



There is no discretion in GST, it is as per formula: Sitharaman
page 9



A-G denies consent for initiation of contempt action against Rahul
page 10

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NEARBY



Two accused held guilty in Nikita murder case

FARIDABAD

The prime accused in the Nikita Tomar murder case, Tosif and his friend Rihan, were held guilty by the District and Sessions Court here on Wednesday. The third accused, Ajrudeen, was acquitted. The quantum of sentence will be announced on March 26. Nikita was shot dead in October last year.

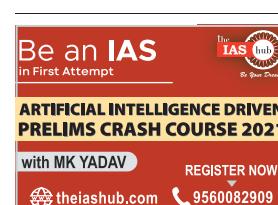
NEWS ▶ PAGE 10

'Harassment of nuns': Kerala CM writes to Shah

LUCKNOW

Two nuns and two novices were forced to get down a train at the Jhansi railway station in U.P. last Friday and detained briefly for questioning after ABVP members accused them of illegal conversions. On Wednesday, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan wrote to Union Home Minister Amit Shah that the harassment was "shocking" and demanded that he instruct authorities to take strict action.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 10



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Justice N.V. Ramana set to take over as 48th CJI

Chief Justice Bobde makes formal recommendation to govt.

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde has recommended Justice N.V. Ramana, the senior-most judge of the Supreme Court, as the next top judge.

The recommendation to the government was followed by the publication of a short statement on Wednesday, informing that Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's October 6 complaint to the CJI naming Justice Ramana was dismissed under an in-house procedure after due consideration.

Complaint dismissed

"A complaint dated October 6, 2020, sent by the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh to the Supreme Court was dealt with under the In-House Procedure and the same, on due consideration, stands dismissed. It be noted that all the matters dealt with under the In-House Procedure being strictly confidential in nature, are not liable to be made public," the statement, published on the Supreme Court website, said.

Mr. Reddy had complained that Justice Ramana was influencing the Andhra Pradesh High Court judiciary to destabilise his govern-

Way to the top

A brief profile of Justice N.V. Ramana

Aug. 27, 1957: Born in an agricultural family in Ponnavaram village in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh

Feb. 10, 1983: Enrolled as an advocate

June 27, 2000: Appointed permanent judge of the Andhra Pradesh High Court

March 10-May 20, 2013: Functioned as the Acting Chief Justice of the Andhra Pradesh High Court

Sept. 2, 2013: Elevated as the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court

Feb. 17, 2014: Elevated as a judge of the Supreme Court

■ He has practised in the High Court of Andhra Pradesh, Central and Andhra Pradesh Administrative Tribunals and the Supreme Court in civil, criminal, constitutional, labour, service and election matters
■ Justice Ramana specialises in constitutional, criminal, service and inter-State river laws

ment. The complaint was sent shortly after a Bench led by Justice Ramana started hearing and fast-tracking hundreds of criminal cases against Ministers, legislators and politicians pending in trial courts across the country.

In an affidavit filed with the election nomination papers in 2019, Mr. Reddy had declared that there were 31 criminal cases pending against him with the CBI, the Enforcement Directorate and different police stations in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Justice Ramana is now set to take over as the 48th Chief Justice of India from April 24. Chief Justice Bobde handed over a copy of his letter of recommendation to Justice Ramana on Wednesday after sending it to the government.

The Centre had recently asked Chief Justice Bobde, who is retiring on April 23, to initiate the transition process to the top judicial office.

Justice Ramana will be the CJL till August 26, 2022.

A GROUNDING IN CIVIL LIBERTIES ▶ PAGE 9

RS approves Bill empowering Delhi L-G amid Oppn. walkout

Legislation brought only to clear ambiguities: Kishan Reddy



Up in arms: A video grab of Congress MPs walking out amid voting on the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday. ■ PTI

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha on Wednesday passed the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill that seeks to empower the Lieutenant-Governor in Delhi. The Opposition, including the Aam Aadmi Party and the Congress, walked out just before the Bill was put to vote as a mark of protest. Earlier, the Biju Janata Dal, the Samajwadi Party and the YSR Congress had walked out.

During the division of votes for adopting the motion that the Bill be taken up for consideration, 83 members voted in favour and 45 against. Union Minister of State for Home G. Kishan Reddy said there was no political motive behind the Bill and it was brought only to clear the ambiguities.

The Bill states that the government in the national

capital territory of Delhi means the "Lieutenant-Governor". The legislation says the L-G is "necessarily granted an opportunity" to give her/his opinion before any decision taken by the Council of Ministers (or the Delhi Cabinet) is implemented.

No power taken away'

"When the Delhi government moved the Delhi Netaji Subhas University of Technology Bill in 2015, it said government means the L-G of Delhi, the Delhi government has already agreed to this... Not a single power of the Delhi government is being taken away. Delhi is a Union Territory, not a full-fledged State," Mr. Reddy said, responding to the debate. The proceedings saw vociferous protest by the Opposition members with the TMC and AAP accusing the government of "killing democracy". The House was ad-

joined twice.

Sanjay Singh of AAP said the Bill was akin to dismissing an elected government.

"Will you pass a Bill that gives all powers to the President of India? You are smothering an elected government. This Bill is akin to dismissing the government. We denied you nine stadiums to turn them into jails for farmers. This Bill is a revenge for that... The BJP has lost elections to [Arvind] Kejriwal twice and so it is targeting his government," Mr. Singh said.

Abhishek Manu Singhvi of the Congress said the Bill was unconstitutional. He said the Supreme Court judgment had stated that the "L-G of the State has more of an advisory role."

He said the powers of the Delhi Assembly were being diluted systematically.

Mr. Singhvi

journed twice.

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'Switch off lights for Earth Hour'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

To observe Earth Hour on March 27, the BSES discoms have urged its Delhi consumers to switch off all non-essential lights and electrical appliances for an hour to raise awareness towards the need to take action on climate change.

Delhiites have been requested to join in the initiative between 8.30 p.m. and 9.30 p.m.

"This Earth Hour, switch off and speak for nature," a BSES spokesperson said.

JNU Registrar appointment is part of administrative overreach'

Teachers' union reiterates stand against interim V-C

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Responding to allegations by the JNU administration saying that "downright falsehood and malicious propaganda was being spread by a small section of faculty member of JNU", the teachers' union said that the university statement was issued in the name of the new Registrar of the university that has not been appointed by the Executive Council of the university as per the rules of the university.

The JNUTA said that the

appointment of the Registrar was an example of administrative overreach on the part of the "caretaker" Vice-Chancellor M. Jagadesh Kumar that they were highlighting.

Executive Council
"Statute 8[1] of university rules categorically states that the "Registrar shall be appointed by the Executive Council" and "shall be a whole-time salaried officer of the university. It may be noted that there has been no Executive Council meeting

where the EC has deliberated on the matter or approval for this decision has been specifically sought," the JNU-TA said.

The JNUTA continued to question the powers of the Vice-Chancellor after the expiry of his term saying no matter what he claims, he is a "caretaker" Vice-Chancellor with restricted powers serving an interim period till the new appointee takes charge.

The JNU administration did not respond to the allegations by the JNUTA.

DUTA marches to CM's residence with demands

It sought timely release of grants-in-aid to avert another imminent crisis

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) on Wednesday carried out a protest march to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence demanding assurance of timely release of grants-in-aid, removal of the pattern of assistance document and revoking the Delhi government order appointing senior administrative officers in the 12 DU colleges that are fully funded by the government.

DUTA president Rajib Ray said: "Employees of these 12

C We remind you once again that such unilateral reworking of pattern of assistance without taking into consideration other stakeholders is both unethical and illegal

DUTA STATEMENT

DU colleges have lost faith in Delhi government as it has not been releasing the grants-in-aids timely. DUTA notes with dismay that the additional grants and posts promised by Mr. Kejriwal to the

principals of the 12 DU colleges in a meeting on March 16 has not yet materialised. This will again lead to financial crises in these colleges as they will not be paid salaries of February and there will also not be any settlement of long pending dues."

The teachers' body also sought removal of the pattern of assistance document. "This document is a prelude to massive restructuring of these colleges that would inevitably lead to dismemberment of these colleges from DU. The office of the principal is competent enough to look into these matters."

Two robbed at gunpoint in two separate incidents

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

In two separate incidents, victims were robbed at gunpoint in the city, said police on Wednesday.

In the first case, Pintu Kumar (18), a resident of Jahangirpuri, was choked allegedly by a boy while his accomplice snatched his mobile phone in northwest Delhi's Ashok Vihar, the police said. The two accused are juveniles and have been apprehended, they added.

In another incident of snatching, a 35-year-old man, Archit, was targeted by two-bike borne men in Shahadra. A video of the incident that surfaced on a social media shows the man being attacked by the accused men wearing helmets who arrived on a motorcycle. They robbed his gold chain at gunpoint. When the victim raised an alarm, the accused pointed a pistol at his mother. They pushed her and snatched her chain as well, a senior police officer said.

"CCTV cameras are being scanned to identify them. Multiple teams have been formed to nab the accused," he added.

2. Date of release of Invitation for Bids through e-procurement-**31.03.2021**

3. Cost of Bids Form-Rs. 5000 per package/job/no-refundable only in form of Demand Draft in favour of respective Executive Engineers.

4. Availability of Bid Document and mode of submission: The bid document is available online and bid should be submitted online on website www.hptenders.gov.in. The bidder would be required to register in the web-site which is free of cost. For submission of bids, the bidder is required to have valid Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) from one of the authorized Certifying Authorities (CA). "Aspiring bidders who have not obtained the user ID and password for participating in e-tendering in NABARD may obtain the same from the website: www.hptenders.gov.in

Digital signature is mandatory to participate in the e-tendering. Bidders already possessing the valid digital signature issued from authorized CAs can use the same in this tender.

* Non-registered bidders may submit bids; however, the successful bidders must get registered in appropriate class with appropriate authorities before signing the contract.

5. Submission of Original Documents: The bidders are required to submit (a) original Demand Draft towards the cost of bid document and (b) original bid security in approved form and (c) original affidavit regarding correctness of information furnished with bid document as per provisions of Clause 4.4B(a) (ii) of ITB with Superintending Engineer, 3rd Circle HPPWD, Solan , on a date not later than three working days after the opening of technical proposal part of the Bid, either by registered post or by hand.

6. Last Date/ Time for receipt of bids through e-tendering-Last date /time for receipt of bids through e-tendering of above mentioned works are as follows:-

Sr. No.	Name of work	Last date /time for receipt of bids through e-tendering.
1	C/o balance work (Formation deficiency) and M/T on Kandaghatal- Mahi road km. 0/0 to 4/450 under NABARD-XXI)	12.04.2021 at 10:30 AM
2	M/T & CD on road from Phashkhan to Jakhed km. 0/0 to 9/00)	12.04.2021 at 10:30 AM
3	C/o Pucca link road from Behl to Deoli km. 0/0 to 2/0 i/c bridge over Kalyanpur- Deoli khad at RD 1/850 in Nalagarh	12.04.2021 at 10:30 AM

7. The site for the work is available.

8. Only online submission of bids is permitted, therefore; bids must be submitted online on website www.hptenders.gov.in. The technical qualification part of the bids will be opened online at 11:00 A.M Hours on above mentioned date in the office of Superintending Engineer, 3rd Circle HPPWD Solan by the authorized officers. If the office happens to be closed on the date of opening of the bids as specified, the bids will be opened online on the next working day at the same time.

9. The bidder is not required to quote his rate for routine maintenance. The rates to be paid for routine maintenance are indicated in the Bill of Quantities. Further, the payment for routine maintenance to the contractor shall be regulated based on his performance of maintenance activities.

All the required materials like Cement/Steel/Bitumen/Explosive etc shall be arranged by Contractor at his own level.

10. The bids for the work shall remain valid for acceptance for a period not less than seventy five(75) days after the deadline date for bid submission.

