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NEARBY



India, Pak. hold brigade commander-level meet

JAMMU A brigade commander-level meeting between the Indian and the Pakistani armies was held in J&K's Poonch district on Friday, the first such meet since the February 25 joint statement by the two countries reaffirming their commitment to abide by the 2003 ceasefire agreement.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 12



Nikita case convicts get life imprisonment

FARIDABAD The District and Sessions Court on Friday sentenced two convicts to life imprisonment for the murder of Nikita Tomar, five months after the 21-year-old woman was shot outside her college. The duo was also fined over ₹20,000 each under various charges, including murder.

REGION ▶ PAGE 6

Poll bond sale can go ahead: SC

No reason to stall it ahead of crucial Assembly elections, court tells NGO

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to stay the sale of electoral bonds prior to the Assembly elections in crucial States such as West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

A three-judge Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde, said the scheme began in 2018 and continued in 2019 and 2020 without "any impediments".

Chief Justice Bobde, who read out the judgment, said the court found no reason to stall the sale of the electoral bonds now.

The judgment came on an urgent application moved by an NGO, Association for Democratic Reforms, represented by advocate Prashant Bhushan, to stay the sale of

Bond matters

Some charges against electoral bonds and the SC's response

Anonymity of buyers	The scheme provides anonymity, but ensures that everything happens only through banking channels
Corporate houses can finance political parties	Anyone buying bonds will have to fulfil KYC norms. The money spent will reflect in the expense sheets of a company
Foreign corporate houses can buy bonds and influence electoral politics	Bonds can be purchased only by a person who is a citizen of India or incorporated or established in India
Bonds bought with white money can be re-purchased with black money	Bonds are not tradeable

the bonds scheduled between April 1 and 10.

'Serious apprehension'
The NGO, also represented by advocate Neha Rathi,

voiced serious apprehension that the sale of bonds before the elections would "further increase illegal and illicit funding of political parties through shell companies".

The court agreed that the scheme protects the identity of purchasers of electoral bonds in a cloak of anonymity, but highlighted that such purchases happened only through regular banking channels. The State Bank of India would eventually know the identity of the buyer.

"While the identity of the purchaser of the bond is withheld, it is ensured that unidentified/unidentifiable persons cannot purchase the bonds and give it to the political parties. Under Clause 7 of the scheme, buyers have to apply in the prescribed form, either physically or online, disclosing their particulars," the court reasoned.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

First phase of polls in Bengal, Assam today

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The process to elect new lawmakers to the Legislative Assemblies of Assam and West Bengal will get under way on Saturday, with 47 seats in Assam and 30 in West Bengal going to the polls in the first phase.

While Assam will have a three-phase polling, the high-stakes battle for West Bengal will see an eight-phase election.

Amid unprecedented security arrangements across five districts of West Bengal, more than 73 lakh voters, including 37.5 lakh men and 36.2 lakh women, will decide the fate of 191 candidates.

HEAVY SECURITY ▶ PAGE 11

India, Bangladesh must fight terror together: PM

Modi pays tributes to 1971 War martyrs



Remembering the heroes: PM Narendra Modi at the National Martyrs' Memorial in Savar on Friday. ▶ PTI

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

Contemporary Bangladesh was created with the blood of the freedom fighters, and of the Indian soldiers who were martyred in the War of Liberation of 1971, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in Dhaka on Friday.

Addressing a special gathering on the National Day celebrations that marked the 50th anniversary of the country's independence, Mr. Modi said the creation of Bangladesh received support from all sections of the Indian political class.

The visiting leader also said the two countries should fight jointly against terrorism.

"Bangladesh is sustained

Four shot dead during protests

Four supporters of a hardline Islamist group were shot dead in Bangladesh on Friday in violent demonstrations over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tour of Dhaka. ▶ PAGE 15

by the blood of the freedom fighters of the country as well as of the Indian soldiers. This blood will create such a relation that will not break under any kind of pressure," he said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

SC backs Tata Sons, sets aside NCLAT order on Mistry

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday ruled completely in favour of multi-billion salt-to-software conglomerate Tata Sons Private Ltd. by setting aside a National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) decision to rein-

state minority shareholder Shaporji Pallonji group's scion, Cyrus Mistry, as its executive chairman.

Mr. Mistry was initially only removed from the post of executive chairman of Tata Sons.

However, his subsequent actions, including the leak-

ing of a confidential mail to the media to create a "sensation" and passing on information to the Income Tax authorities while claiming to be a "law abiding citizen", was an open declaration of "all-out war" against the Tatas. These led to his removal as a director, the court said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

STOCKS GAIN ▶ PAGE 16

fied. The court dismissed allegations by Mr. Mistry of oppression of minority shareholders, such as the Shaporji Pallonji (SP) group, by the Tatas, who had majority stake.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

Bharat Bandh by protesting farmers hits traffic in Punjab, Haryana, Delhi

Marks four months of stir against the new agricultural laws

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Farmers protesting against the three contentious agricultural laws disrupted road and rail transport and closed down shops in much of Punjab and Haryana in response to the Samyukt Kisan Morcha's call for a Bharat bandh on Friday.

House arrest

Parts of Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan also saw shutdowns, while there was a scattered impact in



R.V. MOORTHY

Farmers blocking the Delhi-Meerut Expressway on Friday. ▶ R.V. MOORTHY

other States.

The police detained the Morcha leaders in Ahmeda-

bad and Bengaluru, and some local farmer leaders were placed under precautionary house arrest in Uttar Pradesh.

The nationwide strike call, supported by the central trade unions and some transporters and traders groups, was from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. The protesting farm unions marked the four-month anniversary of their agitation on the borders of Delhi.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGES 2 & 7

Govt. extends validity of vehicle papers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways on Friday issued an advisory extending the validity of driver's licences, permits and registration documents till June 30.

Documents which had expired since February 1, 2020, or would expire by March 31, 2021, the same may be treated to be valid till June 30, 2021, the Ministry said. This is the fourth extension since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Two die while cleaning septic tank

Kin claim duo was forced by management of banquet hall

a housekeeping employee at the banquet hall, called Lokesh to clean the tank and promised to give him ₹3,000. Lokesh brought along Prem. "The duo was called at 7.30 p.m. to clean the tank," Mr. Yadav said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (East) Deepak Yadav said the deceased, Lokesh (35) and Prem Chand (40), were residents of Trilokpuri.

A case has been lodged under Section 304(A) of the IPC and Section 9 of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers & Their Rehabilitation Act.

The FIR states that Rahul,

Prem's brother Radhey Shyam said the victims were waiters and had been called for morning service.

"In the evening, after work, when they asked the management for their salaries, they were told to clean the septic tank or else they would not be given money," the brother claimed, adding that he was informed about this by the other men who had worked with the victims on Thursday.

"My brother had never done any cleaning work before," Mr. Shyam said, adding that the duo was not provided any safety gear.

At least 9 killed in Mumbai hospital fire

STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI

At least nine COVID-19 patients were killed on Thursday night after a fire swept through a mall that also housed a dedicated COVID-19 hospital in the Bhandup area of Mumbai.

Officials said 68 patients were evacuated while nine patients died of suffocation from smoke as the fire engulfed the hospital.

Those who were in ICU and on ventilation could not be evacuated.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 12

OUR PERFORMERS

AIR 11 Nupur Goel - 184 Marks

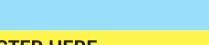
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DUSU writes to Registrar

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi University Students' Union (DUSU) on Friday submitted a memorandum to the DU Registrar, demanding participation of students in the Executive and Academic Council to put forth their issues and concerns.

DUSU president Akshit Dahiya said: "Students' participation in decision making bodies of Delhi University is must to ensure that student-centric issues are put forth in front of the administration. It has been a long demand of DUSU."

IN BRIEF

Cabinet nod to give job to Ankit Sharma's kin

NEW DELHI
The Delhi Cabinet on Friday decided to provide a government job to the brother of slain Intelligence Bureau staffer Ankit Sharma. Sharma was murdered during north-east Delhi riots.

Farmers block entry points at Singhu

They observe Bharat Bandh, say movement getting bigger by the day; heavy police force deployed at borders

SHINJINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI

Protesting farmers at the Singhu border on Friday blocked the entry points to the site, which earlier saw traffic movement, to observe Bharat Bandh.

Allow essential services

They also made repeated appeals from the main stage to not block ambulances and essential services during the protest.

Four months into the agitation against Centre's new farm laws, the protesters recounted the hurdles they had to cross, including tear gas, water cannons and trenches, before reaching Delhi's borders.

The farmers who have been camping at the Capital's borders since November 26, demanding a legal guarantee of minimum support price and a repeal of the three farm laws passed by the Centre last year, reiterated that they would not va-



Farmers protest at the Singhu border during Bharat Bandh in Delhi on Friday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

cate the protest sites till their demands are met.

Kulwant Singh, 70, from Punjab's Gurdaspur district, said: "Our demands are the same as they were on the day we started our journey to Delhi. We had to overcome water cannons, lathis, trenches and tear gas to reach the border. In the first couple of days, we did not even have proper food to eat.

Farmers have overcome so much to reach this point and now it is a given that they are not returning without the laws being repealed."

He said that the movement was getting bigger by the day. "Our leaders are now spreading the word across the country and asking people to not vote for BJP as the party only goes against the interests of common people. There is sympathy on the international le-

vel as well," he added.

Harrjit Singh, a farmer from Fatehgarh Sahib district, added: "It's been four months and even we want to return to our villages. But that can only happen if the laws are repealed. It's high time the government listens to us else we will continue to wait here. Four months later we have nothing more to say."

120 days on...

Stating that the Centre had continued to neglect the ones who feed the country, Balwant Singh, a farmer from Punjab's Moga, said: "It has been 120 days and instead of paying heed to our demands, those in the government have only called us names. There have been 11 meetings with the government but none of the Ministers has been able to give us any concrete answers."

Claiming that big movements had the power to overthrow governments, Mr. Singh added, "Ideally a ruler

should be worried about the interests of the people, but we have a ruler who is not bothered. People of the country, across professions, have stood by us. The Prime Minister should realise that things are not as bad yet and there is still time to rectify and repeal the laws. If needed, we are ready to march to the Parliament as well."

Heavy police deployment was seen at Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur border in view of nation-wide protest called by the farmers on Friday.

'No violence reported'
"We have deployed extra police force at borders to avoid any law-and-order situation. There was no incident of violence reported," said an officer.

In the morning, Delhi Police had closed both carriageways of NH-24 passing through Ghazipur border in view of Bharat Bandh. The restrictions remained till the late evening.

PhD scholar, 4 others nabbed for duping 500 of ₹7.5 crore

They promised jobs in leading MNCs

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A PhD scholar and his accomplices have been arrested for allegedly duping over 500 people of ₹7.5 crore on the pretext of providing jobs with leading multi-national companies, the police said on Friday.

DCP (Cyber Crime) Anyesh Roy said the accused have been identified as Manoj Hota (44), Ashish Ranjan (26), Abhishek Kumar (27), Somy Rawal (29) and Shaik Pintu Ali (28).

He came in touch with Ranjan and Kumar – both engineers. The accused created fake websites and email IDs in the name of various MNCs for the scam.

Further probe revealed that Ranjan was the head of the call centre and Kumar was the 'star caller', who used to convince people that he was calling on behalf of MNCs. Rawal and Ali are graduates and used to be the first persons to call the victims, the police added.

Three of a family trapped in building fire rescued in G.K.

Two constables climbed to the third floor but could not break grills; reason for blaze unclear

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

In a joint operation, the Delhi Police and the Fire Department rescued three of a family trapped in a building fire in south Delhi's Greater Kailash-I on Friday morning, said officials.

Two policemen climbed to the third floor of the building to rescue the three persons – Amit Sudhakar [56], his wife Shalini [48], and mother Sudha [87].

A senior officer said they got a call at 6.55 a.m. that a fire had broken out at second and third floors of the building. DCP (South) Atul Kumar said: "The balcony, in which

the family was trapped, was covered with iron grills."

Greater Kailash police station SHO Ritesh Sharma said a member of an RWA, Lalit, called him and informed him about the fire. The fire department said they got the call at 6.53 a.m. and immediately reached the spot.

The fire started on the second floor of the building and soon reached the upper floor, Mr. Sharma said.

"After the call, I immediately reached the spot with my team. We saw that a massive fire had broken out on the second floor of the building. We checked and found that there was no person on it

and also on the lower floors of the building. Only one caretaker was on the second floor, but he had left the building timely. However, we were informed that some persons were shouting for help from the backside of the building," Mr. Sharma said.

We then saw a family of three trapped in a balcony on the third floor.

"We first asked them to stand on the opposite side in the balcony from where the smoke was coming. There were grills at every floor. The first major issue was an electricity pole near the building.

There was only two feet gap between the pole and the building, and the personnel passed through the narrow area to climb up. Head constable Munni Lal and constable Sandeep climbed to the third floor of the building," he said.

Mr. Sharma added that other personnel too wanted to climb but "we feared that the grill might fall due to weight of too many persons". "Lal and Sandeep tried to break the grills but could not succeed," he said, adding that after the fire tenders doused the blaze, the three persons were rescued from near the stairs.

The reason for the blaze unclear, said officials.

Policemen climbing grills to rescue the trapped family in the city on Friday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT.

Govt. honours 98 schoolteachers, principals for their contribution

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Ninety-eight schoolteachers and principals were honoured for their contribution to education at the State Teachers Award ceremony organised by the Delhi government on Friday.

Speaking at the event, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia implored teachers to rethink strategies on assessment and learning. "We need to build correct approaches and develop 360-degree assessments for our students. The premise of rote-learning evaluated through an end-of-year 3-hour exam is an injustice to



Deputy CM Manish Sisodia implored teachers to rethink strategies on learning ■ P.TI

our students and teachers," he said.

He added that the challenge is to eliminate rote-learning practices, and this is why govt. is at the juncture of establishing the Delhi Education Board. "Our Delhi Education Board will deve-

lop continuous and comprehensive assessments augmenting a holistic learner profile of students and enabling teachers to refine their instruction," Mr. Sisodia said. He said that the education system was badly hit by the pandemic as school closures left everyone clueless.

"Our teachers and principals really stepped up to the occasion and showed unparalleled grit and determination in responding to this situation," Mr. Sisodia said.

Of all those who were honoured, 69 teachers were from Delhi government schools, 18 from private and 11 from civic bodies.

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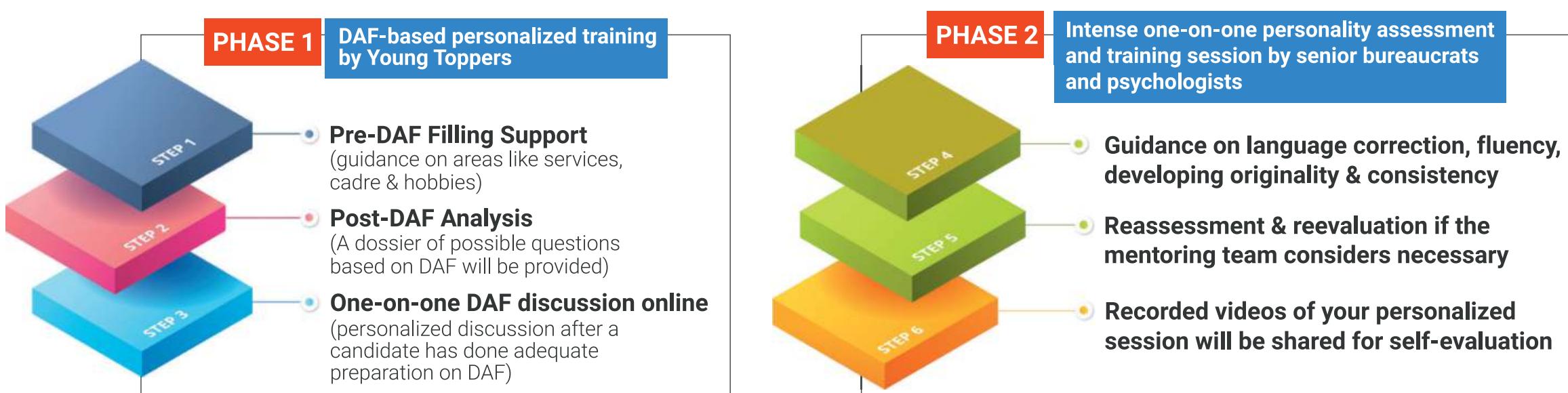
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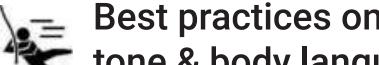
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Delhi City 32 16

Safdarjung 32 16

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Delhi Palam Today

34°C Rise in day temperature

likely. Dry winds would prevail.

Sunny warm day likely.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow

36°C Gradual rise in

temperature expected. Day

would turn very warm with

sunny sky.

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Correction

In the report headlined

'Constable traces 63 children

in 3 months' that appeared in

The Hindu's March 26 edition,

the designation of

Commissioner of Police,

Delhi, S.N. Shrivastava was

wrongly mentioned as DCP

(Deputy Commissioner of

Police). The error is

regretted.

Delhi reports 1,534 fresh COVID-19 cases

20,652 beneficiaries received vaccine in the city on Friday

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The surge in COVID-19 cases continued in the national capital with 1,534 new cases being reported in the last 24 hours - the highest in more than three months. The total number of cases stood at 6,54,276, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Friday.

This is the fourth consecutive day when more than 1,000 new cases were reported this year.

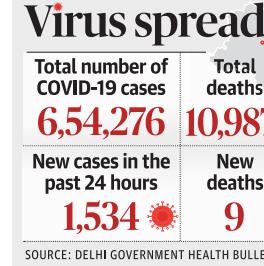
The last time more number of cases were reported was on December 16, with 1,547 cases.

Also, nine more deaths were reported in the past 24 hours, taking the total number of deaths to 10,987. A total of 85,092 tests were done in a day, the bulletin said.

Of the total cases, 6,37,238 people have recovered and there are 6,051 active cases in the city at present.



A man getting vaccinated in Delhi on Friday. ■ V.V. KRISHNAN



had dropped to 94 and it slowly increased to 200 on February 24 and it has been increasing since then.

A total of 20,652 beneficiaries took the COVID-19 vaccine in Delhi till 6 p.m. on Friday, said a Delhi government spokesperson.

Of the total beneficiaries, 10,570 were people who are aged 60 and above and 2,092 people were between 45 and 59 years.

The rest of the people vaccinated were healthcare staffers and front-line workers.

Reconstituted Advisory Council holds first meeting on MPD-2041

Draft to be placed before Delhi Development Authority in April

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) said that the first meeting of the reconstituted Advisory Council for the formulation of the Master Plan for Delhi 2041 was held on Friday and the draft will be placed before the authority, officials said. After obtaining suggestions and objections from the public, the draft plan is likely to be sent to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (RWAs) concerned and other locals residents about it.

The meeting was chaired by Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal who is also the DDA Chairman.

The new master plan is divided into two volumes comprising various sector-wise policies in focus areas like environment, economy, public spaces, heritage, shelter, mobility and social and physical infrastructure, officials said.

Among other policies, a Spatial Development Framework, including the TOD policy and Green Development Area Policy, will be a primary aspect of the new master plan, officials added.



The meeting on Friday was chaired by L-G Anil Baijal, who is also the DDA Chairman.

body said in a statement.

The Advisory Council, which was reconstituted and notified on March 23, is scheduled to meet on March 31 and then April 5, following which the draft will be placed before the authority, officials said. After obtaining suggestions and objections from the public, the draft plan is likely to be sent to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (RWAs) concerned and other locals residents about it.

"We request people to follow social distancing guidelines and other protocols related to COVID-19. There is a rise in COVID-19 cases in the city. We have also instructed police personnel to follow safety guidelines while enforcing the DDMA orders," said the officer.

Meanwhile, Delhi Traffic Police has made elaborate traffic arrangements to ensure safety of motorists.

Ban on Holi celebrations: SHOs told to be vigilant

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

After the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) banned public celebrations on Holi this year, the Delhi police ordered all SHOs to be vigilant and communicate restrictions to locals, the police said on Friday.

A senior police officer said that they have instructed all SHOs to communicate restrictions, imposed owing to the pandemic, to Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) concerned and other locals residents about it.

"We request people to follow social distancing guidelines and other protocols related to COVID-19. There is a rise in COVID-19 cases in the city. We have also instructed police personnel to follow safety guidelines while enforcing the DDMA orders," said the officer.

Meanwhile, Delhi Traffic Police has made elaborate traffic arrangements to ensure safety of motorists.

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• हिन्दी माध्यम

• English-Hindi Translator (prior experience)

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No. Capt/1413/2-MLT-26.03.2021

Tenders are invited (Tender No. 176)

from reputed paper dealers / suppliers / mills for the supply of Paper and cards vade e-tender id 2021 CAPT_420915_B-01. Due date and time of tender / bid submission (online) 06.04.2021 upto 11.00 AM. For detailed information log on to the website:

https://tenders.kerala.gov.in & www.captkerala.com.

Sd/- MD, Capt

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IN CONVERSATION — Life of a Civil Servant

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April 17, 2021 (Sat.)

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IN CONVERSATION — Life of a Civil Servant

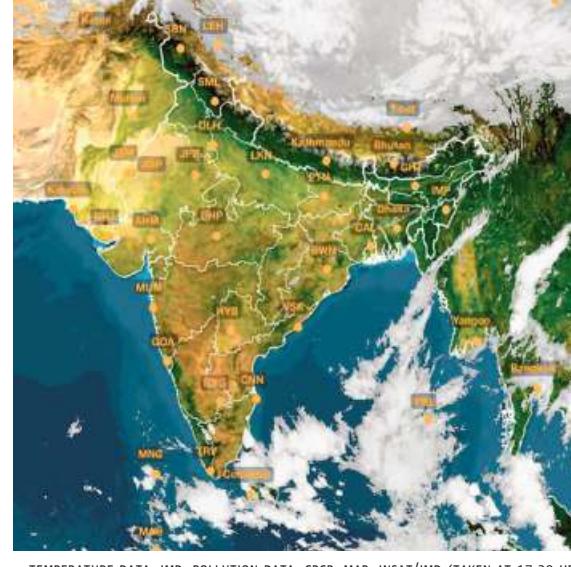
Himanshu Tyagi Associate Vice President Career Launcher

April 17, 2021 (Sat.)

