



Haryana's ₹1.5 lakh cr. budget focuses on health and agriculture

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Mamata discharged from hospital after her condition improves

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Stop illegal influx from Myanmar, Centre tells northeastern States

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Archer's incisive spell sets up England's facile win in the first T20I

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NEARBY



35 RLSP leaders join RJD, call it 'merger'

PATNA

As many as 35 Rashtriya Lok Samata Party leaders, including the State president (in-charge), on Friday joined the Opposition Rashtriya Janata Dal and declared it a 'merger'. RLSP chief Upendra Kushwaha is likely to join the ruling JD(U) on March 14 or 15.

NORTH & WEST ▶ PAGE 5



DMK retains many ex-Ministers, MLAs

Direct fight with AIADMK in 129 seats; 13 MLAs denied ticket

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI
The DMK on Friday retained most former Ministers and MLAs in its list of 173 candidates for the Tamil Nadu Assembly election. It fielded president M.K. Stalin's son Udhayanidhi from the Che-pauk-Thiruvallikkeni seat.

The DMK's candidates will take on AIADMK candidates in 129 constituencies and BJP nominees in 14 can-

candidates. In all, 187 candidates, including 14 of its allies, will contest on the DMK's 'Rising Sun' symbol.

'List of victors'

As many as 13 sitting MLAs were denied renomination. Initially the party did not want to field Mr. Udhayanidhi, but it changed its decision subsequently, sources said.

Mr. Stalin will seek re-

election from Kolathur in Chennai while A. Vetri Azhagan, the grandson of the party's late general secretary K. Anbazhagan, has been nominated from Villivakkam.

Mr. Stalin, who released the list after paying homage at the mausoleum of his father and DMK patriarch M. Karunanidhi on the Marina, described it as a list of "victors".

Mr. Stalin will seek re-

make the Quad a force for global good. We will work together, closer than ever before on advancing our shared values and promoting a secure, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific,"

said Mr. Modi, who described the Quadrilateral framework as an "important pillar of stability in the region".

The Quad members agreed to ensure "equitable"

access to vaccines. A joint statement issued after the summit said: "We will join forces to expand safe, affordable, and effective vaccine production and equitable access, to speed economic recovery and benefit global health."

Mr. Biden emphasised that the Indo-Pacific region should be governed in accordance with human rights.

"And we're renewing our commitment to ensure that our region is governed by international law, committed to upholding universal values and free from coercion

JOE BIDEN, PRESIDENT, U.S.

We are united by our democratic values and our commitment to a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific. Our agenda, covering areas like vaccines, climate change and emerging technologies, make the Quad a force for global good

NARENDRA MODI, PM, INDIA

We join together as leaders of nations to welcome what I think will be a new dawn in the Indo-Pacific through our gathering

SCOTT MORRISON, PM, AUSTRALIA

I wish to firmly advance our cooperation to realise a free and open Indo-Pacific, and make a tangible contribution to the peace, stability, and prosperity of the region, including overcoming COVID-19

YOSHIHIDE SUGA, PM, JAPAN

Novavax reports 96.4% efficacy on original virus

SII to make huge volume of vaccine

In January, the company reported that its vaccine had proved to have 89% efficacy in preventing infection in some trial volunteers in the U.K. The Serum Institute of India has an agreement with Novavax to manufacture a substantial volume of the vaccine.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

DON'T TARGET 'THIRD PARTY', SAYS CHINA ▶ PAGE 9

Retail inflation at three-month high of 5.03%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Novavax, a U.S.-based biotechnology company developing a recombinant vaccine for COVID-19, announced a final efficacy of 96.4% against mild, moderate and severe disease caused by the original SARS-CoV-2 strain in a pivotal Phase-3 trial in the U.K.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

FULL REPORT ON ▶ PAGE 14

India, China to continue LAC talks

ANANTH KRISHNAN

India and China will hold another round of talks between military commanders "as soon as possible" to continue the disengagement process in friction areas along the Line of Actual Control.

This was agreed to on Friday as officials from both sides virtually held the 21st meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC).

The talks led by senior Foreign Ministry officials, along with the parallel military-level talks between Corps Commanders, have been the two key channels for both sides to take forward disengagement.

The phone was possibly used to operate the Telegram channel run by a group identifying itself as 'Jaish-ul-

Hind' that has claimed responsibility for placing an explosives-laden SUV near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence and for the blast outside the Israeli embassy in New Delhi. "It is suspected that this phone has been used for operating Telegram channels used recently for claiming responsibility for terror acts/threats," said Pramod Singh Kushwah, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell).

The officer said that the jail authorities have handed over the phone to Delhi Pol-

Ambani bomb scare linked to IM man

Smartphone recovered from Tehseen Akhtar's Tihar cell

SAURABH TRIVEDI

NEW DELHI

Acting on inputs from intelligence agencies, Tihar Jail authorities have recovered a smartphone from the cell where an Indian Mujahideen member, Tehseen Akhtar, is being kept. The device was found during a search operation conducted inside the high-security ward late evening on Thursday, said a senior police officer on Friday.

The phone was possibly used to operate the Telegram channel run by a group identifying itself as 'Jaish-ul-

Hind' that has claimed responsibility for placing an explosives-laden SUV near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence and for the blast outside the Israeli embassy in New Delhi. "It is suspected that this phone has been used for operating Telegram channels used recently for claiming responsibility for terror acts/threats," said Pramod Singh Kushwah, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell).

The officer said that the jail authorities have handed over the phone to Delhi Pol-

ice and it would be sent to a forensic lab for examination.

A senior police officer confirmed that the device was recovered from the high-security ward no. 8, which houses Akhtar, arrested in 2014 and accused of being involved in a series of blasts including those in Patna's Gandhi Maidan in 2014 ahead of a Narendra Modi rally. They will now seek a production warrant against Akhtar to unearth more details in the case.

SECURITY LAPSE ▶ PAGE 10

A sea of the devout



Festival fervour: A large number of people gathered on R.K. Beach in Visakhapatnam on Friday to take a holy dip in the Bay of Bengal, after overnight prayers to mark the Maha Shivaratri festival. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

Rajasthan Information Commission penalises five officials for negligence

Fine amount will be recovered from their salaries

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

JAIPUR

The Rajasthan State Information Commission has adopted a tough stance against government officials showing negligence in providing information under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

The Commission has imposed fines on five officials of different departments and passed adverse remarks about their conduct.

The Commission has ordered that the fine amount will be recovered from the salaries of the officials.

Two officials of the Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department were fined ₹15,000 each, one official was penalised ₹10,000, and two officials of the Local Self Government

Department were told to pay ₹5,000 each.

The weekly review of work by Chief Information Commissioner D.B. Gupta and penalisation orders have made an impact, ensuring compliance with the RTI Act.

The Commission has laid emphasis on display of information by the departments and local bodies on their own.

No response to notices State Information Commissioner Lakshman Singh slapped a fine of ₹15,000 on the then Village Development Officer of Sata panchayat in Barmer district for not providing information to an applicant in 2018.

The official did not respond to the Commission's notices issued five times.

Teach BJP a lesson, farm unions tell Bengal voters

'Centre's policies benefit corporates'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Farm union leaders under the banner of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) kicked off election campaigning in West Bengal on Friday with a mahapanchayat in Kolkata. They appealed to the State's farmers to "teach a lesson" to the BJP by voting against it.

"We are not asking you to support any particular party. We are only appealing to the people of Bengal to vote against the BJP. Vote for any other party," said veteran Punjabi farm leader Balbir Singh Rajewal, speaking at a press conference in Kolkata before the mahapanchayat.

Similarly, State Information Commissioner Narayan Bareth imposed a fine of ₹5,000 on the Secretary of Urban Improvement Trust, Kota. The then Executive Engineer of Asind municipality in Bhilwara district was also penalised ₹5,000 in two separate matters.

He alleged that the BJP-led Central government's policy would only benefit corporates, not farmers.

India, China to continue LAC talks

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sides to take forward

disengagement.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 9

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IN BRIEF



HC refuses to postpone Mar. 13-14 judicial exam

NEW DELHI
The Delhi High Court on Friday refused to postpone Delhi Higher Judicial Service Main Examination-2019, scheduled on March 13-14, till the COVID-19 vaccination drive is complete for lawyers. A Bench of Justices Siddhartha Mridul and A J Bhamhani said the exam cannot be postponed at the eleventh hour as other candidates who have already arrived for writing the exam would be prejudiced.

FIIB hosts author's talk with Bhavna Dalal

NEW DELHI
Premier Business School, Fortune Institute of International Business (FIIB), conducted its first-ever author's talk on March 6 with leadership coach Bhavna Dalal, author of Checkmate Office Politics. The session focused on how one could evolve learning from every corporate experience. The online session, which revolved around several aspects of corporate life, had 51 participants.

Huts replace trolleys and tractors as farmers gear up for long haul

With stir heading past 3 months, protesters have begun to literally encamp at sites

SHINJINI GHOSH

NEW DELHI

Thatched roofs and solar panels have now replaced several trolleys at the Singhu border where farmers have been camping for over three months. The rows of tractors and trolleys that had been holding fort at the Capital's borders and had been a common sight since the agitation began, has now given way to small hut-like structures with thatched roofs to house the protesting farmers.

Farmers from Delhi's borders have been demanding a legal guarantee of a Minimum Support Price (MSP) and a repeal of the three controversial farm laws brought in by the Centre last year.

Stating that the *chapar* (thatched roof) is a means to avoid the heat, Harinder Singh, a farmer from Punjab's Roopnagar district, said: "Usually the raw material is sourced from rivers. We got one full trolley of material so that after constructing roofs for ourselves we also have enough to distribute



Makeshift hut erected by the protesting farmers at the Singhu border on Friday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

it to others."

In a few instances, a plastic sheet has also been placed above the thatched roof to prevent seepage during rains.

Solar energy

Protesting farmers said that while several sets of solar panels had been distributed at the Tikri border as well, more such units would be brought to the Singhu border to ensure the movement is not disrupted if the government cuts off electricity.

"For the current weather, this is sufficient. Once the heat increases, we will get air conditioners and solar panels to support it. The manner in which things are proceeding, we want to be self-sufficient as the government can do anything and even cut off power supply. We want to have our own arrangements so that the protest continues," said Mr. Singh.

Satinder Singh Gill, a farmer

The manner in which things are proceeding, we want to be self-sufficient as the government can do anything and even cut off power supply

HARINDER SINGH

A protester

er from Ludhiana's Heera village, said that the process of installing solar panels had already begun for those from their village.

Back up measure

"We sent four solar panels to the Tikri border and have kept two panels at the Singhu border. The solar panels will be installed on the thatched roof, which we are in the process of constructing. Even if there is disruption in the electricity supply, the solar panel will ensure that at least one fan is working. Our relatives and siblings who live abroad have also contributed towards this apart from the villagers," said Mr. Gill.

Doctor arrested for sending proxy to medical council exam

Accused had failed in previous attempts

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

A 35-year-old doctor has been arrested for allegedly paying another person and making him sit at a medical exam so that he could get registered with the Indian Medical Council (IMC), police said on Friday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South East) R.P. Meena said that the complainant, identified as Dr. Vinay, came to police station along with the accused identified as Manohar Singh and narrated the story.

Police said that National Board of Examinations is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to standardise medical education in India. The NBE conducts a Foreign Medical Examination (FMGE) for Indian and overseas citizens to get registered with Indian Medical Examination.

The DCP said that during interrogation, the accused allegedly told the police that he was residing in Gautam Pur and met a doctor who offered him to sit at the exam in his place in return of ₹4 lakh.

been trying to clear the exam for the last six years but failed, police revealed.

Caught on camera

Police said that the last FMGE was conducted on December 4 last year and an admit card was issued in the name of Dr. Manohar. The test was conducted at Mathura Road but the result was frozen because the picture captured on the exam day did not match the picture on the application form.

He was subsequently called for verification. But Dr. Manohar didn't come. On March 10, he visited the NBE for verification and his photo didn't match with the person whose picture was taken on the exam day. Therefore, he was taken to Sarita Vihar Police Station.

The DCP said that during interrogation, the accused allegedly told the police that he was residing in his girlfriend's house, but could not find her there. Then he got to know that she had gone to her friend's house in Subhash Nagar. So he reached there and fired in the air to threaten them," she said.

Realtor opens fire to 'scare' ex-girlfriend

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

A 32-year-old property dealer was arrested for allegedly opening fire to "scare" his 21-year-old ex-girlfriend after she blocked his number and started "ignoring" him in west Delhi, police said on Friday.

The accused, Suresh Kadian, is the son of a retired army officer, they said. His friend Pawan (45) was also arrested for allegedly giving his licensed revolver, which was used in the Wednesday evening incident, they revealed.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) Urvija Goel said the woman has been ignoring the man for the past few days and he became more aggressive after she blocked his number. "During questioning, the accused revealed that he wanted to take revenge on his girlfriend. He went to his girlfriend's house, but could not find her there. Then he got to know that she had gone to her friend's house in Subhash Nagar. So he reached there and fired in the air to threaten them," she said.

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Whereas evacuation and fire fighting in the initial stages of fire is a key of survival and its significance increases in the patient care occupancies. Therefore it would be in public interest that all the occupants and employees of Nursing Homes, Hospitals should undergo basic fire safety training to keep themselves acquainted with evacuation and firefighting procedures.

Accordingly, it is proposed to conduct half day basic firefighting training programme at Fire Safety management Academy, Delhi Fire Service, Rohini, Delhi. The training will be imparted in different batches of 40 persons (maximum), depending on the number of nominations received from different organizations, on first come first serve basis, against the prescribed fee of Rs.1000 per candidate, payable to DDO, Motinagar, Delhi Fire Service in conformity with the provisions of Delhi Fire Service Rules 2010.

Therefore, the owners / occupiers of all Nursing Homes, Hospitals are hereby advised to nominate their staff/officials, either directly or through their respective associations for, the basic firefighting training. The nominations may be sent to Officer In Charge, Fire Safety Management Academy, Sector-14, Rohini, Delhi - 110085 (Telephone No. 011-27550138 and e-mail : ocfsma-dlfir@delhi.gov.in).

DIRECTOR

**Issued in Public interest by Delhi Fire Service
(In case of emergency DIAL 101,
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DIP/SHABDARTH/0703/20-21

Showers bring relief from sweltering heat

City records 2.6 mm rain; minimum temperature likely to dip due to gusty winds

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

People take shelter from rain in Delhi. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

A 32-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly cheating women by taking money from them on the pretext of medical care of his loved ones.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka) S.K. Meena said that the accused has been identified as Mohit Goyal and he was arrested on Wednesday.

The minimum temperature is likely to fall further as several parts of the city experienced gusty winds in the evening as well.

The Safdarjung observato-

ry, which provides representative data for the city, recorded 2.6 mm rainfall till 8.30 a.m. but nothing after 5.30 p.m. The relief came under the influence of a Western Disturbance. The forecast by the Met department shows that the temperatures are likely to rise again as no more rain is forecast.

The forecast for March 13 reads: "Partly cloudy sky with mist in the morning."

AQI stays in poor category

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The air quality of Delhi and Gurugram continued to be in the "poor" category on Friday while Noida's was in the "moderate" level, according to the Central Pollution Con-

trol Board (CPCB) data.

"Expected rainfall is likely to contribute to AQI positively through wet deposition. AQI is likely to improve to moderate category on Saturday," said a statement by SAFAR

Toolkit: activist extended protection from arrest

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Friday extended by three days the interim protection from arrest granted to climate activist Shubham Kar Chaudhari, a co-accused along with Disha Ravi and others in connection with allegedly being involved in sharing a "toolkit" on social media related to the farmers' protest.

Additional Session Judge Dharmender Rana granted the relief after police sought an adjournment in the proceedings related to an anticipatory bail application filed by co-accused Disha Ravi and Shantanu Mukul.

No coercive action taken against the accused till next date of hearing," the court directed, after the accused informed the judge that the protection garnered by the High Court was scheduled for hearing.

granted transit bail by the Goa Bench of the Bombay High Court.

Anticipatory bail pleas
During the brief hearing on Friday, the police urged the court to adjourn the matter till March 15, when the anticipatory bail applications filed by co-accused Disha Ravi and Shantanu Mukul were scheduled for hearing.

"No coercive action taken against the accused till next date of hearing," the court directed, after the accused informed the judge that the protection garnered by the High Court was scheduled to end on Friday.

TERMINATION OF SERVICE OF OFFICER

NR-21329X CAPT ANUGRAH CHARAN

D/o MR. VINOD CHARAN
HOUSE NO.: 8/1195, ADARSH NAGAR,
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PIN: 201 204

ORDERS OF THE CHIEF OF ARMY STAFF

FOR TERMINATING THE SERVICE

IN RESPECT OF

NR-21329X CAPTAIN (MILITARY NURSING SERVICE) ANUGRAH CHARAN OF 92 BASE HOSPITAL, UNDER SECTION 7 OF (THE INDIAN) MILITARY NURSING SERVICE ORDINANCE, 1943.

The Chief of Army Staff, in exercise of the powers conferred vide section 7 of (The Indian) Military Nursing Service Ordinance, 1943, dismisses NR-21329X Captain (Military Nursing Service) Anugrah Charan from the Indian Military Nursing Service with effect from 25 August 2020 vide order No.: C/06310/NC/490/AG/DV-2, signed at New Delhi on the twenty fifth day of August 2020.

Realtor opens fire to 'scare' ex-girlfriend

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

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Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) Urvija Goel said the woman has been ignoring the man for the past few days and he became more aggressive after she blocked his number. "During questioning, the accused revealed that he wanted to take revenge on his girlfriend. He went to his girlfriend's house, but could not find her there. Then he got to know that she had gone to her friend's house in Subhash Nagar. So he reached there and fired in the air to threaten them," she said.

CM YK

Timings

DELHI

SATURDAY, MAR. 13	
RISE 06:33	SET 18:29
RISE 06:43	SET 18:28
SUNDAY, MAR. 14	
RISE 06:32	SET 18:29
RISE 07:15	SET 19:22
MONDAY, MAR. 15	
RISE 06:31	SET 18:30
RISE 07:44	SET 20:15

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	31	18
Safdarjung	31	18
Palam	34	20

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

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
33°C marginal drop in morning temperature. A pleasant hazy morning and warm day with partly cloudy sky.

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IN BRIEF

AAP making personal attacks on Oppn.: BJP

NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday accused AAP of stooping to making personal attacks on the Opposition, losing both patience and decency. Delhi BJP vice-president Virendra Sachdeva and spokesperson Harish Khurana, at a joint press conference, said that with time, the schemes and works of the Arvind Kejriwal government were "getting exposed" and their language against opponents was getting worse.

Reserve 5% parking capacity for EVs, says Jain

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Power Minister Satyendar Jain on Friday said that all buildings with parking capacity of more than 100 vehicles should set aside at least 5% of their total parking capacity for electric vehicles (EVs) along with suitable slow EV chargers.

"All parking spaces in Delhi, which have a capacity of housing more than 100 vehicles, have been directed to set aside 5% of the total capacity for electric vehicles with suitable EV chargers so that people get adequate infrastructure to charge their vehicles. In the first phase, we aim to install 500 charging points at 100 locations," Mr. Jain said.

He said that in new constructions, 20% of parking capacity should have provisions for charging of EVs.

AAP attacks BJP over salaries to civic body workers

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The AAP on Thursday attacked the BJP over municipal corporation employees not getting salaries on time and claimed that a Delhi High Court order has held Commissioners of the three Corporations directly responsible for non-payment of salaries.

"The civic bodies have not paid teachers, doctors, nurses, sanitation workers and retired employees for a long time. No solution has been brought forth. The Commissioners have now been directed to make these payments with respect to salaries and pensions by April 5," said AAP chief spokesperson Saubhab Bharadwaj.

THE HINDU
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CM's budget message: progress and growth of Delhi is 'deshbhakti'

'Deshbhakti Budget' passed; Kejriwal criticises Oppn. for opposing initiatives

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The 'Deshbhakti Budget' was passed in the Delhi Legislative Assembly on Friday and talking about it, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said that *deshbhakti* means envisioning growth and progress for all in Delhi.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, during his address to the Assembly, congratulated Mr. Sisodia, who also holds the finance portfolio, for presenting an "excellent" and surplus budget despite difficult circumstances that Delhi had to witness due to less tax and revenue collection due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

He also sought to criticise the Opposition for opposing various initiatives, such as the installation of 500 flag masts across Delhi and the free *'teerath yatra'* to the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya for elders proposed as part of it.

"What is fundamental to our party is that we uphold the ideals of the Constitution while keeping Lord Ram in our hearts. For us, progress and growth of Delhi is *deshbhakti*. We don't believe in empty promises and zero actions," Mr. Sisodia said.

Politics of work'
"We believe in fulfilling our promises and truly working for the people of Delhi. It is the key focus of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to extend help and hope to those who are not privileged. The politics of Delhi government is politics of work," he also said.

Addressing the Assembly, Mr. Kejriwal said circum-



Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia speaks during the budget session of the Delhi Assembly, in New Delhi on Friday. ■ PTI

stances last year were "very tough" with losses in jobs and business. While there was no tax collection on one side, there was an increase in expenditure on the other.

Last year, when the government's revenue got "drastically reduced", he said, many had predicted that the subsidy on electricity and water would cease, but that was not the case.

"We continued to provide free electricity, water, school education, healthcare and bus rides for women. We will continue to provide all these services for free in the next financial year as well. I want to congratulate the people of Delhi on this," Mr. Kejriwal said.

"In the last 1-1.5 months, budgets were presented in almost all the States of India, along with the Central budget that was presented recently. Almost all have presented budgets in deficit.

Delhi is the only State to have presented a surplus budget despite such difficult times, which is a huge achievement," he also said.

Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, who led a walkout after a bitter exchange during Mr. Sisodia's address, termed the Delhi government "directionless" and the budget an exercise in futility.

"The claim that the Budget had shown a phenomenal growth during the last six years of AAP government's rule is totally false and misleading. During previous governments' rule, the budget growth has been around 55%, whereas during the six budgets presented during the AAP government rule, it has slipped to 12% which is deplorable," he alleged.

"The New Excise Policy, under which the government had promised to open 200 new liquor vends to earn ₹2,500 crore revenue in the coming year, is highly objectionable and already every ward in Delhi has a li-

quor vend and opening more such shops will only lead to social unrest," he also alleged.

