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NEARBY



One criminal escapes, another in net in Delhi

NEW DELHI
A wanted criminal of the infamous Gogi gang escaped from police custody following a shoot-out in broad daylight on the premises of GTB Hospital in east Delhi on Thursday afternoon, police said. The incident happened on a day the city police nabbed a notorious criminal, Rohit Chaudhary, and his accomplice after an exchange of fire near Bhairon Marg.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

Delhi HC to hear Akbar's appeal on May 5

NEW DELHI
The Delhi High Court on Thursday posted for May 5 the hearing on a plea by former Union Minister M.J. Akbar challenging a trial court order acquitting journalist Priya Ramani in the criminal defamation case for her tweets accusing him of sexual harassment. The petition could not be taken up as Justice Mukta Gupta was not holding court.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 11

Highest single-day spike since October 23 registered

80% of new cases in 6 States, says Health Ministry

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India reported 58,735 COVID-19 cases and 256 new deaths as of 11 p.m. on Thursday. This is the highest daily spike since October 17, 2020. The cumulative case count stood at 1,18,45,748 and the death toll rose to 1,60,982.

Maharashtra continues to report the highest daily new cases at 35,952, followed by Punjab (2,661) and Karnataka (2,523). The active case-load stands at 4,17,575. The daily rise in infections was the highest recorded in 159 days.



A stitch in time: A worker readying PPE suits at a unit in Ahmedabad on Thursday. ▶ VIJAY SONI

India's cumulative recoveries stand at 1,12,62,408, of which 32,817 recoveries were registered in the 24 hours. The gap between recovered and active cases stands at 1,08,44,833.

Six States – Maharashtra, Punjab, Kerala, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat –

are reporting a surge in daily cases and together account for 80.63% of the new cases reported in the 24 hours till 8 a.m. on Thursday.

EDITORIAL ▶ PAGE 8
'VACCINE EFFECTIVE AGAINST VARIANTS' ▶ PAGE 12

Why no decision on list sent by Collegium, SC asks government

Recommendations pending for six to 18 months

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the government to clarify on the status of 55 recommendations made by the Collegium for judicial appointments to High Courts six months to nearly a year-and-a-half ago.

Of the pending recommendations, 44 were made to fill vacancies in the Calcutta, Madhya Pradesh, Gauhati, Rajasthan and Punjab High Courts.

These recommendations have been pending with the government for over seven

Short staffed

As of March 1, over 60% of the sanctioned strength of judges were vacant at the Patna High Court (in photo), the highest in % terms in India. Three High Courts, all from the northeast, had no vacancies

months to a year.

The remaining 10 names have been pending with the government despite their reiteration by the Collegium.

"This is a matter of grave concern... When do you propose to take a decision?" a Special Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A.

High Courts with highest vacancy %



High Courts with lowest vacancy %



SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Apex court bats for women officers in Army

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

petitioners (women officers)," a Bench, led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, observed.

The evaluation pattern of women officers has caused them economic and psychological harm, the court said.

In a series of directions, the court ordered that the cases of women officers who have applied for permanent commission should be reconsidered in a month and the decision on them should be

given in two months.

They would be considered for permanent commission subject to disciplinary and vigilance clearance. The court said physical standards should be kept at a premium during selection.

The court highlighted how one of the Army's "administrative requirements" was to benchmark women officers, under consideration for permanent commission, with

male officers who are lowest in merit. "This is arbitrary and irrational," Justice Chandrachud, who wrote the 137-page judgment, noted.

The court said the "systemic and indirect discrimination" shown in the Army's evaluation of women officers for permanent commission seemed neutral on the face, but was founded on a structure of "oppression and domination".

four names made by the Collegium to the Delhi High Court have been pending for seven months.

"This is a matter of grave concern... When do you propose to take a decision?" a Special Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A.

Bobde, asked Attorney General K.K. Venugopal. The total sanctioned strength in the 25 High Courts is 1,080. However, the present working strength is 661 with 419 vacancies as on March 1.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

'Modi insecure about Kejriwal's popularity'

Sisodia says Bill brought to 'stop CM's good work'



Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia. ▶ FILE PHOTO

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI
Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Thursday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of doing "negative politics" and said he is "insecure" about Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his work. This Bill has been brought to stop Kejriwal from going forward," he said.

Mr. Sisodia made the comments while attacking the Prime Minister and the BJP over passing the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021 in Parliament.

"The Bill the Central government passed yesterday (Wednesday) shows that Modiji's government is insecure about Arvind Kejriwal and his work. This Bill has been brought to stop Kejriwal from going forward," the AAP leader said.

"Modiji is doing negative politics to stop good governance. He is worried about Kejriwal and had to bring a law to stop Delhi's development," he said.

'Exploring all options'

Mr. Sisodia said they are exploring all options and also talking to legal experts about how to tackle the Bill.

"We know that at present, the nation and the world is talking about the Arvind Kejriwal model of governance and its diverse schemes. People feel that they have a choice to vote for someone who actually works for them. This is exactly what is making the BJP-led Central government insecure," the Deputy Chief Minister said.

"Prime Minister Modi is acting like a roadblock in the politics of good work, in the

SC relief for Editor in hate crime case

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has held that criticism of governmental inaction cannot be branded as an attempt to promote hatred between communities while quashing a hate speech case against *Shillong Times* Editor Patricia Mukhim for a Facebook post.

Ms. Mukhim was charged with promoting hatred between communities for her social media post urging the

such "call for justice".

"Disapprobation of governmental inaction cannot be branded as an attempt to promote hatred between different communities. Free speech of the citizens of this country cannot be stifled by implicating them in criminal cases, unless such speech has the tendency to affect public order," the Supreme Court held.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

In signal to China, U.S. raised India ties during Alaska talks

ANANTH KRISHNAN

The Joe Biden administration highlighted the strength of U.S.-India ties in its March 19 meeting with Chinese officials in Alaska, underlining how it has increasingly come to view India as central to its broader objectives in dealing with China in the Indo-Pacific region.

The speed with which the new Biden administration is learnt, was not favourably

received by China's two officials in Alaska – top diplomat and Politburo member Yang Jiechi and Foreign Minister Wang Yi – and is being seen as reflecting how U.S.-India relations, only two months into the new administration, are developing robustly.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

Parliament adjourned ahead of schedule

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI
Both Houses of Parliament were adjourned *sine die* on Thursday nearly two weeks

before schedule, keeping in mind requests made for the curtailment of the second part of the Budget session by MPs from West Bengal, Ta-

mil Nadu, Assam, Puducherry and Kerala owing to the Assembly elections.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 11

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Our Panelist for Mock Interview

Shri M.C. Gupta (Retd. IAS)

* Former Chief Secretary Govt. of Haryana

* Former Director of IIPA

Ranjiv Singh Dalal (Retd. IPS)

* Former Director General of Police, Haryana

Shri Anil K. Sinha (Retd. IAS)

* Executive Director National Institute of Disaster Management Govt. of India

Shri S. Ranjan Tayal (Retd. IFS)

* Former Ambassador to South Korea, Uzbekistan

Dr. Bala Prasad (Retd. IFS)

(Ex Special Secretary to Govt. of India)

Shri A.K. Upadhyay (Retd. IPS)

Shri Saurabh Kumar (Retd. IFS)

(Former Ambassador to Vietnam, Ireland)

Shri M. Ramachandran (Retd. IAS)

* Former Secretary Govt. of India

* Former Chief Secretary Govt. of U.P.

Shri R. Srinivasan IES (Retd.)

(Retd. Advisor to the Govt. of India)

Dr. G.C. Srivastava (Retd. IAS)

* Ex-member Secretary 12th Finance Commission
* Vice Chairman Central Administrative Tribunal

Shri B.B. Srivastava (Retd. IAS)

* Former Secretary to Govt. of India Department of Land Resources (Ministry of Rural Development)

Shri A.K. Mangotra (Retd. IAS)

(Former Secretary to Govt. of India)

Prof. Rajveer Sharma

(Retd. Prof. of Political Science D.U.)

Prof. V.K. Gautam

(Retd. Prof. of Environmental

Two shoot-outs in a day rock national capital

Criminal escapes from police custody after gun battle at hospital

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A wanted criminal of infamous Gogi gang escaped from police custody following a shoot-out in broad daylight inside the premises of GTB Hospital in east Delhi on Thursday afternoon, the police said.

The shoot-out took place around 12.30 p.m. when the third battalion of Delhi Police was taking gangster Kuldeep alias Fajja to the hospital for treatment in the OPD, a senior police officer said.

"[In the] rear of the main building of the hospital, five persons arrived in a car and a motorcycle and fired at the third battalion of the police in an attempt to get the accused released from police custody," he said.

One assailant dead
During the encounter, one assailant died on the spot and one sustained injuries, while one was caught by the police. The remaining accused, including Kuldeep, fled, the police said.

The accused, who died during the incident, has been identified as Ravi, while the injured has been identified as Anikesh, the police said, adding that they



Wanted criminal Kuldeep was brought to GTB Hospital for treatment.

both are in the age group of 25 to 28.

Wanted criminal, accomplice arrested after brief encounter

In a rare instance, a woman S-I also part of the operation

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

One of the top 10 rewarded criminals and his accomplice were arrested after a brief exchange of fire near Bhairon Marg, police said on Thursday. In a rare instance, a woman Sub Inspector was also a part of this operation.

Additional Commissioner of Police (Crime Branch) Shubesh Singh said that the accused have been identified as Rohit Chaudhary and his associate Praveen alias Titu, both residents of south Delhi's Aya Nagar.

A reward of ₹3.5 lakh and ₹2 lakh was announced on Chaudhary and Praveen's arrest respectively by Delhi Police and ₹50,000 and ₹25,000 by U.P. Police. The accused are involved in cases of murder, kidnapping for ransom, and MCOC Act among others.

Police said that an information was received that Chaudhary and Praveen would come near Bhairon Marg, after which a team including Sub Inspector Priyanka was formed and a



The accused in police custody. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

trap was laid. A car was then spotted coming towards the police barricades. It then crashed and stopped. Occupants of the car fired at the police party but their bulletproof jackets saved them. Police also retaliated and fired at the accused who got hit in the legs and sustained injuries.

Fake identities

During a search of the vehicle, several fake identities and mobile phones and dongles were recovered. Accused were using fake identities to stay in different locations. Mobile phones and dongles

were used for communicating with other gang members through internet calling applications, police said.

Talking about a woman officer being part of the encounter team, Mr. Singh said that a MOCA case was registered against Chaudhary in October last year and she has been working on the case since. "The Sub Inspector is technologically sound and she has done a great job in tracking the accused. Her inputs were valuable and it was only fair and important that she was a part of the team at all times".

The police said that during inquiry, it was found that Divya was admitted in the ICU of Sir Ganga Ram Hospital and was on ventila-

Riots: court says case diaries not maintained

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A court here was irked on Thursday over non-maintenance of files by Delhi Police in a case relating to the alleged burning and desecration of 'Madina Masjid' during riots, which broke out in February last year in north-east Delhi.

Additional Sessions Judge Vinod Yadav said the case di-

aries have not been maintained as per Section 172 (diary of proceedings in investigation) of the CrPC.

According to Section 172 CrPC, every police officer conducting an investigation should day by day enter his proceedings in the investigation in a diary, with the time at which the information reached him, the time at which he began and closed

Recording of statement

The court also noted that the statements of the witnesses were probably recorded after the last date of hearing in the matter, which was registered more than a year ago.

DMRC will intensify drive to contain spread of COVID-19

Commuters who are found flouting norms will be penalised

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

In view of surge in COVID-19 cases, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) on Thursday said that it will intensify its drive to ensure compliance of social distancing, wearing of masks and thermal screening, among other pandemic-related protocol. It said that commuters, who are found flouting norms, will be penalised.

The DMRC said that as part of intensified measures for controlling the spread of the virus, entry at stations will be regulated based on social distancing.

DMRC spokesperson Anuj Dayal said: "Entry will be regulated at stations especially at major ones and interchange ones like Rajiv Chowk, Central Secretariat, Barakhamba Road, Patel Chowk, ITO, etc. during morning and evening peak hours. While waiting in the queue, passengers will be strictly required to wait on marked circles or stripes to ensure social distancing."

"If it is found that the distancing is not followed at stations, entry gates will be closed for passengers at those stations until the distancing is ensured," Mr. Dayal said.

According to data provided by the DMRC, nearly 24,000 commuters have been fined since metro oper-



Entry will be regulated especially at major and interchange stations like Rajiv Chowk, Central Secretariat, ITO, etc. ■ FILE PHOTO

ations resumed in September last year.

This year saw 3,131 people being fined in January, followed by 2,823 in February and 1,833 till March 15, for flouting COVID-19 norms.

The highest number of commuters fined in a month was 5,645 in October last year, followed by 5,180 in September 2020.

"Due to strict reinforcement of social distancing norms, passengers are advised to plan their journey in advance and allow for additional time of 20 to 30 minutes for their commute. If possible, off peak hour travel may also be opted by those who have flexibility to avoid overcrowding or long wait during peak hours," the DMRC said.

"The frequency of checking drives is being increased to ensure that the safety protocol is strictly adhered to by passengers and offenders will be penalised on the spot," officials said.

According to data provided by the DMRC, nearly 24,000 commuters have been fined since metro oper-

Delhi businessman held for slow-poisoning wife, in-laws

His wife is in coma, mother-in-law and sister-in-law no more

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A south Delhi-based businessman has been arrested for allegedly killing his mother-in-law, sister-in-law and harming other family members by poisoning them slowly, using thallium, the police said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) Urvija Goel said that the accused has been identified as Varun Arora, who allegedly killed his mother-in-law Anita Sharma and sister-in-law Priyanka.

His wife Divya is in coma and his father-in-law Devendra Mohan Sharma and their house help have been diagnosed with thallium poisoning.

The police said that on Monday they were informed that a woman named Anita Sharma, a resident of Inder Puri, had been declared dead at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital and the doctors had stated that the death was caused due to poisoning by thallium

which was detected in her blood and urine.

Varun Arora



In January-end, Varun Arora [accused] had cooked fish for the family which he neither ate nor let his twin children eat. He had mixed thallium in it and fed them

■ DELHI POLICE

murder case was registered.

Subsequently, thallium was recovered from his house in Greater Kailash. It was revealed that he had ordered it online.

'Humiliation'

During interrogation, he told the police that he wanted to avenge his "humiliation". His wife got pregnant around the same time as his father had died and he believed his father had come back in the form of the child.

However, Divya developed complications and doctors advised her not to go ahead with the pregnancy, following which she got the child aborted with the help of her family but against the wishes of Varun.

When Varun got to know about it, he planned the revenge, the police said.

Constable traces 63 children in 3 months

16 of them were below eight years

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

After the Anti Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) of Delhi Police failed to trace an intellectually disabled minor girl, who had gone missing from Rithala metro station in 2017, Delhi Police Head Constable Seema took it upon herself to find her. Last month, her investigative skills and perseverance bore fruits as she found the child from a shelter home in east Delhi.



who provided all kind of support to volunteer service to trace missing children," she added.

Ms. Seema said that many were traced to shelter homes or found in slums. The children were traced after door-to-door search, technical surveillance and coordinating with police departments of other States.

Jitendra Mani, DCP (Metro), said that tracing missing children has been Delhi Police's priority and when Ms. Seema showed her interest in pursuing the task while carrying on regular duties, he appreciated her dedication and helped her in every possible way.

An inspiration

"She is an inspiration for other police personnel in the unit. In total, the metro unit has traced around 100 children, including the ones she had traced. So, she has single-handedly solved more than half the cases registered here," Ms. Mani added.

In August last year, DCP S.N. Shrivastava had issued directions and laid down an action plan for tracing missing children and reuniting them with families.

HC rejects plea against grooming brand trademark

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has refused to entertain a petition, which objected to a men's grooming brand's proposed trademark reading "not tested on animals only on rascals" under the brand name "Us-traa" on the ground that the word "rascal" was objectionable and uncivilised and it cannot be used to sell, trade or promote a product.

The plea claimed that the term was more offensive as it has the trade dress with a turbaned pictograph implying men of a particular community.

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TECHNICAL BID EVALUATION RESULT

Empanelment of Agencies under Manpower Rate Contract for providing various category of Manpower to various Departments/ Organizations/Offices of the State Government of Jharkhand
Tender Ref: JAP-IT/RC/MANPOWER/01/2021

With reference to the above tender it is hereby informed that technical bid evaluation result is being published on e-procurement portal for the purpose of information for all bidders at Annexure-1. Along with this, some clarification regarding eligibility criteria is also published as Annexure-2 for better understanding of bidders.
Bidders are requested to download the same from the portal https://jharkhandtenders.gov.in and may submit clarification (if any) in writing to the undersigned within a week.

PR Ref No. 241270

PR 244635 Information Technology(20-21D)

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(A State Government Undertaking)

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Online tender (Two part bid) are invited for the supply of following items, on the prescribed form (Tender Documents). The dates of submission and opening of Techno Commercial Bid of tender is as per detail given below. The Detailed Tender Notice, terms and conditions along with tender documents can be viewed/downloaded from website: https://www.hptenders.gov.in.

Sr. No.	Tender No.	Description of Items	Qty. (In Nos.)	Estd. Cost (In Lacs)	Cost of Tender document GST @18% (Non-refundable) (In ₹)	Date of online publication	Start date & time of bid submission	End date & time of bid Submission	Date & Time of opening of Techno Comm. bid.
1.	CE(MM)-18/2020	Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): 1. Helmets 2. Safety belt with harness 3. Safety Shoes 4. Insulating gloves i) 11 kV ii) 33 kV 5. Earth discharge rod 6. Search light battery i) 5 Watt ii) 15 Watt 7. Fiber glass ladder	7521 3644 7683 5030 1118 2008 442 1742 1215	1110.00	1475/-	30.03.2021	05.04.2021 (upto 11.00 am)	16.04.2021 (upto 11.00 am)	17.04.2021 (at 11.00 am)

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e-NIT No: SIMS 325 (Pl) Tender 05 of 2021
Dated: 19-03-2021

Subject: Abbreviated e-tender notice for supply of various surgical disposable items on 2 year rate contract basis.

E-tenders are invited for and on behalf of Lt. Governor of Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir through Sher-I-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences, Soura, Srinagar, only from original manufacturers or their authorised distributors/agents for supply of various surgical disposable item on 2 year rate contract basis on item wise basis and sample basis as per following:

Description	Tender fee
Group A	Rs 1000/-
Group B	Rs 1000/-
Group C	Rs 1000/-
Group D	Rs 1000/-
Group E	Rs 1000/-
Group F	Rs 1000/-
Group G	Rs 1000/-

Note: The tender fee and sample are to be submitted separately for each group.

NIT Schedule:

Nomenclature	Schedule
Bid submission end date	17/04/2021 upto 4:00 PM
Sample submission end date	20/04/2021 upto 3:00 PM
Technical bid opening date	22/04/2021 at 12:30 PM

The detailed e-tender documents are also available at www.jktender.gov.in & www.skims.ac.in. Complete bidding process will be online on e-tender portal www.jktenders.gov.in & the tenders should be submitted strictly in accordance with the provisions of the detailed NIT.

NO: SIMS 325 P (I)e-Tender 05 of 2021-1746-51-6155-67
Dated: 19/03/2021
No: SIMS 6157
Dt: 23.03.2021

S.R. MATERIALS MANAGEMENT OFFICER PURCHASE I



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STATE TEACHERS' AWARD-2020

Chief Guest

Manish Sisodia

Dy. Chief Minister, Delhi

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



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

-Arvind Kejriwal



Future meets past for jailed present in Sibsagar

Akhil Gogoi's candidature has stirred the Leftist past in a Congress stronghold

RAHUL KARMAKAR
SIVASAGAR

The 18th century Rangghar, considered Asia's oldest amphitheatre, is more than just a landmark in eastern Assam's Sivasagar.

It symbolises Assamese cultural pride, was witness to the birth of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam in April 1979 and most recently, the movement against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

The only posters near this centrepiece of Ahom architecture are of Rajor Dal (RD), one of two new regional political parties sired by the violent anti-CAA movement that landed its president Akhil Gogoi in jail 15 months ago. The posters dis-



A poster of Rajor Dal in the backdrop of Rangghar at Sivasagar in Assam. ■ RAHUL KARMAKAR

play Mr. Gogoi along with Lurinjyoti Gogoi, president of Assam Jatiya Parishad, the other party forged in the anti-CAA fire.

A team of volunteers, many of them college and university students are armed with Mr. Gogoi's posters and cut-outs as they fan out of an unused Naga cuisine restaurant turned party office located 5 km from Rangghar to seek votes for their jailed leader.

"It is tough campaigning without our candidate in person. The BJP and the Congress are trying to take advantage by telling people that a candidate absent before election will not be seen after. But our volunteers are making people understand that he has been kept out of campaigning deliberately," Bedabrata Gogoi, a Jawaharlal Nehru University student handling the RD chief's campaign told *The Hindu*.

"Sivasagar is steeped in history. It was once the kingdom of the mighty Ahoms whose monarchy was more democratic than today's Assam. The people are realising our candidate is the jailed present to a better future without CAA and other anti-people rules imposed on us," he added.

RD also hopes Priyada Gogoi, Akhil Gogoi's 84-year-old mother would help garner the sympathy votes. "People are shedding tears for me as I have been for my son. All I want is for my son to be free, and I know they can help him get out of jail by voting for him," she said.

Protim Sharma, a college teacher and political commentator, said the candidature of Akhil Gogoi – accused of ties with Maoists – has rejuvenated the Left-leaning voters of Sibsagar. The constituency used to be a CPI stronghold before former Assembly Speaker Pranab Gogoi made it a Con-

gress bastion since 2001.

Congress candidate Subhramita Gogoi, a newcomer who has the responsibility of defending the seat for the party, brushes aside the challenge from the jailed leader. "He is not a major factor. He may gain sympathy from some, but most people here do not trust him," he said.

Welcome graduation' The BJP's Surabhi Rajkumar, who had lost the 2016 election narrowly to Pranab Gogoi, welcomed the RB president's "graduation" from "street andolan (agitation)" to electoral politics. "He has his agenda, we have our own, and that is development for all. Let's see who the people opt for," she said.

A total of six candidates, including Ajit Hazarika of Nationalist Congress Party, are contesting the Sibsagar seat that goes to the polls on March 27.

Cong. says BJP government's claims failed in Himachal

Polls to 4 corporations on party symbols for the first time

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

With elections to four urban municipal bodies in Himachal Pradesh all set to be held on party symbols for the first time next month, the polls are being seen by the Opposition Congress as a "critical test" to ascertain the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government's performance ahead of Assembly polls, due next year in 2022.

Out of five municipal corporations in Himachal Pradesh, elections to four of them, including Solan, Palampur, Dharamshala and

Mandi, will be held on April 7. The fifth – the Shimla Municipal Corporation – for which elections were held in year 2017, will not go to polls with the others.

This will be the first time that the elections to these four municipal corporations will be held on party symbols.

'A referendum' With political parties flexing their muscles for the electoral battle, senior Congress leader and party general secretary Kewal Singh Pathania, who is spearheading the party's electoral manage-

ment for the Solan Municipal Corporation, asserts that the election results would be a referendum on the BJP government's work. "These polls are a critical test to ascertain the BJP government's performance ahead of the Assembly polls," Mr. Pathania told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

"Rise in unemployment, poor roads, collapsing health sector and pitiable development of infrastructure across the State, besides neglect of the hill State by the BJP-led Centre has exposed the tall claims of the BJP," he said.