17:00 hrs

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



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

Forecast for Saturday: Thunderstorm with lightning/gusty winds likely at isolated places over Kerala and Mahe. Heat/severe heat wave conditions likely in some/isolated pockets over Gangetic West Bengal, Odisha, Saurashtra & Kutch and Konkan & Goa

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...-37.2...	21.0		Kozhikode	...-35.4...	27.5	
Ahmedabad	...-38.8...	19.7		Kurnool	...-39.4...	25.1	
Aizawl	...-28.9...	13.1		Lucknow	...-33.1...	16.6	
Allahabad	...-35.1...	16.0		Madurai	...-36.8...	25.0	
Bengaluru	...-35.7...	21.6		Mangaluru	...-36.6...	26.0	
Bhopal	...-33.7...	17.2		Mumbai	...-38.5...	22.4	
Bhubaneswar	...-40.0...	24.4		Mysuru	...-35.2...	21.0	
Chandigarh	...-32.1...	14.9		New Delhi	...-32.0...	16.0	
Chennai	...-35.1...	25.4		Patna	...-34.4...	19.0	
Coimbatore	...-36.3...	22.4		Poorni Blair	...-32.5...	25.9	
Dehradun	...-32.0...	13.0		Puducherry	...-33.7...	23.2	
Gangtok	...-20.8...	11.4		Pune	...-37.8...	17.5	
Goa	...-35.5...	26.4		Raipur	...-38.4...	20.0	
Guwahati	...-35.1...	16.9		Ranchi	...-34.5...	19.2	
Hubballi	...-37.0...	29.0		Shillong	...-26.4...	13.0	
Hyderabad	...-37.4...	23.4		Shimla	...-22.3...	20.6	
Imphal	...-30.8...	14.3		Srinagar	...-14.7...	3.8	
Jaipur	...-33.9...	18.1		Thiruvananthapuram	...11.8...	34.0...	25.6
Kochi	...-32.6...	22.2		Tiruchi	...-37.0...	24.4	
Kohima	...-26.8...	14.3		Vijayawada	...-37.8...	23.2	
Kolkata	...-37.5...	24.9		Visakhapatnam	...-34.5...	25.6	

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	34	88	32	145	161	ORANGE
Bengaluru	12	15	51	105	115	ORANGE
Chennai	8	15	56	111	108	ORANGE
Delhi	30	33	23	222	202	RED
Hyderabad	26	75	34	217	20	RED
Kolkata	35	23	32	239	194	RED
Lucknow	6	28	56	146	143	ORANGE
Mumbai	7	20	83	309	186	ORANGE
Pune	6	88	45	168	117	ORANGE
Visakhapatnam	9	71	51	119	150	ORANGE

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

SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

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

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

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

Maharashtra hits fresh peak of 36,902 cases

Active cases soar past 2.82 lakh; over 7,000 new cases in Pune



Shot of hope: People await their turn at a vaccination centre in Mumbai on Friday. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PUNE

Maharashtra touched yet another high in single-day spikes, reporting 36,902 new COVID-19 cases on Friday as its active case tally soared to 2,82,451.

As many as 17,019 patients were discharged in the last 24 hours during which a record 1.57 lakh samples were tested. The State's recovery rate has dipped to 87.2%.

Mumbai reported another new high of 5,515 new cases, taking its total case tally to 3,85,661, of which 36,404 are active. Ten fatalities took the city's death toll to 11,633.

Cases continued to mount in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), with the Kalyan-Dombivli civic body reporting 794 cases to take its tally to 79,083. No deaths, however, were reported.

Nagpur district in Vidarbha reported 4,100 cases as its total case tally reached 21,487, of which 38,348 are active. As per State Health Department figures, the district reported 15 deaths to take its death toll to 3,757.

Aurangabad in Marathwada

reported a huge spike of more than 1,800 cases to take its total tally to 77,525, of which 19,063 were active. Seven deaths took the total death toll to 1,332.

Surge in infections

Nanded in Marathwada recorded more than 1,000 cases and five deaths to take its total case tally to 37,591, of which 12,943 are active while its toll has risen to 731.

Nashik in north Maharashtra reported a spike of more than 3,300 new cases, taking its total tally to 1,62,144, of which 20,568 are active while 10 deaths pushed its toll to 2,172.

Neighbouring Jalgaon reported more than 1,200 fresh cases and nine deaths, taking its total cases to 80,724, of which 6,613 are active while its death toll stayed at 1,576.

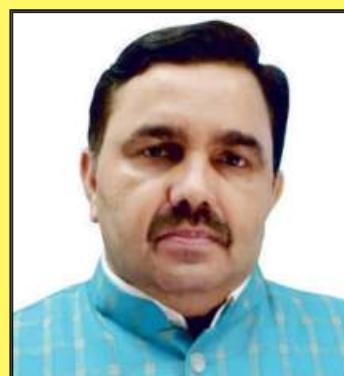
Dr. Awate said that currently, a total of 14,29,998 people across the State are in home quarantine and 14,578 are in institutional quarantine facilities.

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PROF. D.P. AGRAWAL
(Former Chairman, UPSC)



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Alok Kumar Sinha
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Former Jt. Secretary

Open Interactive Session with

Prof. D.P. AGRAWAL (Former Chairman, UPSC)

and other experts on DAF & other demands of Interview

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Ajit Pawar to decide on possible Pune lockdown

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PUNE

With the alarming surge in COVID-19 cases and fatalities making Pune the worst-hit district in India, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and District Guardian Minister Ajit Pawar on Friday hinted at a possible lockdown unless there was a dramatic improvement in the pandemic situation.

Mr. Pawar said the decision on whether or not to impose a lockdown would be taken at the next review meeting on April 2. Till then, the present shutdown orders on all schools and other educational establishments in Pune would be extended till April 30.

"The COVID-19 situation in Pune is getting grimmer by the day. If it continues to deteriorate, then we shall be left with no alternative but to take stern measures.

Even now, with heightened case spikes reported each day, I find people roaming about the streets without any fear, flouting rules with impunity by not wearing masks. Such errant behaviour must stop," Mr. Pawar said after a review meeting with all elected representatives of the district as well as top officials.

While exams for Classes X and XII exams, as well as the remaining papers of the Maharashtra Public Service Commission would proceed as scheduled, the Guardian Minister said all political programmes would be banned in the district from April 1.

FIR filed over leak of confidential report

Fadnavis lays blame on Nawab Malik

STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI

A day after the Maharashtra Chief Secretary submitted a report to the Chief Minister ruling out wrongdoing in the transfers of police officers, an FIR was registered on Friday against unidentified persons for leaking confidential documents.

The FIR was registered on

a complaint by the State Intelligence Department and invoked Section 5 of the Official Secrets Act, 1923, Section 30 of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, and Sections 43(b) and 66 of the Information Technology Act, 2008. The Cyber Crime Branch of the Mumbai Police is conducting further probe into the case.

Earlier this week, BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis alleged a transfer scam citing a report prepared by IPS officer Rashmi Shukla. Mr. Fadnavis on Friday denied that he leaked the confidential report and said he only waved the covering letter of the report before journalists. He accused Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader and State Minister Nawab Malik of leaking the report.

Mr. Fadnavis also claimed that the Chief Secretary's report was prepared by NCP ministers like Jitendra Awadh and Mr. Malik.

"I don't believe that the report was prepared by a straight-forward officer like Sitaram Kunte. It was given to him by the ministers as it is full of errors. The report has not mentioned that phone tapping is allowed by

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•WAZIRPUR A-5, Near Richi Rich Banquet (Opp. Shalimar Bagh)
•JANAKPURI B-1/2, Main Najafgarh Road, Opp. Metro Pillar 543
•NOIDA, Nirula's Sec-2, Near Metro Station, Sec-15, Noida, UP
•LAJPAT NAGAR, 49, Main Ring Road, Adj. Haldi Ram, Near Moolchand Crossing

DELHI POLICE
SHANTI SEWA NYAYA

PUBLIC NOTICE
HELP US SERVE YOU BETTER

General Public of Delhi is hereby informed that in case of a missing/kidnapping of a child, the first few hours are crucial for the police to trace the missing child. Parents often do not inform the police about missing of

Crime Branch files FIR on phone tapping complaint

It was initiated by Minister Shekhawat

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

An FIR has been registered by the Crime Branch unit of Delhi Police on the complaint of Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat in connection with an incident of tapping his phone conversation, officials said on Friday.

A controversy over phone tapping had erupted last year after audio clips purportedly having telephonic conversation between the Minister and Congress leaders surfaced.

Congress leaders of the Ashok Gehlot camp had alleged that BJP leaders were involved in horse trading to topple the State government.

A complaint was filed at Tughlaq Road police station on March 20 by Mr. Shekhawat, who is currently the Minister for Jal Shakti, against Lokesh Sharma, who is serving as the Officer on Special Duty of Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, and others for commission of offences of criminal conspiracy and unlawfully intercepting telegraphic signals (telephonic conversation), they said.

"The complaint was transferred to the Crime Branch of Delhi Police," a senior police officer said.



Gajendra Singh Shekhawat ■

Based on the complaint, an FIR was registered on Thursday under relevant Sections of Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, Information Technology Act and Sections 409 (criminal breach of trust by public servant, or by banker, merchant or agent) and 120 B (punishment of criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code, police said.

According to the FIR, the complainant has alleged that on July 17, 2020, various prominent media houses and news channels had aired some telephonic conversations, allegedly between Sanjay Jain, Bhanwar Lal Sharma, a Member of Legislative Assembly, Rajasthan and the complainant, which were illegally leaked to the media houses and news channels by Lokesh Sharma.

OFFICE OF THE ADDL. COMMISSIONER OF POLICE: TRAFFIC (HEADQUARTERS), DEV PRAKASH SHASTRI MARG, TODAPUR, NEW DELHI

PROCLAMATION REQUIRED FOR DISPOSAL OF CASE PROPERTY

(See Section 457 Cr. P.C.)

Perusal of the application reveals that sufficient effort has been made to trace out the owner of the case property (Vehicle No. DL-11 SG-3564, Challan No. BWC-4504-10100 & 10101-18) but in vain. No one has come forward to claim the property/vehicle and the same is lying unclaimed in the pit of **Bawana circle of Delhi Traffic Police**. Accordingly, it is ordered that after taking recent photographs of the case property/vehicle, the same be confiscated to state and be disposed of by way of sale. The sale proceeds be duly deposited with the government. The application stands disposed of. The photographs be properly preserved as the same may be needed at the time of trial.

By Order
Sh. Anurag Thakur, MM-02,
North West District,
Rohini Courts, Delhi

Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (Market of National Importance)
(Govt. Of NCT of Delhi)
Office Complex, NFM Phase-II, Sarai Pipal Thala, Azadpur,
Delhi - 110033
Ph. 27691804, Fax: 27691762, 27691668
Website: www.apmcnazadpurdelhi.com E-mail: apmcnazadpur@gmail.com

NOTICE OF E-TENDERING
Item rate e-tenders are invited for the under mentioned works on behalf of Secretary, Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee, Azadpur and opened online in the office of Secretary, APMC, Azadpur.

S. No	Tender ID	Name of Work	Estimated Cost/Earnest Money (In Rupees)	Last Date/ Time of Receipt of Tenders
1	DAMB_201229_1	DISMANTLING AND RECONSTRUCTION OF SHED NO.8 IN NFM AZADPUR	5,79,34,453/- 580000/-	05/04/2021 upto 14.30 Hrs
2	DAMB_201713_1	REPAIR OF FLOORING, STEPS & DOOR OF SHED NO.15 NFM AZADPUR	29,61,721/- 29800/-	07/04/2021 upto 14.30 Hrs
3	DAMB_201713_2	ANNUAL REPAIR AND RENOVATION OF COMPUTER OFFICE, CHECK POSTS, AT ENTRY GATE, SITE OFFICES ALONGWITH ALLIED WORKS AT ENTRANCE ROAD, NFM AZADPUR.	29,23,652/- 29500/-	07/04/2021 upto 14.30 Hrs
4	DAMB_201713_3	CONSTRUCTION OF TEMPORARY SHED FOR PARKING OF SANITATION VEHICLES IN CEMENT GODOWN AREA NFM AZADPUR.	29,18,619/- 29500/-	07/04/2021 upto 14.30 Hrs
5	DAMB_201713_4	IMPROVEMENT AND REPAIR OF EXISTING WALLS INCLUDING PROVIDING AND FIXING OF STEEL BUFFERS IN FRONT OF SHED NO.20 AND D-BLOCK NEAR SANITATION OFFICE AT NSM AZADPUR.	29,10,275/- 29500/-	07/04/2021 upto 14.30 Hrs
6	DAMB_201713_5	REPAIR OF FOOTPATH, STEPS & FLOORING IN FRONT OF SANITATION OFFICE D-BLOCK OF NSM AZADPUR	28,85,041/- 29000/-	07/04/2021 upto 14.30 Hrs
7	DAMB_201713_6	IMPROVEMENT OF VACANT AREA FOR PARKING OF SANITATION VEHICLES OF BACK SIDE OF CEMENT GODOWN PARK NEAR SANITATION OFFICE AT NSM AZADPUR.	27,45,320/- 27500/-	07/04/2021 upto 14.30 Hrs
8	DAMB_201713_7	MAINTENANCE OF EXISTING STRUCTURE WORK AT CH. HIRA SINGH PARK AND 500 NOS. NEW PLANTS SUPPLY OF 250 (NOS.) PLANTS WITH RCC POTS FOR MARKET YARD APMC AZADPUR.	25,05,812/- 25100/-	07/04/2021 upto 14.30 Hrs
9	DAMB_201713_8	FILLING DEPRESSING AREA OF B&C BLOCK PARKING BY LAYING READY MIXED CONCRETE INCLUDING REPLACEMENT OF GULLY GRATING & MANHOLE COVER WITH FRAME AT ENTRY ROAD NSM, AZADPUR.	23,69,644/- 24000/-	07/04/2021 upto 14.30 Hrs
10	DAMB_201713_9	CONSTRUCTION OF BOUNDARY WALL INCLUDING REPAIR OF SURROUNDING AREA OF KISHAN BHAWAN NFM AZADPUR	16,54,956/- 17000/-	07/04/2021 upto 14.30 Hrs

Date of release of tender through e-procurement solution: S.No.1: 09/03/2021 and S. No.2 to 10-17/03/2021

Further details can be seen at website <https://govtprocurement.delhi.gov.in>

Executive Engineer
APMC, Azadpur

DIR/Shabdarth/0722/20-21

PROCLAMATION REQUIRED FOR DISPOSAL OF CASE PROPERTY

(See Section 457 CrPC)

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By Order
Anurag Thakur,
MM-02, North West District,
Rohini Courts, Delhi.

Nikita case convicts get life imprisonment

Govt. to move HC seeking death sentence for the two men

ASHOK KUMAR
FARIDABAD

Both the convicts in the Nikita Tomar murder case, Tosif and his friend Rihan, were sentenced to life imprisonment and imposed over ₹20,000 fine on different counts by the District and Sessions Court here on Friday.

Nikita's father Moolchand Tomar, however, said that he was "deeply hurt" by the quantum of sentence since he expected the convicts to be awarded death sentence. He said that it was "incomplete justice" and he would fight till the end to seek "complete justice" for his daughter.

Haryana Home Minister Anil Vij said the government would study the judgment and would move Punjab and Haryana High Court, seeking the death sentence for the two men.

Earlier, Additional Sessions Judge Sartaj Baswana, announcing the quantum of sentence, awarded life imprisonment to the two convicts and imposed a fine of ₹20,000 each for the murder charges. In case of default of fine, the two will have to undergo one year rigorous im-



The spot where Nikita Tomar was murdered. ■ FILE PHOTO

prisonment each.

Criminal conspiracy

Besides, the two were sentenced to five years imprisonment and ₹2,000 fine each separately on charges of criminal conspiracy and kidnapping to compel a woman for marriage. The two will have to undergo two months rigorous imprisonment each in case of default of fine.

Tosif, also convicted under the Arms Act, was sentenced to four years imprisonment and ₹2,000 fine, said Public Prosecutor Sunil Kumar Parmar. He added that the sentences awarded to the two convicts would run concurrently.

Earlier, Defence Counsel

I was deeply hurt by the quantum of sentence. It was incomplete justice and I would fight till the end to seek complete justice for my daughter

Moolchand Tomar
Nikita's father

P.L. Goyal, opposing the death penalty for convicts, argued that the crime did not fall in the category of "rarest of the rare" since the perpetrators did not inflict any brutality on the victim. He also argued that the convicts were young, in their early 20s, and had no criminal record. Mr. Goyal said there were many "loopholes" in the prosecution's case and they would move Punjab and Haryana High Court against the conviction.

Tosif and Rihan were held guilty on March 26. The third accused, Ajrudeen, was acquitted.

Nikita was coming out from the college with her friend after taking an exam when Tosif and Rihan shot her and fled in a car. She later died during treatment.

JNU EC approves appointment of former Dean for Registrar role

Move has been questioned by JNTUA

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Executive Council of Jawaharlal Nehru University approved the appointment of Anirban Chakraborty, Professor and former Dean of School of Computational and Integrative Sciences (JNU), to take care of Registrar's duties in the university on Friday.



agency and report to the Executive Council, and thus he approved the appointment of Mr. Chakraborty on March 17.

"He will be taking care of the office of the Registrar until a new Registrar is appointed for which an advertisement has been issued. It is unfortunate that a few faculty members of JNU have tried to manufacture a controversy over an appointment, which is otherwise a routine process," the statement said.

The JNU administration, in a statement, said: "The EC approved an action taken by the V-C to appoint Mr. Chakraborty, to take care of the duties of the office of the Registrar of the university taken in accordance with the Statute 8(2) of JNU." It said that the V-C, under JNU Statute, is authorised to take decisions on matters of ur-

Report lauds city's effort to curb pollution

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A new report by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) states that though Delhi has to reduce the level of a major pollutant in the air by 60%, the city has done more to curb air pollution than other cities in the country.

The report 'Capital Gains-Clean Air Action in Delhi NCR: What next?', lays down a roadmap on what the national capital and NCR towns should be doing to curb air pollution in the region. The measures to be taken range from changes in cropping patterns to reduce cultivation of paddy and from minimising stubble burning to scaling up pedestrianisation in high footfall areas to create low emissions zones.

"Delhi has seen its [PM2.5] drop by almost a quarter. But even after this drop, Delhi has to reduce the three-year running annual average of PM2.5 by yet another 60%," it said.

Talking about industrial pollution, the report said that Delhi has seen more progress, but that is partly because a lot of industries could be shifted out of Delhi.

'Don't charge more than ₹11 per person for subsidised ration'

Bidhuri says Delhi govt. should give the Centre due credit

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

AAP on Friday said that Pratima Betsy Coutinho, former president of Goa Pradesh Mahila Congress, has formally joined the party.

"AAP national spokesperson Raghav Chadha welcomed Pratima Betsy Countinho. Senior leader Durgesh Pathak and AAP Goa convener Rahul Mahambre were also present at the event," AAP said.

the poor, but the Delhi government wanted to supply flour instead of wheat. There was, Mr. Bidhuri said, no clarity upon the quality of flour, who will pay for the extra expenses and there was no transparency in the whole exercise, making it clear of corruption, he alleged.

"We will not allow the government to charge even a penny from the people of Delhi. This will face a strong protest from the BJP and its cadres, he said. The Centre, the LOP said, clearly states that wheat should be supplied to

"The NFSA has been passed by Parliament under which ration is being supplied to the poor. It is incumbent upon the Delhi government to run this as a Central government scheme and give it due credit," he also said.

Meanwhile, Imran Hussain, Minister of Food and Civil Supplies, said that the Delhi government had immediately complained to the Centre about the rotten ration received from it during the COVID-19-induced lockdown last year, apart from returning the rotten ration.

COUNCIL OF ARCHITECTURE

A Statutory Authority of Government of India
India Habitat Centre, Core 6A, 1st Floor, Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110003

NATA 2021

PUBLIC NOTICE

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The Council has prescribed the Minimum Standards of Architectural Education Regulations, 2020, which inter-alia prescribe that **candidates need to qualify an Aptitude Test in Architecture conducted by Council of Architecture for admission to B.Arch. Course**.

Further, due to Covid-19 pandemic, the Council with the approval of the Central Government, has relaxed the eligibility for admission to 1st year of 5-year B.Arch. Degree Course, by amending the eligibility for academic session 2021-2022 as "No candidate shall be admitted to architecture course unless she/he has passed an examination at the end of the 10+2 scheme of examination with Physics, Chemistry & Mathematics subjects or passed 10+3 Diploma Examination with Mathematics, as compulsory subject."

Council has also extended the last date of registration for the **first test up to 01.04.2021**. First test will be held on **10.04.2021**. Interested candidates are advised to register themselves for **NATA 2021** at the portal www.nata.in. For further details, please refer to the NATA brochure or contact NATA Helpdesk at 9560707764, 9319275557 and email: nata.helpdesk2021@gmail.com.

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Tender Notice

Traffic hit as protesting farmers block tracks, roads in Haryana

'Bharat Bandh' against farm laws evokes strong response; protests peaceful

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

The rail and road traffic in Haryana was hit on Friday with farmers, including women in large numbers, holding blockades at multiple points across the State in response to the call for "Bharat Bandh" from Samyukt Kisan Morcha, a coalition of farmer unions. The protests, however, remained peaceful, said the police.



Farmers blocking the Delhi-Agra Expressway in Palwal on Friday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The 12-hour "Bharat Bandh" in protest against the three farm laws, among other demands, also coinciding with the completion of four months for the sit-in agitation along the Delhi borders evoked strong response across the State. The protesters came out early in the morning to hold blockades at railway tracks and roads, including State and national highways.

The agitating farmers sat on the railway tracks at eleven points across the State

affecting the movement of around a hundred trains, a Haryana Railway Police officer said.

Women protesters
It included the blockades at the railway stations in Sirsa and Bahadurgarh, Fatehgarh in Charkhi Dadri, Jaulani village in Jind and Bhiwani-Rohilkot railway track at Kaluwas village in Bhiwani. Besides, Hisar, Yamunanagar and Fatehabad were also impacted. In Jullani, women sat on the railway tracks in

large numbers to stop the traffic. "The farmers, Khaps, workers, traders and government employees came together to make 'Bharat Bandh' a success. Besides blockades on the railway tracks, the protesters also sat on the roads at several points in Charkhi Dadri including Loharu Chowk, Badhra, Kadma and Chiriy Mor," said local farmer leader Raju Maan.

Director General of Police, Haryana, Manoj Yadava, told *The Hindu* that the

bandh was "fairly strong" with around half-a-dozen blockades in each district on an average. Two national highways, Delhi-Hisar and Delhi-Ambala, were also affected, but mostly the blockades were on the internal roads and the State highways. "It was incident free. The protesters held peaceful demonstrations. The police also had strong presence on the ground," said Mr. Yadava.

Bandh successful'
Haryana All-India Kisan Sabha vice-president Inderjit Singh claimed that the bandh was a "success" and the number of blockades on the roads and railway tracks were many more than the earlier occasions.

The farmers holding a sit-in agitation at Palwal blocked the Delhi-Agra highway for around five hours. Farmers also blocked the Delhi-Jaipur highway in Rewari causing traffic snarls.

RJD bandh paralyses normal life in Bihar

Railway, road traffic hit in the State

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PATNA

Train services and road traffic were disrupted at several places across Bihar during the bandh call given by the Opposition Rashtra Janata Dal to protest the farm laws, unemployment and the forced eviction of Opposition legislators agitating against the Bihar Special Armed Police Bill, 2021, from the State Assembly on March 23.

The bandh call was supported by the Congress and the three Left parties, the CPI, CPI(M) and CPI (Marxist-Leninist).