11. To qualify for a package of contract made up of this for which bids are invited in the same NIT, the bidder must demonstrate having experience and resources sufficient to meet the aggregate of the qualifying criteria for the individual contracts.

12. Other details can be seen in the bidding documents. The Employer shall not be held liable for any delays due to system failure beyond its control. Even though the system will attempt to notify the bidders of any bid updates, the Employer shall not be liable for any information not received by the bidder. It is the bidders' responsibility to verify the website for the latest information related to the tender.

(Er. Surinder Pal Jagota)
Superintending Engineer,
HPPWD, 3rd Circle Solan

Tel 01792-220675, Fax 01792-223802

E-mail hp-sol@nic.in

HP / 6724/20-21

HIM SUCHANA AVAM JAN SAMPAK

'Sad day for democracy, will continue struggle'

Kejriwal attacks Centre after Rajya Sabha passes GNCTD Bill

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Wednesday slammed the Central government for passage of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021, in the Rajya Sabha.

"RS passes GNCTD amendment Bill. Sad day for Indian democracy. We will continue our struggle to restore power back to people. Whatever be the obstacles, we will continue doing good work. Work will neither stop nor slow down," party chief and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said in a tweet.

AAP leader and Delhi De-



Arvind Kejriwal

was chosen for the murder of democracy. People will fight against this dictatorship. #BJPFearsKejriwal," Mr. Sisodia said in a tweet in Hindi.

AAP leader Satyendar Jain said that regardless of whatever the Central government does, "we will keep working, we will not stop".

"The NCT of Delhi [Amendment] Bill, 2021, is an unconstitutional attempt to make Delhi Government 'administratively impotent' by a political party that has been made 'electorally impotent' by people of Delhi," AAP national spokesperson Raghav Chadha tweeted.

Akbar moves High Court against verdict

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Former Union Minister M.J. Akbar moved the Delhi High Court challenging a trial court order acquitting journalist Priya Ramani in the criminal defamation case filed against her over the allegations of sexual harassment.

The plea is scheduled to come up for hearing on Thursday.

The trial court's February 17 order had acquitted Ms. Ramani on the ground that a woman has the right to put grievances before any platform of her choice even after decades. The court had rejected Mr. Akbar's complaint saying that no charges were proved against Ms. Ramani.

Meat shop owner killed in south Delhi

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 25-year-old meat shop owner was shot dead allegedly by unidentified persons on Tuesday in south Delhi's Dakshinpuri, the police said on Wednesday.

The deceased, Dalip alias Kunal, had sustained multiple bullet injuries on his body, they said.

Dalip was a resident of Madangir and was involved in seven cases, including murder and robbery.

"We have registered a case and teams have been formed to identify and the trace the accused persons," DCP (South) Atul Kumar Thakur said.

HC vacates stay on trial in riots conspiracy case

Hard copy of chargesheet ready: police

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has vacated its November 10, 2020 order staying trial in a case relating to alleged conspiracy which led to the north-east Delhi riots after the police informed that hard copy of the chargesheet is ready and the accused can collect it.

"The accused has been identified as Ajay Goswami, a resident of Old Garhi Mendu village, and a case was registered against him in Khajuri Khas police station under relevant sections of law," DCP (North-East) Sanjay Kumar Sain said.

In the video, which went viral, the accused can be seen thrashing the victim and asking him to chant slogans. The police said they have identified the accused and the person who was recording the video. They will be arrested soon.

The victim has criminal background and was involved in murder and robbery cases. Goswami has also been involved in north-east Delhi riot cases. However, the incident has no connection with the riot cases, police said.

"No further order is required to be passed and the same is, accordingly, disposed of with pending application. Accordingly, interim order is vacated," Justice Suresh Kumar Kait noted in its Tuesday order.

"No further order is required to be passed and the same is, accordingly, disposed of with pending application. Accordingly, interim order is vacated," Justice Kait, who had stayed trial in the case in November last year, said.

The Delhi police had before the High Court chal-

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- JANAKPURI B-1/2, Main Najafgarh Road, Opp. Metro Pillar 543
- NOIDA, Nirula's Sec-2, Near Metro Station, Sec-15, Noida, UP
- LAJPAT NAGAR, 49, Main Ring Road, Adj. Haldi Ram, Near Moolchand Crossing

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S. No.	Area	Link for Online Open House Sessions/ Consumer Education Workshop
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2.	Central	https://meet.google.com/hzy-jivz-csq
3.	East & TY	https://meet.google.com/ajq-oeev-mxs
4.	Nehru Place	https://meet.google.com/ave-pepo-viq
5.	West	https://meet.google.com/dfj-oxek-tdv
6.	North	https://meet.google.com/qxj-qkxn-yzf

For joining the OHS, the details/procedure may be seen at our website.

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Timings
DELHI

THURSDAY, MAR. 25
RISE 06:20 SET 18:35
RISE 15:00 SET 04:08
FRIDAY, MAR. 26
RISE 06:18 SET 18:36
RISE 16:05 SET 04:50
SATURDAY, MAR. 27
RISE 06:17 SET 18:37
RISE 17:10 SET 05:30

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	34	16
Safdarjung	34	16
Palam	32	18

Delhi Palm Today
32°C A pleasant cool morning and dry slight warm day with few clouds likely. Moderate gusty winds during day.

Delhi Palm Tomorrow
33°C Moderate gusty winds would continue during day. Pleasant hazy morning and warm day likely.

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IN BRIEF

Cong. protests increase in minimum drinking age

NEW DELHI
The Delhi Congress on Wednesday held a protest outside the Chief Minister's residence to protest against the new Excise Policy of the Delhi government that lowers the drinking age in 25 to 21 years. The Delhi Congress alleged that this move was taken by the government only for the sake of increase in sale of liquor and in turn providing huge profit to the liquor mafia. The party workers were stopped by the police while they were on their way to the Chief Minister's residence.

THE HINDU
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'50 people can pray at Nizamuddin mosque'

Names must be given to SHO: Centre

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday informed the Delhi High Court that 50 people chosen by the Delhi Waqf Board can be allowed to offer prayers at the mosque in the Nizamuddin centre during the coming festival season, once their names are provided to the Station House Officer.

The Centre made the submission before Justice Mukta Gupta during the hearing of a plea to reopen the Nizamuddin centre where the Tablighi Jamaat congregation was held and has been locked since March 31 last year.

The submission came after the Board, represented by senior advocate Ramesh Gupta, urged the High Court to permit individuals to pray at the mosque during the 'shab-e-barat' holiday at the end of the week.

The Board said only the mosque would be used and not the madrasa nearby.

Mr. Gupta also urged the court to decide the case before Ramzan commences from April 13 as more people would want to offer prayers at the mosque during that time. The High Court has posted the case for hearing on April 12.

The Board contended that even after unlock-1 rules permitted religious places outside containment zones to reopen, the centre – comprising the Masjid Bangley Wali, Madrasa Kashif-ul-Uloom and attached hostel, continues to be locked up.

The Board said it had on February 16, 2021, given a representation to the authorities to reassess the necessity of keeping the premises locked. It said no action has been taken so far on their representation.

Delhi reports over 1,000 new cases for second day in a row

'Big spike unlikely as large percentage of population has already been infected'

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

The surge in COVID-19 cases continued on Wednesday with the city witnessing 1,254 new cases in the last 24 hours – the highest in more than three months – taking the total number of cases to 6,51,227, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government.

This is the second day when more than 1,000 new cases have been reported this year.

Wednesday's bulletin also stated that six deaths were reported in the past 24 hours, taking the total number of deaths to 10,973. A total of 82,331 tests were done in a day, it said.

Of the total cases, 6,35,364 people have recovered and there are 4,890 active cases here at present. Dr. Jugal Kishore, Head of

the spike we are seeing, as per data available to us," Dr. Kishore said. He also said that Delhi may not see a big spike since a large percentage of the population has already been infected, as per the last serological survey.

"Recent report of genomic sequencing study showed that 15-20% of samples from Maharashtra had new mutations and this can be the reason behind the rise in cases.

As there is no restriction on travel to Delhi, such mutant variant can be the cause of rise here," Dr. Kishore also said.

Over 23,000 vaccinated

A total of 23,267 beneficiaries took the COVID-19 vaccination in Delhi on Wednesday and one minor Adverse Event Following Immunisation (AEFI) was reported till 6 p.m., a Delhi government

spokesperson said.

"This report is provisional as sessions are going on in hospitals till 9 p.m. Also, there were lesser sessions today, with dispensary-based session sites not functional on Wednesday and Friday," the spokesperson said.

According to the entry logged on Monday, the SI called and informed that he was unwell. He went to Madan Mohan Malviya Hospital for a check-up where he tested positive for COVID-19. He has been told to stay under home quarantine for 17 days.

The document went on to state that the SI had got his first dose of vaccine on February 18 and the second dose on March 19.

DCP (South) Atul Thakur said that they are looking into the matter. Till February end, over 66,000 officers from the force had received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccination.

Policeman tests positive after jab

HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

A Delhi Police Sub-Inspector tested positive for COVID-19 after getting vaccinated, stated a Daily Diary entry in South District.

It added that the police officer is now under home quarantine.

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HC suspends 2-year jail term for AAP MLA

Court stays Somnath Bharti's conviction in case of assault on AIIMS employee

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday suspended the two-year jail term of AAP MLA Somnath Bharti in a case of assault on All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) security staffer.

Justice Suresh Kait also stayed Mr. Bharti's conviction in the case and sought response of the Delhi government on his plea challenging his conviction and the sentence. The High Court will hear the case again on May 20.

Somnath Bharti

Mr. Bharti was taken into custody and sent to prison on Tuesday after pronouncement of the verdict by a trial court here.

According to the prosecution, on September 9, 2016, Mr. Bharti, along with nearly 300 others, brought down the fence of a boundary wall at AIIMS here with a JCB operator.

No evidence

In the petition before the High Court, Mr. Bharti claimed that the court has erroneously convicted and sentenced him and said it was a case of no evidence and the verdict of the trial court was based on totally false and fabricated story of

the prosecution.

"The case of the prosecution is full of improvements, embellishments, contradictions and is unworthy of reliance and will fall like a pack of cards just by the stroke of the sheer hand of Providence by this court," his plea said.

His plea said the magistrate court as well as the sessions court failed to appreciate that he is a sitting and third time MLA having good reputation in the society and he devotes all his time for the service of the society."

Man arrested for spitting on roti

Accused was identified after video of incident went viral

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 25-year-old man has been arrested after a video surfaced on social media purportedly showing him spitting on 'roti [flatbread]' just before putting them in the oven, the police said on Wednesday.

In the video, the man can be seen spitting on the roti just before placing them inside a tandoor. The accused has been identified as Khalik from Kishanganj district in Bihar, they said.

A senior police officer

The police examined the video and identified the accused. A case was filed under relevant IPC sections and the accused was arrested.

SENIOR POLICE OFFICER

said that the video of the incident went viral on social media on Monday.

After the video went viral, the police examined it and identified the accused.

A case was registered un-

der relevant sections of the IPC and the accused was arrested on Monday, the officer said. A challan has been issued to the owner of the hotel for allegedly running it without a license.

The hotel is closed since then, the police said.

Earlier, two men were arrested after a video surfaced on social media purportedly showing one of them kneading dough at a local hotel in west Delhi and the other spitting on the roti just before putting it in the oven.