Congress backs MNF govt. over refugee issue

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PATNA

The Opposition Congress in Mizoram on Thursday backed Chief Minister Zoramthanga on the issue of Myanmarese nationals taking refuge in the State and said that the order of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to stop illegal migration of people from that country is unacceptable.

State Congress president and five-time former Chief Minister Lal Thanhawla said that though the ruling Mizo National Front is an ally of the BJP, he wants the party to disobey the MHA order which also directed four Northeastern States to ensure speedy deportation.

LJP's national secretary general Abdul Khalil served a letter to Mr. Singh, an MLA

LJP seeks explanation from party MLA

He voted for JD(U) in election for Bihar Deputy Speaker

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PATNA



LJP chief Chirag Paswan

Chirag Paswan had fought the recent Bihar polls on its own with the intent to ensure defeat of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's party.

No consultation'

"The party has learnt that you have voted in favour of JD(U) candidate Maheshwar Hazari during election held for the post of Bihar Legislative Assembly's Deputy Speaker on March 24 without consulting the party in this regard," Mr. Khalil said in the letter.

Party's Bihar unit spokesman confirmed issuance of letter to the legislator.

The matter has caused severe embarrassment for the LJP whose president

Virus cases: mall sealed

CORRESPONDENT
CUTTACK

The civic authorities here on Thursday sealed a private coaching centre and a shopping mall for allegedly violating the COVID-19 guidelines.

The city police too have stepped up drive to penalise those not following the virus norms.

The resurgence of cases in the city and its adjoining areas has forced the authorities to intensify the enforcement measures. While the coaching centre at Chandi Chhak was sealed in the afternoon, the authorities in the morning had sealed a theatre-turned-mall at Ranihat. The city reported 20 fresh cases during the past 24 hours.

Will meet experts on anti-pollution plan: Rai

Govt. to hold conclave on April 12 and 13

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Environment Minister Gopal Rai on Thursday said that the Delhi government will hold a round table conference with environmental experts and organisations on April 12 and 13 on pollution.

Previous campaigns "The Delhi government will hold a round table conference at the Secretariat on April 12 and 13. All environmental experts and others will be called so that we can formulate the next action plan. Last year too, we had taken a lot of action after October. We ran an anti-dust campaign, used a bio-decomposer to stop stubble burning, did a 'red light on, car off' campaign, started a green war room and launched the green Delhi app," he said.

Mr. Rai on Thursday held a review meeting with



We will take suggestions of experts before developing an action plan for Delhi
GOPAL RAI
Environment Minister

officials of the Environment Department to control pollution and directed them to create a long-term pollution action plan.

"We will take suggestions of experts before developing an action plan for the national capital," the Minister added.

New registration renewal fee has left vehicle owners confused

Motor Licencing Offices flooded with queries about the process

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A deluge of inquiries regarding the renewal of registration of vehicles older than 10 and 15 years has inundated Motor Licencing Offices (MLOs) across the city after the Centre announced that such vehicles need not be scrapped necessarily.

Earlier this month, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) issued a draft notification proposing an increase in fees for the renewal of registration of vehicles older than 15 years from October 1.

However, sources from the Transport department claimed that the precise provisions under the new policy, allowing more frequent cycles of assessment for older vehicles whose registration can be renewed subject to payment of higher fees, are currently somewhat unclear.

Queries galore "We keep getting calls about one scenario or the other from vehicle owners - my vehicle will be ten years old on so and so date, how much will it cost to renew its registration, what if I intend to re-

new my registration in advance, should I buy another vehicle instead of paying higher fee for this one - and similar queries," an official said.

"It would have been better had the Centre also clarified these specifics instead of just announcing the broad objectives of the scheme. It is increasing the rush of visitors at offices whom we cannot help because we do not have the answers to their questions ourselves," another official said.

At some Regional Transport Offices, visitors with queries are coming across notices asking them to wait till October - when the new policy comes into force - for answers. Most of the queries, sources said, were regarding whether the policy would only apply to vehicles older than 15 years or ten years in addition to other specific criteria.

Adequate security arrangements in place for Bharat Bandh: police

down will start at 6 a.m. and it will be in force up to 6 p.m. across the country on March 26 which marks four months of the farmers' agitation on Delhi's three borders - Singhu, Ghazipur and Tikri, they said.

The Morcha said the 'bandh' will also be observed in the national capital.

Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, have been camping at Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur demanding complete repeal of the three farm laws and a legal guarantee for the minimum support price on their crops.

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of protesting unions, have given a call for complete 'Bharat Bandh' on Friday.



Farmers at the Ghazipur border protest site on Thursday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

places," Mr. Biswal said.

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of protesting unions, have given a call for complete 'Bharat Bandh' on Friday.

The nationwide shut-

101-year-old man gets pacemaker implant

Patient had complete heart block

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

In a first in Delhi-NCR, doctors at Max Super Speciality Hospital, Saket, have successfully implanted a pacemaker in 101-year-old man, Max Healthcare said on Thursday.

The hospital said that Satish Chand Tyagi, 101, a resident of Delhi, was rushed to the emergency room of Max Hospital by his family when he started experiencing sudden episodes of giddiness and intense weakness in February.

Doctors diagnosed the patient with a complete heart block (CHB) leading to

very slow heart rate.

Balbir Singh, Chairman and Head of Cardiology, Max Hospital, said: "With complete heart blockage, the pulse falls and patients can faint, making it a cardiac emergency. However, we were in a dilemma on our further course of treatment to save the patient's life, considering his age."

"Since the entire procedure was done under local anaesthesia, I was continuously talking to the patient while implanting the pacemaker and to my surprise he didn't feel any pain and kept interacting with me," he said.

Doctors diagnosed the patient with a complete heart block (CHB) leading to

Punjab Oppn. takes a dig at Cong. over Kishor meet

Role of State Congress chief outsourced, they taunt

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

A day after Prashant Kishor reportedly met Punjab Congress MLAs to deliberate on an election strategy for upcoming assembly polls in Punjab, which are due early next year in 2022, the Opposition parties on Thursday took a dig at Congress government led by Chief Minister Amarinder Singh.

Mr. Kishor, a poll-strategist, who had recently joined Capt. Singh as his principal advisor, on March 24 held a meeting with first time Congress legislators to take feedback surrounding various political issues in their constituencies.

Former Minister and senior Shiromani Akali Dal leader Daljit Singh Cheema



Prashant Kishor

party president to his new advisor PK. He is holding meetings with elected MLAs of Congress party and formulating election strategy. It will be better for Sunil Jakhar to step down to uphold the dignity of the post of party President," said Mr. Daljit Singh.

'Nervous, desperate'

Mr. Sharma said by bringing in Mr. Kishor, the ruling Congress party has admitted that the party is "nervous and desperate" to face the upcoming Assembly elections.

"The Congress government in the last four years has miserably failed on all fronts and has hired Mr. Kishor to bail it out of the mess it has created by non-governance in the State," said Mr. Sharma.

LJP seeks explanation from party MLA

He voted for JD(U) in election for Bihar Deputy Speaker

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PATNA



LJP chief Chirag Paswan

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Party's Bihar unit spokesman confirmed issuance of letter to the legislator.

The matter has caused severe embarrassment for the LJP whose president

All in a day's work



Washermen busy with daily chores on the banks of the Yamuna in Delhi on Thursday.

■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Key accused in Khajuri Khas thrashing case held

Man who filmed it lands in trouble

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A man, purportedly seen in a video thrashing another man at Khajuri Khas area of north-east Delhi, has been arrested, the Delhi police said on Thursday.

The accused has been identified as Ajay Goswami, a resident of Old Garhi Menzu village, they said.

The police said that a case was registered against him at Khajuri Khas police station.

The video shared widely on the social media purportedly showed the accused beating up the victim and forcing him to chant slogans.

According to the police, the person, who was making the video, has been identified as Deepak Baisala. Legal action will be taken against him as well, they said.

The accused, Goswami, was involved in cases related to riots, which broke out in north-east Delhi in February last year.

The recent case has no connection with riots

POLICE

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 15.00 HRS)

Forecast for Friday: Thunderstorm with lightning likely at isolated places over sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, Kerala and Mahe. Heat wave conditions likely in isolated pockets over Saurashtra & Kutch and Konkan & Goa

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	... 36.6	23.4	...	Kozhikode	... 34.8	26.6	...
Ahmedabad	... 38.0	23.2	...	Kurnool	... 39.9	24.4	...
Aizawl	... 28.2	13.4	...	Lucknow	... 33.5	19.7	...
Allahabad	... 36.3	19.0	...	Madurai	... 36.7	25.8	...
Bengaluru	... 35.1	21.6	...	Mangaluru	... 36.9	25.2	...
Bhopal	... 34.6	19.4	...	Mumbai	... 38.7	22.0	...
Bhubaneswar	... 40.4	23.4	...	Mysuru	... 35.0	19.0	...
Chandigarh	... 30.4	15.0	...	New Delhi	... 29.6	17.5	...
Chennai	... 34.7	25.0	...	Patna	... 35.6	20.2	...
Coimbatore	... 37.0	24.6	...	Poorn Blair	... 32.6	27.2	...
Dehradun	... 30.4	12.4	...	Puducherry	... 32.7	23.3	...
Gangtok	... 20.4	10.9	...	Pune	... 37.3	20.6	...
Goa	... 34.8	25.4	...	Raipur	... 38.0	21.6	...
Guwahati	... 37.2	20.4	...	Ranchi	... 34.1	20.4	...
Hubballi	... 36.0	24.0	...	Shillong	... 26.6	14.5	...
Hyderabad	... 37.8	22.5	...	Shimla	... 8	19.1	7.2
Imphal	... 33.3	15.9	...	Srinagar	... 7.9	4.7	...
Jaipur	... 31.7	18.0	...	Thiruvananthapuram	... 33.4	26.4	...
Kochi	... 32.6	26.6	...	Tiruchi	... 36.2	25.8	...
Kohima	... 25.6	12.4	...	Vijayawada	... 37.2	23.4	...
Kolkata	... 37.7	25.5	...	Visakhapatnam	... 34.0	24.4	...

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES SO NO CO PM2.5 PM10 CODE

CITIES	SO	NO	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	42	62	14	.61	.106	...
Bengaluru	7	10	28	.80	.101	...
Chennai	8	15	56	.107	.116	...
Delhi	5	35	40	.181	.270	...
Hyderabad	24	75	22	.221	.221	...
Kolkata	25	22	32	.262	.184	...
Lucknow	36	52	60	.195	.161	...
Mumbai	9	65	76	.312	.189	...
Pune	16	23	33	.247	.26	...
Visakhapatnam	13	88	56	.172	.214	...

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

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

NO: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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

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

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Siliguri, West Bengal recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 282 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir recorded a healthy AQI score of 26

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

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No transfer scam in Maharashtra: CS's report

IPS officer secured nod to tap phones by misleading govt; no action was taken against her on humanitarian grounds'

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

A report into the phone tapping allegations submitted by Maharashtra Chief Secretary Sitaram Kunte to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Thursday ruled out any wrongdoing in the transfers of police officials by the State Home Department. *The Hindu* is in possession of a copy of the five-page report.

Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis had alleged that the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government had suppressed former Commissioner of Intelligence Rashmi Shukla's report, which claimed that as per intercepted phone calls, some police officials and politicians were allegedly involved in a transfer scam.

The Chief Secretary's report has censured Ms. Shukla for misleading the State government and securing permission to tap phones. The report confirmed that no IPS officer was transferred and there were no pending transfer proposals between June 27, 2020, and September 1, 2020, as the State administration was busy taking measures to curb the spread of COVID-19. Ms. Shukla sought permission to tap phones in July last year and submitted her report on August 25, the report said.

BJP's claims debunked

Mr. Kunte's report said the phone surveillance mentioned in Ms. Shukla's report was of private individuals and had no relation to transfers of police officials. The report debunked Mr. Fadnavis's claims that he was in possession of 6.3 GB of data



Maharashtra Chief Secretary Sitaram Kunte. ■ FILE PHOTO

Her actions have jeopardised the privacy of the officers named as well as subjected them to defamation for no fault of theirs

REPORT BY MAHARASHTRA CHIEF SECRETARY SITARAM KUNTE

on phone surveillance. It confirmed that Ms. Shukla did not submit any pen drive to the State government.

The report said, "Rashmi Shukla purposely misled the government and sought permission under the Indian Telegraph Act to tap phones, claiming possible law and order problem. This Act can be used only to combat anti-national activities, preserving national security and maintaining sovereignty of the nation. Political differences, commercial conflicts, and family matters cannot be brought under this law."

Since the State government was misled, an explanation was sought from her."

The report said when Ms. Shukla was asked to give an explanation, she apologised personally to the Chief Minister and State Home Minister. She told them she was grappling with family problems and the responsibility of looking after her children following the death of her husband. "It was only on humanitarian grounds that no action was taken against her," the report said.

Mr. Kunte's report said a copy of Ms. Shukla's report was in the public domain and leaking such top-secret letters was a serious issue. "Her actions have jeopardised the privacy of the officers named as well as subjected them to defamation for no fault of theirs. Her report has proved no wrongdoing whatsoever," it said.



Rashmi Shukla

vernment, will face action. "We have come to know that there are some officers who have been secretly helping the BJP against the MVA government. They have breached the oath of secrecy, and hence they will face action," he said.

Reacting to Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis's allegations, Mr. Patole said, "He is clearly misleading the people and maligning the image of the State at the national level."

The BJP has been targeting the Maharashtra government ever since it lost power, he alleged.

Asked if the MVA government is shielding Home Minister Anil Deshmukh in the wake of former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh's allegations of corruption against him, Mr. Patole said, "We are setting up an inquiry into the charges. When Mr. Fadnavis was the chief minister, he used to give a clean chit to his ministers."

A delegation of MVA ministers will soon be meeting Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari. A delegation from the BJP had met Mr. Koshyari on Wednesday, requesting him to seek a status report from the Chief Minister on the State's law and order situation.

Sachin Vaze's NIA custody extended till April 3

NIA tells court suspended police officer's alleged crime falls in category of 'terrorist act'



Under probe: Suspended police officer Sachin Vaze being escorted to the court on Thursday. ■ EMMANUEL YOGIN

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA MUMBAI

A special court on Thursday extended till April 3 the custody of suspended police officer Sachin Vaze in the Anti-ilia bomb scare case, with the National Investigation Agency (NIA) claiming that the alleged crime fell in the category of a "terrorist act".

The NIA told the court it wanted to confront Mr. Vaze with the other accused in the Mansukh Hiren murder, a re-

lated case, and probe 62 unaccounted for bullets found at Mr. Vaze's house. Mr. Vaze pleaded that he had been made a "scapegoat". He was produced before the court after his earlier remand expired. The NIA sought his custody for another 15 days.

"I have been made a scapegoat and have nothing to do with the case," Mr. Vaze told judge P.R. Sitre during the hearing. "I was investigating officer of the case for

one and a half days, and did whatever I could in that capacity. But there was suddenly change in some plan somewhere. I went to the NIA office on my own and was arrested," he said.

Additional Solicitor General Anil Singh, the NIA lawyer, told the court that Mr. Vaze's crime being "a terrorist act" and as a person (Hiren) was killed and explosives were planted, further 15-day custody was needed.

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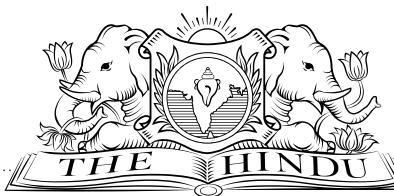
NOT N: CE (D) / KPDC/ 05 of 2021 Dated: 23/03/2021

For and on behalf of the Lieutenant Governor, Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, e-Tenders (in two cover sheet, Part I-Techno-Commercial Bid & Part II-Price Bid) are hereby invited from SI's (System Integrators) who are Authorized Oracle UGBU (Utilities Global Business Unit) Partners having experience in implementation of IT infrastructure for "Up gradation of ORACLE CCB 2.3 version to CCB 2.7.0 version along with its Integration with existing IT applications developed under R-APDRP, Part-A"

1. Bidders are advised to study the Bidding Document carefully. Submission of e-Bid against this SBD shall be deemed to have been done after careful study and examination of the procedures, terms and conditions of the Standard Bidding Document with full understanding of its implications.

2. The tender document is available on website <https://tktenders.gov.in>. Interested bidder may view download the e-Bid document, seek clarification and submit their e-Bid online to the date and time mentioned in the table below:

A Date & Time of downloading of Standard Bidding Document	The Standard Bidding Document can be downloaded http://tktenders.gov.in from 24/03/2021 : 0900 Hours
B clarifications start date	24/03/2021 : 0900 Hours
C Clarifications end date	31/03/2021 : 1500 Hours
D Pre Bid Conference Date & Venue	01/04/2021 in the Office of Chief Engineer Distribution, KPDC, Srinagar, 1400 Hours
E. e-Bid submission (start) date & time (Submission of e-tender fee, EMD and other supporting documents in PDF/XLS format)	03/04/2021 : 1400 Hours
F. Fe-Bid submission (end) date & Time	15/04/2021 : 1400 Hours
G Online Commercial and Technical e-Bid opening date & Time	17/04/2021 : 1400 Hours
H Online financial e-Bid opening date & time	Will be communicated to the Technically Qualified Bidders
I Venue of opening of technical & Financial e-Bids	Office of the Chief Engineer (Distribution), KPDC, Srinagar
J Estimated Cost inclusive of taxes	INR 5,50,00,000.00 (Rupees Five Crores And Fifty Lakhs only)
K Cost of e-Bid document	INR 4,0



Faster, sooner

India has the wherewithal to sharply accelerate daily vaccination rate

Just three weeks after it rolled out the second phase of the mass vaccination programme for people above 60 years and those above 45 years with comorbidities, India has now undertaken course correction – to vaccinate anyone above 45 years irrespective of comorbidity status from April 1. By following the U.K. model of vaccination based on age bands rather than on comorbidities, millions would become eligible to receive the vaccine and be fully protected. Indeed, people with comorbidities are at greater risk of becoming critically ill and even dying. However, the list of comorbidities that made a person eligible for a vaccine was not only highly restrictive but also focused on multiple comorbidities, and that too of severe nature. Also, the need for a medical certificate meant that vaccinating as many people as quickly as possible was unachievable. Since a vast majority, particularly the poor and those in rural areas, are ignorant of their underlying disease, the decision, though belated, to make comorbidities redundant for a vaccine is commendable. As vaccines are a tool to promote health equity, all attempts should be made to remove any artificial barriers, more so when several States are witnessing a surge in cases.

While hesitancy towards the two available vaccines was partly responsible for the low uptake initially, there is now increasing willingness to get vaccinated. While 0.8 million doses administered on February 25 was the highest before the second phase began, the numbers have been rising steadily thereafter; increasing the gap between two Covishield doses partly addresses vaccine shortage. Yet, the seven-day rolling average crossed two million doses per day only in the last couple of days; only about 50.23 million doses have been administered as on March 24, or less than four doses per 100 people. The vaccination programme has also been witnessing lukewarm participation by private medical facilities. The reasons for this, besides the slow pace of expansion in some States, need to be fixed. Though the COVID-19 vaccination, which targets adults, is vastly different from the universal immunisation programme, India has the wherewithal to accelerate the daily vaccination rate. What is missing is the political will to achieve that, reflected in absent targets and awareness building exercises, including vaccine safety, vaccine sites and permissibility of walk-ins. Also, unlike the immunisation programme, overreliance on the CoWIN platform has made vaccination into a largely passive, facility-based exercise rather than a public-health initiative. Lack of microplanning and outreach activities are further impacting uptake. Clearly, there is a case for reaching out to people to quickly increase vaccine uptake.

An unequal providence

Modified tax provision on PF income discriminates against non-govt. employees

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has steered through Parliament the Finance Bill of 2021, which includes 127 amendments. Among the major changes is a tweak in the proposal to tax income on PF contributions over ₹2.5 lakh a year. Responding to MPs' concerns on the tax, she said that nearly 93% PF account holders will be covered by the ₹2.5 lakh per year limit, while a mere 1% were abusing the system. Yet, she introduced an amendment doubling the threshold for annual PF contributions to ₹5 lakh, only for employees whose employers do not remit any contribution to their retirement fund account. For the crores of Employees' PF account holders in the private sector, this ₹5 lakh threshold is a non-starter as an employer-employee relationship is an implicit requirement to open an EPF account. While employees may voluntarily enhance contributions beyond the statutory wage limit of ₹15,000 a month and employers are not bound to match enhanced contributions, a 'zero employer contribution' scenario is not possible for EPF members. This suggests that only some senior government staff who joined service before 2004 and are not part of the NPS will benefit from this concession, as they contribute to the GPF account and get a defined benefit pension separately.

In a country with a large informal workforce and sparse social security systems, reasonable savings for retirement should not be penalised. But to give tax relief for such savings only to government employees smacks of bureaucratic preservation of self-interests deriding an equitable approach to taxation. The least the government could have done was to offer the same cap of ₹5 lakh to EPF members, by including their employer contributions during the year. As things stand now, annual investments into the PPF that anyone can open, are capped at ₹1.5 lakh. Similarly, employee PF contributions beyond ₹1.5 lakh are not tax-deductible under Section 80C of the I-T Act, but income on such contributions beyond ₹2.5 lakh will be taxable and employer contributions into the EPF, NPS or any superannuation pension fund are capped at ₹7.5 lakh. And the income on GPF contributions up to ₹5 lakh would be tax-free. This dissonance suggests an unconscionable disconnect between policy makers and the aspirations of the working class to save for their sunset years. To top this off, the new Wages Code will compel employers to pay higher EPF contributions by linking them to at least half of their total pay on a cost to company basis, rather than 24% of basic pay presently. This will virtually force many EPF members into contributing over ₹2.5 lakh a year. This either reflects a lack of system-wide thinking, with two arms of the government working at cross purposes, or an ingenious ploy to stir up tax collections. With doubts on the implementation of this new tax yet to be addressed, the government must consider putting it on hold and think through its implications.

Here is why the electoral bonds scheme must go

It violates the basic tenets of India's democracy by keeping the knowledge of the 'right to know' from citizens and voters



GAUTAM BHATIA

The Supreme Court, after a brief hearing on March 24, reserved orders on the question of whether or not to stay the electoral bond scheme, ahead of the upcoming State elections. For the last three years, electoral bonds have been the dominant method of political party funding in India. In their design and operation, they allow for limitless and anonymous corporate donations to political parties. For this reason, they are deeply destructive of democracy, and violate core principles of the Indian Constitution.

A blow against democracy
If democracy means anything, it must mean this: when citizens cast their votes for the people who will represent them in Parliament, they have the right to do so on the basis of full and complete information. And there is no piece of information more important than the knowledge of who funds political parties. Across democratic societies, and through time, it has been proven beyond doubt that money is the most effective way of buying policy, of engaging in regulatory capture, and of skewing the playing field in one's own favour. This is enabled to a far greater degree when citizens are in the dark about the source of money: it is then impossible to ever know – or assess – whether a government policy is nothing more than a *quid pro quo* to benefit its funders. The

Indian Supreme Court has long held – and rightly so – that the "right to know", especially in the context of elections, is an integral part of the right to freedom of expression under the Indian Constitution. By keeping this knowledge from citizens and voters, the electoral bonds scheme violates fundamental tenets of our democracy.

