



KUSHWAHA MERGES
RLSP WITH JD-U
AFTER NINE YEARS

P4



FOURTH OF JULY



PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT, ALWAYS IN SESSION

TOUGHEST FOR
MERKEL AS ELECTION
YEAR OPENS

BENZEMA BRACE
GIVES MADRID
THE WIN

P10



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WEATHER

Mainly clear sky. Mist in the morning. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 33 and 14 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: Nil

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 96% Min: 41%
TEMPERATURE
Max: 31.2°C (+2) Min: 14.0°C (-1)
SUN RISES SUN SETS
06:30 hrs 18:29 hrs
MOON RISES MOON SETS
08:13 hrs 20:15 hrs

THUMBNAILS



Farmers protest against new farm laws at Ghazipur border, in the Capital on Sunday. SNS (P5)

Bank operations may be hit on Mon, Tue:
Banking operations across the country could be impacted on Monday and Tuesday as United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) has given a call for a nationwide strike to protest against the proposed privatisation of two state-owned lenders. Services such as deposits and withdrawal at branches, cheque clearance and loan approvals would be affected due to the strike. UFBU, an umbrella body of nine unions, claimed that about 10 lakh bank employees and officers of the banks will participate in the strike. P8

Police officer Waze gets NIA custody till 25 Mar:
Mumbai police officer Sachin Waze, arrested in the probe into recovery of explosives from a car near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence, was on Sunday remanded to the National Investigation Agency custody till 25 March. The NIA, which arrested Waze (49) on Saturday night, brought him to the court in south Mumbai after taking him to a local hospital for his medical examination, an official said. The court remanded him to the central agency's custody for further probe in the matter. P4

25K: Biggest 1-day Covid jump in 84 days

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

The upward trend in the number of new Covid-19 cases reported in a day continued on Sunday, with the country reporting 25,320 new cases in the previous 24 hours, while fatalities too continued to increase at a worrisome rate.

Sunday's figure represented an increase of 438 cases from the previous day and was the highest daily rise in 84 days.

There were also 161 deaths in the last 24 hours, a hike of 21 fatalities from the previous day, the data shared by the Union Health Ministry showed.

The cumulative tally of the cases has risen to 1,13,59,048 while the death toll has reached

1,58,607. Two states accounted for as much as 67 per cent of the newcases. Maharashtra reported 15,602 cases in the last 24 hours whereas Punjab recorded its highest single-day tally this year with 1,515 new cases.

"We used to record this much infections in October-November when the first wave was on decline in the country," according to Rajesh Bhaskar, Nodal officer for Covid-19 in Punjab.

The infection level in the country is back to December's figures as it has reached 1.85 from 1.55 per cent in a short interval. In the last four days, the number of fatalities has also spiked, which earlier was hovering under 100.

Niti Aayog (health) member

V.K. Paul last week said the situation of Maharashtra is worrying as part of the state is going back to strict curbs. However, he shared his concerns for Delhi-NCR, Gurugram, part of Gautam Buddha Nagar and Ghaziabad which are seeing a slight rise in the case numbers," he had said.

So far, 2,97,38,409 doses of Corona vaccine have been administered in the country since the drive began on 16 January. Delhi again tops 400 cases: Delhi today recorded 407 fresh coronavirus cases, crossing the 400-mark for the fourth consecutive day, even as its Covid-19 positivity rate stood at 0.60 percent, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.



People should realise a wounded tiger is more dangerous, West Bengal chief minister and Trinamul Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee declared on Sunday as she hit the streets for the first time after sustaining injuries in an alleged attack in Nandigram.

To mark Nandigram Divas and Farmers' Day, commemorating the death of 14 villagers in police firing during the anti-land acquisition protest in 2007, the Trinamul Youth Congress

organised a rally from Mahatma Gandhi's statue on Mayo Road to Hazra crossing.

Miss Banerjee, in a wheelchair, was at the forefront, accompanied by Trinamul Youth Congress president Abhishek Banerjee, other state ministers, among them Firad Hakim and Aroop Biswas, TMC candidates for Kolkata Port and Tollygunge constituencies respectively. Other TMC candidates like Sashi Panja, Debasish Kumar, Nayana Bandopadhyay of Shampukur, Rash Behari and Chowringhee were also present in the rally.

Agency reports from New Delhi quoted sources in the EC as saying that based on the reports, the EC concluded that Miss Banerjee sustained the injuries prima facie due to a lapse on the part of her security in-charge.

Mr Pravin Prakash, IPS, SP East Midnapore, has also been placed under suspension and charges would be framed against him for major failure of arrangements, according to the EC.

Mr Sunil Kumar Yadav, of the 2009 IPS batch will be posted immediately as SP East Midnapore in place of Mr Prakash.

Ms Smita Pandey, IAS (2005 batch) will be posted as DM and DEO, East Midnapore in place of Vibhu Goel, who will be transferred to a non-election post.

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Covid uptick: Delhi tops 400 cases for 4th day in a row

The number of active coronavirus cases in the city mounts to 2,262; positivity rate stands at 0.60 pc

SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Delhi today recorded 407 fresh coronavirus cases, crossing the 400-mark for the fourth consecutive day, even as its Covid-19 positivity rate stood at 0.60 per cent, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.

The national capital's Covid toll climbed to 10,941 with two more fatalities, the health bulletin said.

Amid a fresh uptick in coronavirus cases, Delhi had yesterday registered 419 Covid cases. It had logged 431 cases on 12 March — its highest single-day spike in over two months. It had recorded 409 cases on 11 March.

The city had logged 370 Covid cases and 3 deaths on 10 March and 320 cases and 4 deaths on 9 March.

On 7 and 8 March, 286 and 239 coronavirus cases, respectively, were logged. The city had registered 321 coronavirus cases and 1 death on 6 March, and 312 cases and 1 fatality on 5 March.



A health worker collects swab sample for Covid test in the Capital on Sunday.

A total of 585 Covid cases were reported in Delhi on 1 January and 384 cases on 4 January. The daily coronavirus count had dropped to 306 on 11 January and had risen again to 386 on 12 January,

according to official figures. The count had subsequently started to dip. On 26 February, Delhi had recorded 256 cases — that month's highest single-day tally.

With today's fresh Covid

cases, Delhi's coronavirus caseload mounted to 6,43,696, the health bulletin said.

The number of active cases in the city mounted to 2,262 from yesterday's 2,207.

Health experts and doctors

have attributed this "sudden rise" of Covid cases to people turning "complacent, not following Covid-appropriate behaviour and assuming that all is well now".

Today's fresh cases were identified from 68,223 tests including 41,195 RT-PCR tests and 27,028 rapid antigen tests, the bulletin stated.

The number of Covid patients under home isolation rose to 1,270 from yesterday's 1,204.

According to the bulletin, 350 Covid patients recovered in Delhi over the last 24 hours, with the city's cumulative tally of such recoveries crossing 6,30 lakh.

On 12 March, Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain had told reporters that the figures of over 400 cases per day in Delhi suddenly were "not alarming".

He had said Delhi's Covid positivity rate was still less than one per cent, "much lower" compared to the figures in Maharashtra and Kerala. He had then also asserted that the Delhi government was "fully prepared and on full vigil" to tackle the Covid pandemic.

As long as I've people's support, I don't care if BJP, Cong curse me for tricolour move: Kejriwal

PTI
NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal Sunday said as long as he enjoys the love of people, he does not care if the BJP and Congress "curse" him for his government's plan to install the national flag across the city and send the elderly on free Ayo-

dhya trip.

The Delhi government has announced in its Budget for 2021-22 that it will install the tricolour at 500 places in the national capital. Finance Minister Manish Sisodia had said Rs 45 crore was set aside in the Budget for the purpose.

Inaugurating a sewer line project in Kirari, Kejriwal said Sunday, "The other parties cursed me why I provided free electricity and free ride to women in the buses. Congress and BJP people taunted me that Kejriwal is squandering money."

"We have decided to celebrate the 75th Independence day by unfurling 500 large flags. These parties are saying tricolors should not be installed. It's a waste of money," he said.

He said the Delhi government will arrange free darshan of Ramlala after the construction of the temple in Ayodhya and added "no matter how much other parties curse me, I do not care as long as I have



Arvind Kejriwal in Kirari area on Sunday.

SNS

your love and faith in me."

The Delhi government faced "very difficult" times last year as its tax collection stopped and expenses rose due to the coronavirus pandemic, Kejriwal said.

"This is a big project that will incur Rs 500 crore expenditure. Officials said there is no funds, but I asked them to arrange money for it as I had promised sewer line and roads in Kirari during Assembly elections," he said.

The project will cover laying of sewer line in 114 residential colonies including 105 in Kirari and nine in Mundka Assembly segments.

Kejriwal said although the project was scheduled to be completed in four years, it will be ready much earlier and asked people to extend cooperation.

"The work we have man-

aged to do in the last five years, other parties failed to do in 70 years. Two months before Assembly polls, BJP leaders said registration will be done in unauthorised colonies. Did anyone get registry of his property?" he asked.

Kejriwal said the AAP government did not tell lies and whatever he promised was delivered. Speaking before Kejriwal, Health minister and Delhi Jal Board (DJB) chairman Satyendar Jain said the Delhi government will construct a hospital in Kirari and an underpass to connect the area with Rohtak Road.

He asked people to help AAP candidates win all the five municipal wards in Kirari Assembly segment in the civic body polls next year. Local AAP MLA Rituraj and Mundka MLA Dharampal Lakra were present on the occasion.

5 who robbed people after offering lift in car arrested

PTI

NOIDA, 14 MARCH

With the arrest of five people, the Noida Police on Sunday claimed to have busted an inter-state gang that robbed people in Delhi-NCR after offering them a lift in their car.

The police recovered two firearms and as many knives besides seizing over five kg of cannabis from the car used by the gang, Noida Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police Ranvir Singh said.

At times, the gang would also force people at gunpoint to withdraw money from ATM kiosks and then abandon them at isolated locations, the officer said. Those held have been identified as Dilip Kumar, Manish Kumar, Shivam, Vikram Kumar and Sagar.

Four of them are residents of Tirokpur in Delhi, while one is from Khoda Colony in Ghaziabad, the police said.

The gang has confessed to being involved in over two dozen such cases where they offered rides to people from Delhi and then brought them to Noida. Here they would overpower and threat-

3 new Covid cases in Noida, tally 25,667

PTI
NOIDA, 14 MARCH

Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddh Nagar recorded three new cases of COVID-19 on Sunday that pushed the district's infection tally to 25,667, official data showed.

The active cases in the district remained at 84, same as the previous day, according to the data released by the state's health department for a 24-hour period.

Another three patients got discharged during the period with the overall recoveries reaching 25,492, the fifth highest in the state, it showed.

Gautam Buddh Nagar has a death toll of 91 with a mortality rate of 0.35 per cent. PTI

One dead, 2 hurt in separate firing incidents in northeast Delhi

PTI
NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

A 47-year-old man was shot dead and two others were injured in three separate firing incidents in northeast Delhi in the last two days, police said on Sunday.

In the first incident on Friday, Suahil and Gazi fired four rounds at a bike mechanic Al Tasleem in Jafarabad area, a senior police officer said. There was no casualty, he said. While Suahil was arrested on Saturday, Gazi was held on Saturday, police said.

According to police, Suahil had recently gone to Tasleem's shop for repairing his bike. Tasleem, however, asked Suahil to wait as he was busy with some other work. Later, Suahil along with Gazi fired at Tasleem. The

second incident took place on Saturday at Khajuri Khas where one Sharab Ansari (47), a shopkeeper, was shot dead by unknown assailants at his shop, the officer said.

Ansari was rushed to Jag Pravesh Chand Hospital where he was declared brought dead. Police said Ansari was shot dead over some family dispute, adding that efforts are on to nab the assailants.

On the same day, one Manoj Sharma, 42, was shot in his cheek in Jafarabad by unidentified men over some monetary issue. "Several police teams are working on the cases. In the incidents of Jafarabad and Khajuri Khas, the accused have been identified and efforts are on to arrest them," DCP Police (northeast) Sanjay Kumar Sain said.

Opposition corners AAP govt over affected water supply

PTI
NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

As large parts of trans Yamuna area here faced water crisis, the BJP and Congress on Sunday attacked the Delhi government, accusing it of not making adequate arrangements to deal with the problem.

The government, in a statement, said water supply in east and north east Delhi was restored by Sunday evening. The water supply was affected due to repair work.

Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta, however, alleged that the "lie" of the Kejriwal government was exposed by the water crisis in the city.

"People are forced to buy



for the 48-hour water crisis in east Delhi.

The Jal Board chose the repair work on Saturday and Sunday, even though there is need of more water by the households in the weekends. Most people were also unaware of the affected water supply as information about the same did not reach them in time," he said.

Meanwhile, the Delhi government said adequate number of tankers were deployed in the affected areas.

Direct tapping supply was restored by Sunday evening, while supply from reservoirs was expected to resume late Sunday night or early Monday morning, a senior DJB officer said.

Classified

LEGAL NOTICES

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT (Order, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure) In the Court of Ms. Rishika Srivastava, Civil Judge-03 Court No. 181, Tis Hazari Court, Delhi J. (Civil)-21 M/SCJ- 93/2019 NDOH 12-04-2021 Kulwant Kaur Versus Indu Goel To 1. Indu Goyal 3830, Lal Kothi, Pataudi House, Darya Gang, New Delhi. 2. International computer Center 3830, Lal Kothi, Patna

di House, Darya Gang, New Delhi.

Whereas you are intentionally evading service of summons, it is hereby notified that if you shall not defend the case on the 12th day of April, 2021, day fixed for the final disposal, it will be heard and determined ex-parte.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court on this 23rd day of February, 2021.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, MOHAMMAD Raghib Hassan Jafry, son of late Md. Ataur Rahman, residing at 19/H/6, Bedford Lane, Kolkata-70016, hereby notify that Mohammad Raghib Hassan Jafry and Mohammad Raghib Hassan Jafry is the same person vide affidavit dated 18.12.2020.

I, ABHISHEK Datta, son of Jayotirmoy Datta, aged about 30 years, of 83A, Chowinghee Road, P.O.: L.R. Sarani, Kolkata-700020 have changed my name as Abhishek M. Datta by virtue of an affidavit sworn on 04.02.2021 before the 12th Metropolitan Magistrate, Calcutta. I will henceforth be known as Abhishek M. Datta. Both Abhishek Datta and Abhishek M. Datta are same and identical person.

COURT NOTICE (U/O 5 Rule 20 CPC) IN THE COURT OF MS. SURUCHI ATREJA

Additional Principal Judge (Additional Family Court), Gurugram Case No. HMA/828/2019 CNR No. HRGRO1-008812-2019 Seal of the court

Delhi HC to resume physical functioning from today

PTI
NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

After a year, the Delhi High Court will resume from Monday its complete physical functioning, which was restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

From March 15, all judges of the high court would hold physical hearings of cases. Since March 2020, the high court has been holding proceedings through video conferencing and subsequently, a few benches started holding physical courts everyday on a rotation basis.