Bandh supporters blocked the national highways and disrupted train movement at several places like Vaishali, Madhubani, Darbhanga, Aurangabad, Jamui, Lakhisarai, Siwan, Bhojpur and Patna.

CPI-ML supporters disrupted movement of vehicles on the Patna-Ara road. The party's State secretary Kunal called the Bihar police bill a "Black Law" to support

the voice of anyone who would dare to speak out against the government headed by Nitish Kumar. "We're also protesting against government's anti-democratic and autocratic style of functioning," he told media persons as he led a procession of bandh supporters.

Vital bridge blocked
RJD leaders and supporters blocked the Mahatma Gandhi Setu bridge, which connects Patna with north Bihar, for several hours causing a long traffic jam.

"We've called for the bandh to protest the police brutality against Opposition members of the Assembly who were exercising their democratic right and agitating against the new Bihar police Bill. The police misconduct against the Assembly members, I believe, was not on the directions of the Speaker, but the Chief Minister," alleged Leader of the Opposition Tejaswi Yadav.



Gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari

MPs/MLAs at Allahabad, to continue him either in the District Jail at Banda or shift to any other prison in the State.

Medical facilities
"There shall be a direction to the Superintendent of Jail, District Jail Banda, Uttar Pradesh, to extend the necessary medical facilities to the 3rd respondent (Ansari). It is made clear that if any specialty treatment is required to the 3rd respondent, the Jail Superintendent of District Jail, Banda, Uttar Pradesh, shall take necessary steps to extend such medical care also, by following the Jail Manual," the judgment read.

BJP names candidates for Rajasthan bypolls

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has sought to play an emotional card by fielding former Minister Kiran Maheshwari's daughter from the Rajsamand seat, which is among the three Assembly constituencies going to by-elections in Rajasthan on April 17. The Opposition party released the list of its candidates late on Thursday night.

The BJP's candidates for bypolls are a mix of veterans and a novice, as the party has

In Titabor, fight to fill the gap left by Tarun Gogoi

BJP sniffs a chance in Cong. bastion

RAHUL KARMAKAR
TITABOR (ASSAM)



Tarun Gogoi had defied the 'Modi wave' of 2016. ■

administrative headquarters of the Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council the BJP wrested from the Congress in December 2016.

Titabor, the Assembly constituency, has been a Congress stronghold since 2001.

Dip Gogoi won it that year but vacated it for brother Tarun Gogoi.

The BJP sniffs a chance in this Congress bastion for a few reasons. The absence of the former CM is one, the Congress not fielding his son and MP Gaurav Gogoi and opting for the inexperienced Bhaskar Jyoti Baruah is another.

Alliance with AIUDF
The BJP is also banking on the perception that the alliance with Badruddin Ajmal's All India United Democratic Front would harm the prospects of the Congress in the Assamese

dominated eastern Assam, more so in Titabor where the late Mr. Gogoi defied the "Modi wave" of 2016.

"The story could have been different had Gaurav Gogoi contested," local teacher Imtiaz Hussain said.

The Congress, hopeful of weaning the tea plantation workers away from the BJP with enhanced daily wage guarantee, is confident that the son not taking the father's space will make no difference. "My relationship with the people of Titabor is beyond politics," Gaurav Gogoi had tweeted, seeking votes for Mr. Baruah.

Spike in cases: Himachal shuts schools till April 4

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

The Himachal Pradesh government on Friday announced the shutting of all educational institutions including universities, colleges, technical institutes and schools - except for the classes having their examinations - till April 4. Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur said the decision has been taken as a precautionary measure keeping in view the spike in COVID-19 cases in the State.

"No social and cultural events would be organised in the State by the government and gatherings would be restricted to maximum of 200 for indoor events," Mr. Thakur said.

"Our Government has been steadfast in its efforts towards empowerment of our tribal communities and preservation of their traditions. We are working tirelessly to transform the tribal-rural economic system."

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

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In-house secrets

SC must waive confidentiality rule and disclose reasons for rejecting AP CM's charges

The Supreme Court has dealt with a grave matter concerning issues of judicial propriety with characteristic opaqueness. It has dismissed a complaint from Andhra Pradesh CM Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, containing explosive allegations against CJI-designate Justice N.V. Ramana, but declined to disclose the findings of an in-house inquiry. The rejection was disclosed on the Court's website on the day CJI S.A. Bobde recommended Justice Ramana as his successor. Going by procedure, a committee of three judges must have inquired into the charges. The lack of transparency is based on a 2003 judgment of the apex court that any inquiry under this procedure is meant only for "the information and satisfaction" of the CJI, and is not meant for the public. However, this may be an instance where not many will agree with the confidentiality norm. The allegations came from a person holding the high office of CM, and the crux of his grievance was that the A.P. High Court was hostile to him and his regime due to the influence wielded by Justice Ramana. Further, he accused the judge of proximity with Mr. Reddy's political rivals and alleged involvement of his family members in a land scam that involved prior knowledge that Amaravati was to be declared the State's capital and speculative buying of land there. There is little to commend the requirement of confidentiality in a probe of this nature, as the dismissal of the complaint *ipso facto* means that a serving CM has levelled false and motivated charges against a senior Supreme Court judge as well as those in the High Court. Mr. Reddy is surely in contempt of court if the committee found no merit in the allegations that he raised in a signed affidavit.

Should the confidentiality rule always hold the field? Is it possible to dismiss the allegations without disclosing who were heard as witnesses and what material was considered as evidence? Was Mr. Reddy given an opportunity to substantiate his charges? And, does he get to know the conclusions? The unsavoury charges are bound to come up in some form or the other again. The A.P. government has appealed against a High Court judgment that stayed a police investigation in the Amaravati land issue. Mr. Reddy faces prosecution in corruption cases himself. A key allegation against him is that his animosity towards Justice Ramana arises from an order that a Bench headed by the latter had passed, that cases involving elected representatives be expedited. In a separate development, the High Court had also ordered a CBI probe into social media posts targeting judges. The charges being bandied about are overtly political, and the episode has become unpleasant. Notwithstanding the confidentiality norm laid down for in-house probes, it behoves the Court to demonstrate that justice was both done and was seen to be done.

Deadly trail

The Mumbai hospital fire shows that India needs to make public safety an absolute value

Fighters keep reminding people that fire is a good servant but a bad master, and the blaze that engulfed a private COVID-19 hospital in Mumbai's Bhandup area on Thursday night comes as a reminder of how true that axiom is. At least nine people died as flames and smoke spread through the facility housed in a mall. Coming soon after the fire that snuffed out the lives of infants in Bhandara, again in Maharashtra, the tragedy focuses attention on the failure to make fire safety a systemic imperative in public buildings. There is no clarity on where the inferno originated, and whether the hospital housed in a commercial building under 'extraordinary circumstances' for COVID-19 patients was equipped for the purpose. The majority of patients were evacuated and admitted to other hospitals. A solatium for the families of the victims has been announced by the State government, and predictable promises to investigate the incident have been made. These steps, though welcome, do little to change the image of decrepitude that marks policies on public safety in the country, and the generally ineffectual nature of inspections and certifications. Fire may be an accident, but the idea of protocols is to prevent it from having a devastating effect on lives and property. It should be pointed out that after a fire in Rajkot last November, the Supreme Court took *suo motu* cognisance of the incident and issued directions, one of which was to task an officer with fire safety for each COVID-19 hospital. States have only themselves to blame, if their officers ignore such guidelines, and avoidable fires claim lives.

Hospital fires are a distinct entity in the literature on safety, since the presence of incapacitated patients, oxygen-suffused environments, plenty of air-conditioning and lack of sufficient physical space creates a devastating combination when disaster strikes. The National Disaster Management Guidelines of 2016 issued by the NDMA address these characteristics, with recommendations on infrastructural and systemic improvements – from comparative to ultimate safety – to reduce the risk of deadly fires. Yet, it is clear that even some of the basic recommendations, such as the availability of open space to move patients in an emergency, are beyond the scope of legacy buildings created for other purposes. What is feasible is for experts to assess the quality of infrastructure, specifically electrical installations, ensuring the retrofitting of structures with flame retardant materials and triaging of patients to reduce crowding. Recurring infernos should also convince States that they must create scientifically designed public health facilities that meet the needs of populous cities, reversing the policy of leaving this crucial function largely to for-profit entities where the imperative to cure is often pitted against cost and profit concerns.

Dormant Parliament, fading business

The gradual deterioration in Parliament's functioning has to be stopped if it is to fulfil its constitutional mandate



M.R. MADHAVAN

The Budget session of Parliament ended on Thursday, two weeks ahead of the original plan, as many political leaders are busy with campaigning for the forthcoming State Assembly elections. This follows the trend of the last few sessions: the Budget session of 2020 was curtailed ahead of the lockdown imposed following the novel coronavirus pandemic, a short 18-day monsoon session ended after 10 days as several Members of Parliament and Parliament staff got affected by COVID-19, and the winter session was cancelled. As a result, the fiscal year 2020-21 saw the Lok Sabha sitting for 34 days (and the Rajya Sabha for 33), the lowest ever. The casualty was proper legislative scrutiny of proposed legislation as well as government functioning and finances. While COVID-19 was undoubtedly a grave matter, there is no reason why Parliament could not adopt remote working and technological solutions, as several other countries did.

No Bill scrutiny

An important development this session has been the absence of careful scrutiny of Bills. During the session, 13 Bills were introduced, and not even one of them was referred to a parliamentary committee for examination.

Many high impact Bills were introduced and passed within a few

days. The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021, which is the Bill to change the governance mechanism of Delhi – shifting governance from the legislature and the Chief Minister to the Lieutenant Governor – was introduced on March 15 in the Lok Sabha, passed by that House on March 22 and by Rajya Sabha on the March 24. Another Bill, the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2021, amends the Mines and Minerals Act, 1957 to remove end-use restrictions on mines and ease conditions for captive mines; this Bill was introduced on March 15 and passed by both Houses within a week. A Bill – The National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) Bill, 2021 – to create a new government infrastructure finance institution and permit private ones in this sector was passed within three days of introduction. The Insurance (Amendment) Bill, 2021, the Bill to increase the limit of foreign direct investment in insurance companies from 49% to 74% also took just a week between introduction and passing by both Houses. In all, 13 Bills were introduced in this session, and eight of them were passed within the session. This quick work should be read as a sign of abdication by Parliament of its duty to scrutinise Bills, rather than as a sign of efficiency.

Consulting House panels

This development also highlights the decline in the efficacy of committees. The percentage of Bills referred to committees declined from 60% and 71% in the 14th Lok Sabha (2004-09) and the 15th Lok Sabha, respectively, to 27% in the



16th Lok Sabha and just 11% in the current one. Parliamentary committees have often done a stellar job. For example, the committee that examined the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code suggested many changes to make the Code work better, and which were all incorporated in the final law. Similarly, amendments to the Motor Vehicles Act were based on the recommendations of the Committee.

Money Bill classification

The last few years have seen the dubious practice of marking Bills as 'Money Bills' and getting them past the Rajya Sabha. Some sections of the Aadhaar Act were read down by the Supreme Court of India due to this procedure (with a dissenting opinion that said that the entire Act should be invalidated). The Finance Bills, over the last few years, have contained several unconnected items such as restructuring of tribunals, introduction of electoral bonds, and amendments to the foreign contribution act.

Similarly, this year too, the Finance Bill has made major amendments to the Life Insurance Corporation Act, 1956. As this is a Money Bill, the Rajya Sabha cannot make any amendments, and has only recommendatory powers. Some of the earlier Acts, including the Aadhaar Act and Finance Act, have been referred to a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court. It

would be useful if the Court can give a clear interpretation of the definition of Money Bills and provide guide rails within which Bills have to stay to be termed as such.

During this session, the Union Budget was presented, discussed and passed. The Constitution requires the Lok Sabha to approve the expenditure Budget (in the form of demand for grants) of each department and Ministry. The Lok Sabha had listed the budget of just five Ministries for detailed discussion and discussed only three of these; 76% of the total Budget was approved without any discussion. This behaviour was in line with the trend of the last 15 years, during which period 70% to 100% of the Budget have been passed without discussion in most years.

The missing Deputy Speaker

A striking feature of the current Lok Sabha is the absence of a Deputy Speaker. Article 93 of the Constitution states that "... The House of the People shall, as soon as may be, choose two members of the House to be respectively Speaker and Deputy Speaker..." Usually, the Deputy Speaker is elected within a couple of months of the formation of a new Lok Sabha, with the exception in the 1998-99 period, when it took 269 days to do so. By the time of the next session of Parliament, two years would have elapsed without the election of a Deputy Speaker. The issue showed up starkly this session when the Speaker was hospitalised. Some functions of the Speaker such as delivering the valedictory speech were carried out by a senior member.

The deterioration in Parliament's functioning is not a recent phenomenon. For example, the

Monsoon Session of 2008 had set some interesting records. That session went on till Christmas, as the government wanted to use a parliamentary rule that a no-confidence motion could not be moved twice within a session; instead of a winter session, the monsoon session was extended with breaks. That session also saw eight Bills being passed in the Lok Sabha within 17 minutes. The following Lok Sabha (2009-14) saw a lot of disruptions to work, with about a third of its scheduled time lost. Some things have improved: over the last few years, we have seen most Bills being discussed in the House and have had less disruptions. However, the scrutiny of Bills has suffered as they are not being referred to committees.

Parliamentary scrutiny is key
Parliament has the central role in our democracy as the representative body that checks the work of the government. It is also expected to examine all legislative proposals in detail, understand their nuances and implications of the provisions, and decide on the appropriate way forward. In order to fulfil its constitutional mandate, it is imperative that Parliament functions effectively. This will require making and following processes such as creating a system of research support to Members of Parliament, providing sufficient time for MPs to examine issues, and requiring that all Bills and budgets are examined by committees and public feedback is taken. In sum, Parliament needs to ensure sufficient scrutiny over the proposals and actions of the government.

M.R. Madhavan is President of PRS Legislative Research, New Delhi

Israel's democracy is facing a stress test

Societal fissures and ideological and cultural divisions have resulted in an offensive and antagonistic politics



KHINVRAJ JANGID

Israel is past its fourth election in less than two years, is in search of political stability and, once again, faces the crisis of not having a leader who can form a coalition government and survive a full term. The election results now have highlighted a fractured mandate where there are 13 parties, most with single digit seats; it is only the Likud party (right-wing, nationalist and neo-liberal) led by Benjamin Netanyahu that has 30 seats out of 120 seats of Parliament. Mr. Netanyahu has lost his political magic but Israel is unable to go beyond him.

Cooktions are the reality

The Likud party could very well be in a position to get to 61 seats with its meagre 30 seats by forming a coalition with other smaller parties that share the same ideological leanings and have the usual partners such as Shas (Haredi religious party with nine seats), Yamina, the new right with seven seats, Religious Zionist Party with its six seats, and United Torah Judaism with its seven seats. Single party majority is a mirage in Israel, while a coalition government is the reality. Yet, the Likud plus these do not ensure that the figure of 61 can be reached and this is

where Mr. Netanyahu is an issue. Parties led by second-rank leaders such as Yair Lapid, Benny Gantz or Gideon Sa'ar are opposed to him as he is the first Israeli Prime Minister on trial for three criminal cases – bribery, fraud and breach of trust. Benny Gantz formed a coalition with Mr. Netanyahu in the last election, in 2020, even when he campaigned on a single agenda, which was 'No Netanyahu'. It was a political calculation that affected his seat tally. In the last three elections, he got seats in the order of 35-33-33, respectively.

Weak spots in the system

The Prime Minister in Israel does not have to resign when charged and indicted in court – any other Minister or the President of state has to step down. This strange legal loophole has given a very long rope to Mr. Netanyahu who not only is in office but could contest election after election. Israel does not have a full drawn Constitution; it does not have an institutional mechanism therefore to uphold public trust and the legal dignity of the highest political office.

For a decade it has been Mr. Netanyahu who could form multiple alliances and coopt smaller parties (ultra-religious, economic liberals, nationalist, settlers, etc.) behind his strong leadership. Since 1996 (the year Mr. Netanyahu became Prime Minister for the first time), governments in Israel have lasted for an average 2.3 years. Once a unifier and a decisive leader, he has now become the dividing figure in Israeli domestic politics.



The last four elections, (in April and September 2019, March 2020 and now on March 23, 2021) have pushed the limits of Israeli electoral politics to new levels. Israel is now a leading democracy in the world with the most frequent national elections, a phenomenon which has exposed its deep-seated internal weakness. Israel does not have a basic common agenda any more.

For a long time, the issue of its conflict with neighbours and the Palestinians has served as a catalyst for national politics. But now, societal cleavages and ideological and cultural divisions have resulted in an offensive and antagonistic politics. Israel stands deeply divided and exposed.

Disintegration of society

The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), a Tel Aviv-based think tank, published its annual as well as a decade-long forecast of Israel's security at the end of 2020. The INSS is a highly ranked think tank that works very closely with the state. An inevitable war with the Hezbollah and Iran's nuclearisation are the two top threats to Israel's national security projected

in 2021-2030. The third issue that has posed another existential threat is the internal disintegration of Israeli society, leading to the loss of its social cohesion and its identity as a Jewish and democratic state. The long phase of dysfunction in the Israeli government (during the last decade when Mr. Netanyahu has been leading the most number of governments), is one of the greatest threats. This is the first time that the INSS's report points to internal domestic issues (not the conventional threats from outside) as being a major threat to the country's strategic situation.

Israeli society was divided from the country's inception, but Zionist labour was successful in working a common consensus. In-gathering of exiles, having the desert bloom and reviving the land of milk and honey were some of the threads used to weave a story that could unite culturally diverse and multiple ethnic groups among Jews.

After the rise of right-wing nationalist parties and a religious revival, post the 1967 war, there has been no common story to work with. Domestic schisms became aggravated and the multiple crises during COVID-19 did not help strengthen the fragile socio-economic fabric. All this affects the stability and the shared values that have characterised Israeli society and the way of life. Meanwhile, Israeli governments mirror the Indian phenomenon of the 'ayam ram, gaya ram' kind of coalition woes.

The President of Israel, Reuven Rivlin, has been expressing his anguish over this situation for a long time now. While the last government failed to complete even a year and collapsed, he said "there is a pressing need to revive the trust between the citizens of Israel and the state. That trust was damaged in the past year – seriously, maybe even critically".

India must take note
The inner political crisis of Israel is a wake-up call for Indian democracy. There are many in India who look up to the Israeli model of a military-led national security, its abilities to retaliate and carry out surgical strikes as well as its aggressive pursuit of power. This model may not serve Indian national security in the long run as the Israeli story unfolds. Strong nations are often those with social cohesion, common values and an inner-capacity for dialogue and compromise. Many of my students are surprised that Israel is also a weak, vulnerable, deeply divided society – contrary to what they gather from stories of the Israeli Army, Mossad and television series such as *Fauda*. Israel may not have a new stable government soon and there is already a situation developing – of a deadlock that might push Israelis to a fifth election. It is indeed a defining moment for Israeli democracy.

Khinva Raj Jangid is Associate Professor and Director, Jindal Centre for Israel Studies, Jindal School of International Affairs, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat, Haryana

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.

Vaccination drive

Notwithstanding the efficacy rate of different vaccines, the immunity conferred may not last for very long (based on what we have read), which in other words means that those who have been administered vaccines could still be vulnerable to COVID-19 even if the vaccination drive is increased manifold. It would take years even with accelerated vaccination. Therefore, vaccines are no more foolproof and a little bit of laxity on the part of those vaccinated will render them vulnerable again. So, a second course may be a must after every year until 70% of the population is inoculated. For now, the government has to accelerate the vaccination drive. In places such as

Mumbai, the younger generation who move about a lot, should be vaccinated en masse to contain the spread.

A.V. NARAYANAN,
Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu

■ It must be understood that the primary objective of vaccines is to prevent serious illness, hospitalisation and tragic ends. All the vaccines in use now seem fully capable from this angle regardless of their efficacy. It is a moot point whether the present surge could have been avoided by not having been lax with social conditions in recent months. But that is how the economy could be allowed to return. Pragmatically, the present surge is the cost that could not have been avoided. It is difficult now to hold people back. In a big country like ours, we should not expect

speeded up vaccination rate to make any dramatic impact in the near and medium terms. However, a big change in focus should be in order such as fully vaccinating Maharashtra on priority.

M. BALAKRISHNAN,
Bengaluru

■ More genomic sequencing, increased volume of epidemiological and clinical data and its meta-analysis will only reveal if the virus is more transmittable and is responsible for the surge. The existing vaccines have shown to neutralise many variants of concern, but additional research needs to confirm the extent of protection. The virus is evolving, and the pertinent point is that only a minuscule percentage of the population have got both the jabs of the vaccine. Acceleration of the

immunisation programme by including all above the age of 21, complemented by increasing awareness, and ease in getting the jab can increase vaccine uptake. More vaccines with higher proven efficacy need to be added. COVID-19 appropriate behaviour has to be enforced. The 1918 influenza pandemic took nearly two and a half years to subside. We need to learn from this.

D. BUJU C. MATHEW,
Thiruvananthapuram

■ Weakening democracy The electoral bonds scheme is not only a direct invitation to the hijacking of democracy by big money, but also an affront to the minimum rights of us citizens. The inaction of the judiciary and the ECI is totally disheartening. With the electoral bonds scheme and the GNCTD Act, a

common person like me has no incentive or reason to participate in the electoral process or even trust it. More than any Opposition party, the electoral bonds scheme and the GNCTD Act are matters which require the citizenry to rise up in protest against this choking of people's voices.

FIROZ AHMAD,
New Delhi

India in Afghan matrix
Afghan Foreign Minister Haneef Atmar's interview, wherein he has stated that excluding India from the Moscow talks was a mistake, should serve to dispel some of the misgivings about India's importance being belittled in ushering in peace, security and prosperity to the strife-torn nation. Given that India has hitherto shied away from engaging

with the distinctly anti-India Taliban, Russia apparently kept it out of the 'Troika' meet because it wanted to save it from the embarrassment of participating in the talks where the Taliban was an invitee. However, what is ironical is that apart from the fact that India and Russia have been sharing time-tested relations, India has been a staunch ally of Afghanistan and has been its largest regional donor. Most unfortunately, because of its geo-strategic importance, Afghanistan has been reduced to being the sacrificial goat in the power struggle between the West and Russia, and India being its neighbour has been unwittingly drawn into it.

NALINI VIJAYARAGHavan,
Thiruvananthapuram



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ASSEMBLY POLLS

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PHASE 1 IN ASSAM

Will anti-CAA stir prove a storm in a teacup?

Tea plantation workers are the deciding factor in most of the 47 seats in eastern and parts of central Assam that vote today

RAHUL KARMAKAR

GUWAHATI
Phase 1 of election on Saturday to the 126-member Assam Assembly is expected to test the impact of the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act movement and the loyalty of 'tea tribes' or Adivasi voters.