It is equally important that if a democracy is to thrive, the role of money in influencing politics ought to be limited. In many advanced countries, for example, elections are funded publicly, and principles of parity ensure that there is not too great a resource gap between the ruling party and the opposition. The purpose of this is to guarantee a somewhat level playing field, so that elections are a battle of ideas, and not vastly unequal contests where one side's superior resources enable it to overwhelm the other. For this reason, in most countries where elections are not publicly funded, there are caps or limits on financial contributions to political parties.

The electoral bonds scheme, however, removes all pre-existing limits on political donations, and effectively allows well-resourced corporations to buy politicians by paying immense sums of money. This defeats the entire purpose of democracy, which as B.R. Ambedkar memorably pointed out, was not just to guarantee one person, one vote, but one vote one value.

However, not only do electoral bonds violate basic democratic principles by allowing limitless and anonymous donations to political parties, they do so asymmetrically. Since the donations are routed through the State Bank of India, it is possible for the govern-



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

ment to find out who is donating to which party, but not for the political opposition to know. This, in turn, means that every donor is aware that the central government can trace their donations back to them. Given India's long-standing misuse of investigative agencies by whichever government occupies power at the Centre, this becomes a very effective way to squeeze donations to rival political parties, while filling the coffers of the incumbent ruling party. Statistics bear this out: while we do not know who has donated to whom, we do know that a vast majority of the immensely vast sums donated through multiple electoral cycles over the last three years, have gone to the ruling party, i.e. the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Gaps in government's defence
The government has attempted to justify the electoral bonds scheme by arguing that its purpose is to prevent the flow of black money into elections. The journalist Nitin Sethi has already debunked this rationale in a detailed 10-part investigative report, which has also highlighted reservations within the government as well as by the Election Commission of India to the electoral bonds scheme. That apart, this justification falls apart under the most basic scrutiny: it is entirely unclear what preventing

black money has to do with donor anonymity, making donations limitless, and leaving citizens in the dark. Indeed, as the electoral bonds scheme allows even foreign donations to political parties (which can often be made through shell companies) the prospects of institutional corruption (including by foreign sources) increases with the electoral bonds scheme, instead of decreasing.

It is important to be clear that the objections to the electoral bonds scheme, highlighted above, are not objections rooted in political morality, or in public policy. They are constitutional objections. The right to know has long been enshrined as a part of the right to freedom of expression; furthermore, uncapping political donations and introducing a structural bias into the form of the donations violate both the guarantee of equality before law, as well as being manifestly arbitrary.

The judiciary needs to act
This brings us to the all-important role of the courts. One of the most critical functions of an independent judiciary in a functioning democracy is to referee the fundamentals of the democratic process. Governments derive their legitimacy from elections, and it is elections that grant governments the mandate to pursue their policy goals, without undue interference from courts. However, for just that reason, it is of vital importance that the process that leads up to the formation of the government be policed with particular vigilance, as any taint at that stage will taint all that follows. In other words, the electoral legitimacy of the government is questionable if the electoral process has become

questionable. And since the government itself cannot – in good faith – regulate the process that it itself is subject to every five years, the courts remain the only independent body that can adequately umpire and enforce the ground rules of democracy.

It is for this reason that courts must be particularly sensitive to and cognisant of laws and rules that seek to skew the democratic process and the level playing field, and that seek to entrench one-party rule over multi-party democracy. There is little doubt that in intent and in effect, the electoral bonds scheme is guilty of both. Thus, it deserves to be struck down by the courts as unconstitutional.

In this regard, the conduct of the Supreme Court so far has been disappointing. The petition challenging the constitutional validity of the electoral bonds scheme was filed in 2018. The case, which is absolutely vital to the future health of Indian democracy, has been left unheard for three years. The Supreme Court's inaction in this case is not neutral: it directly benefits the ruling party which as we have seen, has received a vast bulk of electoral bond funding through the multiple State and one general election since 2018, and creates a continuing distortion of democracy. It is a matter of some optimism that a start was finally made when the Court heard the application for stay before this round of elections. One can only hope that the Court will stay the scheme so that it does not further distort the coming round of elections, and then proceed to hear and decide the full case, in short order.

Gautam Bhatia is a Delhi-based lawyer

Remove the wedges in India-Bangladesh ties

Small but important steps can put an end to the long-standing issues in a relationship that is gradually coming of age



SYED MUNIR KHASRU

The friendship between India and Bangladesh is historic, evolving over the last 50 years. India's political, diplomatic, military and humanitarian support during Bangladesh's Liberation War played an important role towards Bangladesh's independence. Nearly 3,900 Indian soldiers gave up their lives and an estimated 10 million Bangladeshi refugees took shelter in India.

Now it is about cooperation
Post-Independence, the India-Bangladesh relationship has oscillated as Bangladesh passed through different regimes. The relationship remained cordial until the assassination of Bangladesh's founding President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in August 15, 1975, followed by a period of military rule and the rise of General Ziaur Rahman who became President and also assassinated in 1981. It thawed again between 1982-1991 when a military-led government by General H.M. Ershad ruled the country. Since Bangladesh's return to parliamentary democracy in 1991, relations have gone through highs and lows. However, in the last decade, India-Bangladesh relations have warmed up, entering a new era of cooperation, and moving beyond historical and cultural ties to become more assimilated in the areas of trade, connectivity, ener-

gy, and defence.
Bangladesh and India have achieved the rare feat of solving their border issues peacefully by ratifying the historic Land Boundary Agreement in 2015, where enclaves were swapped allowing inhabitants to choose their country of residence and become citizens of either India or Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has uprooted anti-India insurgency elements from its borders, making the India-Bangladesh border one of the region's most peaceful, and allowing India to make a massive redeployment of resources to its more contentious borders elsewhere.

Bangladesh today is India's biggest trading partner in South Asia with exports to Bangladesh in FY 2018-19 at \$9.21 billion and imports at \$1.04 billion. India has offered duty free access to multiple Bangladeshi products. Trade could be more balanced if non-tariff barriers from the Indian side could be removed. On the development front, cooperation has deepened, with India extending three lines of credit to Bangladesh in recent years amounting to \$8 billion for the construction of roads, railways, bridges, and ports. However, in eight years until 2019, only 51% of the first \$800 million line of credit has been utilised whilst barely any amount from the next two lines of credit worth \$6.5 billion has been mobilised. This has been mostly due to red-tapism from India's end, and slow project implementation on Bangladesh's end.

Bangladeshis make up a large portion of tourists in India, out-



THE HINDU PHOTO ARCHIVES

numbering all tourists arriving from western Europe in 2017, with one in every five tourists being a Bangladeshi. Bangladesh accounts for more than 35% of India's international medical patients and contributes more than 50% of India's revenue from medical tourism.

The connectivity boost
Connectivity between the two countries has greatly improved. A direct bus service between Kolkata and Agartala runs a route distance of 500 km, as compared to the 1,650 km if it ran through the Chicken's Neck to remain within India. There are three passenger and freight railway services running between the two countries, with two more routes on their way to be restored. Recently, a 1.9 kilometre long bridge, the Maitri Setu, was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, connecting Sambutan in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh allows the shipment of goods from its Mongla and Chattogram (Chittagong) seaports

carried by road, rail, and water ways to Agartala (Tripura) via Akhaura; Dawki (Meghalaya) via Tamaibil; Sutarkandi (Assam) via Sheola, and Srimantpur (Tripura) via Bibirbazar. This allows landlocked Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura to access open water routes through the Chattogram and Mongla ports (<https://bit.ly/3vXySpB>).

Bones of contention

Despite the remarkable progress, the unresolved Teesta water sharing issue looms large. Border killings are yet to stop. The year 2020 saw the highest number of border shootings by the Border Security Force. The shots are fired at civilians, usually cattle traders, who are usually unarmed, trying to illegally cross the border. India not only failed to stop the border killings but at times has even justified them. The statement by India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, during his recent visit to Dhaka, that "our shared objective should be a no crime-no death border...", raises questions as to why killings, and not due legal proceedings, are being followed in tackling border crimes.

The Modi government's proposal to implement the National Register of Citizens across the whole of India reflects poorly on India-Bangladesh relations. It is not comprehensible why people of all religions and ethnicities barring Muslims will be excluded from the Bill. It remains to be seen how India addresses the deportation of illegal Muslim immigrants, some of whom claim to have come from Bangladesh.

Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives, once considered traditional

Indian allies, are increasingly tilting towards China due to the Asian giant's massive trade, infrastructural and defence investments in these countries. In spite of its 'Neighbourhood First Policy', India has been losing its influence in the region to China. Bhutan also does not abide by Indian influence as evinced by its withdrawal from the BBIN (Bhutan-Bangladesh-India-Nepal) motor vehicles agreement. China, in lieu of its cheque-book diplomacy, is well-entrenched in South Asia, including Bangladesh, with which it enjoys significant economic and defence relations.

Keeping the momentum going
India-Bangladesh relations have been gaining positive momentum over the last decade. As Bangladesh celebrates its 50 years of independence (March 26, 1971), India continues to be one of its most important neighbours and strategic partners. As the larger country, the onus is on India to be generous enough to let the water flow and ensure that people are not killed on the border for cattle even if it is illegal when there are appropriate means for justice. These small but important steps can remove long-standing snags in a relationship which otherwise is gradually coming of age in 50 years. To make the recent gains irreversible, both countries need to continue working on the three Cs – cooperation, collaboration, and consolidation.

Syed Munir Khasru is Chairman of the international think tank, The Institute for Policy, Advocacy, and Governance (IPAG) with presence in Dhaka, Delhi, Melbourne, Vienna, and Dubai

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Virus variant
Just when we thought we could begin to start heaving a sigh of relief with the vaccination drive picking up comes unsettling news – "Double mutant" virus variant found" (Page 1, March 25). The Centre and States must inform people about the new strain even though it is believed to have no correlation with the rising second wave of cases. If that is so, why is there a surge in cases?

S. RAMAKRISHNANAYEE,
Chennai

We are anxious and worried that this specific mutation will help the virus thwart vaccine efficacy. People should start thinking about the need to avoid the suffering of another

lockdown. To avoid this, people should strictly follow COVID-19 protocols. As seen from the huge crowds at places of worship and in election meetings, there is scant respect for safety. Mass vaccination is the only hope now.

D. SETHURAMAN,
Chennai

It is literally a race against time. Scientists should clarify whether the present vaccines administered in India are effective against this new variant. If the virus spreads uncontrollably, the entire system will break down. We need to strike a balance between saving people and the economy.

T. ANAND RAJ,
Chennai

The sharp rise in cases across India after a lull is alarming. The report reveals the complexity in deciphering the changing behaviour of the virus. Whatever it may be, it can be better dealt with by adopting a comprehensive approach. The key tool is a social vaccine, i.e. appropriate behaviour. The media and the authorities have a greater role to play now.

D. D.V.G. SANKARARAO,
Nellore, Andhra Pradesh

It is difficult to forecast how long the pandemic will linger on. It necessitates the adoption of mask wearing, hand hygiene and physical distancing as a lifestyle change and an indispensable part of our lives. In this pandemic time, we must all

submit to science and abide by what science requires us to do if we are to try our 'luck' at self-preservation.

G. DAVID MILTON,
Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

widening footprint there, in the economic sphere.

R. SIVAKUMAR,
Chennai

Good cinema

The purpose of any art activity is to educate, enlighten and entertain; in this regard, 90% of the films produced in India are bereft of these essential criteria. Sensitive and heart touching actions and stories with moralistic approaches are nowhere in the vicinity of

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:
The story titled "Carnatic vocalist, teacher Lalitha passes away" (March 24, 2021, some editions) wrongly carried the photograph of her sister Haripriya.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; Email: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturi Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com

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recognition. The National Film Awards can help filmmakers to do better, provided they are judicious in the selection of stories that can educate, enlighten and entertain. The participating actors, directors and others can also play a vital role in emancipating viewers from violence and vulgarity.

V.P. DHANANJAYAN,
Chennai

ASSEMBLY POLLS

DEHLI THE HINDU | FRIDAY, MARCH 26, 2021

WEST BENGAL PHASE 1

It's Jangalmahal's moment of reckoning

30 Assembly constituencies in one of the most backward regions of the State are going to the polls tomorrow

SHIV SAHAY SINGH

KOLKATA

Thirty Assembly constituencies across five districts of the southern and western parts of West Bengal will go to the polls on March 27, in the first phase of the eight-phase Assembly election. The campaign bells for the high-pitched polls for the first phase fell silent on Thursday evening.

Except a few in Purba Medinipur district, most constituencies that go to the polls in Paschim Medinipur, Jhargram, Purulia and Bankura fall in the Jangalmahal region, once a hotbed of Left-Wing Extremism.

These seats are located in one of the most backward regions of the State. Of the 30 seats, seven are reserved for Scheduled Tribe candidates and four for Scheduled Caste candidates.

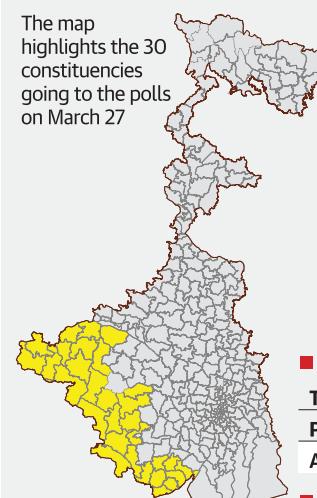
Contestants

In all, 191 candidates are in the fray, including 29 each from the Trinamool Congress and the BJP, 18 of the CPI(M), six from the Congress, four from the CPI and two from the All India Forward Bloc.

The nomination of a Trinamool nominee from Joypur was cancelled and the party has decided to support an independent for the seat. The BJP has supported an AJSU (All Jharkhand Students Union) candidate for the Baghmundi seat in Purulia district. Senior Congress MLA Nepal Roy Salboni will see former

Kicking off

90% of the people in these seats are from rural areas. The share of ST population in these seats is nearly three times that of the State's overall share. About 20% of households in phase 1 depend on cultivation for their primary income. By Vignesh R. & Naresh S



SOURCE | FOR ELECTION RELATED DATA: LOKDHABA FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DATA: DEVDATA LAB, CENSUS

■ 2016 PERFORMANCE IN PHASE 1 SEATS

Party	Seats won	Vote %
AITC	27	50.3
INC	2	6
RSP	1	1.3
CPI(M)	0	19.1
BJP	0	8.6
CPI	0	4.8
NOTA	-	1.7
DSP(P)	0	1.5

■ RURAL/URBAN POPULATION SHARE

Type	Rural %	Urban %
Phase 1 seats	91%	9%
All seats	68.1%	31.9%

■ ST/SC POPULATION SHARE

Type	ST (%)	SC (%)
Phase 1 seats	15.2%	19.6%
All seats	5.8%	23.5%

Mahato is contesting the Baghmundi seat, while Trinamool leader Shantiram Mahato is trying his luck from Balarampur.

The other key constituencies are Kharagpur and Medinipur.

From Medinipur, the Trinamool has fielded actor June Malia.

From Jhargram, the party has nominated Santali language film actor Birbaha Hansda who will contest against the BJP's Sukumar Satpati and CPI(M)'s young leader Madhuja Sen Roy.

Left Front Minister and CPI (M) leader Sushanta Ghosh and in the adjoining constituency of Garbeta, the Samyukta Morcha has fielded Tapas Ghosh.

Both the leaders had considerable influence during the Left Front regime.

Roadshows and meetings

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi has held four rallies in each of the districts of Purulia, Paschim Medinipur and Purba Medinipur, and Bankura, Home Minister

Amit Shah and BJP president J.P. Nadda have followed it up with several roadshows and public meetings.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has also held dozens of public meetings in the region.

The other star campaigner for the Trinamool has been Abhishek Banerjee who has tried to match the pace of the party supremo, who, despite sustaining leg injuries in Nandigram earlier, was addressing three meetings a day.

The BJP won all four seats

in Jangalmahal in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. The defection of Suvidha Adhikari from the Trinamool to the BJP has given it an advantage not only in Purba Medinipur but also in other districts of south Bengal.

The Trinamool has put its faith in Chhatradhar Mahato, former leader of the People's Committee Against Police Atrocities, a frontal organisation of the banned CPI (Maoist), to revive its fortunes in the region. The Trinamool has high-

lighted the absence of elected public representatives of the BJP from the region and introduced outreach programmes such as *Duare Sarkar* at the last moment. The State's ruling party is emphasising on the restoration of peace in the region as its achievement and is promising rations at the doorsteps under the public distribution system. Apart from stressing development, Ms. Banerjee has promised to popularise the Al Chiki language and give recognition to the tribal religion of Sarna.

Along with tribal issues, the other crucial ones are unemployment, lack of industry and economic backwardness.

The BJP is also highlighting the water crisis in the arid region. Mr. Modi and Mr. Shah have raised the issue of water crisis and that the piped water supply project in Purulia has been pending for several years. The BJP has also promised to allocate ₹18,000 of PM Kisan which has been pending for three years.

Though the region voted in favour of the BJP in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, political observers feel that the Trinamool, with the support of tribal schemes such as the 'Joy Johar Bandhu Prakalpa' (a pension scheme for tribals) and establishment of the Bagdi Community Development Board, alongside streamlining the party organisation, is expected to fare better.

In Assam, campaigning for Phase 1 ends

Stakes highest for BJP and AGP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI

Campaigning for the first phase of the Assam Assembly elections covering 47 of the 126 constituencies came to an end on Thursday.

The stakes for the BJP and the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) are highest in this phase as the two allies had won 35 of these 47 seats in 2016. The outcome in this phase will also be crucial for the Congress, which leads the 10-party Grand Alliance. Tea plantation workers are a deciding factor in more than 35 of these 47 seats.

Litmus test

Phase 1 would be a litmus test for the parties on either side of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, too. While the BJP insists the CAA has no impact on the ground, the Congress made it one of its five main issues, as did the two new regional parties – Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) and Rajor Dal – that were forged in the anti-CAA agitation fire.

Among the heavyweights in this phase are Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, who seeks to retain Majuli, and AGP president Atul Borra and his party colleague and Minister Keshab Mahanta, who are seeking re-election from Bokakhat and Kaliabor, respectively.

Three other party presidents – State Congress chief Ripun Bora (Gohpur), his AJP counterpart Lurinjyoti Gogoi (Dulaijan and Naharkatiya), and Rajor Dal president Akhil Gogoi (Sibsagar) – are in the fray in this phase. Other key leaders include former Congress Minister Rakibul Hussain (Samaguri) and former BJP leader-turned-AJP general secretary Jagadish Bhuyan (Sadiya). In this phase, the Congress is contesting 43 seats, the AJP 41, the BJP 39 and the AGP 10.

About 40 km southwest of Madurai, in a hamlet called Vannivelampatti, Karl Marx, Jyoti Basu, Fidel Castro, Lenin and Stalin gather at the village common every morning for banter and tea. They aren't stage artists but ordinary villagers named after Communist leaders. All in their 40s and working as farm labourers in the maize fields that dot the villages on the road to Rajapalayam in Virudhunagar district, their discussions are a ritual now that the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections are round the corner.

Poring over the daily *Thieekkathir*, their conversations veer around the crushed dreams of the working class. These discussions attract other village elders and youngsters too. They sit against the backdrop of the Vembulaiyan Swamy temple.

A few yards away, Dmitri keeps a watch on the children, who are at home due to the pandemic and are prancing around his autorickshaw,

while Ramamurthy takes a walk against the sun with a handful of children, all of them wearing signature Che Guevara T-shirts.

'A reputation to maintain' "The T-shirts were this year's Pongal gift to all the children in the village," Ramamurthy said with pride. "No matter which way the political wind blows, Vannivelampatti village (under Thirumangalam constituency in Madurai district) has a reputation to

maintain."

"We may not look like the original leaders or match their achievements, but we wear their names with pride because they give us the courage to demand justice and never give up the fight against inequality and discrimination," said Saifur Hashmi, 28, a gym coach.

Red has been the colour in this village with 3,000 voters. Over the years they have stuck to an interesting practice of naming their children

after Communist leaders.

"There is some disenchantment but we will vote for the DMK-CPI(M) alliance because we don't believe in religion- and caste-based politics and don't want it to enter here," said Mr. Karl Marx.

The villagers remain unyielding to the two staples of Tamil Nadu politics – caste sentiments and money. "Political party candidates do not even bother to enter our village for campaigning," said Mr. Lenin.

Years in jail have made Mr. Mahato, now guarded by men with semi-automatic rifles, a man of few words. But his organisational skills are sharp, and he explained in detail how he is trying to unite the Adivasi Santhals and Adivasi Kurmis in Jhargram.

Uneasy divide

About 68 km from Jhargram lies Salboni. This is where a landmine blast on the convoy of then Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee in November 2008 triggered political action and violence.

Within days of being nomi-

nated as a Samyukta Morcha candidate, Mr. Ghosh walked through a village and announced his return. "The fathers of the Maoists and Trinamool and BJP know who Sushanta Ghosh is. When I was not there, they could do whatever they wanted. Now if they lay hands on

you, I will break their bones and arrange for their treatment," the former Minister of the Left Front government said at a village in Salboni.

The remark, unsurprisingly, triggered strong reactions from his political rivals. He spent nearly eight years behind bars. Mr. Ghosh likes to speak to the media while standing next to the portrait of former Chief Minister Jyoti Basu. "This time, the wind is different; the people are not going for the Trinamool or BJP," he said.

For the local people of the

area, the return of both leaders sparks unease. Chiranjib Maity, in his 30s, is part of the network of about 417 families whose kin were killed during the violence. "There are many still missing. Those who were behind the violence have got jobs and those at the receiving end are still suffering," he said.

Comeback trail: Chhatradhar Mahato and Mamata Banerjee at a rally in Jhargram. ■ SUBHAM DUTTA

gations revealed that those were the remains of Trinamool supporters who had gone missing.

Road through Lalgarh

One of the roads from Jhargram, where Mr. Mahato wields considerable influence, to Salboni passes through Lalgarh, which was a 'liberated zone' of the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) from 2009 to 2011. In those two years, hundreds of civilians, Maoists and security forces were killed in violence that gripped the area around Lalgarh, including Jhargram, Binpur, Bandwan, and the neighbouring constituencies of Paschim Medinipur, Bankura and Purulia.

After its rout in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls in Jangalmahal, the Trinamool inducted Mr. Mahato, who was the convenor of the People's Com-

mittee Against Police Atrocities, the frontal organisation of the CPI(Maoist) during the Lalgarh movement, into its State committee last July. He is supervising the campaign of Birbaha Hansda, the Trinamool candidate from Jhargram.

At the makeshift Trinamool election office inside a single-screen cinema hall in Jhargram, Mr. Mahato spoke

about his agenda. "The movement then (in 2009) was against the Left Front government and its excesses. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had also contributed to the movement. We were fighting for a dream, and now we are trying to project the success of 10 years under the Trinamool regime and protect it from the BJP's false promises," he said.

