances where following this, people have begun using such grain to feed poultry. There are others who are even selling

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:
The list of railway officials who died in the fire at the Eastern Railway headquarters as given in the report titled "Nine dead in fire at Eastern Railway headquarters in Kolkata" (some editions, March 9, 2021) was erroneous. According to the Eastern Railway authorities, Mr. Utpal Acharya – whose name was mistakenly added in that list – was admitted at the B.R. Singh Hospital with burn injuries.

The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

the grain to the poor or poultry owners.
KALAIKPRIYA SOMASUNDARAM,
Chennai, Erode, Tamil Nadu



ASSEMBLY POLLS

DEHLI THE HINDU | FRIDAY, MARCH 12, 2021

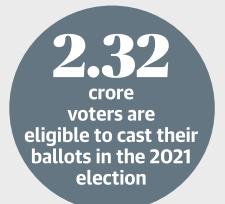
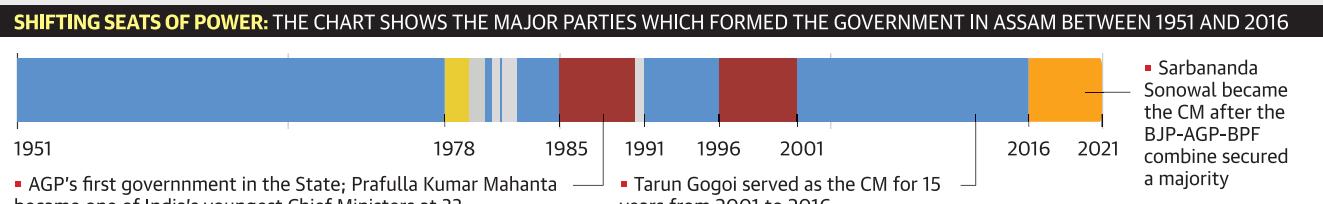
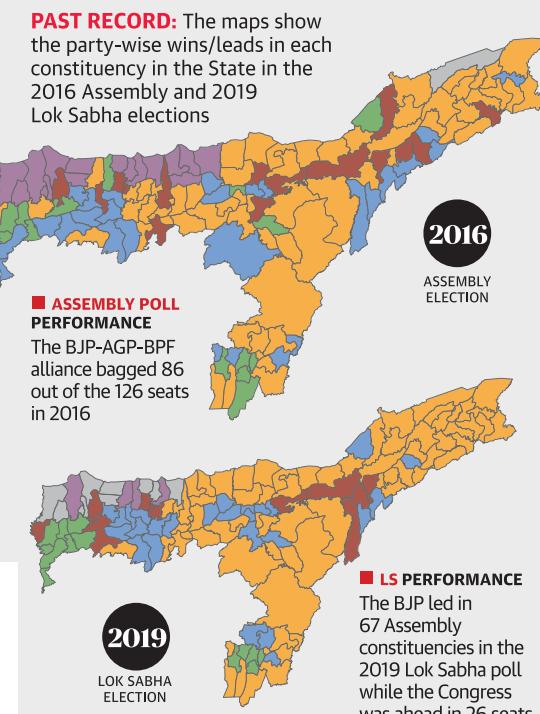
How Assam voted

126

Assembly constituencies in Assam will go to polls in three phases, starting on March 27. In the previous election in 2016, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in alliance with the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and Bodoland People's Front (BPF), won the majority in the State. However, ahead of the 2021 polls, the BPF has switched sides and joined the Congress-led 'grand alliance'. Here is a low-down of the past elections in the State

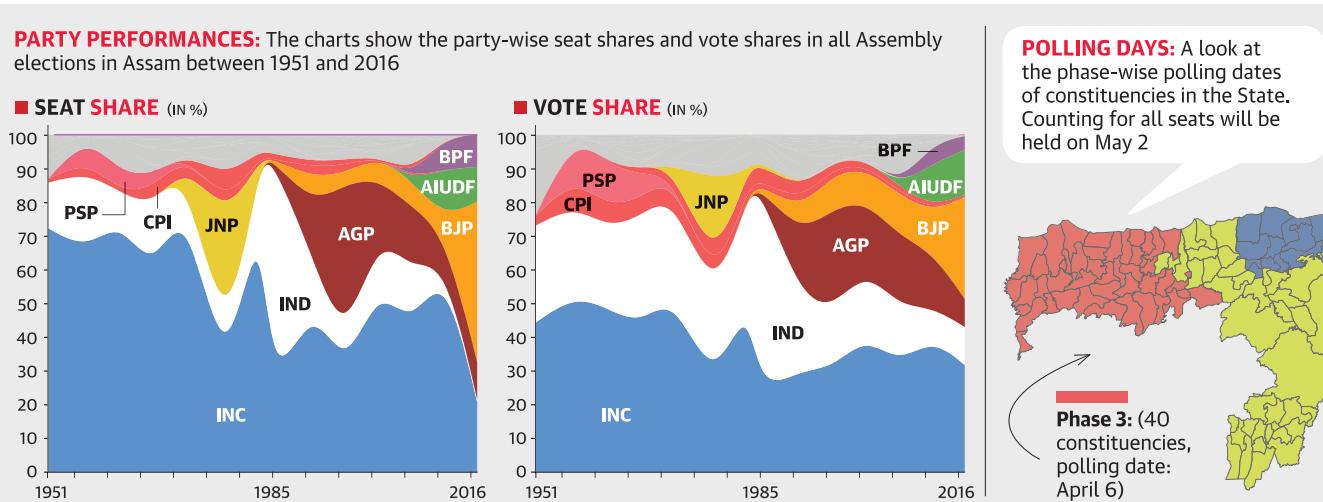
■ AGP ■ BJP
■ All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF)
■ BPF ■ INC ■ OTHERS

COMPILED BY: VIGNESH R. & SUMANT SEN

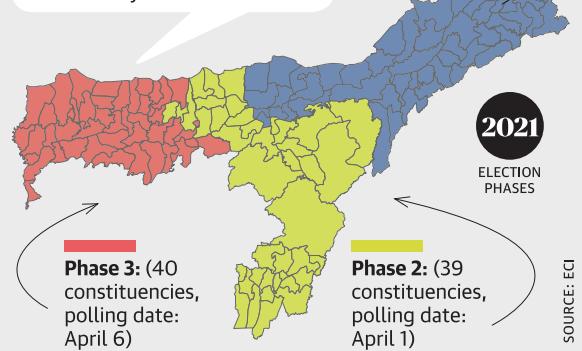


If you ask the common man in the streets, he will tell you without any doubt that the return of the BJP government in Assam is a forgone conclusion

JITENDRA SINGH



POLLING DAYS: A look at the phase-wise polling dates of constituencies in the State. Counting for all seats will be held on May 2



SWOT ANALYSIS

In Assam battle, more to alliances than meets the eye

Partners leave the BJP and the Congress both strong and vulnerable in the State, not to mention the threat posed by the new AJP-Rajor Dal combine

RAHUL KARMAKAR

GUWAHATI

The electoral battle in Assam is being fought among three alliances in many of the 126 Assembly seats. For the alliance headed by the ruling BJP, the other two are like a double-edged sword.

The BJP heads to the polls with a fairly clean image, particularly of Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, and a large portion of its Hindu votes intact. Its grassroots connect and pampering of tea plantation workers – a major voting force in 45 constituencies – are its strength despite the lack of a “Modi wave” as in 2016.

But its weakness has been the lack of inclusive politics and alienation of Muslims who form 34% of the State’s population. Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the

BJP’s main poll strategist, has claimed that the party can do without Muslim votes.

This could help the party in Assamese-majority areas where sentiments against the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) headed by perfume baron Akhil Ranjan Dutta of Gauhati University said the Congress-AIUDF combine could damage the saffron party if the voting trend is similar that of 2016. The Congress and the AIUDF had a combined vote share of 44% in that election.

May play spoilsport
The threat in these areas is perceived to be from the new regional parties, the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) and jailed activist Akhil Gogoi’s Rajor Dal. They are not expected to make a splash, but may play spoilsport by causing a split of the BJP votes.

While the BJP claims that

the incompatibility of the constituents of the two opposition alliances and their overestimation of sentiments against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act will work to its advantage, political scientist Akhil Ranjan Dutta of Gauhati University said the Congress-AIUDF combine could damage the saffron party if the voting trend is similar that of 2016. The Congress and the AIUDF had a combined vote share of 44% in that election.

The BJP’s worries are also its allies – the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) and the United People’s Party Liberal (UPPL), the latter specific to the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

This is because the AJP, born from the same seeds of regionalism as the AGP, is expected to dent the AGP more

than the BJP. The UPPL, on the other hand, could not stop the Bodoland People’s Front (BPF) – the BJP’s former ally now with the Congress-led Mahajot or grand alliance – from becoming the single largest party in the BTC polls in December 2020.

The Congress is believed to enjoy an edge in the BTC

areas. It could also cash in on the State’s demography, especially the BJP’s anti-Muslim stance and unhappiness among a section of some 50 lakh Bengali Hindus, who feel the CAA has done more harm than good to the community in Assam.

Factionalism and too many power centres after the

death of former Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi are the weak spots of the Congress, as is the perceived negative impact of its association with the AIUDF in areas inhabited by the indigenous communities. The alliance, on the other hand, could help it gain in Muslim areas where the AIUDF has been holding sway

since the 2006 polls.

The Congress could also gain from the expected damage the AJP-Rajor Dal combine could inflict on both the BJP and the AGP. The AJP-Rajor Dal aims to be the “more committed” regional alternative to the AGP.

The threats for the Congress would be the possible shifting of minority votes to the AJP-Rajor Dal, which has been working in minority areas to appeal to “Muslims who identify with Assamese sentiments rather than Ajmal.” There is also the likelihood of the “tea tribes” voters to return from the BJP fold despite promises of higher wages and facilities.

The AGP’s strength is its brand of regionalism born of the six-year Assam Agitation to drive out illegal migrants. But the party’s USP is being challenged by the AJP-Rajor Dal and it has long been ridiculed with factionalism with no young and vibrant leaders emerging.

The only minority-based party in Assam, the AIUDF’s strength is its appeal in several districts where migrant Muslims dominate. But it has virtually become a one-man party, dependent on its chief Mr. Ajmal. While the alliance with the Congress has given it an opportunity to expand base and be in the government, it faces the threat of Muslims shifting loyalty to the AJP and Rajor Dal.

The AJP-Rajor Dal has the X-factor going for it, but its refusal to align with the Congress and marking of the AIUDF as a communal party could rob it of an opportunity to make inroads as part of a greater anti-BJP opposition.



In it together: Sarbananda Sonowal with leaders of the BJP and its allies in Garmur, Assam. ■ PTI

INTERVIEW | BADRUDDIN AJMAL

‘Covering up for governance failure is easy in Assam’

It is unfortunate that I become convenient for parties to divert attention from more important issues, says AIUDF chief

RAHUL KARMAKAR

Perfume baron Maulana Badruddin Ajmal has been the whipping boy of Assam electoral politics ever since he founded the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) in 2005. An enemy-turned-friend of the Congress, he has remained the bogeyman for rivals. In this interview, he speaks about his party’s relationship with the Congress and the issues dominating this election. Excerpts:

To quote a former Chief Minister, who is Badruddin Ajmal?

■ Badruddin is good for people who are good at heart, are positive, have a vision, and want to see Assam progress. Badruddin is a villain for those who fear losing power, have no real issues to



take to the people, who could not fulfil even 1% of the promises made five years ago.

Rivals use you as a template of fear – of Muslim migrants planning to take over Assam. Why is that you invariably become the talking point of all elections?

■ Covering up for governance failure is easy in Assam – just sell the fear of Ajmal as a representative or an advocate of migrant Muslims. They go by my attire, skull cap and beard to fan this fear when the truth is that I have gone on record in Parliament demanding that all foreigners who try to cross the border should be shot at. It is unfortunate that I become convenient for parties like the BJP to divert attention from more important issues such as floods,

You have tied up with the Congress, once your bitter rival. Will it result in division of Muslim votes?

■ (Former Chief Minister) Tarun Gogoi was a friend till the time I was the president of the Jamiat Ulama in Assam. He became a rival after the AIUDF took away a chunk of

minority votes over which the Congress had total control. But he took the first step in rekindling our friendship before his death because he realised I was not an enemy of Assam, that I want to build hospitals, universities, schools and promote women’s education.

He laid the foundation of the eight-party Mahajot which hopes to throw out the BJP and its anti-Assam policies such as the implementation of the CAA.

But the perception is that AIUDF might lose some seats in Muslim areas and its association with you might cost the Congress dear in Assamese areas...

■ The observation is right, but the alliance was needed. An analysis of the 2016 election showed that the division of votes between the AIUDF

We checked our community-based emotions and thought strategically to oust the BJP. We have sacrificed a lot of seats for making the Mahajot stronger

and the Congress made the BJP and the AGP (Asom Gana Parishad) scrap through in several constituencies. That’s why we checked our community-based emotions and thought strategically to oust the BJP. We have sacrificed a lot of seats for making the Mahajot stronger.

Why is that the new parties – the Assam Jatiya Parishad and Akhil Gogoi’s Rajor Dal – see you as a communal force?

■ We challenge them to show one instance in 15-16 years of our existence where we have

done anything divisive. It is up to them to decide whether the BJP, which is trying to change Assam’s language and culture by bringing in Hindu Bengalis, is the greatest enemy or I am. They say they want to defeat the BJP but are wooing Muslims and have fielded candidates in minority areas. One can draw an inference.