Political commentators say the tea plantation workers and migrant Muslims have traditionally voted *en bloc*. The Congress was said to be the beneficiary of both 'vote banks' until the BJP enticed the plantation workers in 2016 while the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) ate into the Muslim votes.

The Congress and the AIUDF are allies this time, but Muslims are a deciding factor in only five of the 47 seats in the first phase across eastern and part of central Assam.

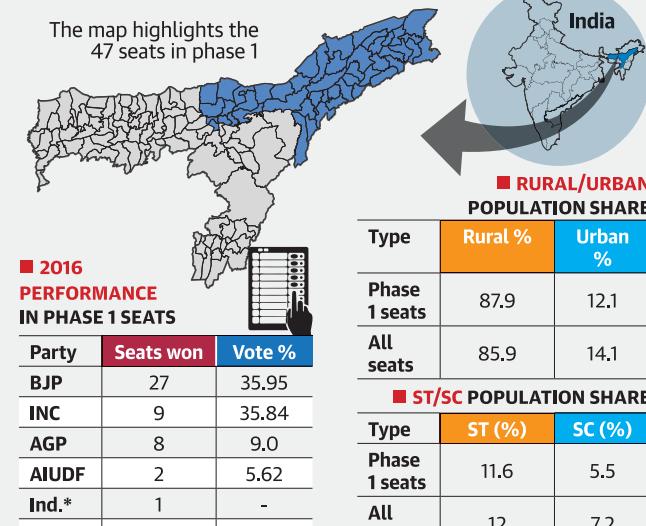
Wages matter

The voters that matter most in this phase are the tea plantation workers who call the shots in 38 of these seats. Apart from the issue of the daily wage, the Adivasis are one of six Assam communities demanding Scheduled Tribe status. Four of them – Chutia, Matak, Moran and Tai-Ahom – demanding ST status dominate several seats in this phase. "We have asked

Battle begins

About 88% of people in these constituencies reside in rural areas. Over 11.5% of the population in these seats belongs to the ST community. The share of literate population in these seats is just over 63%, almost 10% points lower than the State average

By Vignesh Radhakrishnan and Naresh Singaravelu



*Independent | Source: For election-related data; LOKDHABA
For socio-economic data: DEVDATALAB, CENSUS

members of our community to vote wisely for a party that will give them the wages and the ST status they deserve," said All Assam Tea Tribes Association president Stephen Lakra.

"The ST issue somehow seems to have waned after the anti-CAA movement. But the movement too seems to have lost intensity on the

ground, although a section of the people is aware. Cash benefits and other sops could be the reason," Jayanta Krishna Sarmah of Gauhati University's Political Science department told *The Hindu*.

While the BJP has claimed CAA is a non-issue, the Congress virtually hijacked it from the new regional front of Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP)

SHARE OF RURAL HOUSEHOLDS WITH MAIN INCOME FROM CULTIVATION	
Type	%
Phase 1 seats	31.8
All seats	29.2

PER CAPITA ANNUAL CONSUMPTION	
Type	%
Phase 1 seats	₹16,451 ₹26,098
All seats	₹15,337 ₹24,431

SHARE OF LITERATES	
Type	%
Phase 1 seats	63.6
All seats	73.2



Miles to go: Polling officials boarding a boat to travel to their respective centres ahead of the first phase of the Assam Assembly polls, in Dibrugarh district on Friday. ■ PTI

Home booth



Safe choice: Kathakali maestro Kalamandalam Gopi voting in his house at Varadiyam in the Wadakkanchery constituency of Thrissur on Friday. The arrangement helps 'absentee voters' (those above 80, differently abled or COVID-19 patients). ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Where hunger trumps politics

With basic survival at stake, the vulnerable Sabar tribe of Lalgarh in West Bengal has little stomach for elections

SHIV SAHAY SINGH

PUNAPANI

A tube well and a few houses built under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana are new additions to Punapani village in Lalgarh, which lost seven members of the Sabar community in November 2018, reportedly due to hunger and malnutrition.

Election posters and flags are not visible in Sabar *basti*, which is part of the Jharkhand Assembly seat. The members of the tribe have little interest in Saturday's election and do not even know the names of the candidates.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had claimed in 2018 that the deaths of the Lodha Sabars, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), were due to illness and old age, and liver problems caused by excessive consumption of liquor.

When this reporter visited the village, most of the women were out collecting firewood or fishing.

Mithun Sabar, whose parents died in November 2018, said there wasn't much food in the house back then. He displayed the new ration cards provided by the administration. Members of the Sabar tribe, including Mithun, are included as beneficiaries of RKSY-I (Rajya



Members of the Sabar tribe at Punapani. ■ SHIV SAHAY SINGH

Khadya Suraksha Yojana-I), where 5 kg of subsidised foodgrain is given to every family member. But having a card is no guarantee of grain. "Even if we are a day late, the dealer refuses to give us the ration," Mr. Mithun said. He also said he did not have a job card under the MGNREGA scheme.

Assured livelihood
Activist with the Right to Food and Work Campaign Anuradha Talwar, who had visited Punapani soon after the deaths, said that as members of the PVTG, Sabars are entitled to the benefits of the Antyodaya Anna Yojana, where 35 kg of foodgrain is given to every family.

Ms. Talwar, who had

shared a report with the government, had also said that steady work and income must be ensured to the community. However, the lack of any guarantee of work is evident at Punapani. Sukhami Sabar complained about lack of work and said her bank accounts had ₹92 and ₹101 but she could not withdraw any money.

The report, compiled by Ms. Talwar and others, had said, "By observation, we found almost all people of the Lodha Sabar Community to be stunted in growth and anaemic".

Ironically, even as the tribes are struggling to get what they are entitled to, the manifestos of all the major parties talk of food security.

84.2 %

the average 2016 turnout percentage in the 47 seats of Assam which are going to the polls in Phase 1 today. Dhang recorded the highest turnout of 92.1%

4 MLA seats

were won in 2016 by women among the 47 seats in Assam going to the polls in Phase 1. Two belonged to the Congress and one each from the BJP and the AGP



Today Kerala is unable to give its youngsters a future. This is the reality of Kerala, this is the reality of India

RAHUL GANDHI

Congress leader

POLL POURRI



'Will bring law against land jihad'

RAHUL KARMAKAR

GUWAHATI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday said the BJP would bring in laws against "love jihad" and "land jihad". Addressing party rallies at Kamalpur and Jagiroad, Mr. Shah said senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and AIUDF president Badruddin Ajmal were synonymous with "tourism" and "infiltration", respectively. "[Prime Minister Narendra] Modi is synonymous with development and public service, while Rahul Gandhi visits Assam for two-three days and then is not seen for five years. Maulana Badruddin Ajmal is synonymous with infiltration. You have to decide if you will go with development or infiltration," Mr. Shah said. He read out from the election manifesto to reaffirm the BJP's decision to bring in laws against "love jihad" and "land jihad", which refers to the encroachment on land belonging to a network of *satsras* (Vaishnavite monasteries) and wildlife preserves by alleged illegal immigrants.

had', a reference to encroachment by alleged illegal immigrants on land belonging to some 300 *satsras* (Vaishnavite monasteries) and wildlife preserves.

Batadrava, the seat the BJP wrested in 2016 from the Congress, is in this phase. The constituency is named after the Batadrava Satra, birthplace of 15th-16th century saint-reformer Srimanta Sankaradeva, an icon the BJP has appropriated. While many such "threatened" *satsras* are in western Assam, the "unthreatened" one is in Majuli, which Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal represents.

The first phase also has six constituencies straddling the Kaziranga National Park, parts of which are occupied by alleged Bangladeshis, who are also accused of rhino poaching.

AGP president Atul Bora is seeking re-election from one of these seats.

Mr. Bora is among four party presidents whose fate will be locked in the ballot boxes on March 27.

The others are State Congress president Ripun Bora (Gohpur), jailed RD president Akhil Gogoi (Sibsagar) and AJP president Lurinjyoti Gogoi (Dulaijan and Naharkatiya).

SVEEP campaign via pride parade

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI
The authorities of western Assam's Goalpara district on Friday organised a pride parade to focus the Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) campaign on voters

belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. "Goalpara district recorded a turnout of 89.3% in the 2016 Lok Sabha polls. We want to bridge the gap of 10.7% because each voter, irrespective of community, is important," the District's Deputy Commissioner, Varnali Deka, said. The pride parade followed campaigns with female sex workers, drug users and residents of remote villages on the border with Meghalaya.

Nandigram voters being intimidated

SHIV SAHAY SINGH

KOLKATA

Alleging that the voters of Nandigram are being intimidated, the Trinamool leadership on Friday approached the Election Commission urging it to ensure the security of voters.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is contesting against BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari from Nandigram, which will go to the polls on April 1. In a letter submitted to the Chief Electoral Officer, West Bengal Trinamool MPs Derek O'Brien and Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar have referred to nine locations where the BJP candidate is "harbouring armed criminals". Ms. Banerjee also raised concerns over the possibility of violence and electoral malpractice in Nandigram. "From March 28, I will be staying in Nandigram. I will keep an eye on everything. I will leave after the elections are over," Ms. Banerjee said, addressing a rally at Daspur on Friday.

Fight over 'bow and arrow' symbol

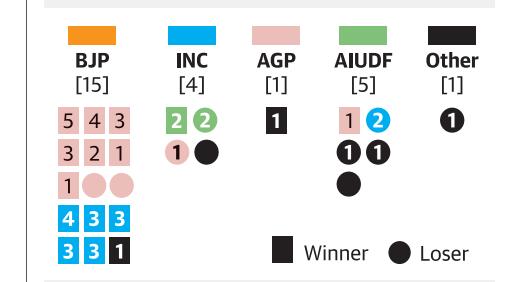
DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI
The Election Commission has decided that the Shiv Sena and the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha will not be allowed to use the bow and arrow symbol, which is reserved for them in their respective

States, for phases five to eight of the West Bengal election. In a letter to the West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer on Thursday, the Commission said since both parties had requested to use the same symbol for phase five to eight of the West Bengal Assembly election, and as per extant policy, the candidates of neither would be given the concession. Instead, they would be allotted one from a list of free symbols, it said.

DATA BYTE

Turcoats profile: Assam

Each box/circle represents a candidate who contested from or won a seat in the 2016 Assam elections. Only candidates who contested from a different party in their previous election are represented. The colour of the box/circle indicates the previous party of the candidate. The number inside the box/circle indicates the number of seats won by the candidate including in the 2016 polls. The BJP had 15 such candidates in 2016 of which 9 were from the AGP



SOURCE: LOKDHABA.ASHOKA.EDU.IN

FROM PAGE ONE

Poll bond sale can go ahead, says SC

The court rubbished the charge of electoral bonds facilitating anonymous and hefty donations from corporate houses to political parties. Anyone buying bonds would have to fulfil KYC (Know Your Customer) norms, the court said.

Purchase of electoral bonds was through banking channels. It would be easy to trace the money spent on buying electoral bonds from the expense sheets of companies. Mr. Bhushan had argued that electoral bonds purchased using white money through banking channels could be re-purchased

by an anonymous entity using black cash. "This contention arises out of ignorance of the scheme. Under Clause 14, the bonds are not tradeable. Moreover, the first buyer will not stand to gain anything out of such sale except losing white money for the black," the court responded in its order.

The court debunked fears that electoral bonds would help foreign corporate houses influence domestic electoral politics. It said the bonds could be purchased only by a person who was a citizen of India or incorporated or established in India.

India, Bangladesh must fight terror together: PM

"I pay my homage to those brave Indian soldiers who stood with the brothers and sisters of Bangladesh during the War of Liberation and gave their blood for the creation of a free Bangladesh," Mr. Modi said at the National Day Programme in the presence of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and President Abdul Hamid.

Recollecting the atrocities unleashed by the Pakistani military, Mr. Modi blamed "Operation Searchlight" of March 25, 1971 for unleashing a reign of terror in the country. "Their language, their voice and identity were being suppressed. The brutality of Operation Searchlight is not as widely discussed in the world as it should be," Mr. Modi said.

Mr. Modi said India and Bangladesh shared common goals and challenges, and that the two countries

should remain focused on dealing with the challenges such as terrorism. He added, "We have to be aware of the challenges that these forces pose to us and we have to remain united to combat them collectively."

Earlier in the day, Mr. Modi paid rich tributes to the martyrs at the National Martyrs' Memorial at Savar and said the sacrifice of the participants in the historic war would remain a lasting legacy in South Asia. He also planted an 'Arjun' sapling at the memorial grounds which contain unmarked graves of the martyrs. Beginning his interactions for the two-day visit, Mr. Modi met the leaders of the ruling alliance in Dhaka and interacted with a delegation of *muktijoddhas*, or former guerrillas who fought in the war. He also met leaders of Bangladesh's religious minorities.

'Clean up the list within a week to ensure fair polls'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday complained to the Election Commission of India about 'bogus voters' in the electoral list of Kerala and asked the EC to clean up the list within a week to ensure 'free and fair' polls.

The party alleged that State election officials colluded with the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government and asked the EC to register FIRs against such officials as well as voters who had registered themselves fraudulently under different identities or in different constituencies.

Kerala will vote in a single phase on April 6 and counting of votes will take place on May 2.

After the Congress delegation met the EC, party

Finance Minister T.M. Thomas Isaac said the inquiry would be subject to the approval of the Election Commission of India as the model code of conduct was in force for the Assembly election. "If the Election Commission clears the inquiry, the requisite steps will be taken soon

Dr. Isaac said the ongoing probes had not been able to come to any conclusion on



It is a serious issue and the aim is to destabilise the government. Let all issues in connection with the gold smuggling be probed... If the Election Commission clears the inquiry, the requisite steps will be taken soon

T.M. THOMAS ISAAC,
KERALA FINANCE MINISTER



controversial audio recording of Swapna Suresh, prime accused in the gold smuggling case, letter written by co-accused P.S. Sarith, and the statements of civil police officers that there was pressure on Swapna to give statements.

Both Swapna and Sarith had alleged that they were forced by investigating officials to name the Chief Minister, Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan, and Ministers as having links with people involved in the diplomatic gold and dollar smuggling cases. Official sources said Chief Secretary V.P. Joy would write to Chief



KERALA

Electoral Officer Teeka Ram Meena seeking the nod of the commission for the inquiry.

M. Sivasankar, the former Principal Secretary to Chief Minister is among those named in these cases. Besides the Enforcement Directorate, the Customs and the National Investigation Agency are inquiring into the smuggling case and the dollar case relating to alleged smuggling of \$1,90,000 (equivalent to ₹1.30 crore) by a former finance head of the UAE Consulate in Thiruvananthapuram to Muscat. Swapna and Sarith are also allegedly involved in the dollar case.

Congress complains to ECI about Kerala 'bogus voters'

Court seeks ECI's view

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOCHI

The Kerala High Court has sought the views of the Election Commission of India (ECI) on a petition filed by Leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala seeking action against what he alleges as large-scale enrolment of double/bogus voters on the

electoral roll published for the Assembly election.

Mr. Chennithala submitted that the ECI was being grossly lethargic towards the complaint. Asif Ali, counsel for the Opposition leader, submitted that the ECI had admitted that a large number of multiple voters were illegally enrolled.

general secretary and chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala held a press conference in which he pointed out three types of fraud: same voter registered in different booths; same voters with the same details and photograph registered in different Assembly constituencies; and finally photograph of the voter remains the same but the name changing in different IDs. "We have given evidence of

eight constituencies," he said. The party urged the Commission to clean up the voter list within a week and sought action against officers who facilitated the fraud.

According to Mr. Surjewala, the EC told the Congress delegation that an officer had already been suspended, written instructions had been given to clean up the list in eight constituencies and an officer had been deputed from Delhi.

Kerala will vote in a single phase on April 6 and counting of votes will take place on May 2.

After the Congress delegation met the EC, party

FIR filed against Jarkiholi on woman's complaint

She has accused former Minister of sexual abuse



A recent protest by the Aam Aadmi Party against Ramesh Jarkiholi. ■ K. MURALI KUMAR

Row over Shivakumar's name in clip

STAFF REPORTER
BENGALURU

Hours after the FIR was filed against former Karnataka Minister Ramesh Jarkiholi, a purported recording of a telephonic conversation between the woman (victim) and her family was leaked to the media where she is heard dropping the name of Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee president D.K. Shivakumar thrice in the seven-minute clip. This triggered a political storm.

However, *The Hindu* could not independently verify the veracity of this audio clip.

The BJP attacked Mr. Shivakumar and demanded that the Congress seek his resignation as party chief.

plaint, the woman accused Mr. Jarkiholi of sexually assaulting, cheating and threatening her after promising her a government job. She said the MLA had sexually assaulted her twice and forced her to share private photos and talk to him. He recorded videos of their interactions, she said.

Mr. Jagadish Kumar said his client would appear before the police if she and her family members were provided security.

No lockdown to fight virus: Telangana CM

32 deaths in four States; Karnataka's cases cross 2,500

STAFF REPORTER
VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh reported close to 1,000 new COVID-19 cases and two deaths, and Karnataka over 2,500 cases, the latter for the second consecutive day on Friday. Kerala reported 1,825 cases with a test positivity rate (TPR) of 3.49% while the incidence was 518 in Telangana on March 25.

Kerala's cumulative fatalities rose as 14 new deaths were added to the official list. Thiruvananthapuram reported five deaths, Alappuzha and Thrissur two each, while one death each was reported from Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Wayanad, Kannur and Kasaragod.

Of the 1,825 new cases reported, 1,612 cases were believed to be locally acquired infections.

Among districts, Kozhikode reported the maximum new cases at 262.

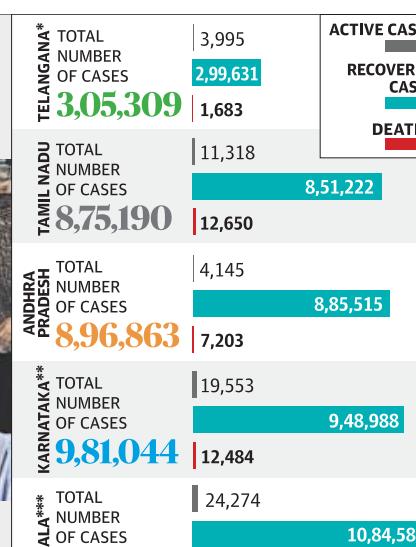
Telangana's COVID-relat-

Viral screening

Civic bodies have intensified testing to arrest the surge in COVID-19 numbers. The graph shows the spread of the pandemic in the southern States



Testing times: Corporation workers collecting samples at the K.R. Market bus stand in Bengaluru on Friday. ■ K. MURALI KUMAR



*Telangana numbers are as of 8 p.m. on Thursday | **Karnataka has 19 non-COVID deaths | ***Kerala has a mismatch of 310 cases due to unaccounted deaths, missing persons

ed deaths on March 25 stood at three.

The number of cases in the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation limits rose from 75 a week ago to 157 on March 25. Also, 35,733 first doses and 4,057 second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine were administered in the State on March 25.

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao on Friday ruled out imposition of lockdown under any circumstances and asserted that the State government would not take any hasty steps.

In his reply to the debate on Appropriation Bill in the Assembly, Mr. Rao said there would be no more lock-

downs or closure of industries. He appealed to the public not to panic on reports of lockdown. Mr. Rao said the decision to close down schools and colleges was painful but it was a temporary measure.

In Andhra Pradesh, four districts reported more than 100 cases each for the first

time in several months. In the 24 hours ending Friday morning, 984 cases were reported.

Visakhapatnam and Chittoor districts reported one death each.

More than half of the State's active cases were from Chittoor (766), Krishna (523), Visakhapatnam (504) and Guntur (431). Karnataka's 2,523 cases on Thursday rose to 2,566 on Friday with Bengaluru Urban reporting 1,490. The State recorded 13 deaths. Nine students in the Brhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike's school in Jogupalya tested positive. The school was declared a cluster and closed for 5 days. The students, who were asymptomatic, were admitted to HAL's COVID-19 Care Centre.

In Tamil Nadu, 1,971 persons tested positive on Friday. While the cases exceeded 700 in Chennai, Chengalpattu recorded a little over 200 cases.

(With inputs from Thiruvananthapuram, Hyderabad, Bengaluru & Chennai)

IN BRIEF



CBI books Andhra MP, kin on forgery charge

GUNTUR
The CBI has booked cases against Narsapuram MP K. Raghu Ramakrishna Raju and his family members who are directors of Ind Bharath Power Gencom Limited on the charges of criminal conspiracy and forgery, on a complaint by an SBI deputy general manager that they had siphoned off bank funds to the tune of ₹237.84 crore.

ED attaches assets in fake certificate case

NEW DELHI
The Enforcement Directorate has attached eight immovable properties worth ₹1.6 crore in a fake educational certificate case in Kerala. The assets are in the name of James George, the chairman of the Modern Group of Institutions, Kollam, and his wife Seema James. He is accused of forging certificates of various universities and supplying them to students and job seekers.

Will take a call on Kerala RS elections soon: EC

NEW DELHI
The Election Commission on Friday said it would shortly take a call on conducting elections for three Rajya Sabha seats from Kerala. It had earlier said that the polls would be held on April 12.

However, on Wednesday, the EC said it was keeping the decision in "abeyance", in view of the Kerala Assembly election on April 6.

Poll panel seeks action against hate video

CHENNAI
Tamil Nadu Chief Electoral Officer Satyabrata Sahoo has recommended to Director-General of Police to act against an unidentified woman for promoting "hate" between communities in a video clip. In the clip, she refers to the DMK's promise to encourage inter-caste marriages, adding that it would lead to social disorder.

SC puts off order on judge's chat case as phone goes missing

Justice Eswaraiah had sought quashing of the enquiry

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

In a curious turn of events, the Supreme Court postponed the pronouncement of its judgment at the last minute on Friday in an appeal filed by a former Andhra High Court judge, Justice V. Eswaraiah, after suspicions were raised that a "concerted effort" was afoot to wipe clean crucial evidence.

The case concerns a WhatsApp call between the former HC judge and a suspended judicial officer, Ramakrishna. The call allegedly contained several

damaging remarks about the Andhra HC and Supreme Court judiciary.

The High Court had ordered a judicial inquiry by former Supreme Court judge, Justice R.V. Raveendran, into the phone chat. Consequently, Justice Eswaraiah moved the apex court in appeal. He said the chat was private and Ramakrishna had recorded it without his knowledge and presented the recording before the HC in an unrelated case. A Bench led by Justice Ashok Bhushan was scheduled to pronounce its judgment on

Justice Eswaraiah's plea to quash the enquiry into the chat. Events however took an unexpected twist when senior advocate Kapil Sibal and advocate Vinip Nair informed the court that Ramakrishna had been arrested. Further, his phone was reported "missing" from the police station.

Mr. Sibal, appearing for an intervenor, M. Bhagya Rao, said there was "an underlying conspiracy to destroy crucial evidence... it is imperative that an impartial investigative agency takes over the investigation".

Police detain farmer leaders in Karnataka

STAFF REPORTER
BENGALURU

The Karnataka government drew the ire of protesters on Friday after the Bengaluru city police detained farmers' leaders and activists who were rallying against the three farm laws brought in by the Union government.