Some of them were also holding hybrid proceedings, wherein lawyers have the option to attend the hearing via video conference instead of appear-

ing in person.

According to a notification issued by the high court administration on March 12, limited numbers of litigants who are appearing in person and/or required to appear in compliance of the court's order/directions be permitted in the court premises.

The high court on March 2 had issued certain guidelines to be followed upon resumption of physical court hearings from March 15, including that visitors and advocates shall maintain social distancing as per government norms.

A circular issued by the administration branch of the high court earlier had said entry of litigants will be regulated as it was during the pre-COVID-19 pandemic period and facilitation counter/pass counter will also

function in a normal manner.

"All the visitors, including lawyers, shall maintain social distancing as per norms/protocol issued by the government of India/ Delhi government and/or this court," it had said.

The functioning of the high court was restricted to urgent matters from March 16, 2020.

Thereafter, from March 25 last year, the functioning of the high court and district courts was further restricted and no physical hearing was being conducted due to the spread of COVID-19 cases.

An office order had said that all pending routine or non-urgent matters listed before it from February 22 to March 26 would be adjourned en bloc to dates between April 15 and May 20.

'Water supply to east, northeast districts to be restored by today'

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Water supply to east and northeast Delhi districts, which remained affected due to leakages in the pipeline on Sunday, will be restored completely by Monday morning, Delhi Jal Board officials said.

The interconnection and repair work was completed by 4 pm. The supply will be normalised in some areas by evening, a DJB statement said.

Areas with underground reservoirs will receive water by Monday morning, a senior DJB official said.

PTI

The Statesman

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SILIGURI 13A, Dabgram Industrial Growth Centre,

AIR-SURCHARGE: Kathmandu - Re. 2, Eastern Region - Re. 1 All other stations in India - Re. 1

Delhi records 14 deg Cel mercury</



Central govt looting in broad daylight. Massive tax collection on gas-diesel-petrol. Snatching people's share, employment by selling PSU-PSB to friends

CONGRESS LEADER RAHUL GANDHI

SLAMMING THE CENTRE OVER RISE IN FUEL AND GAS PRICES AND ALLEGED SALE OF PSU

The Statesman

NEW DELHI, MONDAY 15 MARCH 2021

05



President Ram Nath Kovind visiting Vindhyavasini temple in Mirzapur on Sunday. AGENCIES

Maoist killed: A Maoist was killed when an IED that he was planting on a road to target security forces exploded in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, police said on Sunday. The incident took place on Saturday on the route of Bechapal-Hurepal villages when rebels from the west Bastar division of Maoists were engaged in planting explosives.

IAF airlifts 381 stranded passengers: The Indian Air Force (IAF) has airlifted 381 stranded passengers from Jammu and Srinagar to Leh using a C-17 heavy lift transport aircraft. They were airlifted on Saturday after Srinagar-Leh NH was closed due to snowfall.

Pakistani drone spotted in Punjab: A Pakistani drone entered the Indian territory on Sunday but was forced to return as BSF jawans spotted it and opened fire in its direction in Punjab's Pathankot district, a police said.

Tiger skin seizure case: Police have arrested five more persons, including two police officials and a government school teacher in connection with the seizure of a tiger skin in Bastar. With this, 13 people have been arrested so far in connection with the case.

CAA not election issue, people will vote logically, not emotionally: Assam BJP

Party chief Ranjeet says people are convinced that no foreigner can illegally settle in Assam as long as BJP is in power

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
GUWAHATI, 14 MARCH

Assam BJP chief Ranjeet Kumar Dass on Sunday claimed that the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act is not an issue in the upcoming Assembly elections in the state as people will vote logically, not emotionally.

In an interview, the senior ruling party leader said that people are convinced that not a single foreigner can illegally settle in Assam as long as the BJP is in power in the state.

"There will be no impact (of CAA) on elections and the people of Assam have earlier shown that. When the citizenship issue was at its peak, we had participated in the panchayat polls, asking people to question us if any foreigner enters Assam. We bagged the highest number of seats in that election," he said.

The former Assembly speaker said that the CAA issue had cropped up even during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections but the BJP succeeded in increasing its tally from seven to nine seats.

"We swept the Tiwa autonomous council polls, while the Congress scored a duck. The Congress also did not win any seat in the Bodoland Territorial Region elections. The CAA will not be an issue in the Assembly elections also as people will vote logically, not emotionally," Dass said.

The two-time sitting MLA from Sarboghat constituency said that the party workers have gone to every booth and asked people whether any foreigner has come to their area after the enactment of the CAA.

"It was claimed that 1.5 crore immigrants will come to the state but not a single person has arrived yet. We had asserted that no foreigner can enter Assam as long as the BJP is in power in the state.

People are convinced by our promise. How can foreigners come and settle in Assam when we have such tight security arrangements?" Dass said.

The Opposition Congress, however, is aggressively raising the CAA issue in its poll campaign, promising to nullify the law if the Grand Alliance led by it comes to power in the state. The grand old party has announced that it will build a martyrs' memorial in Guwahati for the five anti-CAA protesters who were killed in police firing in 2019. It also launched a door-to-door campaign to collect 1 lakh 'gamocha' (Assamese scarf) with anti-CAA messages written on them to adorn the memorial.

Two newly floated parties Rajor Dal and Assam Jatiya Parishad, in their election campaign, are also raising up the issue of CAA, which seeks to grant citizenship to Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Jain and Parsi immigrants from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh who have entered India on or before 31 December, 2014.

Despite the Opposition's concerted effort to build a public opinion based on CAA, Dass exuded confidence that the BJP-led NDA will win over 100 seats in the 126-member Assembly. "We are working with a 100-plus target," he said.

The BJP is contesting the Assembly elections in an alliance with Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), who are part of the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), the regional arm of NDA.

The Congress has formed a 'Grand Alliance' with AIUDF, BPJ, CPI, CPI(M), CPI(ML), Anchalik Gana Morcha (AGM), RJD and Jimochayan (Deori) Peoples' Party (JPP) to fight the elections against the BJP-led NDA. Elections will be held in three phases on March 27, April 1 and April 6.



Home minister Amit Shah being presented a memento during a public rally for the upcoming Assam Assembly polls, at Margherita in Assam's Tinsukia district on Sunday. AGENCIES

'Cong-AIUDF alliance forged to grab power, divide people on religious lines'

BISWANATH, 14 MARCH

Attacking the Congress for forging an alliance with the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) in Assam, Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday alleged that the Opposition grouping is only interested in grabbing power by dividing people on religious lines.

Terrorism and insurgency have declined in the state leading to the speeding up of the government's development activities, Singh said while addressing rallies in Biswanath, Gohpur and Dergaon Assembly seats where election will be held on 27 March. The BJP is the only party that has given due respect and recognition to the icons of Assam at the national level, he claimed.

"What has happened to the Congress? When Tarun Gogoi was CM for 15 years, he never allied with the AIUDF. But today, they are with the AIUDF. Why? Is it only because of winning elections and grabbing power?" Singh said.

The Congress has formed a Grand Alliance consisting of the AIUDF and six other parties to fight the election against the BJP-led NDA.

He also attacked the Opposition party accusing it of dividing the country and the state in the name of religion. "The BJP does not do the politics of religion. We are into the politics of humanity for humans," he said.

The saffron party leader said that alliances should be forged with an intention to serve the country, not just to form governments.

BJP worker killed in Assam, one arrested

Devananda Gogoi of Bordumsa locality was murdered on 12 March by Joichandra Gogoi following heated arguments

GUWAHATI, 14 MARCH

Assam police have arrested an individual in connection with the murder of a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) worker in Tinsukia district.

Amidst the pre-poll activities, Devananda Gogoi of Bordumsa locality was murdered on 12 March by another native villager named Joichandra Gogoi following heated arguments.

President of the saffron party's Dumduma-Nagaon booth committee under Margherita legislative Assembly constituency was stabbed by Joichandra, who is reportedly a member of newly formed Asom Jatiya Parishad (AJP), following which Devananda (47) died in the Bordumsa government hospital.

State chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal condoled Devananda's death and assured stern actions against the culprit under the law.

The senior BJP leader, who also holds the State home portfolio, directed the police chief to nab the perpetrator immediately.

"My deepest condolences to his family and friends," said Sonowal.

Assam BJP president Ranjeet Kumar Dass also mourned at Devananda's demise and urged the police to take necessary actions against the culprits.

State's senior minister Himanta Biswa Sarma expressed shock and anguish over the murder and assured that the victim family would get justice. However, the AJP leaders claimed that it was not a political murder as the accused seems to be mentally disturbed.

Moreover, both the deceased and accused hail from the same village and they are relatives.

Farmers' stir may continue till Dec, says Rakesh Tikait

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

ALLAHABAD, 14 MARCH

The Bhartiya Kisan Union-led farmer agitation against the three Central farm laws may continue till December this year, the outfit national spokesman Rakesh Tikait said here on Sunday.

Tikait made the statement while talking to reporters here after his recent visit to the poll-bound West Bengal.

This agitation possibly will stretch up to November or December this year, he said.

Talking about his West Bengal visit, Tikait said during their poll campaigning there, the Central government people have been asking farmers to give them one feasible office. I have advised Bengal farmers to ask grain seekers to fix an MSP of Rs 1,850 per quintal for paddy before giving them a single grain of rice, Tikait told reporters here.

He said after Bengal, he was planning to visit other parts of the country to press for the enactment of a law guaranteeing an MSP for various crops.

In Bihar, the paddy is currently being bought by traders at an abysmally low

rate of Rs 750 to Rs 800 per quintal. I want a law guaranteeing the minimum support price for various crops, said Tikait.

He said he was not going to sit in Delhi alone but was planning to visit all over the country, including Madhya Pradesh on 14 and 15 March, Ganga Nagar in Rajasthan on 17 March, Ghazipur's UP Gate border in Delhi on 18 March, Odisha on 19 March and Karnataka on 21 and 22 March.

The BKU spokesperson claimed the three Central laws will lead to the closure of all small-time neighbourhood shops, leaving only big commercial malls to survive. These farm laws will ruin traders and lead to the closure of small business utilities and the collapse of small industries.

These laws will bring in big multinational firms like Walmart," claimed Tikait. Had this government belonged to a political party, it would have talked to farmers and resolved the matter, Tikait said.

But this government is being run by big business houses. It is bent upon selling the entire country, he alleged.

FIR against farmers for raising concrete wall on NH-44

SONIPAT (HRY), 14 MARCH

Police have registered two separate cases against farmers for allegedly raising concrete wall structure and digging a borewell on National Highway-44 in Haryana's Sonipat district, close to the Singhu border protest site.

Two separate cases have been registered against those who raised a concrete wall structure and dug a borewell on NH-44, Inspector Ravi Kumar said on Sunday.

The cases have been registered under relevant provisions of the IPC and the National Highways Act after complaints from the National Highways Authority of India and the local civic authorities, he said. He added the structure and the borewell border were coming up illegally.

Kumar said the work on raising permanent structures with bricks and digging of borewell has been stopped after the cases were lodged. Some farmers have started raising concrete structures near the Singhu border protest site.

Police suspect that two

CHEER LEADER



BJP supporters during an election campaign rally ahead of the Assembly polls in Assam's Biswanath district on Sunday. AGENCIES

J&K: Terrorist killed; rifle, bullets recovered

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU, 14 MARCH

A US made M4 carbine rifle and 36 bullets capable of piercing bulletproof vehicles were among the weaponry that was recovered on Sunday from the spot where an unidentified terrorist was killed in an encounter in Rawalpora of south Kashmir's Shopian district.

This was disclosed by the Srinagar-based Chinhar Corps that tweeted that three carbine magazines and cash amounting Rs 9,600 was also recovered from the spot during the joint operation.

Police suspect that two

more terrorists are still holed up inside the target house and a flush-out operation is being carried out jointly by the police, Army and CRPF.

The anti-terror operation was launched on Saturday evening after the police received inputs about the presence of terrorists in Rawalpora.

However, the operation had to be halted as five villagers taken by the security forces to guide them in the search operation were trapped in the target house. They all were safely taken out before an assault was made on the hiding terrorists on Sunday morning.

Identity of the killed terrorist could not be established yet. Meanwhile, the police released photos of nine terrorists who are active in Srinagar.

Army's spokesman, Lt. Colonel Devender Anand said that an active terrorist, Firdous Natroo, has been apprehended in a joint operation in the Doda district. He was arrested in the Bekhriyan village where he was engaged in revival of terrorism.

A joint team of police, Army, SSB and CRPF launched a cordon and search operation in the village and apprehended Natroo. Three Chinese pistols, five pistol magazines, 15 rounds and one pistol silencer were recovered.

Barring Assam, BJP will lose polls in 4 other states: Pawar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

PUNE, 14 MARCH

NCP chief Sharad Pawar on Sunday claimed that barring Assam, the BJP will face defeat in four other poll-bound states and the election trend in the five states will give a new direction to the country.

Pawar, whose party is an alliance partner of the Shiv Sena-led Maharashtra government, also accused the Centre of misusing its power in poll-bound West Bengal.

The Assembly elections in West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Assam and Puducherry (Union Territory) will be held in March-April this year and votes will be counted on 2 May.

..It is wrong to talk about results of the five states today as people of these states will take the decision. As far as Kerala is concerned, the Left parties and the NCP have come together and we are sure that we will get clear-cut majority," he said.

In Tamil Nadu, people will support DMK and its chief M K Stalin, and they will come to power in the state after the polls, the former Union minister said.

"In West Bengal, the Centre, especially the BJP is misusing power and trying to attack a sister (referring to chief minister Mamata Banerjee) who is trying to fight for the people of the state," the NCP chief alleged.

The entire state has rallied around Trinamul Congress (TMC) chief Mamata Banerjee since it is a matter of Bengal pride and self-respect, he said. "I have no doubt that the TMC will retain power under the leadership of Banerjee," he said.

Pawar further said he knows the situation in poll-bound Assam, and as per the inputs received from his party people, the BJP, which is currently in power there, is in a "good position" compared to others.

"In nutshell, the BJP will retain power in Assam, but will face defeat in other poll-bound states, and other political parties in those states will come to power. I am confident this trend will give a new direction to the country," he said.

Opp demands discussion on rising fuel price, Cong's Mallikarjun Kharge debuts as leader of Opposition



WEEK IN PARLIAMENT

DEEPAK RAZDAN

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Parliament resumed its Budget Session last week with minimal business because of repeated adjournments.

The Opposition wanted immediate discussion on petroleum price-hikes, but the presiding officers declined, saying the members could raise the subject while discussing the budgetary

demands later.