What are your major issues this time?

■ The CAA definitely is, although the BJP makes claims to the contrary. The National Register of Citizens, which exposed the BJP’s lies about millions of Bangladeshis in Assam, is as important. We are also serious about D (doubtful) voters and detention centres that have destroyed thousands of lives, flood and erosion, joblessness and price rise.

PM’s photo removed from COVID vaccine certificates

Violates rules in poll-bound regions: EC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Health Ministry on Tuesday informed the Election Commission (EC) that the “necessary filters” were added to the Co-WIN platform in the four poll-bound States and one Union Territory, removing Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s photo from the COVID-19 vaccine certificates in those regions.



The EC wrote to the Ministry on March 5 reiterating its standing instructions on the use of photos of political leaders in government advertisements during elec-

tions. It gave the Ministry a few days to come up with a technical solution to remove Mr. Modi’s photo, an EC official said.

Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan wrote to the Deputy Election Commissioner in charge of West Bengal, Sudeep Jain, on Tuesday that “technical measures to comply with the directions of EC have been explored promptly”.

The EC had taken up the issue after the Trinamool Congress complained that publishing Mr. Modi’s photo on the certificates was a violation of the model code.

In Nandigram, it’s a race to the temples

SHIV SAHAY SINGH

NANDIGRAM

Less that two decades ago, towards the end of the Left Front’s 34-year regime, Nandigram not only emerged as the sign of protest against forcible land acquisition but also became one of the biggest symbols of communal harmony. Hindus and Muslims came together to resist the acquisition of land for a petrochemical hub proposed by the then government and were united in the resistance that raged for months.

In 2021, however, when Nandigram is once again taking centre stage in West Bengal politics, the political narrative is dominated by the communal divide.

Months before the Assembly election was an-

nounced, a former Trinamool Congress Minister who switched to the BJP, Suvendu Adhikari, indicated that the saffron party’s campaign in Nandigram would exploit the divide. “On whose support does she [Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee] want to contest: 63,000 or 2.13 lakh,” he had asked just weeks after jumping ship.

Ms. Banerjee started her campaign on March 9. Addressing a workers’ meeting at a ground in front of the Nandigram police station, she began her speech by asking people not to fall prey to the “70 and 30 divide”.

But when Ms. Banerjee started chanting the “Chandi path” from the stage challenging her political opponents on their knowledge of Hindu rituals, the people realised she was referring to the percentage of Hindus and Muslims living in the area. Between March 9 and March 10 evening, she had visited half a dozen temples.

According to the State BJP leadership, Ms. Banerjee’s opponent, Mr. Adhikari, has made 20 visits to temples in Nandigram in the past few days. Mr. Adhikari has ac-

cused Ms. Banerjee of uttering the “wrong mantras” at the March 9 public meeting and said she was “trying to be a fake Hindu”.

Despite the high-decibel campaign, political commentator Biswanath Chakraborty said there is very little evidence of communal polarisation. “I cannot recollect any communal riot in Purba Medinipur in the recent past. The Trinamool Congress should not fall into the trap of the BJP,” said Professor Chakraborty who teaches political science at Rabindra Bharati University.

Minaksi Mukerjee, a CPI (M) candidate, said these tit-for-tat temple visits were attempts to polarise the electorate but the voters will not fall into the trap.



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DATA BYTE

Big winners

The table lists the two highest victory margins recorded in past Assembly elections in each of the poll-bound States

State	Constituency	Year	Party
Tamil Nadu	Killiyoor	1977	JP
		MARGIN (%) 59.98	
Tamil Nadu	Chepauk	1996	DMK
		MARGIN (%) 59.81	
Kerala	Mankada	1967	IUML
		MARGIN (%) 66.33	
Kerala	Kottarakara	1980	KCP
		MARGIN (%) 56.17	
Puducherry	Emballam	2011	AINRC
		MARGIN (%) 93.70	
Puducherry			

FROM PAGE ONE

60% of new COVID cases recorded in Maharashtra

Giving details of the vaccination done so far the Ministry noted that the cumulative number of COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in the country has crossed 2.60 crore on Thursday. A total of 2,60,73,517 vaccine doses have been given, as per the provisional report till 7 p.m. today.

These include 72,16,759 HCWs who have taken the first dose and 40,48,754 HCWs who have taken the second dose, 71,16,849 FLWs (first dose), 6,70,813 FLWs (second dose), 1,021,588 beneficiaries aged 45 and above with specific co-morbidities and 59,98,754 beneficiaries more than 60 years old.

Total of 3,89,337 vaccine doses were given till 7 p.m. today, the 55th day of nationwide COVID-19 vaccination. Out of which benefici-

aries 3,20,247 were vaccinated for first dose and 69,090 HCWs and FLWs received second dose of vaccine as per the provisional report.

Final reports would be completed for the day by late tonight.

Speaking at a press conference on Thursday Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan noted that there is no vaccine shortage in any State in the country and said the acceleration in vaccination has been achieved with active collaboration of private facilities. Seventy-one per cent of vaccine dose administered is in the public sector while 28.7% has been contributed by the private sector.

"The AEFI reported so far stands at 0.020 % of the total immunization done," said Mr. Bhushan.

Trinamool, BJP spar over Mamata's injury

State BJP president Dilip Ghosh demanded that the incident should be probed by Central Bureau of Investigation. BJP spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya pointed out that anybody with a Z plus security has at least a dozen of cars with her when she is on the move.

"If in spite of a three-layer security, the State's Chief Minister is attacked and injured, then an investigation has to take place to find out who is responsible... We want an investigation on the incident at any cost and we want to find the truth be-

hind what happened. The people of the State need to know what happened," Mr. Bhattacharya said.

Pointing out that the Director, Security and the Additional Director, Security were with the Chief Minister (when the incident took place), he asked, "Why haven't their statements come to the public domain yet?"

CPI(M) leader Tanmoy Bhattacharya raised questions on why the Chief Minister who alleged conspiracy on Wednesday has gone silent on the same issue on Thursday.

Kanpur rape: three suspended for negligence

The third accused, Saurabh Yadav, who is yet to be arrested, is Dipu's brother and is accused of intimidating the minor girl's family when they were trying to lodge a complaint against the alleged gang rape.

The father of the girl, 13, died after being hit by a truck a day after she lodged a police complaint on Wednesday.

The relatives of the girl alleged that he was murdered and accused the police of complicity.

A case under Sections 376d (a), 504 and 506 of the Indian Penal Code and Section 5G/6 of the POCSO Act was registered at the Sajeti police station on March 9. The girl had reached a community health centre in Ghatampur for a medical examination after the FIR, when her father and brother stepped out for tea in the morning, said a senior police officer. It was then that the father was hit by an unidentified truck and taken to a hospital where he died, said DIG Kanpur Preetinder Singh, adding that a case under accident had been registered.

As per the FIR lodged on March 9 against the three accused, the girl's father said that on March 8, when

his daughter was returning home from the fields around 7 p.m., Dipu and Golu grabbed her from behind and took her to an isolated place and took turns to repeatedly rape her. They threatened to kill her if she made noise or informed anyone, he stated.

The girl managed to return home late at night in a state of trauma and narrated her ordeal, the FIR said.

The girl's family alleged that a day after the incident, when they had just stepped out of the house to lodge a complaint, Saurabh appeared and threatened to kill them if they went to the police to report the matter.

"You should know that my father is a *daroga* [police inspector]. You can't do anything to us through police station and police. We will do the bad act [rape] again in front of everyone," the FIR read, quoting the alleged threat made to the girl's family by Saurabh.

The girl's relatives and outraged locals staged a dharna on the road and held up traffic on the Kanpur-Sagar highway.

IG Kanpur Mohit Agarwal said directions had been sent to book the accused under the National Security Act and the Gangsters Act.

PM to attend first Quad Summit online today

Ahead of the summit, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who will visit Japan and South Korea next week, said he expected to "see something on vaccines" as an outcome of the summit meeting, expected to begin at 7 p.m. IST on Friday.

In the Quad ministerial summit in February, the four countries had discussed the need for international cooperation to ensure equitable access to vaccines, especially in developing countries.

India, the world's largest

Cong. may release list of Kerala nominees today

Many veterans may not make the cut; names are being finalised in New Delhi

G. ANAND
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Congress activists in Kerala seemed to keep their eyes peeled for signs from New Delhi about the composition of the party's list of candidates for the April 6 Assembly election.

However, Leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala said the Congress would field a strong candidate in Nemom. "Let it be a surprise," he said. The leaders are currently in New Delhi.

Some quarters floated the possibility of K. Muraleedharan, MP, contesting from Nemom or Vattiyarkavu. A KPCC insider said Mr. Chandy and Mr. Chennithala were unlikely to abandon their home grounds in Puthuppally and Haripad, respectively. The party would field candidates in at least 92 seats. Between 45% to 60% could be fresh faces, he said.

He said many veterans might not make the cut. The AICC's accent was on youth, women and influencers from marginal sections of society. The party would field candidates in at least 92 seats. Between 45% to 60% could be fresh faces, he said.

Mr. Muraleedharan would



Gearing up: A file photo of Congress leaders releasing the UDF election logo in Thiruvananthapuram.

require a waiver from the AICC to contest the Assembly election.

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Poll prospects

The KPCC was at the end of a selection process that had commenced in February. It had vetted suggestions put forward by the district committees, MLAs and MPs.

SSLC, Plus Two exams postponed in Kerala

STAFF REPORTER

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The SSLC and Plus Two higher secondary and vocational higher examinations have been postponed to April 8.

Chief Electoral Officer Teeka Ram Meena in a statement on Thursday said

the Election Commission of India had given permission for rescheduling the exams. They will now be held from April 8 to 30.

The timetable is expected to be published soon. Earlier, the exams were scheduled from March 17 to 30.

The high command would examine the list presented by the AICC screening committee in the light of the survey findings before taking a final call. The candidates' list is also likely to be a litmus test of whether group equations impacted the selection process significantly.



Ripped apart: The pharma unit of Tyche Industries, where a blast occurred on Thursday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Two killed in reactor blast at pharma unit

Four battling for life with burns

STAFF REPORTER

KAKINADA

Two supervisors died on the spot and four others are battling for life with severe burns after a 3,000-kg-capacity reactor blew up, reportedly because of heavy pressure, at Tyche Industries Ltd.'s pharma unit at Sarapavaram, on the outskirts of Kakinada, in East Godavari district on Thursday.

East Godavari Collector D. Muralidhar Reddy said the deceased were identified as Kakarla Subramanyam, 31, and Thotakura Venkata Ramana, 37.

They were engaged in the production of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) when the incident occurred.

The injured have been admitted to a hospital near Kakinada.

Handling nitric acid

According to Superintendent of Police Adnan Nayem Asmi, the accident occurred when the staff were handling nitric acid at the reactor. A preliminary inquiry found that there was no leakage of any chemical into the air, he said.

Mr. Muralidhar Reddy said safety measures at the pharma unit were reviewed in November 2020.

The Inspector of Factories, Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board, Revenue and Fire department authorities are investigating the incident and are expected to submit a report soon.

HC gives relief to associates of Shivakumar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

The High Court of Karnataka ordered conditional release of ₹53.46 lakh cash seized from a private company and an individual during raids conducted by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in connection with a corruption case registered against Congress leader D.K. Shivakumar.

Justice John Michael Cunha passed the order while allowing the separate petition filed by Bengaluru-based Wellworth Software Pvt. Ltd., a multi-system operator for cable TV networks, and Sachin Narayan, a close associate of Mr. Shivakumar and partner in the businesses of Mr. Shivakumar's wife.

The High Court directed that the release of the amount is subject to them executing indemnity bond for the equal amount and surety for the like sum to the satisfaction of the trial court. Though the CBI disputed the genuineness of the documents produced by the petitioners, the High Court observed that "there is no *prima facie* material to show that the cash seized from the registered office of the company or the residence of the petitioner is anyway related to the proceeds of the crime" alleged against Mr. Shivakumar or his wife.

No rescue effort

Though forest officials arrived at the spot on Wednesday, no effort was made to rescue the animal. It was

noticed that some private schools were conducting offline classes even for lower primary classes though the government had not granted them permission to do so. He suggested that the Department of Public Instruction consider disaffiliating errant schools for violating the norms.

When contacted, education officials said they had been receiving complaints from parents who were worried about putting their children at risk.

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'Trinamool's letter is full of insinuations'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Thursday responded to the Trinamool Congress' letter – which alleged that abrupt transfers of police officials led to Wednesday's attack on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee – saying the memorandum was "full of insinuations and averments". The EC said it had asked for reports on the matter within 48 hours.

Wage hike: Assam Oppn. targets BJP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

A stay on hike in daily wages of some 7.5 lakh tea plantation workers has given the Opposition alliances a stick to beat the ruling BJP with in poll-bound Assam. Candidates of the Congress-led *Mahajot*, and the regional front headed by the AJP, have begun campaigning against the BJP's "betrayal of trust" of tea workers.

The parties stated that the hike and later court stay was a "drama" played by the BJP government.

Bittu to work as Congress leader in LS

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha member Ranveer Singh Bittu from Punjab will be functioning as the Congress' leader in the Lower House for the remaining period of the current session as Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury will be busy in West Bengal because of the Assembly election.

His deputy Gaurav Googoi and Chief Whip K. Surendra are also busy with the Assembly polls in Assam and Kerala respectively.