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Mock Interviews will commence from TUESDAY, 30th MARCH 2021

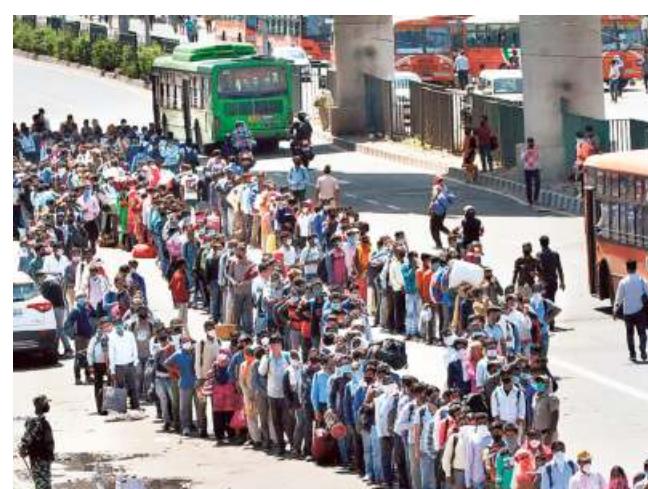
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NEW DELHI CAMPUS
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Capital Exodus

A year ago, as factories and businesses shut during the 'janata curfew' and subsequent lockdown, lakhs of migrant workers — facing sudden income loss and food shortage — had to uproot their lives overnight and return to their villages, with some forced to walk hundreds of kilometres back home



1. A deserted Connaught Place during the one-day 'janata curfew' on March 22, 2020 **2.** Passengers at the New Delhi railway station on March 23, two days before the lockdown came into effect **3.** A migrant family leaves the Capital on foot as bus services were suspended during the lockdown **4.** Migrant workers leaving Delhi in a hired truck **5.** Stranded workers waiting for transport back to their villages **6.** People line up to collect free ration **7.** A man checks the temperature of people in queue for cooked food **8.** Migrant workers wait at Kaushambi bus terminal after some State governments decided to evacuate their residents from Delhi **9.** People get cooked food at a Delhi government-run shelter; **10.** People observe social distancing norms while waiting in line for food during the lockdown in the Capital. PHOTOS BY V. V. KRISHNAN, SHIV KUMAR PUSHAKAR, SANDEEP SAXENA, R.V. MOORTHY

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IN CONVERSATION



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LEGAL NOTICE

IN THE COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI (TESTAMENTARY INTESTATE JURISDICTION) CITATION NO. 285, INDIAN SUCCESSION ACT, 1925
In the matter of TEST CASE No.17/2021 OM PRAKASH AGGARWALPETITIONER VERSUS THE STATE & ORS.RESPONDENTS To All Concerned.
In the matter of estate of Late Smt. Abhilasha Aggarwal W/o Sh. Om Prakash Aggarwal R/o B-2/62, Ashok Vihar, Phase-II, Delhi-110052 it is filed a petition under Section 276 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925 for grant of probate in respect of Will dated 12-08-2020 of Smt. Abhilasha Aggarwal, deceased.

Whereas Sh. Om Prakash Aggarwal S/o Late Sh. Kisan Das Aggarwal, R/o B-2/62, Ashok Vihar, Phase-II, Delhi-110052 has filed a petition under Section 276 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925 for grant of probate in respect of Will dated 12-08-2020 of Smt. Abhilasha Aggarwal, deceased.
The aforesaid case is fixed for hearing on 09-03-2021 at 11:00 A.M. before the Joint Registrar (Judicial) of this Hon'ble Court. This citation is issued, in terms of Section 283 of the said Act to all persons claiming to have any interest in the properties of the said deceased to come to this Court, file objections, if any, to take part in the proceedings or the date specified above for the grant of probate.

Given under my hand and the seal of this Court, in terms of the order dated 01st March, 2021.
Assistant Registrar
SEAL for REGISTRAR GENERAL Dk

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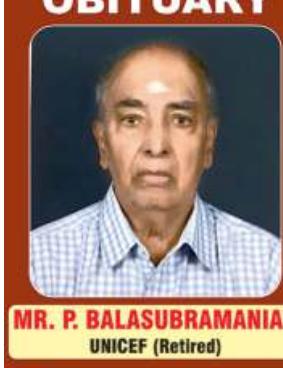
OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH



Kum. B. Lalitha
06.10.1950 - 23.03.2021
(Elder of the Hyderabad Sisters)
Mourned by
Mother, Sisters, Family,
Friends & Students
Ph: +91 9908222437
Email: chedalavada_rk@yahoo.com

OBITUARY



MR. P. BALASUBRAMANIAN
UNICEF (Retired)
Aged 89 years, passed away after a brief illness in Chennai on 23-03-2021
Mrs. B. Vasantha (spouse) and Dr. B. Ramachandran (Ramesh) son.
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The Chief Executive Officer, Itanagar Smart City Development Corporation Ltd, Itanagar A. P invites on behalf of Governor of Arunachal Pradesh online open bid system for following work:-

NIT No.: ITA/SC(SPV)-88/2019-20/01

Name of work: Supply, Installation, Commissioning, Integration & Testing of Surveillance system, Wireless Networking, Testing and Seamless integration with existing ICCC Network with maintenance period of 5 years. Estimated Cost: Rs.15,46,88,417.00. Period of completion : 3 months & Last date and time of submission of bid : 05/04/2021 at 1500 hrs. The bid forms and other details can be obtained from the website <https://arunachaltenders.gov.in>, instead of <http://dud.ar.etenders.in>.

(Dahey Sangno) APCS
Chief Executive Officer
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DIPR/ARN/16790-92/20

3 held for trying to extort ₹5 lakh from businessman

Accused also threatened to shoot him

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Three men were arrested for allegedly trying to extort ₹5 lakh from a businessman in northwest Delhi's Shalimar Bagh. The accused also threatened to shoot him if he failed to provide the amount, the police said on Wednesday.

The accused Rohit (26) wanted to make a quick buck and he chose businessman Sahil Sethi, who his father knows, as his potential target. Rohit along with his two associates, Azam Khan (19) and Faraz Khan (20), hatched a conspiracy to extort money from the businessman, police said. All the three men are residents of Seelampur.

Threat call

According to the police, on Monday morning, Mr. Sethi, received a threat call from an unknown number after which he lodged a complaint at Shalimar Bagh police station.

DCP (North West) Usha Rangnani said a case was registered under section 387 (putting per-

son in fear of death or of grievous hurt, in order to commit extortion) and 506 (punishment for criminal intimidation). During investigation, call details of the alleged mobile number was analysed and the accused was identified.

After raids at several locations, Rohit was arrested and the mobile from which the extortion call was made was recovered from him, she said.

On Tuesday, the businessman got another call around 3 p.m. from an unknown person. He threatened him to withdraw the complaint against Rohit besides demanding ₹5 lakh from him again, the DCP said. The location of the caller was traced and the accused duo, Azam and Faraz Khan, was nabbed and the mobile phone was recovered from them, she said.

"Interrogation revealed that Rohit had relevant information about the businessman as his father has been associated with the complainant for business purposes for a long time," Ms. Rangnani said.

The court was informed that as per the revised estimate of the Delhi government, the total amount payable to the east civic body, south corporation and north municipality towards BTA is ₹864.8 crore, ₹405.2 crore and ₹764.8 crore respectively in the financial year 2020-21.

Advocate Manu Chaturvedi, representing the east corporation, told the court that the municipality had received ₹501 crore and an amount of ₹363 crore was due. The outstanding amount for the other civic bodies is not known.

'Release outstanding amount to civic bodies'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday directed the AAP government to release the outstanding amount to the three municipal corporations as per its own revised estimate before March 31, to enable them to pay salaries and pensions of employees.

An HC Bench said there was no justification for the Delhi government to not pay Basic Tax Assignment (BTA) to the corporations.

It listed the matter for reporting compliance of its order on April 5, when a batch of petitions relating to non-payment of salaries of municipal employees was already fixed for hearing.

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Advocate Manu Chaturvedi, representing the east corporation, told the court that the municipality had received ₹501 crore and an amount of ₹363 crore was due. The outstanding amount for the other civic bodies is not known.

IN BRIEF

'Need to ensure smart and sustainable growth'

NEW DELHI

Delhi Industries Minister Satyendar Jain on Wednesday said the biggest problem in big cities is the way planning is done. "Smart and sustainable growth should go hand-in-hand, but in practice, we have separated the two and have focused only on smart growth," said Mr. Jain at the inauguration of the sixth Smart Cities Indian 2021 Expo at Pragati Maidan.

PATENT CAUTION NOTICE

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- (ii) Indian patent no. 271751 titled "PREPARATION OF AZOXYSTROBIN"
- (iii) Indian Patent no. 286565 titled "PROCESS FOR PREPARING 6-PHENOXYPYRIMIDIN-4-OL DERIVATIVES IN THE PRESENCE OF A QUINUCLIDINE OR A N-METHYL PYRROLIDINE DERIVATIVE"

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Place: Delhi Date: 25.03.2021

ANAND AND ANAND, (Advocates) B-41, Nizamuddin East, New Delhi -110013

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WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

Forecast for Thursday: Thunderstorm with lightning/gusty winds likely at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh, sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, Kerala, Mahe and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Heat wave conditions likely at isolated places over Konkan & Goa

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	37.2	22.4	Kozhikode	35.1	26.8
Ahmedabad	38.0	22.8	Kurnool	39.3	23.6
Aizawl	29.2	13.2	Lucknow	0.6	34.5	20.2
Aligarh	36.7	22.4	Madurai	37.2	25.5
Bengaluru	34.9	20.8	Mangalore	37.2	27.0
Bhopal	0.6	34.1	18.2	Mumbai	38.1	23.7
Bhubaneswar	34.0	21.8	Myanmar	35.0	18.2
Chandigarh	6.2	32.9	13.9	New Delhi	34.2	16.0
Chennai	34.0	25.2	Patna	35.4	23.6
Coimbatore	36.4	23.7	Poona	33.2	26.8
Dehradun	31.5	12.7	Port Blair	33.0	23.0
Gangtok	11.6	20.9	12.7	Puducherry	36.2	21.3
Goa	34.9	25.2	Pune	36.6	21.1
Guwahati	36.0	19.0	Rajpur	36.0	20.9
Hubballi	36.0	23.0	Ranchi	31.5	20.9
Hyderabad	35.5	23.8	Shillong	25.5	14.1
Imphal	31.9	12.7	Srimanta	8	19.4	8.4
Jaipur	31.2	17.4	Srinagar	1.5	9.7	4.1
Kochi	33.0	26.0	Thiruvananthapuram	34.5	25.7
Kohima	25.0	12.8	Tiruchi	37.1	24.2
Kolkata	37.0	26.6	Vijayawada	37.8	23.6
Visakhapatnam	34.2	23.8	Visakhapatnam	34.2	23.8

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing Yesterday

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	51	72	37	129	171
Bengaluru	37	38	121
Chennai	18	55	112	108
Delhi	32	136	79	170	211
Hyderabad	4.4	67	38	131	125
Kolkata	29	22	45	288	198
Lucknow	28	49	54	180	179
Mumbai	19	73	53	307	263
Pune	16	23	313	249
Visakhapatnam	0.8	76	47	162	205

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)
SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

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

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

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



Centre has failed diplomatically, says Capt. Amarinder. ■ FILE PHOTO

Amarinder warns of threat from Pak.

Punjab Chief Minister urges Centre to repeal farm laws in the interest of nation's security

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHANDIGARH

Terming the growing economic and military collusion between Pakistan and China as New Delhi's "failure of diplomacy", Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Wednesday said that by delaying resolution of the farmers' crisis, the BJP-led government at the Centre was allowing Pakistan to take advantage of dissatisfaction emerging in the State.

'Learn from history'
Urging the Centre to repeal the farm laws in the interest of the nation's security, the Chief Minister asked, "Have you not thought of what Pakistan will do in this scenario?"

Warning that they will take advantage of the dissatisfaction among the youth in Punjab, as

farm laws immediately. "This is not Hitler's Germany or Mao Zedong's China. The people's will has to be heard," he stressed.

He added those at the helm should understand that the agitation of the farmers is not a political issue but a matter of their survival.

The agitation is not limited to Punjab, he said.