The Question Hour remained disrupted in both Houses.

In the Rajya Sabha, on Monday, veteran Congress MP Mallikarjun Kharge, making his debut as the Leader of the Opposition, gave a notice under Rule 267 to turn down the request, although nearly all Opposition supported Kharge's move.

Responding to this, Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu said he had rejected it, as the House could discuss the subject during the Appropriation Bill debate.

Kharge said that the price of petrol had reached Rs 100 per litre and that of diesel

about Rs 80 and a major reason for this was the rise in excise duty on diesel by 820 per cent and on petrol by 258 per cent after 2014, he said.

The Chairman said he had discretionary powers under Rule 267 to turn down the request, although nearly all Opposition supported Kharge's move.

A series of adjournments followed. The scene repeated during the next two days also.

On Tuesday, Deputy Chairman Harivansh, presiding in Naidu's absence, said a ruling given by the Chairman could not be "re-opened."

The Opposition members entered the well of the House to press their point.

Kharge said the Opposition was not against taking up of legislative business but wanted the burning issue of petroleum prices taken up first.

He maintained Harivansh was not bound by the Chairman's Monday ruling, and could look at the issue afresh. But the Deputy Chairman declined.

Fourth of July

President Joe Biden's pledge to celebrate July 4 ~ America's independence day ~ to mark what he calls "independence from Covid-19" if people get vaccinated over the next three months, might sound a mite ambitious for the world's worst affected nation. In his first primetime address after taking over as President on January 20, Mr Biden said on Friday, after signing the Covid relief bill, that he will order states to make all adults eligible for vaccination by May 1. This must be considered as a paradigm shift in terms of the antidote, whose allegedly adverse side-effects are yet to be incisively analysed. Current measures prioritise people on the basis of age or health condition. It is profoundly significant that Mr Biden's address to the nation was organised exactly a year ~ to the day ~ after the outbreak was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The catastrophe has been decidedly hideous over the past year when we reflect that half a million Americans have perished. The figure has been calibrated as more than the death toll in the two World Wars (1914-18 and 1939-45) and the Vietnam War combined. Last year many Americans were forced to forgo the elaborate parades, fireworks displays and parties that feature in the national holiday on July 4, the date that marks independence from Britain. President Biden said he did not expect large events to be able to go ahead, but he hoped small groups could meet again. "If we do this together, by 4 July, there is a good chance you, your family and friends can get together in your backyard or in your neighbourhood and have a cookout or a barbecue and celebrate Independence Day. After a long, hard year, that will make this Independence Day truly special as we not only mark our independence as a nation but we begin to mark our independence from this virus." It is doubtless a noble pledge in the aftermath of the ignoble indifference of his predecessor. The United States has by far the highest death toll in the world from the virus, but death and infection rates have been declining in recent weeks as the vaccine programme has picked up. The country's health system is complex and individual states are in charge of public health policy. While the federal government is responsible for getting the vaccine distributed to the states, it has largely relied on them to handle the distribution. In the net, the US President has effected a fine distinction between two definitions of independence, i.e. that of a nation and the one from a virus that has killed many and has been greeted with a sense of shock and awe by many more. He has sought to take care of vaccinations ahead of the romantic euphoria of July 4.

Dravidian politics

Dravidian politics ended Congress rule in Tamil Nadu, known as Madras State, in 1967. Ever since, the Dravida Munnetra Kazham or the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazham has been ruling Tamil Nadu. Elections seldom produced any surprise although a plethora of political parties covet the Fort St George. Tamil Nadu's political landscape has been nurtured by the Dravidian movement which was built on the ethos of Tamil culture, language and valour which, whether one likes it or not, is different from the rest of the country. The distinctive features of the Dravidian movement have effectively blocked the entry of national parties from gaining the upper hand in the State. Periyar Ramaswamy, founder-leader of the Dravida Kazhagam, did not believe in electoral politics. With a view to involving the people of Tamil Nurtured in self-governance, CN Annadurai split the DK and formed the DMK in 1948. It was ill prepared to contest the first General Election in 1952, which produced a hung Assembly and resulted in a coalition government led by the Congress. Although the Congress consolidated its position in 1957, it could not hang on to power beyond the 1962 election. The DMK was split in 1972 by MG Ramachandran because he was expelled from the party and he founded the AIADMK. MGR groomed Jayalalitha as his political successor which the seniors in the party opposed. They installed Janakiamma, MGR's wife, as Chief Minister on his death. In the subsequent Assembly election Jayalalitha trounced Janakiamma and emerged as the absolute leader of the AIADMK. A somewhat similar situation is facing the AIADMK in the current Assembly election. The one and only person Jayalalitha groomed as her political heir is VK Sasikala, her live-in companion of more than three decades who understands the AIADMK like the palm of her hand. Abandoning the Dravidian ethos, Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswamy and senior leaders of the party have endorsed the Hindutva ideology and entered into an electoral alliance with, among others, the BJP. Jayalalitha had excellent rapport with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and senior BJP leaders. But she had vowed to keep the saffron party at an arm's length when it comes to electoral alliance. In her long political career, the only election in which she drew an absolute blank was the 2004 Lok Sabha polls which the AIADMK contested as an ally of the BJP. The present ruling dispensation claiming to usher in 'Jayalalitha' rule, has been doing just the opposite. The number of women candidates of the AIADMK has been reduced from 31 to just 14. Although Tamil Nadu has pioneered women's suffrage, inheritance laws, recruitment to government jobs and police forces, it has been slow to induct them to political power. Jayalalitha overcame all obstacles and emerged victorious. In the 2016 election manifesto, Jayalalitha promised to introduce prohibition in a phased manner. Instead, the government has opened the floodgates of bars in the State. Many of the infrastructure projects begun before her death, particularly flyovers in Chennai, remain unfinished, dangling in mid-air. Palaniswamy should emulate the policies and programmes of Jayalalitha instead of simply mouthing them if he wants to return to power. Opposition DMK is knocking on the doors of Fort

Online challenges

No instructional technology has been developed to replace cooperative learning that takes place in group projects, field studies, recitals and presentations. It is generally agreed that students do not learn merely from textbooks; if so, teachers would not be required



The plan to set up virtual universities is premised on the National Education Policy's objective of enhancing the gross enrolment rate in higher education in the country from the current 26 per cent to 50 per cent by 2035. However, global experience leads to the fear that quality of education delivered by such universities may have to be compromised.

The concept of virtual universities has been developed for students to obtain almost immediate feedback from teachers through email or online discussions. When the term came into existence, it applied to things that were simulated by the computer, like virtual memory. Now this has come to be applied to things that physically exist and are created by means of computers.

In fact, the concept of virtual universities first came with the idea for a wireless university at the BBC. In the tele-university concept, courses were taught on the radio and television in the name of "university of air" which came to take the shape of an open university.

Online courses mean that students learn in their own time by reading course materials, working on course activities, writing assignments and interacting with teachers and other students through teleconferences. Virtual classroom environment is accessible to any student provided he or she has access to a computer and an internet connection. This may allow a dynamic interaction with teachers and among the students themselves. The synergy that may exist in student-centred virtual classes is one of the most vital traits of the virtual learning format.

Virtual Global University in Germany offers a graduate programme in information and management where students can have access to a wide network of people and interactions. They can work at their own pace. Hence, the importance of the development of such skills including creativity communication and knowledge application.

However, the fact remains that a virtual university cannot provide face-to-face interactions. So, the students would be deprived of opportunities for better

communication and deeper understanding. Lack of computer literacy may also deter them from adoption of new technology that may lead to incomplete learning and low performance. The performance of many students at DeVry University in the USA was examined some time ago. The university offers online and contact versions of all its courses, using the same textbooks, assessments, assignments and lecture materials for each format.

Even though the courses were seemingly identical, the students who enrolled online performed worse. As a result, they would be more likely to drop out.

The hardest hit would be the unwilling few and those who entered virtual classes with low grades in their previous examinations. The weaker students would be the worst sufferers. An overwhelming advantage to student learning by thrusting information technology has not been perceived just yet, when simple chalk-and-talk methods could have done equally well.

We cannot think of an equally good alternative to the classroom lecture ~ the discussion method that has been at the heart of the teaching-learning experience. No instructional technology has been developed to replace cooperative learning that takes place in group projects, field studies, recitals and presentations. It is generally agreed that students do not learn merely from textbooks, if so, teachers would not be required. Only when textbooks and supplementary study materials are brought to bear upon a topic to be discussed in the classroom does the teaching-learning process become live. This is accentuated through projects and assignments followed by term-end examinations.

Lack of access, whether it be for economic or logistic reasons, may exclude otherwise eligible students from virtual courses. This is an important issue in rural

and lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. Internet access may pose a significant challenge to users in a virtual university. Not even the most sophisticated technology is hundred per cent reliable. At the same time, in order to successfully participate in an online programme, students must be well-organized, self-motivated and possess time management skills. An online teacher must compensate for lack of physical presence by creating a supportive environment in a virtual classroom where all students feel comfortable in participating.

Computer-related frustration and the fear to face new things among teachers may compromise their pedagogy. For many it may be a threatening experience.

It may be important to recognize that some subjects cannot be taught online because the electronic medium does not permit the best methods of instruction. Examples are hands-on subjects such as public speaking, surgery,

dental hygiene and sports where physical movements contribute to the achievement of the learning objectives. Hybrid courses may represent a solution, thus making that area of the course more accessible to a greater number of people who would otherwise have difficulty getting to the campus.

Online curriculum should reflect the use of dialogue among students and group discussions. Quality education may be provided in a virtual university only if the curriculum is developed or converted to meet the needs of the medium. The task of access both to curriculum products and curriculum experts is an important issue for the success of a virtual university. As students cannot have access to all curriculum products, it is likely that scientific visualisation is used as an educational tool. Curriculum may not be easily updated nor very interactive. Use of email may be effective for exchange of information.

Video conferencing over the internet may not be a practical substitute. From the administrative point of view, the question of accreditation becomes pertinent. Where would the credits go? How can Intellectual Property Rights be maintained? How will the issue of faculty control over content and curriculum be preserved? These questions must be addressed initially.

Programming the curriculum for virtual universities will be one of the biggest challenges. Interactive media courseware development is a tedious operation. A quality educational product would require synergy between faculty experts, programmers and digital artists. A foolproof curriculum requires an institutional investment in faculty expertise. If students of a virtual university follow a separate curriculum from on-campus students, there may not be sufficient baseline from which to determine grades of virtual pupils. While designing electronic curriculum for distance learners it is important to build in a reliable testing infrastructure. If this is done, the distribution of grades between the virtual students and on-campus learners may be identical.

It must be agreed that the quality of a degree depends on the depth and scope of the mentoring relationship between the student and a faculty member. To make possible the interactive aspect would require an enormous investment of faculty time. Few teachers would be there to commit to such a teaching endeavour.

It is desirable that electronic courseware and credit granting must be cost-effective. It may be argued that reduced cost per credit hour will be the prime incentive for students to go in for virtual university courses. Virtual students would like to buy the cheapest educational products in the market where education has become a commodity.

If a purely commodified market model is to be applied in the case of virtual universities, then scholarship is sure to be sacrificed especially when the budget on the education sector keeps getting reduced.

Letters to the Editor

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Continuity & change in Afghanistan

SIR, Apropos the editorial, "Biden's Doha round" (12 March), with a few tweaks to the Trump administration's Afghanistan policy, the Biden dispensation has signalled both continuity and change.

He wants to turn the page on America's ill-fated 20-year excursion in Afghanistan. Delhi, cut out by the Trump Administration and Pakistan, had no role in the previous Afghanistan peace talks, has fortuitously found an opening in Biden's plans which include India, among other nations, as a compon-

ent to ensure peace in the region. India has a lot at stake in Afghanistan. Historical ties between two countries have been buttressed by India's efforts at democratic stability.

The US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, has envisaged a United Nations-led initiative to bring together foreign ministers and envoys from Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India and the US to discuss a unified approach to supporting peace in Afghanistan. But the "intra-Afghan talks" that began last September could

not get off the ground as the violence and killings did not abate.

The Biden Administration's approach is now clear. The authoritative "take it or leave it" tone of US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's letter addressed to President Ashraf Ghani ~ also in the Afghan media ~ is suggestive of as much impatience with the Kabul government as the readiness to turn the screws on the Taliban.

As of now, uncertainties of the previous process remain. The draft proposals have to be acceptable to the

two sides in Afghanistan. There is no indication that the Taliban, which stood firm at Doha that there would be no ceasefire, will agree to one now, in the spring, which in Afghanistan is usually the season for a new offensive.

The Taliban has made no official response yet to the proposals. Its benefactor, Pakistan, is silent too. The government in Kabul has offered no official comment. Finding common ground at the high table could prove to be challenging, as each country's priority would be to safeguard its own interests.

India must prepare for the challenge of sitting at the high table and make most of Quad cooperation for bolstering its security.

Yours, etc., SS Paul, Nadia, 12 March.

TRINAMUL'S BUREAUCRATS

SIR, Apropos the timely news report under the heading "Dual charges for some IAS officers raise eyebrows" (27 February) there is no

A NEW LIFE FOLLOWS DEATH

SIR, This refers to Abhik Roy's article, "Tagore and death" (2 March). In the poet's reckoning, death is a bridge to a new life.

His appreciation of death as bride or bridegroom is justifiable as they together are blessed to give a birth. Welcome to death would appear to be the fullness of life and the fulfilment of an obligation with birth. When we die, we pass the examination of the Supreme and chance upon a new assignment to serve and enjoy his creation.

Fear of death results in grief and sorrow instead of pleasure. Fear of death stimulates and moves one to wealth and waste at the cost of life and the right of another, and face foes and fight heading for curtailment of life.

Yours, etc., Tapan Patra, South 24 Parganas, 12 March.

gainsaying the fact that it is not the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC government alone that has claimed an acute shortage of IAS officers in the state.

In terms of utilising the services of these bureaucrats the state government follows an impractical earlier policy. In fact, the same policy of even its predecessor-in-office, the Left Front, has been scrupulously followed by the TMC government.

It is not surprising that several IAS officers have been entrusted with multiple important portfolios in

different government departments and undertakings while many of their senior colleagues are either not properly utilized or posted to less important departments and undertakings requiring less attention from the appropriate authorities. Strangely enough, despite having an adequate number of around 300 officers, it appears many of them are not only underutilized but are practically sitting idle as OSDs or have been kept on "compulsory wait".

Yours, etc., Arun K Bhaduri, Kolkata, 28 February.



SUNIL SHARAN

Was it Kate Middleton? Or Prince William? Or Prince Charles? Who asked about the colour of the skin of Archie, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's son? In this ongoing blood-feud between the two British royal sisters-in-law, Kate and Meghan, Meghan seems to have drawn blood this round.