Amid protests, Mamata urges restraint

Will return to field
in two or three
days, she says

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

A day after she was hospitalised owing to injuries she sustained in Nandigram, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday released a video from the hospital urging her supporters to exercise restraint.

She expressed the hope that she would return to "her field in the next two or three days". "Maybe, I will have to use a wheelchair for the next few days, but I will manage," she said.

"It is true I was very badly hurt yesterday and there is an injury in my foot, and I suffered from pain in my chest and head. I was greeting people from the bonnet of my car, when a lot of pressure came, and my leg got pressed in the car... I will appeal to everyone to maintain restraint. In the next two-three days, I will be able to return to my field," Ms. Banerjee said in a video message from the hospital.

Sources in the party said Ms. Banerjee may join the poll campaign from Saturday



Protest mode: Trinamool workers taking out a rally in South Dinajpur district on Thursday. ■ PTI

by releasing the manifesto.

The Chief Minister was injured in Nandigram after filling her nomination papers on Wednesday. She had called it a "conspiracy" of four or five people, who surrounded her car and "purposely pushed her".

A six-member medical board examined Ms. Banerjee's health parameters. "There is a plaster on the left ankle. She is feeling pain in a leg and also headache. Some more radiological investigation has been prescribed. We have seen deficiency in sodium. There is bone injury," a member of the board said.

Earlier in the day, the State BJP leadership, led by Samik Bhattacharya and Tathagata Roy, went to meet the Chief Minister at the SSKM Hospital. Party spokesperson Mr. Bhattacharya said the BJP would not indulge in any politics over the injuries to the Chief Minister. "We want her to recover from the injury."

BJP demands probe

State BJP president Dilip Ghosh demanded a thorough probe into the incident. He said people should be cautious about attempts to divert their attention from

real issues ahead of the poll.

The District Magistrate of Purba Medinipur and the Superintendent of Police visited the Birulia market in Nandigram, where the incident occurred.

Protests erupted in Nandigram, particularly the market, where supporters of the BJP and the Trinamool came face to face and tried to push each other. In other parts, Trinamool supporters staged protests against the "attack".

Several people who claimed to have witnessed the incident said Ms. Banerjee's car hit a post on a road at the market.

CM had no
security,
claims party

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Trinamool Congress on Thursday alleged in a letter to the Election Commission of India (ECI) that the removal of the State Director General of Police (DGP) at the "behest of BJP" had put West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's life under threat, and sought an immediate investigation into the issue. It was a "deep-rooted conspiracy", the party said.

"Within 24 hours of the removal of the erstwhile DGP, an attempt on Ms. Banerjee's life was made in Nandigram. At the time of the assault neither the Superintendent of Police nor the local police was present, even though she is a Z Plus protegee," the letter said.

On Tuesday, the ECI ordered the removal of DGP Virendra following an adverse report from its special observers posted in the poll-bound State.

On Wednesday, Mr. Chowdhury, who is also the Congress chief in Bengal, said Ms. Banerjee was talking about sympathy after assessing the ground situation in Nandigram, where she is taking on BJP's Suvedu Adhikari, a close aide-turned-rebel.

"This is a political gimmick. Who would believe that the State's Chief Minister, who is also the Home Minister, would not be protected by the police," he told *The Hindu*.

Earlier too, Mr. Sharma had attacked Mr. Chowdhury on the Congress's alliance with the Abbas Siddiqui-led India Secular Front. Hitting back, the West Bengal Congress chief had said some leaders were only bothered about "personal comfort spots and making remarks in tune with BJP's agenda".

Asked to comment on the contradiction, party spokesperson Supriya Shrinate said the Bengal Congress chief may have "specific information" but asserted that there was no place for violence in politics.

44% of MLAs who switched parties joined BJP: report

Assets of recontesting MLAs, MPs went up by 39%: ADR

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

An analysis of MLAs who switched parties and recontested elections from 2016 to 2020 has found that the BJP was the biggest gainer, while the Congress accounted for the most MLAs who quit to join another party.

The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) report released on Thursday analysed the election affidavits of 443 MLAs and MPs who switched parties and recontested polls in the past five years. Out of the 405 MLAs across the States who

quit and switched parties, 42% were from the Congress, the report found, while the BJP came in a distant second with 4.4%.

On the other hand, the BJP was the party of choice for 44.9% of the recontesting MLAs, followed by the Congress with 9.4%. The report noted that the defection of MLAs was the cause of governments in Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Goa, Arunachal Pradesh and Karnataka falling in the recent past.

Out of the 12 Lok Sabha members who switched parties, five were from the BJP.

In the Rajya Sabha, out of 17 who quit, seven were from the Congress, the report said. The average assets of the recontesting MLAs and MPs had grown by 39%.

The ADR report stated that the most plausible cause of defections were the nexus of money and muscle, absence of laws on the functioning of parties and the last of honest leaders, among others. "Until and unless these trends are reined in, our current electoral and political situation is bound to deteriorate further..." the report said.

Javadekar meets digital media outlets

Minister holds talks with Digital News Publishers Association over new IT rules

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

After severe criticism over not holding consultations with digital media publishers before bringing in the new IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar held a meeting with members of the Digital News Publishers Association on Thursday.

Industry representatives at the meeting included those from *India Today*, *Dainik Bhaskar*, *Hindustan Times*, *The Indian Express*, *The Times of India*, *ABP*, *Eenadu*, *Dainik Jagran* and *Lokmat*. The digital news outlets *The Wire* and *The News Minute*, which have filed a petition in the Delhi High Court challenging these laws, were not invited for

this discussion. There was also no word from the Ministry on whether there will be further rounds of discussions.

As per a statement released by the Ministry, Mr. Javadekar reiterated at the meeting that the new rules placed certain responsibilities on digital news publishers. These include adherence to Code of Ethics such as the norms of journalistic conduct framed by the Press Council of India and the Pro-

gramme Code under the Cable Television Network Act. As the Over The Top (OTT) platforms, the digital news publishers also have to provide a three-tier grievance redress mechanism. First and second tier would be the digital news publishers and self-regulatory bodies constituted by them.

Mr. Javadekar on earlier occasions had claimed that currently the Ministry had no data on various news portals. With the new rules, the

representatives of media houses who were called to Thursday's meeting informed the Minister that they already follow the regulatory protocol laid down by PCI and Cable Television Network Act, since content is shared between the digital and print platforms.

They felt that they should be treated differently than those news publishers who are only on the digital platform.

'Next election will be fought on farm laws'

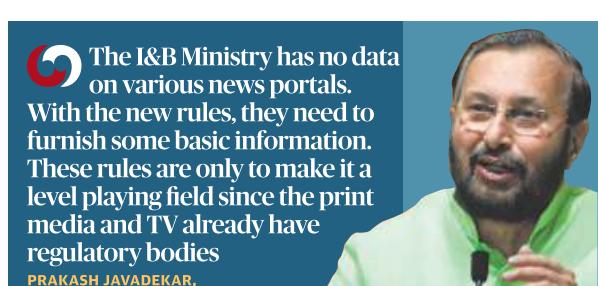
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAIABAD

Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) vice-president Jayant Chaudhary on Thursday said "those who cannot see the farmers sitting on the Delhi border, I cannot see humanity in them."

He was addressing a kisan panchayat of his party in Bhojpur village of Modinagar in Uttar Pradesh. Had the BJP government been a well-wisher of the farmers, they would not have imposed a ₹1 crore on farm

ers for stubble burning. "Can any farmer afford to pay such penalty?" he asked. Every farmer present at the panchayat, he said, would have tractors that were more

than 10 years old. "But the government feels they could afford to buy new ones. I am not sure whether they want to double your income or theirs," he commented.



The I&B Ministry has no data

on various news portals.

With the new rules, they need to

furnish some basic information.

These rules are only to make it a

level playing field since the print

media and TV already have

regulatory bodies

PRAKASH JAVADEKAR,
INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING MINISTER

digital news publishers would also be required to furnish some basic information to the Ministry in a simple form which is being finalised, he said. Mr. Javadekar reiterated that these rules were only to make it a level playing field since the print media and TV already have regulatory bodies.

Separate rules sought
The representatives of media houses who were called to Thursday's meeting informed the Minister that they already follow the regulatory protocol laid down by PCI and Cable Television Network Act, since content is shared between the digital and print platforms.

They felt that they should be treated differently than those news publishers who are only on the digital platform.

भारत सरकार / GOVERNMENT OF INDIA अंतर्राष्ट्रीय विभाग / DEPARTMENT OF SPACE

रिक्ति अधिसूचना / Vacancy Notification

सेमी-कंडक्टर लॉबरेटरी, चंडीगढ़ (अंतर्राष्ट्रीय विभाग, भारत सरकार के अधीन एक स्वातंत्र निकाय) में नियुक्ति के पद पर भर्ती

RECRUITMENT FOR THE POST OF DIRECTOR, SEMI-CONDUCTOR LABORATORY, CHANDIGARH (AN AUTONOMOUS BODY UNDER DEPARTMENT OF SPACE, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA)

विज्ञापन सं. क्र. 27011/13/2012-V/(VII)(खंड.III), दिनांक 12.03.2021

Advertisement No.B.27011/13/2012-V/(VII)(खंड.III) dated 12.03.2021

अंतर्राष्ट्रीय विभाग को चंडीगढ़ स्थित अंतर्राष्ट्रीय विभाग, भारत सरकार के अधीन दिनांक 15 (एकली देवतनाम) में नियुक्ति के पद पर हैकुएक अनुयायी की तलाश है।

Department of Space is looking for a suitable candidate for the position of Director, Semi-Conductor Laboratory (SCL), Chandigarh an Autonomous Body under the Department of Space, Govt. of India, in Level 15(HAG Scale) on deputation basis.

आवेदन प्राप्ति की अंतिम तिथि 23.04.2021 है।

The last date for receipt of application is 23.04.2021.

वे अपर्याप्ति को पहली ही दिनांक 06/11/2020 के विलम्बे विवरण सं. क्र. 27011/13/2012-V/(VII)(खंड.III) पर आवेदन कर चुके हैं, उन्हें आवेदन करने की आवश्यकता नहीं है।

Those who have already applied against the previous Advertisement No. B.27011/13/2012-V/(VII)(खंड.III) dated 06/11/2020 need not apply.

अर्हता, अनुरूप, आयु सामान, आवेदन कार्य आदि जैसे विवरणों के लिए इसको कैसे लिखें।

For details like Qualification, Experience, Age limit, Application form etc.,

please log on to ISRO website www.isro.gov.in

Advertisement No. B.27011/13/2012-V/(VII)(खंड.III) dated 12.03.2021

Event Description : Last date of submission of bid (Received): Dt. 17-03-2021, 02:00 PM.

(2) Pre-qualification Test (Open): 17-03-2021, 4:00 PM. (3) Technical bid Opening: 17-03-2021, 5:00 PM. (4) Technical presentation by bidders (for bidders qualifying pre-qualification criteria only): 19-03-2021, 11:00 AM. (5) Opening of financial bids (for bidders qualifying technical qualification criteria only): 22-03-2021, 04:00 PM.

SD- VC & MANAGING DIRECTOR

Corrigendum : Dated : 10-03-2021

Advertisement No.B.27011/13/2012-V/(VII)(खंड.III) dated 12.03.2021

Revised schedule of Key dates pertaining to RFP/Bidding process.

REVISED SCHEDULE OF BIDDING PROCESS AND KEY DATES & TIME

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SD- VC & MANAGING DIRECTOR

Corrigendum : Dated : 10-03-2021

Advertisement No.B.27011/13/2012-V/(VII)(खंड.III) dated

One year on, virus still has upper hand

There were many as 118 million confirmed cases and nearly 2.6 million deaths as of Thursday

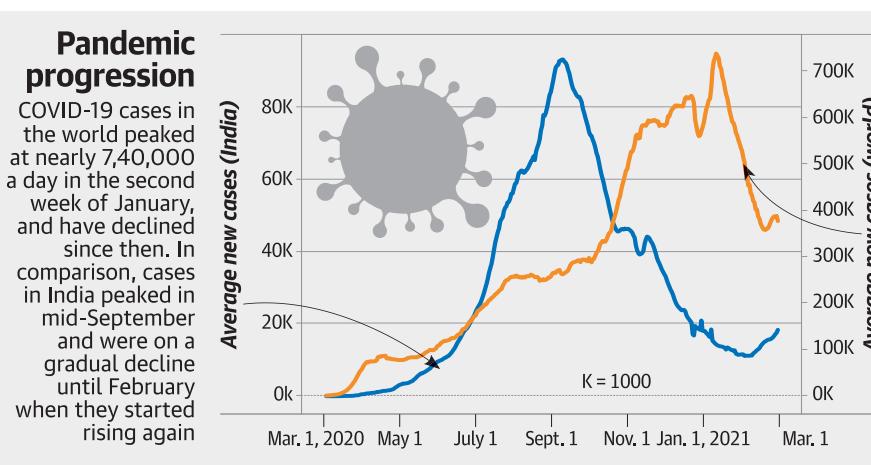
JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that the world was facing its first-ever pandemic from a coronavirus.

Its Director-General, Tedros Adhanom, said then: "Pandemic is not a word to use lightly or carelessly. It is a word that, if misused, can cause unreasonable fear, or unjustified acceptance that the fight is over, leading to unnecessary suffering and death. Describing the situation as a pandemic does not change the WHO's assessment of the threat posed by this virus. It doesn't change what WHO is doing, and it doesn't change what countries should do."

