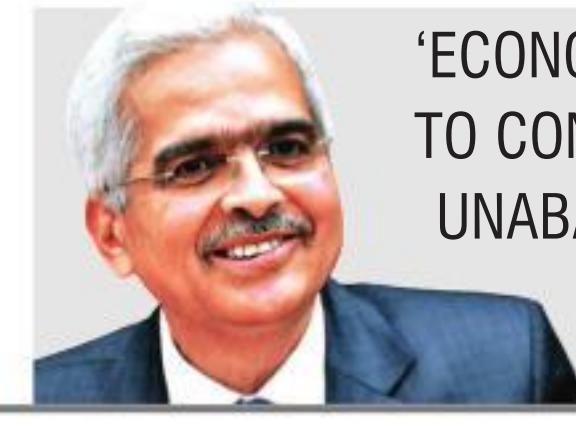




SC QUASHES FIR
AGAINST MUKHIM
OVER FB POST



'ECONOMIC REVIVAL
TO CONTINUE
UNABATED'

P4

P8



N.KOREA TEST-FIRES
BALLISTIC MISSILES
IN MESSAGE TO USA

SURYAKUMAR IS
READY FOR
BATTLE OF PUNE

P9

P12



WEATHER

Mainly clear sky. Strong surface winds during the day. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 32 and 18 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: NIL

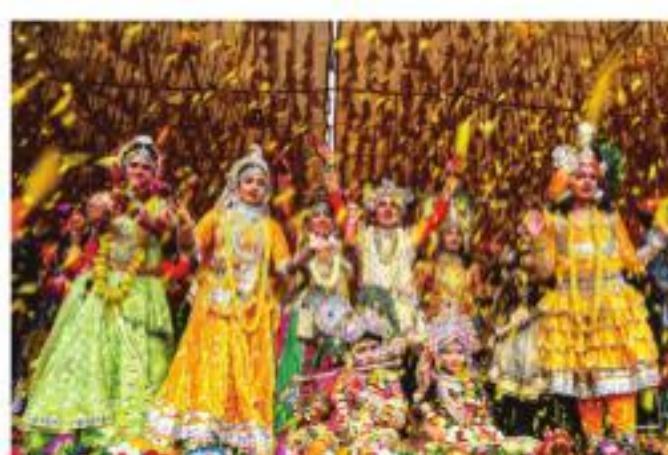
RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 79% Min: 35%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 29.6°C (-1) Min: 17.5°C (0)
SUN RISES 06:17 hrs MOON RISES 16:04 hrs SUN SETS 18:36 hrs MOON SETS 05:30 hrs

THUMBNAILS



Artists perform during 'Lathmar Holi' celebration, at Sri Krishna Janmasthan temple in Mathura on Thursday.

AGENCIES

Lok Sabha adjourned sine die: Ringing curtains over about two-month long Budget session of Parliament, the Lok Sabha on Thursday was adjourned sine die. The Speaker Om Birla did not come to Parliament as he has been diagnosed with Covid-19. BJD leader of the House Bhartruhari Mehta, who was in the Speaker's chair, adjourned the House sine die. The Lok Sabha session had started on 29 January amidst an unprecedented Covid-19. Earlier, Opposition leaders had urged for early conclusion of the Budget session in view of the ensuing Assembly polls in five states.

P5

Domestic violence complaints spiked in 2020: The number of complaints of domestic violence received by the National Commission for Women rose sharply from 2,960 in 2019 to 5,297 in 2020, the year of the lockdown when most people were confined to their homes due to Covid-19. The trend continues this year as well. The NCW received a total of 19,730 complaints of crimes against women in 2019 as compared to 23,722 in 2020.

India records 53,476 new Covid cases, highest in 5 months

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

India recorded 53,476 new Coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, 81 percent of which are mainly from six states, including Maharashtra, Punjab, Kerala, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat.

This is the highest single-day spike reported since October 2020 taking the total tally to 1,17,87,534 on Thursday.

According to the Health Ministry, Maharashtra and Punjab are turning out to be a major cause of worry as cases there have been increasing over the last two weeks.

The six states together account for 80.63 percent of the new cases reported in the last 24 hours.

Maharashtra continues to report the highest daily new cases at 31,855 (59.57 per cent).

Maharashtra alone accounts for 62.91 per cent of the total active cases in the country.

B'luru: RT-PCR -ve must for visitors

BENGALURU, 25 MARCH

Travellers from other states to the IT capital will now be required to produce an RT-PCR negative report, according to state health minister K Sudhakar. The rule comes into effect from 1 April.

Earlier, the requirement was limited to passengers from Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab and Chandigarh. "Now it will be applicable to passen-

gers from all states."

Briefing newsmen here today immediately after a meeting to review the containment measures for Covid-19 in the IT capital, the minister said about 1,400 cases were reported in the city, the highest in the last four months. The daily spike could also be attributed to the inflow of passengers from other states, accounting for 60 per cent of the cases.

The western region is followed by Punjab with 2,613 new cases while Kerala reported 2,456 cases.

Pune, Nagpur, Mumbai, Thane and Nashik are the worrisome districts in Maharashtra, while Jalandhar, SAS Nagar, Ludhiana, Patiala and Hoshiarpur are showing mas-

1,515 cases, 5 deaths in Delhi

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Delhi has continued to witness a spike in fresh coronavirus infections every day now. It today reported 1,515 Covid cases, highest in more than three months, while 5 more people succumbed to the pathogen, according to the health bulletin issued by the Delhi government.

(SEE P4)

have been discharged so far.

The national recovery rate is 95.28 percent. So far, 5.31 crore doses of the Corona vaccine have been administered in the country. Now, those over 45 years of age will also get Covid-19 vaccine from 1 April, irrespective of the co-morbidities, the Central Government has said.

FACT FILE

TOTAL CASES

1,17,87,534

ACTIVE CASES

3,95,192

NEW CASES

53,476

NEW RECOVERIES

26,490

TOTAL DEATHS

1,60,692

UNION HEALTH MINISTRY

FIGURES AS OF 8.00 A.M.

THURSDAY 25 MARCH 2021

This TN candidate ridicules politicians for trying to lure voters with freebies

HARASANKARANT N

CHENNAI, 25 MARCH

A helicopter, iPhone, three-storey house with swimming pool, a sum of Rs 1 crore to every household, a robot to do housework, 100 sovereigns of gold for women when they're getting married, Rs 1 crore to youth who wish to start businesses, Rs 10 lakh per month for people with disabilities, canals with a boat for every household, a 100-day trip to the moon, a 300-feet artificial iceberg to keep the constituency cool and also a rock-elaunchpad...of course there are poll promises of an independent candidate in Tamil



Nadu Assembly election. And to be honest he promises these utopian freebies to make people aware of the hollowness of the promises political parties put forward to them. And sarcastically.

The independent candidate from South Madurai, Thulam Saravanan is a serious contender. And his poll promises have gone viral. When you know that the aspiring politi-

cian's symbol is the dustbin, you may get the taste of sarcasm more. His posters in the constituency say, "Ner-mayin chinnam kuppaihoti", which could be translated as "the symbol of honesty is the dustbin."

According to the 33-year-old affidavit, he has Rs 10,000 cash in hand and Rs 2,000 in the bank. This is also astonishing when you know that most of the 4,000 odd candidates in the fray are crorepatis.

Saravanan, a reporter with a local daily, wanted to create awareness among voters about the false promises political parties making. Particularly to aware youths about it.

Modi hails B'desh's achievements on eve of Dhaka visit

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi today said his two-day state visit to Bangladesh from tomorrow would be an occasion to convey to Dhaka India's appreciation of the remarkable economic and developmental strides made by the neighbouring country under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

In a statement on the eve of his departure, he said he would also convey to the Bangladeshi leadership India's abiding support for the achievements made by the country and express New Delhi's support and solidarity for Bangladesh's fight

against Covid-19. Modi said he was happy that his first foreign visit after the onset of the pandemic would be to a friendly neighbouring country, with which India shares deep cultural, linguistic and people-to-people ties.

"I look forward to my participation at the National Day celebrations tomorrow, which will also commemorate the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation of Bangladesh,

↳ Modi said he was happy that his first foreign visit after the onset of the pandemic would be to a friendly neighbouring country, with which India shares deep cultural, linguistic and people-to-people ties.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Bangabandhu was one of the tallest leaders of the last century, whose life and ideals continue to inspire millions. I look forward to visiting Bangabandhu's Samadhi in Tungipara to pay my respects to his memory," he said. He said he also looked forward to offering prayers to Goddess Kali at the ancient Jashoreshwari Kali Temple, one of the 51 Shaktipeeths in

the Puranic tradition.

"I am particularly looking forward to my interaction with representatives of the Matua community at Orakandi, from where Sri Sri-Harichandra Thakur ji disseminated his pious messages," the Prime Minister said.

He said he would have substantive discussions with Sheikh Hasina following their very productive virtual summit in December last year.

He said he also looked forward to his meeting with Bangladesh President Abdul Hamid, and interactions with other Bangladeshi dignitaries.

Modi's visit to Bangladesh starts a day before the first phase of voting in the Assam elections in West Bengal

where the BJP is involved in virtually a straight contest with Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress.

A number of agreements will be signed and new announcements for intensifying cooperation in key areas will be made during the Prime Minister's visit, Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla told the media.

The areas in which pacts are likely to be signed include disaster management, trade and oceanography. New announcements of cooperation will be made in areas like culture, health, preservation of spirit of 1971, railways, education, border development, power cooperation and start-ups.



STATE TEACHERS' AWARD-2020

Chief Guest

Manish Sisodia

Dy. Chief Minister, Delhi

on 26th March 2021 at 5 pm |Venue: Delhi Secretariat



शिक्षित राष्ट्र, समर्थ राष्ट्र

"We can never repay the debt of our teachers.
They build the nation and shape the future of our society.
Let us resolve to always respect and honour our teachers"

-Arvind Kejriwal





Misogyny and the need to control women as per the wishes of men is so deeply embedded in BJP leaders that it's a matter of national concern now

ON DILIP GHOSH JUSTIFYING HIS CONTROVERSIAL STATEMENT ABOUT CHIEF MINISTER MAMATA BANERJEE

ACTOR-TURNED-POLITICIAN NUSRAT JAHAN

The Statesman
NEW DELHI, FRIDAY 26 MARCH 2021

03

'Centre insecure as Kejriwal rising as Modi's alternative'

Delhi deputy CM Sisodia slams the BJP-led Centre for pushing the controversial GNCTD Amendment Bill through Parliament that gives primacy to Lt Governor vis-a-vis elected govt

SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

A day after Parliament passed the controversial Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021 that gives sweeping powers to the Delhi Lieutenant Governor vis-a-vis the elected government, Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia slammed the Narendra Modi-led Centre over the legislation, alleging that it is feeling 'insecure' as CM Arvind Kejriwal is 'emerging as an alternative to Prime Minister Modi'.

Sisodia asserted that the AAP-led Delhi dispensation was taking legal opinion on the issue to decide the future course of its action.

"The GNCTD Bill passed by the Narendra Modi government reflects the deep insecurities of the PM and the BJP. We know that at present, the nation and the world is speaking of the Arvind Kejriwal model of governance and its diverse schemes," Sisodia told a press conference here.

People have begun to rely on the Kejriwal model of governance and feel that they have a choice to vote for someone



who actually works for them, he said.

"This is exactly what is making the BJP-led central government insecure that Kejriwal is emerging as an alternative to Modiji," Sisodia said.

"Our work has yielded positive results, the impact can be seen, which has led to the entire nation lauding the Kejriwal government. Today,

citizens of other states are also imploring their governments to provide basic facilities like free and 24x7 electricity. People want free and excellent education, they want hospitals with proper facilities," he added.

The Rajya Sabha last night passed the GNCTD (Amendment) Bill, 2021 despite uproar and walkout by the Opposition members. The Bill, com-

taking any executive action, a move that the Delhi government says will undermine the people's mandate and the elected government of the national capital.

Apart from this, the Bill also makes it clear that the "government" in Delhi means the "Lieutenant Governor".

Soon after its passage in the Upper House last night, the Delhi CM had said it was a "sad day for Indian democracy". The AAP supremo Kejriwal also asserted that their struggle to restore power back to the people will continue unabated.

Despite the Opposition's strong demand for its Select Committee scrutiny, and walk-outs by several parties, the Rajya Sabha last night passed the GNCTD Amendment Bill, which "enhances" powers of the LG in Delhi's governance.

In his hard-hitting reaction, Kejriwal, in a Twitter post, had then said: "RS passes GNCTD amendment Bill. Sad day for Indian democracy. We will continue our struggle to restore power back to people. Whatever be the obstacles, we will continue doing good work. Work will neither stop nor slow down."

mands (grain markets). If for some reason the money of the farmers does not reach their respective accounts on time, then they will be paid at the interest rate of nine per cent.

While responding to a query, Chautala appreciated crop payment systems of mandis for the convenience of the farmers of the state. He added the Haryana government will provide complete support if the governments of the neighbouring Punjab and Rajasthan request for adopting their model.

Meanwhile, Chautala said Haryana has become a model state in the country for sending money directly to the accounts of the beneficiaries within 48 hours of submission of their form in the

Haryana to bring out booklet on success stories of women in PRIs

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, 25 MARCH

Haryana Deputy Chief Minister, Dushyant Chautala, on Thursday said that a booklet showcasing the success stories of women representatives who have done "exemplary and outstanding work" in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) will be published so that other women draw inspiration from them.

Addressing 28 female members of PRIs today after presenting them with souvenirs for their commendable work,



Chautala, who also holds the portfolio of development and panchayats department, said that the state government was taking strong initiatives for women empowerment.

Chautala said that in order to ensure greater participation in the development work of women in rural areas, the state government has made a provision of 50 per cent

reservation for women in PRIs hoping this will play an important role in bringing positive change in the society. Director General, development and panchayat department, RC Bidhan said after conferring sash to these women representatives of PRIs, other women will also get inspiration.

Meanwhile, Chautala said Haryana has become a model state in the country for sending money directly to the accounts of the beneficiaries within 48 hours of submission of their form in the

mandis (grain markets). If for some reason the money of the farmers does not reach their respective accounts on time, then they will be paid at the interest rate of nine per cent.

While responding to a query, Chautala appreciated crop payment systems of mandis for the convenience of the farmers of the state. He added the Haryana government will provide complete support if the governments of the neighbouring Punjab and Rajasthan request for adopting their model.

SNOWLAND



A view of Sissu after fresh snowfall in Lahaul & Spiti. On Thursday.

LALIT KUMAR

HP techie-wheelchair player wins bronze in para national table tennis championship

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SHIMLA, 25 MARCH

A software engineer and wheelchair table tennis player from Himachal Pradesh, Piyush Sharma has brought laurels to the state by winning a bronze medal in the Para National Table Tennis Championship held in Indore.

HP Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur and Governor Bandaru Dattatraya have congratulated him for his success and termed him a source of inspiration for the younger generation. Piyush had earlier represented India in the Dutch International Para Table Tennis Championship in Netherlands. He now aims to represent India and win a medal in the International Paralympics scheduled in France in 2024.

Piyush has done B.Tech (Bachelor of Technology) from National Institute of Technology (NIT), Hamirpur.



According to expert Member of HP State Advisory Board on Disability and Chairman of Umang Foundation Ajai Srivastava, Piyush worked as a software engineer in a Dutch company at Bengaluru for four years after his B.Tech in 2016.

Srivastava said Piyush has also got a prestigious Tech-Leaders fellowship from Plaksha at Gurugram and is pursuing a PG programme. Plaksha sponsored him to participate in the national championships.

Piyush is an expert in artificial intelligence and is working on some projects which would make the life of disabled people easier. He is a motivational speaker and disability rights activist also.

Since childhood Piyush has been severely disabled due to some problem in his spine. His father Anil Sharma and mother Santosh Sharma struggled with him on a daily basis

to carry him to school on their backs as the inaccessible environment was the major problem apart from financial constraints.

Piyush studied in St. Edwards schools in Shimla. Social activists Uma Baldi and Madhu Sud helped him continue his studies and he was honoured by the Umang Foundation in 2013 for his outstanding achievements in academics.

Piyush was representing Himachal in the Para National Table Tennis championship for the last three years.

Piyush said the state government should come forward to support the disabled players in their coaching and should extend sponsorship for their participation in national and international events. "They should also give us recognition and reward in every manner at par with other players," he said.

Jai Ram campaigns for BJP nominees for Mandi MC polls

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 25 MARCH

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur on Thursday said Mandi Municipal Corporation (MC) is a "gift" from the BJP government for the people to ensure better development of historic town and sought support of people for MC polls.

The elections for four MCs of Dharamshala, Mandi, Palampur, Solan and six new Nagar Panchayats of the state are scheduled to be held on 7 April.

After inaugurating BJP Election Office at Mandi for Municipal Corporation elections, Thakur said that it was the BJP government in the state which created three new Municipal Corporations at Mandi, Solan and Palampur for ensuring systematic and planned development of these towns.

"All these towns are important from tourism point of view and Municipal Corporation status would ensure better civic facilities to the residents as well as tourists," he added.

Thakur further stated that it was the decision of the state government that elections to Municipal Corporations were being held on party s

ater. The Chief Minister also addressed election meetings at Daundi and Baini in support of BJP candidate for



the parliamentary election by a record margin of over 4.05 lakh votes, which was a record in itself for the Mandi parliamentary constituency.

Sharma played a major role in the development of the Mandi parliamentary area and the void left by him was difficult to fill, he added.

Two minutes silence was also observed on the occasion as a mark of respect to the departed soul.

State Jal Shakti Minister Mahender Singh Thakur said Mandi was fortunate to have a Chief Minister from the district to head the state and it was duty of the people of Mandi to strengthen his hands.

State Education Minister Govind Singh Thakur, MLAs Jawahar Thakur, Vinod Kumar, Inder Singh Gandhi, Hira Lal, Col Inder Singh, Kishori Lal, Surender Shourie, Prakash Rana were also present on the occasion among others.

HP ranked 1st in TB control among states with over 50L population

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 25 MARCH

Himachal Pradesh has achieved first rank in the country amongst the states with a population of more than 50 lakhs for its efforts to eradicate Tuberculosis (TB).

The state was felicitated for efforts to end TB at the national level programme organized at Ambedkar Bhawan, Delhi last evening on the occasion of World TB Day, which is observed on 24 March every year. State health Secretary Amitabh Awasthi said as per the sustainable development goals, the aim was to end TB by 2030.

"The country has committed to end Tuberculosis by 2025 and the state of Himachal Pradesh has set itself a goal to eliminate TB ahead of the national deadline," he added.