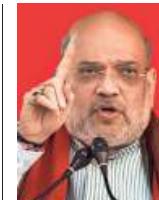
At the makeshift Trinamool election office inside a single-screen cinema hall in Jhargram, Mr. Mahato spoke

85.3%

the average 2016 turnout percentage in the 30 seats in West Bengal that are going to the polls in Phase 1. Garbeta recorded the highest turnout of 90.5%

3 MLA seats

were won by women in 2016 of the 30 seats in West Bengal, which are going to the polls in Phase 1. All three belonged to the Trinamool Congress



If you want schemes, vote for Modiji, if you prefer scams, then vote for the incompetent Trinamool

AMIT SHAH

Home Minister

P9

POLL POURRI



'EC has become cousin of BJP'

SHIV SAHAY SINGH

KOLKATA

Even if all the Election Commission (EC) officers of West Bengal are transferred, the Trinamool's victory cannot be prevented, said Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday after the EC transferred five senior officers, including the District Magistrate of Jhargram. Four seats in the district go to the polls on March 27. "The BJP is interfering in the functioning of the Commission. The Commission has become like a cousin of the BJP," Ms. Banerjee said while addressing a public meeting at Dantan. Many have questioned the reshuffle taking place so close to the election.

'Akhil deliberately branded Maoist'

RAHUL KARMAKAR

Narmada Bachao Andolan leader Medha Patkar on Thursday said Rajor Dal president Akhil Gogoi has been labelled a terrorist of the Maoist kind so that he can be kept behind bars. This was because the BJP-led

government in Assam was scared of him, she told presspersons in Guwahati after campaigning for Mr. Gogoi in the Sibsagar Assembly constituency.

Taking surveys with a pinch of salt

G. KRISHNAKUMAR

KOCHI

The LDF and the UDF in Kerala seem to be taking the pre-poll surveys with a pinch of salt. Though a majority of the surveys predict a second term for the Left Front, leaders including Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan have cautioned the cadres not to carry away by the results. The party is using the results, though, to gain the attention of voters. Meanwhile, the UDF has accused TV channels of showing bias and trying to hoodwink the electorate by predicting an LDF win. Its

FROM PAGE ONE

'Why no decision on list sent by Collegium?'

The court asked Mr. Venugopal to enquire with the Union Ministry of Law and Justice and make a statement on April 8 about their status. The Bench handed over to Mr. Venugopal a chart containing the details of the 55 recommendations.

Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul said on the 10 recommendations, some of which date back to a year-and-a-half, that "neither have they been appointed nor have you (government) given us a response".

Justice Kaul, who was accompanying the Chief Justice and Justice Surya Kant, said the "thought process"

Supreme Court relief for Editor in hate crime case

The court said every Indian had the right to free speech and to travel freely and settle throughout the length and breadth of the country.

'Legitimate exercise' "At times, when in the legitimate exercise of such a right, individuals travel, settle down or carry on a vocation in a place where they find conditions conducive, there may be resentments, especially if such citizens prosper, leading to hostility or possibly violence. In such instances, if the victims voice their dis-

content and speak out, especially if the State authorities turn a blind eye or drag their feet, such voicing of discontent is really a cry for anguish, for justice denied or delayed," Justice Rao wrote.

'Fervent plea' "The fervent plea made by the appellant (Mukhini) for protection of non-tribals living in the State of Meghalaya and for their equality cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be categorised as hate speech," the Supreme Court said.

Highest single-day spike since October 23

Maharashtra, Kerala and Punjab account for 74.32% of the active cases. Maharashtra alone accounts for 62.91% of the active cases. The active caseload registered an increase for the 16th day in row. The recovery rate has dropped to 95.07%, data show.

(With inputs from PTI)

In signal to China, U.S. raised India ties during Alaska talks

But two months on, any initial wariness that the relationship, which had seen rapid progress particularly on the security side over the past four years, would have to be rebuilt from scratch has dissipated.

One reason for that is the successful holding of the virtual Quad summit between India, the U.S., Japan and Australia on March 12, seven days before the U.S.-China Alaska talks.

Although the Biden administration's message was it did not want to push any country beyond its comfort level and was willing to keep in mind their respective China concerns – hence the absence of any reference to China in the joint statement and the focus on deliverables such as the vaccines initiative – India's immediate expression of willingness to go ahead with the summit and the "clarity" with which it put forward its agenda eased many concerns in Washington that New Delhi, amid the on-going disengagement process with China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), might waver in its commitment to the grouping.

If India has made clear it will not be part of any formal alliances, it has also suggested it is more willing to push the bar with China than previously.

The broader reason for the smooth transition in India-U.S. relations is the new administration's emphasis on a bipartisan approach to India and other key foreign policy issues, despite the divisiveness at home on the domestic agenda.

One indicator of that was Mr. Biden's insistence that a video prepared for the Quad summit would begin by, at the very start, acknowledging

CM YK

The next round of military talks is expected to take these forward.

of both the government and the Collegium should be modulated. He said a time frame needed to be fixed for both the Collegium and the Ministry to complete the appointment process.

Senior advocate and president of the Supreme Court Bar Association Vikas Singh said there was a need to institutionalise a process for considering advocates practising in the top courts to judgeships in the High Courts.

The Supreme Court has been repeatedly conveying to the government its growing alarm at the judicial vacancies in High Courts.

Justice Kaul, who was accompanying the Chief Justice and Justice Surya Kant, said the "thought process"

Crime Branch has given me a clean chit: Oommen Chandy

Case relates to 'sexual favour' charges raised by solar scam accused

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

In a Facebook post on Thursday, former Kerala Chief Minister Oommen Chandy said: "the Crime Branch report stating there is no evidence in the Solar case had emerged in the public domain."

It gave him no relief or glee but merely illustrated the fact that no power could suppress the truth for long.

Mr. Chandy said he had not approached the court to quash the police case registered against him in 2018 knowing very well that the law enforcement could arrest him at will.

Mr. Chandy appeared to be referring to the case of rape registered against him and five other top Congress politicians based on the



Oommen Chandy

sworn statement of the woman accused in the solar scam. He did not state where the report exonerating him had surfaced.

The "victim" had alleged that the politicians had sought and received sexual favours from her, promising State support for her business venture during the

2012-13 period.

AICC general secretary K.C. Venugopal, former Ministers Adoor Prakash and A.P. Anil Kumar, Hibi Eden, MP, and Abdullah Kutty, currently a top BJP functionary, are the other respondents in the case.

Mr. Chandy said the police had repeatedly investigated the woman's accusations and found no evidence to substantiate the charges. The Kerala High Court had removed the woman's deposition from the Solar Judicial Commission report.

A retired Supreme Court judge had advised the LDF government that the prosecution had no evidence to proceed against him, Mr. Chandy said.

However, in January, the State government had promulgated an extraordinary notification authorising the CBI to probe Mr. Chandy, suppressing evidence to the contrary.

A police official said it was usual for the State law enforcement to state why it sought a CBI probe in a particular case. He said the CB might have pleaded inability to ferret out evidence in the case to justify the government's demand for a CBI inquiry. However, such a statement, if at all, did not tantamount to absolving of charges.

The cases against Mr. Chandy and others have their provenance in a damning observation by the judicial commission that probed the solar scam.

had hurriedly opened the airport without any DGCA permission and with several pending works, but, "Our government completed all the pending works at a cost of ₹110 crore and fast-tracked the project to make it functional in all aspects within one and a half years."

"We are moving ahead with our aim of making Kurnool the Judicial Capital of the State and this airport will serve as a good asset," the Chief Minister said amid cheers from a large crowd. The Chief Minister inspected the passenger amenities at the airport and later interacted with the airport staff.

She further said the safety of her parents was important and that she would come before the SIT only after security was provided to them.

"I had sent a video to the SIT on March 12 addressing the Home Minister and seek-

Women MLAs seek Sudhakar's resignation

BENGALURU
Women MLAs of Karnataka Congress and KPCC Mahila Congress president Pushpa Amarnath on Thursday urged Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa to sack from the Cabinet Health and Family Welfare Minister K. Sudhakar for insulting members of the Legislative Assembly, particularly women MLAs, by making a challenge to all MLAs to take "monogamy test". Members of the Mahila Congress staged a protest

This is the second video released by her seeking protection.

Referring to the missing complaint filed by her family members, she said, "My family did not give a complaint on its own," but did not elaborate.

"Security of my family is most important," she said, requesting Opposition leader Siddaramaiah and Congress leaders D.K. Shivakumar and K.R. Ramesh Kumar, and women's organisations to help her.

"We are moving ahead with our aim of making Kurnool the Judicial Capital of the State and this airport will serve as a good asset," the Chief Minister said amid cheers from a large crowd. The Chief Minister inspected the passenger amenities at the airport and later interacted with the airport staff.

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IN BRIEF

KARNATAKA
Amit Shah undermining judicial process: Raja
TIRUVANANTHAPURAM
Communist Party of India (CPI) general secretary D. Raja has accused Union Home Minister Amit Shah of undermining the judicial process through his comments on the Sabarimala women entry case. The alleged attempts being made to capitalise on the controversial issue for political gains smacked of ignorance towards the law of the land, he said.

Kerala has 164 forward communities

Kochi
Kerala will have 164 forward communities, including 15 Christian communities, which are out of the ambit of any forms of caste-based reservation. The list attains significance in the wake of the Kerala High Court directive to the State government to release it in one month.

Chennithala moves HC against bogus voters

Kochi
Leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala on Thursday approached the Kerala High Court seeking a directive to the Election Commission and the Chief Electoral Officer of the State to take steps to delete or freeze the fake and multiple entries of names on the final electoral roll published for the Assembly polls.



Double demand: The KPCC women's wing staging a protest to seek the resignation of Health Minister K. Sudhakar and filing of an FIR against former Minister Ramesh Jarkiholi.

CD episode: woman doubts SIT's credibility

She seeks protection for her family

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

In a major twist to the ongoing investigation, the woman in the CD scandal involving former Karnataka Minister Ramesh Jarkiholi released another video on Thursday in which she expressed doubts over the credibility of probe by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) and sought protection for her family.

The cases against Mr. Chandy and others have their provenance in a damning observation by the judicial commission that probed the solar scam.

This is the second video released by her seeking protection.

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"Security of my family is most important," she said, requesting Opposition leader Siddaramaiah and Congress leaders D.K. Shivakumar and K.R. Ramesh Kumar, and women's organisations to help her.

"We are moving ahead with our aim of making Kurnool the Judicial Capital of the State and this airport will serve as a good asset," the Chief Minister said amid cheers from a large crowd. The Chief Minister inspected the passenger amenities at the airport and later interacted with the airport staff.

She further said the safety of her parents was important and that she would come before the SIT only after security was provided to them.

"I had sent a video to the SIT on March 12 addressing the Home Minister and seek-

Jagan inaugurates Kurnool airport

It will be the sixth functional airport in Andhra Pradesh

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KURNool

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Thursday inaugurated the Kurnool airport at Orvalkal and dedicated it to the nation.

This will be the sixth functional airport of Andhra Pradesh when the flight services to Bengaluru, Chennai and Visakhapatnam begin on March 28.

At a public meeting after the inaugural function, Mr. Reddy announced that the airport would be named after the freedom fighter from the region, Uyyalawada Narasimha Reddy, whose death anniversary was on February 22.

Mr. Reddy unveiled the bust of his father and former



New facility: A.P. Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy inaugurating the Kurnool airport on Thursday. ■ U. SUBRAMANYAM

Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy at the entrance of the terminal building.

He said his predecessor

RT-PCR must for entering Bengaluru

A.P. to keep schools open in spite of surge; Kerala adds 12 more deaths to tally

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA

There was a surge in COVID-19 infections and deaths in Andhra Pradesh with the State reporting four more fatalities and 758 cases on Thursday. In Kerala it was 1,989 new cases and 12 deaths from the past few days. Karnataka recorded 2,523 fresh cases and 10 fatalities. Telangana added

COVID-19

493 cases on Wednesday. Karnataka Health Minister K. Sudhakar said from April 1, passengers arriving from any State to Bengaluru must possess an RT-PCR negative report. It was decided to hand-stamp infected persons residing in Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike limits. There were 1,623 new cases from Bengaluru Urban.

Andhra Pradesh Education Minister Adimulapu Suresh said schools would continue to function in the State with strict COVID-19 guidelines. Just when the department thought the education sector could be put back on the rails after the disruption, there were signs of a second wave emerging.

Officials have been given strict instructions to scrupulously follow the protocol – use of masks and hand sanitizers and maintaining social distancing," he said.

On more than 160 stu-

No respite from tests

Besides preventive measures, the authorities have also enhanced testing to contain COVID-19. The graph shows the spread of the pandemic in the southern States



Patient wait: People in a queue to give samples for COVID-19 at a testing centre in Vijayawada on Thursday. ■ K.V.S. GIRI

dents in a junior college in Rajahmundry testing positive, the Minister said it was "very unfortunate". Action was taken against the college management and the hostel closed down," he said.

Andhra Pradesh Education Minister Adimulapu Suresh passed the matter to the magistrate's court to consider afresh the private complaint filed by one Ramesh Naik L. seeking initiation of criminal proceedings.

Justice H.P. Sandesh allowed the petition while allowing the petition filed by Ms. Ranaut questioning the correctness of the direction issued by the magistrate on October 12, 2020, to the Kyathasandra police to register the FIR against her.

On more than 160 stu-

venanthapuram and Kanuru two each, while Alappuzha, Kottayam, Thrissur, Malappuram and Kasaragod recorded one death each.

One returnee from South Africa tested positive. With this, a total of 108 persons who came from abroad since mid-December had tested positive. This included 102 from UK, five from South Africa and one from Brazil.

So far, 11, including one contact of a UK returnee, tested positive for the B.1.1.7 variant.

In Telangana four deaths were reported. There was an increase of 27 cases in Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation area.

On a day when another 1,779 persons tested positive

STATE	TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES	ACTIVE CASES	RECOVERED CASES	DEATHS
TELANGANA	3,04,791	2,99,427	1,680	1,680
TAMIL NADU	8,73,219	8,50,091	12,641	10,487
A.P.	8,95,879	8,85,209	7,201	3,469
**KARNATAKA	9,78,478	9,47,781	12,471	18,207
KERALA	11,11,897	10,82,668	4,539	24,380

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

for COVID-19 in Tamil Nadu, the active caseload went past 10,000 after nearly three

Parliament adjourned ahead of schedule

MPs from States going to the polls had sought curtailment of the Budget session for campaigning

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI Both Houses of Parliament were adjourned *sine die* on Thursday nearly two weeks before schedule, keeping in mind requests made for the curtailment of the second part of the Budget session by MPs from West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Puducherry and Kerala owing to the Assembly elections. The first part of the session started on January 29. The second leg started on March 8 after a break and was to run till April 8.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi, in a briefing after the end of the session, said: "It was curtailed ahead of schedule due to the demands made by various political parties and Assembly elections in four States and one Union Territory." The influence of the electoral contests was seen during the session with frequent references to poll issues in West Bengal during the debates.

Earlier in the day, Bhratnari Mahtab, who was in the chair in the Lok Sabha as part of the 10-member panel



Wrapping up business: The Lok Sabha meeting for the last day of the Budget session. ■ PTI

of presiding officers, commended Speaker Om Birla, who is down with COVID-19, for the arrangements made for the conduct of the House in the middle of the pandemic. In fact, while the first two days of Parliament in the second part of the session were for limited five-hour sittings, the time period of the sittings was made regular again with both Houses running concurrently.

Mr. Mahtab, in the valedictory address, revealed that

despite disruptions, the session clocked 114% in productivity with 24 sittings, which lasted over 132 hours. Seventeen government Bills were introduced and 18 passed, including the Finance and the Appropriations Bills. A total of 171 reports were tabled by various parliamentary committees and 84 starred questions were answered orally.

The tally for the Rajya Sabha was also impressive with 23 sittings, in which the House sat for 104 hours and

clocked a 90% productivity. The Upper House passed 19 Bills, spending 42% of the functional time on legislative business.

Head to head

Though attendance was sparse in both the Houses as members mainly from election-bound States were absent, the Treasury and the Opposition benches went head to head on the strike by farmers against the three controversial farm laws and

even more so with the Government of the National Capital Territory (Amendment) Bill, 2021 which seeks to add to the powers of the Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi.

The Bill was passed after repeated adjournments, especially in the Rajya Sabha, with even neutral parties such as the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) staging a walkout from the Upper House terming it an assault on the rights of elected State governments.

In his valedictory address, Rajya Sabha Chairperson and Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu reminded the members that the country was "entering the 75th anniversary of Independence" and that it was "a moment of introspection".

"While this special occasion provides all of us and citizens the opportunity to cherish the values and ideals that our freedom fighters stood for and helped our country to gain freedom from the colonial rule, it also calls for serious introspection on the functioning of our legislatures and their Members," he said.



Mallikarjun Kharge

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI The Narendra Modi government pushed through Bills to end the second part of the Budget session two weeks before schedule but the Opposition was denied an opportunity to have short-duration discussions or calling attention motions, the Congress alleged on Thursday.

The party said many of the laws passed in the second part of the Budget session will be legally challenged in the Supreme Court, and cited the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) law defining the Lieutenant-Governor in Delhi and the Mines and Mineral (Regulation and Development) Act as examples.

Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge; Chief Whip in the Rajya Sabha Jairam Ramesh; and the party's standard-bearer in the Lok Sabha, Ravneet Bittu, at a joint press conference, said the

sions of the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development Bill, passed by the Rajya Sabha on Thursday, Congress leaders asked how an institution, set up by an Act of the Parliament, could be outside the purview of Central Bureau of Investigation, the Central Vigilance Commission, and the Comptroller and Auditor-General.

Party leaders said that though the Opposition had played a constructive role in getting Bills passed, the government did not agree to any discussion on crucial issues such as disinvestment, inflation and price rise, newly framed rules for digital media, and the farm laws.

"Every Bill that was passed in the Parliament session will be challenged in the Supreme Court. There is no doubt about it," Mr. Ramesh said.

"This is the first time the Opposition's legitimate demand for calling attention [motion], short duration [discussion] has not been agreed to. If it has not been agreed to, it means the government is not keen or prepared to discuss."

Questioning the provi-

Opposition denied chance for discussion: Congress

Party says many laws passed will be legally challenged

DFI is required for the next 25 years of growth: Minister

Rajya Sabha clears Bill; Jairam says it's a rejected concept

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI The Rajya Sabha on Thursday cleared the legislation to establish the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NBFID), which was announced in the Budget speech by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman as the principal development financial institution (DFIs) for infrastructure financing.

Opposition members argued unsuccessfully for sending the Bill to a select committee, saying that in its present form, there was no scope for "external oversight or surveillance".

Ms. Sitharaman, however, said all safeguards had been provided for and an audited report would be placed in Parliament every year.

Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh opened the debate, saying the concept



Nirmala Sitharaman in the Rajya Sabha. ■ PTI

of DFIs had already been tried, tested and rejected. The first such institution was set up in 1948. In 1991, Manmohan Singh, as Finance Minister, had set up the Narasimha committee, which came to the conclusion that the era of the DFIs was over. "Thirty years after Dr. Manmohan Singh's Budget, the clock has turned back and we are going back to the DFI era," Mr. Ramesh said.

He said that despite the government having a 26% stake in this bank, the Bill

did not provide for an oversight mechanism.

The other lacuna was the protection provided to management for the decisions it takes as an "act of good faith", he said.

"What is an act of good faith? Who will determine an act of good faith?" Mr. Ramesh asked.

Ms. Sitharaman said the NBFID was the need of the hour and the need of the next 25 years. The infrastructure that it planned to fund was not only roads but also social infrastructure like schools and hospitals. It would be a professionally run body, with only the government appointing the Chairperson.

The Bill, she said, had safeguards, including the provision that the NBFID had to furnish to the Centre and the RBI a copy of its balance-sheet and accounts.

BJP pulls out all the stops in Bengal

Union Ministers, actor, cricketer campaign for the party ahead of first phase

SHIV SAHAY SINGH

KOLKATA With less than 32 hours to go for the first phase of polling in West Bengal, the BJP is pulling out all the stops.

Apart from senior Union Cabinet Ministers Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh, the party roped in matinee idol Mithun Chakraborty on Thursday for the 30 seats going to the polls on May 27.

Mr. Shah said that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was trying to instil fear among the people by saying "Khela Hobe".

"Do you think that you will be able to scare us by all this. No one will be able to play any games during the game. Please vote without fear," Mr. Shah said.

The Home Minister addressed rallies at Baghmundi, Jhargram and Mecheda and tried to reach out to tribal communities promising a development board for Kurmi Adivasis.

Alleging that the Trinamool government has not



On a roll: Actor Mithun Chakraborty during a roadshow in West Midnapore. ■ PTI

done anything for tribals, Mr. Shah said every family of the Kurmi Adivasi community will have one member who will be provided employment.

"If you want schemes, vote for Modiji, if you prefer scams, then vote for the incompetent Trinamool. It is for you to decide," Mr. Shah said at another public rally at Baghmundi.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh who also held a public meeting at Joypur in Purulia accused Chief Minister Ma-

mata Banerjee of not ushering in development in West Bengal.

Mr. Singh said that like the Left regime, Ms. Banerjee had not delivered on the development front.

The Defence Minister accused the Chief Minister of trying to divide the country by calling people who had come from other States as outsiders.

Mr. Chakraborty participated in roadshows at Saltora and Keshiary in Jangalmahal. The rally drew

enormous crowds who came out to see the actor. The actor had joined the BJP at the Brigade rally of Prime Minister Narendra Modi last month.

Along with the actor, former cricketer and Delhi BJP MP Gautam Gambhir campaigned for BJP candidate Ashok Dinda, who is contesting from Moyna Assembly segment.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath also held two public meetings in the day at Kakdwip and Nandigram and also accused the State government of failing the State on the development front.

Mr. Adityanath said at Kakdwip that Mamata Banerjee was not interested in the State's development and only wanted to promote goons and extortionists. At Nandigram, the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister showered praises on Suvidha Adhikari, and said that he has taken the right decision by joining the BJP.

Centre insists on DBT for welfare boards

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI The Centre has ordered State welfare boards for building and other construction workers (BOCW) not to distribute household and other articles to workers and instead stick to transferring monetary assistance into their bank accounts.

The Labour and Employment Ministry said in a statement on Thursday that it issued an order to States on Monday directing the boards not to distribute articles. The BOCW boards are meant to carry out welfare activities for workers from the cess on construction collected by States.

The Ministry said it had come to its notice that some State boards had issued tenders or incurred expenditure on distribution of articles like lanterns, blankets, umbrellas, cycles and utensils, instead of spending on "tangible welfare measures".

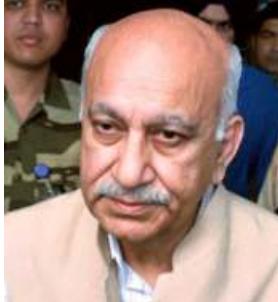
Delhi HC to hear Akbar's appeal on May 5

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI The Delhi High Court on Thursday posted for May 5 the hearing on a plea by former Union Minister M.J. Akbar challenging a trial court order acquitting journalist Priya Ramani in the criminal defamation case for her tweets accusing him of sexual harassment.

The petition, scheduled to come up for hearing on Thursday, could not be taken up as Justice Mukta Gupta was not holding court.

Mr. Akbar moved the High Court against a February 17



M.J. Akbar

verdict of a trial court here dismissing his criminal defamation case against Ms. Ramani. The trial court had accepted Ms. Ramani's

argument that she spoke out against Mr. Akbar after two decades of the incident "in public interest and for the public good."