The pandemic declaration preceded two weeks of the number of cases of COVID-19 outside China increasing 13-fold, and the number of affected countries tripling. Last March 11, there were more than 1,18,000 cases in 114 countries, and 4,291 people had lost their lives, according to the WHO.

A year on, the numbers



had surged nearly 1,000-fold. There are about 118 million confirmed coronavirus cases as on Thursday and nearly 2.6 million deaths due to the disease.

February surge
In India, the number of cases have so far touched 11.2 million, with 1,58,227 deaths confirmed by the government so far. Notwithstanding a decline in daily cases since September, February has since seen an uptick with fresh daily infections crossing 22,000, according to data on Thursday – the first time it's done so this

year.

When the WHO declared a pandemic, India had evacuated 948 passengers from COVID-19 affected countries, 900 of whom were Indian citizens and 48 belonging to different nationalities, including the Maldives, Myanmar, Bangladesh, China, the U.S., Madagascar, Sri Lanka, Nepal, South Africa and Pe-

Ru. Air India operated two special flights for the evacuation efforts that brought back 654 passengers, including 647 Indian citizens from Wuhan, China.

They were quarantined at

the Indo-Tibetan Border Police's Chhawla camp and at an Army facility in Manesar, Haryana.

Travel history

On March 10, the Centre issued an advisory in which passengers with travel history to China, Hong Kong, Republic of Korea, Japan, Italy, Thailand, Singapore, Iran, Malaysia, France, Spain and Germany were expected to undergo self-imposed quarantine for 14 days from the date of their arrival, and their employers should facilitate work-from-home for such employees during this

period.

By that date, the government had had six Group of Ministers' meetings and it was decided to cancel all visits except diplomatic, official, UN/International Organizations, employment, project visas, until April 15, 2020.

Incoming travellers, including Indian nationals, arriving from or having visited China, Italy, Iran, Republic of Korea, France, Spain and Germany after February 15, 2020, were required to be quarantined for a minimum period of 14 days.

As of that day, India reported 60 positive cases, with no deaths confirmed, though a 76-year old from Kalaburgi, Karnataka, was suspected to have died of the infection.

India had only the National Institute of Virology as a testing centre then. The tests subsequently expanded and the country has been able to do nearly 224 million tests.

More than 25.6 million vaccine doses have been administered through 4,78,168 sessions, as of Thursday in the country.

Plea in SC seeks release of over 150 Rohingya in Jammu

Petitioner says application is based on reports in *The Hindu*

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

An application was filed in the Supreme Court on Thursday seeking an urgent intervention to release and protect over 150 Rohingya refugees reportedly 'detained' in Jammu.

The application was filed by a member of the Rohingya community, Mohammad Salimullah, represented by advocates Prashant Bhushan and Cheryl d'Souza.

Mr. Salimullah is already a petitioner in the Supreme Court against the deportation of refugees who had fled from religious persecution and violence in their native Myanmar.

He said that his application was based on reports in *The Hindu* and other media outlets that Rohingya members had been detained in a sub-jail in Jammu.

"This follows the Union Minister Jitendra Singh's statements two months ago that the Rohingya [identified as Muslim refugees by the government] would not be able to secure citizenship.



Long wait: Rohingya refugees near their makeshift camp on the outskirts of Jammu. ■ PTI

These refugees have been illegally detained and jailed in the Jammu sub-jail, which has been converted into a holding centre with the IGP (Jammu) Mukesh Singh stating that they face deportation back to Myanmar following verification by their embassy," the application said.

It stated, "News reports started coming in around March 7, 2021 regarding the nearly 150-170 Rohingya refugees in Jammu after the verification drive and disappearance of family members".

Cong. seeks probe into bribe charges

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday demanded a judicial probe into the allegations that Sweden's automaker Scania offered bribes to government officials in India to secure business.

Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinate told presspersons, "The reports of the bus contract scam are indeed very disturbing. The Scandinavian government reports point a finger at the Central government, various Ministers, various State governments... We demand a judicial inquiry into this."

The spokesperson also demanded a probe into the death of a rape survivor's father in a road accident in Kanpur and questioned the silence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "We demand that the family be duly compensated. We demand a judicial inquiry and demand that the insensitive government wakes up and owns up its moral responsibility," she said.

Minister's office says report on gift of bus is fabricated

A Swedish news channel had named Gadkari as recipient



Nitin Gadkari

company did not, that itself contradicts that the bus was a gift to Shri Gadkari," reads the statement from the Minister's office.

It added, "Mr. Gadkari and his family members have absolutely nothing to do with the purchase or sale of the bus. Nor do they have anything to do with any firm or individual who might be linked with the purchase or sale of the bus."

The Minister's office asserted that Mr. Gadkari introduced Scania's Ethanol run bus in Nagpur as a part of his drive to bring in green public transport in India and encouraged the Nagpur Municipal Corporation to initiate a pilot project following which the Nagpur civic body signed a commercial Memorandum of Understanding with the Swedish firm. *The Hindu* has written to Scania to ascertain the facts reported by the Swedish media and a response is awaited.

HC bats for protection of runaway couples

It suggests providing safe houses

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

To protect the life and liberty of couples who have married against the wishes of their family, the Punjab and Haryana High Court has suggested that safe houses be made available in each district of Punjab, Haryana as well as the Union Territory of Chandigarh.

In a writ petition that sought issuance of directions to the Punjab government to protect the life and liberty of the petitioners who had recently solemnised marriage against the wishes of their parents, Justice Avneesh Jhingan, in an interim order, pointed out that a "number of such petitions can be of great help. An existing cell in the police department can be depoted or a new cell can be created which can deal with the representation in a time-bound manner, in any case not beyond 48 hours. It can also be ensured by authorities that in case a request is made by the couples during the period of consideration of the representation, they be provided shelter in safe house," said the court.

The court added the Legal Services Authorities with the passage of time had been able to reach to the grassroots level.

India, Japan space agencies review ties

Many collaborations planned

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI



Japan and India have been working together on a moon rover mission.

Early this month, India and Italy decided to explore opportunities in earth observation, space science and robotic and human exploration.

Last month, India and Australia signed an amendment to the MoU which will build on the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Both countries are also in discussions for Australia to host vital tracking infrastructure to support the Gaganyaan manned space flight mission.

According to the SVT re-

Rahul flags report on slide in democracy

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Thursday tweeted a news report on the findings of a Swedish institute that claimed that India had turned into an "elected autocracy".

"India is no longer a democratic country," Mr. Gandhi tweeted, tagging the report.

On Wednesday, Sweden-based V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) Institute released a report that downgraded India as a democracy and placed it below neighbours such as Bangladesh and Nepal.

Muzzling of media and frequent use of sedition clauses and defamation cases were cited to explain why India was being categorised as an "elected autocracy".

The report pointed out that the global decline of liberal democracies was "steep" in the past 10 years in the Asia-Pacific region, Central Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America.

According to the SVT re-

port, the financing was handled by Volkswagen's finance company and that Scania's CEO confirmed that it reimbursed Volkswagen for the part of the money that the company linked to Mr. Gadkari did not pay.

"The allegations that the bus was not paid for and was used for the wedding of Mr. Gadkari's daughter are nothing but a figment of media's imagination. The media reports that the bus was financed by a Volkswagen finance company, but Scania stepped into pay for the part that the above-mentioned

PM to flag off march to Dandi today

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off a march from the Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi on Friday to kick off celebrations of the 75th year of Independence, Culture Minister Prahilad Singh Patel said on Thursday.

The Prime Minister would inaugurate cultural and digital initiatives as part of the celebrations and address the gathering at the Sabarmati Ashram as well, the Minister said.

The Culture Ministry had announced last week that the celebrations would begin from Friday, March 12, marking the anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha.

It also marks 75 weeks till Independence Day 2022.

25 days

The march from the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad to Dandi in Navsari, a distance of 241 miles, would take the 81 marchers a period of 25 days, the Ministry said.

The march would be joined by different groups of people along the way. Mr. Patel would lead the first stretch of 75 km of the march, it said.

Prime Minister cites example of vaccines being sent to different countries



Earlier this week, the Prime Minister released a book with commentaries by 21 scholars on the Gita. ■ PTI

worked in quick time to come out with vaccines. Now, we are humbled that vaccines made in India are going around the world. We want to heal as well as help humanity. This is exactly what the Bhagavad Gita teaches us."

The Bhagavad Gita was

born during conflict, a reference to the Mahabharata, and many felt that humanity was passing through a similar conflict and challenges now, he noted. "The world is fighting a tough battle against a once in a lifetime global pandemic. The economic and social impacts

are also far reaching. In such a time, the path shown in Bhagavad Gita becomes ever relevant," he asserted.

The beauty of the Gita was in its depth, diversity and flexibility, he pointed out. He quoted a peer-reviewed journal of cardiology published by the University of Oxford that talks at length about the relevance of Gita during the time of the pandemic.

Praises Tamil diaspora

He praised the Tamil diaspora for scaling new heights in many sectors and yet carrying the greatness of its culture wherever they went.

Paying homage to Swami Chidhavanda, Mr. Modi said his mind, body, heart and soul were devoted to India's regeneration.

'Self-reliant India is good for world'

Prime Minister cites example of vaccines being sent to different countries

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday asserted that in the long run, a "self-reliant India was in the interest of the world" as he expounded the core beliefs in the Bhagavad Gita.

Releasing the 'Kindle' version of Swami Chidhavanda's book on the subject, he said, "At the core of Atmanirbhar Bharat is to create wealth and values not only for ourselves but for the larger humanity. We believe that an Atmanirbhar Bharat is good for the world."

Referring to the COVID-19 pandemic, he said that when the world needed medicines, India did whatever it could to provide them. "Our scientists

were in quick time to come out with vaccines. Now, we are humbled that vaccines made in India are going around the world. We want to heal as well as help humanity. This is exactly what the Bhagavad Gita teaches us."

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Plea in SC against wrongful prosecution

A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court highlighting need for the government to frame guidelines for compensating victims of wrongful prosecution by the police or authorities.

The government had not bothered to implement the recommendations made by the Law Commission of India in its 277th report on the miscarriage of justice in 2018, it stated.

Surprisingly, India, with a population of around 1.5

billion, has no effective statutory/legal mechanism for the wrongful prosecutions due to police and prosecutorial misconduct resulting in a pandemic of false cases which has not only destroyed the social fabric of the nation but also affected the overburdened judiciary in 2018, it stated.

The Commission had prepared the report on the basis of a Delhi High Court order in the Babloo Chauhan case in November 2017 to undertake a "comprehensive examination of issue of relief and rehabilitation of victims of wrongful prosecution and incarceration".

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Traditional kitchens around the country are gearing up to make their raw mango delicacies, as the harbingers of summer slowly make their way into the market

ANASUYA MENON

No Christian wedding in Angamaly takes place without the Angamaly *manga* curry. On the eve of the wedding or even on the main day, it is served over steaming hot rice, often accompanied by beef, pork, chicken or fish. This seemingly simple lemon-yellow gravy is the chief attraction of the wedding feast.

For those from Angamaly, summers are inextricably linked to this raw mango curry. Every Indian, for that matter has a special raw mango memory: Summer makes its unofficial entry into kitchens in their form. Diced and pickled, dusted with chilli powder and salt, cooked and sweetened, mashed and juiced, the raw mango sets the template for the season.

Daisy Kurien, a home-maker from Angamaly, elaborates about the curry. "It is usually made only on special occasions, such as a wedding or a baptism, but I make it at home often since the children love it." The real taste of the curry is in the mixing of its ingredients, she says. Slices of raw mango, shallots, green chilli, ginger, garlic, a few pinches of caraway seeds, salt and red chilli powder go into a large bowl and are crushed together by hand. This mixture, after about 20 minutes, is then cooked in coconut milk. What emerges at the end of the exercise is a delicious tangy curry that lasts up to a week.

On the other hand, in most Bengali households, the first smell of the season is that of *tok dal*, says Aparna Mukherjee,



Look who's strutting into season

who spent her childhood summers at her maternal aunt's home in Kolkata, where her grandmother would make it.

"We still make it at home now in Nagpur. It is a very simple preparation – not too tangy and

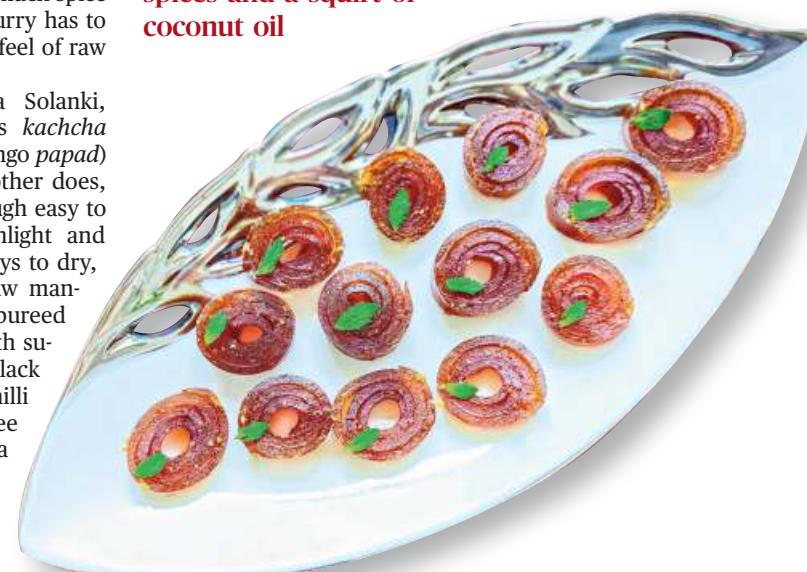
a little sweet, as we add a bit of sugar to it. Some make it with jaggery. It can be made with *masur* or *toor dal*. The essence of the *dal* is its simplicity and the excitement that comes with the first mangoes of the season," she

says. "For the same reason, we don't kill it with too much spice or seasoning. The curry has to retain the taste and feel of raw mango," she adds.