Capt. Amarinder said he had seen the build-up of terrorism, and also the assassination of a CM of Punjab. The situation was worse today because of the economic and military collusion between Pakistan and China, which was "very ominous for India", he said, at a media event.

'AAP poses no risk'

Capt. Amarinder said in the upcoming Assembly polls, the Aam Aadmi Party poses no risk

to the Congress in Punjab. "Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had failed to implement even 30% of his promises in his previous terms. He should focus on his own State instead of talking rubbish in Punjab. He talks about giving jobs to Punjab youths when his own track record in Delhi is pathetic!"

"As for the Akalis, they are a divided lot and the party is splintering, with nobody to hold them together," he said.

Capt. Amarinder added Badal Senior is no longer in a position to lead the party due to his age. On the BJP's prospects in Punjab, he said, "The party has no support base in the State...people are in fact angry with them." The BJP could even end up getting back with the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in desperation, Capt. Amarinder added.

S-I killed over row between brothers

OMAR RASHID LUCKNOW

A police sub-inspector was killed after being shot in the neck when he had gone to address a dispute between two brothers over the harvesting of potatoes in Agra district of Uttar Pradesh, a senior officer said on Wednesday.

Sub-Inspector Prashant and constable Chandrasen had gone to the village in Khandauli police station area after a complaint by Shivnath that his brother Vishwanath was threatening his men and not allowing them to harvest potatoes in the field, said ADG zone Agra Rajeev Krishna.

Vishwanath started running after he saw the police team, said Mr. Krishna. The cops chased him and when they closed in, he fired at S-I Prashant with an illegal country-made weapon, said the officer. The S-I was shot in the neck and died, he said.

CM Yogi Adityanath announced ₹50 lakh ex gratia for the S-I's family and a government job. A road would also be named after S-I Prashant, said a senior official.

Five children killed in road accident

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT JAIPUR

Five children were crushed to death and one was injured in Dantwara village of Rajasthan's Jalore district on Wednesday when a speeding car hit them from behind while they were returning home from their school.

The deceased included three girls and two boys, who were students of classes 9 and 10.

The driver reportedly lost control and the car swerved into an agricultural field after hitting the children walking on the roadside. Two died on the spot, while others succumbed to their injuries on way to the hospital.

AASU intensifies anti-CAA protests

Members go on 11-hour hunger strike

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI

Members of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) on Wednesday went on an 11-hour hunger strike across the State to protest the BJP's avowed commitment to implement the Citizenship (Amendment) Act after the Assembly elections.

The hunger strike coincided with the election rallies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. AASU members had on March 20 organised a State-wide rally on two-wheelers to oppose the CAA. "We will never allow the CAA to be

implemented. Assam cannot be a dumping ground for immigrants all the time," AASU president Dipanka Kumar Nath said.

Another students' organisation, the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chhatra Parishad has also announced a fresh phase of anti-CAA protest from March 25. "We will fight the CAA come what may," Parishad general secretary Palash Changmai said. While the BJP and its allies claim the CAA is a non-issue, the Congress-led Mahajot and a new regional front have campaigned against the law.

Revoke MHA order, says Mizoram group

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI

A group representing ethnically related communities across the India-Myanmar border said the Centre's order to prevent Myanmar nationals from entering India was discriminatory.

The Zo Reunification Organisation (ZORO) asked the Ministry of Home Affairs to revoke its March 10 order directing four Northeastern States bordering Myanmar to deport people from the neighbouring country who have taken refuge in India following the military coup in February. The Mizoram-based group seeks the reunification of the Zo ethnic people of India, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

"Thousands of people from Bangladesh and other countries have illegally migrated to India and the Central government accepted them as refugees and provided them with asylum," ZORO president R. Sangkawia said.

ZORO members had burnt copies of the MHA order in Aizawl on Monday.

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Tactical abstention

India was keen not to lose diplomatic space to persuade Sri Lanka on devolution for Tamils

By abstaining from the vote on the UN Human Rights Council resolution on Sri Lanka, India has signalled its unwillingness to upset its neighbour. At the same time, it does not want to be seen as ignoring Sri Lanka's reluctance to meet the political aspirations of the Tamils or endorsing the country's stubborn refusal to ensure any sort of accountability for its war-time past. It may be easy for the political opposition to dismiss India's abstention as showing an intent to shield Sri Lanka from a credible investigation into allegations of war crimes. A more reasonable assessment would be that India seems to have utilised the opportunity to preserve its diplomatic space and to contain the pervasive influence of China over Sri Lanka even while maintaining its support for the Tamil minority to achieve equality, justice, dignity and peace. India has not been comfortable with externally mandated investigative mechanisms. Even when it voted in 2012 in favour of a credible investigation into human rights, India had got the resolution to incorporate the need for Sri Lanka's 'concurrence' to any assistance that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights may offer in such a probe. In this session and just ahead of the vote, India stressed on both meaningful devolution to meet Tamil aspirations and the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka – aspects that it believes are not an 'either-or' choice.

The resolution comes amidst disturbing signs that Sri Lanka is regressing into the days of democratic deficit seen prior to the 2015 elections. Unfortunately, the present regime withdrew from the commitments made to the UNHRC by its predecessor on constructive engagement with the international community, and the consensual resolution on justice and accountability. The UN High Commissioner's report raises concern over increasing militarisation, heightened surveillance against rights defenders and NGOs, interference with the few prosecutions in emblematic cases from the past, and the dangerous anti-minority rhetoric. India's concerns in Sri Lanka have always been different from the rest of the international community, informed by a sense of the long-term well-being of the Tamils, and that power-sharing does foster reconciliation. Hence its emphasis on devolution rather than accountability. It is clear that India has its own limitations in expressing disappointment over the island nation's move away from reconciliation and devolution. It continues to be weighed down by the Chinese presence in the region. Even the need to be in accord with sentiment in Tamil Nadu in the midst of an election was not motivation enough for India to change its position from tactical neutrality to one of open support for the resolution. When pragmatism and principle were needed in equal measure, the Centre seems to have chosen abstention as an easy way out.

Arts and awards

The National Film Awards can help film-makers narrating stories from remote corners

The announcement of the 67th National Film Awards on Monday, to recognise films certified in 2019, quite predictably drew its share of controversies. While some attributed a few of the awards to the political alignment of the personalities and films concerned, there were others who thought that deserving candidates were overlooked. However, there was no disputing the fact that the awards acknowledged both well known and less known films from different pockets of the country. Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi and Bengali films have always had their fair share of recognition, winning a clutch of awards. Thanks to the blurring of regional and language boundaries in cinema in recent years, a Tamil or a Telugu film, for instance, now stands a better chance at enjoying a pan-Indian theatrical release with subtitles, and thereafter reaching wider audiences through digital platforms. Dhanush, Vetri Maaran and Vijay Sethupathi are names that are recognised well beyond the boundaries of Tamil cinema, appreciated for projects that have smudged the line between art house and mainstream cinema. Dhanush being declared the Best Actor for *Asuran*, which was also acknowledged the Best Tamil Film, and Sethupathi winning Best Supporting Actor for *Super Deluxe*, have been lauded widely. Sharing the Best Actor honours with Dhanush is Manoj Bajpayee for his internalised performance in *Bhonsle*. The Kannada film *Avane Sri-mannarayana* was chosen for Best Action Direction. The Malayalam period magnum opus *Marakkar: Lion of the Arabian Sea* bagged Best Feature Film.

The award that drew the fiercest criticism was that of Kangana Ranaut for being declared Best Actress for *Panga* and *Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi*. Whether or not her politics was a factor in the choice, there is no doubting Kangana's talent. Look beyond the noise surrounding this recognition, and the National Awards also put the spotlight on films from the Northeast region – the Khasi film *Iewduh* for Best Audiography (Location Sound Recordist) and *Water Burial*, in Arunachal Pradesh's tribal Monpa language, for Best Film for Environment Conservation. For film industries that rarely enjoy their place in the sun, a National Award should ideally help winning films find a wider audience. It has not always been the case, but there is hope, in a world where cinema may increasingly be consumed on digital platforms. Perhaps, brushing aside the high-pitched debates, it is imperative to look at how some of these less known feature films, and award-winning non-feature films, can find their target audience, without having to rely on marketing muscle. A framework to bring these films to limelight, with the help of digital platforms, will be an incentive to film-makers striving to narrate stories from the remote corners of the country.

Tamil Nadu's distinct growth path is in peril

The political emphasis on welfare interventions is insufficient to address the emerging developmental issues in the State



KALAIYARASAN A. &
M. VIJAYABASKAR

is that the State's distinct developmental path is at stake.

We suggest that Dravidian mobilisation has institutionalised two sets of policy interventions – 'economic popular' and 'social popular', which have fostered a comparatively inclusive development pathway. While both share certain common characteristics, we find this analytical distinction useful. The 'social popular' pertains to rights-based interventions that ensure inclusive access to modern sectors and public goods. It has a definite redistributive character. Affirmative action policies, land reforms or legislation for equal property rights for women are some examples. 'Economic popular' policies are different. They are driven by electoral imperatives and tend to address issues of absolute poverty such as through expansion of food or education subsidies.

No 'elite bias' here

Scholars like Myron Weiner have pointed out that India's human development policies have been historically biased towards elites. Such bias can be seen in policies privileging higher education rather than universalising primary education, and investing more in curative and tertiary health care than in preventive and primary health care. Public interventions in health and education in Tamil Nadu have countered this 'elite bias'.

In education, Tamil Nadu emphasised primary education as early as the 1950s and gradually shifted its emphasis towards higher education. Interventions such as the noon meal scheme, that goes back to the Justice Party government in the early 20th century are well known. In addition, infrastructure such as hostels for lower caste students, and transport and tuition subsidies have made education one of the most inclusive and low cost in the country. In higher education, apart from investing in such supportive infrastructure, the State used caste-based reservation to enable broad-based access, simultaneously addressing the differences with-



in the Backward Classes and the Scheduled Castes".

Better indicators in health

In health, Tamil Nadu has achieved relatively better indicators such as a favourable total fertility rate, low infant mortality rate, and maternal mortality ratios across social groups. These are again outcomes of a long history of public interventions in health care. 'Social popular' measures such as constituting the first State Planning Commission in India with a taskforce specifically for health care, investments in public health infrastructure, and ensuring a socially inclusive pool of health personnel combined effectively with 'economic popular' measures such as subsidised health insurance, expanded noon meal schemes, and maternity benefits to generate inclusive health outcomes.

If social popular policies helped build public health infrastructure and democratised health governance, economic popular policies enhanced its coverage and added new schemes to meet specific demands. The Tamil Nadu Medical Services Corporation (TNMSC) is a case in point. Through this scheme, the State has pioneered free provision of essential drugs and diagnostics at public healthcare facilities, which in turn has led to households in Tamil Nadu incurring one of the lowest out-of-pocket expenditure for health in India.

Such attainments in human development have sustained and fed into economic dynamism. Contrary to popular perceptions that lower castes are mere recipients of welfare benefits, our analysis of the State's experience tells a diffe-

rent story. Tamil Nadu is home to a higher share of lower caste entrepreneurs compared to Maharashtra or Gujarat. This simultaneity of growth and development becomes particularly evident in the 1990s when regional governments were tasked with the responsibility of mobilising resources for development particularly through attracting private investments. This is a phase when the long-term investments in higher education in the State translated into capital accumulation by sections of lower castes. Several entrepreneurs from lower castes, armed with technical capabilities, emerged during this period.

In addition, Tamil Nadu has also witnessed relatively better diffusion of gains to labour. Though the State is not immune to the global and nation-wide shifts against labour, wage levels and social protection for labour in both the organised and unorganised sectors tend to be better. In fact, apart from relatively lower levels of contractualisation, the share of wages in organised manufacturing is the highest among industrially dynamic States such as Maharashtra and Gujarat.