"The woman has a right to put her grievance at any platform of her choice and even after decades," Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Ravinder Kumar Pandey had said.

The trial court had also accepted Ms. Ramani's contention that Mr. Akbar "is not a man of stellar reputation" on the basis of her testimony and testimony of senior journalist Ghazala Wahab, who too claimed of being sexually harassed by Mr. Akbar.

Mr. Akbar had in his criminal defamation complaint said Ms. Ramani's tweet and her article accusing him of sexual harassment were defamatory, and lowered his profile.

However, Ms. Ramani pleaded truth as her defence in relation to the allegations of sexual harassment against Mr. Akbar. She said her tweet and subsequent article alleging Mr. Akbar of sexual harassment during his previous role as newspaper editor was made in "good faith" and for public good.

TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS-TIRUPATI MARKETING DEPARTMENT e-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE

e-Tender cum e-Reverse Auction/ Reverse tendering is invited for procurement of the following items by the Marketing Department, T.T.D.Tirupati.

Name of the item	Quantity	Period	EMD Amount	Download Starting and Ending Dates
Cardamom 8MM Ageb Variety	36,000 Kgs.	03 Months	Rs. 18,00,000/-	25-03-2021 08-04-2021

For tender notice and tender details log on to the web site <http://www.tirumala.org> and <https://tender.eprocurement.gov.in>. For further details contact phone numbers: 0877-2264079, 2264555, Fax No.0877-2264554.

Rec.No.PRA/13928/Adv.No.373/PRO/2021/Dated:25-03-2021 **EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

Bharat Coking Coal Limited

'A Mini Ratna Company'
(A Subsidiary of Coal India Limited)

Notice

All the tenders* issued by Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL) for procurement of Goods, Works and Services are available on website of BCCL www.bccweb.in, Coal India Limited (CIL) e-procurement portal <https://coalindiatenders.nic.in> and Central Public Procurement Portal <https://eprocure.gov.in>. In addition, procurement is also done through GEM portal <https://gem.gov.in>.

*This is applicable to all Open (Domestic / Global) Tenders issued through e-procurement portal of CIL.

EOI / NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING / OPEN TENDER ENQUIRY

BRBNMPL invites bids from eligible bidders for following EOIs/Tenders:
1. Expression of Interest - EOI/002/MYS/MMD/2020-21 - Design, Manufacturing, Supply, Installation, Commissioning, Integration, Training and Performance Testing of 02 Nos. of Automated Prepress Printing Plate Quality Measuring System-PQMS (One (01) each for BRBNMPL Presses at Mysuru (Karnataka) and Salboni (West Bengal)).

2. Tender No. 118/MYS/MMD/2020-21 - Design, Fabrication, Testing, Commissioning and Supply of 02 Nos. Multipurpose Fire Tender Vehicles (Water, Foam, DCP and CO2) [with Buy back] to BRBNMPL, Mysuru.

3. Tender No. 117/MYS/MMD/2020-21 - Supply of Pullovers and Cardigans for employees to BRBNMPL, Mysuru.

4. Tender No. 116/MYS/MMD/2020-21 - Catering and Hospitality Management Services at BRBNMPL, Mysuru.

5. Tender No. 106/MYS/CIVIL/2020-21 - Construction of New Waste Segregation Yard and Decomposition Yard at BRBNMPL, Mysuru.

For downloading EOI / tender documents, last date of submission of above EOI / tenders and other details, kindly visit our website www.brbnmpl.co.in. Further corrigendum / amendment above EOI / tenders, if issued in future, will be notified on the Company website only.

General Manager

LOOK OUT NOTICE

Sri.Bunash Khan, age 27 S/o Thajudeen, Bismina Manzil, Bharanikkavu Village, Pallikkal P.O, Alappuzha district who is the accused in Cr.90/ 2021 U/ s 20(b) (ii)(c) of NDPS Act Vallikunnam Police Station, he is absconding after the commission of the crime, if any clue or information is obtained about him that may be intimated immediately to Vallikunnam station SHO, Deputy Superintendent of Police Chengannur, District Police Chief Alapp

INTERVIEW | RAKESH AGGARWAL

'Vaccines effective in preventing severe illness caused by variants'

The surge in COVID-19 cases is partly because people are no longer taking precautions as seriously as before, says the Director of JIPMER

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN

Rakesh Aggarwal, Director, Jawaharlal Institute of Post-graduate Medical Education and Research (JIPMER), Puducherry, talks about the unique double mutant COVID-19 virus found in India, its implication for the country which is at the beginning of the second wave of infections and the importance of vaccination. Excerpts:

What do the COVID-19 variants and double mutants found in India mean for the ongoing pandemic and second wave that the country is witnessing?

■ The genome sequencing data of the COVID-19 virus from 10 national laboratories in India made available on Wednesday show that nearly 7.7% of the nearly 11,000 specimens tested contained one of the viral variants.

In this context, it is important for us to understand what the variant viruses are, and what this detection means. Viruses develop

changes in their genomes very often during their multiplication and spread. The progeny viruses with one or more such changes are referred to as 'variants'. The appearance of variants of COVID-19 viruses in our population was not really unexpected.

The 'double mutant' simply means that this virus has two mutations, each of which has individually been seen in viruses from other parts of the world, except that it has both these mutations simultaneously. Such double-mutants are not rare. Based on the recent announcement, there is no reason to

believe that this double mutant has any special characteristics for it to raise any special interest or concern.

Does this mean that nearly 7%-8% of all COVID-19 patients in our country have a variant virus? And should we worry about the variants of the COVID-19 virus?

■ No. I would not think so. The specimens tested were highly selected and preferentially included arriving foreign travellers and their close contacts. These groups would be more likely to have variants. Hence, the data in this select group would overestimate the frequency of variants. The real proportion of variant virus in all cases in our population should be lower than this. Of course, the rate would also be different across different geographical areas of our large country.



The primary aim of the vaccination drive is to reduce the need for ICU beds, the use of ventilators, and deaths

Genetic variations are very common in all viruses, including the COVID-19 virus. So, we do not need to worry about each and every variant. Detection of a variant virus is a matter of interest or of concern if the variant has some special characteristics.

Why are some variants a

reason for concern? And are the variants detected in India 'variants of concern'?

■ You would hear two terms: 'variant of interest' and 'variant of concern'. The first - 'variant of interest' - refers to variants that appear to be associated with a special characteristic, but evidence is still limited. A 'variant of concern', on the other hand, is one where there is evidence supporting such association. These special characteristics of a variant could be an increased risk of transmission, causing more severe disease, failure of detection by the usual tests, or a higher risk of infection after prior infection or vaccination.

Three variants of concern have been detected in India. These had been first identified in the United Kingdom, South Africa and Brazil, respectively, and have been

identified in several countries globally.

These are of concern primarily because they have an increased potential for spread from one person to another.

Fortunately, these variants are not associated with more severe disease or a higher risk of death. The good news is that simple measures, such as the proper use of face masks and of physical distancing, are highly effective in preventing the spread of these variant strains. Hence, we can still effectively control their spread by following these steps. Just that we have to be disciplined.

The other reason for concern has been the reports that some COVID-19 vaccines may not be as good in preventing infection with the South African variant. Again, fortunately, though these vaccines may not prevent

mild illness caused by this variant as well, they still appear to be effective in preventing severe illnesses that need intensive care and ventilator, caused by these variants.

Hence, it is prudent that those at a high risk of such disease, for example, the elderly and those with co-morbid conditions, and are eligible for receiving COVID-19 vaccines, get themselves vaccinated as soon as possible.

Is the current vaccination drive enough to control the pandemic?

■ The current COVID-19 vaccination drive is not really for controlling the spread, but to protect those who are likely to develop severe disease.

Elderly people are more likely to develop severe disease, more likely to need ICU admission, more likely to

need ventilators, more likely to die. The primary aim of the drive is to reduce the need for ICU beds, the use of ventilators, and deaths.

However, as immunisation continues and covers a large proportion of the population, it eventually will lead to a reduction in cases as well. In some small countries, such as Israel, where immunisation coverage is high, the disease rate has come down remarkably. Besides, case-control studies in the U.K. show that an extremely small number of vaccinated people get COVID-19. Increasing vaccination coverage will surely help.

The surge is a cause for worry. It is happening partly because people are no longer taking precautions as seriously as they were previously. COVID-19 is a highly contagious disease and spreads rapidly and exponentially.

IN BRIEF



K. VijayRaghavan gets one-year extension

NEW DELHI

The government has extended the term of Principal Scientific Advisor (PSA) K. VijayRaghavan by a year. An official order was issued by the Department of Personnel and Training on Thursday. Dr. VijayRaghavan, 67, was appointed PSA in 2018 after retiring as Secretary, Department of Biotechnology.

NCP MP Supriya Sule calls on Sonia Gandhi

NEW DELHI

In the midst of the turmoil in Maharashtra over allegations of corruption against the State Home Minister, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Supriya Sule met Congress President Sonia Gandhi on Thursday. Ms. Sule is learnt to have briefed Ms. Gandhi about the political situation in the State. "Thank you so much Hon. Mrs. Sonia Gandhi Ji for your valuable guidance," she tweeted.

Two CRPF jawans killed in militant attack

SRINAGAR

Two Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel were killed in a militant attack in Srinagar on Thursday afternoon. The deceased were identified as constable Ashok Kumar from Chandigarh, driver of the vehicle, and assistant sub-inspector Manga Ram Dev Burman. Two others were injured. According to the police, the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) was behind the attack.

Former NHAI official, others booked by CBI

NEW DELHI

The CBI has booked the then Regional Officer of the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI), Jammu, and others for allegedly awarding a work contract to an ineligible company. The First Information Report names the then NHAI-Jammu Regional Officer, Hem Raj, and Rakesh Kumar Chaudhary, proprietor of the private company named M/s Rakesh Kumar Chaudhary, besides the company, as accused.

Vaccine export may be curbed

Supply schedule could be calibrated to meet domestic need, says official

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

India has supplied vaccine doses to 75 countries. ■ FILE PHOTO

talks with the government and SII over the issue.

The decision comes as several countries including the U.K., Brazil, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Nepal have experienced, or expect to experience, a delay in the supply of Indian-made vaccines.

In addition, a UNICEF representative has said export licences from India had been held up.

"Given our current manu-

facturing capacity and requirements of national vaccination programmes, there may be a need to calibrate the supply schedules from time to time. All stakeholders would have to work together to adjust the schedules as required," an official source said on Wednesday night, stressing that India remains "committed" to its vaccine supplies to the world.

While about 8 million were grants from the Government of India to other countries, most of the supplies have been procured by the international GAVI alliance that runs the COVAX facility (17.86 million) and commercial orders (34.17 million).

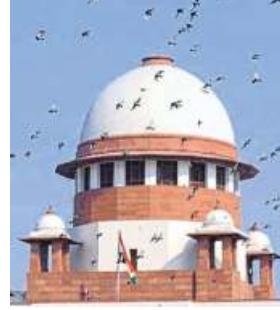
On Thursday, UNICEF also confirmed the delays.

SC suggests posting retired judges to clear backlog in HCs

CJI says some courts have cases pending for 30 years

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI



The Supreme Court on Thursday pushed for the appointment of retired judges to battle pendency of cases in High Courts.

A Bench led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde said retired judges could be chosen on the basis of their expertise in a particular field of dispute and allowed to retire once the pendency in that zone of law was over.

Several problems

"There are suits pending in chartered courts, and in North India, some courts have cases pending for 30 years... there are all kinds of problems," Chief Justice Bobde said at a virtual hearing of a petition filed by NGO, Lok Prahari, on the mounting backlog.

The court said the appointment of ad-hoc judges would not be a threat to the services of other judges. "Ad-hoc judges will be treated as the junior most," Chief Justice Bobde said.

The Chief Justice said the

appointment of ad-hoc judges was provided for in the Constitution under Article 224A. Under the Article, the Chief Justice of a High Court for any State may at any time, with the previous consent of the President, request any person who has held the office of judge of that court or of any other High Court to sit and act as a judge of the High Court for that State.

The court orally outlined prospective guidelines for the appointment and functioning of an ad hoc judge. "If in a particular jurisdiction, the pendency goes beyond a certain limit, say eight or 10 years, the Chief Justice may appoint a certain [retired] judge with expertise in those fields of laws as an ad hoc judge."

The next hearing is scheduled for April 8.

The Bench said retired judges who had handled certain disputes and fields of law for over 15 years could deal with them faster if brought back into harness as ad-hoc judges.

The court said the appointment of ad-hoc judges would not be a threat to the services of other judges. "Ad-hoc judges will be treated as the junior most," Chief Justice Bobde said.

The Chief Justice said the

Mehbooba quizzed for 5 hours by Enforcement Department

Former J&K CM says she has nothing to hide

PEERZADA ASHIQ

SRINAGAR



Former Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti, who was quizzed by the Enforcement Department (ED) in Srinagar on Thursday, said her party will continue to fight for the rights of the people and the restoration of Article 370, which was diluted in 2019.

Officials said Ms. Mufti was questioned by the officials of the ED at the Srinagar office for around five hours. She was summoned in a money-laundering case.

After the questioning was over, Ms. Mufti told the media: "Dissent has been criminalised in the country. One who speaks against you [the

Centre] is being either booked under sedition charges or being summoned by the investigative agencies," she said.

She said the ED officials questioned about her father late Mufti Muhammad Sayeed's property in south Kashmir's Bijbehara. "I was asked how I sold it and other related things. Also about the funds during my tenure as the J&K Chief Minister. I have nothing to hide," she

Police object to passport renewal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

SRINAGAR

The Jammu and Kashmir police has opposed the renewal of a passport to former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti citing an "adverse report" against her, officials said.

said. After being summoned on March 15, she approached the court for a stay but the Delhi High Court did not grant it. Later, in a letter to the ED, Ms. Mufti said she was not in a position to attend the summons on March 22 as she has prior commitments.

Ms. Mufti said she willing to be questioned in Srinagar "preferably at her residence or through a video conference from Srinagar".

NHRC issues notice to UP. police chief

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Thursday issued notice to the Uttar Pradesh Director General of Police (DGP) over policemen allegedly framing an eatery owner in Etah district for a crime after they were asked to pay for the food they had.

The NHRC said it took *suo motu* cognisance of the matter reported by the media this week. The two policemen, who got into a squabble with the *dhaba* owner, allegedly falsely implicated and arrested 10 people – the brother and a cousin of the *dhaba* owner and eight customers – and claimed to have recovered contraband from them.

"The persons reportedly arrested by the police are presently lodged in judicial custody," the NHRC said, seeking a report within six weeks.

CBI register another case against Rotomac Group

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation has registered yet another case against Rotomac Group promoter Vikram Kothari and others, this time in connection with a group entity named Crown Alba Writing Instruments India Private Limited, for allegedly cheating the Union Bank of India of about ₹63.46 crore.

Among those named in the FIR are the company, Mr. Kothari, his wife Sadhana

Kothari and their son Rahul Kothari. The accused are being probed by the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate in multiple bank fraud cases.

In February 2018, the CBI had arrested Mr. Kothari and his son in an alleged ₹3,695-crore "wilful" loan default case.

The latest case pertains to Crown Alba Writing Instruments India, which made writing instruments. However, it later started dealing in multiple commodities in-

Nationwide raid in bank fraud cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

In a nationwide special drive, the Central Bureau of Investigation on Thursday searched over 100 locations in 11 States and Union Territories in connection with more than 30 cases of bank fraud involving over ₹3,700 crore.

The complainant banks include the Indian Overseas Bank, the Union Bank of India, the Bank of Baroda and others.

BJP enabled goons to harass nuns: Priyanka

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

In the clip, a group of men, claiming to be associated with 'Hindu Samaj', were heard questioning the women about their religion and if they were being taken for 'forceful conversion'.

"Which political party runs the government that enables these goons to harass and demand personal details of young women commuting on a train? BJP. Which political party do these goons belong to? BJP. Which party's student wing are some of them members of? BJP. And now that there is an election in Kerala HM



Priyanka Gandhi

@AmitShah is busy giving hollow statements about protecting nuns from harassment. Really?" asked Ms. Gandhi on Twitter.

Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi tweeted on Wed-

niday that "the attack in U.P. on nuns from Kerala is a result of the vicious propaganda run by the Sangh Parivar".

He also tweeted that he would no longer refer to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliates as the Sangh Parivar. "To refer to RSS and its affiliates as Sangh Parivar, in my view, is not right. In a family, there are women, respect for the elderly, love and compassion. RSS has none of this. I won't refer to the RSS as the Sangh Parivar," Mr. Gandhi tweeted on Thursday.

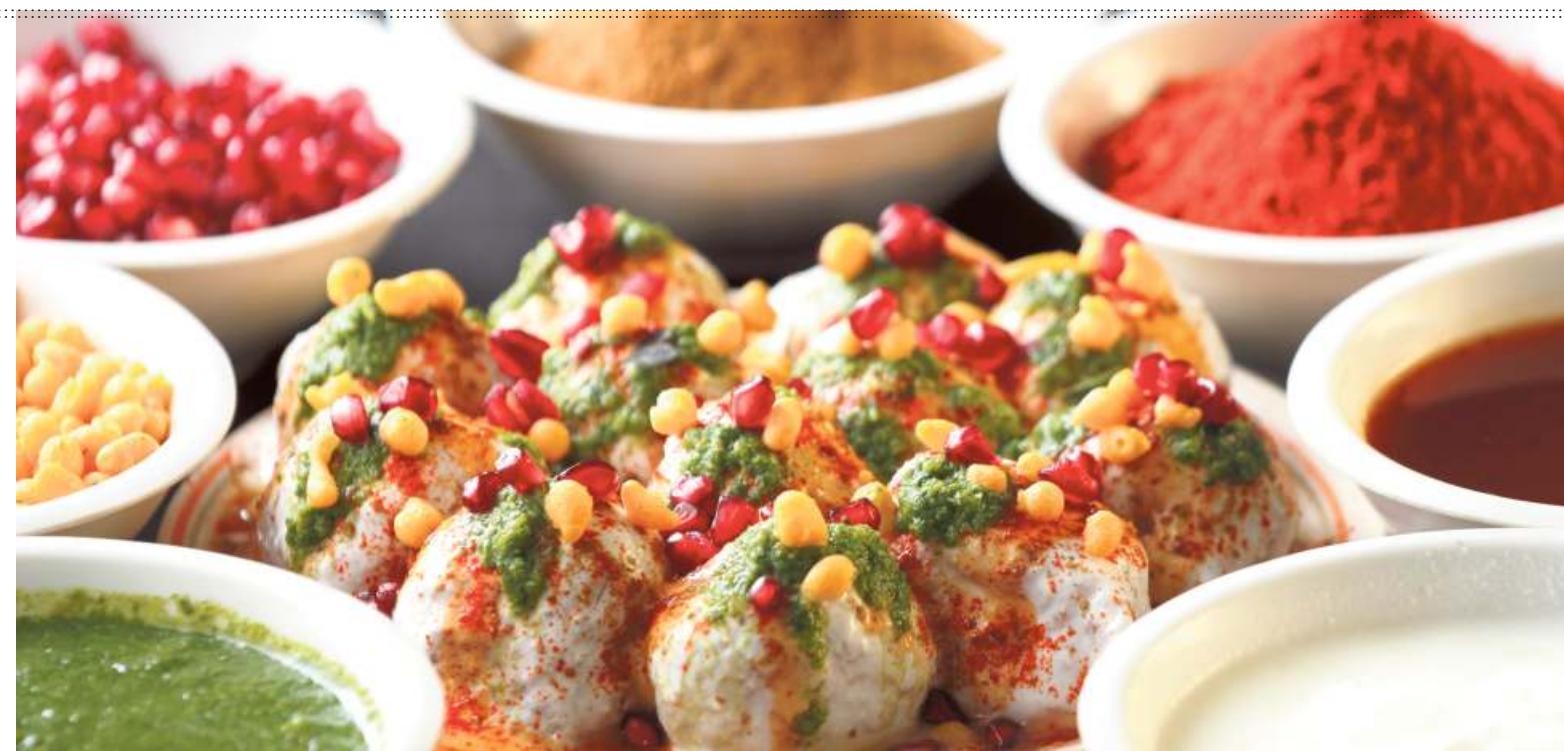
Some dishes and drinks have been irrefutable Holi playmates for aeons. This year, snuggle at home with one such universal favourite — *dahi vada*, with all its shapes, flavours and toppings

PRABALIKA M BORAH

Food in India is decided by season, and the ingredients available in the region one lives in. The festival of colours, Holi is just round the corner and, as the temperature rises, celebrations are incomplete without food that not only tickles your taste-buds, but also cools you down.

Rajani Jain, a home chef in Delhi says, "What better way than cool *dahi vada* after spending hours outside playing Holi?" The *dahi* (curd) cools you down and the common *urad dal vadas*, laced with masalas – cumin, coriander and chat masala powder – bring forth a burst of flavours. "I prefer ginger juliennes on it, with *anar dana* (pomegranate seeds)," she adds.

There are many such preferences and not restricted to toppings alone. There are variations that give this dish an interesting spin, like *vadas*



Vada with verve

made with mixed lentil, *moong dal*, bread, oats or even with *jeera* butter cookies. An illustration to go with Tarla Dalal's recipe, for instance, suggests *vadas* can be made with *jeera* butter

cookies, slightly soaked in lukewarm water before dunking them in a pool of seasoned yoghurt. The mixed lentil variety, also called *masala vada*, consists of *chana dal*, *urad dal* and *moong dal*, all coarsely ground.

The tough question

Dahi vada is a simple dish, but it can get complicated if the *vadas* are not soft enough.

According to chef Garima Poddar, *dahi vadas* are unique, because though they are deep fried, they melt in your mouth. She adds: "A lot of people get stuck with hard *vadas* or *bhallas*. To avoid this, one can soak the fried *vadas* in water for a few seconds, then squeeze the water out gently by pressing them between one's palms and drop them in *dahi*."

Having said that, softness

need not be an obsession, adds Garima, "In Rajasthan, the *vadas* are made with a slightly coarse paste of lentils, so there is a bite to its texture."

Chef Kunal Kapoor suggests that the *urad* batter be made with less or no water, to get soft *vadas*. Whisking the batter well, for quite some time, right before frying the *vadas* will also be helpful, he says.

Season to taste

As for spicing the yoghurt, Garima says, "There is no thumb rule to seasoning the *dahi*. The same applies to its consistency. Some like it thick and creamy, others like it slightly runny. Experiment with what works for your palate on a small quantity of *dahi*."

One of Garima's favourite variations of *dahi vada* is the South Indian version, which uses a runny curd base.

She says, "I also enjoy the tempering on it. One can play it up with any seasoning. I have tasted it with a garnish of *peri peri* masala, and also read about *dahi vada* with Tabasco sauce."

Kunal suggests creative toppings: "It is a season of fruits, so there is no harm in adding chopped fruits such as apples, bananas, grapes or even melons to the whisked yoghurt."

Colourful treat (Clockwise from above) *Dahi vada* with a range of toppings; a *dahi vada alu dum* stall in Cuttack; and a plate of the dish • GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



EXPERIMENTAL MATCHMAKING

Street food lovers in Cuttack, Odisha have created their own twist to the *dahi vada*, pairing it with *alu dum* in a treat exclusive to this city.

The now-iconic street food *dahi vada* and *alu dum* is a fusion experiment that has clicked very well, says consultant chef Rachit Kirteeman.