Samyukta Horata - Karnataka, a coalition of farmers, Dalits, and labour organisations spearheading protests, had given a Karnataka bandh call, but later withdrew it. They announced that they would instead hold a mock funeral procession for the three farm laws, in solidarity with the Bharat



Farmer leader Kodihalli Chandrashekhar being detained in Bengaluru on Thursday. ■ K. MURALI KUMAR

Bandh call given by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha, to mark four months of agitation in Delhi.

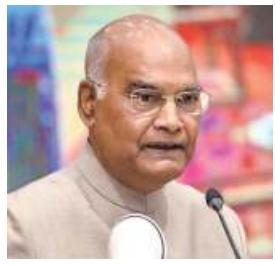
All the activists who were detained were released later in the day.

Bharat Bandh hits traffic in Punjab, Haryana, Delhi

Normal life was disrupted in Punjab and Haryana, the two States which have spearheaded the protest, even as the shutdown remained peaceful. Shops and commercial establishments were seen completely or partially closed except in the Chandigarh, where they remained open.

In Punjab, protestors blocked roads in over 250 places, including National and State highways, disrupting vehicular movement. Public transport was hardly seen on the roads.

In Haryana, Director-General of Police Manoj Yadava, told *The Hindu* that the bandh was "fairly strong" with around half-a-dozen blockades in each district on an average. Two National Highways, Delhi-Hisar and Delhi-Ambala, were also affected. Agitating farmers sat on the railway tracks at 11



Ram Nath Kovind

President undergoes check-up

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

President Ram Nath Kovind on Friday visited Army Hospital Research and Referral following chest discomfort, according to a statement issued by the hospital authorities.

"He is undergoing a routine check-up and is under observation. His condition is stable," it added.

ED searches premises of bank ex-CMD

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has carried out searches on two premises of Archana Bhargava, former chairperson-cum-managing director (CMD) of United Bank of India and former executive director of Canara Bank.

The ED's money laundering probe is based on a First Information Report (FIR) registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation against Ms. Bhargava for alleged disproportionate assets.

According to the FIR, Ms. Bhargava had amassed disproportionate assets of ₹3.63 crore during the period being examined, when she was occupying senior positions in various public sector banks. The searches were carried out by the ED to trace the proceeds of the alleged crime and to unearth evidence.

Heavy security for Phase I polling today

All arrangements made in West Bengal and Assam

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Heavy security arrangements have been made for the first phase of Assembly elections in West Bengal and Assam on Saturday.

The first phase in Assam will decide the electoral fate of several high profile candidates including Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal from Majuli, Assam Pradesh Congress Committee chief Ripun Bora from Gohpur, Speaker Hitendra Nath Goswami from Jorhat and Leader of the Opposition in the Assam Assembly, Debabrata Saikia, from Nazira.

A total of 264 candidates, including 23 women, are in the fray in the first phase, in which over 81 lakh voters across 12 districts will exercise their franchise.



All set: Polling officials carrying election material from a distribution centre in Assam on Friday. • PTI

The first phase polling in Bengal will take place in sensitive areas, that were once the stronghold of the underground Maoists, and hence the Election Commission has deployed 732 companies of Central forces in the five districts to ensure smooth polls.

According to the Chief Electoral Officer, West Bengal, strict guidelines for COVID-19 pandemic will be implemented in polling stations. Along with thermal screening at polling booths, the Election Commission has provided PPE kits for polling officers.

Was Aadhaar data breached, asks HC

BJP allegedly accessed mobile phone numbers of voters in Puducherry

MOHAMED IMRANULLAH S.

CHENNAI



The Madras High Court on Friday directed the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to ascertain immediately if Aadhaar data of citizens had been compromised.

The High Court asked the UIDAI to ascertain if the Puducherry unit of the BJP had been able to access mobile phone numbers of voters.

Democratic Youth Federation of India had not made any representation to it. The judges said the authority could have acted on the basis of information provided by the Election Commission.

Passing interim orders on the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) petition, the first Division Bench wrote: "It is apparent that the sixth respondent (BJP) political party may have resorted to a form

of campaigning (sending bulk SMS with links to join the party's booth level WhatsApp groups) not permissible under the model code of conduct."

It added, "Unfortunately, rather than the seventh respondent (UIDAI) authority trying to ascertain how the personal details of voters may have been leaked from its system, such authority accuses the petitioner of not having brought the matter to the notice of the relevant authority. The Election Commission, however, says that it has brought the matter to the notice of the seventh respondent. The seventh respondent should immediately ascertain how such material could have been accessed by a particular political party."

Earlier, the Puducherry Chief Electoral Officer informed the court of having issued a show cause notice to the BJP on March 7.

Senior counsel G. Rajapalan, representing the Commission and the CEO, said the BJP had not responded to the notice.

The Bench also took note of elaborate submissions made by the Election Commission with respect to the action taken by it and granted it till March 31 to file another status report.

When the petitioners' counsel complained that the bulk SMSs were being sent unabatedly even after the filing of the case, the judges said: "It is for the Election Commission to take immediate action if such is the case."

Mr. Navlakha has challenged the dismissal of his bail plea by the Bombay High Court on February 8. The High Court had upheld

'Vote for govt. that upholds democracy'

Congress will not implement CAA if voted to power in Assam: Manmohan Singh

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, in a video message to voters in Assam, has warned that their society is being divided on the basis of religion and language and urged them to vote for a government that "believes in the Constitution and democratic principles".

He said the Congress, if voted to power, will not implement the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and will try its utmost to get it repealed.

The Congress is committed to protecting the unique language, culture and history of Assam, Dr. Singh asserted.

"You must vote for a government that upholds the principles of democracy and the Constitution. You must vote for a government that cares for every citizen, every community. You must vote

Society is being divided on the basis of religion, culture and language. The basic right of the common man is being denied. There is an atmosphere of tension and fear

MANMOHAN SINGH

FORMER PRIME MINISTER



for a government that will ensure inclusive growth," the former Prime Minister said.

Dr. Singh, who represented the State in the Rajya Sabha for 28 years (1991-2019), said Assam enabled him to serve the country as a Finance Minister for five years and then as the Prime Minister for 10 years.

"However, it is now facing a serious setback. Society is being divided on the basis of religion, culture and language. The basic right of the common man is being denied. There is an atmosphere of tension and fear," Dr. Singh noted.

"Today, I am speaking as one of you. Once again, the time has come for you to cast the ballot in the Vidhan Sabha elections. You must vote wisely," he added.

The former Prime Minister said the economy, which

was already facing a challenge because of demonetisation and a badly implemented goods and services tax (GST), had become more vulnerable because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the high prices of petrol, diesel and cooking gas had made the common man's life difficult, lakhs of people lost their livelihoods and youth were looking for decent jobs, Dr. Singh said.

Congress guarantees

Stating that the Congress's five guarantees were practical, Dr. Singh said "five lakh jobs will be given in the public sector and 25 lakh jobs will be created in the private sector".

Enhanced daily wages for the tea workers, free electricity up to 200 units and monthly income of ₹2,000 for homemakers were the other guarantees of the Congress in Assam.

Gujarat may bring 'love jihad' Bill

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

AHMEDABAD

The Gujarat government is likely to introduce a Bill seeking to penalise forcible or fraudulent religious conversion by marriage in the Assembly next week.

The Bill will have provision for three to 10 years in jail and a fine of up to ₹5 lakh for a marriage in which forcible or fraudulent religious conversion has taken place.

The Bill amends a 2003 Act, and seeks to curb the "emerging trend in which women are lured to marriage for the purpose of religious conversion" as per its "statement of object."

A copy of the amendment Bill was made available on Friday in the Assembly.

Sonia recalls Indira Gandhi's role in '71 war

Sends video message to Bangladesh

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Friday sent a video message to Bangladesh on the occasion of the golden jubilee celebrations of the country's Independence and birth centenary celebrations of 'Bangabandhu' Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

In her message to Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and President Abdul Hamid, Ms. Gandhi recalled the role played by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the liberation of Bangladesh and the special bond between the people of the two nations.

"Fifty years ago, the courageous people of Bangladesh scripted a whole new destiny for themselves and transformed both history and geography of the sub-continent," she said.

"Over the past five decades, Bangladesh's remarkable



Sonia Gandhi

SC relief for Mamata's election agent

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday stayed the operation of a Calcutta High Court order to reinstate criminal cases against West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's election agent in connection with the Nandigram protests against land acquisition.

"Since the order which affects the petitioner (election agent) herein was passed without hearing him, we deem it appropriate to pass an interim order staying the operation of the order dated March 5, 2021," a Bench led by Justice Indira Banerjee noted in the order.

The petitioner, S.K. Supian, has contended he was not made a party in the PIL pleas and the reinstatement of the criminal cases has impaired his ability to discharge his functions as an election agent.

Ms. Banerjee had argued that the order was passed without hearing her election agent and that he had been denied a fair hearing.

Ms. Banerjee had also argued that the election agent had been denied a fair hearing and that he had been denied a fair hearing.

India, U.S. agree to resolve key bilateral trade issues

Investment relationship between countries discussed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

WASHINGTON

India and the United States have agreed to work constructively to resolve key outstanding bilateral trade issues and to take a comprehensive look at ways to expand the trade relationship, the Biden administration has said. United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai discussed the important trade and investment relationship between the two countries during her maiden phone call with her Indian

counterpart Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal.

Shared objectives

"They committed to strengthening cooperation on shared objectives and to revitalise engagement through the U.S.-India Trade Policy Forum. They also agreed to work constructively to resolve key outstanding bilateral trade issues and to take a comprehensive look at ways to expand the trade relationship," the United

States Trade Representative (USTR) said in a readout of the call on Thursday.

Ms. Tai, who was confirmed by the Senate only a few days ago, stressed the critical importance of cooperation on a broad set of issues, including digital trade, intellectual property, agriculture, labour, and climate and environment.

Ms. Tai and Mr. Goyal agreed to hold the next Ministerial-level meeting of the Trade Policy Forum during 2021, the USTR said.

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, RWS&S DIVISION, BALASORE	
Tel: 06782-262249, Fax: 262931, email: eerrws_bls@nic.in, eerrwsbls@gmail.com.	
NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH e-Tendering	
Identification No. 30 Dt. 18.03.2021	
1. Nos. of Work	: 20 Nos. RPWS schemes in Balasore District.
2. Estimated cost	: Rs.13,96 lakhs to Rs.165.82 lakhs
3. Period of completion	: 180 days to 330 days
4. Availability of bid document in Portal	: Dt.30.03.2021 at 10.00 hours to 08.04.2021 up to 17.00 hours through online.
5. Seeking of Clarification	: Dt.30.03.2021 at 10.00 hours to Dt. 07.04.2021 up to 15.00 hours
6. Date of opening of Bid	: Dt.09.04.2021 at 11.00 hours in the O/O E.E., RWSS Division, Balasore.
7. Name and address of the Officer Inviting Tender.	: Executive Engineer, RWS&S Division, Balasore
Bid Cost & Bid Security will be receipt through electronic payment by NEFT/RTGS. Further details can be seen from the e-Procurement Portal : http://tendersodisha.gov.in	
Executive Engineer, RWS&S Division, Balasore. OPR-25013/11/0015/2021	

NORTH EASTERN KARNATAKA ROAD TRANSPORT CORPORATION	
CENTRAL OFFICES, Stores & Purchase Department,	
Behind NEKRTC, Kalaburagi-1 Division office, Old ITI Building,	
MSK Mill Road, KALABURAGI, Tel & Fax: 08472 - 260502,	
Mobile: 7760686172 (COSP), 7760992029(SO),	
No. NEKT/CO/COSP/ 04 /2020-21. Date: 26.03.2021.	
NOTICE INVITING SHORT TERM TENDERS (THROUGH E-PROCUREMENT MODE ONLY)	
Short Term Tender through e-procurement portal for Supply, installation, Commissioning, operation and maintenance of Automated Driving Test Track at Regional Training Institute, Humnabad, Bidar district for driver skill test on Turnkey basis. Vide Tender no: T-17/2020-21, dt: 26.03.2021 is invited. Tender Value Approximate Rs: 1.00 Crore. Last date for submission: 06.04.2021 at 1700hrs. The details of Registration, Tender documents etc. are available at http://eproc.karnataka.gov.in . Mail to cosnpnekrtc@gmail.com or support@helpdesk.com for further information, if required.	
Sd/- Controller of Stores & Purchases, (Tender Inviting Authority)	

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER WATER RESOURCES CIRCLE JODHPUR						
No./Acct/2020-21/1665 E-NIT No. 01 YEAR 2020-21 Dated:-19.03.2021						
On behalf of Hon'ble Governor Rajasthan E-NIT No. 01 year 2020-21 is invited from eligible contractors for civil work for the following works under e-procurement procedure. The interested contractor shall have to be enrolled/registered with portal of www.eproc.rajasthan.gov.in for participating in the bidding process. The details are follows:-						
S. NO.	Name of work	Approx. cost (Rs. in lacs)	Earnest money in rupees	Tender cost Rs.	Processing fee M.D. RISL Jaipur	Completion period
1	Repair & Retrofitting of Dam, Bandi Sandhara Medium Irrigation Project Tehsil Jaswantpura, District Jalore UBNno. WRD2021WLOBO2144	1051.83	0.00 (Signed declaration by Contractor)	10000.00	1000.00	18 Months (Including rainy season)
Period for downloading tender documents 22.03.2021 to 10.04.2021 up to 6.00 pm						
Date time and place of pre-bid meeting 30.03.2021 3.00 P.M. office of the SE, WR Circle, Jodhpur						
Period for Uploading tender document up to 12.04.2021 upto 6.00 pm						
Physical submission of cost of tender document, processing fee through e-Glass Challan and Bid Security Declaration form on Rs. 50/- stamp duly signed (in the office of Superintending Engineer Water resource Circle Jodhpur or EE WRD Jalore)						
Date and Time of Technical bid opening 19.04.2021 up to 01.00 pm						
Other details are available in the following websites:-						
1. www.eproc.rajasthan.gov.in						
2. www.dppr.rajasthan.gov.in						
3. www.sppr.rajasthan.gov.in						
4. www.waterresources.rajasthan.gov.in						
DIPR/C/3328						

(Narayan Lal Kumhar)
Superintending Engineer
Water Resources Circle Jodhpur

TRANSMISSION CORPORATION OF ANDHRA PRADESH LTD. e-procurement TENDER NOTICE	
The APTANSO invites bids online for the works with Spec No. APT-e-50/20	

More vaccine coverage soon, says Minister

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Centre is planning to widen the scope of the COVID-19 immunisation drive by bringing more population groups within its ambit, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Friday, days after everyone above 45 was made eligible to get the vaccination from April 1.

He said people had embraced the 'Made in India' vaccines, and it is due to this enthusiasm and trust that the country crossed the last one crore vaccination in just under four days.

The nationwide vaccination drive was rolled out on January 16 with health-care workers getting inoculated first.

"A few days ago, the government announced that from April 1 all citizens aged 45 years and above, whether having any comorbidity or not, will be eligible to get vaccinated. The government is already planning to widen the umbrella of COVID-19 vaccine beneficiaries soon to cover other sections of the population," Dr. Vardhan said.

"I have often called 2020 the year of science. A vaccine development process that used to take many years, often decades, has been condensed to about 11 months," he said.

At least nine COVID-19 patients killed in Mumbai hospital fire

The facility was set up in a mall due to shortage of beds during last year's surge

STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI

At least nine COVID-19 patients were killed on Thursday night after a fire swept through a mall that also housed a dedicated COVID-19 hospital in the Bhandup area of Mumbai. Two others had died of COVID-19, officials said.

Officials said 68 patients were evacuated.

According to officials, nine patients died of suffocation from smoke as the fire engulfed the hospital.

According to Corporation officials, the fire started on the first floor of the Dream Mall near the Bhandup suburban railway station. The Sunrise Hospital is situated on the third floor and has a capacity of 107 beds. "At the time of fire, 78 patients were being treated," an official said.

Permission to run the hospital was given due to the shortage of beds for COVID-19 patients during last year's outbreak.

According to fire service officials, the fire spread from the first to the second floor and smoke engulfed the third floor.

"We managed to rescue 68 patients from the hospital with the joint effort of all agencies," the official said.



Rescue mission: Firefighters trying to control the blaze at a COVID-19 hospital in the Bhandup area of Mumbai on Friday. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

Those who were in ICU and on ventilation could not be evacuated, he added.

Case filed

"We have filed a case with the Bhandup police station and reasons behind the fire will be probed. Police will also check as to whether all permissions and NOCs related to fire safety were obtained," he said.

The rescued COVID-19 patients were shifted immediately to the nearby COVID care centres.

In a statement, the hospital said it was started under exceptional circumstances

in 2020 and has helped many patients recover.

"It is functioning with all due compliances such as fire licence and nursing home license. The hospital staff did a fantastic job in safely evacuating patients on wheelchairs and beds to the refuge areas and by following the fire drills," the statement said. It added that the fire alarm was set off by the smoke, following which all patients were evacuated.

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, who visited the site of the blaze, apologised to the families of the victims.

Announcing a ₹5-lakh

compensation to the kin of each of the deceased, he said, "We had given permission for temporary COVID hospitals due to the rise in the number of patients in 2020. This hospital, too, was given the permission under this category. All field hospitals and those within buildings must now undergo strict fire safety checks." He added that the permission for the said hospital was to end on March 31, 2021.

The Opposition BJP said the Maharashtra government and the BMC should take responsibility for the tragedy.

Jabs, AEFI deaths have no causal link'

Task force examines 412 cases of severe adverse events following immunisation

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

There is no direct causal relation established between deaths and COVID-19 vaccination with adverse events reported being well within the anticipated numbers, said the expert group investigating the adverse events following immunisation (AEFI).

The national committee looking at AEFI examined 412 cases of severe adverse events including 79 deaths (recorded until March 13) and found "that deaths happened in cases where the person had underlying conditions including heart problems, high blood pressure, diabetes", N.K. Arora, member, National Task Force on COVID, told *The Hindu*. He added that of the deaths that occurred, the cause included heart attacks or brain strokes in 50% of the cases and this was also seen in

20% of hospitalised cases. "With the expansion of the vaccination cover the numbers of these adverse events is expected to get diluted. The age group that was vaccinated included 45 years and above with comorbidities and those over 60. This is an under-stress group (medically) so the numbers of adverse events that we are seeing is anticipated," Mr. Arora said.

"Some persons, who were hospitalised, also displayed symptoms including allergies and anaphylaxis (difficulty in breathing, rash on body and drop in blood pressure). These were managed at the hospital," he added.

Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan earlier this week noted that the 45-plus age group has registered over 88% deaths due to COVID

with a case fatality rate for this age group being 2.85%. India started its immunisation drive on January 16 which has now been extended to all who are 45 years and above from April 1.

Meanwhile India on Friday reported 59,118 new daily COVID cases in the 24 hours to 8 a.m. on Friday, the highest since October 18 when 61,871 infections were recorded, said a Health Ministry release. The total active case load stands at 4.21 lakh currently. This is after touching a low of 1.36 lakh mid-February having come down from a high of 10,17,754 cases in mid-September last year.

Currently three States, Maharashtra, Kerala and Punjab together account for 73.64% of the total active cases in the country, while the country's cumulative recoveries stands at 1,12,64,637.

40% of RTI rejections did not cite valid reason, says analysis

Central Information Commission's report scrutinised

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Centre has only rejected 4.3% of all Right to Information (RTI) requests in 2019-20, the lowest ever rate, according to the Central Information Commission's annual report. However, almost 40% of these rejections did not include any valid reason, as they did not invoke one of the permissible exemption clauses in the RTI Act, according to an analysis of report data by RTI activist Venkatesh Nayak.

This includes 90% of rejections by the Prime Minister's Office. Public authorities under the Central government received 13.7 lakh RTI requests in 2019-20, out of which 58,634 were rejected for various reasons. Rejection rates have fallen since the 13.9% rate in 2005-06, and have been steadily trending downwards since the 8.4% spike in 2014-15. In 2019-20, they hit their lowest level so far.

The CIC's annual report covers more than 2,000 public authorities across the Central government as well as the union territories. An analysis of CIC macro-data from Central ministries by Mr. Nayak shows that the Home Ministry had the highest rate of rejections, as it rejected 20% of all RTIs received. The Agriculture Ministry's rejection rate doubled from 2% in 2018-19 to 4% in 2019-20. The Delhi Police and the Army also saw increases in rejection rates.

The RTI Act allows public authorities to reject RTI requests on a number of grounds, ranging from information which would endanger life and safety to that which involves irrelevant personal information, Cabinet papers, foreign govern-

States told to take up crowd control

India passing through critical phase'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla wrote to the States on Friday "to take necessary measures to regulate crowds" during upcoming festivals by enforcing COVID-19 appropriate behaviour such as wearing of masks and maintaining physical distancing.

Mr. Bhalla said the country was passing through a critical juncture as the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths had been on the rise in many States and Union Territories.

There was no direction for political rallies that were seeing huge crowds in poll-bound Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Puducherry and Tamil Nadu.

The letter said in view of the upcoming festivals such as Holi, Shab-e-Barat, harvest celebrations, Easter and Id-ul-Fitr, the State governments and the Union Territory administrations should take necessary measures to regulate crowds as mandated in the guidelines issued by the Union Home Ministry on March 23.

"After assessing the situation, guidelines for effective control of COVID-19 have been issued by MHA on 23.03.2021 wherein it has been emphasized that



Wearing of masks must be strictly followed, the Health Ministry said.

States/UTs should strictly enforce test, track, treat protocol, COVID-19 appropriate behaviour and prescribed SOPs on various activities, such as opening of schools, higher education institutions, hotels and restaurants, shopping malls, multiplexes, entertainment parks, gyms, exhibitions etc. Further, States and UTs, based on their assessment of the situation, may impose local restrictions at district/sub district and cities/ward level," the letter said.

The letter asked States to issue necessary instructions to the district administrations and police authorities to scrupulously enforce COVID-19 appropriate behaviour and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in all public gatherings during the upcoming festivals.

Chhattisgarh, Chandigarh under watch

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Two high-level multidisciplinary teams have been rushed to Chhattisgarh and Chandigarh, respectively, in view of a surge in the number of COVID-19 cases being reported from the State and U.T., a statement released by the Health Ministry said.

The teams will work with the respective State/UT government to ascertain the reason(s) for the surge, assist in undertaking gap analysis, and recommend requisite COVID-19 control and containment measures. The team to Chhattisgarh is headed by S.K. Singh, Director, National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and has experts from All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Raipur and All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, Kolkata. The team to Chandigarh is led by Vijay Kumar Singh, Additional Secretary and Financial Advisor, Ministry of Textiles, with experts drawn from Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital, New Delhi and Safdarjung Hospital, New Delhi.

"The deployed teams shall visit the most affected districts/hotspots in the State/UT to take a stock of on-ground implementation of public health interventions," said the release.