He further stated that this year the Government of India had also started the sub-national certification of the states and districts for the elimination of TB and from Himachal, 5 districts Una, Hamirpur, Kangra, Lahaul & Spiti and Kinnar had applied. This survey was conducted in February, 2021 and the results were compiled



and declared on the occasion of World TB day, he said, adding the Centre also ranks the states in terms of interventions under National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme. "The award was conferred at Delhi by the Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Dr Harsh Vardhan and Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, Ashwani Chouhan."

On the behalf of the state, this award was received by D. Nipun Jindal, Mission Director, he said.

Awasthi said amongst the districts which had applied for Sub-national Certificate, Lahaul and Spiti earned Silver medal because of its efforts, which was received by Dr Jagdish, District Tuberculosis Officer, Lahaul Spiti.

Kinnar, Hamirpur, Una and Kangra districts got bronze medals, which were received

Library opens in HP Raj Bhawan

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 25 MARCH

A library was inaugurated at the Himachal Pradesh Raj Bhawan here to facilitate the visitors and the Raj Bhawan staff access books there. Governor Bandaru Dattatraya inaugurated the facility and presented a set of books for the library.

The Governor said that due to the availability of electronic facilities, people are becoming less fond of reading books. "Books are not only means of knowledge but also a good friend," he said. Dattatraya

said such libraries should be developed institutionally to develop the reading habits. He directed the Raj Bhawan Secretariat to get books related to various fields. Secretary to the Governor Rakesh Kanwar welcomed the Governor on the occasion and made him aware of the facilities provided in the newly constructed conference room.



Branded T.SHIRT SALE 2XL, 3XL, 4XL, Plus size T-Shirt also available
Up to 60% Off
KIDS SUMMER camp Introducing huge range of Shorts & Lovers
By Economy Sales: 9212758425

ARROW **ColorPlus** **PARK AVENUE** **Raymond**

- PUNCHKUAN ROAD, Garwal Bhawan, (Near Jhandewalan, Gole Chkr.)
- WAZIRPUR A-5, Near Richi Rich Banquet (Opp. Shalimar Bagh)
- JANAKPUR 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



NDA releases Kerala manifesto that is a farrago of venomous claims on 'love Jihad', hollow promises and fantasy welfare schemes stolen from their opponents

SENIOR CONGRESS LEADER SHASHI THAROOR
SLAMMING THE BJP FOR ITS KERALA POLL MANIFESTO

India

India, Pak conclude water-sharing talks

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Amid speculation about formal resumption of the stalled dialogue between them, India and Pakistan concluded a two-day meeting under the Indus Waters Treaty during which Islamabad raised objections to the designs of Pakal Dul and Lower Kalnai hydropower projects in Jammu and Kashmir.

The meeting, which was the first high-level dialogue between the two countries after more than two years, saw the two delegations discussing all issues in a free and frank manner.

"Discussions continued on designs of two Indian projects, namely, Pakal Dul (1000 MW) and Lower Kalnai (48 MW). The Indian side held that these projects are fully compliant with the provisions of the Treaty and provided technical data in support of its position," an External Affairs Ministry release said.

The Pakistani delegation requested India for sharing of information on design of other hydropower projects being planned to be developed by India in Ladakh after the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019.

With 1,515 fresh cases, Delhi sees another virus spike; 5 deaths logged

SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Delhi has continued to witness a spike in fresh coronavirus infections every day now. It today reported 1,515 Covid cases, highest in more than three months, while 5 more people succumbed to the pathogen, according to the latest health bulletin issued by the Delhi government's health department.

This is the highest number of Covid cases since 16 December last year when 1,547 people tested positive for the virus, according to official data.

Delhi yesterday recorded 1,254 Covid cases and 6 coronavirus-linked fatalities.

It had on 22 March reported 1,101 coronavirus infections and 4 Covid deaths, which was the first time since 24 December that the city recorded more

than 1,000 Covid cases.

The city had recorded 888 cases last Monday, 823 on Sunday, 813 on Saturday, and 716 on Friday.

Today, Delhi's active coronavirus cases rose to 5,497 from 4,890 a day ago. The positivity rate rose to 1.69 per cent from yesterday's 1.52 per cent, the health bulletin said.

The positivity rate was 1.31 percent last Tuesday, 1.32 percent on Monday and 1.03 percent on Sunday.

The new infections pushed Delhi's Covid tally to 6,52,742, while over 6.36 lakh patients have recovered from the virus in the city so far, the bulletin stated. Its Covid toll mounted to 10,978.

A total of 89,836 tests, including 58,303 RT-PCR tests, were conducted to detect today's cases. The number of people under home isolation rose to

2,871 from 2,560 a day ago. The containment zones rose to 1,076 from 976 the previous day, the bulletin added.

The total number of Covid cases in Delhi on 1 January had stood at over 6.25 lakh and the fatalities tally was 10,557.

The number of daily cases had started to come down in the city in February. On 26 February, the month's highest daily count of 256 cases was recorded. However, the daily cases began to rise again in March and it has been steadily increasing over the past several days.

In the midst of the fresh Covid upsurge in the national capital, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) has ordered that there will be no public celebrations in the city during upcoming festivals such as Holi, Shab-e-Barat, and Navaratri.

Spl food kits for Vishu bid to influence voters: Cong

Opp claims food kit move is violation of code of conduct, attempt to woo voters



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLLAM/KANNUR,
25 MARCH

welfare measure to aid people when the state went into a lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic last year.

For the past nine months, each family in the state, including both below poverty line (BPL) and above poverty line (APL) ration card holders, had been receiving it. The kit contains 17 ingredients.

Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala on Thursday claimed distribution of special provision kits for Vishu, the Malayalam new year which falls on 14 April, just before the Assembly polls, is a violation of the code of conduct and an attempt to influence voters, a charge denied by chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

"The Opposition has demanded that it be distributed after 6 April (polling day). Does the chief minister think that he can influence the people by distributing all the food kits together just before the polls? Does the chief minister think that the people are fools? There is no problem, if the Vishu kit is given after 6 April," Chennithala, Leader of Opposition in the Kerala Assembly, told a Press conference at Kannur.

"During such a month, how can the opposition ask us not to give assistance to the people. We are not giving the kits for a few votes. These are for the welfare of the people as per a policy decision," he said, adding the decision was not taken yesterday in view of the elections.

The Opposition wants to attack the government even though it is by making the people suffer, Vijayan said. "During the floods, the Congress joined hands with

Fishing contract: Cong targets Kerala CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOZHIKODE, 25 MARCH

the CM was well aware of the project and all details about the controversial proposal submitted by the US-based firm which mooted the project for deep sea fishing in Kerala coast," the Congress leader alleged.

A row had erupted over the MoU signed for deep sea fishing resulting in the government terminating the pact inked with the US firm, EMCI, for deep sea trawling.

"There is a conspiracy hatched to target the CM's office. Since the probe is going on, I am not revealing much now. These days, nothing can be kept as a secret for long. The beginning of this issue itself was part of that conspiracy."

"We have done so much for the fishermen community and have their support..." Vijayan said, adding this has irked the Opposition parties.

alleged that the left seems to have no hesitation in receiving the votes of BJP in Guruvayur and Thalassery constituencies where the nominations of BJP candidates were rejected due to technical errors.

SC quashes FIR lodged against journalist Patricia Mukhim over Fb post



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

cases, unless such speech has the tendency to affect public order, the bench said.

It said India is a plural and multicultural society and the promise of liberty, enunciated in the Preamble, manifests itself in various provisions which outline each citizen's rights, including right to free speech, to travel freely and settle throughout the length and breadth of India.

Justice Rao, who wrote the verdict on behalf of the bench said: "At times, when in the legitimate exercise of such a right, individuals travel, settle down or carry on a vocation in a place where they find conditions conducive, there may be resentments, especially if such citizens prosper, leading to hostility or possibly violence."

"In such instances, if the victims voice their discontent, and speak out, especially if the state authorities turn a blind eye, or drag their feet, such voicing of discontent is really a cry for anguish, for justice denied - or delayed. This is exactly what appears to have happened in this case."

The top court said that a close scrutiny of the Facebook post would indicate that the agony of Mukhim was directed against the apathy shown by the CM of Meghalaya, the Director General of Police and the Dorbar Shnong of the area in not taking any action against the culprits who attacked the non-tribals youngsters.

Stating that the manipulations in the electoral rolls were done with a calculated move to manipulate voters, Chennithala sought to issue directions to the Election Commission of India (ECI) and the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Kerala to rectify the defects in the electoral rolls, prevent bogus voters from casting votes and initiate criminal action against those discovered responsible for the illegal entries in the electoral rolls.

Earlier, Ramesh Chennithala has alleged that there are as many as four lakh bogus voters in the electoral rolls for the upcoming Assembly polls. He had brought this to the attention of the CEO, Kerala.

The CEO had acknowledged that they have found thousands of bogus voters in the rolls after initial assessment.

"Four lakh bogus voters have entered the voters list, when the difference between the UDF and LDF in an election is just between one lakh and two lakh," Chennithala wrote in a Facebook post on Wednesday. Through bogus voting, CPI-M is trying to sabotage the election process, Chennithala alleged.

However, CM Vijayan downplayed the allegations of Chennithala. He said there were no organised move to manipulate the electoral rolls.

Vijayan asks Shah why Customs was unable to catch culprit in gold case

PTI
KOLKATA, 25 MARCH

A day after Union home minister Amit Shah slammed him over the gold smuggling case, Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday asked why the Customs department, under the BJP government, was unable to catch the person who had sent the gold even after nine months. As a counter to Shah's queries, Vijayan also posed some questions to the senior BJP leader asking him if he was aware his Cabinet colleague repeatedly said the gold was not smuggled through diplomatic baggage. Shah was disappointed over not getting anything against the Left government even after all the central agencies have investigated for over nine months, Vijayan told a Press conference here.

Assam's 1st phase poll campaign ends

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
GUWAHATI, 25 MARCH

The campaigning for the first phase polling of Assam legislative assembly elections covering 47 constituencies came to end this evening. Under the ECI's guidelines the campaigning ends 48 hours prior to the close of 27 March polling. "During this period, no person shall convene, hold or attend, join or address any public meetings, processions etc, and display of election matter by means of television and similar apparatus," said a statement from the electoral authority.

It also prohibits propagation of any election matter to the public by holding any musical concert or any theatrical performance or any other entertainment or amusement with a view to attracting the members of the public, in any polling area during the period of 48 hours ending with the hour fixed for the conclusion of the poll. The

BJP's double standard on CAA exposed, party scared to raise issue in Assam says Baghel: Accusing the BJP of adopting 'double standard' on the CAA, senior Congress leader and Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel said the top brass of the saffron party, which had been talking of implementing the contentious law in Bengal, is scared of raising the issue in Assam. Addressing a press conference in Guwahati, the minister alleged the BJP had been avoiding answers on bigger issues of concern such as unemployment, inflation, devastating floods, the plight of tea plantation workers and the thriving syndicate of smugglers. "In Assam, BJP leaders are completely silent on the issue of CAA. CM Sarbananda Sonowal is silent, minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is silent. The PM and home minister also avoid the issue during (poll campaign) addresses," Baghel said.

ECI also directed that no political party or candidate or any other organization or person shall publish any advertisement in the print media on poll day or one day prior to poll day in all the phases, unless the contents of political advertisements are pre-certified by the media certification and monitoring committee (MCMC). In the context of Assam, the restricted days of advertisement are 26 & 27 March for first

The Statesman

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I believe it is not right to call the RSS and associated organisations Sangh Parivar. There are women in the family, there is respect for the elderly, a sense of compassion and affection, which is not there in the RSS



CONGRESS LEADER RAHUL GANDHI

AFTER KERALA-BASED NUNS WERE HARASSED IN UP OVER COMMUNITY ISSUE

The Statesman

NEW DELHI, FRIDAY 26 MARCH 2021

05

Lok Sabha adjourned sine die

Members urge Speaker to end session early in view of electioneering in 5 states

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Lok Sabha was on Thursday adjourned sine die, bringing the nearly two-month long Budget session to an end.

The session started on January 29 and was originally slated to end on April 8 but several members had urged Speaker Om Birla to end the session early as they focus on electioneering in five states going to polls. Speaker Birla had recently tested positive for Covid and was not attending the House.

The Lok Sabha session had started on 29 January amid an unprecedented pandemic that has since claimed thousands of lives and showed signs of resurgence with many states including the national capital of Delhi reporting a spike in cases.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and members from the ruling and Opposition party benches were present in the House.

Earlier, Opposition leaders had urged for early conclusion of the Budget session in view of the ensuing assembly polls



in five states including in Assam and West Bengal. Wishing Om Birla a speedy recovery, earlier, Mehtab informed the House that the Speaker's condition was stable.

Recounting the role of Speaker in the smooth conduct of the House, a Lok Sabha Secretariat note later pointed out that a record work had been completed during the session.

"Like previous Sessions of the Seventeenth Lok Sabha, record work was accomplished during the Budget Session. A total of 24 sittings were held which lasted for 132 hours. The productivity of the House during this Session stood at 114 per cent. Earlier, 125 per cent productivity was achieved in the First Session, 115 per cent in the Second Session, 117 per cent in the Third Session and

a record 167 per cent in the Fourth Session," the note stated.

During the Session, the House sat late for 48 hours and 23 minutes to discuss and dispose of various matters.

"The relentless efforts of Speaker Om Birla, ensured consensus among political parties for smooth conduct of the House. Consequently, like other Sessions of Seventeenth Lok Sabha, the productivity during the budget session remained high. Birla's foresight resolved several complex issues. The members also discussed many important matters sitting late several times," the note further added.

In the first part of the Session, the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address was discussed for 16 hours 58 minutes and 84 starred questions were

answered orally. A total of 583 matters of urgent public importance and a total of 405 matters under Rule 377 were taken up.

The Budget which was presented on 1 February 2021 was discussed for 14 hours and 42 minutes. A total of 146 members participated in the discussion. Demands for Grants from the Ministries of Railways, Education and Health and Family Welfare for the year 2021-22 were discussed in the House. The discussion lasted for a total of 21 hours and 43 minutes.

Detailed discussions on government bills were held during the Session. During the Session, 17 government Bills were introduced and a total of 18 Bills were passed. Some of the important Bills which were passed are the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2021; the National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second (Amendment) Bill, 2021, etc. Parliamentary Committees made important recommendations on financial and other matters and a total of 171 reports were presented by the Parliamentary Committees.

During the Question Hour and 84 starred questions were

CAG: Serious lapses in students' admission in Bihar med colleges

MANOJ CHAURASIA
PATNA, 25 MARCH

teaching staff in all streams of medical education has ranged from six to 56 percent and eight to 70 percent. The report also found significant deficiencies in infrastructure.

What, however, was found alarming was the severe shortage of medical equipment in five top medical colleges in the state, such as Patna Medical College, Nalanda Medical College, Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, all in Patna, Government Medical College, Bettiah and Darbhanga Medical College.

The report also found excess payment/inadmissible payments to the tune of Rs78.47 crore were made towards hiring security agencies, cleaning and house-keeping purposes in at least two medical colleges.

The CAG report further stumbled upon large-scale irregularities in the execution of chief minister's "Seven Resolves" or "Saat Nischay" scheme.

The progress of works under Mukhya Mantri Nischaya Yojana was not satisfactory in Siwan as only 15 to 24 percent of works were completed," the report said. It also found irregular payment of Rs3.15 crore for acquisition of land for landfill site.

The report added that road construction works valued at Rs424.67 crore were started without obtaining technical sanctions in 13 packages while an excess payment of Rs3.57 crore was made on road marking work under three packages in Road Divisions, Madhubani and excess payment of Rs99.05 lakh in Road Division Motihari and Sitamarhi.

Mufti: Dissent has been criminalised by BJP govt

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
JAMMU, 25 MARCH

APPOINTMENT
BABA MOHAN DAS COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Village Motia Kalan (Rewari)-123411 (Haryana)
(Recognized by NCTE & Affiliated to BSEE, Bhiwani)

REQUIRE

The following Teaching staff for D.El.Ed.- HOD-01. Perspective in Education 02, Science, Mathematics, Social Science, Language, Fine/Performing Arts, Physical Education-(01-Each) (Qualification as per NCTE Norms 2017)

Application with photo copies of all documents must reach to the College within 07 days from the publication of this advertisement.

RAO DALIP SINGH COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Mumtajpur, Pataudi, Gurgaon (HR)
(Teaching and Non Teaching Staff) Perspective in Education-3, Pedagogy Subjects (Mathematics-1, Phy. Sci-1, Life Sci-1, Social Science-1, Hindi-1, Eng-1, Comm-1, and Skt-1), Health & Phys.Edu-1, Fine Art-1, Performing Arts (Music/Dance/Theater)-1, Librarian-1, Office Asst. Comp. Operator-1, Clerk-1, Qualification and salary as per NCTE/ State Govt./MDU Norms. Send one copy of Resume to College and one copy to the Dean, MDU Rohtak within 21 days of the date of advt.

Contact : Chairman
Mob.9728024311, 9728363311
E-mail : rdscoo@gmail.com
baljit1972@rediffmail.com

PDP president and former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti on Thursday lashed out at the BJP government, saying that "dissent has been criminalised" in the country. She made the remark soon after her questioning by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with a money-laundering probe. She was questioned for more than five and a half hours by the probe agency in its Srinagar office. "Whoever speaks up, ED, CBI and NIA are used against them. The nation is not running according to the Constitution of India but according to the agenda of a particular party," she said.

"One who speaks against you (BJP government) is either booked under charges of sedition or summoned by the investigative agencies". The government is hounding the dissenting voices by misusing these agencies. Dissent has been criminalized in this country that is being ruled by the ED, CBI and NIA, Mehbooba alleged.