He elaborates, "The Cuttack region of Odisha produces a lot of milk. So instead of letting it go waste, curd was made. *Vada* is a staple breakfast. Someone who had surplus of both curd and *vada* mixed it together and added the *alu dum* as an unusual accompaniment. *Dahi vada* in Odisha uses diluted curd, so when *alu dum* is added, it becomes a complete dish."

Homemade *dahi vada*

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup *dhuli urad dal* (split black gram)
- 1 chopped green chilli
- 1/2 inch peeled and grated ginger
- A pinch of asafoetida
- 4 tbsp water
- Salt to taste
- Oil for deep frying
- Lukewarm water
- 2 cups thick yoghurt (curd)
- 1 tsp chat masala
- 1 tsp cumin powder (for curd)
- 1 tsp cumin powder (for topping)
- 1/4 tsp black salt
- 2 tsp sugar
- 2 tbsp sweet tamarind chutney
- 2 tbsp coriander and mint chutney
- 1/2 tsp red chilli powder
- 1 tbsp chopped coriander

METHOD

To make the *vada* batter, wash and soak *dal* in water for six hours or overnight. Transfer soaked *dal* to the grinder with chopped green chillies and grated ginger. Grind *dal* without using water, stop mixer in between, stir with a spatula and grind again. Keep doing this at regular intervals. If it still does not turn into a smooth paste, add one or two tablespoons of water, then grind. The idea is to use minimum water. Transfer the paste to a large bowl. Add salt, asafoetida and whisk batter briskly for a couple of minutes or till it is light and fluffy.

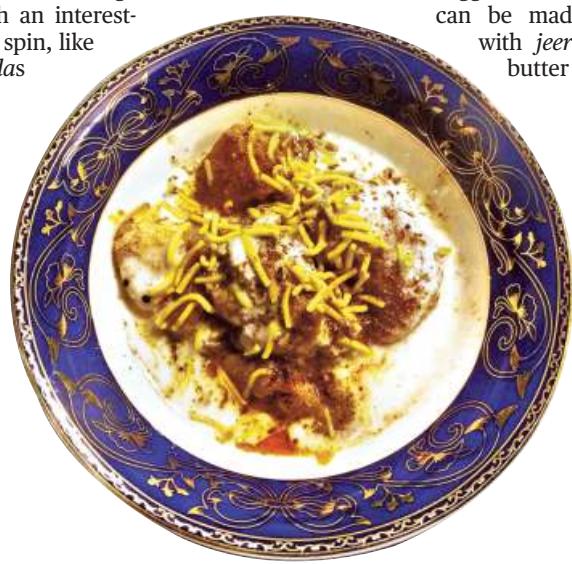
Deep fry the *vadas* over medium heat by shaping small portions of the batter into flat balls with your fingers (dampened with water), or dropping them into the oil with the help of spoons. Allow them to cook as they fry. They can be turned when they are pale golden from the base and sides. Fry until they become crisp.

Soak the *vadas* in lukewarm water in a wide saucenep. Keep enough space for the *vadas* to breathe, as they expand in water. Let them soak for about 10 minutes or until soft and drain out excess water from each *vada* by gently pressing between your palms.

To assemble, first take curd in a bowl. Add salt, cumin powder, sugar and chat masala and whisk till smooth. Dilute the curd and season it to taste.

Arrange *vadas* in a serving bowl. Pour the flavoured curd over the *vadas*, so that it soaks them completely. Top with the green chutney and tamarind chutney. Sprinkle red chilli and cumin powder and chat masala to taste. Garnish *dahi vada* with chopped coriander leaves. Serve chilled.

Recipe by Hina Gujral



Jaishri P Rao documents the culinary and cultural heritage of the Thanjavur Maharashtrian community

CHITRADEEPANANTHARAM

Jaishri P Rao has spent over a decade collecting information on the traditions, rituals and cuisine of the Maharashtrians settled in Thanjavur.

Her initial idea was to bring out a booklet for the community, but the information proved too voluminous. The result of her research has now been published as *Classic Cuisine and Celebrations of the Thanjavur Maharashtrians*.

Chennai-based Jaishri took up this task after her elder son was employed overseas and younger one joined university. "The Thanjavur Maharashtrian diaspora is spread across the globe, and assuming that both my sons would one day leave the country, I wished to preserve our community's unique cooking traditions and cultural heritage for the next generation," says Jaishri.

The book features over 150 recipes, many of which are offered as *naivedyam* (prayer offerings) during festivals, besides everyday dishes and delicacies.

As festivals and religious rituals are a quintessential part of Maharashtrian culture, the author has structured the book chronologically, starting with the festival of Gudi Padwa in the month of Chaitra (March/April) and ending with the festival of Shimga Puneva (Holi) that falls in the month of Phalgun (February/March).

"As the community follows all rituals and celebrates festivals with fervour, I decided to follow this structure, where I mention the festival, talk about the rituals involved, and the dishes associated with a particular celebration," says Jaishri.

In the section on Gudi Padwa, she lists staple heritage dishes such as *puran poli*, *chinch bhath* (tamarind rice), *limbacha bhath* (lemon rice), *vaangi bhath* (brinjal rice), *ambode* (a deep-fried spicy snack made



HORS D'OEUVRES

A jumbo little treat

Mad Over Donuts has partnered with Eros International's upcoming multilingual film *Haathi Mere Saathi*, and *Kaadan*, an adventure drama in three languages, set to release today as *Haathi Mere Saathi/ Kaadan/Aranya* in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu respectively. Plot and Rana Daggubati's star power aside, this is another reason to be excited about the film. There are now elephant-themed donuts you can pick up to celebrate the film's release. As part of the partnership, a limited-edition doughnut paying tribute to the elephant, a key element of the movie, has been put on offer. It is filled with dark chocolate ganache, topped with dark chocolate and colourful sprinkles, finished up with an elephant design on top. These themed donuts will be available from March 19 to April 4 across Mad Over Donuts outlets around the country, as well as on delivery through moddelivery.com, Swiggy and Zomato.



Ice-cold comfort food

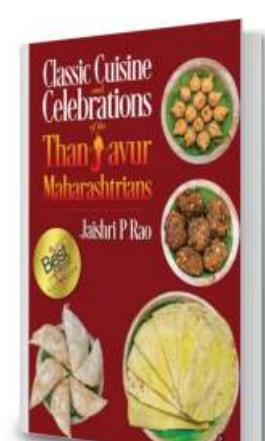
MyFroyoLand, a self-serve frozen yoghurt parlour franchise that lets customers mix and match flavours and toppings, has opened its first outlet in Hyderabad. One can pick a regular cup or waffle cup and fill it with any combination of flavours and toppings from the yoghurt bar with over 100 flavours. Cake batter, chocolate cupcake, peach sorbet, blueberry cheesecake and green apple tart are among the flavours on offer. The topping counter has a selection of candies, chocolates, marshmallows, sprinkles, jellies and fresh fruits, that can be drizzled with a wide variety of sauces. Customers pay by the weight of their concoctions. All products are pure vegetarian, low-fat, non-fat, gluten-free and sugar-free. Vegan options are also available. So far, MyFroyoLand Frozen Yogurt has over 15 stores in Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Pune and Nagpur.



Rolling out superhero oat products

Marvel Avengers fans are in for a treat as Oateo, a multinational oats brand has introduced a superhero-themed oat-based food product range recently. The target audience, style and design were also considered for superhero character associations – for instance, Iron Man is amongst the most popular Marvel characters in India, and so he is paired with Instant Oats which is Oateo's top seller. Priced at ₹50 onwards, the products also include Black Panther Rolled Oats, Captain America Steel Cut oats, Hulk Oats Flour, Deadpool Muesli, Mad Mix and Hulk Muesli Tropical Mix. They are available online (amazon.in, flipkart.com, shopclues.com) and in major grocery stores.

Traditional fare, ethnic flair



with *dal*, *pitha* (mixed veg and lentil curry cooked in tamarind water), *kadi* (buttermilk-based curry) and other recipes.

Over three centuries, the Thanjavur Maharashtrians have also created new dishes, influenced by the Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka cuisines.

"*Pitha* and *daangar* (*urad dal*

flour blended with curd) are typical Thanjavur Maharashtrian dishes, evolved over a period of time.

"Early migrants also replaced certain ingredients with locally available ones. For example, *copra* (dried coconut) is widely used in many Maharashtrian dishes, but in our community freshly grated coconut is roasted and then used to get the *copra* taste," she says.

Coriander seeds, cumin and coconut are the dominant spices used in this cuisine.

"We use various spice powders toasted in a minimal amount of oil to flavour the dishes.

The simplicity of preparation with a good balance of spiciness is the hallmark of Thanjavur Maharashtrian cuisine," says Jaishri.

A classic combination is *ambat bhaja*, *daangar* and *kaatracha misirringa* (mor molaga Thanjavur style). "*Ambat bhaja* is a signature

dish of our community.

This spinach *sambhar* is prepared with a liberal amount of *toor dal*, spiced with green chillies and seasoned with mustard, dry chillies and fenugreek. In sweets, *puran poli*, *doodh poli* and *besan ladoo* top the list."

Methkoot and *daangar* are typical examples of the protein-rich diet of this diaspora. *Methkoot* is a powder made using a mix of lentils such as *toor*, *chanai*, *moong* and *urad*.

Coriander, cumin and dry ginger are used to flavour this powder, which can be used in multiple ways as an accompaniment or even mixed with curd or tamarind water.

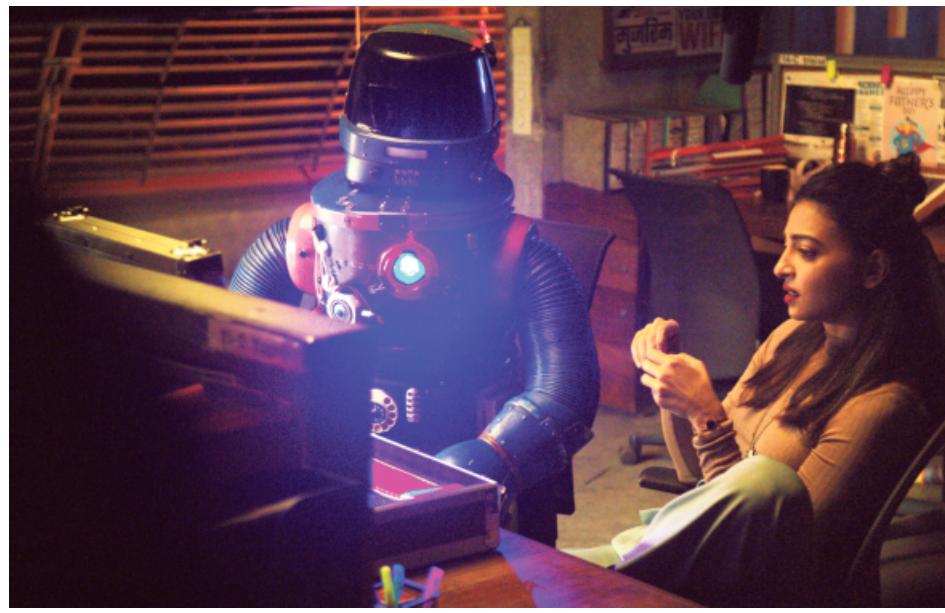
"The book has been well received by the diaspora, especially the younger generation, and it has also won the Best Vegetarian Cuisine Book in the World Award by Gourmand International for the year 2020," says Jaishri. The book and Kindle versions are available on Amazon.



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How Radhika Apte adapted to working with machines for sci-fi comedy *OK Computer*, releasing today on Disney+Hotstar



MY robot FRIEND

PRAVEEN SUDEVAN

In September 2015, one of Google's self-driving cars ran into a conundrum. Upon detecting a pedestrian crossing the road, it applied the brakes as programmed. The pedestrian was safe. But the car was damaged as a human-driven sedan crashed into it from behind. Apart from the wreckage, this accident also triggered an ethical mess: in a similar situation, should a speeding self-driving car try to protect its passenger or the pedestrian?

The upcoming sci-fi comedy *OK Computer* (created by Anand Gandhi, Neil Padgar, and Pooja Shetty) deals with a similar dilemma. A self-driving taxi is hacked and ordered to kill an anonymous human. Who should be held responsible?

Amid this imbroglio is Radhika Apte, who plays robot rights activist Laxmi Suri. The setting, the genre, the character and even the OTT platform (*OK Computer* is a Disney+Hotstar show) are new to her. The actor talks about working with robots, the philosophy in science fiction among other things. Excerpts:

What made you sign up for the series?

• I loved the writing. I read all six episodes in one go; I couldn't put the script down. It is a unique genre, too – a sci-fi comedy murder mystery, which is also a mockumentary. The makers, Neil and Pooja, were extremely original in their vision. They weren't corrupted by any other influences. I also haven't done anything like this character before. Neither have I explored this kind of comedy before. It made me a bit nervous but excited at the same time.

You said that working with robots was fun and that they were really helpful. Can you describe the experience?

• The bigger robots in the show had people in them. But AJEEB (the AI in the show) was basically Ullas Mohan, who was in-

credible. He brought AJEEB to life. There were also a few bots, which were actual machines.

It was fascinating to have them around, doing things that humans usually do. After a while, you start feeling affectionate towards them.

What makes them endearing?

• It has to do with the novelty, I think. There was a time when a person used to grind things manually. Then, when a mixer came, that person would have felt something towards it. With robots, yes, it is a different ballgame, because it has limbs and a face like a human.

There are movies like *The Terminator* and *The Matrix* because of which people fear the advancement of AI and robots to an extent. Do your view on robots and AI match your character, Laxmi Suri's?

• Laxmi Suri's point of view is extreme. I don't even have that much information to have an opinion.

I am not a person who is curious about AI. But when you see Maushi (a robot in the series) doing things for you, you get a feeling that they can't possibly be harmful.

It evokes existential questions. I also got to watch a lot of clips from shows and documentaries about robots in the world.

There were a lot of questions for which I don't know the answers though I find them exciting.

What are your favourite AI/robot films?

• I like *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *The Terminator*. I like *The Fly* because it is philosophical. I am not heavily into sci-fi.

There aren't many futuristic sci-shows or films set in the Indian milieu. Was it challenging to imagine the scenarios in *OK Computer*?

• Not really. It is not too far off from where we live. It was challenging because of the character and the kind of comedy; not because it is AI-related. Even if you forget this is about robots and AI, the way the characters move and how they are – that style and approach is original anyway.



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That way, you can ask if a car is a harmful machine? It can be... if you use it badly. You do not think about such things because it doesn't have a face. When a Maushi robot has a face, you think about whether it is good or evil.

Anand Gandhi's works raise philosophical discussions. This one too seems to have ethical and moral dilemmas. Did you just focus on your role or did you engage with these philosophical questions?

• I spent most of the time with Neil and Pooja, who were on the sets. And, we did have such conversations.

Any sci-fi is based on philosophy. It is just not about, 'Oh, look, a flying machine.'

It evokes existential questions. I also got to watch a lot of clips from shows and documentaries about robots in the world.

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• I like *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *The Terminator*. I like *The Fly* because it is philosophical. I am not heavily into sci-fi.

There aren't many futuristic sci-shows or films set in the Indian milieu. Was it challenging to imagine the scenarios in *OK Computer*?

• Not really. It is not too far off from where we live. It was challenging because of the character and the kind of comedy; not because it is AI-related. Even if you forget this is about robots and AI, the way the characters move and how they are – that style and approach is original anyway.

What made you sign up for the series?

• I loved the writing. I read all six episodes in one go; I couldn't put the script down. It is a unique genre, too – a sci-fi comedy murder mystery, which is also a mockumentary. The makers, Neil and Pooja, were extremely original in their vision. They weren't corrupted by any other influences. I also haven't done anything like this character before. Neither have I explored this kind of comedy before. It made me a bit nervous but excited at the same time.

You said that working with robots was fun and that they were really helpful. Can you describe the experience?

• The bigger robots in the show had people in them. But AJEEB (the AI in the show) was basically Ullas Mohan, who was in-

SUSAN JOE PHILIP

Manya Cherabuddi is gathering marigold, hibiscus and other flowers and boiling them to extract the pigments. "This is how Holi was traditionally celebrated; but somewhere along the line, it was replaced by mass-produced synthetic colours," says the 28-year-old natural colour artist based in Hyderabad.

Many who have been conducting workshops on natural colours for the past two years, is among the growing tribe of people choosing to go eco-friendly for the popular festival of colours. Over the past few years home-grown brands have also come up with ways to help people celebrate Holi, guilt-free.

Avani, a Kumaon-based cooperative founded in 2012, produces an organic range of Holi colours in five shades. "The orange shade is from the flame of the forest, blue from Himalayan indigo, yellow from turmeric, green a combination of turmeric and indigo and lac from a resinous secretion from the lac insects," explains Rashmi Bharti, co-founder of Avani.

They have a model where local farmers convert wastelands to produce raw materials. "We work with 600 farmers and have around 150 acres of land to grow our raw materials. The pigments are also used to dye clothes and create organic crayons."

The organisation uses rice flour as the base and the organic colours are mixed with it. "Dyes and detergents are the major cause of pollution of our water bodies, soil and ocean. When we choose not to use them, we are contributing less to the pollution. Then we oblige the chemical manufacturers to shift to making nature-friendly products," says Rashmi.

Natural colours not only require less water to wash off but the runoff also will not pollute groundwater.

Many organisations also use recycled flowers to make pigments. Visakhapatnam-based GreenWaves Environmental Solutions collects floral waste from temples to make their organic Holi colours, with the help of a small team of women.

This year the startup, which specialises in e-waste recycling and eco-friendly products, is offering Holi colours in yellow, green, pinkish-red and purple for the first time. "The yellow is made from marigold and turmeric that are collected from seven temples across Visakhapatnam. Our collection drive started in the last week of February. On average, we collect nearly a ton of temple floral waste every month," says Potluri Anil Chowdary, managing director of GreenWaves Environmental Solutions.

The green is from neem and tulsi leaves, pinkish-red from rose petals and beetroot is used to make the purple Holi colour. "A major part of the production time goes into drying the floral waste since most flowers are collected in a wet or semi-wet condition. Once dry, it takes a day to complete the process of turning it into Holi colours. Every element in the colours is natural; you can even smell the fragrance of natural product in the colours," says Chowdary.

For the past four years, Bengaluru-based NGO, Craftizen Foundation, has been selling skin-friendly Holi colours labelled Petalists made from discarded flowers col-



Colours of (and for) the Earth

As Holi nears, here is a look at some home-grown brands that offer organic, skin-safe colours to make your celebrations guilt-free



Safe and vibrant
(Top) Extracting natural colour from recycled flowers by Phool.co; (left) people with intellectual disabilities making colours for the Craftizen Foundation ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

lected from temples and even marriage halls.

"The production is done by 200 people with intellectual disabilities from four organisations – NIMHANS, Grameena Abhyudaya Seva Samstha (GASS), Orione Seva and Richmond Fellowship Society, in the city. We provide the training and also market their products," explains Mayura Balasubramanian, founder of Craftizen.

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POOCH CAFE



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



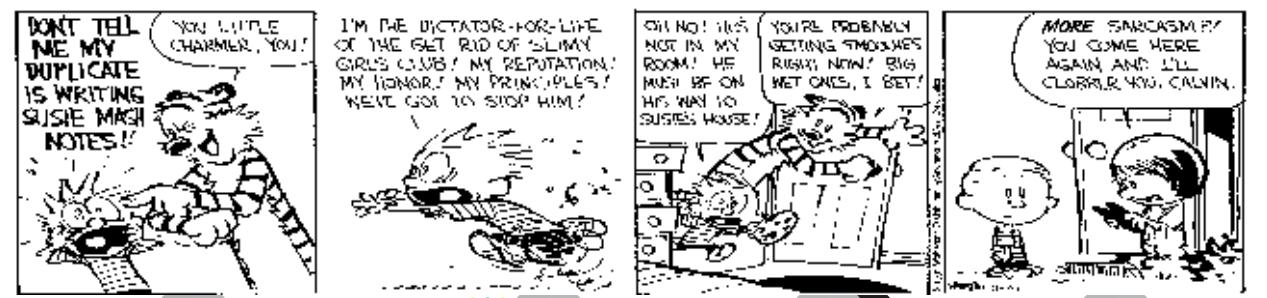
PEANUTS



TIGER



CALVIN AND HOBBES



Suez Canal temporarily halts navigation

Shipping specialists warn it could take days or even weeks to refloat vessel

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

The owners of a giant container vessel blocking the Suez Canal said on Thursday that they were facing "extreme difficulty" refloating it, prompting Egypt to suspend navigation through one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

The Suez Canal Authority (SCA) said it was trying to refloat the Panama-flagged MV *Ever Given*, a 400-metre-long vessel that veered off course and ran aground in a sandstorm on Tuesday.

Satellite pictures released by Planet Labs Inc show the 59-metre-wide container ship wedged diagonally across the entire canal.

Japanese ship-leasing firm Shoei Kisen Kaisha said it owned the giant vessel and

was facing "extreme difficulty" trying to refloat it. "In cooperation with local authorities and Schulte Shipmanagement, a vessel management company, we are trying to refloat [the ship], but we are facing extreme difficulty," Shoei Kisen Kaisha said in a statement on its website.

As shipping specialists warned it could take days or even weeks to budge the vessel, the Suez Canal Authority announced it was "temporarily suspending navigation".

New dredger
Maritime sources told AFP on Thursday that a new dredger had been deployed to speed up the operation while northern convoy ships remain docked in the waiting areas of the canal.



Jammed up: Two tugboats next to the MV *Ever Given* at the Suez Canal on Thursday. ■ AP

"We've never seen anything like it before," said Ranjith Raja, an oil and shipping researcher at international financial data firm Refinitiv. "It is likely that the congestion ... will take several days or weeks to sort out as it will have a knock-on effect on other convoys."

The blockage has already

hit world oil markets. Crude futures surged 6% on Wednesday as traders assessed the likely impact on deliveries. Broker Braemar warned that if tug boats are unable to move the giant vessel, some of its cargo might have to be removed by crane barge to refloat it. "This can take days, maybe weeks," it said.

The vessel's managers, Singapore-based Schulte Shipmanagement, said its 25 crew were unhurt and the hull and cargo undamaged.

A MarineTraffic map showed large clusters of vessels circling as they waited in both the Mediterranean to the north and the Red Sea to the south. Historic sections of the canal were reopened in a bid to ease the bottleneck, with dozens of ships waiting at both ends of the waterway.

It is an "absolutely critical" route because "all traffic arriving from Asia goes through the Suez Canal", said Camille Egloff, maritime transport specialist at Boston Consulting Group.

Nearly 19,000 ships passed through the canal last year carrying more than one billion tonnes of cargo, according to the SCA. Egypt earned \$5.61 billion in revenues from the canal in 2020.

Will run for presidency in 2024 too, says Joe Biden

He addresses first press conference after assuming office

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

WASHINGTON
At his first press conference since assuming office on January 20, U.S. President Joe Biden said he expected to run again for the presidency in 2024.



Joe Biden addressing a press conference on Thursday.

Trump following talks with the Taliban. He, however, added that he did not expect to have troops there next year. There are between 2,500 and 3,500 U.S. troops in the country, as per differing estimates.