Night curfew starts in Maharashtra tomorrow

Malls to be closed from 8 p.m. to 7 a.m.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PUNE

In view of the spiralling number of COVID-19 cases in Maharashtra, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Friday instructed authorities to impose a night curfew across the entire State beginning Sunday night (March 28).

Mr. Thackeray said that the measure had been taken in an attempt to preclude congestion and curb the growing number of infections. The order issued by the State government has decreed that all shopping malls will remain closed from 8 p.m. to 7 a.m..

Mr. Thackeray warned of more stringent restrictions if people did not scrupulously follow COVID-19 safety rules. He further said that while he had permitted District Collectors to decide whether and when to im-



Uddhav Thackeray

pose lockdowns, he assured that there would not be any sudden State-wide lockdown and that the public would be given advance notice.

The move comes following a review meeting in which the Chief Minister interacted with all Divisional Commissioners, Collectors and other municipal and police authorities.

The government order said that no big programmes should be organised on Holi and Rang Panchari.

Rapid drive: More than five crore vaccine doses have been administered in the country since January 16. ■ AP

20% of hospitalised cases.

"With the expansion of the vaccination cover the numbers of these adverse events is expected to get diluted. The age group that was vaccinated included 45 years and above with comorbidities and those over 60. This is an under-stress group (medically) so the numbers of adverse events that we are seeing is anticipated," Mr. Arora said.

Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan earlier this week noted that the 45-plus age group has registered over 88% deaths due to COVID

No 'iron curtains' around electoral bonds, says SC

'Money trail can be traced online'

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A "little effort" will go a long way in piercing the veil of secrecy about electoral bonds, the Supreme Court said in an order on Friday.

"All that is required is a little more effort to pull out such information from both sides (purchaser of bond and political party) and do some 'match the following'. Therefore, it is not as though the operations under the scheme are behind iron curtains incapable of being pierced," a three-judge Bench of Chief Justice S.A. Bobde, Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian said.

Apprehensions allayed
The court dealt with apprehensions that corporate houses, domestic and foreign, could anonymously contribute hefty amounts to

parties and have a stranglehold over electoral politics.

The court said money spent by companies could be easily traced online on the website of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs.

Banking channels

"They can also be obtained in physical form from the Registrar of Companies upon payment of prescribed fee. Since the scheme mandates political parties to file audited statement of accounts and also since the Companies Act requires financial statements of registered companies to be filed with the Registrar of Companies, the purchase as well as encashment of the bonds, happening only through banking channels, is always reflected in documents that eventually come to the public domain," the court noted.

Hike in aviation security fee

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Central government has increased the aviation security fee payable by passengers to ₹200 from ₹160 for domestic passengers.

The same for international passengers has been increased to US \$12 from US \$5.2, according to an order issued on March 19.

The revised fee will come into effect from April 1, 2021. The fee is used to pay for the deployment of CISF personnel at airports.

Two held over Lawaypora attack

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

The Jammu and Kashmir police on March 26 said they had cracked the Lawaypora attack case, which left two CRPF jawans dead on March 25. They arrested two over-ground workers and seized a vehicle.

According to the police, members of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) were involved in the act.

SC stays non-committal on Rohingya issue

'Genocide anywhere is condemnable'

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday maintained a non-committal tone when its judicial conscience was tapped by advocate Prashant Bhushan about the atrocities Rohingya may face on deportation back to Myanmar.

"But will the word of a military government that has seized power through a coup be enough for the Indian government?" Mr. Bhushan asked.

Chief Justice Bobde said the Supreme Court could not refuse to recognise the sovereignty of another nation.

"The mere fact that another country wants them [Rohingya] back and you [India] want to give them is not enough. You cannot send anybody to a place where he can be killed or subjected to torture," Mr. Bhushan argued.

The top court reserved its order in the case.

The court hearing concerns an urgent application filed by NGO, Association for Democratic Reforms, represented by Mr. Bhushan, for the release of about 150 Rohingya reportedly detained in a Jammu jail and stalling of their deportation.

"So, you will deport only after Myanmar confirms?" the CJJ verified.

"Yes, we cannot deport a person from Afghanistan to Myanmar," Mr. Mehta said.

40% of RTI rejections did not cite valid reason, says analysis

Central Information Commission's report scrutinised

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Centre has only rejected 4.3% of all Right to Information (RTI) requests in 2019-20, the lowest ever rate, according to the Central Information Commission's annual report. However, almost 40% of these rejections did not include any valid reason, as they did not invoke one of the permissible exemption clauses in the RTI Act, according to an analysis of report data by RTI activist Venkatesh Nayak.



Instapick

Holi: Brands seem to be banking on the Holi weekend. There are parties in Goa, keeping social distancing norms in mind, we hope. And new chopper rides. Charter or book a seat on a heli taxi from places such as Delhi to Pushkar and Amritsar or Mumbai to Pune and Aamby Valley, offered by companies like Jet Set Go, Pawan Hans and Thumby Aviation in Bengaluru. ₹3,000 onwards. @jetsetgo



Talking point

Earth Hour: On March 27, along with turning off the lights at 8.30 pm for an hour, WWF is urging people to share the video posted on Earth Hour's social media pages. The goal? To help people see the role they play, and build momentum towards the upcoming UN conference on biodiversity. The Imperial New Delhi is hosting a dine-by-candlelight experience for the evening. earthhour.org

KRISHNA SHASTRI DEVULAPALLI

As always, Dear Reader, I bring you yet another exclusive story that very few people (other than me) know about. It begins with a hush-hush conversation that took place in the early 1870s in the city of San Francisco between two gentlemen (and I use the term loosely), a certain Jacob W Davis and a Levi Strauss.

'You know,' said Strauss. 'In the 21st century, the ancient, all-knowing land of India will become a superpower. And we can't let that happen, can we?'

'Oy gevuld, we can't,' responded Davis, popping a crisp golden-brown *latke* into his mouth. 'And I know exactly how to stop them.'

'How? How?' exclaimed Strauss, clapping his hands.

'Let us invent jeans!' said Davis. The two evil villains then took large sips of their Manischewitz, and roared with laughter like a Jewish Joginder and a Yiddish Yama. And thus began the slow erosion of our pristinely protected, Alok Nath-curated, jean-free culture.

Mind you, far-sighted men of our land saw what was coming – like they always do when it comes to the welfare of their sisters and mothers. And they kept warning us from time to time about the pernicious effect this evil garment would have on our demure, god-fearing *naris* were it left unchecked.

For example, a few years ago, legendary singer KJ Yesudas was among the first to raise an alarm about this toxic garment's evil



eligibility and jeans. 'No boy will marry a girl who comes to *mandap* in jeans,' he said, as culture-loving single Indian boys all over the world nodded in vigorous agreement. But when a young mother (accompanying her children) was seen in public, attired not just in jeans, but *ripped* ones, it took Uttarakhand CM Tirath Singh Rawat to step up to the culture plate. 'If such women go out, what kind of message are we giving out to society, to our kids?' he lamented, looking skywards. 'It all starts at home. A child who is taught the right culture at home, no matter how modern he becomes, will never fail in life.'

If at all anyone has atoned for their sins in this matter, it's Akshay Kumar. Back in 2009, when an as yet unenlightened Akshay Kumar was walking the ramp at a fashion show, intoxicated by the hallucinogenic vapours of this corrupting garment, he made his wife, not yet anointed Smt Hasya Haddi, unbutton his jeans in full public view!

Look at him today. He is on the cover of *Forbes*, the second holiest book in our land. He regularly drinks *gaumutra* by his own admission. And he is producing and starring in *Ram Setu*.

Follow him, ladies, and change. From those evil jeans into nine-yard saris with bulletproof *pallus*. And declare, in one voice, Messrs Strauss and Davis *andolan jeevis*.

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

SPIT TAKE

Andolan jeans

Despite many a man educating us on how evil jeans are, alas! Women just don't seem to get the message

influence on our hitherto obedient *moles*.

'Women should not wear jeans and trouble others,' he said at a public gathering to rousing applause. 'Whatever should be covered, should be covered. We appreciate what's concealed, and that's our culture.'

But did we pay heed? No, sir.

Our *betis* continued falling into the diabolical low-rise denim trap.

Around the same time, then Urban Administration & Development Minister Babul Gaur fearlessly highlighted the evil nexus between alcohol, dancing and jeans.

'Women in foreign countries wear jeans and T-shirts, dance with

other men and even drink liquor,' he said. 'But that is *their* culture. It's good for them, but not for India.'

Sigh. Still nothing changed. Women continued wearing jeans and dancing suggestively at non-Shivaratri, non-Garba events.

Union Minister Satyapal Singh weighed in, too, about bridal

Pick of the week

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



Modern Indian Art

Looking to add a VS Gaitonde or an MF Husain to your burgeoning art collection? **AstaGuru's Modern Indian Art** auction features 30 works, including two oil paintings by Gaitonde from 1970 and 1971, estimated at ₹12 to ₹16 crore. On March 30-31, on astaguru.com. Or are you interested in British artist **Sacha Jafri** who made headlines for selling the world's largest painting on canvas (\$62 million)? You may not find part two of *The Journey of Humanity* yet, but try tanyabaxtercontemporary.com.



Music on your mind

The National Centre of Performing Arts is hosting **NCPA-Citi Online Edition**, a webcast with both Indian and Western classical performances. Zakir Hussain with V. Selvaganesh, Niladri Kumar and Dilshad Khan, **Krishna Salunke** and **Aparajita Chakraborty**, will all be a part of this. March 28 to April 2, on NCPA's YouTube channel. For those into rhythm and flow, rapper KR\$NSA has released his debut album, *Still Here*. It features collaborations with Badshah and Raftaar among others, with the single, 'Khauf Hai'.



Lacoste x Polaroid

Lacoste and **Polaroid** have released a limited-edition capsule, inspired by the rainbow colours of Polaroid's famous logo. Handily, all the new looks in the collection – which includes polos and hoodies – can be documented with a limited-edition Polaroid 600, designed to look like a crocodile! Meanwhile, the **#ConsciousEffort Design Show & Conclave** is back. Shop as well as listen to panel discussions with designers, including Ruchika Sachdeva and Rakesh Thakore. On March 27, at The Imperial Hotel, New Delhi.



Freedom at the Barbizon

The Barbizon hotel "where almost every unmarried woman who came to New York resided" has also hosted Grace Kelly and Sylvia Plath. All this and more is brought to light in a new book, **The Barbizon, The New York Hotel that Set Women Free**, by award-winning historian Paulina Bren. HBO has secured the TV rights with actor Emilia Clarke set to produce. Back home, over 100 comic books have been launched for students of classes 3 to 12. Designed by **NCERT** based on its curriculum, they are available on diksha.gov.in.



World Theatre Day edit

This **World Theatre Day**, sit back and choose the play you'd like to watch. The collection comprises *One on One: Unlocked*, *The Colour of Loss*, *Nightmare, Butter and Mashed Banana*, and *Sex, Morality and Censorship*. From March 26 to 28. Free on insider.in. Are you an aspiring actor or scriptwriter seeking a little direction? **Drama School of Mumbai**'s newly launched e-platform, **Ekalavya**, offers eight theatre courses. Each takes about eight to 10 hours to complete. ₹2,999, on ekalavya.art.



Araku Valley in Bengaluru

After opening its first café in Paris, **Araku Coffee** has opened the second in Bengaluru. The two-storey café features a Modbar, a Sensory Bar – where one can experience manual brewing methods – and a book store. You can also learn about various aspects of coffee via courses by Araku World Speciality Coffee Academy. Meanwhile in Delhi, Empress of China, Eros Hotel, Nehru Place, is hosting dinner with a **Prawns from Seven Provinces** festival until March 29. Get them batter friend, pan seared, or baked in a clay oven.



Filming on your phone

Learn how to build visual narratives using a phone camera. The workshop, **Stories We Tell: Visual Storytelling Using a Phone Camera**, will be held by documentary filmmaker Samina Mishra. March 27 and 28. ₹500, insider.in. Want to lead an environmentally-conscious lifestyle but don't know where to start? This workshop by environment sustainability firm **Skrap** will look at the global garbage crisis, the impact, and simple solutions that we can take up. On March 27 at 11 am. ₹500, insider.in.



Dr Bill's X factor

From creating a Glenmorangie single malt inspired by cake to another designed for mixologists, whisky's Willy Wonka is ready for a changing world

RUMA SINGH

There's little doubt that the global pandemic changed the ways of the world. For brands, especially in the luxury space, it was time to pivot or perish. This included the tradition-bound Scotch whisky industry, and taking this challenge head on is The Glenmorangie Company, the Scottish jewel in the LVMH crown with two high-profile malt Scotch whisky distilleries, Glenmorangie at Tain in Ross-shire, and Ardbeg on the Isle of Islay.

Glenmorangie, the 175-year-old whisky brand, named the best-selling single malt in Scotland virtually every year for decades, is now acknowledging that single malt whisky is no longer the domain of tweed-clad older men

nursing a dram by the fireside.

That message comes across loud and clear in their latest marketing campaign for Glenmorangie Original. Yes, the vibrant Glenmorangie orange still saturates the minute-long video clip by celebrity photographer Miles Aldridge, but it features psychedelic scenes of fishbowls with orange fish, tattered melodies on tangerine grand pianos, whisky-sipping by bubble baths, in train compartments, on ferris wheels, on neon-bright balconies and on kaleidoscopic camping trips. The vibe is arresting, youthful, and playful, each scene an eyebrow-raising statement. Far from the monotone concepts of smoky men's clubs and misty peat bogs are the modern ideas of inclusivity, boundary breaking



(Clockwise from left) Glenmorangie The Quinta Ruban, a still from their marketing campaign, Dr Bill Lumsden, and a distillery warehouse ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Quick 6

Whisky cocktails made with premium malts. Yea or nay?

■ Absolutely yes! My favourite whisky cocktail right now is the Ardbeg 10-year-old Whisky Sour.

Smart whisky bottles, with an embedded chip.

■ We will see more and more of this. It gives the customer a guarantee of authenticity.

Collaborations with other creators.

■ Yes, this we have done, are doing and will do. We have done this with Japanese artist Azuma Makoto who makes creations out of flowers, for Glenmorangie's 18-year-old scotch. It helps bring your brand alive.

Your favourite style of whisky?

■ I do enjoy very smoky whiskies or sherrified whiskies, but my favourite style is fruity and smooth and elegant like the Glenmorangie 10-year, which coincidentally was the first single malt I drank as a student.

Small distilleries versus large ones.

■ Anything that adds variety to the mix is a good thing. But larger distilleries have grown large for a good reason: the product is excellent. Smaller doesn't mean better; it just means it is smaller. You can't correlate size with quality.

My last dram on Earth would be...

■ My last two bottles of 1981 Glenmorangie Manager's Choice from a single first-fill bourbon barrel, which I bottled when I was distillery manager. To me it's the most perfect Glenmorangie.

Tracing the roots of this hero ingredient found in everything from cica creams to beauty routines

Centella's beauty mark

VASUDHA RAI

Repair and heal are the new buzzwords in beauty. As lasers, retinols, acids, and microneedling become increasingly popular, there is high demand for products that calm irritated skin. Centella asiatica, prized for its wound-healing ability, tops the list, being the hero ingredient in cica creams prescribed by dermatologists to restore the skin's barrier. But while the ingredient is extremely popular in modern beauty routines, its benefits go beyond just skincare. It is an ancient herb, mentioned in texts such as the *Sushruta Samhita*, dating back to around 6 century BCE. Interestingly, it is prized for its soothing abilities in both modern and traditional medicine, even though the applications are different.

Ayurvedic roots
In Ayurveda, centella asiatica is known as *gotu kola* or *mandukaparni* and is prescribed to comfort the mind. "It improves cognitive function, reduces stress and anxiety, and purifies the blood," says Dr Gunvant Hari Yeola, ayurvedic physician and principal of the DY Patil College of Ayurved & Research

Cognitive boost

Dr Yeola explains how to consume it on the daily*:

- Take it in either powder or juice form. "Consume 10-15 ml (one large tbsp) juice every morning on an empty stomach or a flat tsp along with 1 tsp ghee or ½ cup milk, or plain water if you're vegan."
- This is a preventative herb to preserve intelligence and memory. "If you want to utilise this as a brain tonic, you have to take it for one or two years without break."
- The herb on its own isn't a magic pill – there is a code of conduct, part of *acharya rasayana* in Ayurveda, which helps it function better." This means speaking truthfully, being respectful, following circadian rhythms, not bingeing or eating an excessively spicy or *tamasic* diet.

*Check with a doctor or nutritionist before consuming

Centre in Pune. "It's often confused with *brahmi* or seen as its substitute, though it is cooler in nature." Indeed, if you read the fine print of most *brahmi* supplements or teas, you'll find that the ingredient is centella asiatica, not bacopa monnieri, the scientific name for *brahmi*.



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK



(Clockwise from right) Delphine Bouvier, the La Roche-Posay Cica Cream, Dr Sheth's Cica and Ceramide serum, Forest Essentials' Tejal Balancing Water, and the Re'equil Barrier Cream – all of which contain centella asiatica ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



In the last century, scientists isolated active ingredients from the herb for topical application, which propelled it to its current position of a skin soother. "In the 1990s, the Malagasy Institute of Applied Research, run by the famous Professor Albert Rakoto Ratsimamanga, developed medicines based on local plants, the most emblematic of which is Madecassol, a wound-healing product made from this plant," says Delphine Bouvier, Head Open Innovation, Sustainable Platform, L'Oréal. The cosmetic giant is now harvesting it in Madagascar to produce a variety of 'green centella' that guarantees traceability, fair wages, better extraction (thus consuming very little energy), and generating lesser greenhouse emissions.

A pinch will do
I can personally attest to this herb's wound healing abilities as I use cica cream after an overzealous tretinoin

application or a microneedling facial. If my job didn't entail trying new skincare then I would only have three products in my beauty cabinet – tretinoin to refine, cica cream to soothe, and sunscreen to protect. Strangely enough, when I mix raw centella powder into a DIY mask it has an opposite, stimulating effect, which gives the skin a gentle flush. This means that you only need to use the tiniest amount (about a pinch) in a face mask. It just shows that despite its popularity, we are only just discovering its wide scope of benefits.

Centella asiatica has become very popular also because it is antioxidant and anti-inflammatory, says dermatologist Dr Simal Soin, founder of New Delhi's Aayna Clinic. "We have realised that inflammation impacts everything – it is the root cause of both metabolic disease and skin ageing. Therefore centella has become more relevant than ever before."

Dr Soin prescribes the herb for both internal and external benefits. "If someone asks me for an overall supplement I give them something with centella, if someone has rosacea or does laser, I give



them a cica cream." Because the ingredient is healing in nature, she says that it can be used safely by all skin types.

After Korea, the world

Though the ingredient has been around for decades, it became popular being part of several cult Korean products including Dr Jart's Cicapair and the now notorious Purito Centella Green Level Sunscreen, currently under the scanner for its dubious SPF. Even though the ingredient is native to Asia, Korean skincare popularised it around the world. The fact that companies such as L'Oréal are investing in

centella is testament to its healing potential and will help preserve this ancient herb for futuristic cosmetic applications.

The writer is The Hindu Weekend's beauty columnist.



Stills from the film ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Gupta, Shruti Sharma, and Ashutosh Rana. But the film revolves around Sandhya. It was a tightrope walk, having to convince the audience she is void of sorrow as well as make them empathise with her. "I doubted if I could do it," says the actor, adding, "But Umesh and Guneet [Monga, the producer] were convinced that I could pull it off. And I had so many wonderful actors around me. That gave me confidence."

Being Sandhya

Bist's writing helped. While Malhotra says "the script was wonderful", she did not strictly stick to it. As filming progressed, she gradually accessed the character's mind. "There was a scene where Sandhya was supposed to cry. But this was the 30th day of the shoot and by then I was familiar with her. So, I felt she wouldn't cry in that situation. I am grateful that Umesh allowed me to intervene and was open to what Sandhya wanted to tell him."

Malhotra, in a way, became a conduit for Sandhya and Bist. The director agrees. "Sanya didn't perform; she lived the character," he says, lauding her subtle performance. "The artist is not attempting comedy in the tea-Pepsi scene. She is just trying to catch the right note. [The performance] is like playing an instrument. The tune of a sitar changes, for instance, depending on the emphasis you apply on a note. It's the same with acting. The pauses, breaths... if you can concentrate on and control these things, the emotions can significantly change."

Pagglait is now streaming on Netflix.

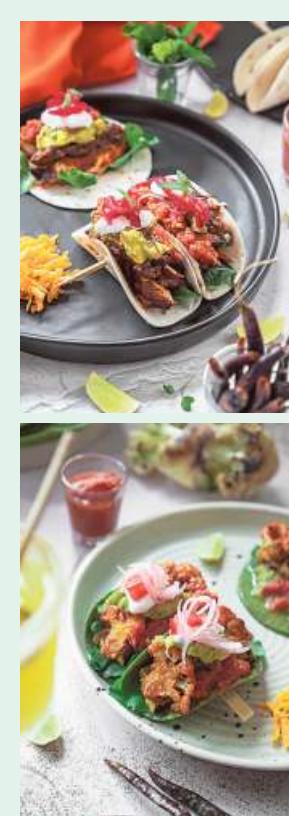
Watch Sanya Malhotra, Umesh Bist and Sayani Gupta in conversation with Praveen Suddevan on weekend.thehindu.com



FOOD SPOT

Have you done a salsa lately?

Mexican food has a number of ingredients Indians love, and Miss Margarita in South Delhi taps into this



Street style chicken taco, sweet potato-cauliflower taco ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

chicken chipotle quesadilla (₹625) was just that – hot with a sharp taste of cheese, while the charred sweet potato and crispy cauliflower taco (₹395) was a spinach tortilla, also topped with a hot sauce. The problem with the latter was that I didn't really get the taste of cauliflower or the sweet potato, as it had been overwhelmed by the sauce.

The pork carnitas tacos, however, were superb. Soft pork belly had been topped with a potato, pineapple and jalapeno salsa, smoked tomato salsa and refried beans (₹575). The chicken enchilada, the chef said, was a dish of chargrilled chicken, mixed with peppers and cheese, rolled in tortilla bread and topped with home-made fermented hot sauces, baked with cheese.

Chef Barnes takes pride in his "Fresh Guacamole Bar", where guacamole is prepared at the table with avocado, tomatoes, jalapeno, onion, coriander and lime, and served with chips. There is a smoked chicken guacamole, too.

There is a lot else on the menu: blackened Cajun fish taco (₹475), gondhoraj flavoured lime shrimp fajita (₹795) and a chicken casserole consisting of crispy, skinned chicken and spiced pilaf (₹775).

I ended the meal with my favourite churros, eaten with chocolate and chilli chocolate sauce (₹425). It is a simple dish – fried dough dusted with sugar and cinnamon, but it is the sauce that gives it its singular taste. I dipped the churros in the chilli chocolate sauce and thought that was a blend soft inside and crunchy outside – had soaked in the flavours.