On his part, Mr. Kejriwal said he failed to understand why the BJP and Congress were "opposing the setting up of flags" across Delhi.

"What makes them oppose this? This is a remarkable move and they should support it and appreciate it. There should be no politics of patriotism. Is it a crime to provide our elders with a free pilgrimage to a place of worship such as Ayodhya? They want to play politics in everything," he said.

"Many opposition parties are mocking us after hearing that we will bid for the Olympics and we will raise the per capita income of Delhi up to Singapore, but we will definitely do it like we fulfilled promises to provide free power, water and improve the condition of government schools and hospitals," he said.

Kejriwal flags off celebration of India's 75th year of Independence

Chief Minister felicitates eminent citizens at the event



Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal with Manish Sisodia and singer Palash Sen at the event on Friday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

man Kurade, who runs an organisation called Goenkarancho Ekvot and is organising the three-day Goa Festival in the city.

Raghav Rai, photographer and photojournalist; Jaspal Kaur (91), the first woman who was compensated by Mr. Kejriwal under the 1984 rehabilitation scheme; Giriraj, a sculptor and potter who in 1987 won a national award in pottery; Kamla Bhasin, an Indian developmental feminist activist, poet,

author, and social scientist; G.K. Aggarwal, a well-known orthopedic; Khalida Zaidi, a retired principal who has displayed exemplary service through her tenure at a civic body school were also honoured.

He also felicitated Riaz Umar, a renowned educationalist from Zakir Hussain Delhi College; Shefalika Verma, a Sahitya Akademi awardee, and Col. Ashok Tara, a veteran who has been awarded the Vir Chakra.

NSUI members converge on Raisina Road, hold 'Chhatra Adhikar March'

Students detained for protesting against unemployment

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Students from across the country affiliated to the National Students Union of India (NSUI) gathered on Raisina Road in the Capital to participate in a 'Chhatra Adhikar March' to protest against rising unemployment in the country.



A student being detained by the police in Delhi on Friday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

that several recruitment examinations had also been cancelled.

National president Neeraj Kundan said that while unemployment was at an all-time high, scams in va-

rious exams, inactive placement cells and various pending results of exams were problems that the Narendra Modi-led government was not addressing.

Shouting slogans like "naukri do ya degree vapis lo [provide jobs or take back our degrees]" students gathered to hear the speeches of senior Congress leaders. They then started a march towards Parliament House and were stopped by the police. When the students tried to climb over barricades to continue towards Parliament, police detained them and used batons to disperse them.

Set up panel to look into financial anomalies in DU colleges: Sisodia

It will probe how third quarter grants have been spent

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Friday directed the Directorate of Higher Education to set up an enquiry committee to look into alleged financial irregularities in 12 Delhi government-funded colleges of Delhi University. The Minister said that stringent action shall be taken against officials responsible, if irregularities are found.



Manish Sisodia

quarter," Mr. Sisodia said while ordering the probe.

Bid to avoid scrutiny
He added that if the colleges have not disbursed salaries, then questions need to be raised as to what they have done with the funds that were given to the college and why colleges have not submitted utilisation certificates. "The non-submission of utilisation certificates seems to indicate financial irregularities. It seems like an

attempt to avoid scrutiny and accountability," he said.

The committee, Mr. Sisodia said, will include senior accounts functionaries to look into how the third quarter grants and existing surplus funds have been spent.

The Delhi University Teachers' Association, which had called for a university strike on the issue of non-payment of salaries in the 12 Delhi government colleges, said on Friday that Delhi government has now released the sanction letter of ₹82,79,79,507 under salary head and an amount of ₹9,50,90,500 under other heads.

An emergent meeting of DUTA executive will be held to decide on our action programme," DUTA president Rajib Ray said. DUTA has been on strike since Thursday day over the issue.

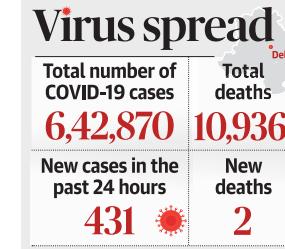
Delhi reports highest number of virus cases in two months

30,575 more vaccinated on a day when city saw two deaths

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The city witnessed 431 new COVID-19 cases in 24 hours, taking the total number of cases to 6,42,870, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Friday.

This is the highest number of cases in over two months and the second consecutive day when more than 400 cases have been reported. The last time more



number of cases was reported was on January 9, when there were 519 cases.

Two deaths were reported

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OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

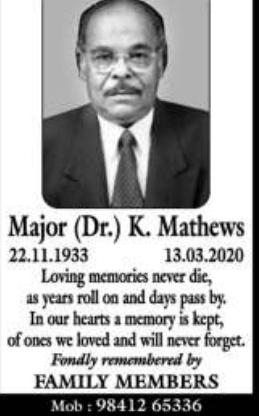
DEATH



Smt. Lakshmi Seshadri
Passed away peacefully on 11.03.2021
as we commemorate our father,
Shri A.M. Seshadri, on his 36th death anniversary.
Sunder, Poorna, Vijaya, Madhavan, Mallika
Grandchildren: Sowmya, Karthik, Manasa, Akshay

DEATH ANNIVERSARIES

FIRST ANNIVERSARY



Major (Dr.) K. Mathews
22.11.1933 13.03.2020
Loving memories never die,
as years roll on and days pass by.
In our hearts a memory is kept,
of ones we loved and will never forget.

Finally remembered by
FAMILY MEMBERS

Mob : 98412 65336

In memory of your loved ones
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DONATE EYES-GIFT SIGHT

Haryana budget focuses on health and agriculture

CM says aim is to double income of farmers

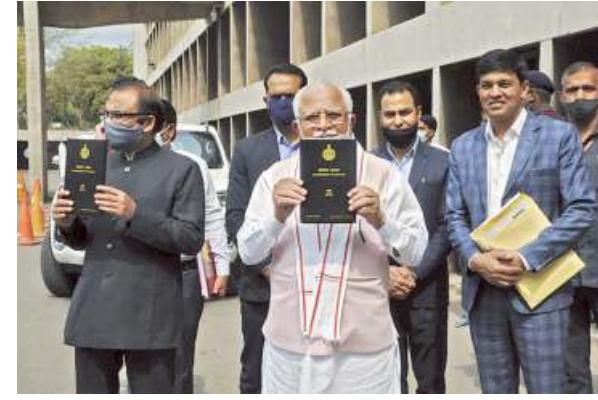
VIKAS VASUDEV
CHANDIGARH

The Haryana government on Friday presented the budget for 2021-22 with an outlay of ₹1,55,645 crore, focusing on health, agriculture and infrastructure.

Chief Minister Manohar Lal, who also holds the portfolio of Finance, while presenting the budget, said ₹1,55,645 crore had been allocated for 2021-22, an increase of 13% over revised estimate (RE) 2020-21 of ₹1,37,738 crore.

"The budget outlay comprises 25% as capital expenditure of ₹38,718 crore and 75% as revenue expenditure of ₹1,16,927 crore," he said.

The budget had been prepared amid the unprecedented global crisis induced by the COVID-19 pandemic and chal-



Haryana CM Manohar Lal arriving to present the budget 2021-2022 in the Assembly in Chandigarh on Friday. •PTI

lenges being faced as never before. "Health of our people has been accorded top priority and reiterating the same, ₹7,731 crore has been allocated in 2021-22, which is an increase of 20.2% over the RE 2020-21 outlay of ₹6,433 crore," he said.

The Chief Minister said the government had identified health, agriculture and infrastructure as key priority areas

that needed to be focussed to arrest the contraction in economy and take a path of resurgence.

He said the government was committed towards realising the national goal of making agriculture futuristic and doubling the income of farmers. "An amount of ₹6,110 crore has been allocated for the year 2021-22, an increase of 20.9% against the RE 2020-

21 of ₹5,052 crore," Mr. Lal said. He added that the Directorate of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, in 2021-22 fiscal, would work towards strengthening Haryana's presence in five major focus areas – aerospace and defence, toy industry, services sector, construction and industrial parks.

Mr. Lal said the government would bring in a comprehensive legislation in the Vidhan Sabha for the long-term implementation of the 'Parivar Pehchan Patra' (PPP) programme.

A disappointment

However, the Congress termed the budget a sheer disappointment. Haryana Congress chief Kumari Selja said people had high expectations from this budget, but it had nothing for them. Leader of the Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda expressed concern over deteriorating financial health of the State.

Allocation for SDGs hiked

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

The Haryana government in its budget presented on Friday earmarked ₹45,066.16 crore for various welfare and development schemes under 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The allocation is 14.07% higher than the revised budget estimates of ₹39,506.79 crore for the previous year.

Mr. Lal said the govern-

ment would bring in a comprehensive legislation in the Vidhan Sabha for the long-term implementation of the 'Parivar Pehchan Patra' (PPP) programme.

827 schemes

There are 827 welfare and development schemes and programmes linked to relevant SDGs to be implemented by different departments, including Parivar Pehchan Patra, Mukhya Mantri Awas Yojana and Mukhyamantri Vivah Shagun Yojana, to name a few.

A total of 175 schemes and programmes will be implemented by 28 departments under Reduced Inequalities.

The maximum allocation of ₹7449.41 crore is for Reduced Inequalities, followed by Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (₹4,705.53 crore); Zero Hunger (₹4,698.98 crore); Clean Water and Sanitation (₹4,433.21 crore) and Gender Equality (₹3,647.22 crore). A total of ₹1172.04 crore – around 2.60% of the budgetary allocations for the SDGs – has been earmarked for Climate Action.

Odisha MLA tries to 'drink' sanitiser

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR

An Odisha legislator tried to consume sanitiser inside the State Assembly on Friday in protest over alleged non-procurement of paddy from

farmers in mandis.

BJP MLA of Deogarh Subash Panigrahi was thwarted from drinking the sanitiser by State Parliamentary Affairs Minister Bikram Kesha Arukha and fellow MLAs

who were present in the House.

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

Probe Assam Rifles HQ land deeds'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

An influential NGO in Mizoram has demanded a probe into the alleged land settlement certificates for owning plots within a battalion headquarters of India's oldest paramilitary force.

The 186-year-old Assam Rifles has been occupying a vast area in the central part of State capital Aizawl as a battalion headquarters since 1917.

The force's 46th Battalion is currently camped there.

JHARIA REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY, DHANBAD

e-Procurement Notice

Tender Reference No.: JRDA/F2/08/2020-21 DATED: 10.03.2021

1.	Name of work	: Development work of Phase VI, VII & VIII at Vishnupati Awas at Belgoria, Dhanbad.
2.	Estimate Cost	: Rs. 48,51,86,404.00
3.	Time of Completion	: 12 months
4.	Date/Time from which bid is available for online bidding	: 12.03.2021 at 11:30 AM
5.	Last Date/Time for on-line submission of bids	: 16.04.2021 up to 5:00 PM
6.	Date and Time of Bid Opening	: 20.04.2021, at 03:30 PM
7.	Name and Address of officer inviting tender	: Chief Manager (Civil), JRDA, Dhanbad-826001
8.	Contact no. of Procurement Office	: 628797418
9.	Helpline number of e-procurement cell	: 628797418

- Note: 1. Only e-tenders will be accepted.
2. Further details can be seen on website <http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in>

Sd/-

Chief Manager(Civil)
JRDA, Dhanbad

PR 243597 District(20-21).D

WESTERN RAILWAY

VARIOUS WORKS

Sr. No.	Tender Notice No. & Date	WORK AND LOCATION	Approx. cost of work in ₹
1	BCT/20-21/375 dt. 10.03.2021	Udhna - Utkai Songadh section : Improvement to drainage under ADEN-Vyara in connection of sanctioned track works for the year 2020-21.	1,29,82,422.78
2	BCT/20-21/376 dt. 10.03.2021	Udhna - Jalgao section : Maintenance to P-way of UP line between km 3.180 to 77.162 under ADEN - Vyara for one year.	1,47,91,624.04
3	BCT/20-21/377 dt. 10.03.2021	Udhna - Jalgao section : Cleaning and disinfection of overhead and underground water tank for two years in the jurisdiction of ADEN - Vyara.	4,08,000.00
4	BCT/20-21/378 dt. 10.03.2021	Udhna - Jalgao section : (1) Recharging of existing dry open well under SSE(W) Vyara & Nandurbar jurisdiction (2) Development of dried borewell in USD-JL section by deepening and checking of yield of borewell at final level under DEN/East jurisdiction.	56,41,697.48

Sr. No. : 1 to 4 : EMD (in ₹) : 0. Date & Time of Submission : On 06.04.2021 till 15.00 hrs. Date & Time of Opening : On 06.04.2021 at 15.30 hrs. Regarding detailed tender conditions please visit www.ireps.gov.in Manual offers will not be considered.

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0723

Sd/-

SHO, Neb Sarai, New Delhi

Tel: 011-29551326, 29551597
Mob: 8750870835

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED

General public is hereby informed that a lady namely **Asha@Poonam**, D/o Shankar Lal R/o H.No. 16/577, Amrit Kaur, Tank Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi has been missing/kidnapped since 26.02.2021 from her house. In this regard, DD No. 55A dated 26.02.2021 has been registered at P.S. Prasad Nagar, Delhi. Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to trace out the missing/kidnapped lady but no clue has come to light so far. The description of the missing/kidnapped lady is as under:



Asha@Poonam

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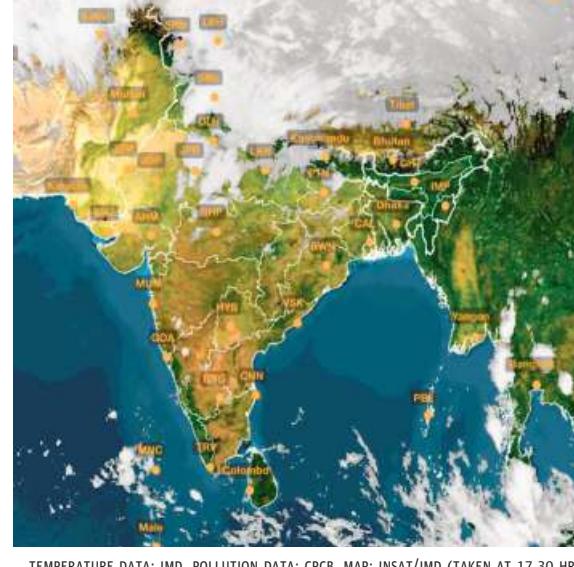
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WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 17.30 HRS)

Forecast for Saturday: Heavy rainfall very likely at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya. Thunderstorm with lightning, hail/gusty winds likely at isolated places over Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, Sikkim, Gangetic West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Kerala and Mahe

CITY RAIN MAX MIN CITY RAIN MAX MIN

Agartala	... -32.3	21.4	Kozhikode	... -32.9 ... -25.5
Ahmedabad	... -37.0	21.4	Kurnool	... -37.2 ... -23.7
Aizawl	... -28.7	12.7	Lucknow	... -32.8 ... -19.4
Allahabad	... -31.5	19.0	Madurai	... -35.4 ... -23.8
Bengaluru	... -32.6	19.6	Mangaluru	... -35.7 ... -22.4
Bhopal	... -32.6	19.4	Mumbai	... -33.4 ... -21.4
Bhubaneswar	... -35.0	23.6	Myanmar	... -33.4 ... -18.0
Chandigarh	... -32.0	19.0	New Delhi	... -2.6 ... -17.9
Chennai	... -33.4	23.0	Patna	... -34.4 ... -21.2
Coimbatore	... -34.7	22.5	Pond Blair	... -31.9 ... -25.2
Dehradun	... 0.2	26.5	Puducherry	... -32.1 ... -21.7
Gangtok	11.8	24.6	Pune	... -36.9 ... -17.6
Goa	... -33.2	25.2	Raipur	... -35.1 ... -22.2
Guwahati	0.1	32.5	Ranchi	... -34.0 ... -17.7
Hubballi	... -33.0	21.0	Shillong	... -23.7 ... -11.6
Hyderabad	... -35.8	22.2	Shimla	... -14.4 ... -8.6
Imphal	... -29.3	11.1	Srinagar	9 ... -4.5 ... -2.2
Jaipur	... -30.2	21.8	Tiruvananthapuram	0.7 ... -36.4 ... -24.0
Kochi	0.6	32.8	Tiruchi	... -34.8 ... -22.4
Kohima	... -23.0	11.6	Vijayawada	... -35.8 ... -22.0
Kolkata	... -32.2	24.3	Vizakapatnam	... -31.3 ... -25.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES SO NO CO PM2.5 PM10 CODE

Ahmedabad	... -	-40	-	-	CODE
Bengaluru	14 ... -33	17	56 ... -78	■■■■■	Good
Chennai	14 ... -18	44	32 ... -39	■■■■■	Good
Delhi	14 ... -49	50	262 ... -342	■■■■■	Good
Hyderabad	... -56	17	44 ... -70	■■■■■	Good
Kolkata	16 ... -21	30	126 ... -109	■■■■■	Good
Lucknow	22 ... -42	93	333 ... -320	■■■■■	Good
Mumbai	59 ... -63	12	62 ... -118	■■■■■	Good
Pune	... -91	48	102 ... -92	■■■■■	Good
Vizakapatnam	10 ... -44	29	40 ... -77	■■■■■	Good

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Singanallur, Madhya Pradesh recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 312 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution.

Karnataka recorded a healthy AQI score of 27

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

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

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

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

Surge continues as Maharashtra records nearly 16,000 new cases

Pune district reports new single-day high of over 3,100 COVID-19 cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

PUNE

Maharashtra reported a new high of 15,817 COVID-19 cases on Friday, pushing its active case tally to 1,10,485. While 56 more deaths took the total toll to 52,723, the State's case fatality dipped to 2.31%. The State's recovery rate stood at 92.79%, with 11,344 patients being discharged in the last 24 hours.

The total tally has reached 22,82,191 and the cumulative recoveries stand at 21,17,744. "Of 1,73,10,586 laboratory samples tested thus far, 22,82,191 (with the case positivity rising to 13.18%) have returned positive, with over 97,000 samples being tested in the last 24 hours," said State Surveillance Officer Dr.

Pradeep Awate. Pune district reported a new single-day high of over 3,100 cases – the highest in the State – to take its tally to 4,33,237. Seven deaths were reported as the toll reached 8,121. However, as per district authorities, the active case tally has surged past 17,000, while the death toll has crossed 9,350. The district accounted for over 20% of the State's case surge.

Pune district reported a new single-day jump in Maharashtra for the past few days, clocking up a daily average spike of more than 2,000 cases. Following a review meeting between district Guardian Minister Ajit Pawar and senior district authorities in which BJP MP Girish Bapat was also present, Mr. Pawar directed the administration to curtail the operating time of hotels and restaurants.

"According to the new set of restrictions, schools and colleges will remain closed till March 31, while hotels and restaurants will be allowed to operate at 50% of their total capacity till 10 p.m. Takeaway food deliveries will be permitted for an hour after that till 11 p.m.," Pune Divisional Commissioner Saurabh Rao said.

Restrictions on malls

It was mandatory for hotels to put up a board, giving details about the occupancy on the premises. Malls and cinema halls should be kept closed after 10 p.m., while people would not be allowed to loiter on roads between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m. Only essential services were to be permitted during this time.

Maharashtra Public Ser-



Mark of gratitude: A cyclist rides past a mural dedicated to the tireless efforts put in by the frontline workers in the battle against COVID-19, at Deonar in Mumbai on Friday. • VIVEK BENDRE

No lockdown, but fresh curbs in Pune Schools, colleges to remain closed in district till March 31

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

PUNE

While clarifying that no lockdown has been imposed across Pune district, the administration on Friday said all schools and colleges would remain closed till March 31 in the wake of a spike in COVID-19 cases.

Pune district has been recording the highest single-day jump in Maharashtra for the past few days, clocking up a daily average spike of more than 2,000 cases.

Following a review meeting between district Guardian Minister Ajit Pawar and senior district authorities in which BJP MP Girish Bapat was also present, Mr. Pawar directed the administration to curtail the operating time of hotels and restaurants.

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Maharashtra Public Ser-

vice Commission coaching centres and libraries would be allowed to remain open with 50% occupancy. Rules for the number of people attending weddings remained the same (not more than 50 people), while public transport services were to operate with 50% occupancy.

Mr. Rao said, "Doctors and health workers are of the opinion that vaccination for Pune should get top priority in the wake of soaring cases.

Health workers are

of the opinion that vaccination for Pune should get top priority in the wake of soaring cases

SAURABH RAO

Pune Divisional Commissioner

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Mr. Rao said, "Doctors and health workers are of the opinion that vaccination for Pune should get top priority in the wake of soaring cases.

They have opined that if we have to reduce the impact of the second wave, then vaccination is the best option.

Since January 16 till today, the number of vaccination centres in the district have increased seven-fold from 33 to 208 with frontline workers largely covered in the first phase."

He said the administration planned to restart the jumbo COVID-19 care facility on the College of

Engineering Pune premises.

35 RLSP leaders join RJD, call it 'merger'

Kushwaha may join JD(U) soon

AMARNATH TEWARY

PATNA

As many as 35 Rashtriya Lok Samata Party leaders, including the State president (in-charge), on Friday joined the Opposition Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and declared it 'merger'.

RLSP president Upendra Kushwaha is likely to join the ruling JD(U) on March 14 or 15. Mr. Kushwaha has called a party meeting in Patna on March 13-14 to discuss the issue.

Meanwhile, there have been indications that in the RLSP's party leaders meet

called on March 13-14, Mr. Kushwaha may announce the party's formal merger with the JD(U).

Recently, State JD(U) chief Basistha Narayan Singh had said, "Mr. Kushwaha has already come with the JD(U) and now only formalities are to be done of the merger with us."

Before 2005, Mr. Kushwaha was a close ally of CM Nitish Kumar but later he parted ways with him and allied with several other parties. He even became a Minister at the Centre in the NDA part-I, but later had joined the Opposition mahagathbandhan. The RLSP did not win even a single seat in the 2020 Assembly elections.

Night curfew in Panvel

RAINA ASSAINAR

NAVY MUMBAI

The Panvel Municipal Corporation (PMC) has imposed night curfew from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. from Friday till March 22.