We suggest that this became possible partly due to better unionisation and also due to welfare interventions outside the workplace that helped enhance the bargaining power of labour. The embedding of labour mobilisation within larger social solidarities among lower castes is critical to the higher unionisation and state response to labour demands. Advances made in human capital formation too aided this process. Relatively higher wages could be offset by access to better quality of labour inputs for competitive accumulation. Based on the Tamil Nadu experience, we can therefore say that processes of human development and economic dynamism can go hand-in-hand and not necessarily be sequential, as hinted by the 'Bhagwati-Sen' debate.

Some imbalances

There are, however, asymmetries emerging in this development tra-

jectory. Federal constraints on resource transfers as well as powers to chart autonomous policies are increasing. This curtails powers to respond to popular demands at the subnational scale. The arbitrary imposition of the National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET) for admissions to medical courses is one such example. We are also beginning to witness unevenness in the quality of health care and education in Tamil Nadu. Poor learning outcomes among schoolchildren as well as a growing preference for private schools even among marginalised social groups have been causes for concern. Similarly, the increase in reliance on private health-care facilities implies a segmentation of public services based on perceived or real differences in quality. Though not unique to the State, this opens spaces for new disparities.

Further, despite a highly dynamic manufacturing and high end service segments, the quantum and quality of jobs are inadequate to accommodate the large numbers of educated lower caste youth entering the labour market. This aggravates the reduced efficacy of affirmative action – a policy central to Dravidian mobilisation, due to growing privatisation. Together, such trends generate new axes of inequalities that are both intra and inter-caste that challenge the sustaining of the Dravidian bloc. The emphasis on welfare interventions is clearly insufficient.

The extent to which political mobilisation can reorient its terrain to forge appropriate demands in the new context will therefore shape the possibilities of further expansion of substantive democracy in Tamil Nadu.

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M. Vijayabaskar is with the Madras Institute of Development Studies. This article is based on their forthcoming book, *The Dravidian Model: Interpreting the Political Economy of Tamil Nadu*.

Assessing India's counter to 'diminishing democracy'

New Delhi has engaged its international critics not on facts but on values, and must now make its position clear



ATUL MISHRA

The first three weeks of March saw major developments in the ongoing drama over international assessment of how New Delhi has overseen the functioning of Indian democracy in the recent past. There were the annual reports of the United States-based Freedom House and the Sweden-based V-Dem Institute, which downgraded and redesignated Indian democracy. And farmers' safety and curbs to press freedom in the context of the ongoing protests by farmers were debated in the British Parliament.

New Delhi has hit back. But how do we assess its response? Consider three elements.

Aggressive, fine-tuned

First, there is decidedly a new approach. Something more layered is replacing the reliance on hard sovereignty. While the establishment continues to underline the internal nature of the issues raised, it is also beginning to counter the criticisms aggressively. The strongest evidence of this yet came from a discussion in the Rajya Sabha, on March 15, 2021, on racism in the United Kingdom. It appeared to implicate everyone, from the royals to society at large, in systemic racism. India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar noted the concern on behalf of the government and made the assurance that it would be taken up

Finally, it has sought to narrow down the scope of the issue and belittle its opponents. A statement by the Ministry of External Affairs on February 3, 2021, arguably put out in response to the celebrity tweets, claimed that a 'very small section of farmers in parts of India' had 'some' reservations about



the farm reforms. It also referred to international critics as 'fringe elements' and linked them to desecration of Gandhi statues. This was built upon in the London statement. It referred to the discussion as involving 'a small group' of parliamentarians in a limited quorum'.

A favourable global situation

Second, the assertiveness in the establishment's response is partly because India currently enjoys a favourable international constellation. Relatively speaking, the novel coronavirus pandemic has spared India and allowed the world's largest vaccine manufacturer (by number of doses produced and sold globally) to engage in vaccine diplomacy and position itself as an 'internationalist' actor. Here, New Delhi has attempted a transference of latitude, leveraging the goodwill generated by 'Vaccine Maitri' to counter the criticisms. Thus, in Chennai, Mr. Jaishankar asked what the (presumably western) critics of the Delhi regime had done in comparison with India's critical health aid to 70 countries. The fact that the western countries have struggled to cope effectively with the pandemic and remain inconsistent as well as, in Europe, divided in their governmental and medical responses, al-

so makes India look coherent and 'functional'.

Further, the contemporary crisis within western democracies is deep rooted. While it eludes resolution, the fact is that it has robbed western governments of the reputational privilege and the moral right to criticise what they view as assaults on liberal democratic values. We see governments quiet but streets and legislators vocal. This factor, coupled with their need for India for economic, environmental, and geopolitical reasons, offers New Delhi considerable space for an aggressive response.

Finally, the conservative allies in western countries that New Delhi has likely cultivated have also helped it undercut international criticism. Recall the October 2019 visit to Kashmir of about two dozen largely right-wing Members of European Parliament. Further, a quick review of the remarks of Conservative UK MPs Bob Blackman and Theresa Villiers on contentious issues concerning India over the past nearly two years will be revealing. In fact, Ms. Villiers' statement during the U.K. parliamentary discussion in early March was remarkably understanding of New Delhi's position.

Key question unanswered

Third, the question of the effectiveness of its response. How substantive is New Delhi's counter? In part, as Mr. Jaishankar's remarks in Chennai showed, it has met facts with rhetoric. In addition, it has questioned the practice of western institutions and civil society of judging and criticising those political processes in non-western democracies that do not

match up to western standards. The objection is useful insofar as it checks sorry remnants of western cultural arrogance as well as 'knowledge imperialism'. But it does not address the fundamental point of the critics, which is that human dignity and freedoms are universal and an assault on them anywhere is an assault on them everywhere.

New Delhi was well within its rights to offer the sovereignty shrug and say it did not care. But it has engaged the critics, not on facts but on values. And now it must make its position clear. If it does not believe that these values apply to all human beings everywhere, regardless of the society and culture in which they find themselves, then it can state it unambiguously. This would deprive its critics of the moral basis for their criticism.

At the Munich Security Conference in February last year, Mr. Jaishankar argued that democracy and the West should not be equated, implying that there are different types of democracies. Fair point. But the Minister did not pursue the thought fully. His South Korean counterpart did. Speaking after him, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea Kang Kyung-wha said: 'South Korea is West if you are going by values... Instead of talking about the West let's talk about the values that we are trying to prove.' This is an approach worth considering. For in order to effectively counter its critics, the establishment must first confront itself.

Atul Mishra teaches International Relations at Shiv Nadar University. The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Vaccination drive
The government's new move is fine but what is alarming is reports of vaccine wastage (Page 1, "As cases rise, govt. gives nod to inoculate all over 45 from April 1", March 24). With a low 3.54 doses administered per 100 population so far, we cannot afford to waste the precious vaccines. It is

quite surprising that vaccine hesitancy is still high even as the second wave of fresh infections is gaining speed. In view of the quicker spread of the infections in the second wave, it is necessary that the vaccination drive is also speeded up. States – especially those experiencing rising cases – should follow a two-

pronged approach of conducting awareness programmes to reduce vaccine hesitancy and employing ground-level care workers to mobilise people for vaccination.

KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI,
Hyderabad

Politics and the police
The burning issue in Maharashtra (Editorial,

"Mumbai muckracking", March 24) has shone the spotlight on why no major political party has focused on police reforms – a possible reflection of the complicity of all actors in systemic corruption. Until the police are kept insulated from political interference, whether in terms of postings or transfers, or in terms of

their investigations, the two will forever remain in *quid pro quo* arrangements. In the context of politics and crime, individuals seek political protection to preserve and expand their wealth, and in turn parties need illegal finances which are sourced from extracting resources from institutions and citizens. What is needed is a charter of

wide-ranging reforms in the criminal justice system that could lead to quick judicial decisions. Watchdog institutions should strongly enforce the law and expose wrongdoing. Maharashtra must address the nexus of politics, police and crime.

N. SADHASIVA REDDY,
Bengaluru

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Arresting the juggernaut in Assam

While the BJP has managed to assuage the anger against the CAA, the Congress has gained some ground



HIREN GOHAIN

The biggest success of the Bharatiya Janata Party's election campaign in Assam has been the virtual erasure of the rage against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) from public memory. The movement against the CAA was crucial in uniting the people of all communities in Assam. Even Bengali Hindus in Assam Valley were lukewarm towards the law that they feared might plunge the State once again into instability and chaos.

The BJP campaign

The BJP has followed a calculated, systematic plan to go about this. For months, it said little about the CAA, instead harping on its alleged historic achievements in ensuring that Assam was at long last on the path of *vikas* (development). The party's rallies have been spectacular extravaganzas filled with airy promises and menacing innuendos. The BJP's top leaders, including the Prime Minister, Home Minister and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, have repeatedly spoken of Assam's glorious heritage. They have promised to preserve the State's culture, traditions and civilisation and ensure that Assam remains free of militancy, agitation, infiltration, violence, corruption, flood and pollution, if voted back to power. The State leaders also borrowed from the war cries of the national leaders against an "alien civilisation" in the State and "Mughal invaders". They have all repeated the cliché that all the Congress did during its rule was indulge in corruption and "appease" Muslims. Further, the BJP has handed out an incredible amount of money in the last quarter in the guise of welfare schemes, borrowing for that purpose, according to regional reports, ₹80,000 crore. Needless to say, it will be a tremendous fiscal burden on any future government in this financially ailing State.

The party has managed to assuage the pent-up fury of the common people who had been reeling under the effects of demonetisation, the Goods and Services Tax, soaring prices, un-



BJP supporters during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally ahead of the Assam Assembly polls, at Sipajhar in Darrang district. • PTI

employment, loss of income and the blow dealt to them by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many in the countryside now fear that if they don't vote for the BJP, money will dry up, though it is certain that such largesse cannot be maintained much beyond the election. The BJP also released ₹2.5 lakh each to 8,756 namghars in August 2020. Namghars are centres of rural social life, though with waning influence. Incumbent Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal has claimed that CAA is not an issue anymore. The party's manifesto does not mention the CAA.

Despite all this, the BJP is not sure if it can repeat the triumph of 2016. It is holding quite a few high-pitched rallies at the last moment, possibly to befuddle judgment. Thousands of people accompanied Assam Minister Himanta Biswa Sharma when he went to file his nomination papers. But the youth, quite ahead of Opposition leaders, have been scathing in their remarks on the hypocrisy, false promises and hollow claims of the BJP.

The Grand Alliance cobbled together by the Congress has held firm in spite of the weaknesses of the national party, thanks to the determination of the Left parties not to allow a division of votes. The Congress leaders had lost touch with the masses and it is because of the excesses of the BJP that the party has gained some ground now. But there is no reason to assume that the anti-BJP

sentiment will automatically turn into votes unless the Grand Alliance puts in a consistent, united, and dedicated effort till the final hour. Their top State leaders have been embroiled in unseemly turf wars, with Gaurav Gogoi also entering the fray allegedly with the aim of joining State politics in the future. Leaders deputed by the Congress high command have tried hard to keep things going, but their efforts have been hampered due to their ignorance of the specifics of the situation.

The Congress is now mounting a campaign to highlight the follies and failures of the BJP. Its manifesto speaks to the people's concerns though there are a few unfortunate concessions to the BJP's populist religious narrative. It has rightly stuck to a clear stand on the CAA. In a few constituencies, perhaps because of infighting or loss of base, it has put up weak candidates. It has the solid support of Muslims in many constituencies and is gaining some ground in the tea garden regions where it was dislodged earlier by the BJP. The BJP's fear of offending big capital by raising wages in these regions has provoked anger and mistrust among large numbers of the tea-garden workers.

The Left parties have to be content with the few seats they have been offered because of their awareness of the much bigger threat posed by the resumption of BJP rule.