The writer is a seasoned food critic



The widow who wouldn't cry

Sanya Malhotra's characters are never predictable and in *Pagglait*, her challenge has been to get audiences to empathise with a woman who cannot grieve

PRAVEEN SUDEVAN

There is a constant in Sanya Malhotra's performances – her impish smile. But the actor has not repeated a type of character in her six films. She has played, among other roles, a young wrestler in *Dangal*, a quarrelling sister in *Pataakha*, a shy student in *Photograph*, and an uncertain girlfriend in her 2020 release, *Ludo*. Malhotra, it is fair to say, has escaped typecasting.

"People used to ask me what kind of roles I would do and I would tell them 'I want to try everything'. Because I'm not a trained actor, I'll only learn if I do all sorts of roles." The timing of her entry into Hindi cinema was important, too. Subjects and characters that were offbeat are now mainstream, allowing talented actors like Malhotra to flourish.

Pepsi, please?
In her upcoming film, *Pagglait* (a derivative of crazy), she plays a young widow, Sandhya Giri. Her husband has died and she is unable to grieve, so much so that

when her mother wails, Sandhya asks her to stop crying. Later, when the mother offers her tea, she asks for Pepsi. When a friend, in the middle of a consolatory hug, tells Sandhya she found out about her husband's death through her sister's Facebook post, the latter dryly observes, "Yes, the post has 235 comments."

Those close to Sandhya feel she is abnormally normal. Her friend asks, "Why are you behaving like nothing has happened?" Her response: "You know, when I was a kid, we had a cat. She got run over by a car. I cried a lot. And I didn't eat for three days." She knows she can feel grief; she just can't feel it now.

Riding solo

While Malhotra, 29, has starred in other OTT projects such as *Ludo* and *Shakuntala Devi*, *Pagglait* – written and directed by Umesh Bist, known for films like *O Teri* and *Hero* – is the first film in which she plays the sole protagonist. It has a considerably big cast that includes Sayani



People used to ask me what kind of roles I would do and I would tell them 'I want to try everything'. Because I'm not a trained actor, I'll only learn if I do all sorts of roles

SANYA MALHOTRA

“

Watch Sanya Malhotra, Umesh Bist and Sayani Gupta in conversation with Praveen Suddevan on weekend.thehindu.com

Bangladesh protest turns violent, 4 dead

On 50th Independence Day, hardline Islamist group stages demonstrations against Modi's Dhaka visit

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

CHITTAGONG

Four supporters of a hardline Islamist group were shot dead in Bangladesh on Friday in violent demonstrations over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tour to Dhaka, officials said.

It comes as Bangladesh marks 50 years of independence from Pakistan with celebrations focused on its economic achievements, which activist groups say have been overshadowed by rights abuses. Police said four bodies of members of Hefazat-e-Islam, a hardline Islamist group, were brought to Chittagong Medical College Hospital after violence erupted at Hathazari, a rural town where the group's main leaders are based.

"We got four bodies here. They are all hit with bullets. Three of them are madrasa students and another a tailor," Alauddin Talukder, a police inspector at the hospital



Flashpoint: Members of the Hefazat-e-Islam group clashing with the police in Dhaka on Friday. ■ AFP

tal, said. He said at least four other demonstrators were critically injured.

Ruhul Amin, the government administrator of Hathazari town, said up to 1,500 supporters of Hefazat attacked a police station chanting anti-Modi slogans.

"They attacked us all of a sudden," he said, without confirming whether any

protesters were killed. Hathazari is home to one of Bangladesh's largest madrasas and is the headquarters of the Hefazat, which was formed in 2010 and is believed to be the country's largest hardline Islamist outfit.

Hefazat spokesman Mir Idris accused the police of "opening fire" at their "peaceful" supporters.

"There were some 5,000 protesters. They were all Hefazat supporters and they were mostly madrasa students. They were protesting Mr. Modi's visit and police actions against demonstrators in Dhaka," he said.

He was referring to other smaller clashes at the compound of the country's largest mosque in central Dhaka after Friday prayers when police fired rubber bullets and tear gas at brick-throwing Islamist supporters.

Hefazat is known for its nationwide network and large-scale protests demanding blasphemy laws in Bangladesh. In 2013, police clashed with tens of thousands of Hefazat supporters in Dhaka, leaving nearly 50 people dead.

Hefazat aside, a diverse range of Bangladeshi groups – including students, leftist and other Islamist outfits – have been staging protests over the last few days against

Mr. Modi's visit. They accuse Mr. Modi of stoking religious tensions and inciting anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002.

On Thursday, more than 40 people were injured, including four police officers, during a student demonstration. At least 33 people were detained for violence.

Celebrations hit

Clashes also occurred at Dhaka University on Thursday evening, when pro-government student activists allegedly beat dozens of anti-Modi student protesters. The violence has overshadowed Bangladesh's celebrations for 50 years of independence from Pakistan.

The former East Pakistan emerged as a new nation in 1971 after a brutal war involving India marked by horrific abuses that Bangladesh says killed as many as three million and displaced many more.

Some rioters posed 'zero threat': Trump

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

Former President Donald Trump on Thursday defended some of his supporters who rioted at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, saying they posed "zero threat" to the lawmakers, who were there to confirm Joe Biden's victory in the presidential race.

Mr. Trump told Fox News that law enforcement was "persecuting" the Capitol rioters, while "nothing happens" to left-wing protesters. He did acknowledge that those who stormed the Capitol "went in and they shouldn't have done it." But he added: "Some of them went in and they're, they're hugging and kissing the police and the guards. You know, they had great relationships. A lot of the people were waved in and then they walked in and they walked out."



Brian Kemp

crats also flipped both Georgia seats in the U.S. Senate in run-offs held in January this year.

The new law's controversial provisions include a cut in the number of weeks during which people can ask for absentee mail in ballots, restricted locations for ballot drop-boxes, outlawing the provision water to those standing in line at the polls, a prohibition on ballot counters taking breaks during counting. Crucially, the law increases the control of the State legislature has over the election machinery.

I

Georgia Governor Brian Kemp signed the Bill into law within two hours of the GOP-controlled State Assembly and Senate passing it along party lines. Mr. Kemp tweeted that the law would make Georgia's elections "secure, fair and accessible".

J

Jim Crow 2.0 is represented in that picture," Georgia lawmaker Donna McLeod told CNN.

S

Since former U.S. President Donald Trump's defeat at the polls last year, Republicans have proposed more than 250 Bills limiting voter access, according to a Reuters report.

M

Mr. Trump and his team had unsuccessfully litigated claims of voter fraud in multiple lawsuits across the country.

P

President Joe Biden, then a candidate, won Georgia, flipping the State after nearly two decades. The Demo-

Recently elected Georgia Senator Jon Ossoff tweeted out his support for Ms. Cannon, suggesting she was charged with a felony unfairly. "For 'knocking on Gov. Kemp's office door' as she tried to observe the cowardly closed-door signing ceremony for the voter suppression law."

Eritrea will pull out troops from Tigray: Ethiopian PM

It may bring an end to killings, abuses

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ADDIS ABABA

Eritrea will pull its troops out of Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said on Friday, a potential breakthrough in a drawn-out conflict that has seen atrocities carried out against civilians.

The announcement comes as Mr. Abiy, winner of the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize, faces mounting pressure to end fighting, in which both Eritrean and Ethiopian troops stand accused of abuses, including mass killings and rapes.

Mr. Abiy sent troops into Tigray on November 4 after accusing the region's once-dominant ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), of attacks on Army camps.

For months both Addis Ababa and Asmara denied Eritrean troops were in Tigray, contradicting accounts from residents, aid workers, diplomats and even some Ethiopian civilian and military officials.

Meeting with Afwerk
Mr. Abiy finally admitted Eritrea's role in an appearance before lawmakers on Tuesday, then flew on Thursday to Asmara to meet with Eritrean President Isaias Afwerk.

During that visit "the government of Eritrea has agreed to withdraw its forces out of the Ethiopian border," Mr. Abiy said in a statement on Twitter.



Abiy Ahmed
The Ethiopian National Defense Force will take over guarding the border areas effective immediately."

Eritrean Information Minister Yemane Gebremeskel did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment.

In a statement on Friday, his office made no mention of any deal on troop withdrawal, saying only that the two sides "agreed to hold follow-up consultative meetings" in Addis Ababa.

But the country's Ambassador to Japan, Estifanos Afeworki, said on Twitter that "as of today" Eritrean forces would "hand over all posts" that were "vacated" by Ethiopian troops when the conflict began.

Ethiopia and Eritrea fought a border war beginning in 1998 that left tens of thousands dead and resulted in a two-decade stalemate.

Mr. Abiy won his Nobel in large part for initiating a rapprochement with Mr. Afwerk after taking office in 2018, but Eritrea and the TPLF remained bitter enemies.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON

China slapped sanctions on several British politicians and organisations on Friday after the U.K. joined the European Union and others in sanctioning Chinese officials accused of human rights abuses in the Xinjiang region.

The U.K. responded by accusing China of violating human rights on an "industrial scale."

China sanctioned four British institutions and nine individuals, including prominent lawmakers who have criticised the treatment of the Uighur Muslim minority in Xinjiang. It said they

would be barred from visiting Chinese territory and banned from having financial transactions with Chinese citizens and institutions.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said the censure imposed by the EU, the U.S., Britain and Canada was based on "lies and disinformation, flagrantly breaches international law and basic norms governing international relations, grossly interferes in China's internal affairs, and severely undermines China-U.K. relations."

"China does not stir up trouble, but China is not afraid when others do," Yang Xiaoguang, China's charge

d'affaires in London, said at a news conference.

"China is not the first to shoot, neither will we be passive and submissive to threats from the outside," he said.

"Today's world is not the world of 120 years ago. The Chinese people will not be bullied."

War on Western brands

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson condemned Beijing's move, saying the sanctioned individuals "are performing a vital role shining a light on the gross human rights violations being perpetrated against Uighur Muslims."

"Freedom to speak out in

opposition to abuse is fundamental and I stand firmly with them," he tweeted.

Meanwhile, China on Thursday launched a PR war on Western brands critical of rights abuses against Uighurs and other minorities in Xinjiang, with celebrities severing ties to Nike and Adidas, H&M facing a boycott and Burberry dumped from a deal with a gaming giant.

Celebrities, tech brands and state media – aided by outrage on China's tightly-controlled social media – piled in on several global fashion brands, as China's vast consumer market was mobilised against critics of Beijing's actions in Xinjiang.

At least 32 killed in Egypt train collision

REUTERS
CAIRO

At least 32 people were killed and 165 injured when two trains collided in central Egypt on Friday, Health Ministry officials said, as Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly admitted the country's rail network needed modernising.

"Unknown individuals" triggered the emergency brakes on one of the trains causing it to stop, the rail authority said. The second train, which was travelling in the same direction, crashed into the first from behind, it added.

'Brazil virus deaths biggest genocide in our history'

Apologise to people, Lula tells Bolsonaro

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BERLIN

Brazil's over 3,00,000 deaths from the coronavirus amount to the "biggest genocide" in the Latin American country's history, former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said on Friday in a scathing attack on current leader Jair Bolsonaro.

"On Tuesday, 3,158 people died of Covid in Brazil. It's the biggest genocide in our history," Mr. Lula told Germany's *Der Spiegel* weekly, adding that Mr. Bolsonaro had lied to the Brazilian people about the pandemic.

As Brazil surpassed 3,00,000 deaths from the virus on Wednesday, Mr. Lula called on Mr. Bolsonaro to apologise to the families of victims.

Mr. Lula, 75, led Brazil through an economic boom from 2003 to 2010 before being sentenced to 26 years in prison on graft charges in 2017. The conviction was annulled earlier this month.

demic. "We must save Brazil from COVID-19," the former President added, saying that "Brazil will not withstand it if this man continues to govern in this way".

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CPRI invites applications for two positions of Project Engineers and two positions of Technical Staff on purely temporary basis, initially for a period of one year. Interested candidates may refer website www.cpri.in for details regarding eligibility criteria, educational qualification, experience etc. and submit their application as per the prescribed format posted in website with all relevant copies of documents by post latest by 15.04.2021. Applications received after the due date will not be considered.

Chief Administrative Officer

Firebomb attack at NLD headquarters

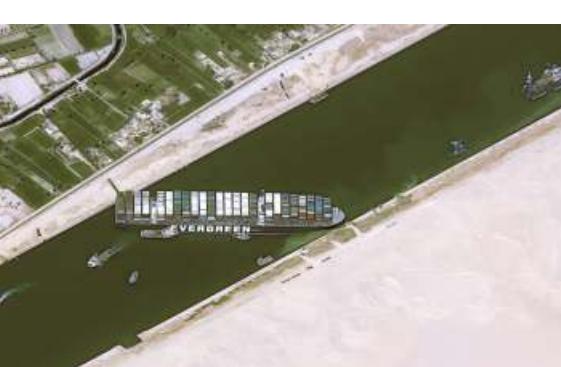
AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
YANGON

A fire from a hurled Molotov cocktail broke out early on Friday at the party headquarters of deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar's largest city, a party official said.

The country has been in uproar since the military ousted the Nobel laureate in a lightning putsch on February 1, triggering an uprising demanding a return to democracy.

Her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), has been in disarray since the coup, with some of its elected MPs in hiding.

At about 4 a.m. on Friday, an attacker hurled a Molotov cocktail at its Yangon HQ, causing a brief fire. "When the residents nearby knew about the fire, they called the fire service department to put it out... it was under control by around 5 a.m.," Soe Win, an NLD member, said.



Sticking around: A satellite image showing the stranded container ship MV Ever Given, operated by Evergreen Marine Corp, in the Suez Canal on Thursday. ■ CNES/AIRBUS DS/REUTERS

Egypt races to dislodge giant vessel blocking Suez Canal

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SUEZ

Tugboats and a specialised suction dredger worked on Friday to dislodge a giant container ship that has been stuck sideways in Egypt's Suez Canal for the past three days, blocking a crucial waterway for global shipping.

The Ever Given, a Panama-flagged ship that carries cargo between Asia and Europe, ran aground in the nar-

row canal that runs between Africa and the Sinai Peninsula.

It got stuck in a single-lane stretch of the canal, about 6 km north of the southern entrance, near the city of Suez.

The ship, owned by the Japanese firm Shoei Kisen KK, has blocked traffic in the canal. Around 10% of world trade flows through the canal. The closure also could affect oil and gas shipments

to Europe from the West Asia.

At least 237 ships were waiting for the Ever Given to be cleared.

A team from Boskalis, a Dutch firm specialised in salvaging, started working with the canal authority on Thursday. The rescue efforts have focused on dredging to remove sand and mud from around the port side of the vessel's bow.

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"When the residents

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trol by around 5 a.m.,"

MARKET WATCH

	26-03-2021	% CHANGE
Sensex	49,008	1.17
US Dollar	72.51	0.15
Gold	44081	-0.59
Brent oil	64.49	4.87

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	72.31	72.63
Euro	85.21	85.59
British Pound	99.52	99.97
Japanese Yen (100)	65.92	66.21
Chinese Yuan	11.05	11.10
Swiss Franc	76.86	77.21
Singapore Dollar	53.69	53.94
Canadian Dollar	57.53	57.78
Malaysian Ringgit	17.43	17.52

Source: Indian Bank

JSW Steel pays ₹19,350 cr. to BPSL creditors

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI
JSW Steel on Friday said it had paid ₹19,350 crore to the financial creditors of Bhushan Power & Steel Ltd. (BPSL) towards implementation of the resolution plan for acquiring the company. With the move, JSW Steel has closed the acquisition of BPSL.

Pursuant to the implementation of resolution plan, the inter alia included payment of ₹19,350 crore to the financial creditors of BPSL, JSW Steel said. It also said ₹8,614 crore had been arranged in Piombino Steel Ltd., a wholly owned subsidiary, which holds 100% in BPSL.

The PSL funds included an infusion of ₹5,087 crore by the company.

IN BRIEF



Bank of India raises ₹602 cr. via AT-1 bonds

MUMBAI
Bank of India (BOI) has announced that it raised ₹602 crore via Basel III compliant Additional Tier 1 (AT-1) bonds on Friday on a private placement basis. The bank had on Wednesday stated that it would raise ₹750 crore under this issue. The bonds carry a coupon rate of 9.30% per annum.

Ashok Leyland introduces 4-axle truck

CHENNAI
Ashok Leyland Ltd., the flagship firm of the Hinduja Group, rolled out four-axle 8x2 dual-tire lift axle (DTLA) truck built on AVTR modular truck platform. Called AVTR 4120, the new truck has a capacity of 40.5 tonne in gross vehicle weight (GVW) and offers an additional 5-tonne payload compared to standard 8x2 trucks, with a better total cost of operation, said the firm. It offers customer the flexibility to operate at a large band of GVW from 28T to 40.5T. It comes bundled with digital solutions and remote diagnostics.

Tata group stocks gain after SC verdict

Tata Steel jumps 6%, Tata Communications rises 4.1%; position vindicated, says Tata Sons

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI
Tata group stocks gained up to 6% on Friday after the Supreme Court set aside the NCLAT order restoring Cyrus Mistry as executive chairman of the conglomerate.

Tata Steel jumped 6.05%, Tata Communications rose 4.1%, Tata Motors went up 3.78% and Tata Power Company increased 4.92% on the BSE. Among others, Tata Consumer Products went up by 2.04%, Tata Investment Corporation by 2.65%, Tata Chemicals by 1.77%, Tata Metaliiks by 3.08% and Tata Steel Long Products climbed 2.58%. In a victory for the Tata Group, the Supreme Court on Friday set aside the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) order that had restored Cyrus Mistry as the executive chair-

The Tata-Mistry tango

2012 DECEMBER: Tata Sons board member and deputy chairman Cyrus Mistry named chairman to succeed Ratan Tata

2016 OCTOBER: Tata Sons board removes Mr. Mistry before completion of his tenure

- On being removed from boards of various Tata group companies, Mr. Mistry moves NCLAT alleging oppression of minority shareholder and mismanagement by Tata Sons

2018 JULY: NCLT issues order favouring Tata Sons

2019 DECEMBER: NCLAT sets aside NCLT order, reinstates Mr. Mistry as chairman of Tata Sons for his remaining term; it also declares appointment of N. Chandrasekaran as executive chairman illegal

▪ Mr. Mistry says he will not return as chairman but wants to be reinducted into Tata Sons board

2020 JANUARY: Tata Sons and Ratan Tata appeal to SC against the NCLAT order

2021 MARCH: SC sets aside NCLAT order that had reinstated Mr. Mistry

man of the conglomerate. A bench of Chief Justice S.A. Bobde and Justices A.S.

Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian said it is allowing the appeals filed by the Tata

group. "The order of National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) dated De-

cember 18, 2019 is set aside," the bench said. In a statement, Tata Sons said, "The judgment... vindicates the position of Tata Sons and upholds the governance standards adopted by the Tata Group over the years."

On December 17, the Shapoorji Pallonji Group had told the top court that the removal of Mr. Mistry as the chairman of Tata Sons in a board meeting held in October 2016 was akin to an ambush, and was in 'complete' violation of the principles of corporate governance and pervasive violation of the Articles of Association in the process.

The Tata group had opposed the allegations and said there was no wrongdoing and the board was well within its right to remove Mr. Mistry as chairman.

Suez Canal blocked, India eyes Cape of Good Hope

'Rerouting may take additional 15 days'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

With \$200 billion of India's trade flows with Europe, North America and South America at risk due to the blockade of the Suez Canal, the Department of Commerce has worked out an action plan to cope with the crisis, including possibly rerouting shipments through the Cape of Good Hope.

More than 200 vessels are waiting on the North and South sides of the Suez Canal and about 60 vessels are joining this queue daily, officials said.

"Such re-routing usually takes 15 additional days' time," officials were informed at a meeting. Shipping firms have promised to honour existing freight contracts, while ports have been advised to be ready for a bunching up of vessels once the canal is unblocked.

"If two more days are taken before the efforts result in clearance of the canal (digging on both sides), extra barges being added on every high tide, tugboats, etc. to straighten the stuck ves-

sel), the total backlog created would be about 350 vessels," the Commerce and Industry Ministry said in a statement, estimating this backlog alone would take about a week to clear.

Export promotion agencies have been asked to identify cargo with perishable items that need priority movement. Container Shipping Lines Association was advised to explore the option of re-routing ships via the Cape of Good Hope.

"Such re-routing usually takes 15 additional days' time," officials were informed at a meeting. Shipping firms have promised to honour existing freight contracts, while ports have been advised to be ready for a bunching up of vessels once the canal is unblocked.

"In the first-ever official development assistance (ODA) project in Andaman & Nicobar (A&N), Japan has approved grant aid worth ¥4.02 billion, or ₹265 crore, to improve the power supply in the islands, stressing the strategic geopolitical location of the islands for an open Indo-Pacific.

Japan has also extended yen loans worth ₹229.5 billion, or ₹16,186 crore, for executing four projects, including Delhi Metro's Phase 4 and Bengaluru Metro's Phase 2 expansion plans for which loan agreements were signed between the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the government on Friday.

"This is the first-ever ODA project in the strategic islands of Andaman & Nicobar (apart from humanitarian emergency assistance)," said a Japanese embassy official.

"Due to its geopolitical location, the islands play a crucial role in our shared vision for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific."

"Cooperation between Ja-



pan and India on these crucial islands demonstrate the commitment of both countries to realising a stable, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific," he added.

The grant would be used to procure 15MWh batteries as well as power system stabilisers to allow better utilisation of solar power generated in South Andaman.

A loan of ₹807 crore was extended for crop diversification in Himachal Pradesh and ₹3,272 crore in loans to rural water supply with a focus on mitigating fluorosis in Rajasthan's Jhunjhunu and Barmer districts.

Similarly, a ₹3,717 crore loan has been approved for developing 80 km of metro lines under the Namma Metro's second phase in Bengaluru. This would cover Line R6 (Nagawara - Gottigere, 22 km), Phase 2A (Silk Board - K R. Puram, about 20 km) and Phase 2B (K R. Puram - Kempegowda International Airport Terminal, 38 km).

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Bairstow, Stokes pummel India into submission to force decider

Opener's bruising 124 and one-drop's belligerent 99 help England chase down 337 and level series 1-1; Rahul's 114-ball 108, Pant and Hardik's blistering knocks in vain

ENGLAND IN INDIA

AMOL KARHADKAR
PUNE

Despite being billed as vital cogs across all the formats, Jonny Bairstow and Ben Stokes had had a quiet, if not ordinary, tour coming into the penultimate game in India.

The duo couldn't have asked for a better occasion than the must-win second ODI to make a sizeable contribution.

Such was the audacity of the onslaught from Bairstow and Stokes that England overhauled a stiff target of 337 without any fuss to level the series with a memorable win.

It was a pity that the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium wore a deserted look because of the pandemic. But the handful of host association officials, security guards and scribes who witnessed the action were left awestruck by the dazzling stroke-play of Bairstow (124, 112b, 11x4, 7x6) and Stokes (99, 52b, 4x4, 10x6).