Panvel had recorded 125 new COVID-19 cases on Thursday. "Failure to follow rules has led to the surge. Positive patients have to be in home isolation. If such people are found outside, a criminal case would be filed against them," PMC Commissioner Sudhakar Deshmukh said.

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THE HINDU

India's National Newspaper

UTTARAKHAND HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE SOCIETY [UKHFWSS]

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INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB) - E-Procurement Notice

Credit No: 5948-IN Date: 13* March 2021 IFB No.: 05/NCB/UHKSDP/STH/ICU/HLL/HCD-2020-21

1. The Government of India has received financing from the World Bank towards the cost of Uttarakhand Health Systems Development Project (UHKSDP) and it is intended that part of the proceeds will be applied to eligible payments under the contract



A moral test

Privileged nations must improve global availability and equitable access of vaccines

A year after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, UN Secretary-General António Guterres has criticised "the many examples of vaccine nationalism and hoarding" in the world. Making available vaccines equitably presents the "greatest moral test of our times", he added. In spite of exhortations by international organisations and efforts to pool resources in a way that all countries could at the earliest begin inoculating at least a fraction of their most vulnerable, several countries were unable to administer a single dose although vaccines were beginning to be stockpiled since November last. In Africa, only 13 countries, according to the Bloomberg tracker, have begun vaccinating. In contrast, over 10% of the U.S. population has been fully vaccinated, or got both doses, as has 3% of the EU. The percentages nearly double when accounting for their populations that have got at least one dose, reaching as high as 34% in the U.K.

India is the third biggest vaccinator among countries, having administered about 26 million doses, or about 1.91 doses per 100 people. But it has fully vaccinated only 0.3% of its population. While India has earned laurels for its 'vaccine diplomacy', the fact is that there are several public health centres, villages and districts where no vaccines have been administered. Though vaccination in the second phase appears to have picked up, there were only 1.7 million inoculations on Friday evening as opposed to the planned vaccination capacity of 5.4 million. India aims to inoculate at least 250 million with two doses from March-July – or over 3.3 million doses per day. But at best, India has administered 1.8 million doses per day. There is also an apparent "class divide" with the rich and those better informed disproportionately getting vaccinated as compared to the poor. Thus, along with the global inequity in accessing vaccination, India is seeing a version of it play out three months since vaccinations began. The inequality was expected as like many rich countries, the U.S. contracted with many vaccine companies for several times the doses it needed. It was precisely this that had led to concerns of 'vaccine nationalism'. The pipeline of supply was largely dependent on India and China. The Serum Institute, Bharat Biotech and several other pharma companies are private entities and bound by contracts to the highest bidders, and not necessarily the Indian government. While the reprieve is that more vaccines are in the pipeline, there will always be the concern that the poor, the old and the digitally naive will be short-changed. The UN and WHO must continue to exert pressure on the privileged nations to improve global availability as well as bear upon countries to improve equitable access within their territory too.

Two bad options

Afghanistan's leaders have to choose between war and sharing power with Taliban

President Joe Biden's push for an interim unity government in Afghanistan is a testament to his administration's grim assessment of the situation in the war-torn country. In a letter to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, which was first published by Afghanistan's TOLONews, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has proposed a senior-level meeting between the government and the Taliban in Turkey and a multilateral conference of envoys from the U.S., Russia, China, Iran, India and Pakistan to discuss a lasting Afghan solution. The peace push comes at a time when the Biden administration is reviewing the U.S.'s Afghan strategy. According to the February 2020 agreement signed between the Trump administration and the Taliban, the U.S. is scheduled to withdraw its troops by May 1. The Taliban have warned they would step up fighting targeting the coalition troops should the U.S. fail to pull out by then. The Biden administration is understandably under pressure. There appears to be a consensus in Washington that there is no military solution to the crisis. The U.S. wants to get out of the longest war in its history. But as Mr. Blinken says in the letter, the U.S. worries that if its troops are out without a peace mechanism, the Taliban, which already controls much of the country's hinterlands, could make "rapid territorial gains".

The U.S. seeks to stop this happening by proposing an interim "inclusive" government between the warring parties. Further, both sides should hold talks on the future constitutional and governance framework. Regional powers, including India and Pakistan, could play a decisive role in this transition as part of a UN-mandated multiparty peace process. This is a more inclusive approach than what the Trump administration did. Under Mr. Trump, the U.S. held direct talks with the Taliban excluding the Afghan government. And after reaching a deal, the U.S. put pressure on the Afghan government to release prisoners, but failed to get any concessions from the insurgents on reducing violence. Even when Afghan government representatives and the Taliban were holding talks in Doha, Qatar, Afghanistan continued to witness violence. The Biden administration does not seem to have faith in the Doha talks, which, even after months, failed to achieve any breakthrough. After 20 years of war, the Afghan leadership does not have any good options to end the conflict. If the Biden administration decides to stick to the Taliban deal and pull back troops, there is no guarantee that the intra-Afghan talks would hold. The Taliban would rather try to take over the whole country using force. If the government accepts Mr. Biden's proposal, Afghanistan's elected leaders will have to share power with the Taliban and agree to amending the Constitution, which means some of the country's hard-won liberties could be sacrificed. It is a choice between two bad options.

The new media rules are a tightening noose

What is worrying is the executive's idea that users need to be protected against the very media that seek to inform them



SASHI KUMAR

The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 (<https://bit.ly/3bGTtGo>), notified towards the end of February by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology should not come as a surprise because it is of a piece with the systematic incremental erosion of the freedom of speech and expression that has marked the Bharatiya Janata Party's rule under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The fate, or the final shape, of the notification will depend on the way the two petitions already filed against it in courts in Kerala and Delhi are decided upon. But the more worrying aspect of this clumsily veiled move by the executive to keep the media – particularly the standalone digital news media, which have generally proved more defiant and inconvenient for the government than the mainstream press or television channels – on a leash is the way it invokes and insinuates the idea that the public, or the users, need to be protected against the very media that in fact seek to make them critically informed citizens, thereby making their democracy that much richer and deeper.

A redress mechanism

For all appearances, the overarching intent of this new set of rules is to put in place a grievance redressal mechanism for the end user or consumer of social media and over-the-top (OTT) platforms and the digital news web portals. That, of course, would normally be an unexceptionable public purpose. But in an already vitiated climate of overweening political and religious majoritarianism, where the

street tends to (and is often egged on to), whip up and aggressively nurse and drive a sense of outrage or hurt on any and every issue, irrespective of institutional procedures or safeguards, the nature and scope of the bulk of grievances can easily be imagined.

Further, the smaller or medium-sized independent digital news and current affairs portals, which are for the most part struggling to stay afloat irrespective of whether they are newer startups or have been around for a few years, will be the ones hardest hit by this redress requirement. Any criticism of the ruling party or government could trigger an orchestrated avalanche of grievances. The notified rules set out an elaborate time-bound three-tier process whereby each and every such grievance is first handled at the level of the portal itself by its own grievance officer, and if not satisfactorily settled, passes on to the self-regulatory body of the sector or industry, and if yet not resolved, moves further up to an inter-ministerial oversight committee of the central government.

Regulation by the government

The sheer process of such grievance handling can stymie the operations of a relatively smaller digital venture in the news and current affairs space. The process, further, makes a mockery of the concept of self-regulation, with an inter-ministerial committee of government officials in effect becoming an appellate authority over the self-regulatory exercise. This would be self-regulation by the media organisation and the industry at the government's pleasure; regulation by the government masquerading as self-regulation by the news media entity or industry. What is worse, the notification gives the Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *ad hoc* emergency powers to block any content the government considers problematic even without such token procedure.



Negation through distortion of the idea of self-regulation is really the nub of the matter, at least as far as the section pertaining to publishers of news and current affairs in the notification is concerned. Real or imagined grievance out there becomes an alibi for this clumsy sleight of hand whereby the government can in effect prescribe, oversee and overrule so-called self-regulation by the publishers. It would be a joke if it did not have such serious implications.

Poses a financial threat

A measure like this, moreover, jeopardises the very sustenance of the already financially strained and functionally beleaguered digital news media – unless that is the very intention. Monetisation avenues become scarce, and investors and brands run scared because of what they see as political considerations supervening upon business interests and a whimsical media policy regime in constant flux.

What makes this notification seem more diabolical than ham-handed censorship is the buzz around the same time about confabulations between groups of ministers and journalists – some of them proactively furthering the ruling party's ideology and agenda, some easily pliable, some perhaps unwary and unwittingly roped into the discussions – and the classification of the journalists by the BJP caucus involved in this exercise based on how cosy or distant they are seen to be to the establishment. It then seems to be part of a concerted move by the go-

vernment to bring the more critical sections of the news media to heel.

Eroding pillars of democracy

The case for organic self-regulation by the news media as against by an external authority or body becomes more focused and urgent in the context of this notification and the many anecdotal symptoms of a censorship mindset we see growing around us. It is important to take a step back and remind ourselves that the fourth estate, or the fourth pillar, is as much a player as the other three pillars – the executive, the legislature and the judiciary – in the separation of powers scheme of our constitutional democracy.

Although the freedom of the press *per se* is not an explicitly prescribed fundamental right in the Indian Constitution, and is, rather, a derivative right from Articles 19(I)(a) and 19(I)(g) which give every citizen the right to free speech and expression, and to practise any profession respectively, these freedoms have in practice become constitutive and definitive of the fourth estate in the country. That fourth pillar of democracy must be in a dynamic relationship of checks and balances *vis-à-vis* the other three pillars: the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. It is a healthy tension among the four pillars that keeps the democratic edifice strong and vibrant.

The fourth estate in India, though, has increasingly been at the receiving end of draconian executive acts, invocations of legislative privilege and judicial intolerance. If the fourth estate is to be treated by the executive as an inconvenience to be sidelined, surely the other pillars, the judiciary and the legislature, lay themselves open to the same fate. Already characterisations of democracy, like the illiberal democracy in Orbán's Hungary or authoritarian democracy here at home, are intimations of the uncertainties ahead.

Surely, the body blow delivered to our democracy by the Emergency of 1975-77 must be, more than a bad memory, a lesson at this conjuncture.

At the risk of sounding tongue in cheek, this notification also begs the question as to why the government should go to such devious lengths to trammel press freedom when there are deadlier weapons in its armoury, including the archaic Sedition law and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, or UAPA, which it has shown little reluctance to use against critical voices.

Truth is getting unstuck

The situation harks back to the beginning of 18th century England, when the idea of the press freedom that we take (or now no longer take) for granted was being fought and suffered for, and secured inch by inch. The mindset of the establishment then was on telling display in the observation of Chief Justice John Holt while giving sweeping powers to the authorities to invoke seditious libel: "If men should not be called to account for possessing the people with an ill opinion of the government, no government can subsist; for it is very necessary for every government that the people should have a good opinion of it."

To this flagrant belief could be traced the origins of truth not being allowed as a legal defence in a case of libel, which had such enormous consequences for truthful journalism. It took a very long time to change that premise and make truth a valid defence against libel. Now, again, truth seems to be coming unstuck as a value. This contentious notification takes it an absurd step further. A blatant measure of government regulation of the news media is sought to be passed off as self-regulation by that same news media. If that is not post-Truth, what is?

Sashi Kumar is Chairman, Asian College of Journalism

Casting the Asian dice on a West Asia board

As the complicated nature of security across this geography changes, the Asian footprint is expected to only grow



KABIR TANEJA

This month, a contingent of the Indian Air Force including fighter aircraft and over 120 personnel is, for the first time, in the midst of a multi-nation exercise hosted by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) named Desert Flag (March 3-27). Other than India and the UAE, Bahrain, France, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and the United States are also participating, offering an interesting view for New Delhi of the various geo-political intricacies at play in and around the West Asia region.

Complexities, Asia's links

West Asia is home to perhaps some of the most complex security conundrums of the modern times. The sixth edition of Desert Flag this year takes place as tensions between Iran and the U.S. peak. Also added into the mix is the signing of the Abraham Accords in September 2020 between Israel, the UAE and Bahrain, a more cordial and joint Arab-Israel

dynamic predominantly designed to counter Tehran's growing influence in the region, as seen through the wars in Syria and Yemen.

While joint exercises in West Asia between Arab states and their western counterparts is common, the 2021 edition's involvement of contingents from India and South Korea in these exercises in the Persian Gulf is reflective of these trends and growing interests of Asian economies. As net importers of crude oil, these Asian economies rely heavily on the West Asian states for their supplies, and, by association, have increased stakes in the safety and security of the region from the perspective of political and economic stability. And more importantly, in the protection of vital sea lanes in areas such as the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea stretching out into the Arabian Sea and the wider Indian Ocean.

A fading U.S. hold

To put the above in perspective, in April 2020, Saudi Arabia was India's top supplier of oil followed by Iraq. For South Korea, in late 2019, it was also Saudi Arabia as the top supplier as both New Delhi and Seoul hedged their bets and diversified, with Russia and the U.S. entering as strong alternatives. The



participation of both India and South Korea in these exercises in the Persian Gulf is reflective of these trends and growing concerns in Asian capitals over an eroding U.S. security blanket in the region. This is highlighted even further by the fact that January 2021 marked the first time since 1985 that the U.S. did not import oil from Riyadh (<https://bit.ly/30DzIDa>), and this reality will be reflective in how Washington DC deals with West Asian politics in the years to come.

Iran and tensions

Amidst these new realities, both India and South Korea have found themselves caught in regional tensions as the pressure on Iran to restart the 2015 nuclear agreement (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA) increases, which the U.S. unceremoniously exited in 2018 under the indelible American presidency of Donald Trump. Both India and South Ko-

rea have faced carbon-copy consequences over the past decade as the West first negotiated with Iran, and later tried to manage the fallout of the JCPOA collapse.

In 2013, an Indian oil tanker named *MT Dush Shanti* was confiscated near the Strait of Hormuz by Iranian forces and taken to the port of Bandar Abbas on the pretext of the ship violating environmental norms. This was also the time when Iran was under sanctions, and looking for oil payments from India, which New Delhi could not complete due to said sanctions. The *Desh Shanti* episode was seen as a pressure tactic by Tehran.

Fast forward to January 2021; Iran confiscated a South Korean tanker, *MT Hankuk Chemi*, also from near the Strait of Hormuz, lugging the ship to an Iranian port, once again highlighting that the vessel was violating environmental norms. This came at a time when Tehran and Seoul were locked in an argument over billions of dollars' worth of oil payments frozen due to sanctions against Iran over its nuclear programme.

India's involvement

The idea of Asian nations having to band together to protect their energy interests in West Asia is not new. Former Indian diplomats have even suggested an idea equitable to an 'importers OPEC', or Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, led by Asian states which today have a much larger stake in West Asia's oil than the West.

India's security footprint in West Asia has seen a steady increase, and energy security and safe passage of sea routes are one of the main driving factors. The Indian Navy has made multiple port calls from the UAE and Kuwait to Iran and Qatar in recent years. In 2020, India had also planned its first bilateral naval exercise with Saudi Arabia, which was postponed due to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

This trend of an increasing Asian security interest and footprint is expected to only magnify in the years to come as the nature of security in West Asia changes itself. Regional states will become more responsible for their own security, and as Asian economies become stronger stakeholders, their geopolitics will become more visible across this geography.

Kabir Taneja is Fellow, Strategic Studies Programme and Head, West Asia Initiative, Observer Research Foundation

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

West Bengal politics

In the surcharged political atmosphere now prevalent in West Bengal, even a small incident involving a political figure is enough to raise hackles and the political heat to such an extent that the real issues take a back seat. The tense atmosphere is sure to leave its mark on the elections. As West Bengal is expected to be a very close fight between the TMC and the BJP, one can expect every trick in the trade to be used in the quest for political power.

V. PADMANABHAN,
Bengaluru

others with co-morbidities. In some places, there have been reports of people scrambling to centres, without getting their names registered on the CoWIN portal, following rumours of scarcity. There is a report that the price of Covishield vaccine is being charged down. While this is a welcome development, the Health Ministry has not clarified whether the cost of ₹250 being charged by private hospitals would also be slashed suitably.

It is hoped that the Health Ministry will take a quick decision on this matter and enable relief to aged and ailing citizens, waiting to get their turn for vaccination. There is no justification in allowing private hospitals to make undue profits.

M.K.B. MENON,
Palakkad, Kerala

■ The recent surge in the number of cases in Maharashtra is a warning. There are reports that a lockdown is necessary in several parts of the State. This shows that the end of the tunnel has not yet been reached as far as COVID-19 is concerned. There needs to be more vigil in public spaces, especially in the run-up to elections. The respective State governments and the Election Commission must work in tandem, along with the Health Department in adopting concrete measures. Moreover, this is just the beginning of the vaccination phase two with only a small percentage having been administered the jab till date.

D.R. JAYASEKHARAN V.P.,
Payyanur, Kannur, Kerala

■ I have been reading many of the letters from readers

about their good experience at vaccination centres. It just shows how low the expectations of Indian citizens are. Courteous behaviour and efficient procedures – which should be the norm – come as a pleasant surprise and a gratifying experience.

UDAY BOSE,
Bengaluru

Many tipplers are unnecessarily brooding over the effects of alcohol on the jab. Except in the case of heavy drinkers, alcohol has nothing to do with vaccination or immunity. Stopping the pandemic through vaccination should take precedence over everything else now.

D.R. TIRUS JOHN,
Trivapoor, Thiruvalla, Kerala

■ It is reported that the Election Commission has

decided to do away with the photograph of the Prime Minister in the COVID-19 vaccination certificates in the election-bound States. But why only such States? It should be applicable to all States because it is quite odd to have such a certificate. I

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The caption of the photograph carried along with the OpEd page article titled "Quad: strategic opportunity or quagmire?" (March 10, 2021) wrongly referred to the fighter aircraft on the deck of the aircraft carrier as Indian Army fighter jets. They were Indian naval aircraft – MiG 29K.

A reader had raised a query as to when the practice of free use of state-owned media by political parties was started. Wasn't it in 1977 after the Janata Party came to power at the Centre, he asked. Actually, it was 1998 as mentioned in the report "ECC gives parties double airtime on DD, AIR" (March 10, 2020). An Election Commission of India press note dated March 9, 2021 gave the year as 1998.

A Sports page report on the Indian Super League (March 10, 2021, some earlier editions) had an erroneous headline: "Williams and Suhair power ATKMB into the

ASSEMBLY POLLS

DEHLI THE HINDU | SATURDAY, MARCH 13, 2021

P7

How Kerala voted

140 Assembly

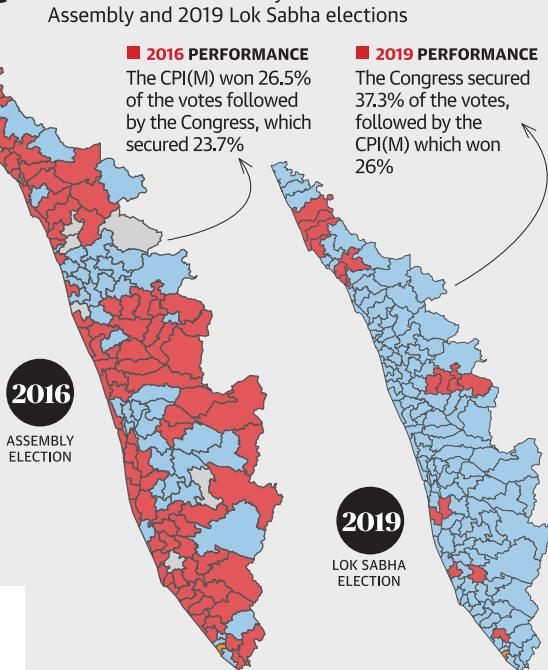
constituencies will go to the polls on April 6. In the previous election in 2016, the Left Democratic Front (LDF), led by the CPI(M), secured a majority by winning 91 seats and 43.1% votes, defeating the United Democratic Front (UDF), which won 47 seats and 38.6% votes. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by the BJP, won one seat and secured 14.9% of the votes. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan and Naresh Singaravelu

GRAPHIC: KARTHIK S.T.
SOURCE: ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA,
CEO KERALA

PAST RECORD: The maps show the party-wise wins/leads in each constituency in the State in the 2016 Assembly and 2019 Lok Sabha elections

2016 PERFORMANCE
The CPI(M) won 26.5% of the votes followed by the Congress, which secured 23.7%

2019 PERFORMANCE
The Congress secured 37.3% of the votes, followed by the CPI(M) which won 26%

**43%**

of the sitting MLAs in Kerala's Legislative Assembly are cronyes. The average assets declared per sitting MLA is ₹2.03 crore

58%

of the sitting MLAs in Kerala declared that they were graduates or more, while 41% declared that they were between '5th pass' and '12th pass'



We wonder if Suvenu Adhikari has suddenly woken up to realise the alleged mistakes of the Trinamool after 10 years

PARTHA CHATTERJEE
Secretary general, Trinamool Congress

2.67
crore
voters are eligible
to cast their ballot
in the 2021
elections

31 year-old
M. Viji
contesting
from Kalliasery
is the youngest in the
CPI(M) list

POLLING DAYS: A look at the important dates and demographic information related to the 2021 Assembly election

March 19

Last date for filing nomination



Male voters **1.29 crore**

April 6

Date of polling

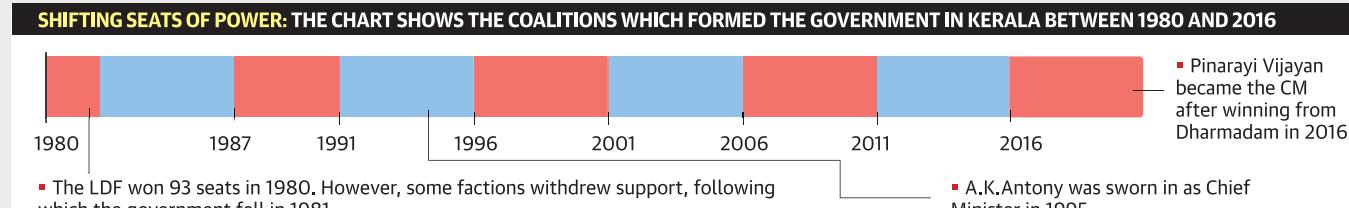
Female voters **1.38 crore**

May 2

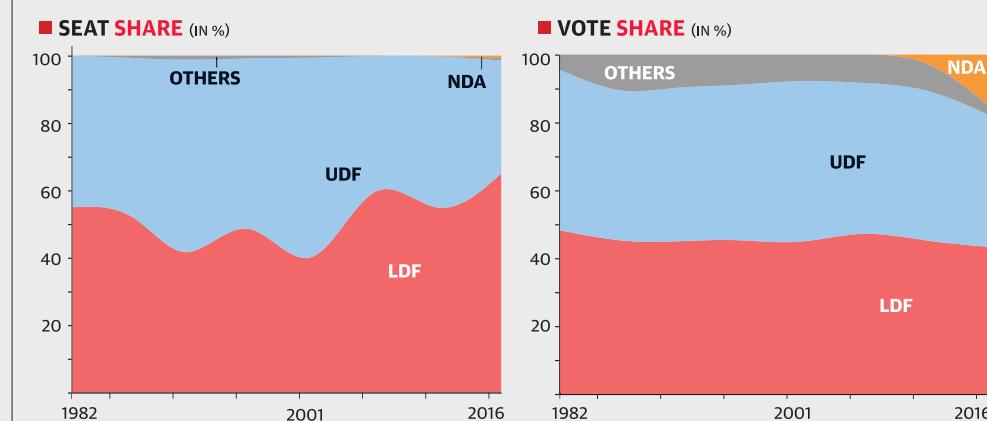
Date of counting

Transgender voters **221**

■ Thirty-three incumbent legislators will not contest in the Assembly election. Five Ministers and Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan have been denied ticket



PARTY PERFORMANCES: The charts show the coalition-wise vote shares (%) and seat shares (%) in all Assembly elections in Kerala between 1982 and 2016



SWOT ANALYSIS

LDF confident of 1977 repeat; UDF faces leadership hitch

Despite facing a volley of allegations, including in the gold smuggling case, the CPI(M)-led front is focusing on good governance, development initiatives and welfare

K.S. SUDHI

KOCHI

"LDF for Sure" is the confident campaign slogan of the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in the Kerala Assembly election on April 6.