The British press is calling Megxit the biggest scandal to hit its royalty since the abdication of King Edward VIII a full eighty-five years ago. Harry and Meghan have leveled serious allegations of racism and neglect at the Palace. The Palace has responded, saying that it will conduct an investigation, while qualifying that there might be conflicting accounts. That just means to imply that Meghan's revelations may not be exactly true. The Palace has further said the investigation will be a family affair, meaning that no one outside the family will get to know the result, barring leaks of course.

The Commonwealth was previously known as the British Commonwealth. It is an aggregation of nations, white and coloured, which were formerly under British rule. White nations like Australia and Canada were treated fairly by the British. Coloured nations like India and Kenya were raped and pillaged by them. India became a republic in 1950. That meant that its sovereign was no longer the British queen then. In a masterful act of British ingenuity, republics were allowed to enter the British Commonwealth. And the name of the body was changed to the more egalitarian Commonwealth.

In a sign of changing times, India has reportedly urged that the headship of the Commonwealth be rotated between its members. This suggestion has of course met with fierce resistance from the British. India has not pushed its case further and seems to have graciously accepted that Charles, once he ascends the British throne, will automatically become the head of the Commonwealth. There is a moral authority vested in the head of the Commonwealth, that in a grouping so varied in colours and creeds and cultures, the head of the Commonwealth and his or her family will set an example for the group to follow.

Take the case of Charles. He cheated on his wife, Diana, who died in an accident. Then Charles made his

Why India must leave the Commonwealth



mistress his wife. Take the case of the Duke of York, Prince Andrew. He first kept company of the former prime minister of Italy, Silvio Berlusconi, who was accused of being a paedophile. Now American authorities want to question Andrew for the role he might have played in the pedophilic scandal enveloping the associates of the American financier, Jeffrey Epstein, who committed suicide.

The Palace refuses to make Andrew available to American authorities for questioning. Harry himself had a tumultuous youth. He is accused of making a racial slur against a Pakistani comrade and donning Nazi uniforms to parties. And

Prince Philip himself, the queen's husband no less, is known to often make disparaging comments against Bangladeshis and others. This then is the state of the British monarchy at its highest levels. With what moral authority is it going to lead the Commonwealth whose very members it disparages?

Gandhi fought against colour prejudice all his life, first in South Africa, and then in India, which he rescued from the white clutches of Britain. But now we seem to be condoning that very organization which appears to be practicing racism. Meghan might not have been altogether truthful in her interview to

Oprah Winfrey, but there is no denying that her son Archie has been denied the title of prince while his cousins have received their titles.

Kate and William's first-born, George, automatically got the title of prince because he's directly in line of succession to the throne. George's younger siblings, Charlotte and Louis, were not automatically conferred a title. The Queen had to make an intervention in each case to make them a princess and a prince respectively. But Archie, Meghan and Harry's kid, was denied a princely title because of the colour of his skin, Meghan now alleges. How despicable that is if it is true. The fact of the matter though is

that the queen hasn't made an intervention to make Archie a prince. That is an indisputable fact.

Fish rots from the top. The Commonwealth is rotting today because its head is rotting. Which other monarchy anywhere in the world makes as much drama as the British royalty? We made the British quit India in 1947 and got rid of their colour prejudice. Their colour prejudice is still alive and kicking. Why should we make ourselves subject to it? India must forthwith leave the Commonwealth.

The writer is an expert on energy and contributes regularly to publications in India and overseas.



IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

A Boss from Hell

MANISH NANDY

A poor boss is an unparalleled curse. Sadly, such bosses turn up with unparalleled regularity.

The large European company where I started life had two layers of incompetence. The top English bosses understood nothing of India, neither its markets nor its direction, and did not care to. Their underlings, the top Indian bosses, were picked up, usually at elite clubs, from other large organizations, on criteria that had little to do with competence. The ability to drink, to wear smart clothes, to play golf or tennis, and to have known other bosses were what mattered most. To think, to analyze, to articulate a vision was of no concern. No surprise, duds as executives were a common hazard. If you had one as your boss, you could only pray for him to burst a blood vessel.

A memorable one I got was Apte. He could gather his four officers the first day and honestly say: I know nothing of this company and this job, please help me do it. We would have told him a few things, so that he could go to his bosses and tell them a few things and look good. We would have thus kept the wheels running as before. No, he had to pretend he knew and understood everything, ask myriad irrelevant questions, suggest ridiculous alternatives, and show us who the boss was. We had to do our work and carry the additional burden of a silly, pretentious boss.

Apte had the cunning of an ignoramus and knew just how to cover up his ignorance. If there was a major problem, he would call us to his office and ask, with a great show of affability, "What do you think of this?" After picking our brain, he would write it up in a

memo and take it triumphantly to his boss. Periodically, he cut his work short and asked us to write him a memo charting our ideas to solve a problem. We found out from his secretary that he would then get her to retype the memo, inserting his name for ours, and send it to the director.

We soon developed counter-strategies. I would say, "Hmm. This is a complex issue. Let me get back to you," and then never get back to him, in spite of reminders. If forced to produce a paper, I would write a mediocre note, leaving out key points that I knew the director would expect from Apte. Or insert carefully crafted double entendres that Apte would be too dumb to notice but would set off a bomb with the much-smarter director. These stratagems were hard to conceive and harder to execute, and course one could not repeat them endlessly without making Apte once-bitten twice-cautious. We were delighted that he could not just misappropriate our handiwork without periodically paying a price for it.

Apte loved not only displaying his position and power but also diminishing the status of his subordinates. The moment he saw me negotiating with the President of a Japanese trading company or the Vice President of an American manufacturer, he had to barge in and say, "Let us meet for a couple of minutes before you leave." The real purpose of those minutes would be to alert the person that he was the big boss and the subordinate did not matter. When I now read management texts that pontificate that the superior's mission is to 'empower' his subordinates, I remember the reality that Apte represented: most bosses labour doggedly to emasculate their juniors.

Apte ran into problems with other departments when they found that the

information or analysis he supplied them was dubious. His confidence in his judgment, he found, was no more shared by other executives than by his subordinates. Some even barred him from their departmental discussions. Apte insisted with the human resource people that he should be invited to speak in the training programme for junior officers, but when they did, the millennial trainees booted at the trite homilies Apte had culled from some book.

I never found out with whom Apte got along, but I knew business associates who were peeved by his abruptness and complained that he was eager to lecture and not to listen. In the months we worked together he never called the staff together to dis-

cuss how we could work better as a team or said to a colleague, "That is a good idea" or "Your suggestion is excellent."

I thought of him as inept but had no reason to question his integrity. That supposition went south the day he came to the office with a large bundle of invitation cards and started handing them over to every salesman who depended on our company for business. His wife was to have an exhibition of her paintings in an elite hotel rather than in a respectable gallery. I understood the choice the moment I arrived: the paintings were pathetically amateurish, and no decent gallery would have displayed them. But the purpose had nothing to do with art; the company's business associates

bought practically all the paintings at ridiculously high prices. A journalist plied with drinks wrote a fawning review comparing Apte's wife to Pissaro. I still wonder if Apte or his wife had ever heard of Pissaro.

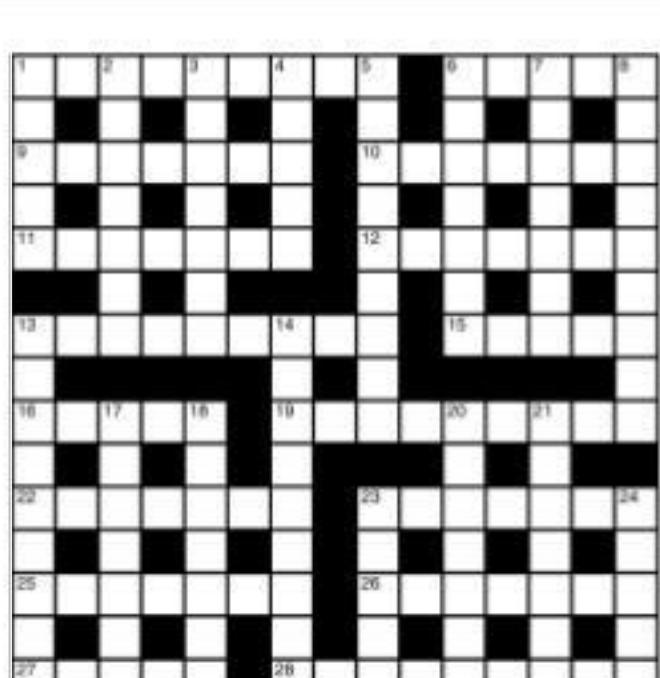
I left the company eventually and joined a larger group. In a few years, I saw the company lose half its national market and more of its reputation. It fell from sheer waste and incompetence and went into liquidation. Tragically, ten thousand people lost their jobs. The only silver lining I could see was that Apte lost the well-paid job he should not have had in the first place.

The writer is a Washington-based international development advisor and had worked with the World Bank. He can be reached at mnandy@gmail.com



Illustration: Debabrata Chakrabarty

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Smooth musician producing flyer (9)
- 6 Measure approach to audience (5)
- 9 Tsarina wrongfully executed crafty fellow (7)
- 10 Swear to overwhelm English member of superhero squad (7)
- 11 Mock ruins of half-hearted comic stories (7)
- 12 Ape I note by gallery (7)
- 13 Usher in National Theatre following a dry finale with a bit of applause (9)
- 15 Bombard Hull (5)
- 16 Revolutionary trial keeping five in box (2,3)
- 19 School crayons Ed chewed (9)
- 22 Complete circuit is more ring-like (7)
- 23 Birds ruin metal containers (7)
- 25 Thoughtful, dear former lover departing (7)
- 26 Win over Palace? Fudging about time! (7)
- 27 Old birds from two parties succeeded (5)
- 28 Generates moving characters for young people (9)

DOWN

- 1 Mark on fine band of material (5)
- 2 Short letter to reveal upset over film (7)
- 3 Outburst from quiet oaf about maintaining independence (7)
- 4 Rubbish vegetation left out (5)
- 5 Article about boxing is true to life (9)
- 6 Films tiny dishes (7)
- 7 Angry about no good, thankless person (7)
- 8 Fooling around in Equus perhaps? (9)
- 13 Trap door collapsed trapping hard

- 14 crustacean? (9)
- 15 Spongy sphere in middle of somewhere else (9)
- 17 Study by fans upset and astonished (7)
- 18 Terry initially swirls around in underwear (7)
- 20 Grandmother keeping one recreational vehicle in paradise (7)
- 21 A fool consumed shake (7)
- 23 Destroyed ample plant (5)
- 24 Gets rid of part of unfinished symphony (5)

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

NO 28854

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

How much the community owes to the Mayo Hospital was illustrated by a letter the other day from a correspondent who, both as a former Governor of the institution, and as an employer of labour, bore testimony to the splendid work carried on there. Mr. Larmour laid stress on the special claim which the Hospital has upon the sympathies of the Indian community. As he said, there are many wealthy Indians in Calcutta who could relieve the Hospital of its financial embarrassments without any very great difficulty if they realised the importance of the case. The Hospital has a strong claim upon all employers of labour as well as upon the general public. The appeal issued by Captain Gilry, I.M.S., as Surgeon-Superintendent and Secretary, has begun to bear fruit, but much more help is needed, and it is to be hoped that additional support will soon be forthcoming. It would be a misfortune, especially in these hard times, if the work of the Hospital or its dispensaries had to be permanently cut down for want of adequate funds. We know that in England the position of the great hospitals supported by voluntary contributions - long the pride of the country - has given cause for serious anxiety during recent years. This is all the more reason why India should begin to show a good example.

NEWS ITEMS

QUEEN MARY RECEIVES OXFORD DEGREE

Queen Mary, accompanied by Princess Mary, today visited Oxford and received the Degree of Civil Law in the presence of a large and distinguished gathering at the Sheldonian Theatre. The Chancellor said that this was the first time a Queen of England had received an honorary degree of Oxford University. He paid a tribute to the example of well-doing which the Queen had set to the nation. He read a message from the Queen saying that Her Majesty valued the honour, not only because it was the highest the University could confer, but because it enabled her publicly to testify her interest in the cause of the education of women.

GREECE AND TURKEY

The situation in regard to Greece and Turkey has again become critical. The Allies yielding to Greek protests have cancelled the proposal to internationalise Thrace which is now to remain Greek. In consequence of this reversal of policy and the new decision to appoint a Christian - probably a Greek - Governor of Smyrna under the League of Nations practically all the concessions to Turkey have been wiped out. A settlement seems almost as far off as ever and fighting is likely to continue. The withdrawal of the French from Cilicia has been followed by a movement of the Kemalist army to join with the forces opposing the Greeks. The latter are now advancing towards the lateral railway with the object of cutting the Turks off.

ARREST OF HPOONGYI U. OTTAMA

Rangoon, Mar 14
Owing to the arrest of Hpoongyi U. Ottama in Kyaungone, near Bassein, on a charge of sedition under Section 121(A) I.P.C., all the shops in Mandalay have been closed. In Rangoon a large number of stalls and in some instances whole bazars were closed yesterday afternoon owing to the same reason. No report, however, has been received as yet in the Burma Secretariat detailing the alleged offences for causing the arrest of the Bikhu. Later in the day the closing of shops by Burmese and the declaration of a hartal in sympathy with the Bikhu became general, and practically all the Burmese shops in the town closed their doors. A number of Indian shops followed suit, but the Chinese shopkeepers, though threatened, refused to close their stalls.

SCHOOL OF CHEMICAL TECHNOLOGY

The first meeting of the Advisory Board of the School of Chemical Technology took place at the Indian Association Hall, Calcutta on Sunday. Mr. H.W.B. Moreno was in the chair, and Captain Petavel, B.C. Sinha, and J.C. Ghosh, were present by invitation. Mr. J.C. Ghosh was appointed a member of this committee, and Hon Secretary and Treasurer, and Dr. Sir P.C. Roy is to be invited to join the Board. It was resolved that the Board should accept no responsibility so far as the assets and liabilities of the school were concerned, such matters resting entirely with the proprietor, Mr. J.C. Ghosh. The matriculation standard or its equivalent is to ordinarily be accepted as a qualification for admission to the school. Special cases will be examined by the Board for admission.



Virus willing, we will definitely see a huge rebound in growth in 2020-2021

RAGHURAM RAJAN
FORMER RBI GOVERNOR

THUMBNAILS

Spectra expects to double revenue: Broadband solutions company Spectra expects to more than double its revenue in next 5 years to around Rs 500 crore and plans to be a more focussed business-to-business service provider. The Gurgaon-based firm expects to close the current financial year with marginal growth but expects to grow aggressively in the next 2-5 years, Spectra CEO Udit Mehrotra.