The Congress's alliance with the

All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) is the greatest gamble it has taken considering the long-standing feud between the two parties for immigrant Muslim votes. But in view of the creeping fear among Muslims about the intentions of the BJP, the alliance may well pay dividends. That is precisely why the BJP keeps harping on the alleged threat to the Hindu Assamese and the tribals and projects AIUDF leader Badruddin Ajmal as the future Chief Minister of Assam to drive the indigenous peoples into panic. But this strategy seems to have had only limited success. Mr. Ajmal is an orthodox Maulana and has enough sense not to indulge in anti-Assamese or anti-Hindu fusillades.

Dividing anti-BJP votes

Both the regional parties, the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) and the Rajo Dal, have said that the BJP is a menace to democracy and will change the identity of the indigenous people; yet, surprisingly, both of them have kept their distance from the Congress saying that all the national parties have aims antithetical to regional interests. The AJP has in its fold some stalwarts who may prefer the BJP to the Congress if the question of a post-poll alliance arises at all.

Activist Akhil Gogoi's detention hampered the efforts of his Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti whose members know how to agitate but have no idea how to run an election. They have a following among the poor and marginalised and should have thrown in their lot with the Grand Alliance. Mr. Gogoi stubbornly bargained till the eleventh hour with the Congress demanding that the AIUDF be dropped from the Grand Alliance, an impossible demand from the perspective of the Congress. That they are contesting just a few seats now has unwittingly weakened the Opposition. But the late entry of Bodoland People's Front leader Hagrama Mohialy, now disenchanted with the BJP, might add several seats to the Grand Alliance from the Bodoland Territorial Area District.

The two regional parties may snatch some votes from the Grand Alliance and end up dividing the anti-BJP votes. This would only weaken the prospects of democratic forces.

Hiren Gohain is a scholar and literary critic

Water, the looming frontier

There are only two unpolluted fresh water sources left in the country, which we must conserve and use



VIKRAM SONI

While we are still in the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is airborne, we have forgotten that another such blight could well come from contaminated water.

NITI Ayog and WaterAid, amongst others, have found that over 70% of India's surface and groundwater is contaminated by human and other waste and is likely to carry viruses. Indiscriminate human activity is often the reason for environmental degradation and pandemics. The practice of keeping animals locked together for mass production of meat produces an artificial environment that can birth mutations in erstwhile dormant viruses. Earlier, in the wild, animals were far away from human habitats. The viruses they harboured remained isolated. But today's practices can spawn viruses that can easily transfer to the human population.

A source of virus

Once the virus has found its way into the human population, it is bound to proliferate in wastewater. For example, in England, Wales and Scotland, several wastewater samples were tested and were found to carry traces of SARS-CoV-2. Remnants of the virus have also been detected in raw sewage across Sydney. Research at the University of Stirling in Scotland indicates that the SARS-CoV-2 virus can spread through sewage water.

But such water is often discharged into water bodies in India. This is an alarming prospect for us as river water or lake water, which carries human waste, sewage, and toxic waste, can be a very generous host for viruses of different kinds and we do not know where and how they can mutate and strike. Some water-transmitted viral pathogens are astrovirus, hepatitis A and norovirus. Unlike in the developed world, a huge section of the population in India uses polluted water from sources like rivers, lakes, or groundwater for drinking.

Are we prepared for this? Certainly not. Can we be prepared? Very unlikely, even if we understood the viruses, and we are not there yet. Can we decontaminate our water bodies and groundwater? This could take several decades. But despite the poor quality of water in India, the government has announced a ₹3 lakh crore 'Nal se Jal' scheme to provide drinking water connections to every rural household by 2024. Since most of

the water sources are contaminated, the only way to purify water is through reverse osmosis (RO). But though RO removes contaminants, it also takes out all the healthy minerals and nutrients required by the human body. This is an unhealthy and exorbitantly priced proposition. To neutralise the virus, we would need at least an ultraviolet aquaguard treatment. While this won't take out chemical contaminants, it is also costly.

So, what is the solution? The simple answer is that there is no technological substitute for living natural resources like pristine natural water and soil. This means that we must conserve and use our natural living resources. The water beneath our forests is as good as natural spring water. We must safeguard it for our own lives and for future generations. We have destroyed our natural living resources in our rush for development. Our development model is always focused on artificial infrastructure, building highways, industrial plants, high-rise structures. In doing this, we kill our natural resources. As a result, we are running out of natural infrastructure at an alarming pace. Let's not forget that developed countries have stable landscapes and populations whereas India has a growing population, which means there will be growing consumption.

Freshwater sources

There are two unpolluted fresh water sources left in the country. The first is the water lying below our forests; the second is the aquifers that lie below the floodplains of rivers. Both these sources provide natural underground storage and are renewable - the rains provide natural recharge year after year and it is this recharge which can be used to water our cities and towns. There is one sacred conservation condition: we should use only a fraction of the annual recharge.

The aquifers underlying forests can provide healthy mineral water purely for drinking purposes. Since a person drinks only 2-3 litres of water a day, the mineral water requirement is modest. The river floodplains are a great source of water for cities. The Yamuna floodplains in Delhi already use such a scheme to provide water to a million people each year. Forests and floodplains must be declared as water sanctuaries. Such schemes work with nature rather than against it. They can be used around the globe. It is important to remember that these evolutionary resources, once lost, will be lost forever. It is time we understood this is natural infrastructure bequeathed to us by nature. If we don't realise this, it will only be our loss.

Vikram Soni is Emeritus Professor at Jamia Millia and Jawaharlal Nehru University

Adding coal to the fire

Adani's Carmichael coal project will generate jobs but significantly impact health and environment

VINOD THOMAS
& CHITRANJALI TIWARI

If India loses the fight against climate change, new investments in coal will be a decisive factor. India has reaffirmed its commitment to bold plans for switching to renewable energy. Yet, one of the world's largest new coal investments is Adani's \$16.5 billion dollar Carmichael coal mine project in Queensland. That this project is going ahead despite coal's declining competitiveness raises valid concerns that the new coal investments are viable only because they are supported by the Australian government's subsidies or incentives.

Gains and losses

Coal mining provides incomes for Australia's local economy, but the health and environmental harm from mining and combustion represents a big net loss for the world. CO₂ emissions, the chief cause of climate change, totalled 36 billion metric tonnes globally in 2019, of which nearly 40% came from coal. The Carmichael mine is set to become Australia's largest coal mine, producing up to 60 million tonnes of coal annually and 2.3 billion tonnes over its 60-year lifespan. Of the nearly 8 billion tonnes of coal produced globally in 2019, a sixth is exported, with the largest share, one third, coming from Australia. In 2020, 16% of Australia's coal exports were shipped to India.

As India is the primary buyer of the Carmichael coal, the project will significantly add to its emissions. Australia's coal mining and coal exports generate incomes and jobs, but when the destruction from pollution, soil erosion, and biodiversity loss is included, the net contribution for India is negative. In south-western China, the environmental and social damage from burning coal exceeds the price of coal by four times. The health damages from coal-fired power stations in the U.S. are estimated at 1.6 times the value of the power output. In India, coal contributes to 1,00,000 premature deaths annually: the poor are hit hardest. With declining coal prices, the mine may be unable to generate sufficient revenue to get a return on investment. That the project might not be viable even if

financially – and this without considering the environmental, social and health impacts – is damning. It supports the worry that government subsidies underlie Adani's decision to proceed with the project. It bears mentioning that 17 international banks declined to fund the Carmichael mine based on its weak financials and environmental danger; State Bank of India's plan to provide financing is under scrutiny. A report by the Australia Institute points out that the spillover harm from extracting and burning coal is not included in the true cost of coal projects. One estimate puts the damage to health alone in Australia at \$2.6 billion annually. The mining of coal emits massive amounts of particle pollution, contributing to heart disease, lung disease and lung cancer. With exports of coal, India will be hurt too from burning coal, and the global harm is a multiple of Australia's.

Leave coal underground

Then there is the environmental and climate impact. Annual emissions of 79 million tonnes of carbon equivalent from the Carmichael mine is higher than Malaysia's 75 million tonnes and Austria's 76 million tonnes. The mine will also lead to the Galilee Basin being opened up to nine additional coal mines, which would cumulatively emit an estimated 705 million tonnes of CO₂ every year, more than 1.3 times Australia's current emissions. After facing heat waves, bushfires, and intense rainfall that are linked to climate change, Australia should be deeply concerned – and so should India. The Government of India is drawing up plans for carbon neutrality, following several others that have announced 2050 as their target date for this. Achieving a zero-carbon target will require vast investments in the production, storage, and distribution of renewable energy. But the approval for Adani to mine and export coal to India makes reaching those targets much harder. It is time for India and Australia to leave coal underground.

Vinod Thomas is a former senior vice president of the World Bank and Chitranjali Tiwari is alumna of Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy

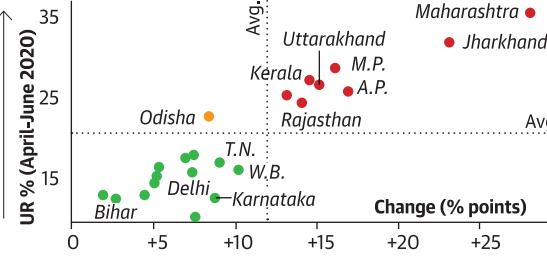


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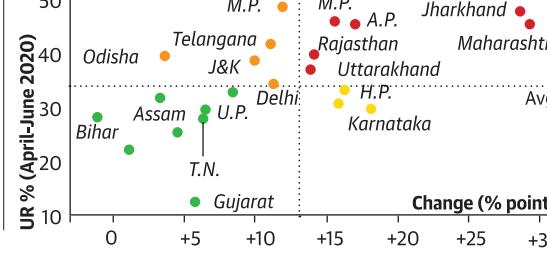
Variance in joblessness

The urban unemployment rate (UR) in India rose sharply to 20.9% in the April-June quarter (Q1FY21) following a stringent lockdown, according to the recently released Periodic Labour Force Survey. Urban unemployment was even steeper (34.7%) among workers aged 15-29. The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR: employed plus those searching for jobs) also decreased marginally. However, the impact of the lockdown on the job market was unevenly distributed among the States. The job scenario was particularly bad in States such as Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Maharashtra. In contrast, the impact on the jobs front due to the lockdown in States such as Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Punjab and Haryana was relatively less. By Sumant Sen, Vignesh R and Naresh Singaravelu

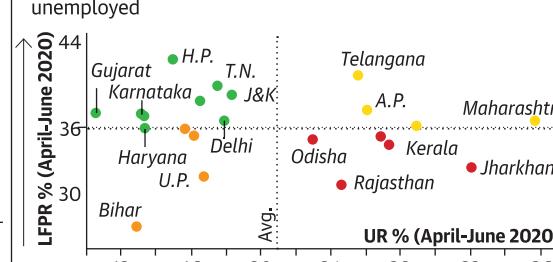
1. UNEVEN IMPACT | The chart plots urban UR in Q1FY21 against the change from Q1FY20 across all age groups across 22 States/U.T.s. In eight States (●), both urban UR in Q1FY21 and the increase from a year before were higher than the Indian average



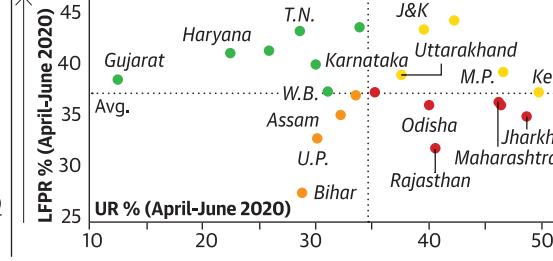
2. YOUNG WORKERS HIT HARD | The chart plots urban UR in Q1FY21 against the change from Q1FY20 in the 15-29 age group across 22 States/U.T.s. In six States (●), both urban UR in Q1FY21 and the increase from a year before were higher than the Indian average



3. LFPR VS UR (ALL AGES) | The chart plots the urban UR against the urban LFPR across all ages in 22 States/U.T.s for Q1FY21. Five States (●) had a higher UR and a lower LFPR than the Indian average, indicating that a relatively lower share of people was employed or actively searching for jobs in these States, and of them, a relatively higher share was unemployed



4. LFPR VS UR (15-29 YEARS OLD) | The chart plots the urban UR against the urban LFPR for those aged 15-29 in 22 States/U.T.s for Q1FY21. Six States (●) had a higher UR and a lower LFPR than the Indian average in the period



FROM PAGE ONE

Double mutant' virus variant found

However, international studies have shown reduced efficacy of vaccines – particularly those by Pfizer, Moderna and Novavax – to certain variants. However, the vaccines continue to be significantly protective in spite of this.