The alliance is positive about a repeat of 1977, the only time an incumbent government in Kerala won the people's mandate to remain in power. Going to the local body polls last December, the Left had faced a slew of allegations, but a resounding victory instilled hopes of a return to power in the minds of Left Front workers.

In the saddle

Pre-poll surveys too projected such a trend. The Left is facing the polls with Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan firmly in the saddle.

If the seizure of gold

sought to be smuggled through diplomatic channel in Thiruvananthapuram had put the government in a spot early last year, thanks to the alleged involvement of M. Sivasankar, then Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, the last few months witnessed a volley of charges raised by the Opposition, ranging from backdoor appointments to a now-annulled pact with a U.S. firm pertaining to fishing in the deep seas. But the CPI(M) has sidestepped the allegations and focused on good governance, development initiatives and welfare measures, which, it believes, will stand it in good stead.

Most parties in the Left Front have announced their list of candidates, a mix of veterans, youth and women, but not without hiccups. When the CPI(M) conceded a few sitting seats to the Kerala



Dawn to dusk: Kerala Minister T.M. Thomas Isaac speaking at a Left Democratic Front convention in Kalamassery, near Kochi, on Friday. ■ THULASI KAKKAT

Congress(M), a new Left Front ally, party workers went up in arms in the Ponmani and Kuttiyadi constituencies in Malabar, while

the fielding of a former CPI (M) branch member by the KC(M) from Piravom raised the hackles of party cadres there too.

A legal battle is also on the cards for the CPI(M), as coinciding with the announcement of the polls, the Customs Department filed an

affidavit in the Kerala High Court quoting a reported confessional statement of Swapna Suresh, an accused in the gold smuggling case, implicating the Chief Minister and Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan in smuggling of foreign currency.

The party has accused the Customs Department of campaigning for the BJP, but the department is going ahead with its plan to interrogate Vinodini Balakrishnan, wife of former CPI(M) State secretary Kodiyeri Balakrishnan, and Mr. Sreeramakrishnan in connection with the smuggling cases.

Troubles for UDF

On its part, the United Democratic Front (UDF) is worried about the leadership options even before the polling.

After its near-rout in the civic polls, the Congress brought back former Chief

Minister Oommen Chandy to the fore, which many view as an indication of the non-confidence of the national leadership in Opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala.

"New Kerala with Modi" is the party punchline in the hope of increasing the vote share and improving its tally from just a seat in the Assembly. Like the UDF, the BJP is also trying to re-enliven the issue of entry of women of all ages into the Sabarimala temple, which it relied on ahead of the Lok Sabha polls eyeing a consolidation of caste Hindu votes. It has been able to recruit retired judges and bureaucrats, including technocrat E. Sreedharan, in the run-up to the polls.

But rising fuel and LPG prices and the ongoing privatisation of profit-making PSUs remain a concern, as they are topics of discussion in Kerala.



Livelihood issues: Workers plucking tea leaves on the outskirts of Guwahati in April 2020. ■ RITU RAJ KONWAR

Not a storm in a teacup in Assam gardens

Workers link wage issue and vote

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI

The Assam Tea Tribes Students' Association (ATTS) has called for a complete shutdown of tea estates across the poll-bound State on March 22 over the issue of plantation workers' daily wages.

At an emergency executive meeting of the association in eastern Assam's Dibrugarh on Thursday, the body also resolved to launch a State-wide awareness campaign against the BJP-led government for "deliberately exploiting" plantation workers by using "wage as a tool" for extracting votes from them.

'Fooling workers'

"The BJP-led government has failed to fix the minimum wages of tea garden workers since 2018. They had announced an interim wage hike of ₹30 ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha poll and another interim amount of ₹50 before the 2021 Assembly poll, which was stayed by the Gauhati High Court because the planters were not consulted," said ATTS pre-

sident Dhiraj Gowala. "It is clear that the interim hikes are meant only to attract votes for the party. We condemn this disgusting practice. We will now launch a campaign across the plantations explaining how the BJP and the AGP [Assam Gana Parishad] are using the wage issue to fool the workers," he added.

The shutdown assumes significance as the first phase of polling begins on March 27. This phase will cover 47 seats, mostly in the tea-growing areas of eastern Assam.

The loosely termed 'tea tribes' and 'ex-tea tribes', broadly referred to as Adivasis, constitute about 20% of Assam's total population of 3.3 crore. Although the State government has been transferring cash benefits to 7.5 lakh workers, there are an estimated 10 lakh workers.

The Adivasis, who were brought by the British colonists from central India almost 200 years ago for plantation work and logging, can influence the outcome in 40-45 of the 126 Assembly seats in Assam.

Restrictive order

J.N. Jamaludeen, a lookalike of former Chief Minister and DMK leader



Standing in: The lookalikes of political leaders who participate in temple festivals and political campaigns say that offers have reduced for them in the past five years. ■ ASHOK R.

Parties use us to canvass voters. But no political party has taken measures to improve our livelihood

B. RAMACHANDRAN
Artist and lookalike of MGR

The artistes say they are often denied permission to perform at temple festivals following a court order denying permission for 'obscene or vulgar' dance and song events (*aadal-paadai*) during temple

festivals. "It is unfair to deny permission to all the artistes. There is no vulgarity or obscenity in the performances of lookalike artistes. In fact, it was primarily in Madurai that lookalike artistes were nurtured in the past," says K.S. Basha Seth, secretary of Then Matavai Medai Nadana Nattiyai Kalaignar Sangam, a group of stage artistes.

The pandemic also affected the artistes. They had no source of income during the lockdown, says A. Hema, a lookalike of former Chief Minister and AIADMK leader Jayalalithaa.

"Even though polling dates have been announced, we have not received any offers yet," she says.

Due to unstable incomes, many artistes have taken up other jobs to

support their families, says M. Bhuvana, who leads the women's wing of the Artists' Association. For instance, B. Yakub, who dresses up like actor and politician Kamal Hassan, sells tender coconut to support his four children.

M. Musthafa, a member of the Artists' Association, says there are around two lakh stage artistes across the State, who constitute a significant share of the vote bank.

"Political parties make use of us before the elections. So, the party that comes to power must also take steps to revive the livelihoods of the artistes," he says.

"Although the vocation has not been highly remunerative, we continue performing because of the passion for the art form," says Sevvaiyal, an artiste.

POLL POURRI

Give jobs, not CAA, says Congress



The youth wing of the Assam Congress on Friday launched the party's third poll campaign in a row. The slogan of the campaign is "CAA nohay, sakari laage (Give jobs, not CAA)". "With this campaign, we intend to create awareness in each and every booth against the polarised, amended Citizenship Act and about jobs," Congress leader Bobbeeta Sharma said. Some of the party's promises include job guarantee, a law to stop implementation of the CAA and NRC, and raising the daily wage of tea plantation workers to ₹365 within 30 days of coming to power, and free electricity up to 200 units per household.

Swap of party colours in Golaghat



Former Assam Minister Ajanta Neog and Bitupan Saikia are rivals again in Golaghat, but with a swap of party colours. As the BJP candidate in 2016, Mr. Saikia lost the eastern Assam constituency to Ms. Neog, a Congress heavyweight, by 5,213 votes. Ms. Neog quit the Congress in December 2020. It is the BJP which is fielding her from Golaghat this time. So, a bitter Mr. Saikia joined the Congress, which readily offered him the seat. The only other candidate contesting the seat is Rina Saikia of the Assam Jatiya Parishad.

DATA BYTE

Photo finish

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

Constituency (State)	Year	Party	Margin (%)
Singanallur (T.N.)	2006	AIADMK	0.01
Radhapuram (T.N.)	2016	AIADMK	0.03
Baruipur (W.B.)	2001	TMC	0.003
Uttarpara (W.B.)	1972	CPI(M)	0.01
Mankachar (Assam)	1985	IND.*	0.01
Rangiya (Assam)	1972	INC	0.01
Erapipuram (Kerala)	2001	RSP	0.02
Sreekrishnapuram (Kerala)	2001	CPI(M)	0.02
Karaikal South (Puducherry)	2016	AIADMK	0.08
Mahe (Puducherry)	1977	IND.*	0.2

*Independent

FROM PAGE ONE

Quad leaders for 'open and free' Indo-Pacific

Mr. Morrison laid out the agenda of the Quad in the near future. "We join together as leaders of nations to welcome what I think will be a new dawn in the Indo-Pacific through our gathering," he said.

Prime Minister Suga acknowledged the new dynamism that the Quad had received because of the meeting of the top leaders. "With the four countries working together, I wish to firmly advance our cooperation to realise, a free and open Indo Pacific, and to make a tangible contribution to the peace, stability, and prosperity of the region, including overcoming COVID-19," he said.

The Quad had been taken to the "apex level", Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said during a special briefing on the leaders' summit.

"We are all committed to free and open, inclusive, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific. Today's summit adopted a positive vision to address contemporary issues with vaccine cooperation. Leaders agreed to strengthen, peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific re-

Novavax reports 96.4% efficacy on original virus



A volunteer taking the Novavax shot in London. ■ AP

It is likely to conduct a bridging study (that determines the vaccine's safety and immunogenicity in Indians).

Novavax in January also reported results of a trial in South Africa, testing the vaccine in two groups of healthy individuals as well as a small group of 245 individuals who were HIV positive and medically stable. Overall, the efficacy was 48.6% – a result, the company says, was due to the predominance of the variant 'South African' strain, B.1.351/501Y.V2. In the HIV group alone, the efficacy was 55%. Across both trials, NVX-CoV2373 demonstrated 100% protection against severe disease, including all hospitalisation and death.

15,000 participants
"We are very encouraged by the data showing that NVX-CoV2373 not only provided complete protection against the most severe forms of disease, but also dramatically reduced mild and moderate disease across both trials. Importantly, both studies confirmed efficacy against the variant strains," Stanley C. Erck, president and chief executive officer, Novavax, said in a statement.

In the U.K. trial, the study enrolled more than 15,000 participants between 18 and 84 years of age, including 27% over the age of 65.

The primary endpoint of the U.K. Phase-3 clinical trial was based on the first occurrence of PCR-confirmed symptomatic (mild, moderate or severe) COVID-19 with onset at least 7 days after the second study vaccination in serologically negative (to SARS-CoV-2) adult participants at baseline.

Efficacy was 96.4% (95% CI: 73.8, 99.5) against the original virus strain and 86.3% (95% CI: 71.3, 93.5) against the B.1.1.7/501Y.V1 variant, or the so called U.K. variant.

Five severe cases were observed in the study, and all occurred in the placebo group. Four of the five severe cases were attributed to the B.1.1.7/501Y.V1 variant.

An analysis of trial results by the company in January suggested that prior infection with the original COVID-19 strain might not completely protect against subsequent infection by the variant predominantly circulating in South Africa. However, the complete analysis of the South Africa trial indicates that there could be a late protective effect of prior exposure with the original COVID-19 strain.

The report submitted before the Southern Bench of the tribunal pointed out that petrol refuelling stations were a major source of benzene emissions, volatile organic compounds, and particulate matter.

The committee was directed

to assess the ambient air quality levels in the State, especially in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Kochi, Alappuzha, Kozhikode, Thrissur, Kasaragod, and Kannur.

District-wise analysis

The joint committee comprises officials of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Central and State Pollution Control Boards, and the CSIR-National Environmental Engineering Research Institute, Chennai.

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Green concern: Fuel stations are a major source of emission, according to the National Green Tribunal. ■ K. MURALI KUMAR

concentration. "Therefore, installation of vapour recovery system is an important step in improving air quality. This is to be implemented in coordination with the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organization [PESO] shortly," it said.

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India and China to continue LAC talks

Decision was taken at virtual meeting of the WMCC; two sides review situation along the border

ANANTH KRISHNAN

India and China will hold another round of talks between military commanders "as soon as possible" to continue the disengagement process in friction areas along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

This was agreed to on Friday as officials from both sides virtually held the 21st meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC).

The talks led by senior Foreign Ministry officials, along with the parallel military-level talks between Corps Commanders, have been the two key channels for both sides to take forward disengagement, with Friday's meeting of a mechanism that has in the past convened only twice a year, the seventh held since the June 15 clash in the Galwan Valley last year.



On the retreat: Chinese PLA soldiers during the military disengagement along the LAC in Ladakh. ■ DEFENCE MINISTRY/APP

The two sides reviewed the situation along the LAC and "had in-depth discussions on the remaining issues", a statement from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

Both "agreed that the completion of the disengagement in North and South Bank of the Pangong lake provided a good basis for the two sides to work towards early resolution of these re-

maining issues," it added.

A 11th round of talks between Corps Commanders would be held "as soon as possible to further ease the situation on the ground and jointly safeguard the hard-won peace and stability in the border areas", it said.

At the 10th round on February 20, both commanders noted "the disengagement in the Pangong lake area was a significant step

forward and it provided a good basis for the resolution of other remaining issues along the LAC".

Since the meeting, there has been no official word so far on the progress of disengagement in the Gogra-Hot Springs area and in Demchok.

Long-running tensions

There are also long-running tensions involving the blocking of patrols in the Depsang plains, which Indian officials have said pre-dated the current crisis.

The MEA said both sides agreed to "continue their dialogue to reach a mutually acceptable solution for complete disengagement from all friction points at the earliest", which "would enable two sides to look at broader de-escalation of troops in the area and work towards restoration of peace and tranquility in the border areas."

Both also agreed that "in the interim, two sides should

continue to maintain stability at ground level and prevent any untoward incident."

A statement from China's Foreign Ministry said both sides "agreed to continue dialogue and communication via diplomatic and military channels" and to hold the 11th round of the commanders meeting "at an early time to further de-escalate the situation on the ground, and jointly maintain the hard-earned peace and tranquility in the border areas."

"The two sides appraised the disengagement of the front-line troops of both countries in the Pangong Lake area, and had candid and in-depth exchange of views on promoting the resolution of other issues in the China-India border areas," the statement said, adding that the two countries agreed "to stabilise and control the border situation and avoid a relapse", referring to last year's tensions.

Mamata discharged from hospital

West Bengal Chief Minister can move with certain restrictions, say doctors

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA
West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was on Friday discharged from SSKM Hospital where she was admitted on Wednesday after suffering a leg injury in Nandigram. Ms. Banerjee came out of the Woodburn ward on a wheelchair and was taken to her Kalighat residence.

A six-member medical board that has been treating her said they had suggested that she should be under observation for the next 48 hours. "We discharged her because of her repeated requests...With certain restrictions, she will be able to move," a member of the board told journalists.

"The medical board met



Back to work: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee being discharged from hospital on Friday. ■ ANI

today and examined her condition. She is responding well to treatment and the improvement has been quite satisfactory. The injury was

examined, and the haemato-ma size has considerably diminished. The ankle injury also showed signs of improvement," the doctor said.

Doctors said new plaster slabs were put on her and members of the medical board had explained to her the precautions and restrictions.

A number of visitors, including social activists Medha Patkar and Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court T.B. Radhakrishnan met the Chief Minister at the hospital.

On Thursday, Ms. Banerjee said "she will be back in her field in two to three days".

The Trinamool Congress had to cancel the release of its manifesto on March 11 and reschedule it on March 14. The Chief Minister is likely to join the poll campaign from March 15. The first phase of polls is scheduled on March 27.

Trinamool submits memo to EC on Mamata incident

BJP urges release of 'raw footage' of Nandigram incident

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI
A six-member delegation of the Trinamool Congress on Friday submitted a memorandum to the Election Commission of India (EC) on the alleged attack on party president and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

The memorandum quoted comments made by BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in the run-up to the Wednesday incident in Nandigram. Calling it a "deep-rooted conspiracy", it alleged that the "attack" was "premeditated".

Amid this development, BJP general secretary Bhupendra Yadav said in a tweet that the party had, in a meeting with EC officials on Friday also requested the release of "raw footage" of the incident where Ms. Banerjee sustained injuries. "BJP has requested the EC to release raw footage of Ms. Mamata Banerjee's 'accident' to dispel rumours being spread by the Trinamool Congress leaders. The BJP also seeks action against TMC leaders



Trinamool MPs after meeting the EC officials in New Delhi on Friday. ■ PTI

for spreading misinformation in violation of the model code," he said. The party urged the EC to set up a panel to probe the incident. It also sought the despatch of a special observer to Nandigram as it was a "sensitive constituency".

The Trinamool Congress demanded an "immediate, thorough and unbiased investigation" into the incident. To underline their claim that the alleged attack was pre-planned, the party, in the memorandum submitted to the EC, listed eight instances.

On March 8, the party

BJP's Suvendu Adhikari files nomination

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA
BJP candidate for the Nandigram Assembly seat Suvendu Adhikari on Friday filed his nomination papers at the office of the Sub-Divisional Officer, Haldia. Other nominees of the party, including Haldia MLA Tapasi Mondal, also filed their nomination papers at the same venue.

Mr. Adhikari is facing Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in the constituency.

Before submitting his nomination, he visited a couple of temples and addressed a meeting. "Nandigram is not just an Assembly seat. It is the symbol of the fight against forcible land acquisition and played a crucial role in the change of 2011," he said. He pointed out that 41 people had lost their lives in the violence during 2007-08.

The biggest issue the State people were facing was economic crisis. The number of unemployed youth in the State had increased to two crore, he stated. Mr. Adhikari was accompanied by Union Ministers Dharmendra Prashant and Smriti Irani.

Top G-23 leaders out of star campaigner list

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI
Prominent leaders of the group of 23 dissenting leaders (G-23) do not figure in the Congress's list of 30 star campaigners for West Bengal polls that was released on Friday.

The 30-star campaigners submitted by the party to the EC did not include top

leaders like Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma, Kapil Sibal, Manish Tewari and Bhupinder Singh Hooda.

The top names in the list include party chief Sonia Gandhi, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, former party chief Rahul Gandhi, and general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Mallikarjun Kharge.



TELANGANA STATE CIVIL SUPPLIES CORPORATION LIMITED
(A STATE GOVT. UNDERTAKING)
(Regd. Office: 6-3-655/1/A, C S Bhavan, Somajiguda, Hyderabad - 500 082)
No.Mktg.M2/2298/Food Fortification 2020-21
Dated:13.03.2021
SHORT TENDER NOTICE
Tenders are invited for empanelment of suppliers for supply of 2600 mts (approximately) of fortified rice kernel (FRK) containing three micro-nutrients i.e. Iron, Folic Acid and Vitamin B12 as per FSSAI specifications in 25 kg bags for fortification of rice to be distributed under PDS in Jayashankar Bhupalapally district and also under MDM & ICDS schemes in all the districts of Telangana state.
A pre-bid meeting will be held on 20.03.2021 At 11:00 am at (venue) 6-3-655/1/A, Civil Supplies Bhavan, Somajiguda, Hyderabad with the interested tenderers and last date for filing of the tenders is 25.03.2021 Upto 5:00 pm. Contact details: 9949902084 & 7995050703.
Sd/- for VC & MANAGING DIRECTOR
TSCSCL
TSCSCL
DIP R.O.No.9811-PP/CL/ADVT/1/2020-21 Dt. 12.03.2021

'Exclusive blocs' should not target 'third party': China

Beijing sees Quad Summit as U.S.-led containment move

ANANTH KRISHNAN



Zhao Lijian

In a statement just hours before the first summit on Friday of the four leaders of the Quad framework, China has said cooperation between nations should not "target or damage interests of a third party" and countries should not "pursue exclusive blocs".

"Exchanges and cooperation between nations should contribute to mutual understanding and trust among nations rather than target a third party or damage interests of a third party," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said in response to a question about the Quad virtual summit of India, United States, Japan and Australia.

"We hope that relevant countries uphold the principles of openness, inclusiveness and win-win results, refrain from pursuing exclusive blocs, and do things that are conducive to regional peace and stability," he said.

The first Quad leaders' meet is being closely followed in China and covered by the State media, which has broadly framed it as a U.S.-led effort aimed at "containing" China. At the same time, Chinese experts have sought to play down the significance of the meet.

Speaking to State broadcaster China Global Television Network, former People's Liberation Army Senior Colonel Zhou Bo, a frequent

commentator on strategic affairs, said, "China should not take it too seriously."

"I can give you my comment on the Quad in one sentence," he told the channel. "None of the four countries would like to sacrifice its own interests [with regard to China] for the interests of the other three countries," he said, referring to their different relationships with China, particularly on trade.