Metal scrap recycling: The Centre has issued a framework for scrap recycling of non-ferrous metals, including aluminium and copper, in a bid to cut down the scrap imports. The mines ministry is also of the view that one of the key challenges faced by the non-ferrous metals industry is its heavy dependence on import of metal scrap and stressed that a major share of the demand is served by imports owing to the underdeveloped metal scrap collection, segregation and processing infrastructure in the domestic market.

ONGC's share: State-owned ONGC, which is often perceived as a drag on the crude oil and natural gas produced in the country, has actually seen its contribution to the national production jump to over 70 per cent from under 55 per cent a decade back, petroleum ministry data showed. While Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) maintained production levels, output by other operators has dropped.

L&T recruits 22 per cent women: In a strategic decision, construction major Larsen & Toubro has recruited 22 per cent women at trainee level across its major businesses in 2020, up 8 per cent over the previous year. Figures shared by L&T suggest a rise in the intake of women at the level of graduate engineer trainees, and post graduate engineer trainees.

CAIT demands restoration of MSME status for 8 cr traders

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) has demanded restoration of MSME status taken away in 2017 from 8 crore retail and wholesale traders who are part of the service industry.

The government in June 2017 removed retail and wholesale traders from the MSME category forcing the players either borrow at a higher rate or from informal financial sources, CAIT secretary general Praveen Khandelwal.

According to banking sources, about Rs 3 lakh crore loans given to them are at the risk of losing a tag of MSME-loan at the end of March when banks do their annual closure.

As a result, many banks will face the problem of meeting priority sector lending (PSL)

Five IPOs to hit markets this week; seek to raise ₹3,764-cr

Shares of these companies will be listed on Bombay Stock Exchange and National Stock Exchange

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Riding on the upbeat market sentiment, as many as five companies are set to come out with initial public offers this week to raise an estimated Rs 3,764 crore.

The companies are expecting to benefit from an equity market which is flush with liquidity and has seen a sharp increase in new retail investors.

Craftsman Automation and Laxmi Organics Industries will launch their initial share-sale programmes on Monday while that of Kalyan Jewellers India will open on Tuesday. IPOs of Suryoday Small Finance Bank and Nazara Technologies will begin on Wednesday, information with the exchanges showed.

Shares of these companies will be listed on BSE and NSE.

Besides, the initial public offering (IPO) Anupam Rasayan is currently underway. Apart from these, nine companies have already float-



ed their initial share-sales so far.

Automaker Craftsman Automation's Rs 824-crore IPO comprises a fresh issue of equity shares aggregating up to Rs 150 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of up to 45,21,450 shares by promoter and existing shareholders.

Those offloading shares in the offer-for-sale are Srinivasan Ravi, K Gomatheswaran, Marina III (Singapore) Pte Ltd and International Finance Corporation (IFC).

The issue, with a price band of Rs 1,488-1,490 a share, will open on 15 March and close on 17 March.

Laxmi Organics' IPO con-

sists of fresh issuance of shares aggregating to Rs 300 crore and an offer for sale worth Rs 300 crore by the promoter Yellow Stone Trust.

The price band has been fixed at Rs 129-130 per share for the IPO, which will open for public subscription during 15-17 March.

On Friday, Craftsman Automation and Laxmi Organics Industries had raised Rs 247 crore and Rs 180 crore respectively from anchor investors.

The Rs 1,175-crore IPO of Kalyan Jewellers India Ltd

comprises issuance of fresh equity aggregating up to Rs 800 crore and an offer for sale worth Rs 375 crore.

Kalyan Jewellers' promoter T S Kalyanaraman would be offloading shares worth up to Rs 125 crore, while Highdell Investment Ltd, an affiliate of Warburg Pincus, would sell up to Rs 250 crore worth of shares through the OFS route. The company has set the price band at Rs 86-87 a share for the initial share-sale, which will conclude on 18 March.

The IPO of Suryoday Small Finance Bank comprises fresh issuance of 81,50,000 equity shares and an offer for sale of up to 1,09,43,070 equity shares by existing shareholders.

Those offering shares through the OFS route include International Financial Corporation (IFC), Gaja Capital, HDFC Holdings, IDFC First Bank, Kotak Mahindra Life Insurance Company, DWM (International) Mauritius Ltd and Americorp Ventures.

The bank has fixed a price a band of Rs 303-305 a share for its initial share-sale, which

will open for public subscription on 17 March and conclude on 19 March.

At the upper end of the issue, the IPO would fetch Rs 582 crore. The small finance bank has proposed to utilise proceeds from the fresh issue towards augmenting its Tier-1 capital base to meet future capital requirements.

Gaming firm Nazara Technologies' Rs 583-crore public issue will see sale of 52,94,392 equity shares by the promoters and existing shareholders. Those selling shares in the IPO include Mitter Infotech LLP, a promoter of the company, IIFL Special Opportunities Fund, Good Game Investment Trust, IndexArb Securities and Azimuth Investments.

The company, backed by ace investor Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, is popularly known for its games on World Cricket Championship, Chhota Bheem and Motu Patlu series.

The company's IPO will be open for subscription during 17-19 March with a price band of Rs 1,100-1,101 a share for the issue.

sation of two public sector banks as part of the government's disinvestment plan.

The government has already privatised IDBI Bank by selling its majority stake in the lender to LIC in 2019 and has merged 14 public sector banks in the last four years.

Conciliation meetings before the additional chief labour commissioner on 4, 9 and 10 March did not yield any positive result, so the strike stands. All India Bank Employees Association general secretary C H Venkatachalam said.

Members of UFBU include All India Bank Employees Association (AIIBEA), All India Bank Officers' Confederation (AIBOC), National Confederation of Bank Employees (NCBE), All India Bank Officers' Association (AIBOA) and Bank Employees Confederation of India (BEFI).

Others are Indian National Bank Employees Federation (INBEP), Indian National Bank Officers Congress (INBOC), National Organisation of Bank Workers (NOBW) and National Organisation of Bank Officers (NOBO).

Bank operations may be hit on Mon, Tue due to nationwide strike

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Banking operations across the country could be impacted on Monday and Tuesday as United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) has given a call for a nationwide strike to protest against the proposed privatisation of two state-owned lenders.

Services such as deposits and withdrawal at branches, cheque clearance and loan approvals would be affected due to the strike. UFBU, an umbrella body of nine unions, in a statement claimed that about 10 lakh bank employees and officers of the banks will participate in the strike.

Many public sector lenders, including State Bank of India have informed their customers that their normal working could be affected at the branches and offices if the strike materialises. Banks have also informed that they are taking necessary steps for the smooth functioning of bank branches and offices.

In the Union Budget presented last month, finance minister nirmala Sitharaman had announced the privati-

the overall financial health, and bond yields have also been on an upward trajectory.

The latter trend indicates that government borrowings could become more costly.

About reform measures, Rajan said that while the 2021-22 Budget has placed a lot of weight on privatisation, the history of the government delivering on this is checkered, and he wondered how it will be different this time.

He pointed out that in the latest Budget, laudably, there is more transparency about the true extent of spending, as well as a degree of conservatism about budget receipts that has not been seen in recent budgets.

However, Rajan opined that the budget is less clear about revenue raising and the financial sector actions.

Drastic changes in monetary policy framework can upset bond market: Rajan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

As the economy slowly comes out of the pandemic blues, former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan on Sunday cautioned that "drastic changes" in India's monetary policy framework can upset the bond market as the current system has helped in containing inflation and promoting growth.

Rajan, also a noted economist, opined that the government's ambitious target to make India a \$5-trillion economy by 2024-25 was "more aspirational, rather than a carefully computed one even before the pandemic".

"I believe the (monetary policy) framework has helped bring inflation down, while giving the RBI some flexibility to support the economy. It is

hard to think of what would have happened if we had to run such large fiscal deficits without such a framework in place," Rajan told in an interview. His remarks were in response to a query on whether he was in favour of reviewing the 2-6 per cent target band for inflation under the mon-

etary policy framework. The Reserve Bank of India has the mandate to maintain retail inflation at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side. The central bank's six-member monetary policy committee (MPC) headed by RBI Governor decides on policy rates keeping this target in

mind.

The current medium-term inflation target, which was notified in August 2016, ends on 31 March. The inflation target for the next five years starting 1 April is likely to be notified this month.

Against this backdrop, Rajan said, "We risk upsetting bond markets if we make drastic changes in the framework." "I think the framework has been beneficial in bringing down inflation, I don't think it has been costly in slowing growth, and this is probably the wrong time to make drastic changes," he pointed out.

With the government embarking on substantial borrowing plans to boost the coronavirus pandemic-hit economy, there are concerns among certain quarters about

Need to limit, streamline independent directors' liability: CII to government

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

as per the RBI's guidelines, commercial banks should extend 40 per cent of the total lending towards the priority sector. However, for regional rural banks (RRBs) and small finance banks (SFBs), the PSL target is 75 per cent.

PSL is available at concessional rate and objective behind is to promote these labour intensive businesses in the economy.

According to estimates, the country's largest lender State Bank of India (SBI) alone will have to reclassify Rs 50,000 crore loans given to traders and ICICI Bank will do reclassification of about Rs 25,000 crore at the end of this month.

Khandelwal said even the Udyam portal launched in July last year after the revision in definition of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), denied MSME tag to traders.

independent directors from vicarious criminal liability since they are not involved in the day-to-day running of the company. A non-obstante clause may be incorporated in the Act to exclude independent directors from any vicarious criminal liability for offences committed by the company, it said.

The government recently concluded the exercise of decriminalising the Companies Act, 2013. In this connection, CII has submitted a Paper to the ministry of corporate affairs highlighting matters with respect to framework for settlement of offences; liability of independent directors; vicarious liability, etc.

The chamber said it is necessary to expressly exempt

Indian equity markets will be guided by the US Federal Reserve's call on interest rates and domestic macroeconomic data this week, analysts said.

Market participants will also be keenly focusing on the US Fed's plans to tackle the volatility in the bond yields. Rising US bond yields have attracted safe-haven bets and caused a correction in global equities mainly technology stocks recent weeks.

Indian equities followed global cues throughout the last week. The rise in US bond yield kept the volatility high, swaying between gains and losses.

Although a fall in US unemployment rate and the signing of the stimulus bill helped the market in between, but

continuous rising bond yields outweighed market sentiments, analysts said.

During the holiday-shortened last week, the 30-share BSE benchmark index gained 386.76 points or 0.78 per cent. Markets were closed on Thursday on account of Mahashivratri.

The market will be keenly focusing on the upcoming Fed meeting scheduled to be held on the 16th & 17th of March," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services said.

The market would also depend on the investment trend of foreign portfolio investors, movement of the rupee against the US dollar and Brent crude prices.

"On the global front, the market will be closely eyeing the US Fed meet for their stance on interest rates and plans to tackle the volatility in the bond yields," said Ajit Mishra, VP Research, Reliance Broking.

Extending its gaining streak for the third day in a row, the Indian rupee advanced by another 12 paise to close at 72.79 against the US dollar on Friday.

Fed interest rate decision, macroeconomic data to guide stock markets this week

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

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Although a fall in US unemployment rate and the signing of the stimulus bill helped the market in between, but

for privatisation, the possibility of clubbing of profitable and non-profitable airports will be explored to make more attractive packages, sources said.

A National Monetisation Pipeline of potential brownfield infrastructure assets will be launched and an asset monetisation dashboard will also be created for tracking the progress and to provide visibility to investors, she had said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had last month said that the government is targeting monetising 100 assets such as oil and gas pipelines, which can draw a massive Rs 2.5 lakh crore of investment.

The government is targeting Rs 1.75 lakh crore from divestment proceeds in the next fiscal year beginning 1 April.

Govt to sell remaining stake in Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad airports



dra Modi government, the Adani Group bagged contracts for six airports Lucknow, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Mangaluru, Thiruvanantha-

puram, and Guwahati last year.

The Airpost Authority of India, which works under the ministry of civil aviation, owns

and manages more than 100 airports across the country.

While in Mumbai International Airport, Adani Group holds 74 per cent stake, the remaining 26 per cent stake is with Airpost Authority of India.

In Delhi International Airport, GMR Group holds 54 per cent, Airports Authority of India holds 26 per cent, while Fraport AG and Eraman Malaysia holds 10 per cent stake each.

Airpost Authority of India along with the Government of Andhra Pradesh holds 26 per cent in Hyderabad International Airport Ltd. It holds a similar stake in Bangalore International Airport along with the Karnataka Government.

Finance minister nirmala

Sale of Airport Authority of India's (AAI) remaining stake in the four airports as also 13 more airports have been identified for privatisation in 2021-22 fiscal, two people aware of deliberations at Empowered



Syria has seen every type of violence and enormous suffering by the population

CALLING FOR INTENSIFIED PEACE EFFORTS ON THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE START OF THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

POPE FRANCIS

The Statesman
NEW DELHI, MONDAY 15 MARCH 2021

09

Myanmar civilian leader in hiding vows 'revolution'

Acting leader of parallel civilian government says it is 'the darkest moment of the nation'

AGENCIES

YANGON, 14 MARCH

The civilian leader of Myanmar's government in hiding vowed to continue supporting a revolution to oust the military that seized power in last month's coup, as security forces again met protesters with lethal force.

Mahn Win Khaing Than, who was named the acting vice president by Myanmar's ousted lawmakers and is a member of deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi's party, addressed the public on Saturday via Facebook for the first time since the 1 February military takeover.

Forces opened fire on anti-coup protesters in the commercial capital Yangon on Sunday, and at least three people were killed, witnesses and domestic media said.

Video taken at the site



Protesters gathered to attend and participate in a candlelight night rally in Yangon, Myanmar on Saturday.

tic media said.

The Kachin Wave media outlet said another protester was killed in the town of Hpakant, in the jade mining area in the northeast.

Over 80 people had been killed as of Saturday in widespread protests against the military's seizure of power last month, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners advocacy group said. Over 2,100 people have been arrested, it said.

Mahn Win Khaing Than said, "This is the darkest moment of the nation and the moment that the dawn is close."

He said the civilian government would "attempt to legislate the required laws so that the people have the right to defend themselves" against the military crackdown.

The Monywa township in central Myanmar declared it

had formed its own local government and police force.

In Yangon, hundreds of people demonstrated in different parts of the city after putting up barricades of barbed wire and sandbags to block security forces.

In one area, people staged a sit-in protest under sheets of tarpaulin rigged up to protect them from the harsh midday sun. "We need justice," they chanted.

At least 13 people were killed on Saturday, one of the bloodiest days since the February 1 coup, witnesses and domestic media said. "They are acting like they are in a war zone, with unarmed people," said an activist in the city of Mandalay, Myat Thu.

Junta-run media MRTV's evening news broadcast on Saturday labelled the protesters "criminals" but did not elaborate.