IMPORTANT NOTICE			
This is notified for the information of rail passengers that the timings of the following Special Trains will be revised as under :-			
Revised Timings of 09027/09028 Bandra Terminus - Jammu Tawi - Bandra Terminus Festival Special Express (Weekly)			
Train No. 09027	STATIONS	Train No. 09028	
ARR. DEP.		ARR. DEP.	
-- 12:00	Bandra Terminus	15:00 --	
23:05 --	Jammu Tawi	-- 05:45	
Revised Timing effective from : 09027 Ex. Bandra Terminus on every Saturday from 27.03.2021 & 09028 Ex. Jammu Tawi on Every Monday from 29.03.2021.			
Stoppages : Borivali, Vapi, Surat, Vadodara Jn., Anand Jn. Nadiad Jn., Ahmedabad Jn., Mahesana Jn., Palanpur Jn., Abu Road, Falna, Marwar Jn., Pali Marwar, Jodhpur Jn., Merta Road Jn., Degana Jn., Chhoti Khatu, Didwana, Ladnun, Sujangarh, Ratangarh Jn., Churu, Sadulpur Jn., Hisar, Barwala, Dholi Jn., Ludhiana Jn., Jalandhar Cantt., Pathankot Cantt. & Kathua stations.			
Revised Timings of 02917/02918 Ahmedabad Jn. - H. Nizamuddin - Ahmedabad Jn. Sampark Kranti Superfast Special (Weekly)			
Train No. 02917	STATIONS	Train No. 02918	
ARR. DEP.		ARR. DEP.	
-- 15:30	Ahmedabad Jn.	03:35 --	
05:45 --	H. Nizamuddin	-- 13:25	
Revised Timing effective from : 02917 Ex. Ahmedabad Jn. on every Monday from 29.03.2021 till further advise & 02918 Ex. H. Nizamuddin on Every Saturday from 03.04.2021 till further advise.			
Stoppages : Nadiad Jn., Anand Jn., Chhayapuri, Godhra Jn., Dahod, Ratlam Jn., Kota & Mathura Jn. stations.			
For any kind of information such as arrival/departure timings and stoppages enroute, the passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website https://enquiry.indianrailways.gov.in or NITES App.			
Note: All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.			
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NORTHERN RAILWAY

WALK-IN INTERVIEW FOR ENGAGEMENT OF CONTRACT MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS OVER DLI DIVISION

Ref : CMP/22409/GAZ/P-9/DRM Office/Delhi

A walk-in interview will be organized for filling up vacancies of full time General Duty Medical practitioners on contract basis in Divisional Railway Hospital, Northern Railway/ DLI Division. The period of contract will be for one year. On satisfactory completion of the contract period of one year, the contract may be extended. The retired Government Doctor can be engaged of one year each up to 65 years of age. Retired Government Doctors are also invited in walk-in Interview for engagement on contract basis. Eligible candidates are invited on the date, time and venue given below:

Place of Interview	Date	Time
Chief Medical Superintendent, Divisional Railway Hospital, Northern Railway/DLI Division	06.04.2021	09:30 a.m - 14:30 p.m Candidate to report by 08:30 hrs

No. of Posts

Total = 03

UR = 2

SC = 1

ST = 0

OCB = 0

Vacancies are only indicative as per requirement, administration can post doctors anywhere in DLI Division.

Remuneration :-

Category of CMPs	Monthly Remuneration (in Rs.)
GDMO	75,000/-

1. Name of the post : Contract Medical Practitioner (CMP) (GDMO) on full time engagement.

2. Nature of Engagement:- The engagement is purely on contractual basis for one year or till regularly UPSC selected Doctors (ADMO/DMO/Sr.DMO) become available whichever is earlier. Further, the service of these doctors are also terminable before the expiry of one year. The service rendered as contract doctor is a stop gap arrangement and will not have any bearing in respect of consideration of the period in case of regular selection through UPSC. It will also not confer any right for automatic regularization/absorption in any circumstances.

3. Other Facilities :- One set of 1st class complimentary pass for self & Family during each Contract which be issued after three months of regular contract service (except retired railway doctors)

Contract Medical Practitioner can avail free medical treatment for self only other conditions apply. Expenses on out station journey connected with contract work will be borne by the daily allowance at specified rates will be admissible for such work.

Qualification :- MBBS from a recognized university and must have completed rotating internship for one year and should be in possession of a valid registration certificate of any of the state council

Railway Quarter (Subject to availability and after deduction of Rest House Rent)

No. of Posts

Total = 03

UR = 2

SC = 1

ST = 0

OCB = 0

Vacancies are only indicative as per requirement, administration can post doctors anywhere in DLI Division.

Parl passes Bill to set up NBFID

The NBFID will be set up with an authorized share capital of Rs 1 lakh crore, with financial and developmental objectives.

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Parliament has passed the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development Bill, 2021 with the approval of Rajya Sabha today. The Lok Sabha passed the Bill on Tuesday. The legislation seeks to establish a new Government institution, the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NBFID), as a corporate development finance institution (DFI) to support infrastructure financing in the country.

Necessary arrangements were made in the Parliament House and especially in the Lok Sabha Chamber. Covid testing was arranged for Members, officers and employees of the secretariat and personnel of allied agencies. A vaccination Centre was also set up in Parliament House Complex, as per the government guidelines. Rajya Sabha was adjourned sine die ahead of the scheduled date of 8 April. While giving a brief account of the performance of the House, Rajya Sabha Chairman Venkaiah Naidu said the upper house functioned for a total of 104 hours and 43 minutes and 84 starred questions were

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Impasse in Israel

The outlook in Israel in terms of governance is ever so fogbound. The resultant uncertainty arguably lends a new dimension to the relentless ferment in the Middle East. There are thus far no distinct winners or losers in the recent election, and exit polls from the fourth election in two years show a Parliament divided between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's likely opponents and supporters. The polls have projected yet another impasse, though the final tally will not be declared for a while. However, going by the forecasts on Wednesday, Mr Netanyahu's stewardship of what they call a "world-beating Covid-19 vaccination rollout" ~ a highlight of his campaign ~ may not have been sufficiently robust to propel the leader of the right-wing Likud party to victory. To that can be added the corruption cases he has got himself embroiled in, indeed grist to the mill of his opponents. Forecasts indicated a deadlock even with the ultranationalist leader and once Netanyahu's defence minister, Naftali Bennett's prospective backing, with the 120 seats in Parliament divided equally between the Netanyahu camp and his detractors. Bennett, whose far-right Yamina party was forecast to win seven seats, shares Netanyahu's hardline nationalist ideology, including the annexation of parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank and would seem to be more likely to ultimately team up with the incumbent Prime Minister. Whether he could tip the balance will depend on the final results. The performance of Israel's opposition was said to have been better than expected and support for Likud dipped after Netanyahu's critics highlighted corruption charges against the country's longest-serving leader and accused him of mishandling the pandemic. The erosion of his support base has been considerable. Dramatic too has been the composition of Parliament, the 50-50 ratio being the outcome of the remarkable psephological swing. Though Likud is projected to retain its status as the biggest party within the Israeli parliament, there are red herrings along the trail to a clear majority. Unless the negotiations towards a coalition hit the reefs, Israel's electorate could be headed towards a fifth election in a span of two years, a record of sorts. While the exit polls do not throw up a clear winner, they have projected a "huge victory for the Israeli right". According to analysts in Jerusalem, the question of forming a cohesive coalition is much more difficult for the anti-Netanyahu bloc, given their ideological differences. A Netanyahu government with Bennett and a clutch of other ultra-nationalists on board would result in one of the most right-wing governments in Israel's history. At the end of the day, stability is a different kettle of fish altogether. The electorate is profoundly polarised, with supporters greeting him as "King Bibi" and opponents holding up placards calling him "Crime Minister". The truth perhaps lies between these two perceptions of Israel's longest-serving Prime Minister.

Trilateral tension

In an oblique message to Seoul, China on Monday fired a diplomatic warning shot at the United States of America through a new agreement between President Xi Jinping and the North Korean leader, Kim Jong Un, one that poses grave security challenges for the US in the near future. Xi's office announced on Monday morning that he and Kim had traded seemingly benign messages through two interlocutors from each country during a meeting in Beijing earlier in the day. A report in Chinese state news said the two leaders agreed "to uphold the political settlement of the Korean Peninsula issue and preserve peace and stability on the peninsula, so as to make new contributions to regional peace, stability, development and prosperity." It is open to question whether the bilateral signal of intent will minimise the prospect of hostilities considering that the choppy waters of the South China Sea shall remain a contentious issue. Indeed, the statement of cooperation, so-called, poses a fresh threat to the United States, not the least because of the belligerency that has for years influenced geopolitics. An exchange between Xi Jingping and Kim Jong Un implies that North Korea may restart nuclear weapons or ICBM tests if President Biden does not heed an implicit warning. The Pyongyang-Beijing statement represents a clear threat to President Biden not to continue the policies of the Trump administration or face drastic consequences, reminding Washington that China continues to hold outsized influence in North Korea and the extent to which Pyongyang decides to restart tests of its nuclear weapons or intercontinental ballistic missiles depends on how aggressive an approach the United States takes. The timing of the new threat becomes all the more conspicuous by the aggressive statement that Kim's powerful sister issued last week, returning North Korea to international attention with pledges of fresh violence amidst an apparent stalemate in talks between Pyongyang and Washington. Both countries have since confirmed that North Korea has not responded to diplomatic outreach from both the Trump and Biden administrations for more than a year. Monday's exchange comes days after a fiery meeting last week between top American and Chinese diplomats in Alaska. Both sides appeared eager for their domestic and international audience to see the hard line each plans to take against each other, and so the usually staid and brief opening remarks on Thursday almost immediately devolved into a 90-minute exchange of rants with each side publicly blaming the other for regional and, at times, global instability. The seemingly schizophrenic response from the Chinese delegation was widely seen as a classic example of Beijing's diplomacy. Monday's threats pile on to that strategy with a reminder that China must, to a certain extent, accept any punishments that the US exacts on North Korea for them to have any effect.

Hydrogen Alliance

Hydrogen is an infinite energy source, and this means we can produce as much as we want. Furthermore, it can be stored in liquid or gaseous form, easily transported, and it backs up renewable energy when we fail to supply energy from other renewable sources due to unpredictable climate conditions, for example



A significant cause of global warming and climate change is when fossil fuels are burned as they release carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the environment. To counter this, at the 21st UN Climate Change Agreement held in Paris back in December 2015, 195 countries agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and develop green energy sources to replace carbon energy. There are mainly two green energy sources the world is paying attention to: one is renewable energy that uses nature such as solar or wind power to generate electricity, and the other is hydrogen energy that we produce through a chemical reaction to release hydrogen. The focus on hydrogen energy ~ since its supply is endless and only emits pure water ~ has increased as green energy sources are becoming more and more important. Several countries are putting efforts into establishing a hydrogen-powered society, leading to the reduction of fossil fuel consumption.

What is notable is that hydrogen is an infinite energy source, and this means we can produce as much as we want. Furthermore, it can be stored in liquid or gaseous form, easily transported, and it backs up renewable energy when we fail to supply energy from other renewable sources due to unpredictable climate conditions, for example. According to the Hydrogen Council, global hydrogen consumption will increase to about 546 million tons by 2050. This will replace 13.26 billion barrels of petroleum, which can generate about 78 EJ. With hydrogen energy satisfying approximately 18 per cent of the world's energy demand, we can assume that our society, which currently relies on carbon energy, will gradually change to hydrogen as a primary source. Already we are seeing developments in several countries in this field. China plans to put in place 300 hydrogen refuelling stations by 2025 and 1,000 by 2030. This infrastructure will support 50,000 fuel-cell electric cars by 2025, expanding to one million by 2030. In Japan, Tokyo's governor designated hydrogen as the "energy star" of the 2020 Olympics ~ with the Olympic Village to be powered by fuel cells and athletes to be shuttled around the games by hydrogen-powered vehicles.

Creating net-zero industrial value chains in Carbon2Chem®. ThyssenKrupp and other industrial partners have demonstrated the conversion of carbon-rich off-gases of a steel plant to green chemical products by using electrolysis and chemical synthesis technologies. In the US, California is nurturing deployment of fuel-cell electric vehicles and associated infrastructure through its ZEV Regulation and co-funding of hydrogen refuelling stations. Meanwhile, in the UK, the H21 Leeds City Gate pilot project

is converting the entire city's natural gas-based heating grid to 100 per cent hydrogen fuel, testing a concept that could eventually span the entire country. Hydrogen's energy density makes it perfect for long-distance transport and heavy loads. Alstom's Coradia iLint is the world's first hydrogen passenger train; a greener, quieter alternative is already operational in Germany.

Globally, over 5,000 new hydrogen refuelling stations have been announced for 2030, and many are industry-government collaborations. Fuel-cell electric transportation can be applied to land transport ~ cars, buses, trucks, and trains ~ maritime, and aviation. As a result, by 2050, fuel-cell cars alone could replace 20 million barrels of oil per day in transport. Annual Co2 emissions from feedstock could also be reduced to as much as 440 million tons in 2050 if hydrogen production were to be largely decarbonized through technologies such as electrolysis. India has a huge edge in green hydrogen production owing to its favorable geographic conditions and presence of abundant natural elements such as sunlight and wind. As of 31 March 2020, almost 36 per cent

fuel stations, will provide long-term gains. Green Ammonia, oil refining, the steel industry, and several other sectors will benefit the most from the development of technologies for hydrogen.

The revolution is already underway. Public-private initiatives, joint ventures, supportive policies, and risk-sharing instruments are creating an environment to speed up the advancements cited above. The Finance Minister in the union budget for 2020-21 formally announced the 'National Hydrogen Mission' for the generation of hydrogen from green power sources. The government has given impetus in scaling the gas pipeline infrastructure across the length and breadth of the country and has introduced reforms for the power grid, including the introduction of smart grids. Such steps are being taken to effectively integrate renewable energy into the present energy mix. With the appropriate capacity addition to renewable power generation, storage, and transmission, producing green hydrogen in India can become cost-effective which will not only guarantee energy security but also ensure self-sufficiency in time. Hydrogen will help in storing renew-

able energy and transporting renewable energy, and that will overcome the problem of interdependence, which renewable energy suffers from. It is particularly useful in long-haul transportation, where battery storage falls short.

It is of the utmost importance that a hydrogen policy be established. We need regulatory agencies to regulate hydrogen i.e. the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, MNRE, Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board, Petroleum & Explosive Safety Organisation, etc.

The commercial use of hydrogen needs co-ordination among the ministries and its regulatory bodies. There is a need for the setting up of a Centre of Excellence in Hydrogen by energy companies in India. CoE is a concept whereby industries, academics, research institutes, and knowledge partners collaborate in all aspects of R&D.

Such CoEs will focus on training 100,000 process safety engineers through various universities in India and will provide opportunities for masters and Ph.D. programmes collaborating with international universities. These CoEs will create an ecosystem in the entire value chain starting from R&D for Hydrogen production i.e. grey, blue, and green, transportation, storage, safety standards, and assist Gov-

ernment in formulating policies. These CoEs will also assist the National Hydrogen Mission in policy formulation based upon the best international practices followed globally, in making Hydrogen energy available by 2030 and thereafter.

Nayara Energy is the first energy company to develop a Centre of Excellence in Process Safety at IIT Delhi with Gexcon of Norway, the world's leading fire and explosion safety consultants, as a knowledge partner. Indian Oil Corporation and Greenstat, the Norwegian-based global energy specialist, have also signed a cooperation agreement to develop a Centre of Excellence, with a specific focus on green hydrogen, solar, wind, and zero-emission maritime solutions. There are already several more large energy companies in India in the process of setting up CoE to cover the entire value chain in hydrogen. This COE will focus on:

- Costs to decrease by up to 50 per cent for a wide range of applications, making hydrogen competitive with other low-carbon alternatives and, in some cases, even conventional options.
- Develop hydrogen applications and know-how including hydrogen boilers, compact cars, and industrial heating to compete with low-carbon alternatives, as the cost of production and distribution continues to fall.
- Develop a hydrogen production and distribution system at scale.
- Develop hydrogen alternatives for long-range vehicles such as trucks and taxi fleets, and developing the infrastructure, such as fuelling stations, to provide long-term gains.

With a CoE in place, India can become the global leader and take advantage of increasing investment in R&D, capacity building, compatible legislation, and the opportunity for the creation of demand among its vast population. Such initiatives could propel India to become the most favoured nation as both a knowledge provider and exporter of hydrogen technology globally. However, to take advantage of this opportunity, policymakers must continue to move at speed. They hold the power to exponentially scale up the development of hydrogen technologies.

Global co-operation is needed in exchange for technologies. No single country can complete the entire value chain and thus, there is a need for co-operation among countries to make green energy available at the earliest opportunity. At the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow this November, the Indian government should put forward the need for an International Hydrogen Alliance. This alliance would serve the global community, making green energy available as soon as possible by bringing world organisations together on one platform.

A MEMBER OF THE **ANN**
ASIAN VOICES

Get thee to work

When Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli in a drastic move decided to dissolve the House of Representatives on December 20, a faction of his own party, then the Nepal Communist Party, led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Madhav Kumar Nepal; the Nepali Congress; and the Janata Samajbadi Party reacted fiercely. All accused Oli of making an unconstitutional move, attacking democracy and attempting to subvert the system and political gains. All these parties opposing Oli's decision took to the streets and held demonstrations demanding the reinstatement of the House.

Civil society leaders, constitutional experts and even former Supreme Court justices were of the view that Oli had breached constitutional provisions in dissolving the House. A little over two months later, the Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court on February 23 decided to overturn Oli's move, calling it unconstitutional. It also ordered a meeting of the House within 13 days.

President Bidya Devi Bhandari then summoned the House session for March 7 as per the government's recommendation. But hours before the House meeting, the Supreme Court on March 7 passed yet another verdict, taking everyone by surprise.

The court not only scrapped the Nepal Communist Party altogether, deciding on an almost-three-year-old case but also revived the CPN-UML and the Communist Party of Nepal

THE KATHMANDU POST
(Maotai Centre)

It has been more than two weeks since the reinstated House convened its first meeting. But it has been utterly dysfunctional. As many as eight ordinances introduced by the government were to be presented before the House on the first day of the meeting. But that could not happen due to obstructions by the opposition parties ~ the Nepali Congress and the Janata Samajbadi Party. The Maoist Centre boycotted the first meeting.

As political uncertainty continues, with politicians back to their partisan games, the House has no business. The opposition parties have accused the government of not providing business and undermining the House while Oli is making every attempt to justify his argument that the existing Parliament has become irrelevant and the parties should seek a fresh mandate from the people. Five meetings of the House have been held since March 7, all of them without any substantial business to deal with.

The Maoist Centre wants Oli to step down, but it is reluctant to withdraw the support it lent him back in February 2018. The Congress, the primary opposition, has decided to stay silent ~ it is neither interested in forming an alliance with the Maoist Centre and the Samajbadi Party to lead a new government nor filing a no-confidence motion against Oli. The Samajbadi Party, which currently has 32 seats in Parliament, is trying to strike a deal with Oli. But the party has also kept the option of joining hands with the Congress and the Maoist Centre open. When Oli prorogued the House on July 2 in the face of a crisis looming over his head, more than four dozen bills were pending. Even since the House was reinstated, it has not been able to do its primary job of processing the bills and enacting laws. Lawmakers from across the spectrum have hardly tried to internalise the fact that their primary role is making laws. It's the House that gives birth to a government, but Nepali political parties have turned their parliamentarians into tools to gain the upper hand.