So far, only three global VOCs have been identified: the U.K. variant (B.1.1.7), the South African (B.1.351) and the Brazilian (P.1) lineage. So far, of 10,787 samples from international passengers, 771 instances of these VOCs have been identified in 18 States of the country.

After the new double variant has been submitted to GISAID, it will be categorized under a formal lineage,

and will have its own name. The identification of a new variant does not yet imply new public health measures, the Health Ministry said: "It would require the same epidemiological and public health response of increased testing, comprehensive tracking of close contacts, prompt isolation of positive cases & contacts as well as treatment as per National Treatment Protocol" by the States/Union Territories.

Separately, genome variation studies from Kerala have revealed the presence of other mutations associated with the ability to help the coronavirus evade neutralising antibodies.

SC flags concern over electoral bonds' misuse

Mr. Venugopal, appearing for the government, said only parties registered under the Representation of the People Act could receive donations through electoral bonds, and that they should not have secured less than 1% of the votes polled in the previous elections.

The court said it did not want to "get into politics" nor were its comments aimed at any particular party.

The exchange came during a virtual court hearing of an application filed by the Association for Democratic Reforms, represented by advocate Prashant Bhushan, to stay the sale of electoral bonds scheduled between April 1 and April 10, prior to the crucial Assembly elections in five States, including West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. "Electoral bonds scheme introduces anonymity in political donations. The sale of bonds in April should be stopped," Mr. Bhushan urged.

Mr. Venugopal said the sale was announced after getting permission from the Election Commission of India. "The Election Commission is supporting electoral

bonds or we will go back to the pre-existing situation of donations coming in by cash," senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, for the poll body, said.

Chief Justice Bobde then asked whether the purchasers of electoral bonds disclosed whether the money paid was black or white. "When a businessman goes and buys bonds, does he have to disclose whether he purchases them with white or black money? Does he have to pay tax?" the Chief Justice asked Mr. Venugopal.

"Buyers have to use white money. The purchase is through bank drafts, cheques or electronic transfer," Mr. Venugopal replied.

But Mr. Bhushan intervened to submit that though the original purchase of bonds could be done using white money, somebody could anonymously re-purchase the bonds from the original buyer and drop it at a political party office with anyone none the wiser. "Nobody will know who purchased the bonds from the original buyer. The scheme facilitates kickbacks," Mr. Bhushan argued.

Matter is serious, move HC, SC tells Param Bir

Mr. Singh, who was shunted out to the Home Guards Department, said his transfer order arrived "immediately after" he complained to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and other senior leaders about the "corrupt malpractices" of

Mr. Deshmukh. "The entire State is rocked. Police reforms have not taken place," Mr. Rohatgi submitted. "That is the case with all States, including U.P., West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, it's just not this State," Justice Kaul observed orally.

India should have been included in Moscow talks'

The Afghanistan government is expected to unveil its full proposal during the upcoming intra-Afghan talks due to be held in Istanbul in the beginning of April. The talks are a part of the U.S.'s latest push for intra-Afghan talks with the Taliban that appear to have stalled in Doha, and was outlined in a letter from U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken to President Ghani.

While the U.S. has also proposed future regional talks, led by the UN, to engage all regional stakeholders, including India, the most recent talks held in Moscow on March 18 by the so-called "troika", with envoys from Pakistan, Qatar, Afghan and Taliban leadership, had not invited the Indian government, which Mr. Atmar called a "mistake".

"We made it clear [to the organisers] that peace and stability and regional connectivity and prosperity cannot happen without India," he said. Mr. Atmar said there was no proposal to request Indian troops in Afghanistan, nor had his government asked India to directly open

a dialogue with the Taliban. He said Afghanistan "appreciates" India's position that it would engage the Taliban "if the Taliban come and join a legitimate government of Afghanistan".

In a statement at the end of Mr. Atmar's visit, issued on Wednesday, the Ministry of External Affairs did not refer directly to the Ghani proposal, but said India remained committed to "a peaceful, sovereign, stable and inclusive Afghanistan where the rights of all sections of society are protected within a democratic constitutional framework".

Asked if he had discussed the recent steps in India-Pakistan engagement with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, Mr. Atmar said the India-Afghanistan talks focused only on "bilateral issues". However, he added that he welcomed any dialogue between them, and hoped that India's "responsible gestures are met with reciprocity" from Pakistan.

(Read the interview here: <http://bit.ly/HaneefAtmar>)

Kerala, Karnataka report over 4,700 cases

Virus fatalities in four States touch 28; incidence rises in Telangana and A.P

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The toll of people dying from COVID-19 in four southern States went up by 28, with Karnataka recording 12 deaths and Kerala adding 10 fatalities from the past few days on Wednesday.

Kerala reported 2,456 new cases on Wednesday when 56,740 samples were tested, taking the State's cumulative cases to 11,09,908 cases.

The test positivity rate (TPR), below 4% for the past few days rose to 4.33%.

The addition of 10 new deaths to the official fatalities list on Wednesday raised the toll till date to 4,527 in Kerala.

Thrissur reported three deaths, Kollam and Malappuram two each, while one death each was reported from Idukki, Kozhikode, and Kannur.

Of Wednesday's 2,456 new cases, 2,164 were locally

acquired infections. This included infections in 18 healthcare workers. In 105 cases, the Health Department has reported a history of travel to other States.

Kozhikode district reported the maximum of 333 new

COVID-19

cases, Thiruvananthapuram 300, Kannur 295, Ernakulam 245, Thrissur 195, Kottayam 191, Malappuram 173, Kollam 153, Pathanamthitta 117, Kasaragod 103, Palakkad 101, Alappuzha 94, Idukki 86, and Wayanad 70 cases.

Telangana's count of new cases on Tuesday was 431, the highest in a day this year.

On Tuesday, 70,280 people were tested. Two more patients succumbed, taking the toll to 1,676.

The new cases included 111 from Greater Hyderabad, 37 from Medchal-Malkajgiri,

Back to square one

With COVID-19 clusters emerging in schools and colleges, authorities have decided to shut down institutions



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

	TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES	ACTIVE CASES	
		RECOVERED CASES	DEATHS
TELANGANA*	3,352	2,99,270	1,676
TAMIL NADU	9,746	8,49,064	12,630
ANDHRA PRADESH	2,946	8,84,978	7,197
KARNATAKA**	16,886	9,46,589	12,461
KERALA***	24,268	10,80,803	4,527

31 from Rangareddy, 21 each from Jagtial and Mancherla, and 19 from Nizamabad. Only one person tested positive in Jayashankar Bhupalapally.

Andhra Pradesh reported

four deaths and 585 new infections, the highest daily toll in two months and highest single-day incidence in

100 days. At 1.67%, the TPR of 35,066 samples was also the highest in the past three and a half months. The four new deaths were in Chittoor, Guntur, Kurnool and Visakhapatnam districts.

In Karnataka, cases shot

up on Wednesday by 2,298.

Of these, 1,398 were from

Bengaluru Urban. There were 12 deaths, raising the toll to 12,461. In all 1,08,013 tests were conducted in 24 hours. On Wednesday, 1,12,105 senior citizens and 37,355 people above 45 years with comorbidities were vaccinated.

COVID-19 cases exceeded

Karnataka Minister warns of lockdown

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

Karnataka Health and Medical Education Minister K. Sudhakar on Wednesday said there would be no other option for the State other than a lockdown if the number of COVID-19 cases rose further. Despite repeated appeals, people were still not wearing masks or maintaining physical distancing, the Minister said.

1,600 in Tamil Nadu on Wednesday, taking the tally to 8,71,440. A total of 1,636 persons tested positive and 12 persons died. Chennai continued to register a surge as 633 persons tested positive.

(With inputs from Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Bengaluru & Chennai bureaus)

NDA promises jobs to all families

Many sops for low-income families in Kerala

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The BJP-led NDA's manifesto for Kerala Assembly polls released on Wednesday leaned heavily on populist measures targeted at low-income families. It reaffirmed the alliance's core commitment to nationalistic politics.

Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Prakash Javadekar unveiled the declaration. The manifesto promised employment for at least one member in each family. An increased social welfare pension of ₹3,500 a month, free housing, piped drinking water and power for the poor are the other highlights.

The BPL families would receive medical assistance up to ₹5 lakh under the Ayushman Bharat scheme. The NDA would open Jana Oushadhi centres in all panchayats. It also promised an IMIS centre in Kerala and upgrading district hospitals and medical colleges in the



Clear message: Election graffiti in Gujarati in Mattancherry, a multicultural pocket in the Kochi constituency. ■ THULASI KAKKAT

families, a monthly medical grant of ₹5,000 to inpatients from BPL households, travel concession for senior citizens and fair wages are the other highlights.

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State to specialty and super-specialty centres.

The NDA promised to be a

bulwark against the global Islamist threat and terrorism. It pledged a State law against 'Love Jihad'. It vowed to free temple administration from political control and hand the institutions over to collectives of devotees. The coalition promised to target terrorism, anti-national organisations and end political violence in Kerala for good.

He was addressing an

election convention of the National Democratic Alliance at Ponkunnam.

Mr. Shah dismissed allegations of deploying the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for political gains and threw a set of queries towards the Chief Minister.

He also spoke about how the CPI(M) was allegedly remote controlling the Public Service Commission (PSC) to fit in its cadre in government jobs.

Shah attacks LDF, Pinarayi on gold case

STAFF REPORTER
KANNUR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday launched a scathing attack on the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan over the gold smuggling case.

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election convention of the National Democratic Alliance at Ponkunnam.

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'New legislation a ploy to enforce Police Raj'

'It will give unbridled powers to police'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Eight Opposition parties, in a joint statement, condemned the events that took place in the Patna Assembly on Tuesday, where Opposition members were brutally beaten up and dragged out of the Assembly by the police, following chaotic scenes over the Bihar Armed Police Bill.

"This is unprecedented. I have never heard about such an incident in 49 years of my political career that the police entered inside the State Assembly to drag out legislators, including women members. This is crossing all democratic boundaries and making a mockery of our Constitutional system," Leader of the Opposition in the Raja Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge said.

In a joint statement signed by the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Congress, the Samajwadi Party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, the Telangana Rashtra Samithi, the Trinamool Congress and the Shiv Sena, the Opposition said that the Bihar Armed Police Bill is an "insidious conspiracy to enforce Police Raj in Bihar".

This law conferred unbridled powers upon the Bihar Military Police to conduct raids and arrests without warrants.

"This is an unconstitutional Bill that effectively transforms the police force into an armed militia to harass, suppress and crack down on academics, activists, journalists, the political opposition and all those who dare to speak truth to power," it said.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PATNA

A day after they were evicted from the Assembly by the police after a scuffle, Opposition Rashtriya Janata Dal legislators held a parallel session on the lawns of the House protesting against the Bihar Special Armed Police Bill, 2021.

Leader of the Opposition Tejaswi Yadav, while condemning the "forcible, brutal police act", said they would boycott the Assembly for the remainder of its tenure, if Chief Minister Nitish Kumar did not apologise.