Minister says Afghanistan forces can hold their own

ASSOCIATED PRESS

KABUL, 14 MARCH

Afghanistan's interior minister said Saturday that Afghan security forces can hold their ground even if US troops withdraw, challenging a warning from the United States predicting a withdrawal would yield quick territorial gains to the Taliban.

Masoud Andarabi's comments in an interview Saturday with The Associated Press were the first government reaction to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's warning issued in a sharply worded letter to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani last weekend.

In the letter pressing Ghani to step up efforts to make peace with the Taliban, Blinken said, I am concerned the security situation will worsen and that the Taliban could make rapid territorial gains after the American military withdraws.

Andarabi said Afghanistan's National Security Forces could hold territory, but would like



ly endure heavy losses trying to hold remote checkpoints without US air support.

The Afghan security forces are fully capable of defending the capital and the cities and the territories that we are present in right now, he said.

We think that the Afghan security forces this year have proven to the Taliban that they will not be able to gain territory.

While the Taliban have not attacked US or NATO forces as a condition of the agreement, the Afghan National Security forces have faced some blistering assaults.

Interviewed at the heavily fortified Interior Ministry, Andarabi also repeated his government's warning against a hasty US retreat from the war-torn country, saying that the Taliban's ties to al-Qaeda remain intact and that a swift pullout would worsen global counterterrorism efforts.

He said that Afghan National Security Forces backed by US assistance have so far put a squeeze on terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan, including the local Islamic State affiliate.

A hasty uncalculated withdrawal could certainly give an opportunity for those terrorists ... to threaten the world," he said from inside the compound, protected by concrete blast walls, barbed wire and a phalanx of security guards.

The warning comes as Washington is reviewing a deal the Trump administration struck with the Taliban over a year ago.

British-Iranian woman back in court after 5 years in jail

DUBAI, 14 MARCH

A trial to present fresh charges against a British-Iranian woman detained for five years in Iran convened Sunday, her supporters said, casting uncertainty over her future following her release from prison.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe appeared in court in Tehran to face new charges of spreading propaganda against Iran, wrote Tulip Siddiq, a member of the British Parliament who represents her area of London and campaigned for her release.

A verdict was expected next week, Siddiq added. Nazanin's lawyer did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The new trial came a week after she completed her prison sentence on widely refuted spying charges.

Although she was allowed to remove her ankle monitor and leave house arrest when her sentence formally ended, she remains unable to fly home to her family in London.

The 42-year-old was sentenced to five years in jail after being convicted of plotting the overthrow of Iran's government, a charge that she, her supporters and rights groups vigorously deny. She was taken into custody at the airport while returning home in 2016.

Pakistan's Hindu community pardons mob accused of vandalising temple

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PESHAWAR, 14 MARCH

The Hindu community in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has decided to pardon the mob that vandalised and burned down a century-old temple in the province.

The local clerics and members of the Hindu community held a meeting on Saturday to resolve the dispute.

As per the dialogue, informally called 'jirga', the accused have tendered an apology over the attack and a similar incident in 1997. The Muslim clerics have assured full pro-



tection to the Hindus and their rights as per the country's Constitution.

A reconciliation statement from the meeting would be presented to the Supreme Court, in a bid to secure the release of the accused from detention.

On December 30 last year, a mob led by some local clerics and members of radical Islamist party Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam vandalised the temple and an adjoining 'samadhi' and set it on fire in Terri village of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Karak district.

Speaking to the media after the meeting with the local Ulama, Pakistan Hindu Council Chairman Ramesh Kumar said the incident had hurt the feelings of Hindus across the world. Kumar said KPK CM Mahmood Khan had chaired the 'jirga' proceedings and thanked him for settling the matter amicably.

No matter how he tried, it would be hard to achieve Uganda's recommended scientific wedding, slimmed down for the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Africa, where weddings often go big, he would invite 1,300 people if he could. Now he worries about how the uninvited might react and the consequences for his fam-

CELEBRATION



Chinese fans of Aamir Khan, who in recent years has become one of India's most popular film star in China, celebrating his 56th birthday at the Indian Embassy in Beijing, on Sunday.

AGENCIES

Hondurans to vote in primaries amid corruption allegations

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TEGUCIGALPA, 14 MARCH

politicians.

Honduras' economy has been hammered by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Two devastating Category 4 hurricanes passed through in November. Persistent gang violence and endemic corruption continue to drive large numbers of Hondurans out of the country.

Whoever wins Honduras' presidency will face US administration under that has already signalled a shift in priorities that will consider issues beyond just immigration in its relationship with the Central American nation.

Africans rethink big, bountiful weddings as pandemic bites

ASSOCIATED PRESS
KAMPALA, 14 MARCH



It's a bit complicated, very complicated actually, said the employee of a government research agency whose wedding is scheduled for April.

But we have a scapegoat of the Covid-19 pandemic. I will say, It's not me. It's what the government has said. If I didn't invite you, please understand.'

He is not alone. Many Africans are rethinking big, bountiful weddings amid the economic ravages of the pandemic.

In Uganda, an East African country of 45 million where colorful wedding convoys are a street spectacle on weekends, President Yoweri Museveni last year ordered so-called scientific weddings, attend-

ed by no more than 10 people, to stem the spread of the coronavirus.

Museveni put on such a wedding for a cousin in July in the lush gardens of the official residence, State House, with the masked couple in socially distanced seats.

Even the simple bridal cake looked dismal, unlike the giant tiered cakes that often dominate receptions.

The pandemic is forcing change in communities where family can mean a whole clan and weddings are seen as key in cementing relations between communities.

Extended families often plan weddings, and large, extravagant ones are a status sym-

bol in places like Nigeria, where over \$2 million can be spent.

Many in Uganda have expressed skepticism about small weddings, and there were reports of police interrupting noncompliant ceremonies before the rules were gradually eased to allow up to 200 attendees.

When the coronavirus struck, people adjusted quickly, very quickly, said the Rev. Sammy Wainaina, provost of All Saints Cathedral in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi.

For weddings, people have gone small." The demand for church weddings "has gone down considerably, he said.

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Clairvoyant (3)
- 3 Vocalise musically (4)
- 9 Drink mat (7)
- 10 Perhaps (5)
- 11 Thrust (5)
- 12 Irritated (7)
- 13 Badminton cone (11)
- 17 Disordered (7)
- 19 Seat (5)
- 21 Frequently (5)
- 22 Disobedient (7)
- 23 Armoured vehicle (4)
- 24 Manage (3)

DOWN

- 2 Buttons, 16 Long (5)
- 4 Blissful (7)
- 5 Cupidity (5)
- 6 Thoroughfare (6)
- 7 Semitransparent (11)
- 8 Leave out (4)
- 14 Make cheerful (7)
- 15 Spiny plant (6)
- 16 Colouring stick (6)
- 17 Small farm (5)
- 18 Marine food fish (4)
- 20 Loathe (5)

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

- ACROSS 12 Controversy, 16 Buttons, 18 Paste, 20 Small, 21 Isolate, 22 Lot, 23 Hypo-ship,
- DOWN 7 Molt, 9 Oste, 10 Inter, 14 Employ, 15 Severe, 16 Basil, 17 Ogle, 19 Shaky.

By arrangement with The Independent
Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required

BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker



RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson



DADDY DAZE/John Kovaleski



NEED TO KNOW

HOSPITALS

- AIIMS 26588500, 26588900
- Moolchand Medcity (formerly Hospital) 42000000 & 24-hour Chemist Shop 42000447
- Vidyasagar Institute for Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences 26924300, 26924304
- Batra Hospital & Medical Research Centre 29051280, 29958747
- Deen Dayal Upadhyay 25496320, 25494403
- Guru Tegh Bahadur 23717473, 2325320

RAILWAY INQUIRY

- General Inquiry 139
- Toll Free Nos. 1800112511
- SMS Inquiry Nos. 57886, 54959, 5676747

ROADWAYS INQUIRY

- ISBT (General Inquiry): 23868836, 23865181
- AIR INDIA Flight Inquiry and Reservation 08001801407
- INDIGO AIRLINES New Delhi City Office 43513185, Call Centre 09910383838, 18001803838, Reservation 43513186; Indigo Airlines Airline 23717473, 2325320

FLIGHT INQUIRY

- AIR INDIA Flight Inquiry and Reservation 08001801407
- INDIGO AIRLINES New Delhi City Office 43513185, Call Centre 09910383838, 18001803838, Reservation 43513186; Indigo Airlines Airline 23717473, 2325320

SCRABBLE® BRAND



PAR SCORE 140-150

by JUDD

FOUR RACK TOTAL TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION BY JUDD

- | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|-------|---|---|---|
| A | S | T | O | U | N | D |
| B | U | I | L | E | R | C |
| C | W | E | R | E | T | O |
| D | F | E | R | E | T | O |
| E | G | F | E | R | T | O |
| F | H | G | F | E | T | O |
| G | I | H | G</td | | | |



I will do everything I can to make sure the streets are safe

UK PRIME MINISTER BORIS JOHNSON

WEATHER

CITY	MAX(°C)	MIN(°C)
SINGAPORE	31	25 H
HONG KONG	23	19 H
TOKYO	18	10 CL
LONDON	11	5 H
DUBAI	24	20 CL
SAN FRANCISCO	12	7 H
NEW YORK	10	-1 S
MOSCOW	3	-2 R

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

THUMBNAILS



A medical staff from the National Health Organisation conducts a rapid test for Covid at a mobile testing point, in Athens on Sunday.

2,000 flights cancelled: More than 2,000 flights have been cancelled over the weekend at Denver International Airport in USA as a major snowstorm strikes the region. The National Weather Service has issued a winter storm warning, saying it expects 18 to 24 inches of heavy, wet snow to fall in Denver and Boulder from Saturday afternoon through Sunday night.

Travel bubble: Australia and Singapore are in talks for a possible travel bubble that will allow residents to travel between the two countries without having to quarantine, the Foreign Ministry here confirmed on Sunday. PTI

Kosovo embassy in Jerusalem, Israel: Kosovo's Foreign Ministry said on Sunday it has formally opened its embassy to Israel in the disputed city of Jerusalem. A statement said the move was made after the establishment of diplomatic ties with Israel on February 1 and a Kosovo-Serbia summit held at the White House in September.

Buckingham Palace to get law firm to conduct bullying probe

LONDON, 14 MARCH

Buckingham Palace plans to hand over an investigation into allegations that Meghan Markle, the Duchess of Sussex, may have bullied staff during her time as a frontline royal with Prince Harry in Britain to external investigators, a UK media report said on Sunday.

Earlier this month, the palace had confirmed that a probe would be conducted after The Times' published a leaked email from a staff member alleging that the former American actress drove two personal assistants out of the royal household and undermined the confidence of a third member of staff.

Now, "The Sunday Times" reports that it has been decided that the inquiry would be handed to a third-party law firm to conduct an independent investigation, rather than an inhouse inquiry.

Our commitment to look into the circumstances around the allegations from former staff of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex is being taken forward but we will not be providing a public commentary on it, a Buckingham Palace spokesperson said.

Several former and current royal aides who could not give evidence in court during Meghan Markle's recent legal case about privacy against a British newspaper are expected to speak to the inquiry.

"The actual worst incidents haven't come out. There are some harrowing stories to tell, the newspaper," quoted a royal source as saying.

THE INDEPENDENT

China, NK loom as Blinken, Austin head to Asia

The Biden administration's first Cabinet-level trip abroad is an effort to bolster US influence and calm concerns about America's role in Asia

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 14 MARCH

Threats from China and North Korea will loom large over the Biden administration's first Cabinet-level trip abroad, part of a larger effort to bolster US influence and calm concerns about America's role in Asia.

A senior administration said Saturday that US officials have tried to reach out to North Korea through multiple channels since last month, but have yet to receive a response, making consultations with the reclusive country's neighbors, Japan, South Korea and China, all the more critical.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin are heading to Japan and South Korea for four days of talks starting Monday. Blinken and Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, will then meet with senior Chinese officials



Their first official overseas visits are intended to restore what Biden hopes will be a calming and even-keeled approach to ties with Tokyo and Seoul after four years of transactional and often temperamental relations under the previous president, Donald Trump. He had upended diplomatic norms by meeting not once, but three times, with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

In addition to their official talks, Blinken and Austin plan virtual meetings with journalists, civil-society members and others. After reassuring their counterparts of US



commitments to Japanese and South Korean security, they plan to focus their talks on cooperating to confront an increasingly assertive China, the nuclear challenge from North Korea and the coronavirus pandemic.

In his first months in office, Biden has already signaled his desire to return the Asia-Pacific, or Indo-Pacific, as has become more common in officialese, to the top of the US foreign policy agenda. In keeping with his broader "America's back" diplomatic theme, Biden has pledged to keep stability in the region at the core of his international ini-

tatives.

On Friday, Biden participated in a virtual summit with the leaders of India, Japan and Australia. "A free and open Indo-Pacific is essential," Biden told his fellow members of the so-called Quad. "The United States is committed to working with you, our partners and all of our allies in the region to achieve stability."

As part of that effort and "to reduce the risks of escalation," the senior official said efforts had been made to connect with the North Koreans since mid-February, including through what is known as the "New York channel." To date, the official said, "we have not received any response from Pyongyang." The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive diplomatic outreach.

As the administration plots its strategy, the official said it would continue to consult with the Japanese and South Koreans, as well as with the Chi-

nese, and had also reached out to numerous former US officials involved in North Korea policy, including from the Trump presidency.

Biden's meeting with the Quad came less than a week after US and South Korean negotiators overcame years of contentious discussions under Trump to reach a tentative deal on paying for the American troop presence in South Korea. That agreement, along with a similar one for Japan, will be front and center in Blinken and Austin's meetings.

As he had done with allies in Europe, Trump threatened to reduce security cooperation unless host countries paid more, sparking fears of troop withdrawals at a time of particular uncertainty as China boosts efforts to dominate the region and North Korea's nuclear weapons remain a major source of angst.

"Diplomacy is back at the center of our foreign policy, and we are working to strengthen

America's relationships with our allies as well as the relationships among them," said Sung Kim, a career diplomat who is the top US diplomat for Asia. He served in the Philippines and Indonesia during the Trump administration and was also previously the special envoy for North Korea.

Yet, for all of Biden's suggestions that he will reverse Trump's overt hostility to China, he has yet to command a single one of his predecessor's policies. He has, in fact, reaffirmed several of them, including maintaining sanctions in response to human rights abuses in western Xinjiang and Hong Kong and restating a Trump-era decision to reject outright nearly all of China's maritime claims in the South China Sea. Many of China's policies that the US finds objectionable, including its crackdown in Hong Kong, stepped up rhetoric against Taiwan and actions in the South China Sea,

Although China is not on Blinken's itinerary, after wrapping up the stop in Seoul, he will fly back to Washington via Anchorage, Alaska, where he and Sullivan, will meet senior Chinese officials. Austin, meanwhile, will fly from Seoul to New Delhi.