On China, Mr. Biden recounted a two-hour conversation he had as President with Xi Jinping and said he told him that he was not looking for confrontation but he knew there would be "steep, steep competition" and that he would insist that China play by the rules.

Mr. Biden also talked about shoring up alliances, including with European allies, with whom he was scheduled to hold talks later in the day.

N. Korea launches 'ballistic missiles'

This threatens the peace and security of the region, says Japanese PM Suga

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SEOUL
North Korea fired two suspected ballistic missiles into the sea on Thursday in its first substantive provocation to the new U.S. administration of Joe Biden.

The nuclear-armed North has a long history of using weapons tests to ramp up tensions, in a carefully calibrated process to try to forward its objectives. Donald Trump's first year in office was marked by a series of escalating launches, accompanied by a war of words between him and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

Pyongyang had been bidding its time since the new administration took office, not even officially acknowledging

ing its existence until last week.

But Seoul's joint chiefs of staff said the North fired two short-range missiles into the Sea of Japan, known as the East Sea in Korea, from South Hamgyong province.

They travelled 450 km and reached a maximum altitude of 60 km, the JCS added, and after an emergency meeting South Korea's National Security Council expressed "deep concern" at the launch. North Korea is banned from developing any ballistic missiles under UN Security Council resolutions and is under multiple international sanctions over its weapons programmes.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga was unequi-



voval, telling reporters that "North Korea launched two ballistic missiles".

It had been a year since the last such incident, he added, saying, "This threatens the peace and security of our country and the region. It is also a violation of the UN resolution."

Tokyo said they came down outside the waters of

Japan's exclusive economic zone. Pyongyang has made rapid progress in its capabilities under Mr. Kim, testing missiles capable of reaching the entire continental United States as tensions mounted in 2017.

Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim then embarked on an extraordinary diplomatic bromance, holding two headline-grabbing summits in Singapore and Vietnam. The U.S. pulled back on some joint military exercises with South Korea while the North froze intercontinental ballistic missile tests.

However, the February 2019 Hanoi summit broke up over sanctions relief and what North Korea would be willing to give up in return.

The Philippine military ordered the deployment of more navy ships to the South China Sea on Thursday amid a growing diplomatic row over a fleet of Chinese boats parked near a disputed reef.

China claims almost the entirety of the resource-rich sea, and was accused by the United States this week of efforts to "intimidate and provoke others" by parking its vessels near the Whitsun Reef.

In hot water: A satellite picture shows Chinese boats anchored at the Whitsun Reef on Tuesday. ■ AP



In hot water: A satellite picture shows Chinese boats anchored at the Whitsun Reef on Tuesday. ■ AP

Forces of the Philippines said the additional navy ships would carry out "sovereignty patrols" in the waterway. He did not say if the ships would go near the reef or what type of vessels would be used.

The diplomatic row has escalated with several countries, including Canada, Australia and Japan, expressing concern over the renewed tensions in the region. Beijing often invokes the so-called nine-dash line to justify its apparent historic rights over most of the South China Sea, parts of which are also claimed by Taiwan, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei. China has ignored a 2016 international tribunal decision that declared its assertion as without basis.

Manila sends more ships to South China Sea

Diplomatic row intensifies over a fleet of Chinese vessels at a disputed reef

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MANILA

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Incursion of territory: Manila has ordered Beijing to recall 183 boats at the reef around 320 km west of Palawan Island, describing their presence as an incursion of its sovereign territory.

Around 220 boats were detected by the Philippine coast guard on March 7, but this was made public last weekend.

A military aerial patrol over the reef on Monday found

183 of them were still there. China says the fishing boats are sheltering from poor weather near the reef, which it claims is part of the contested Spratly Islands. A spokesman for the Armed

Biden chooses Harris to lead efforts to tackle migration

She will be responsible for developing a long-term plan

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

U.S. President Joe Biden has tapped Vice-President Kamala Harris to lead the White House effort to tackle the migration challenge at the U.S. southern border and work with Central American nations to address the root causes of the problem.

Mr. Biden made the announcement as he and Ms. Harris met at the White House on Wednesday with Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and other immigration advisers

to discuss the increase in the number of migrants, including many unaccompanied minors, arriving at the border in recent weeks.

"When she speaks, she speaks for me," Mr. Biden said, noting that her work as California's Attorney-General makes her specially equipped to lead the administration's response.

Ms. Harris is tasked with overseeing efforts to deal with issues spurring migration in the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, as well as pressing them to strengthen enforcement on their own borders, officials said. She is also tasked with developing and implementing a long-term strategy that gets at the root causes of migration from those countries. Mr. Biden suggested former President Donald Trump's decision to cut \$450 million funding in 2019 to the region was partly to blame for the situation.

COVID-19 deaths in Brazil cross 300,000

Bolsonaro under fire from leaders

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAO PAULO

Brazil was in a political disarray as it surpassed 3,00,000 COVID-19 deaths on Wednesday evening. Foes and allies alike are pleading with President Jair Bolsonaro to change course to stem a recent surge of daily deaths accounting for almost one-third of the total worldwide.

Shifting rhetoric: Mr. Bolsonaro this month began shifting rhetoric on the value of vaccines but continues to refuse restrictions on activity he paints as infringement on personal freedom and still promotes

unproven COVID-19 cures.

"Should I change my narrative? Should I become more malleable? Should I give in? Do what the vast majority is doing?" Mr. Bolsonaro said on Monday during a ceremony at the presidential palace.

"There is a lot of solidarity, but everything has its limit. Everything," the House's speaker, Bolsonaro ally Arthur Lira, said in Congress. Another prominent senator from a centrist party anticipates the chamber opening an investigation next month. That could further damage Mr. Bolsonaro's popularity ahead of his 2022 re-election bid.

COVID-19 deaths in Brazil cross 300,000

As crackdown widens, Belarus opposition to restart protests

Demonstrators plan nationwide firework salute, flash mobs

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MINSK

Opposition activists in Belarus were preparing for fresh protests on Thursday to breathe life into a movement against President Alexander Lukashenko that fizzled out in the face of a severe crackdown.

The authorities were moving military vehicles into the centre of the capital Minsk in preparation, according to videos circulating on social media and published by local media.

Rallies erupted in the ex-Soviet country last August after President Lukashenko claimed a sixth term in a vote the opposition and Western diplomats said was rigged. But a sustained police crackdown saw weekly mass demonstrations in city centres peter out by the end of the year, with thousands

of protesters detained and several killed.

The opposition has since changed tactics, calling for supporters to gather in small groups in every district.

The Nexta Telegram channel, which has mobilised and coordinated demonstrations, urged protesters to march through courtyards and organise flash mobs on Thursday. It called on drivers across the country to sound their horns at 6:30 p.m. (1530 GMT) and for a nationwide firework salute to end the day at 9:00 p.m.

"We want to declare March 25 the day when the cities are ours!" Nexta wrote.

The resumption of the protests coincides with Freedom Day in Belarus, which the Opposition marks each year on the anniversary of the country's declaration of independence in 1918.

Officials have said the planned protests are illegal and have moved to crack down on dissent this week, accusing a group representing Polish people in Belarus of stirring up racial hatred and the "rehabilitation of Nazism". Police detained the head of the Union of Poles in Belarus, Anzhelika Boris, for 15 days on Wednesday and searched the group's offices, the homes of its activists and at least one Polish school.

AHMEDABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION E-Governance Department

RFP NO:- AMC-E-GOVERNANCE SOLUTIONS-2021-22-01

Request for Proposal for Operation, Maintenance and Enhancement Support of E-Governance Solution and Maintenance of Existing Mini Data Center of Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation.

Submission Up to

Date :- 16/04/2021 , Time:- 16:00

Detail & Tender available on

www.nprocure.com and www.ahmedabadcity.gov.in

For Any AMC Complain call : 155303

		GOVT. OF ODISHA e-mail: se_nerwkrj@rediffmail.com		AHMEDABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION E-Governance Department		
				"e" Procurement Notice for Road Works Identification No. Road Online NCB No.298 No.1365/ Date : 24.03.2021		
				Request for Proposal for Operation, Maintenance and Enhancement Support of E-Governance Solution and Maintenance of Existing Mini Data Center of Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation.		
Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender On-line for bidding	From	To	Last Date & Time of seeking Tender Clarification	Date & Time of Opening of Tender in O/S E.N.E.R.W.CIRCLE.Keonjhar.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Superintending Engineer, North Eastern Rural Works Circle, Keonjhar.	Road Online NCB No. 298	Dt.31.03.21 at 11.00 A.M.	DL.15.04.21 up to 5.00 P.M.	Dt.13.04.21 up to 5.00 P.M.	DL.16.04.21 at 11.00 A.M.	Will be intimated later
• Further details can be seen from the website: www.tendersrossia.gov.in						
Sd/- Superintending Engineer, N.E.R.W.CIRCLE, Keonjhar.						
O-1292: OPR-25048/11/0027/2021						

MARKET WATCH

	25-03-2021	% CHANGE
Sensex	48,440	-1.51
US Dollar	72.62	-0.10
Gold	44,347	0.00
Brent oil	61.49	-3.10

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	688.25	-18.60
Asian Paints	2402.20	-41.35
Axis Bank	694.60	-11.80
Bajaj Auto	3501.60	-101.95
Bajaj Finserv	9057.55	-144.50
Bajaj Finance	5122.20	-148.10
Bharti Airtel	507.75	-15.90
BPCL	418.95	-11.00
Britannia Ind	3443.85	-93.90
Cipla	787.25	-5.70
Coal India	128.10	-4.20
Divis Lab	3450.20	-30.95
Dr Reddys Lab	4380.55	30.05
Eicher Motors	2580.45	-80.20
GAIL (India)	128.00	-3.00
Grasim Ind	1372.75	-14.90
HCL Tech	957.05	-18.60
HDFC	2470.75	5.00
HDFC Bank	1463.35	-15.45
HDFC Life	667.00	-9.50
Hero MotoCorp	2941.65	-92.20
Hindalco	314.00	-3.75
Hind Unilever	2237.05	-81.55
ICICI Bank	571.55	4.05
IndusInd Bank	957.80	-0.90
Infosys	1333.80	-19.95
Indian Oil Corp	90.90	-3.65
ITC	211.60	-4.35
JSW Steel	438.00	0.65
Kotak Bank	1762.90	-19.55
L&T	1371.10	1.95
M&M	791.70	-19.70
Maruti Suzuki	6786.85	-279.35
Nestle India Ltd.	16170.10	-278.00
NTPC	103.00	-3.00
ONGC	102.00	-2.80
PowerGrid Corp	216.40	-4.65
Reliance Ind	1991.45	-55.85
SBI Life	864.10	-16.60
State Bank	355.20	-4.65
Shree Cement	27580.35	-222.95
Sun Pharma	575.75	-9.55
Tata Motors	285.55	-8.90
Tata Steel	723.15	20.35
TCS	3064.85	-56.25
Tech Mahindra	968.70	-23.45
Titan	1450.85	-37.30
UltraTech Cement	6666.50	-192.15
UPL	595.65	-13.20
Wipro	399.65	-11.35

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	72.42	72.74
Euro	85.51	85.89
British Pound	99.21	99.65
Japanese Yen (100)	66.39	66.69
Chinese Yuan	11.07	11.12
Swiss Franc	77.41	77.76
Singapore Dollar	53.74	54.01
Canadian Dollar	57.55	57.80
Malaysian Ringgit	17.46	17.55

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



Mercedes unveils A Class limousine at ₹39.9 lakh

MUMBAI

Mercedes-Benz India has introduced the A-Class limousine in the Indian market. It is the longest and tallest in its segment and priced at (ex-showroom) ₹39.9 lakh for A-Class 200 (petrol). "We are confident the A-Class Limo will attract a lot of new customers," said Martin Schwenk, MD and CEO of the company.

Chola MS Risk, Denxpert to unveil legal software

CHENNAI

Cholamandalam MS Risk Services Ltd. has partnered Hungary-based Denxpert EHS&S Software Ltd. to introduce the latter's legal software in India. Denxpert Legal is a digital tool for regulatory mapping and assurance in matters pertaining to environment health and safety. This will help industries comply with legal regulations.

SPORT

Indian women take gold in 25m sports pistol

Rahi, Chinki and Manu put on a resounding display; silver in women's 50m rifle 3-position

SHOOTING WC

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

There was cheer in the Indian camp as Rahi Sarnobat, Chinki Yadav and Manu Bhaker combined strongly to win the 25 metre sports pistol team gold with a resounding 17-7 victory over Poland in the shooting World Cup at the Dr. Karni Singh Range, Tughlakabad, on Thursday.

Even though it was a collective triumph, Asian Games gold medallist Rahi, who was pushed to the silver in the individual event by Chinki, was a class act.

In 12 series, Rahi has a perfect 5 six times, a 4 five times and once a three. Out of 60 rapid fire shots, she missed

Das sees no reason to cut FY22 forecast

Vaccines, COVID-19 awareness, lesser likelihood of lockdown offer insurance on growth: RBI Governor

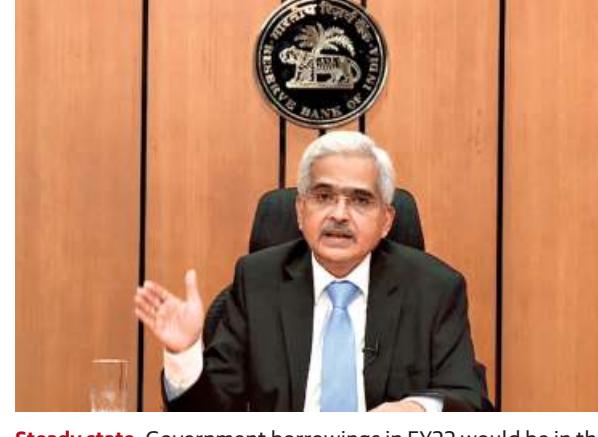
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Despite the fresh threat from rising COVID-19 cases, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) chief maintained the central bank's forecast for GDP growth in FY22 at 10.5%.

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said though the renewed surge in COVID-19 cases in many parts of India was a concern, this time around growth would continue unabated.

He said the Reserve Bank remained "fully committed" to use all policy tools to secure a robust recovery of the economy from the debilitating effects of the pandemic.

"We have to keep in mind that this time around, compared to where we were last year, let us say in March or April, we have some additional insurance against the



Steady state: Government borrowings in FY22 would be in the same range as they have been this year, says Mr. Das. ■ PTI

impact of the COVID-19 pandemic," he said in his inaugural virtual address at 'The Times Network India Economic Conclave 2021'.

"The first is that the two vaccines which are being rolled out," he said, adding

that the speed of the roll-out had been "very fast" and about 5 crore people had already been vaccinated.

"The second aspect is that overall, by and large people are now used to the COVID-19 protocols. So one

would expect that people who have lowered their guard would step up their guard against the spread of COVID-19 [virus]," he said.

"And third, at this point... one does not foresee a kind of lockdown that we had experienced last year. Because last year, it came as a huge shock. This time we all know what the pandemic is all about, notwithstanding some new strains which have developed," he added.

Preliminary analysis:

Mr. Das asserted, "revival of economic activity which has happened should continue unabated going forward and I don't foresee [a downward revision], although I should not be saying this before the details are presented by our research teams. But my understanding and our preliminary analysis show that the growth rate of 10.5% for next year, which we had given, would not require a downward revision."

To a question on keeping rising bond yields in check, Mr. Das said, "The relationship between the central bank and bond markets need not be combative, it has to be cooperative. We have been emphasising time and again that there should be an orderly evolution of the yield curve and not sudden spikes or any knee-jerk reaction to certain incoming numbers."

Stating that the government's borrowings for the next year would remain in the same range as it had been this year, Mr. Das said that the RBI would manage the borrowings and that there should not be any "disorder in the yield curve".

SEBI extends dividend policy to top 1,000 firms

It aims to bolster governance norms

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

To strengthen corporate governance practices and disclosure requirements, markets regulator SEBI on Thursday decided that the top 1,000 listed firms listed on the stock exchanges should formulate a dividend distribution policy.

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

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

of the end of the board meeting for the day on which such results are considered. SEBI also said that promoters should disclose their intention to delist their company by making an initial public announcement.

The regulator also decided to remove the list of restricted activities or sectors from the definition of venture capital undertaking, to provide flexibility to venture capital funds registered under alternative investment funds in making investments.

The markets watchdog also said listed firms should make available recordings of analyst and investor meets on their websites as well as with stock exchanges within 24 hours or before the next trading day.

Air India likely to incur loss of almost ₹10,000 cr'

Valuation, closer to financial bid stage'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Air India is likely to incur a loss of ₹9,779 crore for the financial year 2020-2021, according to provisional figures shared by the Centre in Lok Sabha on Thursday.

"The COVID-19 pandemic, along with its related impact on the aviation industry, has worsened the financial position of airlines in the country, including Air India," Minister of State for Civil Aviation Hardeep Puri told Parliament.

On whether the latest losses would impact Air India's privatisation, the Minister said, "the valuation of Air India will be done closer to the financial bid stage."



The government has so far received "multiple" expressions of interest after it put the airline under sale in January 2020 and those have been evaluated by transaction adviser EY. As per the process, the adviser will intimate the qualified interested bidders about the next steps for the proposed disinvestment.

'Resolution of stress returns to normal'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHENNAI

IBBI Chairperson M. S. Sahoo said "normalcy" has been restored with respect to resolution of stress under the insolvency law, with the expiry of suspension of fresh proceedings.

Mr. Sahoo said three things are clear now.

The Supreme Court cleared the haze around moratorium on loans. Second, the suspension on initiation of corporate insolvency proceedings in respect of COVID-19 debtors expired on Wednesday. Third, COVID-19 has become the new normal for business. Thus, normalcy is restored for resolution of stress under IBC.

"To achieve this, we want to enter developed markets such as North America and Europe. Most of our products, particularly scooters

TVS Motor to boost premium bike sales

Speth will keep company future-ready, says CMD Venu Srinivasan

N. ANAND
CHENNAI

TVS Motor Company Ltd. (TVSM), a leading two-and-three-wheeler maker, has a global ambition to become a premium motorcycle firm, said CMD Venu Srinivasan.

"The world is changing technically and every vehicle is getting connected or moving towards electric," he said. "With the acquisition of Norton (U.K.'s iconic sporting motorcycle brand), we have a global ambition to become a premium motorcycle firm with 20% of our business coming from premium brands," he told The Hindu.

"To achieve this, we want to double its sales volume. Currently, TVSM is the third largest two-wheeler firm in In-

dia with a revenue of more than ₹18,217 crore. Its premium product offerings include Norton, Apache, Ntorq (a bluetooth-connected scooter) and iQube (a smart electric scooter). As much as 33% of revenue is from international operations and over 10% from premium bikes.

EV, connected bikes

"There is a world out there in terms of electric and connected vehicles, that are future-ready and we need leadership to take us forward."

To achieve this goal, TVSM has appointed Ralf Speth, a global automotive industry veteran and JLR's ex-CEO, as non-executive director. He would take over from Mr. Srinivasan in 2023.

"We have inducted Mr.

Speth to keep the firm future-ready," said Mr. Srinivasan.

"We need a person who can be the chief mentor of the company. He is one of the most respected leaders in the automotive industry globally. He understands quality, patent, design and technology. He has built a company from a small size to a global level."

Asked if he was stepping aside as he was almost 70, Mr. Srinivasan said: "There is no such reason. I am not stepping aside. I will be there as chairman emeritus."

There are nonagenarians in the company supporting us. "The current CEO K.N. Radhakrishnan and JMD Sudarshan Venu will continue. Here, we are talking only about the chairman."

E-com firms bypass rules, Reliance Retail tells govt.

'Complex legal structures deployed'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

India looks to deliver the knockout punch

England suffers major setback as the injured Morgan is ruled out of series; Billings to miss second ODI



Make or break: Kuldeep, low on confidence, will hope to turn it around before it's too late. ■ SPORTZPICS / BCCI

ENGLAND IN INDIA

AMOL KARHADKAR
PUNE

Over the last two months, twice in as many formats has India come back with a bang to win the series, first in the Tests and then the T20Is.

Things will be slightly different on Friday, however. While India will be relishing the opportunity to seal the ODI series with a second successive win, England, the reigning world champion in the 50-over format, will be desperate to stay alive.

In its quest to do an India on India by winning the last two games, England suffered a major setback ahead of the second ODI at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium. Captain Eoin Morgan has been ruled out of the remaining two ODIs while Sam Billings will be unavailable for selection on Friday.

While Morgan batted despite splitting his webbing trying to stop a ball in the series-opener, Billings suffered a shoulder injury when fielding on Tuesday.

Livingstone to play

The England team management, while releasing an update on the second ODI, confirmed on Thursday evening

that Liam Livingstone will make his ODI debut. With no other specialist batsman as a back-up, it will be interesting to see the combination that England is forced to go in with.

India, on the other hand, has plenty of options to replace the injured Shreyas Iyer. A team spokesperson confirmed on Thursday that the No. 4 batsman had been "ruled out of the remainder of the series" after suffering a serious shoulder injury on Tuesday.

India can either draft in Rishabh Pant or hand Suryakumar Yadav an ODI debut. Both have been in superlative form and will be hoping to get some game-time.

Despite criticism of Kuldeep Yadav's ordinary outing in the series-opener, it would be prudent for the team management to back the left-arm wrist-spinner.

Kuldeep has spent most of the last four months on the bench and deserves to be given a longer rope if the management believes he can play a vital role in the T20 World Cup later this year.

For two years prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, Kuldeep and Yuzvendra Chahal had emerged as a lethal spin combination in limited-over

cricket. But with Kuldeep losing – a combination of a reduction in confidence and the slowing of his pace, something that works against a spinner in modern-day cricket – he has moved south in the preferred spinners' list.

If Kuldeep is persisted with on Friday, it may be a make-or-break opportunity for him, with Chahal waiting in the wings to wear India's blues one last time before joining the IPL bandwagon.

Ahead of the series, questions were raised about its context. But with India within touching distance of stunning the World champion and snatching its No. 1 ODI ranking, there will be no dearth of context for Friday's game.

The teams (from):

India: Virat Kohli (Capt.), Rohit Sharma, Shikhar Dhawan, Shubman Gill, Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pandya, Rishabh Pant, K.L. Rahul, Yuzvendra Chahal, Kuldeep Yadav, Krunal Pandya, Washington Sundar, T. Natarajan, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh Krishna, and Shardul Thakur.
England: Jos Buttler (Capt.), Jonny Bairstow, Moeen Ali, Sam Curran, Tom Curran, Liam Livingstone, Matt Parkinson, Adil Rashid, Jason Roy, Ben Stokes, Reece Topley, and Mark Wood.

Match starts at 1.30 p.m.

Nothing beats game-time: Rahul

Talks about the challenges of finding batting rhythm

AMOL KARHADKAR
PUNE

When K.L. Rahul was included as wicketkeeper-batsman ahead of Rishabh Pant in India's team for the opening ODI against England, a lot of eyebrows were raised. But the connoisseurs weren't surprised. After all, since the start of 2020, Rahul has been extremely successful as the preferred gloveman-cum-finisher in the 50-over format.

Despite a horrendous run with the bat in the T20Is, Rahul justified his inclusion with an unbeaten 62 off 43 in a blitzkrieg association with Krunal Pandya that took the game away from England.

Ever since being sidelined with a wrist injury midway through the tour of Australia, Rahul has been deprived of game-time – something he had no qualms admitting he struggled to deal with.