IN MEMORIAM

SENGUPTA CHAYA — Of Lady Keane School, Shillong. Passed away on this day in 2020. Missed and fondly remembered by family in Kolkata.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Reservations without contours

SIR, This refers to the editorial, 'Debate must follow' (24 March). The issue of reservations has long lost its clearer contours, although the 1992 Indra Sawhney versus Union of India case, known as the Mandal judgment,

had endowed it with some. The Supreme Court's reported question, whether another look at the 1992 ruling may have become necessary because of Constitutional amendments, court judgments and changed social dynamics, itemises some of the factors that have resulted in the uneven history of quotas in India.

It is a history of confusing, sometimes apparently contradictory, precedents, tussles among different groups and their political manipulation for votes, of the 'creamy layer', of the place of merit and of the ever-expanding sphere of

quotas, from education to jobs to promotions. Politicization of reservations has eroded the best effects. Instead of time-bound, carefully monitored reservations for each group, especially so that the most underprivileged in each group can access quota benefits, reservations have kept on growing in scope and sphere so that politicians can satisfy specific constituencies.

The courts, too, have not been consistent in their rulings on the numerous issues that have sprung up since 1992.

It has to be asked if there is more discontent,

more caste consciousness, more sense of deprivation on one side and dependence on quota benefits on the other than a gradual levelling of educational and employment fields and erasure of social differences resulting from the political misuse of reservations. Revisiting the 1992 judgment to reconsider the ceiling and exceptional circumstances can be fruitful and just, but only if the data on benefits, achievements and deprivations are laid out, and the administration of quotas ~ giving them a time-frame with scheduled reviews, for example ~ is considered.

The messiness surrounding the quota question

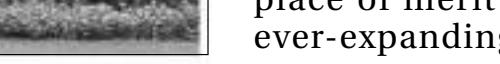
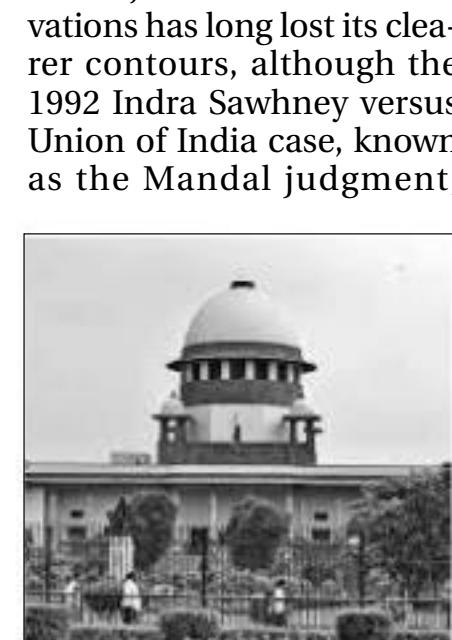
MAHATMA'S SUBLIME VIEWS

SIR, Apropos of Jaydev Jana's eminently readable centre-piece "Gandhi and Politics" (25 March). While the article has reinvited our attention to M K Gandhi's sublime views on politics, it suffers from a discrepancy of dates. Gandhi did not return to India on 19 December, 1914 as informed in the article. He actually returned on 9 January, 1915 landing in Bombay's Apollo Bunder. Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is marked on that date in honour of his return. He was a prominent Pravasi (non-resident) Indian, who spent nearly a quarter century outside India. However, going by the roaring welcome he received in India on arriving, it appears the Indians were following his activities in South Africa. In between he had occasionally visited India to participate in the sessions of Indian National Congress. Apparently, the last such visit took place in 1901 for the Calcutta Congress.

Yours, etc., Priyadarshi Dutta, New Delhi, 25 March.

suits all politicians. It is urgent to clear it up, so that the reservations policy has its intended effect.

Yours, etc., SS Paul, Chakdaha, 24 March.



South Asia without nuclear weapons

SHUBHAM SHARMA

South Asia rightly claims civilizational status for itself. The unfortunate break-up in 1947 split the sub-continent into multiple nation-states, and since then civilizational status is just maximally employed to peddle an oriental image set in a modernist frame. The many pathologies of caste, growing economic inequalities, religious strife, although biting us in the face, have a history. In other words, these are not deliberately acquired through a conscious programme of action. But there is one barbaric thing that was not only consciously acquired but has been elevated as a matter of national pride - nuclear weapons.

Nuclear weapons, unlike other armaments, are the most brutal manifestation of man's ability of annihilation. It is not just the offensive obliterating capabilities, but the omnici-dal nature of these weapons which makes them a subject of moral abhorrence and should ideally be rejected for military purposes.

The South Asian nuclear dyad of India and Pakistan is most susceptible to nuclear conflagration. Both countries possess sufficient firepower to annihilate one another twice over. The Indian doctrine of 'no first use' might seem assuring but the late Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar's statement of 'responsible use' of nuclear weapons and his declaration of 'why bind ourselves to the no first use doctrine' should alert us to the horrid possibilities of a doctrinal revision. His later clarification that these were his personal thoughts, barely holds. And one also wonders what a 'responsible' use of nuclear weapons could possibly be.

This was not the first time that a senior national leader questioned the no first use doctrine. In 2011, ex-foreign and defence minister Jaswant Singh went one step ahead and said: "I am of the view that the policy-framework that the NDA devised in 1998 is very greatly in need of revision because the situation that warranted the enunciation of the policy of 'no-first-use' or 'non-use against non-nuclear weapons', 'credible deterrence with minimum force', etc. has long been overtaken by events."

In the case of Pakistan, the situation is even more delicate as it relies on tactical nuclear weapons with a weak command, a radicalised military, a lack of strategic depth and conventional military weakness which makes it more susceptible to 'first use'. The presence of China is usually less talked about because of the frequency of conflict with Pakistan, yet the Indian deterrence doctrine was directed

towards it right from the beginning. After the 1998 Pokhran tests, Prime Minister Vajpayee sent an assuaging cable to the angry Americans that the bomb was for China.

And the very next day, he sent his then-National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra to mollycoddle Beijing. Pakistan soon followed up with its own explosion something which it could never have done unilaterally. This newly drawn nuclear Rubicon also emboldened it to take up the Kargil intrusion in Jammu and Kashmir.

The debates around nuclear weapons have existed right from their acquisition. After the US acquired the bomb, USSR exploded its own in the year of Stalin's death in 1953. The transition to a post-Stalinist USSR was marked by a debate around the future war against capitalism. Georgi Malenkov and Vlachyslav Molotov emerged as the contenders for the leadership of USSR. The former argued that the advent of thermonuclear weapons meant that the competition between socialism and capitalism would have to become a peaceful one whereas the latter labelled this position as revisionist and argued that the end of capitalism would come through war, therefore to say otherwise was to reject Marx.

The emergence of Nikita Khrushchev led to his appointment of a Kremlin committee in 1954 which concluded that a nuclear war could eventually destroy the Soviet Union and perhaps 'all life on earth'. David Holloway noted that 'this remarkable document was open and explicit about the consequences of nuclear war and had nothing about the destruction of capitalism or socialism'.

At the 20th Party Congress in 1956, Khrushchev announced that the 'the policy of Soviet Union and the communist world at large will be of peaceful co-existence'. On the other hand, the US under President Truman, had already used the bomb against the hapless civilians of Hiroshima and Nagasaki primarily to impose an immediate end to the war before the Soviet Union could seize northern China, Manchuria, Korea, the Kurile Islands, Hokkaido in northern Japan and insulate his political future.

Since then, the US had on 30 occasions prepared/threatened to initiate nuclear war during international crises, confrontations, and wars— primarily in the Third World. For instance, in 1954 the US offered France the option of two bombs to break the Vietnamese siege at Dien Bien Phu which the latter fortunately declined. On another occasion in 1969, notes the late radical journalist Christopher Hitchens, the notorious



US National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger contemplated, in the face of the Vietnamese revolutionary intransigence, the use of nuclear weapons just to clear the pass through which ran the railway link from North Vietnam to China.

Khrushchev's insistence on peaceful co-existence was also predicated upon political-economic arguments. He contended that the presence of nuclear weapons would ward off military aggression from the US and allow the Soviet Union to outperform the former in technological innovation, provide a decent material life for the masses and focus on the Third World. The latter aim was most successfully achieved much to the discomfort of the capitalist West.

Soviet economic and technical assistance reached non-aligned states like India, Indonesia, Egypt, and Ghana. Cuba's independence was also assured in this window of peace through the successful negotiation of the Khrushchev-Kennedy agreement. Such was the euphoria that Khrushchev in the same declared to the Western diplomats that 'we will bury you'.

Economically, there was substance in Khrushchev's thinking. Since a socialist system is supply-driven, unnecessary military expenditure is always a drag, owing particularly to the absence of organic links between the civilian and military sectors of the economy and the concomitant non-presence of a military-

industrial complex—the hallmark of post-war capitalism even more rampant in the neo-liberal era. Demand-driven Western capitalism well understood this weakness and ruthlessly promoted the armament industry, which was also, according to Mike Kidron, the reason for their economic revival from the economic ravages of the Second World War.

Following Khrushchev, the chief Ayatollah of Neo-Realism, Kenneth Waltz argued that nuclear weapons provide 'cheap security' to its possessors i.e., there would be no need to spend heavily on conventional armaments and the nuclear umbrella would suffice as a solid deterrence.

Although powerful and parsimonious, it is historically untenable. After acquiring nuclear weapons, India is far from reducing expenditure on importing armaments. Within a decade, India became the largest importer of arms accounting for 14 per cent of net imports and is currently trailed by Saudi Arabia which has been engaged in a devastating war against Yemen. India imports 9.3 per cent of the total arms production and became the third-highest military spender in 2019 by spending \$71.1 billion.

Other nuclear-armed states already armed to the teeth, also saw an increase in military expenditure. The US increased its spending to \$732 billion; China remained the next highest spender by spending \$261 billion marking a 5.1 per cent increase from

2018 and 85 per cent percent higher than in 2010. And Russia too marked an increase in its military expenditure by 4.5 per cent moving up from the fifth to the fourth-highest spender. Contrary to the cheap security thesis, both Russia and the US are engaged in extensive and expensive programmes to modernise their nuclear warheads, missile and aircraft delivery systems, and nuclear weapons production facilities.

For instance, in late 2019 the US started to deploy a new low-yield warhead on some of its nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines. The nuclear arsenal of China is in the middle of a significant modernisation program whereas both India and Pakistan are thought to be increasing the size of their nuclear arsenals. These trends are even more baffling given the fact that the US and Russia have 1,750 and 1,570 deployed warheads respectively with 4,050 and 4,805 readied for further deployment. Whereas China, India, and Pakistan are said to have 320, 150 and 160 warheads with none deployed. Instead of a negative correlation what we see is a positive correlation between nuclear arms production, overall military spending, and conventional arms acquisition—a bad recipe for peace.

The writer is a student of world history at the University of Cambridge.
To Be Concluded

of power in what was once deemed the rump state still can't handle the bitter truth.

Perhaps we don't wish to be reminded of the fact that for all its foibles, follies and inherited flaws, Bangladesh is doing better than Pakistan on a number of economic indicators. Or, for that matter, to recognise that the pattern began to be repeated, soon after the bifurcation, in Balochistan.

By then the military chief in Pakistan was Tikka Khan, a former military governor of East Pakistan. It was under his aegis that the army has claimed in March 1971 that it could 'restore order' within 72 hours or so. That particular delusion came a crop over some nine months later, albeit only after India had openly pitched in.

The lessons of history are difficult, if not impossible, to learn without acknowledging the facts. All too many nations, including Pakistan and India, are often shy of facing up to their past. Not long ago, Poland made it a crime for anyone to suggest that some Poles had collaborated with the Nazis in perpetrating genocide against Jews. And so it goes.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, it might be too late to atone for what happened half a century ago, but remembering it accurately might suffice as a warning against repeating the experience.

Dawn/ANN.

NO 28865

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

It is always taken for granted that if we could "see ourselves as others see us" we should get a disagreeable shock. M. Lucien Hubert, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French Senate, has given a picture of British ways which, for once, affords a pleasant surprise. British diplomacy has "eyes, ears, and hands everywhere." Britain "shows skill in winning friends everywhere," having allies in every political party and group abroad, and "making use of everything without exception of party or doctrine." British propaganda is "based upon supporting its friends till their final triumph, rescuing them from danger and protecting them in times of stress;" and the French statesman concludes with a graceful admission that French diplomacy itself - the most polished in the world - owes some degree of inspiration to the methods which have "resulted so brilliantly for France's friend across the Channel." Good, honest John Bull is accustomed to reading very different descriptions of himself and his ways emanating from frantic Anglophobists, and will rub his eyes in amazement over this unexpected tribute. On the British side it has dissipated the delusion that the French are mercurial, volatile, or unstable. On the French side it appears to have relegated to limbo the caricatures of the British character which formerly found currency, and, in particular, we may hope it will be long before the phrase "Perfidie Albion" is heard again.

NEWS ITEMS

NO CHANGE IN INDIA'S OPIUM POLICY

In the House of Commons Mr. Reed asked whether, in view of the fact that there appears to have been an extensive rerudescence of poppy-growing in the provinces of Fukien and Yunnan and owing to disorder in China many other provinces were also drifting back to the situation preceding the Opium Treaties, it is proposed to continue the opium policy in India, whereby Indians are taxed higher and the Chinese reap no advantage. Mr. Montagu replied that it was not proposed to change the opium policy of the Government of India as a result of the rerudescence of poppy-growing in China. The matter was now governed by the Hague Convention, under which as China was prohibited from importing opium, India was bound to prevent the export from India of opium to China.

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA ACT

"Rules under the Government of India Act" have been presented to Parliament together with the Indian Elections Act, 1920, and instrument of instruction to Governors as appendices, and also the full index. The rules are complete except those to be framed by the Secretary of State in Council to regulate conditions of employment in the Civil Services in India, and to prescribe the duties of the public service commission, and of an auditor-general. The preface points out that the act of 1919 is now incorporated with the consolidating measure of 1915, and is therefore the only one Act in existence, known technically as the Government of India Act, without any distinguishing date of enactment.

STRIKE AT B.B. AND C.I. WORKSHOP

Contrary to expectations the strike of employees of the Bombay Baroda and Central India Railway workshops at Parel continues today, with the result that the suburban service of trains has been badly disorganized, causing a good deal of inconvenience to the public. The inconvenience has been rendered all the more acute by reason of today being foreign mail day. The strikers' main immediate grievance appears to be the payment of grain compensation allowance due to them for the last five months, which the authorities have promised to pay by March 10. In view of the fact that it will take a considerable time before accounts in this connection are made up in the case of each man, the position has been fully explained to the strikers.

KUKA DISTURBANCES OF 1872

In 1872, after the Kuka disturbances, restrictions were placed by the Punjab Government over the movement of leaders of this Sect and a police post was established at Bhaini Ala, their head quarters in Ludhiana District. These restrictions involved the reporting of their movements by the leader, supervision over visitors to the shrine, and prohibition of meetings without sanction from authorities. On a representation recently made as the result of a meeting held at Bhaini Ala, the Punjab Government by its order dated December 10, 1920 have formally cancelled the restrictive orders which are still in existence, and the Mahant of the Kukas has been informed accordingly. The question of the removal of the police post at Bhaini Ala is under consideration.

Remembrance if not atonement

MAHIR ALI

It would be tricky to designate the starting point of the subcontinent's second partition. The seeds, it could be argued, were sown during the late 1940s and fertilised through much of the succeeding two decades. There can be little question, though, that the point of no return was reached around midnight on March 25-26 half a century ago.

That was the night the massacres began. The initial targets stretched from Awami League stalwarts and strongholds to the intelligentsia more generally — among them university students, professors, writers, journalists, doctors and engineers. All too many of an incipient nation's best minds were obliterated before its birth.

That could be described as Pakistan's parting blow in the aftermath of the nation's first properly democratic exercise the preceding December. The elections had been postponed from October after floods wreaked havoc in East Pakistan. They were followed in November by a cyclone and tidal wave remembered as one of the deadliest natural catastrophes anywhere in the world.

The estimated death toll hovered around a million. Pakistan's military ruler, Yahya Khan, stopped over in Dhaka on his way home from a state



visit to China, witnessed the devastation during a helicopter ride, then promptly resumed his journey to Islamabad.

He returned in due course, purportedly to oversee the relief effort, but by then the eastern wing was already fluttering in the wind, poised to take solo flight. Much of the assistance in its hour of dire need had come from foreign countries. This inevitably reinforced the impression among Pakistani Bengalis that their

brethren in the West couldn't care less about their trials and tribulations.

This sense undoubtedly fed into the December elections — the first to be based on universal adult franchise, 23 years after independence. The nationalist Awami League, with its six-point agenda for provincial autonomy, won 160 of the 162 directly elected seats in East Pakistan — an absolute majority in any putative national parliament.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan Peo-

ples' Party surpassed expectations in Punjab and Sindh, but its total seats were barely half that of the Awami League — and, much to Bhutto's consternation, Yahya effectively designated Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the next prime minister of Pakistan.

Within less than four months, though, Mujib was designated a traitor (not for the first time) and taken into custody, the Awami League was banned, and voters in East Pakistan faced a bloodbath. The ferocity of the military action was all but unprecedented in the post-war decades.

Through the remainder of 1971, the denizens of West Pakistan were kept uninformed by the local media, official as well as 'independent'. With the start of the military action on March 26, complete censorship was imposed and only official versions of the events were allowed. The 'trouble' in the eastern wing, we were relentlessly told, was an Indian plot. Sure, there were some 'traitors' and a lot more 'miscreants', but they were all being adequately dealt with by our fearless 'jawans'. The implication was that in due course all would be well, the 'patriotic' Bengalis were anyhow in a majority, and the necessarily harsh treatment would bring the rest to their senses.

In the 50 years since then, this kind of nonsense has never entirely been superseded by a more objective narrative. The recent cancellation of a Lums seminar on the topic reinforces the impression that the sources

of power in what was once deemed the rump state still can't handle the bitter truth.

Perhaps we don't wish to be reminded of the fact that for all its foibles, follies and inherited flaws, Bangladesh is doing better than Pakistan on a number of economic indicators. Or, for that matter, to recognise that the pattern began to be repeated, soon after the bifurcation, in Balochistan.