Scotland Yard under fire over vigil policing, report sought

LONDON, 14 MARCH

Scotland Yard on Sunday defended its actions in policing a vigil in south London where a 33-year-old woman went missing and was later found murdered.

The murder of Sarah Everard, who disappeared on her way back home from a friend's place last week, has sent shockwaves across the UK as a serving Metropolitan Police officer appeared in court charged with her murder this week.

An unofficial gathering in memory of the victim ended up in scuffles with the police and four arrests as the Met Police acted to break up the crowds under the current coronavirus lockdown rules.

Police must act for people's safety, this is the only responsible thing to do. The pandemic is not over and gatherings of people from right across London and beyond, are still not safe, said Met Police Assistant Commissioner Helen Ball.

We repeatedly encouraged those who were there to comply with the law and leave. Regrettably, a small minority of people began chanting at officers, pushing and throwing items. After speaking with officers, the vast majority of people quickly left. Four arrests have been made for public order offences and for breaches of the Health Protection Regulations, she said.

However, scenes of clashes on Saturday evening were shared widely across social media and resulted in outrage from different quarters, including London Mayor Sadiq Khan "urgently seeking an explanation" from Met Police Commissioner Cressida Dick.

"Some of the footage circulating online from the vigil in Clapham is upsetting. I have asked the Metropolitan Police for a full report on what happened," said UK Home Secretary Priti Patel.

Italy toughens Covid restrictions, imposes Easter lockdown



EU setback as AstraZeneca announces shortfall

LONDON, 14 MARCH

The European Union was faced with another setback in its coronavirus vaccination programme after AstraZeneca announced a shortfall, as countries across the world try to step up their Covid-19 immunisation drives.

The pharmaceutical company's image had already taken a hit, with several countries suspending the roll-out of its vaccine over blood clot fears, though the World Health Organisation said there was no reason to stop using it in the fight against the pandemic.

It previously warned of shortfalls from its European supply chain due to lower-than-expected production output. AstraZeneca's shot is among the cheapest available, and forms a bulk of deliveries to poorer nations under the WHO-backed Covax initiative.

Most of Italy, including its capital Rome and its financial centre Milan, will have curbs on business and movement intensified from Monday as the government ramps up its efforts to stem a steady rise in coronavirus cases.

The country will also be placed under a nationwide lockdown over the Easter weekend for the second year running, the government said on Friday.

Italy, the first Western country hit hard by the pandemic, saw infections rise by 10 per cent this week compared with the week before, and officials have warned that the situation is deteriorating as new, highly contagious variants gain ground.

In recent months the country has calibrated restrictions in its 20 regions according to a four-tier, colour-coded system (white, yellow, orange and red) based on local infection levels which are revised every week.

Under an order approved on Friday by Health Minister Roberto Speranza seven regions have been shifted into the toughest red zones, including Lombardy around Milan, and Lazio around Rome.

Three other regions were already red, meaning half the country's regions and most of its population will be under the most severe restrictions from Monday.

In these areas schools and non-essential shops will be closed and Italians will only be allowed to leave their

homes for work, health or emergency reasons.

"I hope that this will be the last sacrifice asked of our citizens," said Lombardy President Attilio Fontana.

Italy has reported more than 100,000 deaths from the disease since discovering its first cases 13 months ago, the seventh highest toll worldwide. Friday saw another 380 deaths and almost 27,000 new cases.

The whole country will become a red zone over Easter, from April 3-5, Mario Draghi's one-month old government ruled.

FRIENDLY FACE-OFF



Men participate in a mass fight competition during Maslenitsa (Shrovetide) holiday celebrations at the Izmailovsky Kremlin in Moscow, Russia.

Sunday. That would be a hopeful signal for the national election campaign, in which the traditionally left-leaning environmentalist party is expected to make its first bid for the chancellery. Merkel isn't seeking a fifth term after nearly 16 years in power.

About 7.7 million people are eligible to vote in Baden-Wuerttemberg and some 3.1 million in Rhineland-Palatinate. The center-left Social Democrats have led that region for 30 years, currently under governor Malu Dreyer. It is an awkward moment for new CDU leader Armin Laschet to face his first major test since being elected in January. Laschet has sought to preempt any fallout, saying that state elections always have their very own character and the outcome won't affect the stability of his leadership.

In Baden-Wuerttemberg, Germany's only Green party governor, Winfried Kretschmann, has become popular with centrist voters in 10 years running a region that is home to automakers Daimler and Porsche. The region was long dominated by the CDU until Kretschmann

won power shortly after Japan's 2011 Fukushima reactor disaster, which accelerated the end of nuclear power in Germany.

Kretschmann, 72, a fatherly figure with a conservative image, features on Green election posters with the slogan 'You know me'. That is a slogan that Merkel famously used in a pre-election debate to underline her own largely ideology-free appeal.

In Baden-Wuerttemberg's last election in 2016, the Greens overtook the CDU to become the strongest party in the state. Polls suggest they can hope to widen their lead

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Nipping opium in the bud

A carrot and stick policy should be adopted to end illicit poppy cultivation in the hills of Manipur and ensure equitable rural development



THONGKHALA HAOKIP

In the last couple of months, the Narcotics and Affairs of Border wing of Manipur Police, assisted by the Manipur Rifles, was strenuously engaged in destroying illicit poppy cultivation for opium in the hill areas of Manipur. It is claimed that several thousands of acres of poppy farms were destroyed by the police in their "war against drugs" in the state.

During the drive, videos went viral on social media wherein women cultivators could be seen wailing upon seeing the destruction of their farms. Indeed, after sowing and nurturing the plants for a year, spending huge amounts of time, energy and money, it must be painful to see their only source of income and livelihood being destroyed in front of their eyes and being helpless to do anything against the indomitable State forces.

Those sensational videos have divided the public into two camps – those who want to see the state provide alternative means of livelihood, and those who want total elimination of illicit poppy cultivation with the use of brute force. Such views almost neatly run along ethnic lines, thereby exacerbating division.

Instead of engaging in the destruction of illicit cultivation at the time of harvest, measures should be adopted to prevent such cultivation at all. In recent weeks, there have also been several reports of brown sugar manufacturing units being busted in the foothills and valley of Manipur. Those manufacturing units are the outcome of poppy plantations and would cease to exist when raw opium production stops.

There is enough bashing and whining of such cultivators without looking into how and why they turn to illicit farming. A recent study by Eric Dante Gutierrez claims that such crops "enable marginalised communities and territories abandoned by the State", who live in the "so-called 'fragile' and conflict-affected areas" and mainly "displaced and dispossessed households", to adopt "innovative and unorthodox strategies for coping and survival in changing and insecure environments".

In different parts of the world, research shows that illicit cultivation is prevalent mostly in areas torn apart by conflict and lack of development. In Afghanistan, opium is the "main source of cash" in remote areas where developmental aid did not reach. In the Southern American country of Colombia, coca is the main source of livelihood in remote and neglected areas inhabited by people who have been displaced by conflicts and commercialisation of agriculture.

The hill areas of Manipur have seen almost all the same factors and circumstances that lead to the illicit cultivation of the drug crop elsewhere – violence and conflict, poor infrastructure and a languishing agrarian economy. Indeed, the grievances arising out of the long neglect of the hill areas in terms of transport communication, educational infrastructure and health facilities have piled up.

Studies conducted by the United Nations Drug Control Programme have found that "One unintended result of forced eradication was that

in some areas, growers, who received no assistance, developed opposition to the government and came under greater influence of drug traffickers and insurgent groups, thus posing a potential risk to national security".

The State and hill areas

The hill areas of Manipur have a long history of resisting outside interference, like any other area in the hills of the North-east, from the time of the medieval Manipuri kingdom to the British Raj later. In the early colonial period, there was minimal intervention in the hill areas until the Anglo-Kuki War from 1917-1919. This resistance war brought tighter colonial rule in such areas, but it was limited to law and order. The hill peoples were largely left alone to administer their day-to-day life in villages.

After Independence, several laws were passed such as the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960 and the Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956. But those laws remain ineffective due to strong opposition from village chiefs, who are supported by the people. It is indicative of the fact that unless chiefs and the people support the policies of the government, they are unlikely to succeed.

In the Manipur government's "war on drugs", there is a possibility that forceful ending of illicit cultivation may exacerbate problems resulting in a State-versus-people situation or worse, fuel ethnic polarisation.

Land ownership and farming

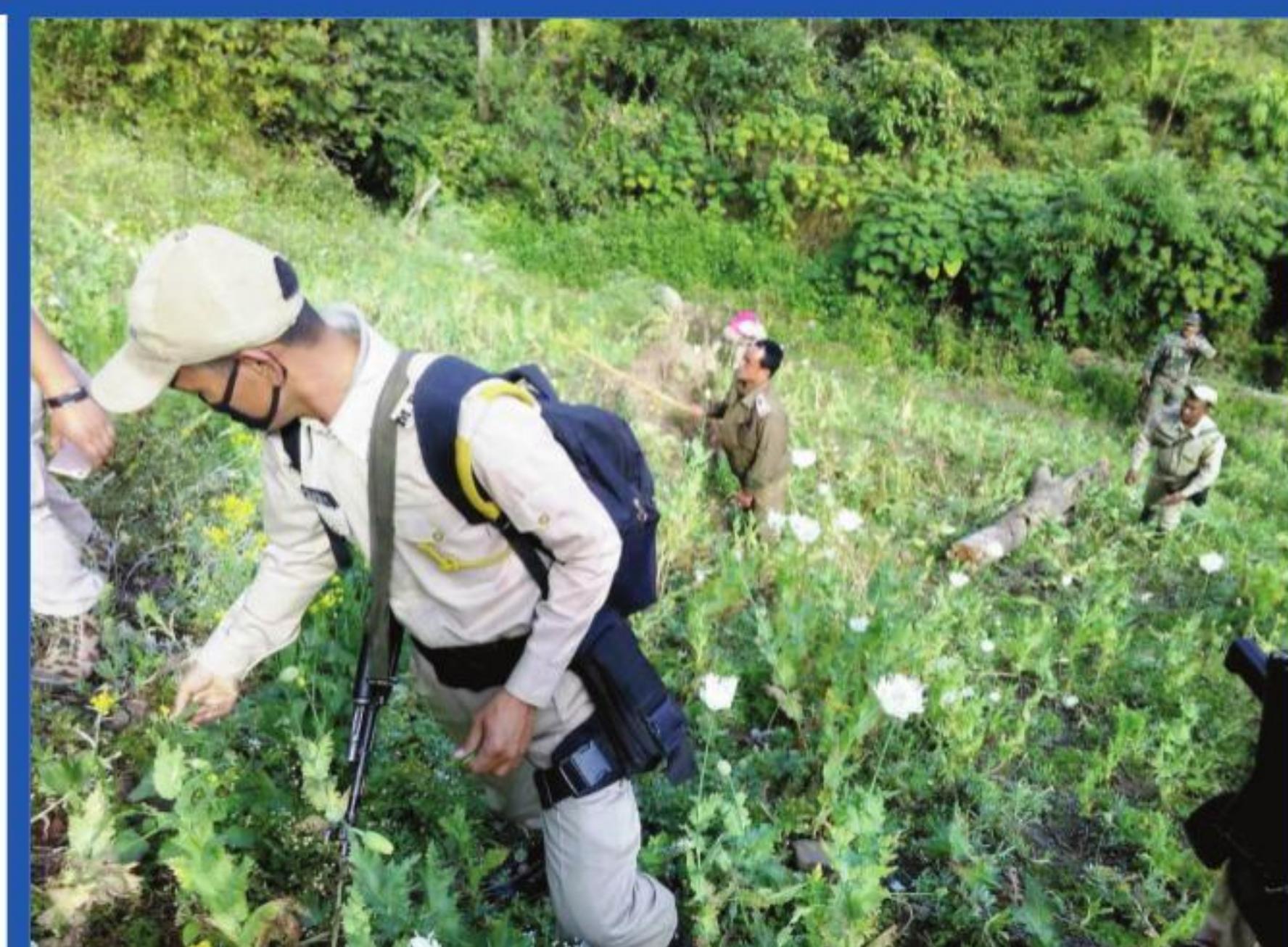
In the hills of Manipur, land is owned either by the community as a whole or the chief. Community ownership is common among Nagas, where the chiefs act as custodians. Among Kukis, the chiefs, who are known as *haosa*, own the land.

The main livelihood of the people is *jhum*, slash and burn, cultivation. The annual allocation for *jhum* fields is usually done either at the end of the year or the beginning of each year. Traditional *jhum* cultivation, and other resource extraction from the land, is done by paying a nominal tribute to the chief annually. Such privileges are enjoyed only by villagers.

However, ever since the cultivation of poppy started about two decades ago, the cultivators lease a certain unit of land from the village chief with the payment of an annual rent. During my fieldwork in early 2018, for an acre of land, a sum of Rs 5,000-10,000 was paid to the chief depending on the fertility of the soil and availability of a stream nearby.

Poppy cultivation is quite different from traditional *jhum* cultivation. After decades of debate between foresters and researchers, it has been agreed recently that "jhuming" may not be as destructive as it was previously thought. The Nagaland government has officially permitted *jhum* cultivation with certain forest renewal measures.

While traditional *jhum* cultivation is dry farming, shifting fields after a year or a maximum of two years without uprooting tree trunks, poppy cultivation is just the opposite. It is sedentary cultivation and requires a lot of water and fertilisers. Some peo-



ple have cultivated for as long as 10 years in the same field. In the course of such cultivation, all trees were eliminated, deep down to the trunk and roots, from the field.

The illicit crop, opium, is cultivated in remote areas as cash crop. It compensates for the infrastructure lacuna and decades-long governmental negligence. During the field work of my research project on land use policy in Manipur, on the question of primary education and educational opportunities, the response of opium cultivators revealed the stark absence of functional public schools in the hills. Majority of the respondents confessed that they used a large chunk of their income from such illicit cultivation to fund their children's education in private schools. While they are engaged in illicit cultivation in the far-off hills, their children stay in boarding schools under the close watch of wardens, which is a form of compensation for their moral duty as parents.

The government's recent attempts to destroy poppy cultivations have only increased the price of the opium product. Indeed, market value multiplies with prohibition.

Alternative development

The UN uses the term "alternative development" to describe "conventional rural development applied to a drug-producing area". The concept was developed in the 1970s, after identifying the underlying root causes for illicit crop cultivation – "lack of development, marginalisation, poverty and, thus, overall human insecurity". To address those factors and the root causes for illicit drug economies in a sustainable way, it was identified that economic development, especially in rural areas, through an integrated rural development approach was needed.