YouTuber Amrita Solanki, from Indore, makes *kachcha aam papad* (raw mango papad) just the way her mother does, every summer. Though easy to make, it needs sunlight and takes up to three days to dry, says Amrita. The raw mangoes are cooked, pureed and boiled along with sugar, salt, cumin, black pepper and red chilli (optional). This puree is then poured onto a plate greased with oil and left out in the sun. Once completely dried, it appears



While *aam panna*, the popular North Indian summer cooler, uses powdered spices, the *appekayi saru* in Karnataka uses whole spices and a squirt of coconut oil



HORS D'OEUVRES



Much ado about proffee

Coffee lovers who spent most of last year whipping up Dalgona, may now have a new craze that promises to deliver a caffeine kick with some healthy protein. TikTok has revived the interest in 'proffee', a drink that mixes protein supplements with coffee into a photogenic concoction. The #proffee has over 1,20,000 views on TikTok worldwide, but the drink is a little more than just a viral trend, believe its health-focussed supporters. Since it is more filling than regular coffee, it is also said to stave off hunger pangs for those in sedentary work-from-home jobs. There are numerous recipes online for making proffee with protein powder and pre-prepared shakes. Aspiring proffee makers, however, are advised to check the ingredients list of their protein powder to avoid hidden caloric additions.

Move over, pineapple

Fans of Jamie Oliver were left scratching their heads this past week, after the British celebrity chef decided to top one of his pizzas with fresh grapes (Photo: Jamie Oliver's Instagram).

Introduced as the recipe for a 'favourite speedy sausage pizza' on the Channel 4 programme *Keep Cooking Family Favourites*, Oliver's dish uses vegetarian sausage, red onion and sun-dried tomato paste garnished with shredded mozzarella cheese and red seedless grapes. The chef said the sweetness of grapes was a 'game-changer' that set off the rest of the savoury ingredients to good effect. He later posted a

Twitter poll about whether grapes would be a good addition to the classic pan pie that usually has loads of cheese, olives and salami as toppings. Of the over 1,900 replies, the grapes were disliked by 65% of respondents, while 17% were doubtful about its pairing, and 17% were willing to try it out. A few others said the only way they would add grapes was as a wine to go with the pizza.



Served hot The chillies, in season for just a few weeks, are cooked into pickles and preserves to last

■ RAMAKRISHNA G AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Pandu mirapakaya kharam

INGREDIENTS

- 500 gm pandu mirapakaya chillies
- Salt to taste
- 125 gm tamarind
- ½ tsp turmeric

METHOD

Wash the *pandu mirapakaya* and pat dry with a cloth. Cut each into two or three pieces. In a grinding jar, add the chillies, tamarind, turmeric and salt and make a coarse paste. The paste can be stored in an airtight container in the fridge for six months. To make fresh pickle, cut a medium-sized onion into small pieces, and stir fry it with one tablespoon of Bengal gram dal, urad dal, cumin, mustard seeds and curry leaves. Add this to a dollop of the chilli paste and mix thoroughly. Serve with hot rice and ghee.

Recipe by Srigouri Ketavarapu



A pickle to tickle your taste buds

The many ways the Telugus' favourite *pandu mirapakaya* can be made to extend its short stay

PRABALIKA M BORAH

When the season of *pandu mirapakaya* (ripe red chilli) arrives at the end of winter, there is no stopping chilli lovers in the Telugu states. Sold in heaps by the roadside, the vivid red chilli is a coveted ingredient in regional cuisine.

Ripe chilli from Warangal, Telangana, is not too hot; in fact, it has a sweet aroma and leaves a sweetish aftertaste. The skin is fleshy and becomes slightly leath-

ery when left to dry. If not sundried or refrigerated, these chillies do not last long. Despite being mild, *pandu mirapakaya* is rarely eaten raw, and popularly made into pickles, chutneys or used as an ingredient to add colour and spice to dishes.

A big reason behind the coveted status of pickles and chutneys made from this chilli, is its short season – it appears around Sankranti, stays for a couple of months later, and disappears just before

harshest stretch of summer sets in. So, *pandu mirapakaya* has long been relished in the form of various sauces, pickles, dips and marinades, any medium that can help extend its stay in the kitchen.

Arundati Rao, a baker who also runs a culinary studio in Hyderabad, says that apart from the traditional chutney made with gener-

ous amounts of fresh garlic, *pandu mirapakaya* can also be used to make red pasta sauce. She suggests, "De-seed the chillies and puree them along with tomato. This cuts the tanginess of the tomatoes and adds a delicious red tinge. De-seeding takes away the heat from the chillies, making it an absolute winning ingredient. It can also be used to make chilli oil."

Sampath Srinivas Tumala, restaurateur owner Spicy Venue, Hyderabad, says, "*Pandu mirapakaya* pickle is one of the most popular dishes in Telugu cuisine. In our household, we make delicious pickle out of it with *gongura* (sorrel leaves) and it is finger-licking good. As a restaurateur I find the paste of this chilli to be an excellent marinade for any shallow or dry non-vegetarian dish, especially prawns and chicken. Somehow, I haven't heard too many people using *pandu mirapakaya* paste for curries."

Srinivas also suggests mixing (de-seeded) fresh chilli paste with hung curd and roasted garlic, as a dip for finger foods.

Innovations aside, some old fa-



vourites persist. For instance, Sri-gouri Ketavarapu, a retired general manager with the Ordnance Factory, makes sure she makes enough *pachchadi* (chutney) with this *mirchi*. She says the recipe is her connection with her mother who used to make it every year without fail – a connection Telugu children everywhere can relate to.

The raw tang of summer
(Clockwise from far left)
Appekayi saru in Karnataka;
raw mangoes on a tree;
kachcha aam papad in indore

■ PAVITHRA M ADIGA, THULASI KAKKAT AND AMRITA SOLANKI

The *appekayi saru* is Pavithra M Adiga's ode to the season. "Don't mistake it for *aam pannapanna*, the popular North Indian summer cooler uses powdered spices, the *appekayi saru* uses whole spices and a squirt of coconut oil. It is also seasoned with curry leaves, red chillies, mustard and cumin seeds. Pavithra, a food blogger and photographer, learnt how to make it from her grandmother. Popular in coastal Karnataka, Malnad and the Western Ghats in Karnataka, the drink is a sure presence in her kitchens during the hot months.

The right tang
Appekayi is an aromatic, sour variety of mango found mainly in the Malnad/coastal and Western Ghats regions of Karnataka. Their availability in the local market has reduced to a large extent, so in their absence, Pavithra uses aromatic mangoes sourced from a friend's farm in Bengaluru. The drink can be had chilled or warm, she says.

Much like the *rasam* or the *sambar* in a South Indian household, the *pachi pulusu* is a Telangana summer staple. *Pachi* means raw and *pulusu* means gravy, says Geeta Gudavarti. Geeta, settled in Bengaluru, is from Hyderabad and she makes the dish every summer. She has a food blog as well. "The traditional way of making it is to use every ingredient in its raw form – mango, onions, coriander. However, over time, people have started roasting the mangoes. Some even boil them," she says. Steaming or grating mangoes makes them easier to mash. What gives the dish its distinct flavour is the same seed powder, ground coarse with red chillies, a ubiquitous ingredient in every Telangana home, she adds.

Start making the most of raw mangoes now, for once the golden ripe ones flood the markets, it will be a different story.



AISHWARYA UPADHYE

Two decades ago, the coastal communities of Gujarat knew the 'barrel,' but not the whale shark. It was a commonly used name for the fish, not because of its size but because harpoons and barrels were used while hunting it. But today, they are referred to as *vhalii* which means "dear one" in Gujarati. The change in perception is due to the conservation efforts of Wildlife Trust of India.

A recent study published in *Nature*, one of the world's leading science journals, states that the global population of sharks and rays has crashed by over 70% in the past five decades.

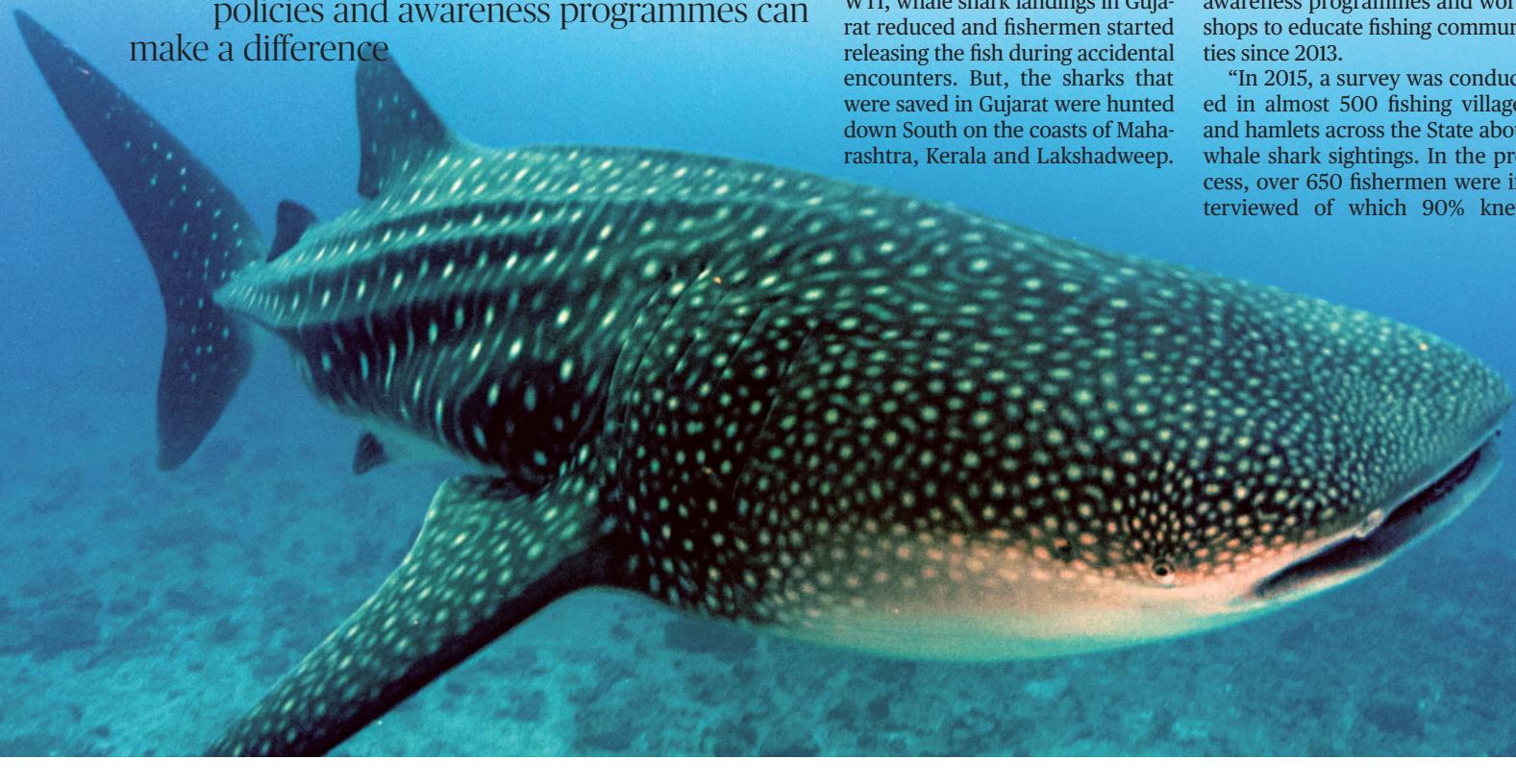
According to a report by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, India is now the second largest shark fishing nation in the world, following Indonesia. This makes present-day grassroots conservation efforts – by NGOs and State Forest Departments alike – all the more worthy of the spotlight.

Starting steps
It was in 2001 that, in a conservation attempt, whale sharks were included in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act of India, 1972, rendering the capture and killing of the fish a cognisable offence. It was the first-ever species to be protected under this Act, after which the Ganges shark (*Glyptis gangeticus*) and speartooth shark (*Glyptis glyptis*) were added to it.

Sajan John, head of marine projects at Wildlife Trust of India, adds, "However, enforcing the fish-

Saving the sea giants

A study reveals the global population of sharks and rays have crashed by over 70% in the past five decades. But a few conservation initiatives in India show that well-crafted policies and awareness programmes can make a difference



Home for all (Clockwise from left) Awareness campaign by Wildlife Trust of India at a school in Gujarat; and a whale shark being released from nets ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ing regulations for these sharks was not straightforward, as whale sharks were usually hauled in as by-catch when fishermen were targeting economically benefiting species. The meat of whale sharks is not very edible, it is the liver that is the most important for commercial trade, while oil from the fish is used for water-proofing boats."

Despite the protection, whale shark landings were common on India's West coast, especially in Gujarat.

This is when Wildlife Trust of India, decided to launch awareness and conservation programmes in the State to educate the fishermen about the species.