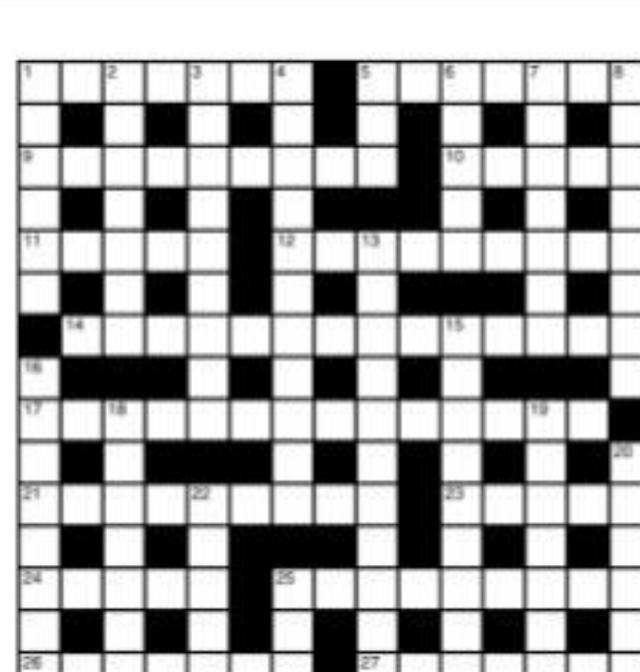
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As far as Pakistan is concerned, it might be too late to atone for what happened half a century ago, but remembering it accurately might suffice as a warning against repeating the experience.

Dawn/ANN.

CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



ACROSS

- 1 Snack service, one in wrapper ready for delivery (6)
- 5 Bangers, nuts and bananas not all there (8)
- 9 Dog gets my German dish (4,4)
- 10 Number Two's tax disc sent in (6)
- 11 A fruit tree's top in country food (12)
- 13 It's put on 24 and 16 (4)
- 14 They conquer lady's heart in stylish short poem (8)
- 17 Start with yen lad's saved (6,2)
- 18 We short-circuited race? (4)
- 19 Learned book sustain latest paper supplier (9)
- 20 Insured flyer flies, not needing manual? (4-8)
- 23 Province's queen bee regularly wearing silk (6)
- 24 Royalty now and then gets hard biscuits (8)
- 25 Warmed up, he put away wine bottles (8)
- 26 Cook cut unimportant piece of game (6)

DOWN

- 2 Long slice of feta cheese (4)
- 3 Learned book sustain latest paper supplier (9)
- 4 Nauseating article turns up in English clubs (6)
- 5 Novice once fed on random microwave meals? (11,4)
- 6 Charlie avoids habit-forming preservative for one (8)
- 7 Ford place out of commission (5)
- 8 About to tour St Petersburg once, start off in reverse (10)
- 12 Relish top northern booze (5,5)
- 15 Countless flyers imported, all about milk supplier (5,4)
- 16 Copper's suggested faster route (5,3)
- 19 Chopped and changed it in East Germany twice (6)
- 21 Bishop cuts canon's cash in Crimea (5)
- 22 Started to lose heart and pulse (4)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)



Inflation targeting has worked well and the government must stay with it, and it is going to work well in the period ahead also

D SUBBARAO
FORMER RBI GOVERNOR

THUMBNAILS

Single-window clearance for investors by 15 April: As part of furthering the ease of doing business in the country, the government is set to introduce a single-window clearance mechanism for investors by mid-April in order to attract greater foreign investment, a senior official said on Thursday. The single-window portal will integrate the existing clearance systems of various Central and state departments. "A lot of handholding, a lot of investor support (is being provided) and we are also going to launch a national single-window for the investors. We are targeting 15 April for that launch," department for promotion of industry and internal trade (DPIIT) secretary Guruprasad Mohapatra said.

BPCL divestment: Disinvestment process of oil marketing firm BPCL is moving on well and expected to conclude by September-end, department of investment and public asset management secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said on Thursday. The government is selling its entire 52.98 per cent stake in BPCL in the nation's biggest privatisation till date.

Nod to Airtel: The National Company Law Tribunal has sanctioned a "scheme of arrangement" between Bharti Airtel, Bharti Airtel Services, Hughes Communications India and HCL Comtel, according to a regulatory filing. In May 2019, Bharti Airtel and Hughes Communications India Ltd had said they will combine their VSAT satellite operations in the country, with Hughes holding a majority stake in the merged entity.

Realme phone: Smartphone maker Realme on Thursday introduced its latest youth flagships 8 series ~ Realme 8 Pro and Realme 8. Realme 8 Pro is the first Realme smartphone to be equipped with a 108MP ultra quad camera, while Realme 8 is equipped with 64MP AI quad camera, said a Press release from the company. "The 8 series from Realme promises a comprehensive experience for smartphone users at the most democratised price," it added.

Audi car: German luxury car maker Audi has launched Audi S5 Sportback in India. Powered by 3.0-litre, twin-turbo TFSI petrol engine, the four-door sports coupe is being brought to India via CBU (completely built unit) route and is priced at Rs 79.06 lakh (ex-showroom) onwards, said a statement from the company.

Samsung: Samsung has expanded its kitchen appliances range by launching the Baker Series microwaves that come with features such as steaming, grilling and frying with pro-level convection features, according to a Press release.

Economic revival to continue unabated: RBI Governor

At this point of time, one does not foresee a kind of lockdown that we experienced last year: Das

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 25 MARCH

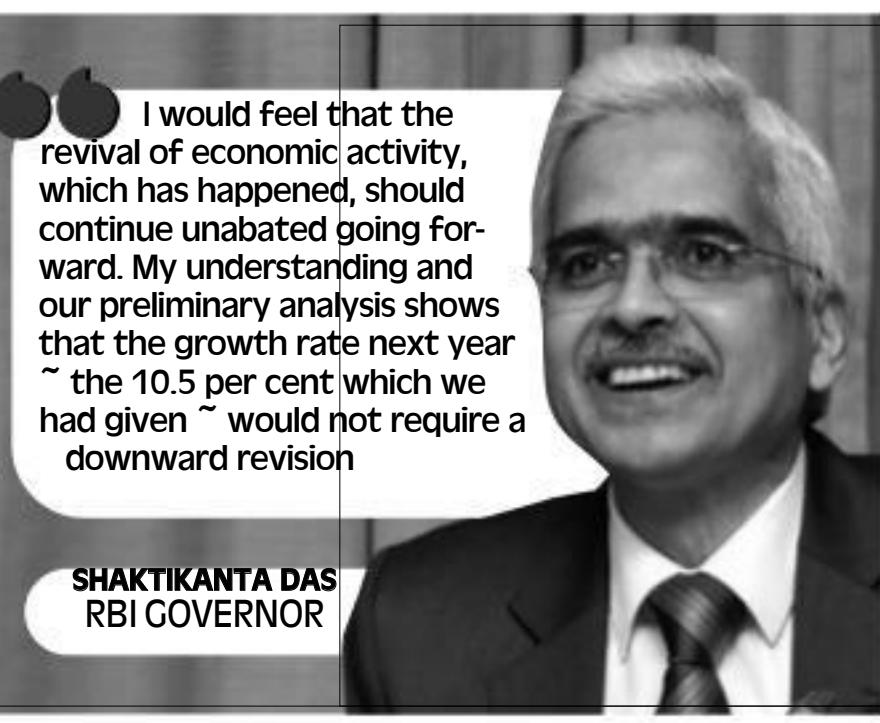
The rising Covid-19 infections across the country are a matter of concern, but it may not impact the ongoing economic revival as one does not foresee lockdowns, Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das said today.

The economic revival will continue "unabated", Das said, asserting that there is no need for a downward revision of RBI's 10.5 per cent GDP growth forecast for financial year 2021-22.

Speaking at Times Network's India economic conclave, Das said: "We have insurance to protect economic revival like a fast-paced vaccination drive, greater ability among people to follow Covid protocols", and one does not see lockdowns as well.

"The renewed surge in Covid cases in many parts of the country is a matter of concern," the Governor said.

"I would feel that the revival of economic activity, which has happened, should continue unabated going forward. My understanding and our preliminary analysis shows that the growth rate next year ~ the 10.5 per cent which we had given ~ would not require a downward revision," he added.



SHAKTIKANTA DAS
RBI GOVERNOR

unabated going forward. My understanding and our preliminary analysis shows that the growth rate next year ~ the 10.5 per cent which we had given ~ would not require a downward revision," he added.

It can be noted that India reported over 50,000 new Covid-19 infections today with states like Maharashtra reporting newer highs, and a new strain of virus has also been found.

Some pockets of the country have already resorted to stricter lockdowns in the face of the rising infections. It can be noted that a nationwide lockdown last year led to a deep economic impact and the GDP is set to contract by over 7 per cent in financial year 2020-21.

"...at this point of time, one does not foresee a kind of lockdown that we experienced last year. Last year, it came as a huge shock," Das

said.

The Governor affirmed the central bank's commitment to use all its policy tools to facilitate the economic revival from the debilitating impact of the pandemic while ensuring price and financial stability.

Das declined to comment on the inflation trajectory he sees going ahead, asking everybody to wait for the resolution of the monetary policy committee early next month which will have the RBI's outlook.

On the future of the "V-shaped" growth recovery, he made it clear that the RBI had never used any alphabet to denote the recovery but came out with a number, which is being maintained.

When asked about the bond market, Das said the central bank and the market are in no fight and added that the relationship should be non-combative. He, however, added that the RBI would like for an orderly evolution of the yields curve and no sudden spikes.

The RBI does not want excessive volatilities in the forex market and has been accumulating reserves to pro-

tect against the possible impact of the withdrawal of the stimulus measures in advanced economies, Das said.

He said there are no differences with the government over cryptocurrencies and the RBI has conveyed major concerns on the same to the government, which will eventually take a decision on the matter.

Financial sector stability is a major cause of worry which is being assessed as the RBI works on the central bank's digital currency, he said.

When asked about the Budget proposal to privatise two state-run lenders, Das said there had been discussion between the Mint Street and North Block before the Budget and after it as well, and added that the process is moving ahead.

The board has approved the proposals with respect to the framework of Innovators Growth Platform (IGP) under the Sebi (Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2018, with an objective to make the platform more accessible to companies in view of the evolving start-up ecosystem," Sebi said.

The regulator has decided to reduce the period of holding of 25 per cent of pre-issue capital of the issuer company by eligible investors to one year from the current 25 per cent to 49 per cent.

Sebi eases norms for listing of start-ups

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

requirement of two years.

The term "accredited investor" for the purpose of IGP renamed as "innovators growth platform investors". Such investor's pre-issue shareholding should be considered for entire 25 per cent of the pre-issue capital of the issuer company, against the current limit of only 10 per cent.

On the lines of provisions for listing of companies on the main board, Sebi has decided that the issuer company on the IGP should be allowed to allocate up to 60 per cent of the issue size on a discretionary basis, prior to issue opening for subscription to eligible investors with a lock-in of 30 days on such shares.

Currently, issuer company is not permitted to make discretionary allotment.

"In line with the provisions of main board IPO, issuer companies which have issued superior voting rights (SR) equity shares to promoters/founders shall be allowed to do listing under IGP framework," Sebi said.

The regulator has also decided that threshold trigger for open offer should be relaxed from the existing 25 per cent to 49 per cent.

Dividend distribution policy must for top-1,000 listed cos

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

the day on which such results are considered.

The regulator also cleared a proposal in relation to applicability, constitution and role of the risk management committee (RMC). Sebi said requirement to seek stock exchange approval for change of name of a listed entity has been dispensed with.

"Requirement for formulation of dividend distribution policy by the existing top-500 listed entities has been extended to the top-1,000 listed entities on the basis of market capitalisation," Sebi said in a statement after conclusion of its board meeting.

In case of board meetings held for more than one day, Sebi said the financial results should be disclosed by listed entities within 30 minutes of end of the board meeting for

quarter, Sebi said.

Frequency of submission of compliance certificates relating to share transfer facility and issuance of share certificates within 30 days of lodgement for transfer, subdivision, among others have been revised from half-year to annual. To strengthen these corporate governance practices, Sebi board approved several amendments to the LODR (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations.

"These amendments are aimed at ensuring gender neutrality and maintaining consistency within the LODR regulations, harmonising certain provisions of the LODR regulations with Companies Act, in addition to strengthening the corporate governance practices..." Sebi said.

The government today offered 67 coal mines for sale, launching the second tranche of commercial coal mining auction and termed it a step towards "Atmanirbhar Bharat".

This is the highest number of mines on offer in a particular tranche after commencement of the auction regime in 2014.

"India launched its 2nd tranche of auction for commercial coal mining, offering 67 mines for sale of coal, today. Union coal minister Pralhad Joshi launched the auction process in a programme held in New Delhi," ministry of coal said in a statement.

NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant and coal secretary Anil Kumar Jain were also present in the function.

Out of the total 67 mines offered by the ministry, 23 are under Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act and 44 under Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act.

The blocks on offer are a mix of mines with small and large reserves, coking and non-coking mines and fully and partially explored blocks spread across 6 states - Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

"We are making coal the driver of economic activities in the country. There are huge opportunities that the Indian coal sector is offering. Therefore, I invite investors to come and be a part of vastly untapped coal reserves in the country. Grow your businesses and take India along on the growth course

PRALHAD JOSHI
UNION COAL MINISTER

Commercial coal mining will bring in new investments, create huge employment opportunities and boost socio-economic development in coal-bearing states, and a market-based coal economy will help the nation become Atmanirbhar in coal, he said.

The coal minister also said looking at the past success, the government is moving towards adopting a "rolling auction" mechanism for conducting future auctions. Coal is the first mineral resource where this mechanism is being implemented in which a pool of coal blocks will always remain available for auctions.

"With rolling auctions, we will upload a comprehensive list of mines along with key technical data and bidders can submit their preferences for the mines to be included in the next tranche of auction," Joshi added.

Normalcy restored for resolution of stress under IBC: IBBI chief

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

which was in place for one year, ended on 24 March.

IBBI (Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India) chairperson M S Sahoo today said "normalcy" has been restored with respect to resolution of stress under the insolvency law, with the expiry of suspension of fresh proceedings.

After a year of relevant provisions being suspended amid the coronavirus pandemic, fresh proceedings under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) can now be initiated.

Certain provisions under the Code, which provide for time-bound and market-linked resolution of stressed assets, were suspended with effect from 25 March last year in the wake of the pandemic significantly impacting business activities. The suspension,

retrospectively from 25 March ~ the day when the nationwide lockdown to curb spreading of coronavirus infections had come into effect.

Later, a Bill to replace the Ordinance that had amended the Code was cleared by Parliament in September last year.

Initially, the suspension of fresh proceedings was for six months starting from 25 March. The same was extended twice for three months each ~ one till 24 December 2020 and then till 24 March 2021.

The corporate affairs ministry had suspended Section 7, 9 and 10 to provide relief for companies hit by the pandemic.

Sections 7, 9 and 10 deal with initiation of corporate insolvency resolution process and the same came into force

by a financial creditor, operational creditor and corporate debtor, respectively.

On 22 March, the ministry had told the Lok Sabha that the benefit of the suspension was applicable to all those defaults of the corporate debtor that occur from 25 March 2020 till the end of period of suspension.

"Such defaults arising from 25 March 2020 and till completion of suspension period will remain as honest for the purpose of initiation of CIRP under the code as permanent carve out," it had said in a written reply.

L Viswanathan, partner at law firm Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas, said there is no requirement for the government to take any action for bringing the provisions related to IBC filings in force.

NHAI plans to raise ₹1 lakh crore in 5 yrs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Union minister Nitin Gadkari today said the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is planning to raise Rs 1 lakh crore through monetisation of national highways in the next five years and exhorted industry players to come forward to reap rich dividends by investing in it.

Gadkari, who holds road transport portfolio along with MSME, said this will spur growth and the funds could be utilised for creating sound infrastructure.

"NHAI is planning to raise Rs 1 lakh crore through monetisation of highways under toll operate transfer (TOT) mode in the next five years," Gadkari said addressing CII's national conference

Petrol, diesel prices cut for second straight day

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

Petrol and diesel prices were today cut for the second straight day as international oil prices fell on prospects of speedy recovery in consumption getting clouded by second wave of Covid-19 cases.

Petrol price was cut by 21 paise per litre and diesel by 20 paise, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

Petrol now costs Rs 90.78 per litre in Delhi and a litre of diesel comes for Rs 81.10.

Rates have been reduced across the country and vary from state to state depending on the local incidence of taxation (VAT).

Prices were reduced by 18 paise a litre on petrol and 17 on diesel in the first reduction in six months on Wednesday.

Despite bouts of freeze, prices had gone up by a record Rs 21.58 per litre on petrol since the government raised excise duty in March last year. Diesel prices had increased by Rs 19.18 a litre.

Prices which last month hit record highs including crossing Rs 100 mark in some places in Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, had been on freeze since February-end when elections to five states, including West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, were announced.

In Mumbai, the petrol price was cut to Rs 97.19 a litre today from Rs 97.40 while diesel rates were reduced to Rs 88.20 from Rs 88.42, the price notification showed.

The rate reduction followed international oil prices tumbling to the lowest since early February as the second wave of Covid-19 infection clouded the prospects for a speedy recovery in consumption.

Equity indices crash for second straight session

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 25 MARCH

Equity benchmarks crashed for the second straight session today as a spurt in Covid-19 cases in the country and fears of localised lockdowns triggered an across-the-board selloff. Bearish global cues and expiry of monthly derivative contracts added to the volatility, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex slumped 740.19 points or 1.51 per cent to close at 48,440.12 points. The broader NSE Nifty tanked 224.50 points or 1.54 per cent to 14,324.90 points.

Maruti was the top loser in the Sensex pack, shedding 3.98 per cent, followed by HUL, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Auto, NTPC, Bajaj Finance and

SENSEX PLUNGES 740 POINTS

► Equity benchmarks crashed for the second straight session on Thursday as a spurt in Covid-19 cases in the country and fears of localised lockdowns triggered an across-the-board selloff.

cation may quickly stabilise the market," said Vinod Nair, head of research at Geojit Financial Services.

Binod Modi, head - strategy at Reliance Securities, said the market capitalisation of domestic market slipped

740.19 points or 1.51 per cent to close at 48,440.12 points.

below Rs 200 trillion for the first time after 3 February 2021, resulting in wealth erosion of over Rs 5 trillion in the last two days.

All sectoral indices ended in the red, with BSE telecom, power, auto, energy, utilities

and realty indices declining as much as 3.14 per cent.

Broader BSE mid-cap and small-cap indices tumbled up to 2.22 per cent.