It was felt that there is a need to shift from crop substitution to a

broader, integrated rural development approach by "complementing interventions focusing on the quality of life and investments in social and road infrastructure". According to that, the State needs to provide well-established networks for production, distribution and marketing in order to enable cultivators to effectively compete by manufacturing legal products in an area of illicit cultivation. Hence, it was felt that "economic and technical provisions must be made to ensure the marketing, storage and transport of new products. The new concept of integrated rural development also sought to improve the overall quality of life of the target population by addressing not only income but also education, health, infrastructure and social services".

The UN recommended a relatively heavy infrastructural investment, particularly in road building, in order to overcome the barrier of inaccessibility, along with other inputs that would facilitate the opening up of remote and underdeveloped areas where illicit crop cultivation was prevalent.

Carrot and stick policy

Evidently, illicit crop cultivation cannot be stopped by infrastructure development and other largesse alone given the huge income cultivators have enjoyed over the years. One of the best ways to end illegal cultivation of poppy is to restrict the access of land. That can only happen if one understands the intricate land ownership system in the hills.

Village chiefs are also part of the problem since land for illicit cultivation is mainly leased from them as they are the sole landowners in the hills. They can also be a part of the solution by not allowing such cultivation. Therefore, there is a need to find ways to dissuade chiefs from leasing their land to illicit cultivators.

As seen from efforts to imple-

ment various laws that affected the hill people in the past, any attempt at direct intervention would be resisted and antagonise them further given the fragile relations between different ethnic groups. It will lead to the adoption of a confrontational approach and if such a situation arises, the whole "war on drugs" would be jeopardised.

Using insurgent groups, who are engaged in peace talks with both the Central and state governments, to implement such ideas by imposing huge fines on the chiefs, who are allowing such cultivation, would also be futile. The use of threats and intimidation would encourage both the chiefs and cultivators to align with rebel groups, who are not under any understanding with the government, for their protection and continue their illicit crop cultivation.

Given this situation, a carrot and stick policy must be devised. There should be efforts towards integrated rural development programmes including improving road infrastructure, building government schools, healthcare facilities and water supply, along with a crop substitution scheme and the government facilitating marketing, storage and transport of the produce. Alongside that, village chiefs should be weaned away from leasing their land through certain schemes or regulations.

The scheme should either compensate for the possible lure of leasing their land or the regulation should empower the state machinery to stop providing welfare to those identified villages, which practice illicit poppy cultivation. Only then would village chiefs be more likely to choose welfare schemes over allowing illicit cultivation, as they have become used to receiving generosity from the government for decades.

The writer is assistant professor, Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

PLUS POINTS

Women's Day in AP



International Women's Day was celebrated with great enthusiasm at Anini of Arunachal Pradesh, where both the Indian Army and civil administration organised several events including a mini marathon. The programme attracted many enthusiastic women participants. A female Army officer also gave a motivational lecture to around 100 girls on various career prospects in the Indian Army.

In another function at Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu said that the lack of quality education has emerged as a hurdle in providing girl children with a bright future. Speaking about the drug menace, the BJP leader asserted that women can take the lead in creating awareness among the youth and vulnerable groups of society. He asked the State Women Commission, AP Women's Welfare Society etc to keep a vigil on the functioning of de-addiction and rehabilitation centres and report the same to the government with necessary recommendations.

Stating that women always show exemplary grit, honesty and sincerity when given responsibilities, Khandu urged women entrepreneurs to take advantage of various government schemes including the "Deendayal Upadhyay Swawlamban Yojana".

—NAVA THAKURIA

Book release



With Assam going to the polls on 27 March, 1 and 6 April, chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal recently released the Assamese translation of Union home minister Amit Shah's biography, *Amit Shah and the March of BJP* in Guwahati. State finance, health and education minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has translated the book into Assamese as "*Amit Shah Aru Agragami BJP*". The function was graced by Union minister of state for development of the North-eastern region Jitendra Singh, the saffron party's national vice-president Baijayant Jay Panda, national general secretary Dilip Saikia and state BJP president Ranjeet Kr Dass, among others. Originally written in English by Anirban Ganguly and Shiwani Dwivedi, the book highlights the political journey of Shah. Both authors were also present on the occasion.

Sarma, who also serves as the North-east Democratic Alliance convenor, stated that Shah has immense knowledge about the country and its civilisation. "When I met Amit Shah ji and began working with him for the BJP, I could realise that I had already wasted 22 years of my life with the Congress Party," he said.

Candlelight vigil



The Dimapur Meitei Council and Chumukedima Meitei Apunba Lup held a joint mass candlelight vigil programme at Meitei Mandop, Manipuri Colony and marched till Tiniali Junction, Chatteri Colony in Dimapur last week, says a report in the *Morung Express*.

The programme was held to express solidarity with Meiteis in particular and all innocent civilians living in Myanmar given the prevailing turmoil in the country. Prem Thongbam, media secretary and treasurer of the Dimapur Meitei Council, informed in a press release.

The Meitei communities in Dimapur appealed for full humanitarian access to support the most vulnerable civilians and protesters in Myanmar. "We also appeal to the various state governments of India, especially the bordering governments such as Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram, to raise their voice and shun violence," the release added.

Further, the communities offered condolences for the loss of precious lives and appealed to the military and police in Myanmar "to exercise utmost restraint, and respect human rights and international law."



ALL PRAISES

Rishabh Pant (photo, left) 'changed the course' of three Test matches with his fearless batting approach, something which most players aren't able to achieve in their entire career according to Ian Chappell. "Pant has produced three innings that changed the course of a Test with mature counter-attacking when the team was in trouble. Most players don't contribute that many in a career," Chappell said.

For more updates

www.thestatesman.com

THUMBNAILS

Muguruza wins: Caroline Muguruza ended her almost two-year wait for a title with a 7-6 (6), 6-3 win against Barbora Krejčíková in the final of the Dubai Championships. It's the 27-year-old Spanish player's first title since winning in Monterrey in April 2019.

Open 13 final: Top-seeded Daniil Medvedev will bid for his 10th career title when he meets unseeded Pierre-Hugues Herbert in an unusual-looking Open 13 final. Medvedev faces a player who owns all four majors in doubles but has never won a singles title.

Mithali milestone: Mithali Raj on Sunday added another feather to her cap by becoming the first player to complete 7,000 runs in women's ODI cricket. She reached the 7,000-run milestone in her 213th match.

Smashing Shaw, cool Tare guide Mumbai to Vijay Hazare Trophy title

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH



Skipper Prithvi Shaw's (in photo) marauding 73 off 39 balls followed by former skipper Aditya Tare's unbeaten hundred guided Mumbai to their most deserving Vijay Hazare title triumph with a crushing six-wicket victory over Uttar Pradesh in one of most lopsided final on Sunday.

Opting to bat, UP rode on opener Madhav Kaushik's unbeaten 158 to post 312/4, but it was overshadowed by the Shaw blitzkrieg which set the platform for Tare to finish off the chase in style with as many as 51 balls remaining.

This is Mumbai's fourth Hazare title and the one to remember for Shaw (827 runs), who now holds the record for highest runs scored in single edition of this competition.

He then took on Dayal, hammering two boundaries and a six over mid-wicket, his trademark pull-shot, as Mum-

bai raced to 32/0 after three overs.

Shaw continued his onslaught and notched up his 50 in only 30 balls, with a six, another pull shot, but then holed in the deep off Shivam Mavi when another hundred looked imminent.

Jaiswal and Tare added 38-run stand but the left-handed opener gave Shivam Sharma his first wicket, after being caught by Mavi but Mumbai were already on course with a

run-rate of 8.5 runs per over.

Veteran Tare, who hammered 18 boundaries in his 107-ball knock, anchored the innings and found an ally in Shams Mulani (36), as the duo took the game deep, as Mumbai cruised to the target, with 174/2 after 25 overs.

Tare and Mulani kept playing shots at will as the duo added crucial 88-runs for the third wicket. But Mulani perished in the 31st over, with Mumbai still needing another 98 runs.

However, Tare kept the momentum going as he hammered Dayal for three boundaries in the 33rd over, even as Shivam Dube (42 off 28 balls; 6x4, 1x6) played a fitting cameo.

Tare completed his century in 91 balls, his first in List A cricket, with a single. The Tare-Dube duo took Mumbai on the cusp of a win, adding 88 runs for the fourth wicket, before the former skipper played a back

cut between point and short third man to complete the formalities.

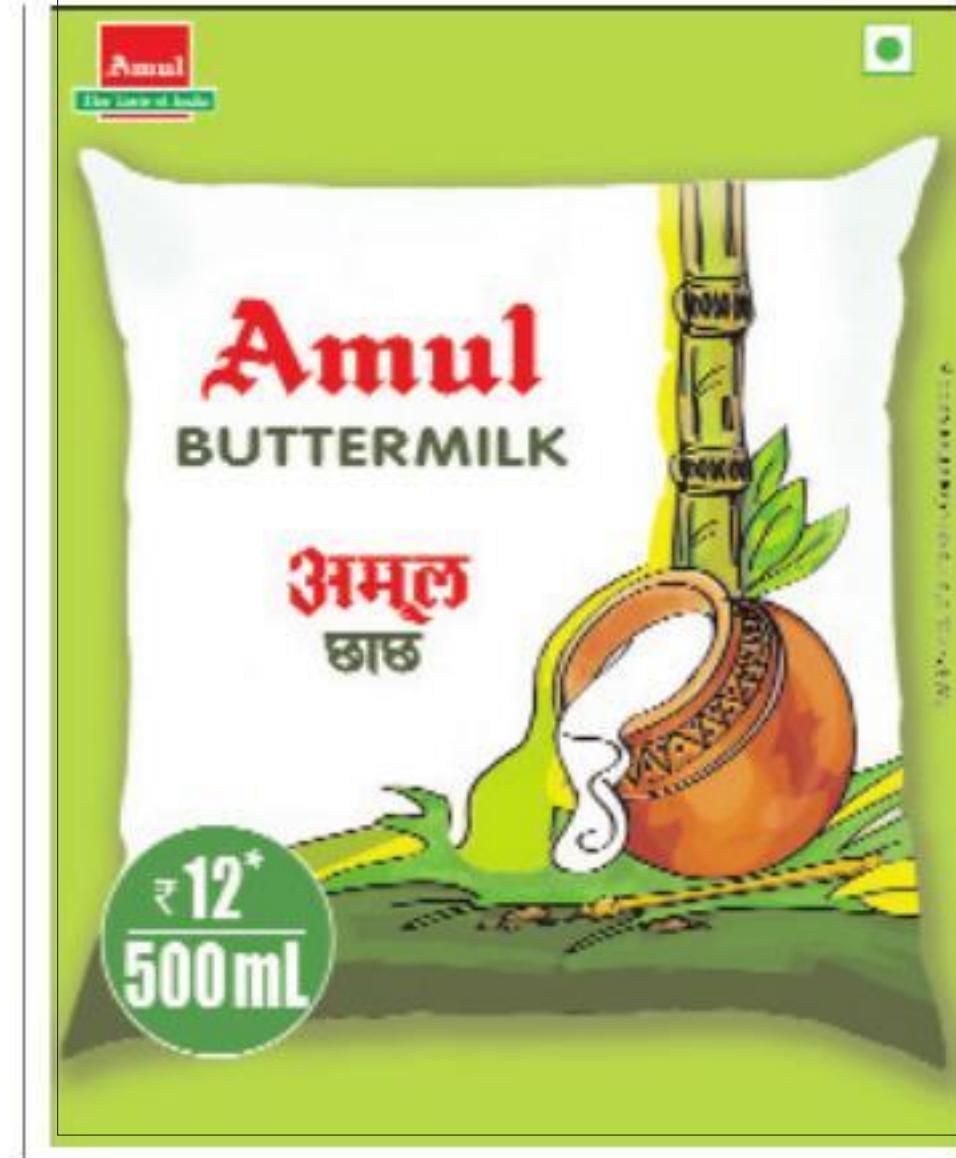
Earlier, UP rode on openers Madhav Kaushik's unbeaten 158 to post 312/4.

Kaushik, who hammered 15 fours and four sixes, in his 156-ball knock and Samarth Singh (55 off 73 balls; 4x4; 3x6) added 122 runs for the first wicket to lay the foundation of a big score.

It will be some consolation that Kaushik is now the highest individual scorer in a National One Day Championship final, surpassing Mayank Agarwal's 125 against Punjab in 2014.

Brief Scores:

Uttar Pradesh 312/4 (Madhav Kaushik 158 not out, Akshdeep Nath 55; Tanush Kotian 2/54, Prashant Solanki 1/71) lost to Mumbai 315/4 (Aditya Tare 118 not out, Prithvi Shaw 73, Shivam Mavi 1/63) by six wickets.



Indian bowlers restrict England to 164/6



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

AHMEDABAD, 14 MARCH

Indian bowlers pulled things back brilliantly in the last five overs to restrict England to 164 for six in the second T20 International here on Sunday.

Sent into bat, England suffered an early jolt in the form of Jos Buttler (0), who

was adjudged off Bhuvneshwar Kumar in the third ball of the innings.

Just when Roy (46 off 35) and Dawid Malan (24 off 23) shared 63 runs off 47 balls to take the England innings forward. But the dangerous-looking partnership was broken by Yuzvendra Chahal in the ninth over when he trapped Malan LBW in front of the

crease as India got the review right on this occasion.

Just when Roy was looking dangerous, he was caught at deep square leg by Bhuvneshwar off Washington Sundar's bowling in the 12th over.

Washington struck again in his next over when he has Jonny Bairstow (20) caught by debutant Suryakumar

At the time of going to print India were 21/1 and needed 144 runs in 99 balls with the required run rate at 8.72

SCOREBOARD

ENGLAND INNINGS	
J Roy	c Kumar b W Sundar 46
Jos Buttler	t b w b Kumar 0
D Malan	lbw b Chahal 24
J Bairstow	c Yadav b W Sundar 20
Eoin Morgan	c Pant b Thakur 28
B Stokes	c Pandya b Thakur 24
Sam Curran	not out 6
Chris Jordan	not out 0
Extras:	(b 1, lb 0, w 5) 16
TOTAL:	(20 Ov, RR: 8.20) 164/6
BOWLING:	B Kumar 4; 0, 28, 1 W Sundar 4, 0, 29, 2 S Thakur 4, 0, 29, 2 H Pandya 4, 0, 33, 0 Y Chahal 4, 0, 34, 1

Yadav at deep square leg. England captain Eoin Morgan (28 off 20) was the next casualty as in search of big hits, he edged a Shardul Thakur slower delivery to Rishabh Pant behind the stumps.

At 130 for four in the 15th over, England looked well in course of reaching a near 200-run target but the Indian bowlers bowled brilliantly to concede just 34 runs in the last five overs.

Washington struck again in his next over when he has Jonny Bairstow (20) caught by debutant Suryakumar

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