"The decision of protecting the species was taken at an apex level but the information never trickled down to the fishermen. That is why we launched our Whale Shark Conservation Programme in Junagadh in 2004 and thereafter spread to Gir Somnath, Porbandar, and Dwarka," explains Sajan.

Workshops were conducted in villages and street plays were written and enacted to convey the consequences of hunting whale sharks. "We also roped in leaders from local communities to head our campaigns so that we did not look like outsiders calling them out for their practices," adds Sajan.

Due to the consistent efforts of WTI, whale shark landings in Gujarat reduced and fishermen started releasing the fish during accidental encounters. But, the sharks that were saved in Gujarat were hunted down South on the coasts of Maharashtra, Kerala and Lakshadweep.



"Once we realised this, we launched awareness campaigns in Kerala and Lakshadweep. Like Gujarat, we have street plays in coastal villages and have been part of carnivals to raise awareness. It is due to these efforts that the last whale shark landing from Gujarat was reported in 2005 and the incidents have reduced drastically in Kerala and Lakshadweep. Since 2007, the fishermen in Gujarat have reported spotting of over 50 whale pups. We are now geo-tagging these fishes to know their whereabouts," he adds.

Meanwhile, on the East coast, the Forest Department of Andhra Pradesh along with The East Godavari River Estuarine Ecosystem (EGREE) has been conducting awareness programmes and workshops to educate fishing communities since 2013.

"In 2015, a survey was conducted in almost 500 fishing villages and hamlets across the State about whale shark sightings. In the process, over 650 fishermen were interviewed of which 90% knew

about the whale shark, 50% had seen the fish and over 11% had seen a pup," says C Selvam, Deputy Conservator of Forests (WL), Eluru. Kakinada, Visakhapatnam, Machilipatnam and Nizampatnam are major shark landing areas in the State.

Blacktip sharks, bull sharks, pelagic and big-eye thresher shark, smooth and scalloped hammerhead, and tiger sharks are the species that are hunted frequently on these coasts. "Of these, several species like smooth and scalloped hammerheads are classified as threatened species by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Scalloped hammerheads are categorised on the IUCN Red List as globally endangered," adds Selvam.

Long road ahead
Irrespective of their size or habitat, humans have found a way to hunt most of the sharks and use every part of them.

The skin is used for leather which is made into boots and bags, and liver for oil. The fins were earlier harvested for shark fin soup, a sought-after delicacy in Southeast Asia and China. However, exporting shark fins was banned in India in 2015. It was easier raising awareness about whale sharks as the fish is protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act but this could not be done for others.

Adding to this Sajan says, "The basic question that fishermen ask is whether it is illegal to kill the fish and when the answer is no, we have lost the battle there. We need to have more species under the Act so that we can save them from extinction."

My garden blooms again

Tamil Nadu's second largest garden has been renovated, at the age of 113. Now, a walk through the refreshed botanical garden of Tamil Nadu Agriculture University, is a riot of colours, scents and lessons in flora

K JESHI

A canopy of gulmohar trees streak the air with yellow as I begin my walk at the Tamil Nadu Agriculture University's (TNAU) renovated botanical garden in Coimbatore. A few steps away, a

riot of orange blooms dot the ground. Next to this bay of flowering shrubs of rose, yellow and orange tecoma flowers, are vast stretches of green lawns.

The renovated front of the 113-year-old garden, second largest in the State after the Government



Green hub The 47-acre garden has over 800 species of flora ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

common names. Spread across 47 acres, the garden has over 800 species of flora, both exotic and native. "It brings together education, aesthetics, and recreation," says N Kumar, Vice-Chancellor of TNAU. "The garden is a zero-plastics zone and we ensure that the public strictly adhere to it." The front entrance leads to a renovated play area for children – a cheerful space with swings and colourful slides. An artificial cascade waterfall is being readied.

A garden maze with railings is accompanied by rows of clerodendron plants, with tiny white flowers. "These are evergreen plants and can grow up to two metres and in perfect shape. Children can run and hide themselves among the greenery," says M Gan-

ga, Associate Professor from the Department of Floriculture.

A little distance away is a five-tiered sunken garden. It has a central pond laid below the ground level, and terraces around. It also features steps embellished with flowering shrubs like pink euphorbias, and ruellias with pink, white and purple flowers. "The Department of Floriculture maintains the garden. It's a tropical botanical garden and serves as an education centre for floriculture students to learn about landscaping and concepts of floriculture as it is a part of the syllabus," explains Kumar.

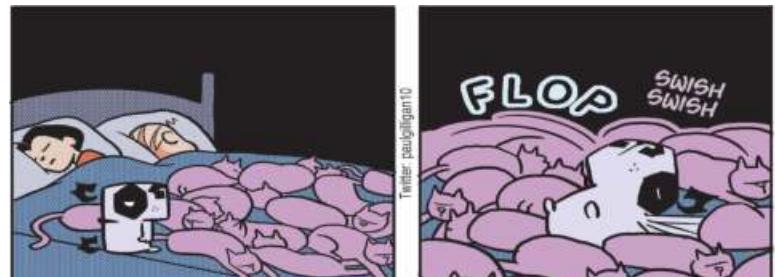
A number of new species have been added, like the branched palm sourced from the Royal Botanical Garden of Kolkata. A cluster of male and female branched palm trees stands still and picturesque overlooking the four-lawn green turf, developed with Mexi-

can grass. Other attractions include a bambusetum with 15 species of bamboo, a rock garden with cacti species, and a palma-tum with diverse palm species.

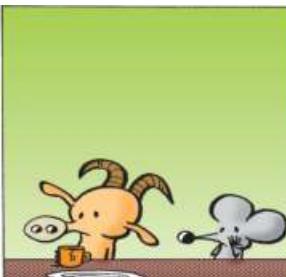
We walk past sivakundalam (sausage tree) and 100-year-old gulmohar trees with buttressed roots, to reach the plant conservatory, where plants are nurtured in a green house with shade net. A sprinkler water system creates a misty environment for the plants. There are anthuriums, birds of paradise, heliconias, rose grape cluster plants, peace lily, and more. "These species require high humidity. Most are rare, endangered or threatened. They cannot withstand direct sunlight, so we nurture them under diffused light," explains Ganga.

"Our objective is to reach out to the public. A love for flora should eventually lead to conservation," explains Kumar.

POOCH CAFE



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



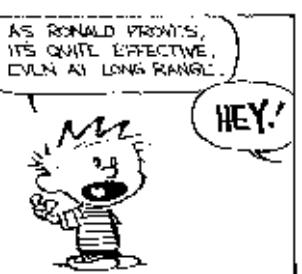
PEANUTS



TIGER



CALVIN AND HOBBES



China Parliament approves 5-year plan

It highlights key strategic projects, including building a dam on the lower reaches of the Brahmaputra

ANANTH KRISHNAN

China on Thursday formally approved the outline of its 14th five-year plan (2021-25), which highlights a number of key strategic projects to be pursued as a priority, including the first dam in Tibet on the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo or Brahmaputra, a Sichuan-Tibet railway line near the India border, and a push for self-sufficiency in emerging industries such as Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The draft outline of the five-year plan (FYP) and objectives through the year 2035 were passed by the National People's Congress, the ceremonial legislature, as it closed its six-day annual session. Among the key projects is the building of a hydropower base on the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo, which refers to the sections of the river in Tibet just before it enters India in Arunachal Pradesh. While four dams have been approved on the upper and middle reaches, this is the first project in the lower reaches of the river. Che Dalha, deputy Communist Party chief of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), said at the NPC that authorities should



Final stamp: Xi Jinping, left, and Li Keqiang casting their vote at the closing session of the NPC in Beijing on Thursday. • AP

on upstream flows with an estimated 35% of its basin in India, according to officials.

High-priority project

Dams on the lower reaches and at the Great Bend of the river near the border, which has been cited as a possible location for the new project, would raise worries because of the location across the border from Arunachal Pradesh in an ecologically sensitive canyon. Past projects to tap the enormous hydropower potential of the Great Bend were not given approval, but the inclusion of the project in the FYP suggests that China provides under a bilateral arrangement. The Brahmaputra is not entirely dependent

viewed as a key element of a broader push to diversify China's energy mix and meet a target of peaking carbon emissions by 2030.

The hydropower base was listed in the outline of the FYP among projects that serve major national strategies, along with the Sichuan-Tibet railway. The FYP highlighted the railway from Ya'an in Sichuan to Nyingchi in Tibet as a key infrastructure project. It also called to "advance the preparatory work" for building a railway line from Xigaze in Tibet to Gyirong along the Tibet-Nepal border, which is part of an already agreed plan to build a cross-border railway link connecting China and Nepal. The FYP also emphasised opening up access to key border highways, including the strategically important G219 national highway that runs along the entire length of the India-China border in Xinjiang and Tibet.

The rail from Ya'an to Nyingchi in Tibet, which lies just across from Arunachal Pradesh, is the first segment of a line that will eventually run to Lhasa and is the second major rail link from China's hinterland to Tibet. President Xi Jinping in November officially "gave the

instruction" to begin work on the project, calling it "a major step in safeguarding national unity and a significant move in promoting economic and social development of the western region." Zhu Weiqun, a senior Party official formerly in charge of Tibet policy, said last year the railway will help "transport advanced equipment and technologies from the rest of China to Tibet and bring local products out" and "if a scenario of a crisis happens at the border, the railway can act as a 'fast track' for the delivery of strategic materials."

Beyond the strategic infrastructure projects, the broader goal of the FYP and the 2035 outline emphasised establishing China's self-sufficiency in key high-tech industries. While the FYP for the first time did not outline a growth target, it listed an annual target to increase R&D spending "by more than 7% per year". It said China "will take self-reliance in science and technology as strategic underpinning for national development" and "will focus on the development of strategic emerging industries including information technology, biotech and new energy".

Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief Bill passes U.S. Congress

\$1,400 cheques for eligible people, aid to local governments

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

In a massive and early victory for the Democrats, the House of Representatives approved 220-211 a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief Bill, voting almost entirely along party lines. The Bill, having already passed the Senate, will be signed into law by President Joe Biden on Friday.

"Help is here," Mr. Biden tweeted shortly after the House had voted on the American Rescue Plan. He called the Bill – which is one of the largest stimulus measures on record – a "historic victory" for the American people.

nated and Mr. Biden has said the country will have vaccines for everyone who wants them by the end of May.

Eligible Americans will receive \$1,400 cheques under a \$400 billion measure contained in the Bill. Another \$350 billion will be directed towards vaccine distribution, assistance to State and local governments and to fund tax credits for those with children.

The Bill extends by six months a \$300 weekly unemployment insurance scheme which was due to expire in March. It also covers assistance to schools to facilitate the return of children to classrooms, a 15% increase in food stamp benefits for another six months and assistance for the heating and cooling of homes income for poor families among other measures.

Many of those eligible for the cheques are expected to receive them by the end of the month. Unlike what Mr. Trump had done with two sets of relief cheques that went out earlier, Mr. Biden will not have his name on the cheques.

She is the sixth woman to accuse him of harassment. On Tuesday, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said that if the Bill was passed Americans would be met by "some measure of prosperity" after the pandemic.

Over 5,00,000 Americans have died of the coronavirus pandemic. Over 18% of Americans have been vaccinated.



Big boost: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer holding the COVID-19 aid Bill. • AFP

pansive and pushed through a raft of progressive policy priorities.

"This isn't a rescue Bill, it isn't a relief Bill, it is a laundry list of left-wing priorities that predate the pandemic and do not meet the needs of American families," House Minority (Republican) Leader Kevin McCarthy said, as reported by the Washington Post.

Measures Republicans have opposed include a \$86 billion bailout to failing multi-employer pension plans, on the grounds that it is not related to the pandemic.

The sole House Democrat who had opposed the Bill, Jared Golden of Maine, said some of the Bill's measures were unnecessary while others were absent – such as a provision to set the federal minimum wage at \$15, up from \$7.25 per hour – which could not pass the Senate version of the Bill.

Nevertheless, a significant majority of Americans (70%) support the Bill, according to a survey released by the Pew Research Center on Wednesday. The same survey said 41% of Republicans and independents who lean Republican support the measures.

The stimulus is expected to boost the global economic recovery from COVID-19, the OECD had said on Tuesday.

China overhauls Hong Kong's poll system

Beijing-appointed politicians will have a greater say in running the city's politics

ANANTH KRISHNAN

China on Thursday passed sweeping changes for Hong Kong's electoral system that will give Beijing-appointed politicians a greater say in running the Special Administration Region (SAR), marking the biggest change since the handover in 1997.

The National People's Congress (NPC), the Communist Party-controlled legislature, approved "to improve" Hong Kong's electoral system as it ended its week-long session, with President Xi Jinping and 2,894 other delegates supporting the move. One abstained and none opposed the change, which was passed with thunderous applause from the Party-appointed delegates to the NPC in Beijing.

At the heart of the new proposal is a move to give Beijing-appointed politicians greater power in running the

HKSAR's politics, through a newly expanded Election Committee of 1,500 members.

The NPC said the move was to ensure that "the electoral system should conform to the policy of one country, two systems", meet the realities in the HKSAR and serve to ensure that Hong Kong is administered by people who love the country and love Hong Kong". The idea to "ensure the administration of Hong Kong by Hong Kong people with patriots as the main body" was described by Beijing as a response to the 2019 pro-democracy protests that roiled the city and called for universal suffrage.