"If you ask all four, are you against China or is this an anti-China club, they say no," he said. "My conclusion is the Quad is definitely established because of China, although they would not say that it is against China. But if you look at this club as a military alliance, India would totally deny that. [The Quad] is still developing and coming into shape, but it is difficult for them to decide which way it will go, be it military or economic."

On the meeting between the top diplomats of the U.S. and China set to be held in Alaska on March 18 – Yang Jiechi, a member of the Politburo and director of the Central Committee's Foreign Affairs Commission, and Foreign Minister Wang Yi will travel for talks with Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan – Mr. Zhao, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson, termed the meet "a high-level strategic dialogue". This was in contrast to Mr. Blinken's comments that the meet would not be the start of a strategic dialogue and any following engagement with China would only depend on "tangible" outcomes.

China has said it wants a reset with the new Biden administration, but has laid the blame for the past four years of strained ties at the door of Washington. The Biden administration, in statements so far, has suggested it might continue at least some of the previous administration's policies with respect to China, including on trade. Mr. Blinken in a March 3 speech described ties with China as "the biggest geopolitical test".

Mr. Zhao said, "China's position on China-U.S. relations is clear."

"We ask the U.S. to view China and China-U.S. relations in an objective and rational manner, reject the Cold-War and zero-sum game mentality, respect China's sovereignty, security and development interests, and stop interfering in China's internal affairs," he said.

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Payment of fees in online mode	15.03.2021 to 10.04.2021
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Tentative date of Online examination	June/July-2021
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Maharashtra tops tally of daily fatalities

India records 117 deaths in the last 24 hours

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India has reported 117 new COVID-19 deaths in the 24 hours till 8 a.m. on Friday, with six States accounting for 82.91% of them. Maharashtra reported the highest number of casualties (57), while Punjab followed with 18 deaths and Kerala 13, a release issued by the Health Ministry said on Friday.

Along with the highest casualties, Maharashtra has reported the highest number of daily new COVID-19 cases at 14,317 (61.48% of the new cases).

It is followed by Kerala with 2,133 cases while Punjab reported 1,305.



Increased surveillance: A health worker taking a swab sample in the Dharavi area of Mumbai. • AFP

"Some States in the country have been reporting a very high number of daily new COVID cases with Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu cumulatively accounting for 85.6% of the new cases re-

ported in the past 24 hours. India has reported 23,285 new cases in the last 24 hours," the Ministry said.

It added that more than 1.09 crore (1,09,53,303) people have recovered so far and in the 24 hours alone, 15,157

Over 2.8 crore vaccine doses administered so far

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The cumulative number of COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in the country crossed 2.8 crore on Friday.

A total of 2,80,05,817 vaccine doses have been given, as per the provisional report till 8 p.m. on Friday. They include 72,84,406

patients have recovered and been discharged.

India's total active case-load has reached 1,97,237 and five States cumulatively account for 82.96% of the total active cases in the country. Two States – Maharashtra and Kerala – account for 71.69% of India's total active cases. The Health Ministry has said that it is actively engaging with all State and UT governments, especially those showing a surge in case count.

health care workers (HCWs) who have taken the first dose and 41,76,446 HCWs who have taken the second dose, 72,15,815 frontline workers (FLWs) (first dose), 9,28,751 FLWs (second dose), 71,69,695 people more than 60 years old and 12,30,704 people aged 45 and above with specific co-morbidities.

Maths, physics no longer must for engineering admissions

AICTE says bridge courses will be offered where needed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prospective engineering students will not have to mandatorily study maths and physics in Class 12, according to new norms released by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) for 2021-22.

Council Chairperson Anil Sahasrabudhe defended the changes on Friday, saying they are in line with the multi-disciplinary approach of the new National Education Policy.

According to the AICTE's approval process handbook for 2021-22, students only need to score 45% in any three subjects from a list of

14 in order to qualify. The diverse list includes physics, mathematics, chemistry, computer science, electronics, information technology, biology, informatics practices, biotechnology, agriculture, technical vocational subject, engineering graphics, business studies and entrepreneurship.

"The universities will offer suitable bridge courses such as mathematics, physics, engineering drawing, etc for the students coming from diverse backgrounds to achieve [the] desired learning outcome of the programme," said the handbook.

"The new NEP is all about breaking silos and promoting multi-disciplinarity. We are creating flexibility. We must also recognise the wide range of engineering programmes. We have some 240-odd specialisations and not all of them have the same requirements," Dr. Sahasrabudhe told *The Hindu*.

Dr. Sahasrabudhe agreed that physics, chemistry and maths would remain the bedrock of most engineering courses, but argued that students could still take bridge courses in the first year of a B.E. programme.

"They may bring expertise from other areas which could also be valuable," he added.

Scania denies reports on gift to Minister

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Swedish bus maker Scania has denied local media reports that Union Minister Nitin Gadkari was gifted a luxury bus by its India arm in exchange for contracts.

"Scania India has not gifted any bus to Minister Gadkari. There is nothing in our investigation showing that the Transport Minister personally has been involved in Scania's sales of the bus you are referring to," Hans-Åke Danielsson, Scania's Press Manager and Senior Advisor, wrote in response to an e-mail query. "As SVT claims, Scania India sold the bus to one of its private dealers, which in its turn rented it (or sold) to a bus transport company," the Press Manager wrote.

On Thursday, Mr. Gadkari's office rejected Swedish TV channel SVT's report as "malicious, fabricated and baseless".

'Lawyers not consulted on hybrid model'

NEET for UG medical courses on August 1

Exam will be held in offline mode

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The NEET examination for admission to undergraduate medical courses will be held on August 1, 2021. It will be conducted on a single day, in an offline pen-and-paper mode, the National Testing Agency announced on Friday.

NEET (UG) or National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (Undergraduate) is used for admission to MBBS and BDS courses as well as programmes for alternative or traditional medicine and nursing. It is usually held in May, after Class 12 board examinations, in order to facilitate admissions by August.

However, due to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, board examinations have been delayed this year and will only be completed in June. In 2020, NEET was held in September, and repeated in October to cater to those who missed the exam due to COVID-19.

Some students had urged that multiple attempts be permitted in 2021, similar to engineering entrance examination JEE. However, the NEET examination will revert to a single date in 2021.

Education Minister Ramesh Pokhray Nishank has indicated that although there will be no reduction in syllabus for NEET, there may be a larger level of internal choice to account for the fact that several school examination boards have reduced their syllabi.

The Tatmadaw, or Myanmar military, had taken over the country after a coup on

Students waiting to enter a NEET exam centre in September 2020.

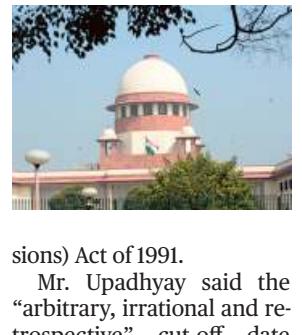
Centre's reply sought on plea against Places of Worship Act

Some clauses against principles of secularism, says petition

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday asked the government to respond to a plea challenging a special law enacted in 1991 by the Congress government, which freezes the status of places of worship as it was on August 15, 1947.

A Bench led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde issued notice to the Union Ministries of Home, Law and Culture on a plea filed by advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay against various provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act of 1991.



Mr. Upadhyay said the "arbitrary, irrational and retrospective" cut-off date bars Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs from approaching courts to "reclaim" their places of worship which were "invaded" and "encroached" upon by fundamentalist barbaric invaders".

"The Act declared that the character of places of worship-pilgrimage shall be maintained as it was on August 15, 1947 and no suit or proceeding shall lie in court in respect of disputes against encroachment done by fundamentalist barbaric invaders and law breakers and such proceeding shall stand abated," the petition said.

The petition said Sections of the Act that dealt with the bar on legal claims were against the principles of secularism and "fundamentalist barbaric invaders".

Census data may decide food subsidy

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Once the new census data is available, the Centre may consider revising the number of people who get subsidised foodgrains under the National Food Security Act, Food Secretary Sudhanshu Pandey said on Friday. He said there is no proposal under consideration, but that the Food Ministry was having conversations on a NITI Aayog paper on the issue, which recommended a reduction in the NFSAs coverage.

He was speaking at the launch of 'Mera Ration' mobile app for ration card holders.

NIA recovers ₹91 lakh from field in Jammu

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday recovered ₹91 lakh from an agricultural field in Jammu and Kashmir's Samba district. The cash, concealed in a pit, was recovered at the instance of an accused, Romesh Kumar. He was arrested earlier this month in a narco-terrorism case, an NIA official said.

The NIA said it recovered "proceeds of narcotics" in the early hours of Friday.

"Investigation revealed that arrested accused Romesh Kumar had received the cash proceeds of drugs from narco-smugglers based in Kashmir valley for self as well as for further channelization to different terrorist entities," the NIA said in a statement.

'Serious lapse on part of jail authorities'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A senior police officer involved in the investigation into the Mukesh Ambani bomb scare case said the unearthed of a smartphone from the high-security ward of Tihar indicates a serious security lapse on the part of jail authorities.

The cell remains under round-the-clock CCTV surveillance and is guarded by armed police personnel. And there is no power socket inside the cells. This was definitely done by some insider who was providing logistical support to the inmates," claimed a Tihar Jail official.

Delhi Home Minister Satyendar Jain on Friday said the government has ordered a probe. "We have written to the DG asking how the phone was found."

Rollout of labour codes likely after elections

Rules are ready, say officials

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

The implementation of the four new labour codes, replacing 29 Central labour laws, is likely to take place after the ongoing State Assembly elections, according officials in the Labour and Employment Ministry.

An official said the rules framed under the four codes – on wages; occupational safety, health and working conditions; industrial relations; and social security – were "ready" to be rolled out "soon". However, the implementation of the codes was "likely after the elections".

The Assembly elections in Assam, West Bengal, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and Kerala are scheduled for April and May, with results being declared on May 2.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
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Modi flags off padyatra to commemorate salt march

'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' to continue till Aug. 15 next year

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
AHMEDABAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday flagged off the foot march to re-enact the historic Mahatma Gandhi-led Salt March, while launching the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', the government's initiative to mark 75 years of India's Independence.

The *padyatra* is being undertaken by 81 persons on April 5. The march from Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad to Dandi in Navsari district, a distance of 386 km, will take them 25 days. It will mark the 91st anniversary of the historic march against the tax on salt imposed by the British in India.

Prime Minister Modi said the 75th anniversary celebrations would continue till August 15, 2023. He reiterated the five themes of the celebrations, Freedom Struggle, Ideas at 75,

current internal situation in Myanmar. In this regard, the MHA has already issued an advisory Dated 25.02.2021 to Chief Secretaries of Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh and also to Border Guarding Force(BGF) along IMB (Assam Rifles) to stay, alert and take appropriate action to prevent a possible influx into Indian territory through IMB (India-Myanmar border) due to

large-scale flow

In a letter dated March 10 to the four States and Assam Rifles, the Ministry said, "As you are aware, there is a probability of large-scale illegal influx into Indian territory through IMB (India-Myanmar border) due to

The letter stated that it

has been reported that "illegal influx from Myanmar has started."

It recalled the guidelines addressed to all States on August 8, 2017 "wherein instructions were issued to sensitize all law enforcement and intelligence agencies for taking prompt steps in identifying illegal migrants and initiate the deportation processes expeditiously and without delay." It also mentioned another set of guidelines to States sent on February 28, 2018 "advising them to sensitize the law enforcement and intelligence agencies for taking appropriate prompt steps for identifying illegal migrants, their restrictions to specific locations as per provisions of law, capturing their biographic and biometric particulars, cancellation of fake Indian documents and legal proceedings including initiation of deportation proceedings as per provisions of law."

Justice Indu Malhotra, the first woman judge to be appointed to the Supreme Court Bench directly from the Bar, completed her last working day, virtually hearing cases alongside Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde on Friday.

Justice Malhotra, in an emotional address, said she was "leaving the court with a great sense of fulfilment". With Chief Justice Bobde and Justice A.S. Bopanna looking on, Justice Malhotra said she was grateful for the opportunity which enabled her to contribute to the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court. Chief Justice Bobde said he had not seen a finer judge than Justice Malhotra.

At a function organised later in the day by the Supreme Court Bar Association, Justice Malhotra said, "A judge derives great satisfaction when a long-drawn litigation is brought to a close or justice is done to those who are voiceless." Judges appreciated the fact that the institution was "far greater than the individuals who compose the Bench", she noted.

Justice Malhotra was on the Constitution Bench that unanimously decriminalised homosexuality between adults. She is known for her lone dissenting opinion in the Sabarmala judgment.

SC asks govt. to respond on plea for district-level assistance

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday asked the government to respond to a plea to constitute district medical boards to which the top court had referred her, she withdrew her plea for termination of pregnancy.

But advocate V.K. Biju, appearing for the girl, said this case highlighted the need for setting up medical boards in every district so that rape survivors could benefit from early medical intervention and not be forced

to go through more trauma. Mr. Biju said he had seen, first-hand, the pain and suffering of the victim and her parents.

The Chief Justice said a rape survivor should receive timely aid and advice to exercise her rights and options.

"There should be some mechanism for that. It will be helpful if there is a local board... We will issue notice," the CJI said.

At the flagging off ceremony, Mr. Modi said salt was in fact a symbol. Salt was never valued on the basis of mere cost.

He said Gandhiji understood this chronic pain of the country, understood the pulse of the people and turned that into a movement.



Celebrating history: Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagging off the Dandi March in Ahmedabad on Friday. • VIJAY SONEJI



Justice Indu Malhotra's tenure ends

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

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Instapick

Donate a Wall: Kerala's success with Insta-ready walls continues. Over 17 days, artist Sachin Samson transformed the walls of this fisherman's house in Kasaragod with a mural that showcases *Chaaavukara* – a phenomenon where fishes and prawns throng the ocean during a specific season. The work is part of St+art India's *Donate a Wall* programme, now ongoing in the state. [@startindia](#)



Talking point

Grammy Awards: Singer Harry Styles, who will open the show, and K-pop star BTS are among the artistes who will take the stage at music's biggest night, hosted by comedian and talk show host, Trevor Noah. For audiences tired of virtual events (and that includes the technical glitches at the Golden Globes!), Grammy organisers promise a spectacular live show. March 15 (6.30 am IST).

SPIT TAKE

Bollywood bites

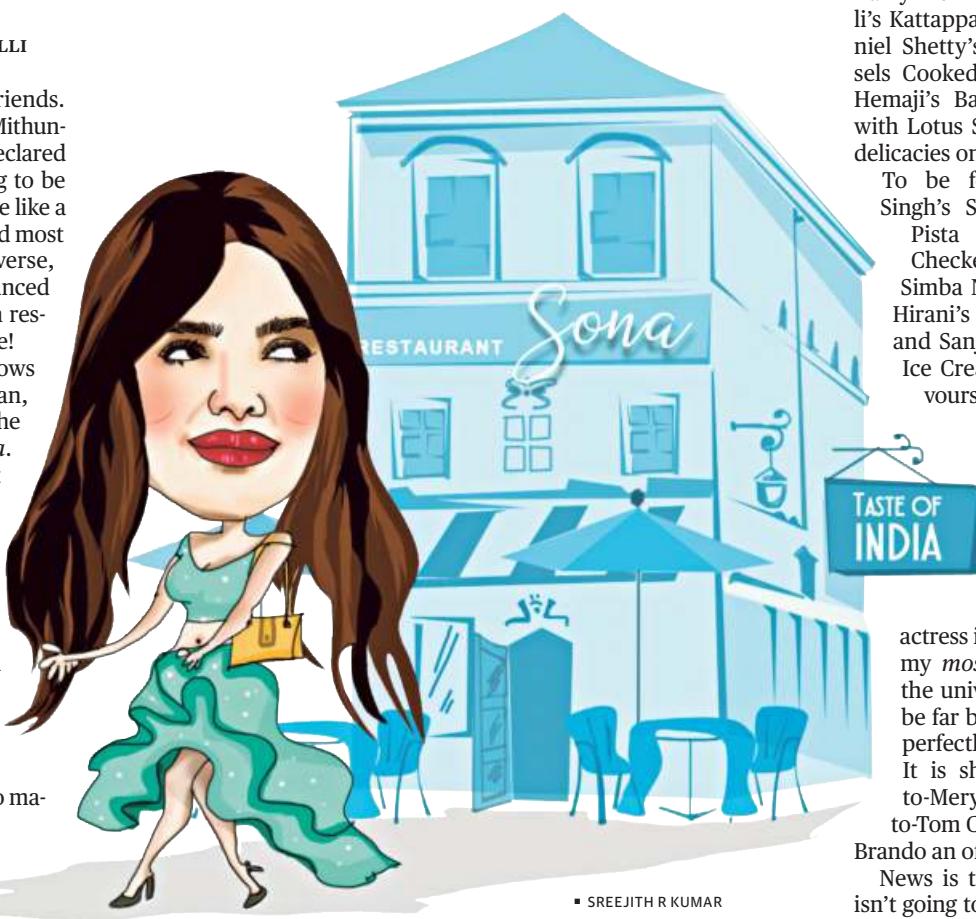
If Priyanka Chopra opens a restaurant in New York, can other Indian actors be far behind?

KRISHNA SHASTRI DEVULAPALLI

I'm super excited, dear friends. And that isn't just because Mithundha has joined politics and declared that his top priority is going to be killing everyone with one bite like a cobra. It's because my second most favourite actress in the universe, Priyanka Chopra, has announced that she's opening an Indian restaurant in New York. Yippee!

While my excitement knows no bounds, as a bona fide fan, I'm a tad disappointed that the restaurant is called *Sona*. Why, PC? A bit lame, don't you think, when you could have called it *Dosai Girl*? Or *Udipi Sri Jonasa Dosai Girl Vilas*? Or had an exclusive buffet-only restaurant called *Quantity Co*? Or a vegan restaurant called *Eggsatvic*? Or a joint that served specialty *naans* called *The Wheat Tiger*? Or a BBQ-style restaurant called *Daddy's Little Grill*? So many options.

Anyway, the good news is that my



■ SREEJITH R KUMAR

watchman knows PC's chef's step-brother's neighbour's ex-wife. And she has shared some exciting news of what's cooking (sorry for the cheap pun). Meaning, here's a sneak peek of the exclusive Bollywood-themed menu of *Sona*.

Shakti Kapoor's Sick Kababs on a Nada, Twinkle Khanna's Funny-boneless Chicken with Akki Roti, Alia Bhatt's Silly Chicken Marinated in Ran Beer, Ekta Kapoor's Bahu Curry with Killer Saas, SS Rajamouli's Kattappam with SFX Stew, Suniel Shetty's Expressionless Muscles Cooked on a Woodfire, and Hemaji's Basanti Thayir Saadam with Lotus Seeds are some of the delicacies one can expect here.

To be followed by Ranveer Singh's Sequinned Strawberry Pista Blueberry Tomato Checkered Ice Cream with Simba Nuts on Steroids, Raju Hirani's Saccharine Value Kulfi and Sanju Baba's Cold Stoned Ice Cream in a variety of flavours for dessert.

The bar will serve Sallu Bhai's Blackbuck's Fizz and Dharam Paa ji's signature cocktail, Canine Bloody Mary.

Well, if my second most favourite actress is up to something, can my *most* favourite actress in the universe, nay, multiverse, be far behind? My readers are perfectly aware of who that is. It is she-who-teaches-stunts-to-Meryl Streep-and-accents-to-Tom Cruise. And could make

Brando an offer he couldn't refuse. News is that she – yes, *her!* – isn't going to let this go that easily.

My sources tell me that she is planning her own restaurant right opposite PC's. And that it might be called *The Real Sona Not Like The Fake One Across The Road or Bharat Ka Sabse Greatest Most Fantastickest Jai Hind Restaurant of New York or If You Don't Eat Here You're Antinational Cafe or Tapsee Mukti Bistro*.

And her chef, apparently, is the guy who scored ten marks more than PC's chef in catering college. And can deadlift 300 kg. And is also a qualified brain surgeon who just happens to prefer cooking sturgeon, so there.

Rumour has it that while the restaurant will most likely be multicuisine, it won't serve Mughlai. Or British. Or Italian. For obvious reasons. It also won't serve Greek because Alexander lied and said he defeated Porus. It won't serve West Indian because, well, Rihanna. Or Canadian, for that matter, because Trudeau is a closet farmer. In fact, it won't serve anything grown by farmers.

But there will be unlimited Patriotic Poori with Hrithik Masala, Low Cal Nepo-Free Salad tossed in Kjobja Oil and Chicken in a Bhasker.

Come to think of it, why can't we have more restaurants run by film actors, I say? And some South Indian ones, too. I, for one, would love to go to a restaurant run by T Rajendar. Where I could order a Coffee Not The Toffee made with a Decotion of the Solution in the Rejuvenation.

KRISHNA SHASTRI DEVULAPALLI IS A SATIRIST. HE HAS WRITTEN FOUR BOOKS AND EDITED AN ANTHOLOGY.

Pick of the week

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



Charlotte de Witte update

Belgian DJ and record producer **Charlotte de Witte** is bringing her brand of minimal techno to India, performing live in Goa on March 19 and Bengaluru on March 21. Tickets for the limited-capacity event start at ₹2,800, on [in.bookmyshow.com](#). Meanwhile, an eclectic lineup, including **Lucky Ali** and **Raghav Meattle**, will participate in the **Open Up India Concert**, to help informal sector workers affected by the pandemic. Hosted by VJ-DJ Nikhil Chinappa, it is organised by UNDP India. On March 13, at 7 pm, on [insider.in](#).



Dance or make a film?

It appears that choreographer and YouTuber **Sonali Bhaduria**'s masterclass is much sought after. The two-hour-long session (for all age groups) will include moves to 'Nadiyon Paar' from the Jhanvi Kapoor-starrer *Roohi*. March 14 at 5 pm. ₹400, on [insider.in](#). What's keeping the director in you in check? Bengaluru-based independent filmmaker **Bharat Darria**'s workshop, *Make Zero Budget Short Films*, will cover topics such as casting on a budget, building a crew, and the like. March 13, 4 pm. ₹400, on [insider.in](#).