Laying the foundation

Bairstow and Jason Roy (55, 52b, 7x4, 1x6) laid a solid foundation for the chase, but the game was in the balance when Roy was run out, thanks to Rohit Sharma's brilliance at short mid-wicket in the 17th over. At 110 for one, Stokes took guard. Bairstow didn't let the pressure of the scoreboard mount, continuing to find gaps at will.

There was hardly any dew, but the Indian bowlers were left dumbfounded as the pair mounted a brutal assault. Seldom did the batsmen play a slog.

In fact, the feature of their clean hitting was that most of the duo's sixes – 17 between



Raining runs: Jonny Bairstow and Ben Stokes' brutal assault left the Indian bowlers stunned though they had a mammoth 337 to defend, thanks to K.L. Rahul's fifth ODI hundred. ■ SPORTZPICTURES/BCCI



SCOREBOARD

INDIA

Rohit Sharma c Rashid b Sam Curran 25 (25b, 5x4), Shikhar Dhawan c Stokes b Topley 4 (7b), Virat Kohli b Buttler b Rashid 66 (79b, 3x4, 1x6), K.L. Rahul c Topley b Tom Curran 108 (114b, 7x4, 2x6), Rishabh Pant c Roy b Tom Curran 77 (40b, 3x4, 7x6), Hardik Pandya c Roy b Topley 35 (76b, 1x4, 4x4), Krunal Pandya (not out) 12 (9b, 1x4), Shardul Thakur (not out) 0 (0b); Extras: (lb-2, w-7); 9; Total (for six wkts. in 50 overs): 336.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-9 (Dhawan, 3.5 overs), 2-37 (Rohit, 8.4), 3-158 (Kohli, 31.6), 4-271 (Rahul, 44.5), 5-308 (Pant, 46.5), 6-334 (Hardik, 49.5).

ENGLAND BOWLING

Sam Curran 7-0-47-1, Topley 8-0-50-2, Tom Curran 10-0-83-2, Stokes 5-0-42-0, Moeen 10-0-47-0, Rashid 10-0-65-1.

ENGLAND

Jason Roy run out 55 (52b, 7x6), 1-9 (Jonny Bairstow c Kohli b Prasidh 124 (112b, 11x4, 7x6), Ben Stokes c Pant b Bhuvneshwar 99 (52b, 4x4, 10x6), Dawid Malan (not out) 16 (23b, 1x4), Jos Buttler b Prasidh 0 (3b), Liam Livingstone (not out) 27 (21b, 2x6); Extras: (b-4, lb-2, w-8, nb-2); 16; Total (for four wkts. in 43.3 overs): 337.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-110 (Roy, 16.3), 2-285 (Stokes, 35.2), 3-287 (Bairstow, 36.1), 4-287 (Buttler, 36.4).

INDIA BOWLING

Bhuvneshwar 10-0-63-1, Prasidh 10-0-58-2, Shardul 7.3-0-54-0, Kuldeep 10-0-84-0, Krunal 6-0-72-0.

Toss: England; MoM: Bairstow.

England won by six wickets with 39 balls to spare, three-match series level 1-1.

Third and final ODI: March 28, 1.30 pm.

■ Bairstow and Stokes sealed the deal between overs 31 and 35, pounding an astounding 87 as England soared to 281 for one

SOUND BYTES

It was a very good wicket to bat on, no doubt. The score says it all. We scored 330-plus and they chased it down in the 44th over. It was a flat wicket, challenging for the bowlers... the margin of error was very, very less

PRASIDH KRISHNA on the surface

There were a couple of chances that may have gone our way but we must give them credit for the way they played, the way they took on the bowlers

On the Indian bowling

There is definitely a method behind it, it is not just rash batting. The depth of batting does help, with someone like Adil Rashid, who has 10 First Class hundreds coming in at 10. The likes of Moeen Ali, Curran brothers... the guys just keep coming

JONNY BAIRSTOW on the counterattack

I believe there was a little GM (the bat stiker) behind the line. It would have been a real shame to lose a wicket like that (run out) at that stage and it would not be appropriate to say it out loud what Ben would have said had he been run out at that point

On the close run-out call that Stokes survived

Rookies steer New Zealand to series sweep

Bonner's maiden ton takes Windies to a draw

SL IN WEST INDIES

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NORTH SOUND
(ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA)

Maiden centuries for Devon Conway and Daryl Mitchell set up a crushing 164-run win for New Zealand in the third One-Day International against Bangladesh here on Friday, giving the hosts a series clean sweep.

Conway blasted 126 off 110 balls and Mitchell finished on 100 not out after New Zealand elected to bat, making 318 for six.

The scores: New Zealand 318/6 in 50 overs (Martin Guptill 26, Devon Conway 126, Daryl Mitchell 100 n.o.; Rubel Hossain 3/70) bt Bangladesh 154 in 42.4 overs (Mahmudullah 76 n.o.; Matt Henry 4/27, James Neesham 5/27).



Nkrumah Bonner. ■ AFP

the match at 236 for four, having been set the unlikely target of 375.

The scores: Sri Lanka 169 & 476 drew with West Indies 271 & 236/4 in 100 overs (Nkrumah Bonner 113 n.o., Kyle Mayers 52).

Verstappen leads first practice

BAHRAIN GP

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SAKHIR

Max Verstappen got the Formula One season underway on Friday with the fastest time in first practice for the Bahrain Grand Prix.

The Red Bull driver was .298 seconds ahead of Mercedes driver Valterti Bottas and .503 clear of McLaren's Lando Norris.

World champion Lewis Hamilton led early on for Mercedes but dropped back to finish with the fourth-quickest time.

Hamilton is looking for an eighth title to move ahead of Michael Schumacher. The latter's son Mick, making his F1 debut with Haas, finished the first session in 19th place.

However, in the men's sec-

Saina in last four; Srikanth crashes out

Ira Sharma's run ends; three doubles teams make the semifinals

ORLEANS MASTERS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PARIS

Saina Nehwal pulled off a thrilling three-game win over USA's Iris Wang to advance to a singles semifinal, for the first time in two years, at the Orleans Masters badminton tournament here on Friday.

The World No. 20 had to dig deep to script a 21-19, 17-21, 21-19 win over World No. 36 Wang in a grueling quarterfinal match that lasted exactly an hour.

Saina will next face Denmark's Line Christophersen, who ended the run of Ira Sharma with a 21-11, 21-8 win, for a place in the final of the Super 100 event, which is a part of BWF's revised Olympic qualification events.

Upset win

Ashwini Ponnappa and N. Sikki Reddy entered the last four stage of the women's



The wait ends: Saina made the semifinals of a singles event for the first time in two years. ■ FILE PHOTO

tion, top-seeded K. Srikanth was stunned 21-14, 21-18 win over the English pair of Chloe Birch and Lauren Smith.

The men's pair of Krishna Prasad Garaga and Vishnu Vardhan Goud Panjala outlasted the French duo of Christo Popov and Toma Junior Popov (Fra) 21-17, 10-21, 22-20;

Callum Hemming & Steven Stallwood (Eng) bt M.R. Arjun & Dhruv Kapila 21-19, 18-21, 23-21

Mixed doubles: Ashwini & Dhruv bt Max Flynn & Jessica Pugh 21-13, 21-18.

to make the semifinals.

The unheralded Indian duo will face England's Callum Hemming and Steven Stallwood, who stopped M.R. Arjun and Dhruv Kapila 21-19, 18-21, 23-21.

The results (quarterfinals):

Women: Saina Nehwal bt Iris Wang 21-19, 17-21, 21-19; Line Christophersen (Den) bt Ira Sharma 21-11, 21-8.

Doubles: Ashwini Ponnappa & N. Sikki Reddy bt Chloe Birch & Lauren Smith (Eng) 21-14, 21-18.

Men: Toma Junior Popov (Fra) bt K. Srikanth 21-19, 21-17.

Doubles: Krishna Prasad Garaga & Vishnu Vardhan Goud Panjala bt Christo Popov & Toma Junior Popov (Fra) 21-17, 10-21, 22-20;

Callum Hemming & Steven Stallwood (Eng) bt M.R. Arjun & Dhruv Kapila 21-19, 18-21, 23-21

Mixed doubles: Ashwini & Dhruv bt Max Flynn & Jessica Pugh 21-13, 21-18.

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to puzzle 13205

H	S	A	C	S	A	B
O	I	N	K	C	R	O
S	I	T	W	Y	R	R
O	S	I	R	H	D	O
S	I	R	U	D	O	C
M	U	I	I	A		
E	Q	U	P			
E	Q	U	P			
U	S	E	K			
B	A	G	H	D	A	R
G	A	H	D	O	C	I
A	R	E	S	U	P	
R	A	E	S	U	P	
S	K	A	T	E	R	B
C	R	E	T	E	R	I
R	A	E	T	E	R	I
S	C	R	E	E	B	L
G	R	E	E	B	L	O
B	R	E	E	B	L	O
H	O	T	E	E	R	A
W	U	G	E	E	R	A
R	U	G	E	E	R	A
H	O	T	E	E	R	A
W	S	D	H	D	S	Y

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

5	1	3	9	7	4	2	6	8
6	7	4	3	8	2	5	1	9
2	8	9	1	5	6	7	4	3
1</								

TV PICKS

Bahrain Grand Prix: Qualifying, SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 8.25 p.m.

FIFA WC European qualifiers: Sony Ten 1 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m. & 10.30 p.m.; Sony Ten 1 & 2 (SD & HD), 1.15 a.m. (Sunday)

IN BRIEF



Chaminda Vaas returns as Sri Lanka's bowling coach

COLOMBO Sri Lanka's fast bowling coach Chaminda Vaas returned to his job a month after quitting over a pay dispute that was 'amicably resolved' the cricket board said on Friday. The former Test player quit, days after replacing Australian David Saker, on the eve of the team's departure to the West Indies last month. AFP

Tour de France to start from Bilbao in 2023

PARIS The 2023 Tour de France will set off from Bilbao, marking the sixth time in 10 editions that the world's most famous cycling race starts outside France, its organisers said on Friday. This year's race will set off in home territory, beginning in Nice on June 26 and the next year in Copenhagen. REUTERS

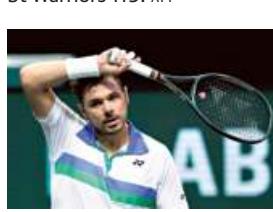
Mendonca wins Hungarian meet

CHENNAI Young Indian GM Leon Luke Mendonca emerged victorious in the 2nd Kumania GM chess tournament in Kisujszallas, Hungary, with a score of 6.5 points from nine rounds. The 15-year-old remained unbeaten and finished with four wins and five draws. Mendonca finished equal with Slovakia's Milan Pacher but took the top position on the basis of a better tie-break score. PTI



Fourth straight loss for LA Lakers

LOS ANGELES Reigning NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers endured a fourth straight defeat, falling 109-101 to Eastern Conference-leading Philadelphia 76ers on Thursday. Before the game, Sixers' Dwight Howard and Danny Green received the championship rings they won last year with the Lakers. **The results:** Spurs 85 lost to Clippers 98; Heat 122 lost to Trail Blazers 125; Knicks 106 bt Wizards 102; Lakers 101 lost to 76ers 109; Kings 141 bt Warriors 119. AFP



Wawrinka goes under the knife for a foot injury

PARIS Former World No. 3 Stan Wawrinka has undergone surgery on a left foot injury. The 35-year-old will miss clay court events in Marbella, Monte Carlo and Belgrade in April. He hopes to be fully fit in time for the May 23 start of Roland Garros. AFP

Greece fights back to hold powerhouse Spain

Winning starts for Germany, Italy and England

WC QUALIFIERS

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON

European giants Germany, Italy and England all got off to a winning start in World Cup qualifying, while Zlatan Ibrahimovic marked his return to international soccer with an assist to help Sweden to victory on Thursday.

There was disappointment for Spain, however, as it was held to a 1-1 draw at home by Greece.

In Granada, Alvaro Morata put Spain ahead in the first half but the visitors equalised with a penalty converted by Anastasios Bakasetas early in the second period in one of the team's few scoring chances.

Spain coach Luis Enrique brought youngsters Pedri and Bryan Gil on to improve

the team's attack but they couldn't do much to change the game's outcome.

The 39-year-old Ibrahimovic, who last played for Sweden at the 2016 European Championship, set up Viktor Johan Anton Claesson's first-half goal in a 1-0 win over Georgia.

He set up the goal after receiving a pass on his chest and scooping the ball into the middle of the area for Claesson's close-range shot in the 35th minute.

Human rights

Germany coach Joachim Low began his farewell tour with a 3-0 win against Iceland in Duisberg. Germany lined up before kickoff wearing T-shirts with its national-team jerseys bearing the message "HUMAN RIGHTS."

It was an apparent state-

ment about human rights abuses in Qatar, which is under scrutiny because of its discriminatory laws and conditions for the migrant workers who are helping to build infrastructure for the World Cup.

Later on Friday, world football's governing body FIFA said it will not sanction the German national team.

Comfortable

There was also a comfortable opening win for England, which beat San Marino 5-0 at Wembley.

After failing to qualify for the last World Cup for the first time in six decades, Italy got its campaign off to a positive start with a 2-0 win over Northern Ireland.

The results: Group B: Sweden 1 (Claesson 35) bt Georgia 0; Spain 1 (Morata 33) drew with

Greece 1 (Bakasetas 57-pen). Group C: Bulgaria 1 (Despodov 46) lost to Switzerland 3 (Embo 7, Seferovic 10, Zuber 12); Italy 2 (Berardi 14, Immobile 39) bt Northern Ireland 0.

Group F: Israel 0 lost to Denmark 2 (Braithwaite 13, Wind 67); Moldova 1 (Nicolae 9) drew with Faroe Islands 1 (M. Olsen 83); Scotland 2 (Hanley 71, McGinn 85) drew with Austria 2 (Kraljic 55, 80).

Group I: Andorra 0 lost to Albania 1 (Lenjani 41); Hungary 3 (Salai 6, Szalai 53, Orban 78) drew with Poland 3 (Piatek 60, Jozwiak 61, Lewandowski 83); England 5 (Ward-Prowse 14, Calvert-Lewin 21, 53, Sterling 31, Watkins 83) bt San Marino 0.

Group J: Germany 3 (Goretzka 3, Havertz 7, Gundogan 56) bt Iceland 0; Romania 3 (Tanase 28, Mihaela 50, Hagi 86) bt North Macedonia 2 (Ademi 82, Trajkovski 83); Liechtenstein 0 lost to Armenia 1 (Frommelt 83-og).



Opening salvo: Alvaro Morata's strike for Spain was not enough as Greece equalised via Bakasetas' penalty. ■ GETTY IMAGES

A three-way contest for the title

Gokulam Kerala takes on TRAU as they chase maiden title

I-LEAGUE

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Gokulam Kerala FC, Tiddim Road Athleti Union (TRAU) FC, and Churchill Brothers SC figure in three-way contest for the title making the concluding round of the Hero I-League's championship leg a virtual final.

The three teams have 26 points each but Gokulam is leading the race on account of having better statistics in terms of head-to-head results as compared to the other two.

The Kozhikode-based side will take on Imphal's TRAU at the Kishore Bharati Stadium, while other match will see two-time champion from Margao, Churchill Brothers, meeting another former champion Round-Glass Punjab FC (Mohali) at

The tie-breakers

- Gokulam, TRAU and Churchill Brothers are in contention for the trophy with 26 points each
- Gokulam will be champion if it beats TRAU, as it leads Churchill, which takes on Punjab FC, on head-to-head
- A draw will also do for Gokulam if Churchill loses to Punjab FC
- TRAU will take the title if it beats Gokulam as it has a superior goal-difference to Churchill in the event that the later beats Punjab FC

the Salt Lake Stadium. Both matches will start simultaneously at 5 p.m.

Both Gokulam and TRAU have been quite impressive in the championship leg where each has remained unbeaten while winning

three and drawing one match respectively. The calculation is straight for Gokulam – it just needs to beat TRAU to secure its maiden I-League crown.

Cannot relax

"This is a final for us, and we need to win this game. We are too excited, we cannot relax. The mood is fine, but we have just one thing on our mind and that is to win this game," said Gokulam Kerala coach Vincenzo Annesi on Friday.

The Malabarians had beaten the Imphal side 3-1 in the first phase and the result could spur the former to go for another successful outing.

TRAU also needs a win, which will keep it ahead of Churchill Brothers statistically in case of a tie on points.

Motorcycle Endurance Race on Sunday

SPORTS REPORTER
CHENNAI

The TVS Eurogrip MMSC Motorcycle Endurance Race to be run over two hours will be held at the MMRT Circuit here on Sunday with a record 48 team entries and a clutch of the country's top riders in the fray.

The two-hour Endurance race which will have a Le Mans (running) start, a unique feature of this format, will be contested in three categories - Pro-stock 301-400cc, Stock 165cc (restricted to under-25 riders) and Girls (TVS Apache RTR 200). Each team will have two riders.

All the bikes will be run on TVS Eurogrip tyres.

TENNIS ROUND-UP

Karman Kaur in last four

MONASTIR (TUNISIA): Karman Kaur Thandi beat USA's Amy Zhu 6-4, 6-1 to enter the \$15,000 ITF women's semifinals here on Friday.

In the €44,280 Challenger at Zadar, Croatia, qualifier Nemanja Fatic of Bosnia and Herzegovina beat second seed Sumit Nagal 5-7, 6-3, 7-5 in the quarterfinals.

Other results: €44,820 Challenger, Lugano, Switzerland: Doubles (quarterfinals): Szymon Walkowiak & Jan Zielinski (Pol) bt Purav Raja & Tristan-Samuel Weissborn (Aut) 6-4, 6-2.

Doubles (semifinals): Luca Casterlucci (Sui) & Arjun Kadhe 6-3, 7-6(5); Zane Khan bt Aidan McHugh (GBR) 4-6, 6-4, 6-0; Jonathan Mridha (Swe) bt Simon Carr 7-5, 2-6, 6-1.

Doubles (finals): Manish Sureshkumar bt Henry Patten (GBR) 3-6, 7-6(3), 6-4; Oliver Crawford (USA) bt Arjun Kadhe 6-3, 7-6(5); Zane Khan bt Aidan McHugh (GBR) 4-6, 6-4, 6-0; Jonathan Mridha (Swe) bt Simon Carr 7-5, 2-6, 6-1.

Over-35: Aditya Khanna bt Vipin Sirpal 5-0 (retd.).

Doubles: Aditya Khanna & Ashish Khanna bt Jitin Bishnoi & Avinash Kunwar 6-4, 6-2.

Over-45: Preetam Yashwant bt Gagandeep Wasu 6-3, 6-1;

Doubles: Raman Bhatiani & Rishi Kapur bt Anshul Bagai & Arun Mehta 6-2, 6-0.

Over-55: Nagaraj Revanasiddaiah bt Chandra Bhushan 6-1, 6-3;

Doubles: Arun Aggarwal & Nagaraj Revanasiddaiah bt Chandra Bhushan & Sharad Tak 6-0, 6-3.

Over-65: A.J.S. Chhatwal bt Bhag Nand Singh Negi 6-2, 6-4.

over-35 and over-55 events

respectively in the ITF Seniors tennis tournament at the DLTA Complex on Friday.

In the women's section, Deepa Mittal won the over-35 event in the league format, as she beat Bhavna Ravish and Shruthi Keerthi.

Sonal Vohra won the over-45 league, ahead of Rashmi Mohan, Nazneen Rahman and Neetu Bansal.

The results (finals): Men: Over-35: Aditya Khanna bt Vipin Sirpal 5-0 (retd.).

Doubles: Aditya Khanna & Ashish Khanna bt Jitin Bishnoi & Avinash Kunwar 6-4, 6-2.

Over-45: Preetam Yashwant bt Gagandeep Wasu 6-3, 6-1;

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Over-65: A.J.S. Chhatwal bt Bhag Nand Singh Negi 6-2, 6-4.

DELHI ROUND-UP

Fine bowling by Yash and Vivaan

A five-for by Yash Vardhan Sharma and three wickets for just five runs by Vivaan Jindal helped Sonnet Club beat Rohtak Road Gymkhana by nine wickets to enter the semifinals of the Harcourt Butler under-15 tournament.

The scores: RRG 114 in 21.2 overs (Priyanshu Sehrawat 74, Yash Vardhan Sharma 5/38, Vivaan Jindal 3/5) lost to Sonnet Club 115/1 in 16.2 overs (Prashant Raj 40 n.o., Akash Malhotra 37).

All-round show by Mayank

Delhi Under-19 player Mayank Malhotra top-scored with 62 and picked up three wickets as Mishra Sports beat Gyanti Academy by 187 runs in the Shashi Sharma memorial under-19 tournament.

The scores: Mishra Sports 287/9 in 40 overs (Mayank Malhotra 62, Tejas Dahiya 60, Samyak Jain 44, Akhilesh Semwal 4/57) bt Gyanti

Academy 100 in 20.3 overs (Mayank Malhotra 3/20).

Narrow win for Ravindra Academy

Man-of-the-Match Kaustubh Gupta made 86 as Ravindra Academy beat Dogra Academy by five runs in the 15th Swastik Cup Open.

The scores: Ravindra Academy 243 in 38.2 overs (Kaustubh Gupta 86, Rohit Rai 43, Tanush Sethi 3/37) bt Dogra Academy 238/6 in 40 overs (Saurabh Nautiyal 108, Ishan Verma 54).

Pinkey, Susmita run riot

Pinkey Kumari scored five goals and Susmita added four as Frontier Delhi FC thrashed Ahbab FC 15-0 in the Delhi Women's Football League. All other games on the day ended in draws.

The results: Frontier Delhi FC 15 (Pinkey Kumari 5, Susmita 4, Varsha Rani 2, Kanishka Bhatt, Sonal Arora, Ritika Diwakar, Jigysa) bt Ahbab FC 0; Hans Women FC 0 drew with Hindustan FC 0; Bangadarshan FA 2 (Shruti, Priya Tarafdar) vs

drew with Rangers SC 2 (Raziya Khan, Saloni); Sudeva Delhi FC 0 drew with Jaguar FC 0.

Sumit, Akshay take VJA to victory

Sumit Mathur made an unbeaten 123 and took four wickets while Akshay Saini added 138 and took three as Vidya Jain Academy beat RCC Club by 136 runs in the RCC Open tournament.

The scores: VJA 346/5 in 40 overs (Akshay Saini 138, Sumit Mathur 123 n.o.) bt RCC Club 210 in 31.5 overs (Sarthak Pal 58, Krish Yadav 49, Ranbir Singh 47, Sumit Mathur 4/32, Akshay Saini 3/21).

Half-centuries by Karan, Sarvesh

Karan Sharma and Sarvesh Rohilla's half-centuries helped Noida Wonders beat Youth XI by nine runs in the 7th all-India Ramesh Chandra Prasad memorial tournament.

The scores: Noida Wonders 259/6 in 40 overs (Karan Sharma 68, Sarvesh Rohilla