Wang Chen, vice chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, said the new move was to plug "clear loopholes and deficiencies, which the anti-China, destabilising elements jumped on

to take into their hands the power to administer the HKSAR".

More legislators
Currently, only half of the 70 members of Hong Kong's Legislative Council (LegCo) are directly elected and the rest are nominated. With this change, the number of LegCo members will be increased to 90, with the additional members also nominated, thereby reducing the share of elected representatives.

The expanded Election Committee will be composed of 1,500 members, up from 1,200 previously, with the new members set to include the Beijing-nominated Hong Kong members of the NPC (the legislature) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (the political advisory body or upper house). The Election Committee, as previously,

will be responsible for electing the Chief Executive, and will also choose some of the members of LegCo.

The selection of "patriots" will be ensured by the setting up of a new candidate qualification review committee, which the NPC said "shall be responsible for reviewing and confirming the qualifications of candidates for the Election Committee members, the Chief Executive, and the LegCo members".

The new electoral system is the second significant change in the administration of the HKSAR since the 2019 protests, with a national security law passed last year that lists penalties for "secession" and "subversion" and, in the view of Hong Kong's pro-democracy parties, has eroded the political freedoms that distinguished Hong Kong from the mainland under the "one country, two systems" model.

ELSEWHERE



Prince William denies royal family is 'racist'

LONDON Prince William on Thursday defended the British royal family after his younger brother Harry and wife Meghan accused them of racism in a bombshell interview watched around the world. "We're very much not a racist family," Prince William, 38, told reporters during a visit to a multi-racial school in a deprived area of east London. The Duke of Cambridge, as he is formally known, is the first senior royal to speak out publicly about the explosive row that has engulfed Britain's most famous family. He said he had yet to speak to Prince Harry since the interview with U.S. chat show host Oprah Winfrey, first aired in the U.S. on Sunday night. • AFP

Blinken to meet Chinese officials

U.S. set to raise major concerns about Beijing's actions

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan will meet their Chinese counterparts, Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi and State Councillor Wang Yi in Anchorage on May 19, State Department spokesman Ned Price said via a statement.

The U.S. will raise the many concerns it has with Beijing's actions and behaviour that pose security challenges to the U.S. and its partners, Mr. Blinken told the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC). A State Department statement noted that the meetings will take place after Mr. Blinken meets with his counterparts in South Korea and Japan – which is scheduled to happen earlier next week.



Antony Blinken

talk about the competition that we have with China to make sure that the United States has a level playing field and that our companies and workers benefit from that," he said.

Mr. Blinken also made clear that next week's meeting was not a strategic dialogue.

"This is not a strategic dialogue. There's no intent at this point for a series of follow-on engagements. Those engagements, if they are to follow, really have to be based on the proposition that we're seeing tangible progress and tangible outcomes on the issue of concern to us with China," he said.

Mr. Blinken also confirmed during his hearing that he was not contemplating concessions to the Chinese government going into the Anchorage meeting.

Junta spurns UN, keeps using lethal force

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Spurning an appeal by the United Nations to stop using lethal force against peaceful demonstrators, security forces in Myanmar on Thursday fatally shot at least 10 people protesting against last month's military coup.

The military also lodged a new allegation against Aung

San Suu Kyi, the elected leader it ousted on February 1. It charged at a news conference in the capital, Naypyitaw, that in 2017-18, she was illegally given \$6,00,000 and gold bars worth slightly less by a political ally, former Yangon Division Chief Minister Phyo Min Thein.

Military spokesman Brigadier General Zaw Min Tun

said Phyo Min Thein had admitted giving the money and gold to Ms. Suu Kyi, but presented no evidence.

The accusation was clearly aimed at discrediting Ms. Suu Kyi, and perhaps charging her with a serious crime.

She and President Win Myint are both being detained on less serious allegations.

Myanmar has been roiled

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IN BRIEF



Google Pay adds new user privacy features

NEW DELHI Google Pay on Thursday announced new features for improved user privacy, including the option to delete transaction records as well as the choice to opt out of getting personalised offers and rewards. "All users will be asked to choose whether they would like to turn the control on or off as soon as they upgrade to the next version of the Google Pay app," Ambarish Kenghe, vice president - Product, said in a blog post.

NMDC declares interim dividend of ₹7.76

HYDERABAD Public sector mining major NMDC on Thursday declared an interim dividend of ₹7.76 per equity share (face value of ₹1 each) for 2020-21. The interim dividend will be paid/dispatched as per the provisions of the Companies Act, 2013, NMDC said informed the stock exchange. This is the first interim dividend this fiscal from the country's largest iron ore producer, in which the Centre holds 69.65% stake.

Cloud software provider Icertis gets \$80 mn
BENGALURU Contract management solutions provider Icertis received an investment of \$80 million, almost tripling its valuation to \$2.8 billion, the company said. The latest round, Series F, was led by existing investor B Capital Group. Icertis, which works with clients such as Apple and Microsoft, has so far raised \$280 million. The earlier round, two years ago, had valued the company at almost \$1 billion.

U.S. curbs could hit Quad's vaccine aims

Restrictions on exports could dent alliance's push to speed global vaccinations, counter China's moves

REUTERS
MUMBAI

The U.S.-backed Quad alliance aims to invest in India's pharmaceutical capacity as it looks to ramp up COVID vaccine output, but U.S. curbs on exports of key materials could hamper that effort, sources say.

The alliance, grouping the United States, Japan, Australia and India, wants to expand global vaccinations and in turn counter China's growing vaccine diplomacy in Southeast Asia and worldwide. India is the world's biggest vaccine maker.

India to seek assurance As the alliance's first virtual summit kicks off on Friday, one key assurance that India will be seeking is for an easing of export curbs, said two



Regional thrust: Some additional shots from India will go to Southeast Asia even as China pushes its vaccines. ■ REUTERS

sources briefed on the issue.

The White House said last week it had used the U.S. Defence Production Act — which prevents export of materials to prioritise local production — to help drug-maker Merck make Johnson

& Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine.

"India's seeking both raw materials and investments from Quad partners and once this aspect is resolved, then the Quad alliance can start large-scale distribution

starting in Southeast Asian countries," said one Indian government source.

Earlier this week Reuters reported that the U.S. and Japan would help fund Indian firms manufacturing vaccines for U.S. drugmakers Novavax Inc. and J&J.

Some of the additional supplies from India will go to Southeast Asia as China pushes its vaccines to supply Indonesia, Philippines and others in the region.

Filters and bags

But the Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's biggest vaccine maker, has said it is worried the U.S. ban on exports of materials like filters and bags, keeping them for U.S. companies, could limit production, especially of the Novavax shot that it was set

to start making next month.

"The ramp-up and scaling of Novavax production could take a sharp hit, and if restrictions persist this could slow the road also slow the ramp-up of Covishield," said a source close to the matter, referring to the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine that SII is also licensed to produce.

SII did not respond to a request for comment.

U.S. officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment. India's foreign ministry had no immediate comment.

Limitations to production of the Novavax and Covishield shots risk hurting the GAVI/WHO COVAX initiative that is heavily reliant on those two vaccines as it shares inoculations with poorer countries.

'Economies to see pre-Covid activity only by '22'

Credit slump to fade away: Moody's

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Moody's Investors Service on Thursday said the credit downturn arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic would be short-lived but that most economies would not return to pre-pandemic activity levels until 2022.

In the year since the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020, the virus has disrupted the global economy and triggered a credit downturn accompanied by a spike in bond defaults.

Stating that most economies would not return to pre-pandemic activity levels until 2022, Moody's said it expected a slow and bumpy global recovery and that uncertainty around the macroeconomic outlook remains much higher than usual. Policy actions will continue to support economic activity and financial markets after the pandemic has eased, it added.



uncertainty around the macroeconomic outlook remains much higher than usual. Policy actions will continue to support economic activity and financial markets after the pandemic has eased, it added.

Policymakers will continue to support economic activity long after the pandemic has faded, in some cases for years, Moody's said.

PLI: Centre's nod for 33 API applications

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The government has approved 33 applications with a committed investment of ₹5,082.65 crore under the production-linked incentive scheme for active pharmaceutical ingredients, an official release said on Thursday.

Setting up of these plants will make the country self-reliant to a large extent in respect of these bulk drugs, it noted.

The Department of Pharmaceuticals had unveiled a PLI scheme for the promotion of domestic manufacturing in four different target segments with a total outlay of ₹6,940 crore for the period 2020-21 to 2029-30.

'Govt. owning bad bank is more capital efficient'

Set-up may lower credit charges: BofA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

Amid confusing reports about the control of the proposed bad bank, a brokerage has called for government ownership, saying state-funding was more capital efficient apart from speeding up implementation and also lowering the credit costs for the banks.

The government owning the proposed bad bank would not only be more capital efficient but also not impact the fiscal numbers, as otherwise, it would have to keep on recapitalising the state-owned lenders as they would be the biggest beneficiaries of the proposed bad bank, Bank of America Securities India said in a re-

C Pandemic woes may drive gross NPAs from 2.8% in March 2020 to 13.5% in September 2021

port. Again, such a set-up could lower the credit charge on banks to a fifth in the worst-case scenario from the 100% now, the report added.

As of March 2020, the gross non-performing loans of banks stood at 2.8% or ₹2,89,500 crore, which is 1.3% of the GDP, according to the report. This would go up to 13.5% by this September, a two-decade high, given the impact of the pandemic on the companies and banks, according to the Reserve Bank of India.

Fuel demand fell to 5-month low in Feb'

REUTERS

India's fuel consumption fell for the second month in a row in February to its lowest since September last year as record-high retail prices continued to stonewall a demand recovery for the world's third-biggest oil importer and consumer.

Consumption of fuel, a proxy for oil demand, fell 4.9% to 17.2 million tonnes year-on-year in February, data from the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC) showed.

"Prices have to come down or coronavirus cases should reduce before we see a real recovery, as some people are still reluctant to travel," said Refinitiv analyst Ehsan Ul Haq.

Tata Motors bets big on CV growth, unveils range of trucks

Firm expects commercial vehicles to grow 30% next fiscal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Tata Motors expects the commercial vehicles industry to grow more than 30% in the next fiscal on the back of cyclical demand upturn and overall recovery of economic activity, according to a top company official.

The company, which on Thursday unveiled its latest range of intermediate and light commercial trucks (I&LVC) — the Ultra Sleek T-Series — starting from ₹13.9 lakh (ex-showroom Delhi), is also seeking to cash in on the return of demand and enhance its market share in the segment.

"One can now say that the



Girish Wagh

economic recovery is well and truly in place and we see the last quarter GDP growth has been positive," Tata Motors President Commercial Vehicle Business Unit, Girish Wagh told reporters in a virtual conference.

He further said the CV in-

Pandemic slowed IT deal conversions: LTI's Jalona

'Trend may change, with crisis easing'

MINI TEJASWI
BENGALURU

The process of contracting for large deals has become quite complex as the solution components and customer collaboration models have changed with the pandemic, said Sanjay Jalona, CEO and MD, Larsen & Tourelle Infotech (LTI).

"Because of this, deal conversion takes longer than usual. But we are witnessing the beginning of the end of this crisis, and are hopeful that the pace will gradually become faster," he said. The tech firm has been actively chasing large deals in the last several quarters.

"We have successfully



closed several multi-million, multi-year deals in the last few quarters. A reflection of this is the 22 new clients we signed in Q3 [this year]," he said. According to him, all aspects of business had witnessed accelerated digitalisation during the pandemic.

Apple starts to make in India its iPhone 12'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Apple Inc is commencing assembly of its iPhone 12 model in the country, a move expected to help the firm consolidate its position in the smartphone market in India. Apple has partnered with third-party manufacturers such as Foxconn and Wistron to make some of its phones in India.

These include the iPhone SE, iPhone 10R and iPhone 11. Sources said Foxconn would be making the iPhone 12 at a T.N. facility.

Comments from Foxconn could not be immediately elicited. Apple had started making iPhones in India in 2017.

Kraft paper shortage hits more than 2,000 carton box units

Centre urged to curb exports as domestic supply dwindles

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

More than 2,000 corrugated or carton box units in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry are on the verge of closure due to an export-led shortage and sudden increase in kraft paper prices.

Following this, the South India Corrugated Box Manufacturers' Association (SICBMA) has urged the Centre to impose an immediate ban on export of kraft paper in any form as its supply to the local market had shrunk by more than 50% in the recent months. Kraft paper is the main raw material in the

production of corrugated boxes used mainly by sectors such as pharma, FMCG, food products, automobiles and electrical appliances.

Though the demand for the boxes is steadily growing post COVID-19, the manufac-

turers are not able to ensure supply, as thousands of tonnes of kraft paper are leaving Indian shores for export markets.

According to SICBMA president G. Nagaraj, the cost of kraft paper typically accounts for 85% of the production cost of corrugated boxes. With the steep rise in the price of kraft paper, triggered largely by the exported shortage, the cost of manufacturing of corrugated boxes has risen by 60%.

It is a highly competitive sector and the box manufacturers work on a very thin margin, he pointed out.

"We have successfully



Ecstasy: PSG's Kylian Mbappe is all agog after scoring. ■ AFP

lor Navas to tip his spot-kick onto the bar.

Going for it

Barcelona certainly went for it, but there was to be no repeat of its infamous recovery against the same opponent at the same stage four years ago, when it lost the first leg 4-0 but triumphed 6-1 in the return.