This one's for Karnad

Theatre Nisha will stage **Arundhati**, a play written last year as an homage to author Girish Karnad. It is inspired by the maid, Swarnalatha's narrative from Karnad's book, *Yayati*. At Alliance Française of Madras. March 13 at 3 pm and 7 pm. ₹200 on [in.bookmyshow.com](#). QTP and Natak Company present **White Rabbit Red Rabbit** by Iranian playwright Nassim Soleimanpour. The play is handed to a new performer each time. In English, Hindi or Marathi, March 13 at 8 pm. ₹300 onwards, on [in.bookmyshow.com](#).



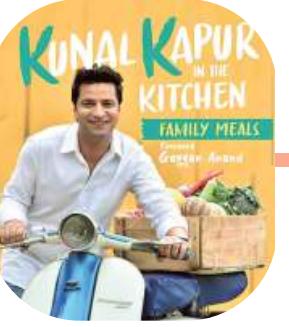
Select your comedy

Actor and writer **Ankita Shrivastav** brings her brand of observational comedy into your home. Catch her latest routine, *Main, Meri Family aur Lockdown*, on March 13-14, and 20-21. ₹299 on [in.bookmyshow.com](#). 'Your manager should factor in the time you spend spiralling on the internet when they fix your deadlines,' **Kautuk Srivastava** recently tweeted. The writer and comedian's *Working on the Vaccine* sees him trying to make sense of the new 'abnormal' and his marriage. March 14 at 8 pm. ₹249, on [in.bookmyshow.com](#).



BAFTA nods

With over 120 changes introduced to the process, the nominees for the **BAFTAs** are highly diverse this year. **Adarsh Gourav** scored a Leading Actor nomination for *The White Tiger*, while four women vie in the Best Director category, including Chloé Zhao for *Nomadland*. Zhao's drama has seven nominations. While the BAFTAs will be held without a live audience on April 11, the **Oscars** will be held on April 26 (5.30 am IST). Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas will announce the nominations on March 15.



Kunal Kapur's kitchen

The celebrity chef's new book, **Kunal Kapur in the Kitchen**, will explore memories of dining table conversations and flavours from his grandfather's kitchen. Recipes get a "fresh new spin", resulting in dishes such as ham and cheese bread *pakoras*. Releases March 15. ₹1,250. Why did **Munaf Kapadia** quit his job at a tech company to start his successful home restaurant, *The Bohri Kitchen*? Find out in his book, *How I Quit Google to sell Samosas: Adventures with the Bohri Kitchen*. Available for pre-order on [amazon.in](#), at ₹319.



Thirteen museums are participating in the hybrid **Bihar Museum Biennale**. While visitors can physically see two exhibitions at the Bihar Museum, a free virtual two-day conference, tours and masterclasses (Zoom links to be available from March 15) will be held. From March 22 to 28. On [biharmuseumbiennale2021.org](#). Meanwhile, the first vial used in the COVID-19 vaccinations in the US has been added to the **Smithsonian National Museum of American History**. The Pfizer-BioNTech jab was administered to ICU nurse, Sandra Lindsay.



(Clockwise from far left) Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, Madira Bedi, Boman Irani, Zia Mody, Hema Malini, the book cover, and Diana Hayden ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Write me a letter

Boman Irani, Mandira Bedi

Bedi and other personalities provide words of advice to their children and grandchildren via letters compiled for the nonprofit, CRY

NEHA BHATT

A new book, *Anything Can Be: Words of Wisdom & Love for our Children*, goes where few venture these days: reviving the tradition of writing letters.

Within its pages are missives written by 34 contributors, many of them well-known personalities – attorney Zia Mody, sarod maestro Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, actors Hema Malini, Boman Irani, Sameera Reddy Varde, Diana Hayden and the like – to their children and grandchildren about their dreams for them and a blueprint for the fu-

ture. Intimate family photos work as cheerful companions to each letter.

Anything Can Be is an initiative by CRY, so many of the letters have also been written by mothers of children supported by the nonprofit. Proceeds from the hardbound, coffee-table style book will go to CRY's 1,000 Day Campaign to support maternal and infant health through the critical period of conception to 24 months.

Legacies and lessons Put together by author Sathyia Saran, the letters are woven with tales of family legacies and life lessons, brimming with ideals of gender equality, tolerance and compassion.

Khan, for example, writes to his

grandchildren, Abeer and Zohaan,

about their long *gharana* tradition

and how they are born into a family



Universal theme Though the letters have an intimate feel to them, they speak to an

audience united by similar concerns for their children. Saran says it was a curious idea to curate a book full of letters at a time when "WhatsApp and abbreviations have taken over our lives". While letters, unlike phone messages, last and can be read and reread... most people have forgotten the art of writing one, she states in her introduction to the book, adding, "Letters imply... a certain need to communicate, to reveal true feelings, and to say things that will stand the test of time and the scrutiny of others perhaps, besides the person the letter is written for."

Other letters speak of small and big struggles of families striving to afford a home and a decent education to ensure a better life for the next generation. Contributor Seema Ramchand Nirmal, the mother of a child supported by CRY who found it difficult to adjust to the bustle of city life when her family moved to a *chawl* in Mumbai from her village, shares her letter to her children, Niraj and Dheeraj, wise words of advice. "City life is different; here one loses touch with roots with family. Distances and the demands of everyday life make every one of us isolated individuals. And I am worried it could do this to you. So my sons, remember the times and learnings you have had from your elders, your grandparents... Remember the

visits to our village in Pratapgarh Zilla, and what you saw and learnt there."

Published by Penguin India, Anything Can Be: Words of Wisdom & Love for our Children is available at ₹699.

audience united by similar concerns for their children. Saran says it was a curious idea to curate a book full of letters at a time when "WhatsApp and abbreviations have taken over our lives". While letters, unlike phone messages, last and can be read and reread... most people have forgotten the art of writing one, she states in her introduction to the book, adding, "Letters imply... a certain need to communicate, to reveal true feelings, and to say things that will stand the test of time and the scrutiny of others perhaps, besides the person the letter is written for."

The contributors, too, felt charmed by the romance of writing a letter to be part of a bigger, noble theme. "I agreed to do it in a heart-beat – it was such a novel and thoughtful idea," says Mandira Bedi, whose letter to her son, Vir, offers him a road map, by way of gratitude and love. "Normally I am a WhatsApp, short and sweet kind of person. But this was an opportunity to express my feelings and what life has taught me in detail. It is something that will stay with my kids over time."

For the actor Irani, who writes letters regularly, it was an unusual experience to address one to his young grandchildren, Ziaan and Sysha. "It was unusual simply because one does not normally write to grandchildren who don't read or write. So the letter, in many ways, is going to be retrospective when they finally get to read it. It was an emotional little moment. I do write letters very often to loved ones, to my sons, to my wife, to friends, but when this came up, it made me extremely emotional. I am grateful for this opportunity [to write a letter] that my grandchildren can read some years from now," he concludes.

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Anamika Khanna ready for a reunion

FDCI x Lakmé Fashion Week join forces after 15 years, while Khanna returns to the runway after a hiatus of over two years

VARUN RANA

There is no doubt that Anamika Khanna is one of India's most talented and well-regarded fashion designers. With no formal fashion training, she has built her brand's signature on hybrid silhouettes that work for women of all shapes, and painstaking surface embellishments that balance traditional embroideries with modern application. On the hanger, her clothes look like cherished heirlooms, yet wear like red carpet entrances. To anyone, she would be the ideal designer to open the newly-reunited FDCI x Lakmé Fashion Week; the first time the twain have met since their split in 2006.

Even so, she has had to face comments like 'Why Anamika? She's a Calcutta designer!', the source of which she chooses not to share. "Why would anyone say something like this? I'm an Indian designer; I could be from anywhere in the country!" This only goes to show the deep chasm that the Great Fashion Week Split created when it happened. Over the

years, it grew into a rivalry – the pre-existing Delhi-Mumbai Divide helped – that manifested in real business outcomes for designers based in Delhi and Mumbai, as well as elsewhere.

Quiet isn't always bad

At 49, Khanna is one of the few designers to have shown at both fashion weeks over her 16 years in the business, so I ask her if this merger became possible because the platforms have recently gone digital due to COVID-19. "I think going digital just sped up the inevitable," she says. "The coming together of these two giant platforms unifies the entire fashion industry. When you go to France, you don't have 10 different fashion weeks, do you? This is a good move, and I'm excited to be part of this historic event."

But will this partnership survive when physical shows come back? "That's just a detail," she says. "Shows can happen anywhere. All over the world, the media

travels to the host cities. As a designer based in Kolkata, I've always packed up my collection and my team, and gone to wherever the shows are being held. So I hope this merger continues to go strong."

Khanna's last show happened in Mumbai at Lakmé Fashion Week (LFW) in January 2018 (the finale; Kareena Kapoor walked the ramp). Since then, the high points – at least from a brand and marketing perspective – have been few and far between. She hasn't launched any major collections on Instagram as is the norm today, and her twin sons' label, AK-OK – an athleisure line launched in 2019 – has not perceptibly broken any ground on social media yet (with just over 6k followers at the time of going to press). She gently disagrees.

"We've launched the Mumbai flagship store [at Kala Ghoda] recently," Khanna says over a Zoom call. "And AK-OK has found its online retail presence where the collections have started rolling out. We've launched our men's line, too. So a lot has been happening, even though we've been doing everything quietly." She had even planned to launch a home line before the lockdown, but that took a back seat due to the pandemic.

"But it has worked in our favour. We've always been a quiet brand, and we're hitting higher numbers," she adds. "India is a land of celebrations and weddings, and that never stops." Had she felt the need to create more social media and marketing buzz, she would have, she says. "I just don't want

to go crazy and do things just because I have to."

Flip side of fashion

The timeline of her fashion shows, for both the FDCI and Lakmé-led fashion weeks, attests to this. Famously inconsistent, she hasn't held fashion shows season after season as expected, and prefers to pick her moments. "Everyone forgets that I'm a mother first," she says. "I've brought up two boys who've gone through school, exams, activities, sports, illnesses, vaccines, and a number of other things. So there have been challenging times that I've had to navigate." She adds that there is a part of her that needs to be 100% convinced to take anything on – and a fashion show by any standards is a big undertaking – otherwise she simply doesn't do it. "Besides, being from Kolkata, I'm away from the daily hullabaloo of fashion."

I ask her if this physical remove keeps her sane. "Probably. There is a lot of pressure that designers face. Pressure that you have to create collections and sell them, that you have to be present on social media... otherwise you'll be lost in the crowd; it's extremely challenging," she says. "It's like you're at a party for just a second, but you take a picture and post it. Or you're designing a garment and you begin with thinking which colour would look best for an Instagram post. Or you stand next to a stranger's car and take a selfie. How am I going to create anything if all I'm thinking about is how it'll look like on social media? I cannot live like that." Her tone at this point is earnest, and exhausted even from thinking about the topic.

The right priorities

Two years ago, Khanna went through what her friend Sonam Kapoor described on social media as a "terrible ill-

ness" that spun off into an online debate. In our conversation, she hints that one of the reasons her health suffered was work-related stress. "I had a major health episode two years ago... and that happened because I was going mad!"

Once she was back on her feet, she started taking things more slowly, and allowed herself to enjoy the process. "Today, I don't want to see Instagram. I'm totally ignorant about what other people are doing. I want to be able to create beautiful things and push my creativity to the next level, to wake up and be excited for my work," she says. "This collection has been put together in a short time, but I've loved every minute of designing and making it. I've grown with it," she adds, while refusing to even hint at what to expect.

There is one last question that I put to her as delicately as I can, for Khanna has done multiple 'opening' and 'finale' fashion shows – a phenomenon unique to Indian fashion weeks. I ask if celebrating fashion shows because of their scheduling creates a sense of the theatrical, and if that takes away from the business and economic role the industry plays.

"What bothers me more is that it creates a narrative that some designers are better than others because they are opening or closing the event," she says, adding that she doesn't think it affects business as much as it does the perception of the designers in the market.

Not having ever worried about perception herself, Anamika Khanna may just be the exception that proves the rule.

Anamika Khanna's show for the FDCI x Lakmé Fashion Week is scheduled on March 16, and will stream live on both the FDCI and LFW Instagram handles.

The writer is a fashion commentator and brand consultant.



(From far left)
Anamika
Khanna,
designs from
label
Raffughar and
P.E.L.L.A for
FDCI x LFW
■ GETTY IMAGES



FOOD SPOT

What the doc DIDN'T ORDER

Biryani followed by sweet — a weekend treat that's poetry in the mouth



On the menu Afghani paneer biryani (above), angoori gulab jamun ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

es. Just like a *kulhad* adds to the taste of tea, the leaf cartons did their bit to make the food seem more appetising.

The biryanis were rather different from the ones we have been eating. Take the Afghani *paneer* biryani. I never thought I'd enjoy a *paneer* biryani – but I did. The *paneer* had been marinated and stuffed with masalas and then cooked with the rice.

The mutton biryani was nicely spicy, and the meat and rice had been cooked on *dum*. The meat was soft, but not mushy. The Persian chicken biryani was deliciously light – the long grained rice had soaked in the flavours of whole spices. The biryanis came with a tangy *raita*, and I enjoyed that as well.

What surprised me the most was the mutton *seekh* kabab. I have often held forth on how *seekh* kababs delivered home are either too chewy or much too soft. This was just right. The meat had been marinated well, so it had all the aromas of spices, and cooked to perfection: neither rubbery, nor hard or undercooked. It came with some green chutney and had a yoghurt-based topping that gave it a tart zing.

The *rasmalai* – one of the household favourites – was sublime. There were six small *chhaina* globules in creamy, sweetened, thickened milk. Just what the doctor didn't order.

As I said, I am not a poet, but it left me writing another little poem. The sweet/ Was a treat/ The *rasmalai*/ Made me sigh.

The writer is a seasoned food critic



RAHUL VERMA

I am not much of a poet, but a four-liner had been haunting me for a while: Rice/ Is nice/ And with meat/ It's good to eat. It may not get me the Nobel Prize for literature, but it did lead me to a good meal the other day. The poem was humming in my brain, so when I was told about a delivery outlet called The Biryani Experiment, I thought it needed to be looked into.

This is a new initiative of Ola Foods (olafoods.co/biryani-experiment.html) that offers different kinds of biryanis. If you've had your fill of Hyderabadi *kacchi* biryani or the potato-laden Kolkata version (disclosure: I don't think I ever will) then you may want to look up this menu. It has dishes such as chicken pilaf, Nizami *murgh dum* biryani, Kochi pepper chicken biryani, Afghani mutton biryani, Colaba mutton biryani, Darbari *paneer dum* biryani, and Darbari vegetable *dum* biryani.

I zeroed in on Persian chicken biryani (₹339), Nawabi mutton biryani (₹399), Afghani *paneer* biryani (₹289), Mutton *seekh* kababs (₹350) and Angoori *rasmalai* (₹79). Each plate of biryani was more than enough for one; two orders can easily serve three. The food is delivered through Swiggy and Zomato.

These days, I take a lot of a pleasure in looking at the way food is delivered. Some deliver in *handis*, some in microwaveable containers. This one came in sun-dried areca palm leaf box-



Kalki Koechlin ■ RIDHIKA MEHRA

inclusivity. Recently, the company released its first 'inclusion report', which revealed that women comprised 47.1% of its workforce internationally. "We are pretty close to 50% in terms of employee ratio even in India. We've had a great run in the movies as well. For 2020-21, 50% of our creators are either female producers or female directors. Across films and series, 50% of the

protagonists were

women," says Srishti Behl Arya, Director, India Original Films, Netflix.

■ **On Masaba**

Masaba: When director Sonam Nair was putting together the crew for *Masaba Masaba*, a hybrid show that marries fact with fiction, starring the mother-daughter pair Masaba and Neena Gupta, she

found herself gravitating towards women. "In season one, our producer, the director, all the writers, most of the lead actors and most of the HODs, except for the cinematographer, were female. I instinctively felt that with something like a *Masaba Masaba*, a woman would know what's on a character's bedside table. Or when *Neenaji* is putting a face pack on, they'd know what kind of face pack. Basically, I didn't want to explain the details of their intimate lives to every single person," explains Nair.

■ **Not just lip service:**

While there are more stories being told by women and about women, there are still many hurdles to clear. Author and filmmaker Tahira Kashyap Khurrrana, whose short film *Pinni* is currently on the platform, as part of an anthology titled *Zindagi in Short*, says, "Everyone's challenges are unique and individual. Personally, being a married woman with two kids and being married to a certain profile [her husband Ayushmann Khurrana is a well-known actor] has been a challenge. But I feel that it is not just lip service anymore or writing slogans for women empowerment – we can actually see it happening now."

■ **Focus on the flawed:**

Renuka Shahane, who made her directorial debut with *Tribhanga* starring Kajol earlier this year, believes that mainstream Bollywood is a behemoth that is slow to embrace change. "Take *Tribhanga*, for example; after the narration people asked, 'There's no hero in the film? How can a film be made without a hero? There must be some romance or there must be a man.' And so, there is nothing they would want to put their money on. Also a story like this still cannot be told in the mainstream without making it adult content, because we have a different system of censoring films."

■ **Unboxing roles:** A

future when a character's gender doesn't take away his or her individuality, and a 'female' director is referred to just as a director, is what women in cinema are hoping for. "Also, the baggage that comes with being a 'female director' –



The lineup at the Netflix roundtable featuring the likes of Guneet Monga, Renuka Shahane, Aneesa Baig, and Rasika Dugal, among others ■ VASHNAV PRAVEEN

The women at Netflix

At a series of roundtables in Mumbai, the platform's actors, directors and head of the film division say there is reason to cheer

As a platform, the streaming service has been very vocal about its commitment to fostering

because you are expected to tell a certain kind of story. Not to be boxed in is the real challenge," concludes Ayesha Sood, one of the directors of the docuseries *Indian Predator*.

Biden seeks 'independence from virus'

President vows to make all adults eligible for vaccines by May 1; hopes for normalcy to return by July 4

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

One year after the nation was brought to a near-standstill by the coronavirus, President Joe Biden pledged in his first prime-time address to make all adults eligible for vaccines by May 1 and raised the possibility of beginning to "mark our independence from this virus" by the Fourth of July. He offered Americans fresh hope and appealed anew for their help.

Speaking in the White House on Thursday night, Mr. Biden honored the "collective suffering" of Americans over the past year in his 24-minute address and then offered them a vision for a return to a modicum of normalcy this summer.

"We are bound together by the loss and the pain of the days that have gone by,"



Quick moves: U.S. President Joe Biden signing the American Rescue Plan in the White House on Thursday. ■ AP

he said. "We are also bound together by the hope and the possibilities in the days in front of us."

Call for cooperation

He predicted Americans could safely gather at least in small groups for July Fourth to "make this Independence Day truly special."

But he also cautioned that

this was a "goal" and attaining it depends on people's cooperation in following health guidelines and rolling up their sleeves to get vaccinated. Only that, he said, can bring about an end to a pandemic that has killed more than 5,30,000 Americans and disrupted the lives of countless more.

"While it was different for

everyone, we all lost something," Mr. Biden said of the sacrifices of the yearlong-and-counting pandemic.

The speech came just hours after Mr. Biden signed into law a \$1.9 trillion relief package that he said will help defeat the virus, nurse the economy back to health and deliver direct aid to Americans struggling to make ends meet.

COVID-19 aid Bill signed

Some cash distributions could begin arriving in the bank accounts of Americans this weekend.

"This historic legislation is about rebuilding the backbone of this country," Mr. Biden said as he signed the Bill in the Oval Office.

Most noticeable to many Americans are provisions providing up to \$1,400 in direct payments and extending

\$300 weekly emergency unemployment benefits into early September. Also included are expanded tax credits over the next year for children, child care and family leave — some of them credits that Democrats have signalled they'd like to make permanent — plus spending for renters, food programs and people's utility bills.

Mr. Biden said that as vaccine supplies continue to increase, he will direct States and territories to make all adults eligible for vaccination by May 1. The U.S. is expecting to have enough doses for 255 million adults by the end of May, but Mr. Biden warned the process of actually administering those doses would take time, even as his administration looks to instill confidence in the safety of the vaccines to overcome hesitance.

U.S. NSA implies LAC situation discussed at Quad leaders meet

Cybersecurity incidents impacting Quad allies also discussed

SIRRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters after the Quad leaders summit that China was discussed at the meeting but was not the focus. He also implied that one of the China-related challenges discussed was the India-China border situation.



Jake Sullivan

their harassment around the Senkaku Islands, their aggression on the border with India," Mr. Sullivan said, implying that the India-China border standoff had been discussed.

"The Quad at the end of the day — at the end of today — is now a critical part of the architecture of the Indo Pacific," Mr. Sullivan said.

Also discussed were cybersecurity incidents impacting Quad members.

The discussions included not just the cyberattacks on U.S. targets (Microsoft Exchange and SolarWinds) but also cybersecurity incidents in India, Japan and Australia, Mr. Sullivan said.

Weeks ago, news broke that spyware originating in China had made its way into several Indian power installations and port facilities.

'Quad isn't a new NATO'

Mr. Sullivan reiterated that the Quad was not a military alliance or NATO equivalent (it has been referred to by some commentators an 'Asian NATO'). He was responding to a question on whether there would be

greater Quad security cooperation with Taiwan so that it would become more costly for the Chinese to move against Taiwan. "So the way that we look at this is that the Quad is not a military alliance. It's not a new NATO, despite some of the propaganda that's out there," Mr. Sullivan said, adding that it was an opportunity to cooperate on economics, technology, climate and security. While maritime security, humanitarian and disaster response were core to the Quad agenda, "where we go from there on everything from freedom of navigation to broader regional security questions that has to be worked through," he said.

Huawei decision

Asked about recent news that India was likely to block Indian telecom operators from using Huawei equipment for security reasons, Mr. Sullivan said it was a sovereign decision for India to make but consistent with the decisions the U.S. has been advocating. The U.S. — during the Trump administration — campaigned internationally for countries to exclude Huawei from its 5G networks, citing security concerns.

Overall, Mr. Sullivan sounded an optimistic note on the Quad. "Today is a big day for American diplomacy. This summit is a big deal for the President and for the country...," he said.

Russia for Taliban's inclusion in Afghan interim govt.

U.S. President is reviewing whether to completely pull out troops from the country by May

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MOSCOW

Russia said on Friday it backed the Taliban's integration into a future interim government in Afghanistan, as global powers ramped up efforts to secure a peace deal and end decades of war.