India saw 53,476 new coronavirus infections in a day, the highest single-day rise so far

this year, taking the nationwide Covid-1



Thanks to the joint efforts made by China and India, the situation in the border area has been eased distinctly

CHINA'S MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEFENCE SENIOR COLONEL REN GUOQIANG
AT AN ONLINE MEDIA BRIEFING.

The Statesman
NEW DELHI, FRIDAY 26 MARCH 2021

09

Myanmar protesters return to streets in large numbers

Security forces in Mandalay sought to break up some of the protests by force

ASSOCIATED PRESS

YANGON, 25 MARCH

Protesters against last month's military takeover in Myanmar returned to the streets in large numbers on Thursday, a day after staging a silence strike in which people were urged to stay home and businesses to close for the day.

Security forces sought to break up some of the protests by force. Social media accounts and local news outlets reported violent attacks on demonstrators in Hpa-an, the capital of the southeastern Karen state, as well as the eastern Shan state's capital of Taunggyi and Mon state's capital of Mawlamyine, also in the south.

It was not clear if soldiers used live ammunition in addition to firing rubber bullets at the demonstrators.



Protesters wearing different Myanmar ethnic costumes taking part in a demonstration against the military coup. ■ AFP

According to Democratic Voice of Burma, a broadcast and online news service, two young men were shot and seriously wounded in Hpa-an.

Other protests on Thursday morning proceeded peacefully, including in Mandalay, the country's second-biggest city, and on a smaller scale in neighborhoods of Yangon, the largest metropolis.

DVB also reported that

another young man was killed and at least four other people wounded Wednesday night in what it described as a crackdown by the army in Kyauk-padaung, a town in central Myanmar. The military's 1 February seizure of power ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, whose party won a landslide election victory last November.

It put the brakes on the Southeast Asian nation's

return to democracy that began when Suu Kyi's party took office in 2016 for its first term, after more than five decades of military rule. Myanmar's Assistance Association for Political Prisoners says at least 286 people have been killed in connection with the crackdown.

It says 2,906 people have been arrested, charged or sentenced at one point in connection with resisting the coup, with most remaining detained. Kanbawza Tai News, an online news service based in Taunggyi, reported that four of its staff, including its publisher and its editor, were detained Wednesday night.

It said the home of the editor was raided and materials seized. The detentions constitute the junta's latest attack on press freedom. About 40 journalists have been detained since the Feb.

1 coup, and roughly half are still in custody.

The military government has also ordered at least five news outlets to shut down, although they continue to operate.

Thein Zaw, a journalist for The Associated Press who was arrested last month while covering an anti-coup protest, was released Wednesday.

The judge in his case announced during a hearing that all charges against him were dropped because he was doing his job at the time of his arrest. He had been facing a potential three-year prison sentence under the public order law he was charged with violating.

On Wednesday, more than 600 protesters were released from Yangon's Insein Prison, where Thein Zaw had also been held a rare conciliatory gesture by the ruling military.

North Korea test-fires ballistic missiles in message to America

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SEOUL, 25 MARCH

North Korea test-fired its first ballistic missiles since President Joe Biden took office on Thursday, as it expands its military capabilities and increases pressure on Washington while nuclear negotiations remain stalled.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said the launches threaten peace and safety in Japan and the region, and that Tokyo will closely coordinate with Washington and Seoul on the North's testing activities.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the missiles were fired at around 7:06 a.m. and 7:25 a.m. from an area on the North's eastern coast and flew 450 kilometers (279 miles) on an apogee of 60 kilometers (37 miles) before landing in the sea.

"This activity highlights the threat that North Korea's illicit weapons program poses to its neighbors and the international community," Kafka said.



while closely consulting with allies.

Another senior US official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military observations, matched the information from South Korea's military, saying that initial assessments suggest the North fired two short-range ballistic missiles.

"The judge in his case announced during a hearing that all charges against him were dropped because he was doing his job at the time of his arrest. He had been facing a potential three-year prison sentence under the public order law he was charged with violating."

On Wednesday, more than 600 protesters were released from Yangon's Insein Prison, where Thein Zaw had also been held a rare conciliatory gesture by the ruling military.

short-range weapons presumed to be cruise missiles into its western sea over the weekend.

North Korea has a history of testing new US administrations with missile launches and other provocations aimed at forcing the Americans back to the negotiating table.

Still, Thursday's launches were a measured provocation compared to the nuclear and intercontinental missile tests in 2017 that inspired war fears before the North shifted toward diplomacy with the Trump administration.

Analysts say that the North would gradually dial up its weapons displays to increase its bargaining power as it angles to get back into stalled talks aimed at leveraging nuclear weapons for badly needed economic benefits.

It's unclear how the Biden administration would respond before it completes its policy review on North Korea in the coming weeks.

IMF approves \$500 million loan to Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, 25 MARCH

The International Monetary Fund has agreed to release the next tranche of USD 500 million loan for Pakistan after approving four pending reviews of the cash-strapped country's economic progress.

The IMF had agreed in 2019 to provide Pakistan USD 6 billion under a 39-month Extended Fund Facility (EFF) arrangement but it was disrupted due to Covid-19 pandemic last year.

Quoting official sources in Washington, the Dawn newspaper reported that the approval revives the USD 6 billion IMF loan programme after it remained latent for over a year and followed some tough decisions taken in Islamabad to stabilise the economy.

The measures included a steep rise in electricity bills, imposition of Rs140 billion taxes and agreeing to grant unprecedented autonomy for the central bank.

The executive board of the IMF endorsed the staff-level agreement, reached between the government of Pakistan and the Fund's team last month. The board's approval has paved the way for the release of USD 500 million third loan tranche, adding that out of the USD 6 billion, the IMF has already disbursed USD 1.45 billion in two tranches, to total disbursements of USD 2 billion.

Hong Kong vaccination drive struggles to gain public trust

ASSOCIATED PRESS

HONG KONG, 25 MARCH

Hong Kong's sudden suspension of a COVID-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech is another blow to a vaccination program already struggling against a wall of public distrust.

Hong Kong on Wednesday suspended use of the Pfizer vaccine, distributed by Chinese pharmaceutical firm Fosun Pharma, after defective packaging such as loose vial lids and cracks on bottles were found in one of two

batches of the vaccine.

For now, Hong Kong residents can only get the Chinese-made Sinovac vaccine, which is reported to have an efficacy rate of 62 per cent, compared with Pfizer's 97 per cent. Wariness toward the Sinovac shot has grown after seven people who were vaccinated with it died, though authorities noted to the vaccine.

When the government launched the vaccination drive in February, Chan Yuet Lin was eager to get inoculated. Since vaccinations began 5.7 per cent of Hong Kong's residents have gotten the dose.

immigrant in the semi-autonomous city, she hoped vaccination would help her eventually visit her family in the Chinese mainland, whom she had not seen since the pandemic began, without enduring onerous quarantines.

But after seeing reports on television that several people with chronic illnesses had died days after having the Sinovac vaccine, Chan decided against getting inoculated.

Since vaccinations began 5.7 per cent of Hong Kong's residents have gotten the dose.

Deadlock prevails as tallying resumes in Israeli election

ASSOCIATED PRESS
JERUSALEM, 25 MARCH

Vote tallying in Israel resumed on Thursday in the deadlocked parliamentary elections held earlier this week, with neither Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu nor those determined to topple him gaining a clear path to forming a government.

Tuesday's vote, the fourth Israeli parliamentary elections in two years, was widely seen as a referendum on Netanyahu's fitness to rule while under indictment. But neither the pro-Netanyahu camp nor his highly fragmented opponents gained 61 of the necessary 120 seats



in parliament.

With around 95% of the votes counted, Netanyahu and his allies had a projected 52 seats compared to 57 held by his opponents.

In the middle are two undecided parties: Yemina, a seven-seat nationalist party headed by a former Netanyahu lieutenant, and Raam, an Arab Islamist party that won

four seats. Neither Naftali Bennett of Yemina nor Mansour Abbas of Raam has committed to either camp.

"It's apparent that our political system finds it very difficult to produce a decisive outcome," Plesner said. He added that inherent weaknesses in Israel's electoral system are compounded by the Netanyahu factor: a popular prime minister struggling to stay in power while under indictment.

Stuck ship in Egypt's Suez Canal imperils shipping worldwide

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ISMALIA, 25 MARCH

A skyscraper-sized cargo ship wedged across Egypt's Suez Canal further imperiled global shipping on Thursday as at least 150 other vessels needing to pass through the crucial waterway idled waiting for the obstruction to clear, authorities said.

The Ever Given, a Panama-flagged ship that carries cargo between Asia and Europe, ran aground Tuesday in the narrow, man-made canal dividing continental Africa from the Sinai Peninsula. In the time since, efforts to free the ship using dredgers, digging and the aid of high tides

have yet to push the container vessel aside.

Egyptian officials and others were due to begin work again to free the vessel Thursday morning after halting for the night. So far, dredgers have tried to clear silt around the massive ship. Tug boats nudged the vessel alongside it, trying to gain momentum. From the shore, at least one backhoe dug into the canal's sandy banks, suggesting the bow of the ship had plowed into it.

Bernhard Schulte Ship-management, the company that manages the Ever Given, said the ship's 25-member crew are safe and accounted for.

The ship had two pilots from Egypt's canal authority aboard the vessel to guide it when the grounding happened around 7:45 a.m. Tuesday, the company said. Canal service provider Leth Agencies said at least 150 ships were waiting for the

Ever Given to be cleared, including vessels near Port Said on the Mediterranean Sea, Port Suez on the Red Sea and those already stuck in the canal system on Egypt's Great Bitter Lake.

Cargo ships already behind the Ever Given in canal will

be reversed south back to Port Suez to free the channel, Leth Agencies said. Authorities hope to do the same to the Ever Given when they can free it. Evergreen Marine Corp., a major Taiwan-based shipping company that operates the ship, said in a statement that the Ever Given had been overcome by strong winds as it entered the canal from the Red Sea but none of its containers had sunk.

An Egyptian official similarly blamed a strong wind. Egyptian forecasters said high winds and a sandstorm plagued the area on Tuesday, with winds gusting as much as 50 kilometers (30 miles) per hour.

Prime Minister Imran Khan

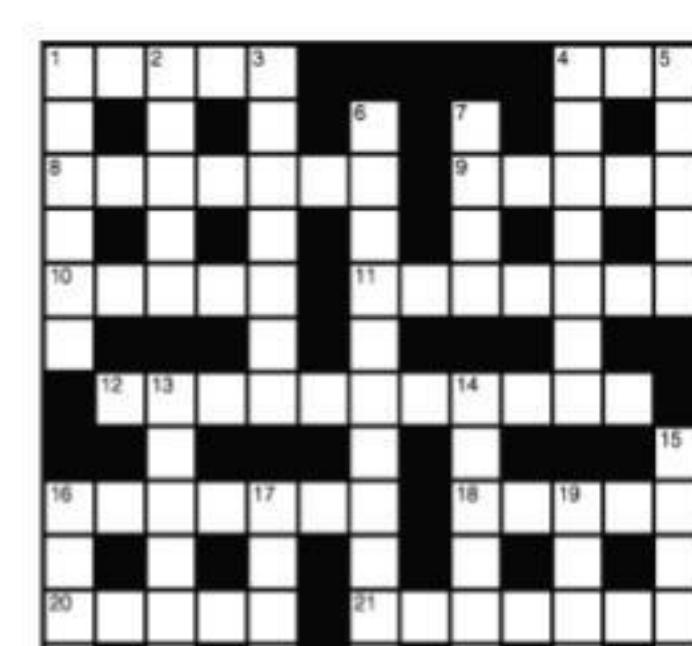
was unable to attend as he is currently in quarantine after testing positive for Covid-19.

"Peaceful coexistence is the cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy. The situation warrants that the leadership of South Asia reject the politics of hate, prejudice and religious extremism to guide the region towards prosperity," Alvi said.

He said that the resolution of the Kashmir issue is imperative for peace in South Asia. The Ministry of External Affairs had said it desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan in an environment free of terror.

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1 Church passageway (5)
- 4 Concealed (3)
- 8 Active (2,3,2)
- 9 ... (5)
- 10 Snaking dance (5)
- 11 Army member (7)
- 12 Uncompromising (4-7)
- 16 French castle (7)
- 18 More than sufficiently (5)
- 20 Defence of being elsewhere (5)
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The EU's problems with getting deliveries of vaccines have underscored the need for the bloc to redouble its efforts to produce its own doses

GERMAN CHANCELLOR ANGELA MERKEL
AHEAD OF AN EU SUMMIT

WEATHER

CITY	MAX(°C)	MIN(°C)
SINGAPORE	30	25 H
HONG KONG	22	18 CL
TOKYO	18	13 H
LONDON	13	4 H
DUBAI	34	23 CL
SAN FRANCISCO	14	9 H
NEW YORK	18	9 H
MOSCOW	7	-6 H

S=sunny, CL= clear, H=hazy, R=rainy...

THUMBNAILS



The celebration cauldron is seen lit on the first day of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic torch relay in Naraha, Fukushima prefecture, northeastern Japan.

■ AGENCIES

Lanka to buy Sputnik V doses: Sri Lanka has decided to purchase 7 million doses of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine. The government says it will pay \$69.65 million for the shots. Sri Lanka aims to inoculate 14 million people out of the population of 22 million. So far, over 850,000 people have received their shots using the AstraZeneca vaccine. AP

Protest against Chinese foreign minister's visit: Hundreds of Uighurs staged protests in Ankara and Istanbul on Thursday, denouncing Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to Turkey and demanding that the Turkish government take a stronger stance against human rights abuses in China's Xinjiang region. AP

US jobless claims fall to 684,000: The number of people seeking unemployment benefits fell sharply last week to 684,000, the fewest since the pandemic erupted a year ago and a sign that the economy is improving. AP

Reforms pushed in Texas as trial nears in Floyd death

AUSTIN, 25 MARCH

Outside of George Floyd's public memorial last summer in Texas, Republican Governor Greg Abbott floated the possibility of a law named in honor of the long-time Houston resident that would take aim at police brutality.

But nine months later, as a former Minneapolis police officer charged in Floyd's death is set to stand trial next week and a George Floyd Act is heard in the Texas Capitol for the first time Thursday, there are scarce early signs of GOP support for the package of sweeping police reforms introduced by Democrats, including from Abbott.

It reflects the challenges facing the efforts in Texas, where Floyd, who was Black, was laid to rest following his death in May after Derek Chauvin, who is white, pressed his knee against his neck for about nine minutes while he was handcuffed and pleading that he couldn't breathe. Chauvin is charged with murder and manslaughter in a trial that begins Monday in Minneapolis.

Members of Floyd's family are expected to testify in Texas, as is the sister of a second Black man, Javier Ambler, who also died in police custody and was heard saying on body camera video that he was having trouble breathing while being detained by sheriff's deputies near Austin.

Provisions of the bill include banning chokeholds and requiring officers to intervene if another officer is using excessive force.

Earlier this month in Congress, House Democrats passed the most ambitious effort in decades to overhaul policing nationwide under the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act. AP

'AstraZeneca vaccine strongly effective'

AstraZeneca's newest calculations are based on 190 COVID-19 cases that occurred during the study, 49 more than it had included earlier

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 25 MARCH



AstraZeneca insists that its Covid-19 vaccine is strongly effective even after counting additional illnesses in its disputed US study, the latest in an extraordinary public rift with American officials.

In a late-night news release on Wednesday, the drugmaker said it had recalculated data from that study and concluded the vaccine is 76 per cent effective in preventing symptomatic Covid-19 instead of the 79 per cent it had reported earlier in the week.

Just a day earlier, an independent panel that oversees the study had accused AstraZeneca of cherry-picking data to tout the protection offered by its vaccine. The panel, in a harsh letter to the company and to US health leaders, said the company had left out some Covid cases that occurred in the study, a move that could erode trust in the science.

Some experts said the new data provided by AstraZeneca was reassuring and that the information was likely solid enough for US regulators to authorize the vaccine.

AstraZeneca may have just been too hasty in submitting the earlier, incomplete interim analysis rather than waiting to analyse and submit the full dataset, said Julian Tang, a virologist at the University of Leicester who was not connected to the research. He said the updated details didn't look substantially different from what was published earlier this week.

Data disputes during ongoing studies typically remain confidential but in an unusual step, the National Insti-

tutes of Health publicly called on AstraZeneca to fix the discrepancy.

AstraZeneca had been counting on findings from a predominantly US study of 32,000 people to help rebuild confidence in a vaccine that, despite being widely used in Britain, Europe and other countries, has had a troubled rollout. Previous studies have turned up inconsistent data about its effectiveness, and then last week a scare about blood clots had some countries temporarily pausing inoculations.

Most have since restarted after the European Medicines Agency said the vaccine doesn't increase the overall incidence of blood clots. But it could not rule out a connection to some rare blood clots and issued new advice for monitoring those who get vaccinated.

Now the question is whether the company's newest calculations can end the tension. Even before the latest spat, experts had expressed concern that missteps in the vaccine's rollout could undermine confidence in the shot, which is

crucial to global efforts to end the coronavirus pandemic since it is cheap, easy to store and a pillar of the COVAX initiative aimed at bringing vaccines to low- and middle-income countries.

Earlier Wednesday, Dr Anthony Fauci, the top US infectious disease expert, told reporters he hoped that when all the data was publicly vetted by federal regulators, it would dispel any hesitancy caused by the spat. He predicted it would turn out to be a good vaccine.

AstraZeneca's newest calculations were based on 190 COVID-19 cases that occurred during the study, 49 more than it had included earlier in the week. The vaccine appears especially protective against the worst outcomes, with no severe illnesses or hospitalizations among vaccinated study volunteers compared to eight severe cases among those given dummy shots, the company said. It didn't provide a breakdown of the rest of the cases.

Some European authorities have questioned how protective the vaccine is in older adults. In the US study, it was 85 per cent effective in volunteers 65 and older, the company said. The study didn't turn up safety concerns.

The updated information confirms that our Covid-19 vaccine is highly effective in adults, including those aged 65 years and over, AstraZeneca research chief Mene Pangalos said in a statement. He said the company looks forward to "the rollout of millions of doses across America."

The study hasn't ended, so additional cases can still accrue. AstraZeneca cautioned that 14 additional possible cases already are being examined and that could lead to further changes in the data.

The company intends to seek Food and Drug Administration clearance of the vaccine within a few weeks.

The FDA will publicly debate all the evidence with its outside advisers before making a decision.

stering election security and ethics laws.

Democrats are renewing their efforts to muscle through the largest overhaul of US elections in a generation, setting up a fight with Republicans that could bring partisan battles to a climax in the evenly split Senate and become a defining issue for President Joe Biden.