But Messi made it 1-1 with a ferocious strike from 30 metres and the Argentine had the chance to put Barca ahead after Antoine Griezmann was fouled in the area, only for the outstanding Key-

nals with a 2-0 win in Budapest that coach Jürgen Klopp said helps his side put its Premier League woes to one side.

The results: Liverpool 2 (Salah 71, Mane 74) drew with RB Leipzig 0. Liverpool wins 4-0 on aggregate.

Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Mbappe 31-pen) drew with Barcelona 1 (Messi 37). Paris Saint-Germain win 5-2 on aggregate.

Liverpool eased past RB Leipzig into the quarterfinals.

City bounces back in style

EURO LEAGUES

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MANCHESTER

Manchester City bounced back after its 21-game winning streak came to an end with a convincing 5-2 win over Southampton to move 14 points clear at the top of the Premier League.

Luis Suárez's penalty sent Atletico Madrid six points clear at the top of LaLiga on Wednesday as the leader survived a scare to beat a resurgent Athletic Bilbao 2-1.

The results: Premier League: Manchester City 5 (De Bruyne 15, 59, Mahrez 40, 55, Gundogan 45+3) bt Southampton 2 (Ward-Prowse 25+2, Adams 56).

LaLiga: Atletico Madrid 2 (Llorente 45+2, Suarez 51-pen) bt Athletic Bilbao 1 (Muñain 21).

Bundesliga: Arminia Bielefeld 0 lost to Werder Bremen 2 (Sagrot 47, Moehwald 75).

West Indies wins big

SL IN WEST INDIES

ASSOCIATED PRESS
NORTH SOUND (ANTIGUA)

Sri Lanka slumped after opener Danushka Gunathilaka was given out for obstructing the field and lost the first ODI by eight wickets here on Wednesday.

Gunathilaka made 55 and put on 105 in an opening stand with captain Dimuth Karunaratne.

The match became ill-

tempered when, in the 21st over, Gunathilaka was judged to have obstructed the field when he trod on the ball while Pollard was attempting to affect a run out.

The scores: Sri Lanka 232 in 49 overs (Danushka Gunathilaka 55, Dimuth Karunaratne 52, Ashen Bandara 50) lost to West Indies 236/2 in 47 overs (Shai Hope 110, Evin Lewis 65, Darren Bravo 37 n.o.).

Man-of-the-match: Hope. West Indies won by eight wickets with 18 balls to spare.

Afghanistan piles it on with Shahidi double-ton

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ABU DHABI

A historic unbeaten double hundred from Hashmatullah Shahidi (200 n.o., 21x4, 1x6), skipper Asghar Afghan's 164 (14x4, 2x6) and their record 307-run stand helped Afghanistan pile up 545 for four declared, its highest Test score, against Zimbabwe in the second Test here on Thursday.

Zimbabwe was 50 for no loss, still needing 346 to avoid the follow-on and the prospect of facing leg-spinner Rashid Khan, who is likely to get spin from the third day.

The scores: Afghanistan 545/4 decl. in 160.4 overs (Ibrahim Zadrin 72, Hashmatullah Shahidi 2

White ball evens out the gap

England will fancy its chances against India in the shortest format

ENGLAND IN INDIA

ASHWIN ACHAL
AHMEDABAD

After being outplayed by India in the Tests, England will be desperate to put up an improved show in the five-match T20 series, which commences here on Friday.

On paper, the shortest format should provide a more even contest between the two teams. The full-strength England squad includes the likes of Jos Buttler, Jonny Bairstow and Moeen Ali – all of whom took rest breaks during the Test series. Pace ace Jofra Archer has been declared fit, which lends great heft to the bowling unit.

Pitch will not matter

The pitches at the Narendra Modi Stadium – which caused the visitors much dis-

comfort in the third and fourth Tests – will not play as significant a role. Heavy hitters Eoin Morgan, Ben Stokes, David Malan, Jason Roy, Buttler and Bairstow, armed with the licence to attack from the get-go.

There is, however, no escaping the might of the Indian team, which, in recent years, has firmly established themselves as a powerhouse across formats.

The white-ball specialists join the old guard to give the home team a fresh yet formidable look.

Emphatic answer

A selection question – choosing an opening partner for Rohit Sharma – received an emphatic answer from Kohli. The skipper stated in a media interaction on Thursday that K.L. Rahul gets the nod ahead of Shikhar Dhawan.

Rahul, who donned the wicketkeeping gloves in Australia, will feature as a specialist batsman, given that Rishabh Pant has cemented his place behind the sticks.

If a recent training video posted on his social media is taken at face value, Hardik Pandya could return to pace bowling duties. The electric Baroda cricketer has bowled only sparingly since suffering a back injury over a year ago.

Pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who missed a significant part of the IPL due to a thigh injury and last played for India in December 2019, is set to take the new ball.

Despite the cliché about focusing on the here and now, both teams will have an eye on the ICC T20 World Cup to be held in India in October.

All selection conundrums must be resolved well before

the mega event, which only increases the stakes for players hoping to seal long-term spots.

This is a battle between the top two T20 sides in the world, studded with exceptional talent. Expect fireworks galore.

The teams (from):

India: Virat Kohli (Capt.), Rohit Sharma (Cice-capt.), K.L. Rahul, Shikhar Dhawan, Shreyas Iyer, Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pandya, Rishabh Pant, Ishan Kishan, Yuzvendra Chahal, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Rahul Te-wati, T. Natarajan, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Deepak Chahar, Navdeep Saini and Shardul Thakur.

England: Eoin Morgan (Capt.), Moeen Ali, Jofra Archer, Jonny Bairstow, Sam Billings, Jos Buttler, Sam Curran, Tom Curran, Chris Jordan, Liam Livingstone, David Malan, Adil Rashid, Jason Roy, Ben Stokes, Reece Topley, Mark Wood.

Match starts at 7 p.m.



BATTLE OF EQUALS

There is nothing to separate India and England in T20Is. In the duels between the two, no team has won more than three on the trot

■ The first time the sides met in the shortest format was in the World T20 in Durban, a match made memorable by Yuvraj Singh's six sixes in an over off Stuart Broad. India won by 18 runs

■ The last meeting between the two was in Bristol, 2018, when Rohit Sharma's unbeaten 100 helped India pull off a big chase (England 198/9 lost to India 201/3)



TOP PERFORMERS IN INDIA FOR INDIA

MOST RUNS

	M	Inns	Runs	HS	Avg.	SR	50s	100s
Suresh Raina	6	6	204	63	40.80	136.00	1	0

MOST WICKETS

	M	Inns	Wkts.	BBI	Avg.	Econ.	SR	5W
Yuzvendra Chahal	3	3	8	6/25	10.62	7.08	9.0	1

FOR ENGLAND

MOST RUNS

	M	Inns	Runs	HS	Avg.	SR	50s	100s
Eoin Morgan	5	5	162	51	40.50	138.46	1	0

MOST WICKETS

	M	Inns	Wkts.	BBI	Avg.	Econ.	SR	5W
Tim Bresnan	3	3	5	2/19	14.40	6.54	13.2	0

FOR ENGLAND

	M	Inns	Wkts.	BBI	Avg.	Econ.	SR	5W
Chris Jordan	3	3	5	3/22	21.00	8.75	14.4	0

Rahul-Rohit first-choice opening pair: Kohli

Dhawan on stand-by; newcomers have added depth to batting, says skipper



On the job: Virat Kohli leads his team at a training session on Thursday. ■ PTI

ASHWIN ACHAL
AHMEDABAD

K.L. Rahul and Rohit Sharma form India's first-choice opening pair, with Shikhar Dhawan as back-up, says skipper Virat Kohli.

"The starting combination will be Rohit and Rahul. They have been consistently performing at the top. In a situation where Rohit takes rest, or Rahul has a niggle, Shikhar will come in," Kohli said at a media interaction here on Thursday.

System in place

On spinner Varun Chakravarthy, who has reportedly been ruled out of the T20 series after failing the fitness test, Kohli said: "Individuals have

to understand and appreciate the system created for the Indian cricket team. We should try and operate at very high levels of fitness and skill."

"There is a reason why this is the top of the ladder when it comes to playing cricket. You expect players to abide by what is required to be a part of Team India. There should not be any compromise in that regard."

With the addition of newcomers like Ishan Kishan and Suryakumar Yadav, Kohli believes the issue of inadequate batting depth has been addressed. "The kind of players we have added to the squad gives the batting more depth."

We have explosive batsmen in the team now, which can change the game even if we are two or three wickets down.

"This time around, you will see guys play more freely, and not be worried if we have enough batsmen to take care of things if we lose a couple of wickets. That was the case before. We couldn't play freely for the first 10-12 overs," Kohli said.

Asked if in-form offie R. Ashwin can find a spot in the T20I squad, Kohli said, "Washington (Sundar) has been doing very well for us. You cannot have two players of the same discipline playing in the same spot."

'The right preparation for World Cup'

England captain expects team to gain from India experience

SPORTS REPORTER

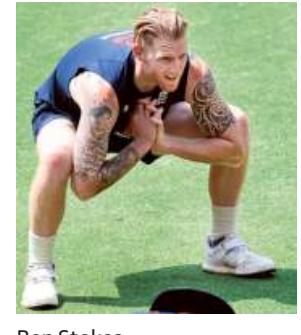
AHMEDABAD

England T20I captain Eoin Morgan says the five-match series will stand his team in good stead for the ICC T20 World Cup to be held in India later this year.

"We're playing against one of the best sides in the world. The perfect scenario would be to learn a huge amount from this series, and then have the time to improve before the World Cup begins."

Points to ponder

"Yes, we are the number one-ranked T20 team in the world, but one of the areas we have to improve is playing away from home. Playing against spin, bowling in the



Ben Stokes. ■ PTI

PowerPlay, bowling at the death – these are aspects we need to significantly improve to become genuine contenders," Morgan said at a media interaction here on Thursday.

Morgan expects big things from southpaw Dawid Malan, the top-ranked T20I bat-

sman in the world.

"Dawid has been so exceptional. It is scary to think that he can continue to do this and more. It's an exciting time for him."

"He has been picked by Punjab Kings in the IPL, so he will continue his experience of playing in India. This will benefit us in the World Cup," Morgan said.

The pitch

On what he expects from the pitch, Morgan said, "It was another hot day today, with the pitch under covers. We had a glimpse; the pitch looked good."

"It depends on what the groundsmen choose to do between today and the match."

Indian women appear to hold the edge

Adapting to the conditions will be key to the outcome

SA IN INDIA

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
LUCKNOW

With the five-match series level 1-1, India and South Africa will strive to defy the conditions in the third One-Day International at the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ekana Stadium here on Friday.

"Hard to score in the morning, and tough to take wickets in the afternoon", has been the trend so far.

The challenge

The challenge would be putting up a competitive total, as the moist conditions in the morning have compelled captains to opt to bowl.

The early moisture and the heat later in the day are distinct factors dictating the flow of the matches.

With a lot more discipline



Ace in the pack: Smriti Mandhana has established herself as a very influential cog in India's wheel. ■ TWITTER/BCCI WOMEN

in shot selection, the Indian team looks to be better equipped to handle the situation, even though South Africa may also be entertaining similar thoughts.

The return of medium-pacer Mansi Joshi, in place of the gentle left-arm pace of Monica Patel, and the nippy bowling of the tall Jhulan

Goswami has lent a menacing look to the Indian attack. While the second match saw the ball swing appreciably in the morning, there could be some spin in the strip to be rolled out for the third match.

South Africa captain Sune Luus was quoted as saying that the team could come up with a better performance by handling the first 10 or 15 overs with more caution.

Laying the foundation

That is one point the Indian team has grasped quickly, after having let the momentum slip in the first one-dayer – establishing a good foundation.

While left-arm spinner Rakeshwar Gayakwad has been able to make an impact, Harmanpreet Kaur is capable of better purchase than what she has managed so far.

South Africa has to find a way to score runs once the openers Lizzelle Lee and Laura Wolvaardt – they put on 169 in the first ODI – are out. Luus and Lara Goodall have done well, but a lot more is required to make a contest of it. It will be interesting to see how the match unfolds.

Haryana men and Kerala women reign

SPORTS BUREAU

BHUBANESWAR

Haryana men and Kerala women won the 69th National volleyball championships at the KIIT University here on Thursday.

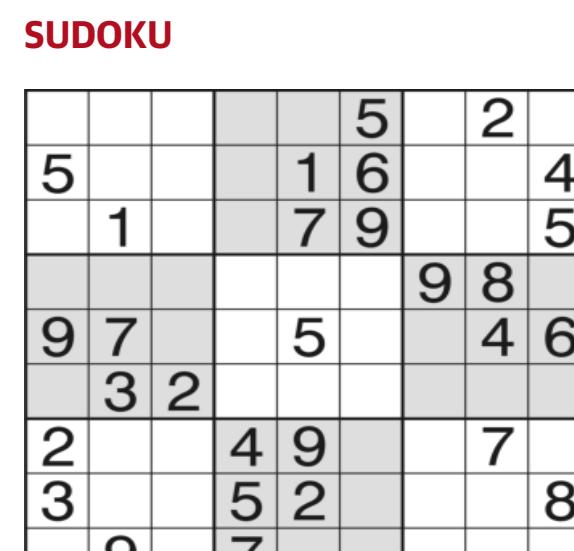
Both the finals were won in straight sets with Haryana beating Assam and women's defending champion Kerala prevailing over Railways.

Kerala men defeated Rail-



Winning smiles: The victorious Kerala women's team which completed a hat-trick of titles. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 13193

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