The Foreign Ministry's comments come as a May deadline looms for the U.S. to end its two-decade military involvement in the ravaged country.

Washington has encouraged the Afghan leadership to work towards establishing an "inclusive" government and proposed talks with the Taliban to secure a peace accord.

The formation of an interim inclusive administration would be a logical solution to the problem of integrating the Taliban into the peaceful political life of Afghanistan," Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told reporters ahead of talks next week in Moscow.

But she added that the decision should be made "by the Afghans themselves and should be resolved during negotiations on national reconciliation".

Regional stability
U.S. President Joe Biden is reviewing whether to stick to a deal with the Taliban negotiated by his predecessor Donald Trump, who wanted to

pull out the U.S. troops from Afghanistan by May.

The Biden administration has signalled that it wants to take a hard look at Mr. Trump's deal and its repercussions for Afghanistan and regional stability.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrote a letter to Afghan leaders, encouraging them to consider a "new, inclusive government."

The U.S. withdrawal is being complicated by a new

surge in fighting and concern that a speedy exit may only unleash further chaos.

Mr. Blinken's letter to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said bluntly that Washington feared the "security situation will worsen and the Taliban could make rapid territorial gains" if the U.S. suddenly withdrew. Mr. Blinken proposed a 90-day reduction in violence that would avoid the Taliban's annual bloody spring offensive.

Premadasa slams invite to Myanmar junta's Minister

He says it 'legitimises the military takeover'

MEERA SRINIVASAN
YANGON

Sri Lanka's Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa "vehemently" condemned the Rajapaksa administration's invitation to the Myanmar junta's Foreign Minister, for a virtual meet of regional body BIMSTEC early April. The invitation "basically legitimised the military takeover", Mr. Premadasa said, describing the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena's move as "distasteful and tardy."

In a letter sent earlier this month, Mr. Gunawardena invited the junta-appointed Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin for a ministerial meeting of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation that Sri Lanka now chairs.

Amid mounting criticism from hundreds of social media users and pro-democracy activists from Myanmar, Colombo sought to justify its invitation, saying it was extended to all members, and limited to the BIMSTEC meet. The

Suu Kyi's lawyer rejects military graft claims

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
YANGON

Myanmar's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi's lawyer on Friday rejected junta's allegations of corruption against her as "groundless", calling it "illegal mudslinging" by the Generals who seized power from her.

The country has been in uproar since a February 1 putsch that saw Ms. Suu Kyi ousted, detained and accused of several criminal charges, including owning unlicensed walkie-talkies and violating coronavirus restrictions.

On Thursday, a junta spokesman made new accusations, saying a now-detained Chief Minister had admitted giving her \$6,00,000 and more than 10 kg of gold.

This allegation against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the state counsellor, is groundless, especially regarding the dollars and gold bars — it is the most hilarious joke of all," her lawyer Khin Maung Zaw said.

WHO says no reason to stop using AstraZeneca vaccine

Many nations pause its use over blood clot fears

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GENEVA

The World Health Organization said on Friday there was no reason to stop using AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine after several countries suspended the rollout over blood clot fears.

The WHO, which said its vaccines advisory committee was examining the safety data coming in, stressed that no causal link had been established between the vaccine and clotting.

The UN agency also said that after the injection of more than 260 million vaccine doses so far around the world, no deaths had yet been attributed to a COVID-19 jab.

Denmark, Norway and Iceland paused the use of the AstraZeneca jab as a precaution after isolated reports of recipients developing blood clots.

Italy and Austria have banned the use of shots from separate batches of AstraZeneca, and Thailand and Bulgaria said they would delay the rollout of the shot.

A range of health authorities around the world have insisted the jab is safe, including the European Medicines Agency and the WHO.

"AstraZeneca is an excellent vaccine, as are the other vaccines that are being used," WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris told reporters in Geneva. "Yes, we should continue using the AstraZeneca vaccine," she added, stressing though that any concerns over safety must be investigated.

"We must always ensure that we look for any safety signals when we roll out vaccines, and we must review them," she said.

"But there is no indication to not use it."

No causal link found

The EMA said Thursday that there had been 30 cases of so-called thromboembolic events among five million people who had received the jab in Europe. But European countries could still keep using the vaccine, the EU's drug regulator said. Ms. Harris said that while a few countries had, as a precaution, suspended the use of a specific batch of AstraZeneca vaccine distributed in Europe, based on reports of blood coagulation disorders, "a causal relationship has not been shown".

TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS : TIRUPATI

TENDER-CUM-AUCTION NOTICE

Roc.No.Rev.5/42/AEO(Rev)/2020

Tenders are invited to participate in Tender-Cum-Auction for Leasing out TTD House Building situated in the property bearing D.No.130, Bharathiar Road, Ganapaty, Coimbatore for residential purpose on rental basis for a period of 1 year and it is extendable for further two (02) Years subject to satisfaction and discretion of the Executive Officer, TTD.

The Tender-Cum-Auction Schedule and tender documents can be downloaded from the Executive Officer Website, i.e., www.tirumalatirupati.org. Tender Schedule Demand Draft will be issued from the Executive Officer, TTD, Tirumala for Rs.100/- + 12% /Rs.120/- (along with GST @12%) shall be enclosed to the tender along with all other requisites and the filled in tender-cum-auction-schedule shall be dropped in the tender box. The tender box will be opened at TTD House Building premises situated in the property bearing D.No.130, Bharathiar Road, Ganapaty, Coimbatore on 24-03-2021 at 3.00 p.m. The cost of tender-cum-auction-schedule (along with GST @12%) is not refundable. Submission of tender documents after the due date and time will be rejected.

The Executive Officer, TTD, Tirumala, reserves all rights to cancel or to postpone the tender at any stage without assigning any reasons.

Roc.No.PR4/13928/Adv.No.353/PRO/2021; Dated:12-03-2021 EXECUTIVE OFFICER

TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS : TIRUPATI

e-TENDER NOTICE

Roc.No.TTD-70021(31)/22/2020-ACV50-TTD

e-Tenders are invited for Requirement of "Supply, Erection, Installation and Commissioning of 1389 CCTV cameras and its accessories including its maintenance at different points in Tirumala under Phase-III"

DATE OF OPENING TENDER: (1) Bid Document Downloading Start Date & Time: 11-03-2021 @ 11.00 a.m. (2) Bid submission closing Date & Time: 30-03-2021 @ 11.00 a.m. (3) Pre-Bid Meeting: 18-03-2021 @ 11.00 a.m.

Tender documents can be downloaded from the web site <https://tender.apereprocurement.gov.in>. For further details contact phone numbers: 0877-2264079, 2264555, Fax-2264554 and mail ID:cc2avcsott@gmail.com.

Roc.No.PR4/13928/Adv.No.354/PRO/2021; Dated:12-03-2021 EXECUTIVE OFFICER

VISVESVARAYA JALA NIGAMA LIMITED

(A Government of Karnataka Enterprise)

Office of the Executive Engineer VJNL, Yettinahole

Project Division, No.1 Sakleshpur -573134

No: EE/VJNL/YPDNo.1/Tender/Cancel/2020-21/1797

Dated:12.03.2021

TENDER CANCELLATION

Ref: 1.EE/VJNL/YPDNo.1/ROAD/TNR-10 /2020-21/1692 Dated: 26/02/2021.

The tender invited through e-portal for the "Construction of Concrete road in Sakleshpur and Alur taluk of Hassan District (Package work of 21 roads)" by the undersigned vide tender notification referred above is here by cancelled.

Sd/-Executive Engineer, VJNL, YP Division, No.1, Sakleshpura

STAY PROTECTED FROM COVID-19, NO CARELESSNESS UNTIL THERE IS A CURE.

Wear Mask Follow Physical Distancing Maintain Hand Hygiene

Notice Inviting Tender (NIT)

Office OF Meladhikari, Kumbh Mela, Haridwar

Email: procure.kumbh2021@gmail.com

Office of Meladhikari, Kumbh Mela, HARIDWAR on behalf of "Governor of Uttarakhand" invites tenders through e-tendering, from Eligible Bidders for during Maha Kumbh 2021 for following works:-

- Selection of Agency for Installation, Operation and Maintenance of Night Shelter at Hardiwal Kumbh Mela-2021.
- Retender for Selection of Agency for Installation, Operation & Maintenance of Changing Rooms for Hardiwal Kumbh Mela-2021.
- Selection of Agency for Development of Advertisement Infrastructures and Management of Advertisement Rights For Hardiwal Kumbh-2021.
- Selection of Agency for Conducting Laser Show with Water Projection Screen for Hardiwal Kumbh-2021.

Above mentioned works shall be available on uktenders.gov.in from 13.03.2021 at 1000 hrs. Detailed eligibility criteria, EMD, ITB, and other terms & conditions of the re-tender document can be seen at [https://uktenders.gov.in](http://uktenders.gov.in). Any amendment in future against the re-tender shall be uploaded only on [https://uktenders.gov.in](http://uktenders.gov.in).

Meladhikari, Kumbh Mela, HARIDWAR

Interested candidates may send their applications along with self certified photocopies of qualification documents, experience certificates & others, indicating the post applied for at the top of the envelop through speed-post in the prescribed format available at the institute's website to:

MARKET WATCH

	12-03-2021	% CHANGE
Sensex	50792	-0.95
US Dollar	72.79	0.16
Gold	44059	-0.51
Brent oil	69.35	2.19

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	728.15	-17.20
Asian Paints	2401.35	-30.60
Axis Bank	750.60	-10.15
Bajaj Auto	3746.40	-121.15
Bajaj Finserv	9934.10	-57.35
Bajaj Finance	5557.85	-12.80
Bharti Airtel	524.20	-1.65
BPCL	457.55	12.05
Britannia Ind	3434.25	-46.10
Cipla	805.95	-6.45
Coal India	150.50	-0.45
Divis Lab	3512.05	-16.05
Dr Reddy's Lab	4426.50	-73.90
Eicher Motors	2637.50	-34.80
GAIL (India)	146.85	-0.85
Grafix Ind	1379.50	-5.55
HCL Tech	979.25	-9.25
HDFC	2568.00	-31.80
HDFC Bank	1551.95	-3.80
HDFC Life	710.80	-20.55
Hero MotoCorp	3350.55	-68.80
Hindalco	330.20	-10.15
Hind Unilever	2204.75	-23.10
ICICI Bank	612.85	-12.75
IndusInd Bank	1022.65	-17.20
Infosys	1374.85	-6.70
ITC	101.30	2.45
JSW Steel	418.75	-4.75
Kotak Bank	1935.15	-28.80
L&T	1514.00	-10.20
M&M	855.80	-8.00
Maruti Suzuki	7096.20	-175.90
Nestle India Ltd.	16722.45	-209.00
NTPC	109.10	-0.55
ONGC	115.05	0.65
Power Grid Corp	220.05	-4.90
Reliance Ind	2137.60	-44.35
SBI Life	914.20	-26.55
State Bank	381.10	-6.60
Shree Cement	27701.50	145.70
Sun Pharma	613.60	-12.40
Tata Motors	317.55	-3.90
Tata Steel	719.95	-4.55
TCS	3057.95	-13.00
Tech Mahindra	1003.25	-5.50
Titan	1482.50	11.25
UltraTech Cement	6638.15	-125.90
UPL	620.30	-1.00
Wipro	425.20	-1.50

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	72.58	72.90
Euro	86.62	87.00
British Pound	100.87	101.33
Japanese Yen (100)	66.61	66.90
Chinese Yuan	11.15	11.21
Swiss Franc	78.09	78.44
Singapore Dollar	53.95	54.20
Canadian Dollar	57.85	58.11
Malaysian Ringgit	17.62	17.71

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



TRAI sets deadline for telemarketing entities

NEW DELHI

Entities who need to send bulk messages to customers, such as those involved in banking, logistics and e-commerce, will need to complete the registration process within three days to comply with telemarketing rules, failing which they will be barred from sending commercial communication to customers, TRAI said. PTI

Withdraw directive on AT-1 bonds, SEBI told

NEW DELHI

The finance ministry has asked market regulator SEBI to withdraw its directive to mutual fund houses to treat additional Tier I (AT-1) bonds as having maturity of 100 years as it could disrupt the market and impact capital raising by banks. SEBI had earlier this week issued regulations that put a limit of 10% for cumulative investments by MFs in Tier I and Tier II bonds. PTI

Govt. to sell 26.12% stake in Tata Comm

NEW DELHI

The Centre will sell its 16.12% stake in Tata Communications via an offer for sale and the remaining 10% to Panatone Finvest Ltd., according to a filing. Tata Sons holds 14.07%, Panatone Finvest, 34.8% and the government, 26.12% in Tata Communications. At Friday's closing price of ₹1,289.75 apiece, the value of the Centre's stake is more than ₹9,601 crore. PTI

NMDC to pay Centre ₹1,553-crore dividend

HYDERABAD

The Centre will receive ₹1,553 crore as its share of the interim dividend declared by mining major NMDC for the current fiscal. The State-owned company, whose board had approved an interim dividend of ₹776 per equity share (face value of ₹1 each), said the outgo would be ₹2,274 crore of which ₹1,553 crore would be the Centre's share. The government holds 69.65% stake in the company. CMK

Inflation quickens as Jan. IIP contracts

Retail price gains hit 3-month high of 5.03% in Feb. on food, fuel costs; industrial output shrank 1.6%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

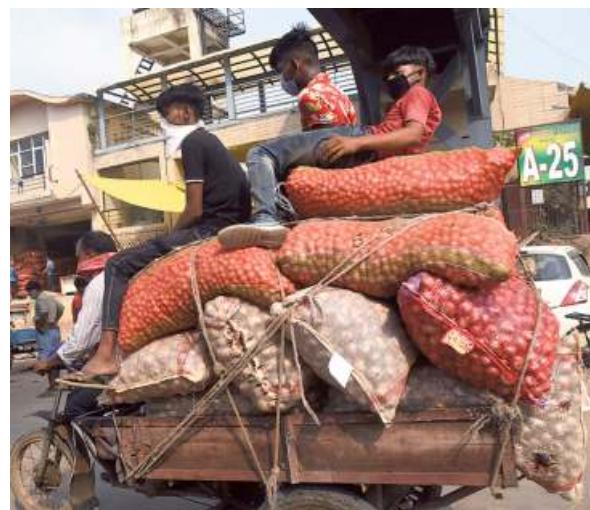
NEW DELHI

Retail inflation quickened in February to 5.03%, a three-month high, spurred by higher food and fuel prices, official data released on Friday showed.

Food price inflation as measured by the Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) accelerated to 3.87% last month, from 1.96% in January. While the prices of oils and fats surged 20.8% from a year earlier, those of pulses and products climbed 12.5%, while meat and fish prices increased 11.3%, eggs (11.1%) and fruits (6.28%).

Prices of vegetables, which have been softening in recent months, saw the contraction narrow to 6.27%, after falling 15.8% in January.

Inflation in the transport and communication category was 11.4%, a sharp jump



Taxing times: Inflation in the transport and communication category rose sharply to 11.4%. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

from January's 9.3%.

The spurt in retail inflation mainly originated from higher food inflation, said Sunil Kumar Sinha, Principal Economist at India Ratings

and Research.

"Weakening of base effect in February 2021 contributed to higher food inflation. Vegetable prices remained in deflationary mode for the

third consecutive month. However, deflation slowed down considerably to 6.3% in February 2021," he added.

Mr. Sinha added that higher retail prices of fuel due to a combination of higher crude prices and elevated excise duties pushed transport and communication inflation to a four-month high.

"Health inflation... at 6.3% was a 17-month high and is turning structural," he added.

Factory output retreats

Industrial production contracted 1.6% in January, mainly on account of a decline in output of capital goods, manufacturing and mining sectors, Press Trust of India reported, citing a separate official release.

Output of the manufacturing sector, which constitutes 77.6% of the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), shrank by 2% in January, as against a growth of 1.8% in the same month last fiscal.

trial Production (IIP), shrank by 2% in January, as against a growth of 1.8% in the same month last fiscal.

Some distance to cover

"The contraction in IIP numbers at -1.6% for January comes as a bit of surprise after turning positive in December (1.04%)," M. Govinda Rao, Chief Economic Adviser, Brickwork Ratings, said in a statement. "The manufacturing sector continues to contract at 2% and shows that we still have some distance to cover before the economy recovers," the economist added.

"Going forward, the excess liquidity in the system combined with volatility in fuel prices can pose an upward risk to inflation," Dr. Rao said. "The RBI might take some measures to drain excess liquidity," he added.



Blowing cold: Loading of coal, which comprises half of railway freight, saw a shortfall of 50 million tonnes. ■ REUTERS

Railway freight usage surpasses FY20 level

Auto, onions, sand help drive numbers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Railways on Friday said its freight loading for the financial year 2020-21 has already surpassed the levels achieved during the last fiscal, as of March 12, driven by transportation demand from newer sectors such as automobiles, onion, sand and cotton.

In 2020-21, the Railways has till now loaded 1145.68 million tonnes (mt) of freight, marginally higher from 1145.61 mt in the previous year.

Emerging from deficit

Highlighting this as a 'huge achievement', particularly amid the disruption to rail services due to the pandemic, Railway Board Chairman Suneet Sharma said, "This gives us a great boost and proves how the Railways has continued to be the driving force of the economy... despite the fact that the coronavirus crisis had pushed us into a deficit of 70 mt from April to July."

For the current financial year, the government had allocated ₹20,000 crore for capital infusion into PSBs to help them meet their regulatory requirements.

bricants. However, loading of commodities such as foodgrains, iron and steel, cement and clinker, fertilizers and other goods saw good growth.

"The incremental loading of more than 15 mt in other goods [from 78.93 mt to over 94 mt] is indicative of freight basket diversification. For example, in non-traditional commodities, we saw a growth of 64% in automobiles, 36% in fly ash, 57% in stone, 23.4% in onion, 43.9% in chemical salt, 27.4% in sand, 19% in sugar and 26.6% in cotton..." Earlier these items didn't come to us," Mr. Sharma said.

With fewer passenger trains operational, Railways was able to almost double the average speed of freight trains to 44 kmph from 23.29 kmph earlier, he said. "A number of concessions/discounts are also being given in Indian Railways to make rail freight movement very attractive.

"The strong emergence of business development units in zones and divisions, constant dialogue with the industry and logistics service providers... are adding to the robust growth of the freight business for the Railways," he added.



THE HINDU GROUP

'Centre to infuse ₹14,500 cr. into banks under PCA soon'

Indian Overseas Bank, Central Bank, UCO Bank may benefit



help these banks to come out of the RBI's enhanced regulatory supervision.

Funds from market

Most large state-owned lenders – including State Bank of India, Punjab National Bank, Bank of Baroda, Canara Bank, Union Bank of India and Indian Bank – have already raised money from market sources, including share sale on a private placement basis.

For the current financial year, the government had allocated ₹20,000 crore for capital infusion into PSBs to help them meet their regulatory requirements.

Cement sector

expected to

grow over 10%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

The Civil Aviation Ministry is working on the airline sector's demand to bring aviation turbine fuel (ATF) under the ambit of Goods and Services Tax (GST) and has taken up the matter with the Finance Ministry, a senior official said.

At a virtual event on global aviation and air cargo, Civil Aviation Secretary Pradeep Singh Kharola also said the Ministry has taken specific steps for optimum utilisation of the country's airspace, which would help international airlines flying over India as well as domes-

Ramco Cements plans capacity expansion

Company eyes 20 MTPA by FY22



a thermal power plant and waste heat recovery plant (WHRP) before March 2021.

"Things got delayed due to COVID-19," he said.

"At Jayanthipuram plant, our plan was to install 27 MW of WHRP in all the three lines of clinker manufacturing. The first two lines have been commissioned and the third will become operational by Q1 of FY22."

Till now, the firm has incurred capital expenditure amounting to ₹2,500 crore.

Hatsun to set up dairies, solar power plant

Expansion to serve eastern region

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

<p

Archer, Roy make it a no contest in opener

Shreyas wages a lone battle as India manages only 124 for seven; visitors canter to an eight-wicket win

ENGLAND IN INDIA

ASHWIN ACHAL
AHMEDABAD

Having endured a disappointing time in the Tests, England demonstrated that white-ball cricket is a different story altogether. The visitor, the top-ranked T20 nation in the world, dismantled India with an eight-wicket victory in the first of the five-match series here on Friday.

A brilliant bowling show kept India down to 124 for seven, before the batsmen efficiently completed the job.

A rapid 72-run opening stand between Jason Roy (49, 32b, 4x4, 3x6) and Jos Buttler (28, 24b, 2x4, 1x6) took the wind out of India's sails, in what turned out to be a sombre night for the big crowd at the Narendra Modi Stadium.

As Dawid Malan (24 n.o., 20b, 2x4, 1x6) and Jonny Bairstow (26 n.o., 17b, 1x4, 2x6) applied the finishing touches, many spectators took one last selfie and made an early exit. England reached home in only 15.3 overs, with a powerful straight six from Malan.

Slow start

After being put in, India was slow off the blocks. The England bowlers kept it tight and built the pressure. Jofra Archer and Mark Wood bowled at good speeds – touching nearly 150 kmph – while leg-spinner Adil Rashid rarely bowled a loose ball.

On a slow pitch, skipper Eoin Morgan rotated his bowlers constantly, leaving



Opening blitz: Jason Roy set the tone for England's win with a belligerent knock. ■ GETTY IMAGES

no time for the batsmen to settle in.

Opener K.L. Rahul was the first to go, when an airy drive off Archer found the inside edge.

Rashid, who took the new ball, got the prize wicket of Virat Kohli in the next over. Kohli, unable to get off the mark after four deliveries, backed away and tried to loft a length ball over mid-off, but couldn't get the elevation.

Shikhar Dhawan, who replaced a rested Rohit Sharma, lost his stumps to a wild slog. At the end of six overs, India was struggling at 22 for 3.