Democrats and Republicans both see the legislation, which touches on nearly every aspect of the electoral process, as fundamental to their parties' political futures. The Senate bill, similar to a version passed by the House earlier this month, could shape election outcomes for years to come, striking down hurdles to voting, requiring more disclosure from political donors, restricting partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts and bol-

ing a rare appearance at a hearing, said Wednesday it took mighty movements and decades of fraught political conflict to achieve the basic dignities of current election laws and any American who thinks that the fight for a full and fair democracy is over, is sadly and sorely mistaken.

Democrats see the measure as a forceful response to voting rights restrictions advancing in Republican-controlled statehouses across the country in the wake of Donald Trump's baseless claims of a stolen 2020 election.

The Senate legislation would create automatic voter registration nationwide, allow former felons to vote, and limit the ways states can remove registered voters from their rolls.

It would expand voting by mail, promote early voting and give states money to track absentee ballots.

Democrats launch Senate battle for expanded US voting rights

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 25 MARCH

seeking election security and ethics laws.

The debate over who has the right to vote, and how elections are conducted, could play out for months, if not years. Democrats newly in control of both chambers of Congress say they are trying to rebuild trust in the ballot after two tumultuous election cycles. Republicans charge the bill would strip power from the states and cement an unfair political advantage for Democrats.

With the GOP unanimously opposed, the legislation is presenting a crucial test of how hard Biden and his party are willing to fight for their priorities, as well as those of their voters. Unless they united around changing Senate rules, their chance to enshrine expansive voting protections could quickly slip away.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., mak-

ing a rare appearance at a hearing, said Wednesday it took mighty movements and decades of fraught political conflict to achieve the basic dignities of current election laws and any American who thinks that the fight for a full and fair democracy is over, is sadly and sorely mistaken.

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Scientists mull clues on coronavirus origin

ASSOCIATED PRESS
GENEVA, 25 MARCH

LONG SOUGHT ANSWER



► The report will offer a first glance in writing from 10 international epidemiologists, data scientists, veterinary, lab and food safety experts who visited China and the city of Wuhan

► Critics have raised questions about the objectivity of the team, insisting that China's government had a pivotal say over its composition

Chinese counterparts who pulled up the bulk of early data.

Critics have raised questions about the objectivity of the team, insisting that China's government had a pivotal say over its composition.

It wasn't immediately clear when the report will be released after its publication was delayed earlier this month. By many accounts, the report could offer few concrete answers, and may raise further questions.

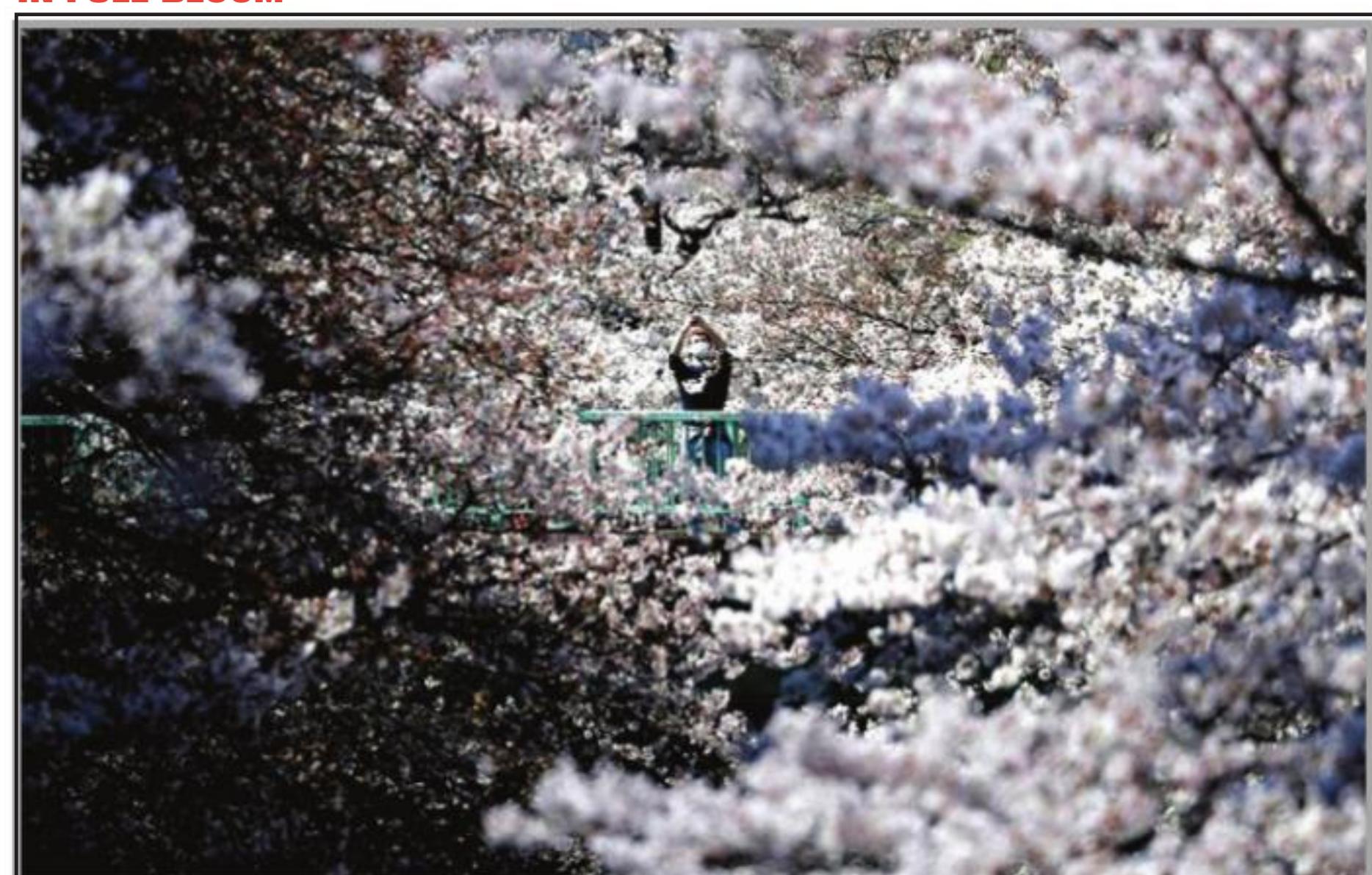
It will offer a first glance in writing from 10 international epidemiologists, data scientists, veterinary, lab and food safety experts who visited China and the city of Wuhan, where a market was seen as the initial epicenter earlier this year to work with

as insufficient." The Wuhan trip is billed as Phase 1 in a vast undertaking to flesh out the origins of the virus.

The WHO has bristled at depictions of the mission as an "investigation" saying that smacks of an invasive forensic probe that wasn't called for under the resolution adopted unanimously by the agency's member states in May that paved the way for the collaboration. The WHO and China later ironed out the ground rules.

Team member Vladimir Dedkov, an epidemiologist and deputy director of research at the St Petersburg Pasteur Institute in Russia, summarised the four main leads first laid out at a marathon news conference in China

IN FULL BLOOM



A man wearing a protective face mask takes a photo among blooming cherry blossoms in Tokyo, Japan. ■ AGENCIES

Joe Biden taps Harris to lead effort to stem immigrant flow

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON, 25 MARCH

last month about the suspected origins of the first infection in humans. They were, in order of likelihood: from a bat through an intermediary animal; straight from a bat; via contaminated frozen food products; from a leak from a laboratory like the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

Officials in China, as well as Chinese team leader Liang Wannian, have promoted the third theory the cold-chain one while the US administration under President Donald Trump played up the fourth one, of the lab leak. But Dedkov said those two hypotheses were far down the list of likely sources.

He suggested frozen products on which the virus was found were most likely contaminated by infected people. An infected person also likely brought and spread the virus at the Wuhan market associated with the outbreak, where some of the contaminated products were later found. All the conditions for the spread of infection were present at this market, Dedkov said in an interview. Therefore, most likely, there was a mass infection of people who were connected by location. At this point, there are no facts suggesting that there was a leak" from a lab, Dedkov said.

In 2010, Harris was elected California's Attorney General and oversaw the largest state justice department in the United States. Harris, 56, is the first female US vice president as well as the first African American and first Asian

American vice president.

The task mimics Biden's own efforts in 2014 and 2015, when he was tapped by then-President Barack Obama to lead diplomatic efforts in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador after a surge of unaccompanied minors from those countries began arriving in the US.

"This new surge (of migrants) we are dealing with now started with the last administration but it is our responsibility to deal with it humanely and to stop (it from) happening and so this increase has been consequential," Biden told reporters at the White House.

"The vice president has agreed... to lead our diplomatic effort and work with those nations to accept the returnees and enhance migration enforcement at their borders and we are already talking with Mexico about that," he said.

When he took office two months ago, Biden, a Democrat, stopped further construction of the border wall championed by his Republican predecessor Donald Trump and embraced what he said would be a more humane treatment of migrants.

Migrant: State of emergency in Arizona

PHOENIX (US), 25 MARCH

A small town in Arizona has declared a state of emergency over migrant families being dropped there as a growing number of border communities grapple with how to get the new arrivals to shelters in bigger cities.

The situation simmering in Gila Bend and other communities near Arizona's border with Mexico comes as much larger groups of asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors show up at bigger cities in Texas and California that have shelters where they can stay until they can travel to relatives or sponsors in the US. Officials in Yuma and Tucson have said in recent days that US authorities have told them that large tent-like facilities designed to help deal with the influx of new arrivals will be erected in their cities. AP

Leaving behind an unfulfillable void

Sitar maestro Pandit Monoj Shankar was marked by knowledge of oceanic magnanimity and an uncanny insight into his students' minds

MEENA BANERJEE

Pandit Monoj Shankar's *Sangeet Sadhana* was fighting a losing battle with destructive ailments over the last 10 years. However, it did not hold him back from the normal schedule of performance and teaching. A staunch believer in life being synonymous with sitar, he finally bowed to the inevitable. The end came quietly in his residence on 9 March.

The interesting life-story of this self-effacing devotee of music goes back to the early 1940s when the corridors of the majestic mansion of Narayandahar *zamindars* (in the Mymensingh district of East Bengal, present-day Bangladesh) found a child of seven furtively picking up the full-fledged Tarabdar Sitar of his elder brother with the confidence of a master, tuning it to perfection and reproducing Ustad Inayat Khan's *Khamaj*, *Tilak Kamod* and *Bhairavi* in smooth succession, exactly as he had heard on the gramophone record.

Apparently, Shankar took to sitar like duck to water. The musical ambience of his ancestral home – venue of many a *mehfil* where visiting musicians entertained the elite gentry – the guidance and encouragement of his uncle (himself a musician and musicologist) and his inborn talent manifested in his control over the complicated 20-stringed instrument without being formally taught the basic principles of fingering and stroking. The proximity of the distinguished musicians patronised by his family (including Chhote Khan, Chandrika Prasad Dubey and Khusru Miyan) stimulated the talented youngster's passion further.

Later, he was formally initiated to sitar by Sukhamay Sengupta, a noted disciple of Inayat Khan *sahib*, who taught Shankar for a few months. The Sangeet Sammelan to raise funds for Noakhali riot victims featured stalwarts

such as Allauddin Khan, Keramatullah Khan, Sachindas Matilal, Tarapada Chakrabarty and several others and interacting with them probably hardened the budding musician's resolve to dedicate his life to *Sangeet Sadhana*.

Turbulence of the pre- and post-partition years ruptured the harmony of the *Bhatiyali* he listened to for hours on the river banks and Shankar's teenage sensibilities witnessed a new, grim reality of life – the trauma of being uprooted from a safe haven of luxury to a life of struggle for survival in an alien land. The family crossed over to India (the "modern" independent India as distinguished from the undivided India of the Raj) and settled in Siliguri, North Bengal, where high-school and college, were priorities while musical pursuits continued.

Higher studies brought Shankar to Kolkata where he met renowned sitarist Ustad Ali Ahmed Khan, armed with a letter of introduction from his college-teacher in Siliguri. The Ustad – on hearing him play – recognised raw talent and accepted him as his disciple. *Talim* and performances ran parallel and the annual festival of the famous Allauddin Sangeet Samaj found Shankar (accompanied by Mahapurush Mishra on the tabla) performing with luminaries like Bade Gulam Ali Khan, Ali Akbar Khan and Nikhil Banerjee. Connoisseurs of Kolkata acknowledged the virtuosity of the young sitarist who made his presence felt in major musical events.

Around that time, sarod maestro Bahadur Khan – fresh from Maihar – arrived in Kolkata and mesmerised the music world. Legendary film director Ritwik Ghatak promptly invited him to compose the background score for his then upcoming film *Subarnarekha*. Bahadur Khan – who had heard Shankar perform in several festivals and marked his flair for creative work – invited him to assist with the music composition. Later Ustad Bahadur



Khan proposed to teach Shankar who – though hesitant and unwilling initially, in keeping with traditional ethics – was later persuaded by Ustad Ali Ahmed Khan *sahib* to accept Ustad Bahadur Khan as his second Guru.

This Guru-Shishya bond continued till the passing of the Ustads while Shankar's journey crossed important milestones. Leading music festivals of India – including Sadarang, North Calcutta, Entally, Ballygunge, Shovabazar, Serampore, Shri Ram Centre (Delhi), music conferences in Patna, Darbhanga, Allahabad, Kanpur, Cooch Behar, Silchar, Guwahati, Sikkim, etc – were witness to the *Dhrupad-ang baaj* of a true *Charanedar* musician.

Shankar's musicality and repertoire reflected a synthesis of tradition and imagination. Allauddin/Maihar Gharana's *Dhrupad*-based *Alapchari*, profuse application of *Kharaj-Pancham* strings as in Rudra Veena, systematic *raga* delineation and progression with a unique blend of *Raagdari* and emotion, a seamless integration of sarod idioms in sitar *baaj*, all these and more contributed to his style which, though very much rooted in the Maihar tradition, differs considerably from that of Ravi Shankar and Nikhil Banerjee. His handling of folk-based *dhuns* (especially *Bhatiyali*) reveals the rustic simplicity and lyrical beauty that his subconscious probably assimilated in childhood.

Sensational *jugalbandis* with his Guru Bahadur Khan reached the height of popularity and Shankar excelled in solo and duet performances to the accompaniment of legendary tabla players including Keramatullah Khan, Kishen Maharaj, Kanai Dutta, Latif Ahmed and Sharda Sahai among others. By that time his contribution to the background music of award-winning feature films including MS Sathyu's *Garam Hawa* and documentaries, ballet and theatre was well-known.

The gradual transition from prolific performer to *acharya* happened over time. Teaching, which began in the early 1950s during his period of struggle, subsequently became a special aspect of his musicality, marked by knowledge of oceanic magnanimity, yogic patience, uncanny insight into the student's mind, articulation of a high order, and, what's more, a parental urge for students' upbringing.

As such he is widely acknowledged as one of the most revered Gurus of mod-

ern times, with students across the globe, including noted professionals with international acclaim.

The instrumental music department of Rabindra Bharati University was enriched by his expertise for more than 15 years. Bharati Vidya Bhavan, London, invited him to their prestigious summer school as visiting professor in 2007 when he overwhelmed audiences and students by performances, workshops and teaching sessions. The department of information and culture, Government of West Bengal, in association with Baba Allaudin Memorial Committee, felicitated Pandit Shankar at Rabindra Sadan, Kolkata, on the death anniversary of Baba Allaudin Khan.

The void left by the passing of a Guru of his stature is unfulfillable.

The writer is a senior music critic

SNIPPETS

Marvel postpones



Black Widow, an upcoming Marvel film starring Scarlett Johansson in the title role, has been pushed back by two months.

Marvel announced on Tuesday that *Black Widow* (photo above), which was originally scheduled for release on 7 May, will now be unveiled on 9 July. The film will be released simultaneously in select cinemas and on Disney+, where it will be available for a premium fee.

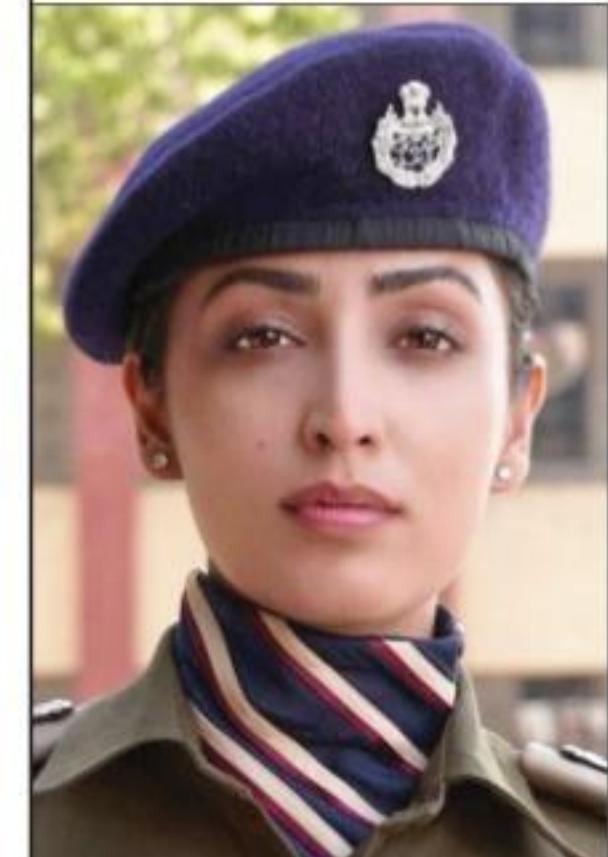
It is one of several adjustments to Disney's release schedule announced earlier this week. The upcoming Marvel film *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*, which was scheduled to come out in July, has been pushed back to 3 September.

Cruella, starring Emma Stone as Cruella de Vil from One Hundred and One Dalmatians, is keeping its scheduled release date of 28 May, with an added simultaneous release on Disney+. Pixar's upcoming film *Luca*, meanwhile, won't be released in cinemas and will debut on Disney+ in countries where the streaming service is available. In other markets, the film is expected to have a theatrical release.

Four more films have been given new release dates – *Free Guy* has been moved from 21 May to 13 August; *The King's Man* from 20 August to 22 December; *Deep Water* from 13 August to 14 January 2022; and *Death on the Nile* from 17 September to 11 February 2022.

—THE INDEPENDENT

Jail tales



Actress Yami Gautam, who plays a uniformed police officer in the film *Dasvi*, has an interesting anecdote from her location shoot in Agra's Central Jail.