"Being in the middle, playing games is what gives me the best touch, so having not got as much game-time as I would have liked – I won't say did play on mind – but I knew that somehow or the other I'll have to find a way to get myself best prepared with whatever opportunities [I had] at training," Rahul said on Thursday. "In terms of that, I tried to pre-



Letting the bat talk: K.L. Rahul came back strongly after a forgettable T20I series. ■ SPORTZPICS/BCCI

Shreyas to miss IPL

AMOL KARHADKAR
PUNE

Shreyas Iyer will miss IPL 2021 as he is set to undergo surgery on his injured left shoulder just before the tournament begins on April 9.

The Hindu understands that Shreyas, in consultation with the BCCI medical team, has decided to go under the knife on April 8.

Good knocks by Bonner and Mayers

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NORTH SOUND
(ANTIGUA & BERMUDA)

Nkrumah Bonner (84 batting) and Kyle Mayers (50 batting) kept alive the West Indies' hopes of forcing a draw in the first Test against Sri Lanka as the home side reached 181 for two at tea on the fifth day.

Pathum Nissanka's hundred on debut and Niroshan Dickwella's pugnacious 96 solidified Sri Lanka's second innings rearguard with a total of 476 that left the West Indies with a target of 375. **The scores:** Sri Lanka 169 & 476 in 149.5 overs (Lahiru Thirimanne 76, Oshado Fernando 91, Dhananjaya de Silva 50, Pathum Nissanka 103, Niroshan Dickwella 96; Kemar Roach 3/74, Rahkeem Cornwall 3/137 vs West Indies 271 & 181/2 (Nkrumah Bonner 84 batting, Kyle Mayers 50 batting), at tea.

Spectators were barred from the departure ceremony and first leg over ongoing fears about the coronavirus. But they will line the rest of the route during the 121-day relay, which will criss-cross Japan and involve 10,000 runners before the torch lights the Olympic cauldron on July 23.

Organisers are hoping the relay will dispel doubts about holding the Games during a pandemic, and Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashi-

Olympic torch relay finally sets off



Ray of light: Tokyo organisers hope that the relay will dispel doubts about holding the Games during a pandemic. ■ AP

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
IWAKI

The Tokyo Olympics torch relay got underway on Thursday after a year's coronavirus delay, with officials hoping it will be a "ray of light" after the problems caused by the pandemic.

As spectators were barred from the departure ceremony and first leg over ongoing fears about the coronavirus. But they will line the rest of the route during the 121-day relay, which will criss-cross Japan and involve 10,000 runners before the torch lights the Olympic cauldron on July 23.

Organisers are hoping the relay will dispel doubts about holding the Games during a pandemic, and Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashi-

moto called the flame a "ray of light at the end of the darkness".

"This little flame never lost hope and it waited for this day like a cherry blossom bud just about to bloom," she told the ceremony at Fukushima's J-Village sports complex, which was a base for responding to the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Asuka Iwashimizu, one of Japan's 2011 World Cup-winning women's footballers, was the first to carry the rose-gold, cherry blossom-shaped torch, accompanied by former teammates.

She passed the flame to Fukushima high school student Asato Owada, who like all the runners wore an official white tracksuit with a red diagonal stripe.

Saina and Srikanth in last eight

Ira Sharma, along with doubles teams, also advances

ORLEANS MASTERS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PARIS

Saina Nehwal, Ira Sharma and K. Srikanth advanced to the quarterfinals of the Orleans Masters badminton tournament here on Thursday.

Running against time to make it to her fourth Olympics, Saina recovered from an opening game reversal to see off Marie Batomene of France 18-21, 21-15, 21-10 at the Super 100 event, which

is part of BWF's revised Olympic qualification period. Ira, ranked 162, made it to the last eight after beating Bulgaria's World No. 71 Mariya Mitsova 21-18, 21-13.

Among the men, top-seeded K. Srikanth dispatched Malaysian Cheam June Wei 21-17, 22-20 but Chirag Sen bowed out after losing 21-14, 9-21, 17-21 against Hans-Kristian Solberg Vittinghus of Denmark 21-7, 21-13.

Ashwini Ponnappa and N. Sikki Reddy advanced to the quarterfinals on a walkover from the Indonesian duo of Febriana Dwipuji Kusuma & Amalia Cahaya (Indonesia) walkover.

The results (pre-quarterfinals): Men: K. Srikanth bt Cheam June Wei (Mas) 21-17, 22-20; Hans-Kristian Solberg Vittinghus (Den) bt Chirag Sen 14-21, 21-9, 21-17; Brice Leverdez (Fra) bt Kiran George 21-15, 14-21, 21-19.

Doubles: M.R. Arjun & Dhruv Kapila bt Rory Easton & Zach Russ (Eng) 21-11, 21-12; Krishna Prasad Garaga and Vishnu Vardhan Goud Panjala bt Kristian Hoholdt Kramer & Marcus Rinshoj (Den) 21-7, 21-13.

Women: Saina Nehwal bt Marie Batomene (Fra) 18-21, 21-15, 21-10; Ira Sharma bt Maruya Mitsova (Bul) 21-18, 21-13.

Doubles: Ashwini Ponnappa & N. Sikki Reddy bt Febriana Dwipuji Kusuma & Amalia Cahaya (Indonesia) walkover.

Mixed doubles: Dhruv Kapila & Ashwini Ponnappa bt Callum Hemming & Victoria Williams 21-12, 21-18; Nicholas Nohr & Amalie Magelund (Den) bt Pra-naav Jerry Chopra & N. Sikki Reddy 21-10, 21-7.



On course: K. Srikanth stayed in contention with a facile win over Cheam June Wei. ■ INSTAGRAM/ORLEANSMASTERS

Manvir helps India share honours with Oman

Amrinder pulls off quite a few saves



The saviour: Manvir's header made it 1-1 in the 55th minute. ■ AP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DUBAI

India made a fine comeback in the second half to hold Oman 1-1 in a friendly here on Thursday.

India conceded a goal in the 43rd minute as Chinglensana Singh's clearance crossed the goalline after hitting goalkeeper Amrinder Singh.

Manvir Singh scored the equaliser in the 55th minute to help India pull off a rare draw against Oman. India head coach Igor Stimac handed debuts to 10 players.

Oman squandered a penalty in the 27th minute after Rowlin Borges committed a foul

on Abdul Aziz Al Gheilani inside the box.

However, Oman scored when Al Aghbari sent a low cross which Amrinder could not collect cleanly. The ball hit Chinglensana and went in.

India equalised five minutes before the hour mark when Bipin Singh's superb cross from the right flank was headed home by Manvir.

Oman pressed hard for the winner but Amrinder was solid under the bar, effecting fine saves in the 63rd and 65th minutes.

The result: Oman 1 (Chinglensana 43-0g) drew with India 1 (Manvir 55).

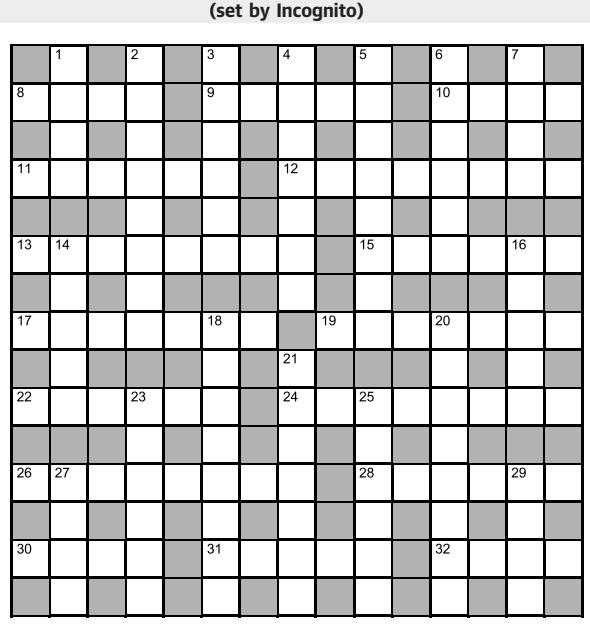


Pathum Nissanka. ■ AFP

CROSSWORD + 13205

(set by Incognito)

Display keystrokes of genius.
Type your answers into our online grids!
@ <https://qrgo.page.link/jjpTn>



ACROSS

- 8 Sound like a pig in fine surroundings (4)
- 9 Charlie takes okra preparation to perish in a toadish way? (5)
- 10 Brown horse's initially rough cry (4)
- 11 Ring with master is for the Lord of the Underworld (6)
- 12 Possessed landing places for boats getting fishes (8)
- 13 Englishman joked, "Supplied with proper tools" (8)
- 14 By means of large moving pictures with sound accompaniment (6)

- 17 Had bad shivering around midnight in capital city (7)
- 19 American brain is addled about initial apathy in Scheherazade's nights, perhaps (7)
- 22 Sister catches little Caitlin and sports-person (6)
- 24 Squash, for example, stray dog trapped within a short distance (8)
- 26 Devious con urges bum (8)
- 28 Shout, "Elbow is bent around middle of niblick" (6)
- 30 Howl like an owl, "Too hot to be returned!" (4)
- 31 Compere and addled notary absent during disturbance of tea ceremony (5)
- 32 Right paddle makes sound possibly heard in the forest (4)
- DOWN
- 1 That chap's sister initially makes sibilant noise (4)
- 2 Kiss him excitedly around end of December and fight! (8)
- 3 Spills catsup and behaves badly (4)
- 4 How dice is cast on leather, for example (7)
- 5 Jumper who may carelessly drop to hasty conclusion (8)
- 6 Overseas sailor's on the street (6)
- 7 Bishop's ship's woody exterior (4)
- 14 Doctor? Yes and No! Perhaps a pretentious "Medical Officer" (5)
- 16 Fine, a hog without tail is an animal! (5)
- 18 Set a piece of cooking equipment in middle of empty road (8)
- 20 Robbers grab URLs deviously (8)
- 21 Indian in southern church makes shrill note (7)
- 23 Solicitors consume king-fishes (6)
- 25 Wired: "Taxi was in the forefront" (6)
- 27 Cold war boast? (4)
- 29 Say, "Part of 8"? That's fine! (4)

SUDOKU

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

TV PICKS

India vs England: 2nd ODI, Star Sports 1 (SD & HD), 1.30 p.m.
Bahrain Grand Prix: Practice, SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 4.50 p.m. & 8.25 p.m.

IN BRIEF



Arjun Maini to race for Mercedes-AMG in DTM

NEW DELHI
Arjun Maini will race for the Mercedes-AMG Performance Team GetSpeed in the upcoming 2021 DTM season, which will have eight rounds and 16 races across Germany and Europe. The 23-year-old Indian, a former Haas F1 Development Driver who is currently backed by JK Racing, is set to become the first Indian to compete in DTM full-time. ANI

New PL season to start on August 14

LONDON
The 2021/22 Premier League football season will begin on the weekend of August 14, it was announced on Thursday. After the ongoing campaign was condensed due to the coronavirus pandemic, the English top flight will revert to its usual starting slot in the second week of August. The season will end on May 22, 2022, with all 10 matches kicking off at same time. AFP



KUALA LUMPUR
Malaysian badminton star Lee Zii Jia downplayed expectations on Thursday that he could win the country's first Olympic gold in Tokyo following his breakthrough victory at the All England Open. "I just want to (go) step by step," he told a press conference. "So far, the progress is going well, so I don't want to put too much pressure on myself. I just want to enjoy the game." AFP

Iqbal delivers for CCFC

I-LEAGUE

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA
Former champion Chennai City FC ended its Hero I-League campaign on a high, beating NEROCA FC 2-1 at the Kishore Bharati Stadium on Thursday.

Mohamed Iqbal netted the winner in added time for Chennai City, which finished third in Group B (relegation leg) with 15 points from 14 outings.

Demir Avdic had scored the opening goal for Chennai City in the first half before NEROCA's Romtan Singh equalised in the final minute of the second half.

NEROCA tallied eight points from 14 matches to finish at the bottom.

Aizawl FC scored two late goals to overcome the challenge of debutant Sudeva Delhi FC 2-1 at the Kalyani Municipal Stadium.

Kean Lewis put Sudeva ahead in the 42nd minute before substitute Rohmingthanga Bawite levelled it for Aizawl in the 90th.

Vanlalremdika strikes
Brandon Vanlalremdika found the target from the spot in the final minute of injury time to trigger celebrations in the Aizawl camp. Sudeva was reduced to 10 men in the 34th minute when Sairuatkima was sent off.

Aizawl finished on top of the group with 24 points from 14 matches while Sudeva was second with 18.

The results: NEROCA 1 (Romtan Singh 90) lost to Chennai City 2 (Demir Avdic 24, Mohamed Iqbal 90+4).

Aizawl FC 2 (Rohmingthanga Bawite 90, Brandon Vanlalremdika 90+6-pen) bt Sudeva Delhi FC 1 (Kean Lewis 42).

Turkey shock for the Netherlands

Portugal manages to overcome Azerbaijan; Ukraine holds France; Belgium beats Wales

WC QUALIFIERS

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

The Netherlands slumped to a dramatic 4-2 defeat against Turkey in its opening 2022 World Cup qualifier on Wednesday, while reigning champion France was held by Ukraine despite a brilliant Antoine Griezmann goal and Belgium came from behind to beat Wales.

European champion Portugal battled to a 1-0 victory over Azerbaijan, but 2018 World Cup runner-up Croatia lost 1-0 in Slovenia.

Triple strike

At Istanbul, Turkey led 3-0 shortly after half-time through two Burak Yilmaz goals and a Hakan Calhanoglu strike, but substitutes Davy Klaassen and Luuk de Jong gave Frank de Boer's men



Turkish delight: Burak Yilmaz, left, came up with a hat-trick against Frank de Boer's men. •AFP

or the 2018 World Cup, but is one of the fancied sides ahead of the delayed Euro 2020 finals this year.

France kicked off its title defence with a 1-1 draw against Ukraine. Griezmann curled a fine finish from outside the box into the top corner in the 19th minute to draw level with David Trezeguet in fourth place on

France's all-time goal-scoring list, with 34.

But Presnel Kimpembe put through his own net before the hour mark to draw Ukraine level.

Belgium, the world's No. 1 side, fell behind early against Wales but fought back to outlast its opponent 3-1.

Harry Wilson scored an excellent 10th-minute open-

er for Wales in Leuven, but Kevin De Bruyne and Thorgan Hazard netted in the space of six minutes to put the hosts ahead before the half-hour mark.

Belgium's record goalscorer Romelu Lukaku wrapped up the points with a penalty 17 minutes from time, gaining the Red Devils a measure of revenge for their Euro 2016 quarterfinal loss to Wales.

Roberto Martinez's men sit second in the early Group E table behind Czech Republic, which thrashed Estonia 6-2 on neutral ground in Poland, with West Ham midfielder Tomas Soucek scoring a hat-trick.

A struggle

Portugal, which defends the title at Euro 2020 later this year, struggled in its Group A opener against Azerbaijan in Turin.

But Maksim Medvedev's own goal nine minutes before half-time was enough, despite Cristiano Ronaldo, on 102 international goals, failing to close the gap to Iranian Ali Daei's all-time record of 109.

Portugal's group rival Serbia battled back to beat the Republic of Ireland 3-2 as

Aleksandar Mitrovic came off the bench to grab a second-half double.

Elsewhere, Russia stuttered to a 3-1 win in Malta while Croatia was beaten by Sandi Lovric's early goal for Slovenia.

The results:

Portugal 1 (Medvedev 36-og) bt Azerbaijan 0.

Serbia 3 (Vlahovic 40, Mitrovic 69, 75) bt Republic of Ireland 2 (Browne 18, Collins 86).

Finland 2 (Pukki 58, 77) drew with Bosnia and Herzegovina 2 (Pjanic 55, Stevanovic 85).

France 1 (Griezmann 19) drew with Ukraine 1 (Kimpembe 57-og).

Belgium 3 (de Bruyne 22, T. Hazard 28, Lukaku 73-pen) bt Wales 1 (Wilson 10).

Estonia 2 (Sappinen 12, Anier 86) lost to Czech Republic 6 (Schick 18, Barak 27, Soucek 32, 43, 48, Jankto 56).

Turkey 4 (Yilmaz 15, 34-pen, 81, Calhanoglu 46) bt The Netherlands 2 (Klaassen 75, L. de Jong 76).

Latvia 1 (Ikauniens 40) lost to Montenegro 2 (Jovetic 41, 83); Gibraltar 0 lost to Norway 3 (Sorloth 43, Thorsvold 45, Svensson 57).

Malta 1 (Mbong 56) lost to Russia 3 (Dzyuba 23, Fernandes 35, Sobolev 90).

Cyprus 0 drew with Slovakia 0.

Slovenia 1 (Lovric 15) bt Croatia 0.

Super Kings leave for Mumbai

To be based there for a month



Getting ready: Dhoni will look to fire on all cylinders.

IPL

SPORTS REPORTER
CHENNAI

Chennai Super Kings left for Mumbai on Thursday following a two-week camp here. The team will continue its preparations for the 2021 Indian Premier League in Mumbai and be based there for a month.

The Super Kings play their first five matches in Mumbai – Delhi Capitals (April 10), Punjab Kings (April 16), Rajasthan Royals (April 19), Kolkata Knight Riders (April 21) and Royal Challengers Bangalore (April 25) – before moving to Delhi, Bengaluru and Kolkata for the rest of the

league stage fixtures.

CSK's pre-season camp started on March 8 at the M.A Chidambaram Stadium with skipper M.S. Dhoni leading the way.

"The players felt the fortnight-long camp was very beneficial. We also had four or five days of open nets," said CSK CEO K.S. Viswanathan.

"After the previous season, Dhoni told us he would reach Chennai in March to prepare for the 2021 edition. True to his word, he was here," he added.

CSK picked six players, including Moeen Ali and K. Gowtham at the auction in February, after trading Robin Uthappa from Rajasthan Royals.

'Keepers shouldn't chat with batsmen: Kirmani

ASHWIN ACHAL
BENGALURU

Former India cricketer Syed Kirmani said he was not a fan of wicketkeepers like Rishabh Pant engaging in a chat with the batsmen.

"It is rather unfortunate. Chats from wicketkeepers were happening during my time too."

"There have been instances of wicketkeepers

disturbing the concentration of the batsmen. It's not fair cricket. You have to play like a gentleman, and not be a cause for fines," said Kirmani at a press conference to address his YouTube chat show *Pitch-Perfect*.

Kirmani stated that both Pant and K.L. Rahul are proven performers with the big gloves.

TENNIS ROUND-UP

Kadhe overcomes poor start to beat Palan

PUNE: National champion Arjun Kadhe bounced back from an indifferent start to get past Dominik Palan of the Czech Republic 1-6, 7-6(4), 7-6(5) in the pre-quarterfinals of the KPTI \$15,000 ITF men's tennis tournament at the Deccan Gymkhana on Thursday.

Palan was serving for the match at 5-4 in the decider, but Kadhe broke serve to push the contest to a tie-breaker.

The Indian took a 5-1 lead before closing out the three-hour duel.

In the quarterfinals, Kadhe will face fourth seed Oliver Crawford, who beat Dev Javia 6-1, 6-2; Arjun Kadhe bt Dominik Palan (Cze) 1-6, 7-6(4), 7-6(5).

Zane Khan (US) bt Vijay Sundar Prashanth 6-3, 7-5; Aidan Mchugh (GBR) bt Ishaque Ebqa 6-1, 6-3.

Jonathan Mridha (Swe) bt Paras Dahiya 6-1, 5-7, 7-5; Simon Carr (Irl) bt Filip Bergevi 6-2, 7-6(7).

Gagandeep knocks out top seed Yosgesh

NEW DELHI: Gagandeep Wasu knocked out top seed Yosgesh Kohli 6-4, 7-5; Preetam Yashvant bt Deepak Marwaha 6-2, 6-3.

Many athletes compete in both track and field events, which makes sche-

duling a challenge. Last night, we gave the athletes the option of redoing their events, but the athletes forced us to hold the events at night.

"Those who were not comfortable with the light last night were given the option of doing their events today afternoon."

"Also, the athletes in last night's events were not in the visually-impaired category. They were actually in the least disabled category. They are adults who made a choice to compete. I don't think the light was insufficient," Deepa said on Thursday.

phone torches had been "sufficient".

"Many athletes compete in both track and field events, which makes sche-

duling a challenge. Last night, we gave the athletes the option of redoing their events, but the athletes forced us to hold the events at night.

"Those who were not comfortable with the light last night were given the option of doing their events today afternoon."

"Also, the athletes in last night's events were not in the visually-impaired category. They were actually in the least disabled category. They are adults who made a choice to compete. I don't think the light was insufficient," Deepa said on Thursday.

play fourth seed Preetam Yashvant, who put out second seed Deepak Marwaha for the loss of four games.

The scores:

Over-35 (semifinals): Aditya Khanna bt Raj Kumar 6-1, 7-6(4); Vipin Sirpaul bt Mohit Phogat 7-5, 6-3.

Over-45 (semifinals): Gagandeep Wasu bt Yosgesh Kohli 6-4, 7-5; Preetam Yashvant bt Deepak Marwaha 6-2, 6-3.

Quarterfinals: Yosgesh Kohli bt Narendra Kankaria 6-0, 6-3; Gagandeep Wasu bt Naresh Kumar 4-6, 7-5, 6-1; Preetam Yashvant bt Sheetal Sharma 6-3, 6-3; Deepak Marwaha bt Syed Babar Zaidi 6-1, 6-2.

Over-55 (semifinals): Nagaraj Revanasiddhaa bt Pawaj Jain 6-1, 6-0; Chandra Bhushan bt Ajet Bhardwaj 6-4, 6-2.

Over-65 (semifinals): A.J.S. Chhatwal bt Yosgesh Shah 6-2, 7-5; Bhag Nand Singh Negi bt Vinayak Gujrathi 6-4, 7-5.

Bucks hold off Celtics

NBA

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LOS ANGELES

Milwaukee Bucks pushed its NBA winning streak to eight games on Wednesday, squandering a 25-point third-quarter lead but holding on to edge Boston Celtics 121-111.

Khris Middleton scored 27 points and pulled down 13 rebounds for the Bucks, who escaped with the victory when Boston center Daniel Theis' three-point attempt failed to drop as time expired.

Quiet night

Milwaukee's two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo had a quiet night of 13 points, eight rebounds and seven assists as he returned after resting his sprained left knee.

Orlando Magic guard Evan Fournier drove for the game-winning layup with 6.4 seconds remaining in a 112-111 victory over Phoenix Suns.

Magic center Nikola Vucevic put up 27 points and 14 rebounds – his 30th double-double of the season.

Fournier added 21 points and pulled down 13 rebounds for the Bucks, who escaped with the victory when Boston center Daniel Theis' three-point attempt failed to drop as time expired.

The results:

Pacers 116 bt Pistons 111; Bucks 121 bt Celtics 119; Raptors 135 bt Nuggets 111; Magic 112 bt Suns 111; Bulls 94 lost to Cavaliers 103.

Thunder 107 lost to Grizzlies 116; Timberwolves 108 lost to Mavericks 128.

Rockets 97 lost to Hornets 122; Spurs 101 lost to Clippers 134; Kings 110 bt Hawks 108; Jazz 118 bt Nets 88.

Nagal enters last eight

SPORTS BUREAU<br