Rishabh Pant (21, 23b, 2x4, 1x6) got the fans involved with an extraordinary

SCOREBOARD

INDIA

Shikhar Dhawan b Wood 4 (12b), K.L. Rahul b Archer 1 (4b), Virat Kohli c Jordan b Rashid O (5b), Rishabh Pant c Bairstow b Stokes 21 (23b, 2x4, 1x6), Shreyas Iyer c Malan b Jordan 67 (48b, 8x4, 1x6), Hardik Pandya c Jordan b Archer 19 (21b, 1x4, 1x6), Shardul Thakur c Malan b Archer O (1b), Washington Sundar (not out) 3 (3b), Axar Patel (not out) 7 (3b, 1x4); Extras (w-2): 2; Total (for seven wkt.s in 20 overs): 124.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-2 (Rahul, 1.2 overs), 2-3 (Kohli, 2.3), 3-20 (Dhawan, 4.6), 4-48 (Pant, 9.6), 5-102 (Pandya, 17.2), 6-102 (Shardul, 17.3), 7-117 (Shreyas, 19.3).

ENGLAND BOWLING

Rashid 3-0-14-1, Archer 4-1-23-3, Wood 4-0-20-1, Jordan 4-0-27-1, Stokes 3-0-25-1, Curran 2-0-15-0.

ENGLAND

Jason Roy lbw b Washington 49 (32b, 4x4, 3x6), Jos Buttler lbw b Chahal 28 (24b, 2x4, 1x6), Dawid Malan (not out) 24 (20b, 2x4, 1x6), Jonny Bairstow (not out) 26 (17b, 1x4, 2x6); Extras (w-3): 3; Total (for two wkts. in 15.3 overs): 130.

Innings Scan

India	England
54	Dots
12	Fours
3	Sixes
22/3	PP
6.20	RR

job, putting on 54 runs for the fifth wicket.

Shreyas negotiated the tricky surface by playing late, using the pace to steer his shots into gaps. Helped by exceptional timing, the Mumbai batsman recorded his highest T20I score.

Archer scalped Pandya and Shardul Thakur in successive balls in the 18th over, as the duo tried to accelerate.

Shreyas' lone hand came to an end in the last over, to a fine running catch by Malan.

Archer, who found great rhythm and speed, was the standout performer with figures of three for 23.

'Will not change our approach'

This is a five-match series, perfect time to try different things, says Shreyas

ASHWIN ACHAL
AHMEDABAD

On the eve of the first T20 against England, India skipper Virat Kohli had stated that he wanted his batsmen to play freely, even if the side loses a few wickets. The move did not work, as the home team struggled and made a sub-par 124 for seven on Friday.

Shreyas Iyer explained that despite the setback, the side will stick to Kohli's plan. "We had to keep the scoreboard ticking, even if we lost wickets. We will not change [Kohli's plan]. If you see the power-hitters that we have in our batting line-up, we don't need to change anything."



Not enough: Shreyas tried his best with a top score of 67, but wickets at regular intervals pegged India back. ■ GETTY IMAGES

ing. Going into the World Cup, we have to check all the boxes. This is a five-match series, so it's the perfect time to try different things," Shreyas said.

Shreyas Iyer explained that despite the setback, the side will stick to Kohli's plan. "We had to keep the scoreboard ticking, even if we lost wickets. We will not change [Kohli's plan]. If you see the power-hitters that we have in our batting line-up, we don't need to change anything."

Shreyas does not believe

that his spot in the team is under threat. "I'm not under pressure. I'm playing freely, happily and enjoying my knocks," he said.

Going in to bat at 20 for three, Shreyas was keen to take the singles and give the strike to Rishabh Pant. "Pant was batting well. I had to give him singles, and take on the spinners," he said.

Can't get ahead of ourselves: Archer

S. DIPAK RAGAV



England pacer Jofra Archer, who set up England's win with a tight spell of 3/23, said it was important for his side not to underestimate the home team after a comprehensive eight-wicket win on Friday.

Speaking about his man-of-the-match performance, Archer said, "I am just glad to help and it doesn't matter if I get one or three wickets. It doesn't change the way I bowl."

"We still have four matches to go and they are ranked number two for a reason.

er explained, "The wicket was bit slower so it was going to be hard to hit the length-ball; if it becomes fuller then it is easier to hit. The plan for everyone was to hit a length as long as possible and luckily for us we didn't have to change that."

On England's success in getting Indian skipper Virat Kohli cheaply once again, Archer said, "He is a dangerous batter and to see the back of him early so many times is a real bonus. It might probably dampen their camp as well and that is a little advantage of getting him early."

Milan grabs an edge over United

Tottenham, Arsenal and Roma on the front foot in their ties

EUROPA LEAGUE

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

Simon Kjaer's last-gasp equaliser gave AC Milan a dramatic 1-1 draw at Manchester United on Thursday, handing the Italians a great chance of reaching the Europa League quarterfinals while Roma, Tottenham and Arsenal cruised closer to the last-eight.

Kjaer netted with a bullet header in the final seconds of stoppage time of the last 16, first leg encounter at Old Trafford, levelling the scores after Amad Diallo had opened in the 50th minute with his first United goal.

Milan called the shots easily on and had two goals disallowed, Rafael Leao's effort ruled offside and Franck Kessie's powerful 11th-minute finish chalked off after a VAR review showed the ball had glanced off the midfielder's arm before his shot.

Diallo's introduction at half-time proved an inspired move from United coach Ole Gunnar Solskjaer as the 18-year-old Ivorian, recently bought by United from Milan's Serie A rival Atalanta, soon broke the deadlock.

Milan's domestic rival Roma made sure it was a good night for Italian football with a 3-0 win over Shakhtar Donetsk. A Harry Kane double helped Tottenham Hotspur ease to a 2-0 home win over Dinamo Zagreb that continues a good run of form for Jose Mourinho's team.

Arsenal also came away with a win, 3-1 at Olympiacos which all but secures its place in the quarters.



Nodding home: Simon Kjaer, left, heads in the crucial away goal for AC Milan against Manchester United. ■ AFP

Lee's knock takes South Africa to an easy victory

India loses despite posting the highest total in series so far; Mithali reaches 10,000 international runs

SA IN INDIA

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
LUCKNOW

Despite a whirlwind 132 with 16 fours and two sixes, opener Lizelle Lee was denied the privilege of providing the finishing touches, as rain intervened in the climax, and forced the umpires to declare South Africa the winner on better run-rate in the third ODI here on Friday.

Chasing 249, the highest total in the series so far, South Africa had a hesitant start when new captain Laura Wolvaart was dismissed after labouring for 12 runs.

Lee then took the bowling apart, hitting both the medium-pacers and spinners all over the park as she single handedly tore apart the Indian resistance.

Yet, at 223 for four in 46.3 overs, it was anybody's match when rain provided an unexpected twist to the tale. It was Lee's third hundred in one-dayers. She scored 132 off 131 balls and



Whirlwind knock: Lizelle Lee clobbered the Indian bowlers all over the park. ■ FILE PHOTO

was adjudged the player of the match.

Among the Indian bowlers, Jhulan Goswami stood out, picking up two for 20 in nine overs, while the rest were at the mercy of Lee.

India had reasons to believe that it had a winning total, when Punam Raut top-scored with 77, while skipper Mithali Raj, Harmanpreet

SCOREBOARD

INDIA

Jemimah Rodrigues c Jafta b Shabnim O (2b), Smriti Mandhana c Shangase b Sekhukhune 25 (27b, 4x4), Punam Raut c Bosch b Kapp 77 (108b, 11x4), Mithali Raj c Preez c Punam b Rajeshwari 37 (46b, 2x4, 1x6), Marizanne Kapp c Mithali b Jhulan O (5b), Anneke Bosch (not out) 16 (28b, 1x4); Extras (b-5, w-4, nb-1); 10; Total (for four wkts. in 50 overs): 248.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-0 (Jemimah, 0.2 overs), 2-64 (Smriti, 11.6), 3-141 (Mithali, 27.6), 4-161 (Punam, 33.6), 5-221 (Harmanpreet, 44.6).

SAOUTH AFRICA BOWLING

Shabnim 10-1-46-2, Kapp 10-0-47-1, Khaka 10-1-39-0, Sekhukhune 10-0-53-1, Shangase 4-0-24-0, Bosch 6-0-29-1.

SOUTH AFRICA

Lizelle Lee (not out) 132 (131b, score 10,000 international runs, after Charlotte Edwards (10273) of England.

The joy of the Indian batting and the accomplishment

ments were eventually sidelined as Lee's hurricane knock shook the home team out of its slumber before the heavens opened up.

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TV PICKS

ISL: Final: ATKMB v Mumbai City FC, Star Sports 1 & 2 (SD & HD) & Star Sports 3, 7.30 p.m.

Premier League: SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 6 p.m., 8 p.m., 11 p.m. & 1.30 a.m. (Sunday).

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

IN BRIEF



Brathwaite replaces Holder as Test captain
ST. JOHN'S (ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA)
Kraigg Brathwaite will replace Jason Holder as the West Indies Test captain with a two-Test series against Sri Lanka coming up this month, Cricket West Indies said on Thursday. AFP

BWF cancels US and Canada Opens

NEW DELHI
The Badminton World Federation on Friday announced that this year's US Open and Canada Open will not take place due to the COVID-19 "restrictions and complications" across the globe. PTI



Bhullar makes strong start with 67 in first round
DOHA
Gaganjeet Bhullar got off to his best start on the European Tour in over a year as he carded a four-under 67 in the opening round of the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters here. Bhullar was tied-10th. The other Indians in the field, S.S.P. Chawrasia (70) and Shubhankar Sharma (71) T-57 and T-68 after the first 18 holes. Scotland's David Law carded seven-under 64 to take the lead. PTI

FIFA approves Musiala's switch to Germany

ZURICH
FIFA said it gave formal approval on Friday for Bayern Munich teenager Jamal Musiala to switch his national eligibility to Germany from England. The 18-year-old midfielder can now be called up to the German national team, which begins 2022 World Cup qualifying games this month. Musiala decided his wish last month to represent Germany, where he was born. AP

Swiss court rules against prosecutor in FIFA case

ZURICH
A Swiss court ruled that a special prosecutor investigating Switzerland's former Attorney General acted illegally while pursuing a separate case against FIFA president Gianni Infantino, football's governing body said. AP

It's Rishika vs Sai Samitha

GURUGRAM
Rishika Sunkara beat top seed Yubarani Banerjee in three sets to set up a title clash against Sai Samitha who beat the second seed Preerna Bhambri for the loss of four games in the Haryana Open ₹5,00,000 AITA women's tennis tournament at the Tennis Project in Balawas on Friday.

The results (semifinals): Rishika Sunkara beat Yubarani Banerjee 4-6, 6-0, 6-1; Sai Samitha beat Preerna Bhambri 6-3, 6-1.



Heat's Leonard fined for anti-Semitic slur
MIAMI
Miami Heat's Meyers Leonard has been fined \$50,000 and suspended for a week from team facilities and activities after he made an anti-Semitic comment while playing a video game on a live stream, the NBA has said.

Commissioner Adam Silver, in announcing those sanctions Thursday, also said that he believes Leonard "is genuinely remorseful" for using the slur. Reuters

Interesting finale between equals

Habas' ATKMB takes on Lobera's Mumbai City in the game that matters

ISL 2020-21

SPORTS BUREAU

Sergio Lobera will be looking for his maiden Indian Super League (ISL) title while Antonio Habas will be keen to maintain his blemish-less record in ISL finals when Mumbai City FC takes on ATK Mohun Bagan (ATKMB) at the Fatorda Stadium in Goa on Saturday.

Mumbai head coach Lobera previously led FC Goa to a runner-up finish in the 2018-19 final, while ATKMB's Habas has a clean 2-0 record in summit clashes, having managed two trophies with ATK - prior to the merger with Mohun Bagan - including last year.

Identical records

These are the two best sides in the competition, with identical records in the league stage - 12 wins, four defeats, four draws and 40 points each. But it remains to be seen if ATKMB bears any of the scars from its twin defeats to Mumbai. The second of these (2-0) came on the last day, with Lobera's men pipping Habas to the coveted AFC Champions League slot.



Double delight beckons: ATKMB's prolific Roy Krishna, second from left, is not only in pursuit of a second straight title but also the Golden Boot. ■ PTI

But recent form in the semifinal playoffs may give ATKMB some solace. Where it defeated Khalid Jamil's impressive NorthEast United FC 3-2 on aggregate in regulation time, Mumbai huffed and puffed and, in the end, needed a nerve-wracking penalty shootout to progress.

Lobera will also miss the season-wending back Mandar Rao Dessai, who is out with a

suspension, while Habas has a near-full squad to choose from.

Will Krishna be lucky? Of added interest will be Roy Krishna's pursuit of the Golden Boot, which he narrowly missed out on last year.

The ATKMB striker is tied with Goa's Igor Angulo on 14 goals, and if he doesn't score, Angulo will win by vir-

tue of having a superior goals-scored to minutes-played ratio.

The race for the golden glove will also see an end-game, with Mumbai custodian Amrinder Singh and ATKMB's Arindam Bhattacharya tied on 10 clean sheets.

The latter is slightly ahead, having conceded fewer goals (16 to 20).

Well-prepped Chashni for Governor's Trophy

3. IMPPECABLE

3 PREMIUM SPIRIT PLATE (1,400m), maiden 3-y-o only, (Terms), 2:30-1. Imperial Blue (-) 56, 2. Mitsuru (5) Darshan 56, 3. Scaravaggio (8) Vinod Shinde 56, 4. The Inheritor (9) Sai Kumar 56, 5. Twilight Fame (2) Sai Kiran 56, 6. Unique Style (6) Sal Vasanti 56, 7. War Chieftain (3) Akshay K 56, 8. Beautiful Oblivian (10) Kiran Rai 54.5, 9. Gulfstream Park (11) Srinath 54.5, 10. Ohanna (4) R. Marshall 54.5, 11. Own Legacy (1) Trevor 54.5, 12. Serendip (7) S. Sharaf 54.5.

1. OWN LEGACY, 2. OHANNA, 3. MITSURO

4 CHAMPION TRAINER TROPHY (1,600m), rated 15 to 35, 4-y-o only, 3:00-1. Arlette (6) Akshay K 60, 2. Secret Source (10) J.H. Arul 59, 3. Niche Cannabis (7) Darshan 57, 4. Almanach (8) Trevor 56.5, 5. Chain of Thoughts (1) R. Marshall 56.5, 6. Southernaristocrat (3) Srinath 56.5, 7. Rainbow Rising (4) Sai Vasanti 55.5, 8. Royal Blossom (5) Antony 55.5, 9. Eminence Grise (11) Zervant 55, 10. Dream Chaser (9) Kiran Rai 54.5 and 11. Marvellous Maggi (2) Jagadeesh 53.

1. ALMANACH, 2. ROYAL BLOSSOM, 3. ARLETTE

5 LEADING STUD TROPHY (1,400m), rated 30 to 50, 3:30-1. Mountain Lion (1) Srinath 60, 2. Lucky Isabella (3) Madhu Babu 59.5, 3. Katana (8) Trevor 57.5, 4.

1. OCEAN DUNES, 2. RAVEN ROCK,

Benediction (12) S. Shareef 55.5, 5. Sainthood (10) P. Surya 55.5, 6. Decorum (6) Akash Chavan 54.5, 7. Griffin (11) Salman Khan 54.5, 8. See My Heels (2) Akshay K 54.5, 9. Classic Charm (9) Kiran Rai 54.5, 10. Birchwood (5) S. Mubarak 53.5, 11. Stroke of Genius (4) Sal Kumar 53 and 12. Twinkie Feet (7) Arshad 53.

1. MOUNTAIN LION, 2. SEE MY HEELS, 3. CLASSIC CHARM

6 LEADING OWNER TROPHY (1,400m), rated 60 & above, 4-0: 1. Colonel Harry (4) Tauseef 60, 2. Star Carnation (6) H.M. Ash 59.5, 3. Velocidad (2) Trevor 59, 4. Malwa (1) Akshay K 57.5, 5. Peluche (8) Kiran Rai 57, 6. Alpha (7) Nazerul 55.5, 7. Set To Win (5) Sal Kumar 55.5, 8. Alexandre Dumas (3) Sai Kiran 55 and 9. The Response (9) Ankit Yadav 52.5.

1. VELOCIDAD, 2. ALPHA, 3. SET TO WIN

7 GOVERNOR'S TROPHY (1,600m), 3:y.o., (Terms), 4:30-1. Chashni (1) Trevor 57, 2. Flying Quest (4) Darshan 56.5, 3. Silvarius (5) Antony 56.5, 4. Scintillating Lass (3) Srinath 55.5, 5. Soliloist (2) Akshay K 55 and 6. Teresita (-) 55.

1. CHASHNI, 2. SCINTILLATING LASS

8 CHAMPION JOCKEY TROPHY (DIV. I, 1,200m), rated 15 to 35, 4-y-o only, 5:00-1. Copper Sunrise (12) Antony 60, 2. Mystic

Eye (7) Zervant 60, 3. Flamingo Road (9) S. John 58.5, 4. Java Peninsula (4) Ravi 57, 5. Star Highway (11) Shreyas Singh 56.5, 6. Ultimate Choice (5) Kiran Rai 56, 7. Code of Honour (10) Trevor 55.5, 8. Comeonson (3) H.M. Akshay 55, 9. Belli Deepa (6) R. Pradeep 54.5, 10. Capable (8) S. Saqlain 53, 11. Highland Nectar (2) Jagadeesh 53.5 and 12. Sand Castles (1) Darshan 53.5.

1. COPPER SUNRISE, 2. FLAMINGO ROAD, 3. MYSTIC EYE

9 SEABISCUIT SALVER TROPHY (1,400m), rated 15 to 35, 5-y.o. & over, 5:30-1. Marco Polo (9) J.H. Arul 60, 2. Sadaqa (4) Ikrar Ahmed 60, 3. Shivalik Kiss (6) L.A. Rozario 60, 4. Rivers Of Babylon (1) M. Naveen 59.5, 5. Striking Memory (12) S. Saqlain 59, 6. Zhu Zhu Zest (8) Chandrashekhar 57.5, 7. Another Rainbow (2) H.M. Akshay 56, 8. Adela (7) Chethan G. 55.5, 9. Kingsfield (5) Salman Khan 54.5, 10. Happy Dancing (10) Md. Aliyar 53.5, 11. Girl With Pearl (3) Siddaraju 52 and 12. Reverence (11) B. Dharsan 52.

1. STRIKING MEMORY, 2. MARCO POLO, 3. ADELA

Day's best: **VELOCIDAD**

Double: **ALMANACH – MOUNTAIN LION**

Jkt: 5, 6, 7, 8 & 9; Tr (i): 1, 2 & 3; (ii): 4, 5 & 6; (iii): 7, 8 & 9.

Siraj sets sights on white-ball format

Calls Brisbane show memorable



Future plan: Mohd. Siraj is now raring to do well in limited-over cricket. ■ V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM

CRICKET

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM HYDERABAD

For someone who was one of the star performers for India in the recently played Test series in Australia and against England at home, 24-year-old Mohd. Siraj is now training his guns to be a regular member of the Indian team in the white-ball format.

"The target is to keep doing well in future. I am ready for the challenge of doing well in ODIs and T20s if given the chance," he said.

Siraj is also excited about the World Test championship final against New Zealand in June in England. "If I get the chance, it will be like a World Cup for me," he said.

Giving your best
"Playing for any team and in any match, I always try to give my 100%. I would love to deliver what the team expects from me," Siraj said.

"The grace of God and thanks to the all-round support of the entire Indian team, I was able to make some impact on the team's performances in Test matches. Now, I am aiming to be a consistent bowler in the limited-overs formats too," Siraj said in a chat with *The Hindu* at the Rajiv Gandhi Stadium here where he was playing in the HCA League on Friday.

"To be honest, I'm feeling very good now. Whenever I got a chance I gave my 100% and the best part was that as a bowler I could execute all

the plans," said Siraj, who has 16 wickets from five Tests including a five-for in the Brisbane Test.

Harman follows at five under two strokes behind; play suspended due to darkness

PLAYERS C'SHIP

REUTERS PONTE VEDRA BEACHES

Spain's Sergio Garcia used a late surge to shoot a 7-under 65 on Thursday to hold a two-shot lead after the first round of The Players Championship here.

Brian Harman was alone in second place at five-under, while a group of three at four-under included England's Matthew Fitzpatrick, Canada's Corey Conners and Ireland's Shane Lowry when play was suspended due to darkness with 21 players still on the course.

India's Anirban Lahiri had a tough round before finishing at six-over 78.

Playing in the morning wave, Garcia started on the back nine at TPC Sawgrass and made the turn at 3 under



Getting it right: Sergio Garcia had the measure of the TPC Sawgrass course on Thursday. ■ AP

thanks to an eagle on the par-5 16th.

"I just love it," Garcia said of TPC Sawgrass. "I've always said it, Valderrama and this course are some of my top favourite ones and for some reason they just, it just kind of fits my eye."

Sriram Balaji loses doubles quarterfinals

INDIANS ABROAD

SPORTS BUREAU BIELLA (ITALY)

Second-seeded Sriram Balaji and Luca Margaroli of Switzerland were beaten 6-3, 7-6(6) by Germany's Dustin Brown and Switzer-

land's Marc-Andrea Huesler in the doubles quarterfinals of the €44,820 Challenger tennis tournament here.

Other result: \$15,000 ITF men, Sharri El Sheikh, Egypt: Quarterfinals: Petros Chrysostomos (Cyp) bt Sasikumar Mu-kund 6-3, 6-1.

Bishan Bedi discharged from hospital

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

Legendary former India spinner Bishan Singh Bedi has been discharged after spending nearly three weeks at a city hospital here following a bypass surgery.

The 74-year-old former India captain had complained of heart problems. He subsequently also underwent an operation to remove blood clotting in his brain.

Zimbabwe follows on

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE ABU DHABI

Ace leg-spinner Rashid Khan and fellow slow bowler Amir Hamza shared seven wickets between them to leave Zimbabwe battling to avoid defeat in the second Test in Abu Dhabi on Friday.

Forced to follow-on after being dismissed for 287 all out, Zimbabwe was 24 without loss in its second innings after the third day's play.

The scores: Afghanistan 545/4 decl. in 160.4 overs vs Zimbabwe 287 in 91.3 overs (Prince Masvaure 65, Kevin Kasuza 41, Tarisai Musakanda 41, Sikandar Raza 85, Regis Chakava 33, Amir Hamza 3/73, Rashid Khan 4/138) & 24/0 in 13 overs.

WC: Qatar to host India's qualifiers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

India will play its remaining three FIFA World Cup qualifiers in Qatar as