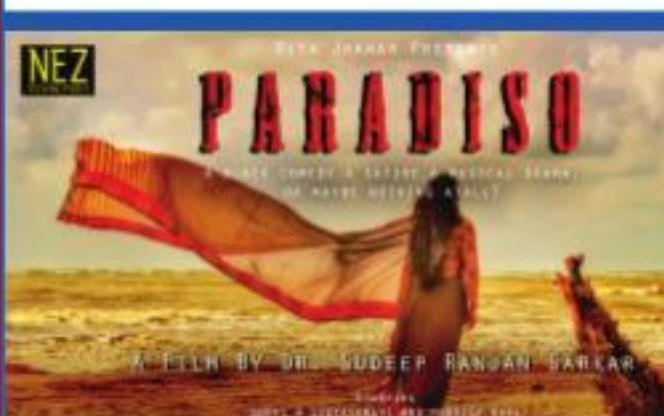
"When you enter the jail, there are some gates to cross and it is a long walk. As I would cross the path, the officers guarding the gates would salute. I used to feel thrilled and then I realised that it wasn't me they were saluting, they were saluting the uniform!" she told *IANS*.

Gautam said playing a cop from Haryana for the first time in the film is in sync with her efforts to push herself as an actress. "My whole idea of selecting a film and going ahead with it has been to be as versatile as possible, to do my homework well. For Jyoti Deswal, an IPS officer, I took coaching to get the nuances right. You always get to know through the nuances where you fit in without getting into a language barrier. We also worked a lot on language," she said.

Dasvi is directed by Tushar Lalota and also stars Abhishek Bachchan and Nimrat Kaur. Besides this film, Gautam has *A Thursday*, *Bhoot Police* and *Faraar* lined up.

'I HAVE TRIED TO ECONOMISE THE PROCESS OF FILMMAKING'

Independent filmmaker Sudeep Ranjan Sarkar gets talking on his formative years, cinematic philosophy and a lot more



to cinema?

One was my devouring of *Diamond Pocket Comics*, a very popular series in those days that featured stories around Dharmendra, Rajesh Khanna, Jeetendra and so on. Then came video theatres that screened films at a flat rate of Rs 10 and I went to every show. They were fibre projections and the results were good.

Then I was exposed to C-grade films made in the South, which gave me a different insight into cinema. My exposure to international cinema came when *Doordarshan* began to screen European films after 11 pm. I was not allowed to watch them. So, I would hide outside while my father sat in front of the television and watch through the window grills.

What made you leave Dhanbad?

I knew that if I wanted to become a filmmaker, I had to shift either to Bombay or Calcutta. Bombay was a distant dream as I came from a normal middle-class family and my father could not afford to send me there.

So, it had to be Calcutta where I did my graduation, followed by management studies amid great financial difficulties and then taught in a management institute. I went on to build three management institutes but my fascination with films remained.

How did films happen?

Strangely, in Calcutta, Coffee House did not attract me, but I made two friends. One of them is Debdoot

Ghosh and the other is Ashoke Mitra. Before them, every person I had met and expressed my wish to direct films to, gave me negative vibes. But it only made my determination stronger.

Finally, I made my first short film called *Neti Neti Not This, Not This*. It had a running time of 28 minutes. I shot it on a handycam, and it dealt with the topic of time and the impermanence. It went on to bag 28 awards.

All your films from *Umformung: The Transformation through Paradise and Lust to Glorious Dead* and *The Death of Spring* deal with philosophical, spiritual and sensual questions around the lives of men and women, which can be defined as a genre unto itself. How do you explain this?

I believe in the philosophy of redemption and it lies at the core of all my films. Notwithstanding the fact that the stories, all written and scripted by me, including the music and often, the cinematography, have completely different storylines, characterisations and unfolding. I believe that every sin can be exorcised through redemption.

You have also indulged in radical technology much before it became common. Tell us about that.

I have tried to economise the entire process of filmmaking without compromising on quality. For exam-

ple, *Umformung* was shot on a digital camera, which gave the film an old vintage feel, and it bagged 19 awards.

Almost all your films were shot on an iPhone. Can you explain why?

There are several reasons. First, it leads to the democratisation of the entire process of filmmaking. Second, it brings down the budget considerably. Third, the quality of the final film is so good that you cannot make out that it has been shot entirely with an iPhone as it can produce the same depth-of-field.

And fourth, I carry my iPhone to different locations because I shoot across the map. Shooting with a phone and selfie stick does not call for permissions from the authorities.

What are you working on right now?

I am working on two films. One of them is called *Notes to a Lover* in English and the other is *Ikititam*, an Urdu word which means "The End".

Notes to a Lover deals with a father and his two daughters – one legitimate and the other illegitimate. It is based on the intriguing premise of incest.

Ikititam is about a failed female writer who suffers from writer's block. She dies and becomes a ghost, only to find that the writer's block has disappeared. She picks up the pen again as a ghost.

The writer is a senior film critic

SHOMA A CHATTERJEE

Meet SUDEEP RANJAN SARKAR. He is an independent filmmaker who has, down the years and through five full-length feature films, crafted his own distinct genre – one where the spiritual blends into the sensual.

In this interview, Sarkar gets candid about the evolution of entertainment over time in his hometown Dhanbad, shooting films on his phone and his cinematic philosophy. Excerpts:

You are an English language poet, Impressionist painter, a writer, corporate honcho and management expert, apart from being a filmmaker. Then why focus on filmmaking so much?

I was born and brought up in Dhanbad where my father worked in a colliery. Cinema – whatever little I could gain access to as theatres like Deshbandhu and Mahabir were quite far away from where we lived – fascinated me and that passion, or obsession, continued through my boyhood days.

Why did the *jatra* performing groups that came to Dhanbad fascinate you so much?

The Dhanbad coal belt hardly had any avenues of entertainment when I was a boy. But in winter, *jatra* groups would come and the effect on me was pure magic!

When the video cassette culture came in, your interest got focused on a few films. Can you elaborate on that?

Yes, there was. The officers had better vantage points for watching while non-officers went to a make-shift tent. Besides, there was heavy load-shedding those days and we had to often study under the head lights worn by miners.

When the video cassette culture came in, your interest got focused on a few films. Can you elaborate on that?

The three films that fascinated me were *Hero*, the debut film of Jackie Shroff; *Betaab* starring Sunny Deol, and *Tohfa* with Sridevi and Jeetendra. In fact, *Deol* remained my favourite for many years and inspired me to find out whether I could get admission to the Film and Television Institute of India in Pune.

When I asked a filmmaker how I could get in, he said that I had to have a strong mathematical background. Although I could sense he was pulling my leg, I gave up the attempt.

What other elements pulled you



For more updates www.thestatesman.com

DEAD RINGER

They may not be meeting the real Lionel Messi, but Islam Battah's (*in photo, left*) resemblance to the footballer is so uncanny that the children at an orphanage in the Egyptian city of Zagazig swarm around him in delight anyway. Seeing the excitement his presence causes at such events, the 27-year-old Egyptian painter is happy to pose as the Argentine, wearing a Barcelona shirt and joining in a game of football.

THUMBNAILS

Indo-Pak series: India and Pakistan could play a Twenty20 series this year, the Pakistani media has reported. This comes on the heels of a unilateral ceasefire by both countries along the Line of Control last month. The last series between them was played in 2012-13.

Iyer out: Shreyas Iyer has been ruled out of the remaining two One-Day Internationals against England after injuring his left shoulder in the first match, the International Cricket Council said on Wednesday. He is also likely to miss part of the Indian Premier League.

Windies v England: The West Indies will host England in five Twenty20 Internationals and three Test matches in 2022 in an expanded schedule of their International Cricket Council future tours programme, the cricket boards of both teams said on Wednesday.

Indians progress: A Ponnappa and N Sikkil Reddy hit the women's doubles quarter-finals of the Orleans Masters badminton tournament with a bye in their second-round match, having made the second round with a 21-9, 17-21, 21-19 win over a Danish pair.

Pay gap: President Joe Biden made the case that the pay disparity between men and women had hurt the economy, bringing members of the US women's soccer team to the White House to help set new goals for equality. Wednesday marked "Equal Pay Day."

Squash tour: International action returns for the first time in more than a year with the Challenger Tour hosting an Indian event from 27 March to 31 March at the Indian Squash Academy in Chennai. Eight nations will be represented across two draws.

Yogasana included: Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju on Thursday said the government has included Yogasana in Khelo India Youth Games 2021 in a bid to develop it as a competitive sport. Rijiju said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha that the government has also given recognition to National Yogasana Sports Federation (NYSF) for promotion and development of Yogasana in the country. "Yogasana sport for both male and female categories have been included in Khelo India Youth Games, 2021," he said.

Aizawl FC beat Sudeva Delhi: Aizawl FC staged a remarkable comeback by scoring two goals at the fag end to beat 10-man Sudeva Delhi FC 2-1 in their last I-League match at the Kalyani Municipal Stadium in Kalyani on Thursday. After Sairatukima was sent off in the 34th minute, Kean Lewis gave Sudeva the lead in the 42nd minute.

LGBT groups want equality: Activists submitted a petition with over 106,000 signatures to Japan's ruling party Thursday, calling for an LGBT equality law to be enacted before the Tokyo Games, saying Japan as host nation should live up to the Olympic charter banning gender and sexual discrimination.

Ankita to lead Hyderabad Strikers in TPL: India's top ranked women's player Ankita Raina will lead the challenge of Hyderabad Strikers in the Tennis Premier League, to be held in Mumbai later this year. At the player auction held on Tuesday, Ankita garnered the highest price among the women players as she was picked for Rs 4.10 lakh.

Virus scare: Germany will be without two players for its opening World Cup qualifier against Iceland after midfielder Jonas Hofmann tested positive for the coronavirus and full-back Marcel Halstenberg was deemed a close contact.

Suryakumar Yadav likely to be let loose

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

PUNE, 25 MARCH



Suryakumar Yadav (*in photo*) is likely to get a chance to showcase his "360-degree" hitting skills when India take on England aiming to clinch another series victory in the second One-Day International here tomorrow.

Shreyas Iyer's dislocated shoulder has led to Yadav being discussed and his ODI debut, after a blockbuster Twenty20 Internationals beginning, looks imminent after an all-round show by the hosts ensured an easy victory in the first game. Iyer was one of India's most prolific 50-over batsmen before lockdown but such would seem to be the team's bench strength now that an aspirant appeared more formidable to a world champion opposition, even if they were utterly confused at this point.

Skipper Virat Kohli has not had Ravindra Jadeja's services for close to three months but neither Axar Patel in Tests nor Krunal Pandya in

ODIs has let the team miss the man from Rajkot. Prasidh Krishna, already a household name because of the Indian Premier League, looked completely at home on his ODI debut, netting batsmen in the absence of Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammad Shami. The biggest thing about the opening game was Shikhar Dhawan's return to form with a match-winning 98. He was under pressure after being benched for a large part of the

T20 series.

The southpaw would be raring to go one more time. Rohit Sharma took a blow on an elbow in the first match but was expected to be fit. If India allow him a break, Shubman Gill can open alongside Dhawan with KL Rahul staying in the middle order.

Sharma, though, is keen to get cracking as his injury is not very serious. Risabh Pant could play purely as a batsman and Rahul will keep

Rohit Sharma took a blow on an elbow in the first match but was expected to be fit. If India allow him a break, Shubman Gill can open alongside Dhawan with KL Rahul staying in the middle order.

wicket. Chinaman bowler Kuldeep Yadav leaked 68 runs in nine overs and could be replaced by leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal.

The pace trio of Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Prasidh Krishna and Shardul Thakur took nine of the 10 wickets and would be keen to rock the England batting line-up again. England will look to level the series and stay alive in the contest. England have a lot to ponder over and injuries to skipper Eoin Morgan and batsman Sam Billings, while fielding, in the first ODI have only added to their woes. Both appear doubtful for the second game.

Match starts at 1.30 pm

Rahul loves Krishna's aggression

PUNE, 25 MARCH

KL Rahul on Thursday said he wasn't surprised with the performance of pace bowler M. Prasidh Krishna, who took four for 54 on debut in the first ODI against England, and said the youngster's aggression and bravery impressed him. "I am not surprised with what he did yesterday [March 23]. I was always confident that the next player to come out of Karnataka will be Prasidh. We weren't of the same batch, but I watched him play a lot of junior cricket and also [saw him] in the nets. He was somebody who would catch your eye. Tall guy, bowls quick and gets a lot of bounce from the wicket," Rahul told the media in a virtual interaction on Thursday. Rahul said Prasidh Krishna also possesses a keen sense of game. "Having played with him for the last couple of seasons for Mushtaq Ali [Trophy] and Vijay Hazare [Trophy], I realised that he is a brave boy and has a great sense of the game. [Also impressive is] how he understands the game. He is a very keen learner and he is very brave, and comes in with a lot of aggression," he said.

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Saina enters into quarterfinals

PARIS, 25 MARCH

Indian Badminton star Saina Nehwal advanced to the quarterfinals of the Orleans Masters badminton tournament after prevailing over France's Marie Batomene in the women's singles second round here on Thursday. Running against time to make it to her

fourth Olympics, Saina recovered from the opening game reversal to see off world no. 65 Marie 18-21 21-15 21-10 in a 51-minute clash in the Super 100 event, which is part of BWF's revised Olympic qualification period. She will face either France's Yaelle Hoyaux or Malaysia's Iris Wang next.

Nissanka's debut hundred strengthens Sri Lanka

AGENCIES
ANTIGUA, 25 MARCH

team," said the 22-year-old Nissanka speaking through an interpreter.

"Niroshan kept telling me for us to prolong the innings for as long as possible and get a big total to make sure the bowlers had enough runs to work with."

Nissanka and Dickwella dominated the first two sessions of the day, putting on 179 for the sixth wicket and frustrating a West Indies team that was fast running out of ideas and doing little to help their own cause.

Bonner dropped the simplest of catches at gully off fast-medium bowler Jason Holder when Dickwella was on 45.

He also enjoyed a slice of luck closing on the elusive century when a half-hearted appeal by Alzarri Joseph for a catch to the wicketkeeper down the leg-side was turned down by the presiding umpire.

Nissanka, who lost overnight partner Dhananjaya de Silva in the first over of the morning, slowed to a crawl in the second session of the day but finally reached the coveted century landmark just before tea to join Brendon Kuruppu (who completed a double century), Romesh Kaluwitharana and Thilan Samaraweera as the only Sri Lankans to score hundreds on Test debuts.

Samaraweera was the last to achieve the landmark before Wednesday, getting to three figures in his first Test, against India in Colombo in 2001.

"I wasn't even aware of any records or anything like that. I just wanted to perform for the day," he said.

In individual competitions if we make mistakes, we are losing the points, nobody else. But here, we feel a little more responsible. It is very different from qualification, it is hit or miss here, but, in qualification, every shot counts in a different way," Sarnobat said.

Bhaker added, "I take everything as practice for my main match. It's not like a test event or anything, it's just that we have to be at our best. I consider it the same thing, just the name has been

Shooting WC: India add gold, silver to continue dominant run

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 25 MARCH

The Indian juggernaut remained unstoppable at the ISSF shooting World Cup with the country's women shooters grabbing the spotlight by clinching the 25m pistol team gold medal following a silver in the 50m rifle 3 positions team event here on Thursday.

The seventh competition day was also marred by the Hungarian team's pullout from the men's rifle 3 position final -- against India -- after a dispute with its seasoned shooter Peter Sidi over a bipod that was attached to his rifle, leading to a postponement of the event to Friday. The host nation's team will take on third-placed USA in the final.

As a rule, the first team to reach 16 points wins the match.

Two points are awarded to the team winning one five-shot series which each of the three team members have to shoot. Both teams get one point in case of a tied series.

Earlier in the day, India's Anjum Moudgil, Shreya Saksena and Gaayathri Nithyanadam claimed the silver medal in the 50m rifle 3 positions team event. The Indian rifle team shot 43 in the gold medal showdown to finish behind the Polish team, which scored 47 to grab the top prize.

They had scored 1304 and 864 in the first and second qualifying rounds respectively. The Polish rifle team comprised Aneta Stankiewicz, Aleksandra Szutko and Natalia Kochanska. The bronze medal went to the Indonesian team consisting of Ivida Rafika Rahmatan Toyiba, Monica Daryati and Audrey Zahra Dhiyaanisa, who beat the Hungarian trio of Lalita Gaspar, Eszter Denes and Lea Horvath 47-43.

There was positive news for India after that unprecedented act, as the triumvirate of Chinky Yadav, Manu Bhaker and Rahi Sarnobat shot a total of 17 to beat Poland's Joanna Iwona Wawrzynowska, Julita Borek and Agnieszka Korejwo, who managed to score 7.

"In individual competitions if we make mistakes, we are losing the points, nobody else. But here, we feel a little more responsible. It is very different from qualification, it is hit or miss here, but, in qualification, every shot counts in a different way," Sarnobat said.

Bhaker added, "I take everything as practice for my main match. It's not like a test event or anything, it's just that we have to be at our best. I consider it the same thing, just the name has been

changed." The team gold came only a day after Yadav, Bhaker and Sarnobat swept the individual final by winning all the medals on offer on Wednesday.

The victory in this event consolidated India's position at the top of the pecking order with 21 medals, including 10 gold, six silver and five bronze.

Senior shooter and Asian Games champion Sarnobat was particularly impressive as she shot a series of five out of five hits (seven) out of the 12 five-shot series that were required to win the match.

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Two points are awarded to the team winning one five-shot series which each of the three team members have to shoot. Both teams get one point in case of a tied series.

In the rifle event, the team had to go through two rounds of qualification before reaching the gold medal match. In the first round where every team member is required to shoot 15 shots in each of the three kneeling, prone and standing positions, India shot a total of 1304 out of 1350 to finish fourth out of eight teams.

In the second qualification round, each team member fired 10 shots in each position, as India finished with a combined 864, which was second to Poland who shot 872. Hungary was third with 857, and Indonesia, fourth, with 856.

However, the highlight of the day was the women's pistol team winning the top prize even though the drama surrounding the Hungarian men's rifle team caused some flutter.

India and Hungary, who had finished in first and second place in the qualification round on Wednesday, turned up for

their gold medal match, scheduled to begin at 11 am, but the visiting team's world number one shooter Istvan Peni and Zavan Pekler, after a discussion with the technical officials, refused to participate alongside Sidi.

The 42-year-old Sidi is a five-time Olympian and former world champion, having won the gold medal at the 2010 world championships in Munich.

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The gold medal round will

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Hungary pulls out over internal feuds, disqualified

The gold medal contest between India and Hungary in the 50m rifle 3 positions men's team event

on Thursday postponed after the visiting team pulled out following an internal dispute with its star marksman Peter Sidi.

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