The Opposition members led by the RJD had created a ruckus inside and outside the Assembly on Tuesday over the Bihar Special Armed Police Bill, which they called "draconian".

Outside, RJD leaders had clashed with policemen. Several party leaders and poli-



Scaling up: Opposition legislators protesting against the Nitish Kumar government outside the Bihar Assembly in Patna on Wednesday. ■ PTI

cemen were injured. Inside the House, the protesting Opposition legislators staged a dharna outside the Speaker's chamber and prevented him from resuming the session to pass the Bill. They were forcibly ousted and allegedly "beaten up and manhandled by policemen" who

were called in by the Speaker.

RJD MLA Satish Das was seen being taken out on a stretcher.

Later, an FIR was filed against Tejaswi Yadav and several RJD leaders for clashing with the police at the Dak Bungalow intersection in the

city on Tuesday.

Mr. Yadav said the Bill had provisions that would allow the police to conduct searches and arrest anyone without a warrant. The "draconian" Bill, he said, would give absolute powers to the police, so that it could act as a veritable arm of Mr. Nitish's dicta-

torial politics. The Opposition's parallel Assembly session had senior RJD leader Bhudeo Choudhary as the "Speaker". Members of the RJD, Congress, CPI, CPI(M) and CPI(ML) carried placards with slogans against the NDA government.

Inside the House, JD(U) leader and NDA candidate Maheshwar Hazari was chosen as the Deputy Speaker by voice vote in the absence of the Opposition members.

Meanwhile, the Bihar Special Armed Police Bill, 2021 was passed in the Legislative Council too amid protests by the Opposition members.

The UNHRC had adopted a resolution against Sri Lanka's rights record, which gives the U.N. body a mandate to collect evidence of crimes committed during the brutal civil war (2008-09) against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

A grounding in civil liberties

Justice N.V. Ramana remembers the excesses committed during the Emergency

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

Many years before he began his journey, which will eventually see him being sworn in as the 48th Chief Justice of India, Nuthalapati Venkata Ramana undertook an arduous journey by truck with ₹10 in his pocket.

The journey was to the home of his maternal aunt. The year was 1975. The young man had heeded his father's advice to stay away from their agrarian home at Ponnavaram village after word spread that the government was going to proclaim Emergency.

The father feared that the police would arrest his son, who had never hid his passion for civil liberties.

"In hindsight, I wish my father had given me some more money," Justice N.V. Ramana recounted the incident recently.

He said excesses such as the Emergency impacted generations.



Justice N.V. Ramana

In January 2020, a Bench led by Justice Ramana ripped the veil of secrecy shrouding months of restrictions imposed in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Bench made it mandatory for the government to publish each and every one of its orders that crippled the fundamental freedoms of over 7 million Kashmiri people following the abrogation of Article 370.

The Bench held that a

right cannot be used against itself. The extensive reach of the Internet cannot be cited as a reason to restrict the right.

"Freedom of speech and expression includes the right to disseminate information to as wide a section of the population as possible," Justice Ramana observed in the judgment.

Part of many decisions

Justice Ramana, as Supreme Court judge, has been part of various decisions ranging from electoral issues and rights of women to bringing the Chief Justice of India's office within the ambit of the Right to Information (RTI).

In 2019, a five-judge Bench, of which Justice Ramana was a member, declared the CJI's office a public authority accountable under the RTI to provide information sought in public interest.

However, Justice Ramana, in a separate opinion, said

"RTI should not be used as a tool of surveillance".

Paternalistic notion

A Bench led by Justice Ramana, in a recent judgment, criticised the paternalistic notion that homemakers neither work nor contribute anything of economic value to the household.

Justice Ramana's judgment in the Karnataka MLAs' disqualification case said it was time to "reconsider strengthening certain aspects of the Tenth Schedule".

The verdict said that horse-trading political parties and partisan Speakers were denying citizens a stable government.

In his speech at a Madras Bar Association function amid the controversy surrounding the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister's letter to the CJI, Justice Ramana highlighted the need to "hold on to principles and be fearless in decisions".

Closure to plea against Justice Ramana

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court's dismissal of Andhra Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's complaint against the Supreme Court judge Justice N.V. Ramana in an in-house procedure comes a few months after Attorney-General K. K. Venugopal declined consent to a plea to initiate contempt action against Mr. Reddy.

The top law officer and constitutional authority has, however, said it was "open"

for the court to initiate *suo motu* contempt against the Chief Minister.

A few months ago, in November, the Attorney-General had declined permission to a Supreme Court lawyer, advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay, to initiate contempt proceedings against the Chief Minister for his October 6 letter of complaint.

Mr. Venugopal had then maintained that the Chief Justice of India was "seized" of the letter and it would be inappropriate on his part to

grant consent and "preclude the determination of the Chief Justice of India" in the issue.

The Attorney-General had concurred that the timing of Mr. Reddy's letter was "suspect". In this context, the Attorney-General had referred to Mr. Upadhyay's statement that Mr. Reddy had 31 criminal cases against him.

Mr. Upadhyay had twice sought the Attorney-General's consent to file contempt proceedings against Mr. Reddy in the Supreme Court.

Mr. Upadhyay is the petitioner-in-person in a case seeking quick disposal of criminal cases against legislators across the country. He had alleged that Justice Ramana's order on September 16 to try these cases expeditiously may have prompted Mr. Reddy to write the letter on October 6. He had said that Mr. Reddy's letter and its release to the media by the Chief Minister's Principal Adviser Ajeya Kallam on October 10 amounted to contempt of court.

The court recorded, in the present crime, the Central government has given directions to the NIA under Section 6 (investigation of scheduled offences) and 8 (power to investigate connected offences) of the NIA Act to investigate this crime. "Transmit all relevant documents and records to the NIA without any delay," the court said.

Give papers of Antilia case to NIA, ATS told

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The special court at Thane on Wednesday directed the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) to hand over all case papers in the Antilia case and the Mansukh Hirani murder case to the National Investigation Agency.

Representing the NIA, Additional Solicitor-General Anil Singh said as per the Central government directions, the State and the ATS police officers shall not proceed with the investigation and shall transfer the relevant documents to the Central agency.

The court recorded, in the present crime, the Central government has given directions to the NIA under Section 6 (investigation of scheduled offences) and 8 (power to investigate connected offences) of the NIA Act to investigate this crime. "Transmit all relevant documents and records to the NIA without any delay," the court said.

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The court recorded, in the present crime

IN BRIEF



Petrol price cut by 18 paise a litre

In the first reduction in rates in over a year, petrol price on Wednesday was cut by 18 paise a litre and diesel by 17 paise a litre as the international oil prices tumbled to the lowest since early February. Petrol price was cut to ₹90.99 a litre in Delhi from ₹91.17 per litre. PTI

Haryana bans celebrating Holi in public places

CHANDIGARH

Haryana Health Minister Anil Vij on Wednesday said in view of the COVID-19 situation, celebrating Holi in public places across the State has been banned. "On this festival, people apply colour and come in contact with each other, which increases the risk of spreading the disease," he said.

Nod for use of ranks by retired SSC officers

NEW DELHI

Addressing a long-pending demand of retired Short Service Commission (SSC) officers of the Army, the Defence Ministry has decided to allow them the use of military ranks. "The decision will not only remove dissatisfaction and discontentment among the retired SSC officers, but will also serve as a boost to young aspirants," the Ministry said.

Congress seeks recall of Manipur Governor

NEW DELHI

A delegation of Congress legislators from Manipur met President Ram Nath Kovind on Wednesday with a plea to recall Governor Najma Heptulla for "failing to discharge her obligatory Constitutional duty".

Stan Swamy conspired to overpower govt.: court

MUMBAI

While refusing bail to the 83-year-old Jesuit priest Father Stan Swamy in the Bhima Koregaon violence case, the special National Investigation Agency (NIA) court held that it could be gathered that Fr Swamy along with others hatched a serious conspiracy to create unrest in the entire country and to overpower the government.

Two accused held guilty in Nikita murder case

Sentence to be announced tomorrow

ASHOK KUMAR

FARIDABAD

The prime accused in the Nikita Tomar murder case, Tosif and his friend Rihan, were held guilty by the District and Sessions Court here on Wednesday. The third accused, Ajrudeen, was acquitted.

The judgment in the sensational murder case came almost five months after Nikita, 20, was shot point-blank outside Aggarwal College in Ballabgarh on October 26 last year. The quantum of sentence will be announced on March 26.

Pronouncing the verdict, Additional Sessions Judge Sartaj Baswana held Tosif and Rihan guilty on charges

'Grave concern over Maharashtra, Punjab'

Health Ministry expresses worry about case surge

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

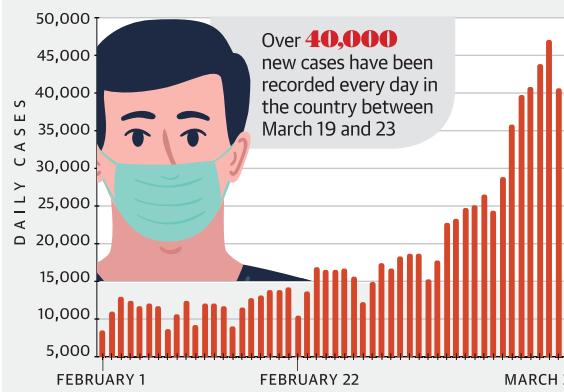
NEW DELHI

Maharashtra and Punjab are States of grave concern with both showing a surge in daily new COVID-19 cases, Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said at a press conference on Wednesday. Pune (43,590 cases), Nagpur (33,160), Mumbai (26,599), Thane (22,513) and Nashik (15,710) in Maharashtra and Jalandhar (92,629), SAS Nagar (2,561), Ludhiana (2,167), Patiala (2,064) and Hoshiarpur (1,833) in Punjab are the districts registering the highest numbers.

"Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh and Chandigarh are also areas which are seeing a surge. While COVID protocol needs to be fol-

Surge continues

On March 23, India's daily COVID-19 case count crossed the 45,000 mark for the second-time in just three days



lowed, we also urge greater private partnership to ensure faster and wider coverage of the vulnerable population," he said.

Mr. Bhushan said 88% of the COVID-19 deaths in India was of those 45 and above, and the expanded vaccination cover was aimed at pro-

tecting the most vulnerable. "The way forward in this early phase of the second wave is test, mask and vaccination," Balram Bharagava, Head, Indian Council of Medical Research, said.

He said the vaccines available with India protected against the U.K. and Brazil-



In the pink: Asia's largest Tulip Garden will start welcoming tourists on Thursday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

Visit tulip garden in J&K: Modi

15 lakh flowers of more than 64 varieties in bloom

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday asked everyone to visit tulip garden, located at the foothills of Zabarwan range in Jammu and Kashmir, and enjoy the warm hospitality of the people of Jammu and Kashmir."

The tulip garden will be thrown open to public on Thursday.

"Tomorrow, 25th March is

special for Jammu and Kashmir. A majestic tulip garden in the foothills of the Zabarwan Mountains will open for visitors. The garden will see over 15 lakh flowers of more than 64 varieties in bloom," Mr. Modi said in another tweet.

The tulip garden is located in the foothills of the Zabarwan range.

said, "Whenever you get the opportunity, do visit Jammu and Kashmir and witness the scenic Tulip festival. In addition to the tulips, you will experience the warm hospitality of the people of Jammu and Kashmir."

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I missed... The big screen

It's March 2020, a late evening on a Friday and I have come to see *Trance* at a well-known mall in the city, positively unaware of the red flags that are about to be raised. In a week's time, they will announce the first bout of lockdowns and in two weeks, the same mall would come under scrutiny for suspected Covid cases.

For someone whose job description includes residing in a theatre – almost religiously – for the customary Friday ritual, the pandemic, in cinema terms, brought about the longest interval, as we awaited the second half with bated breath.

Eight months and nearly 250 days later, here I was trudging my way through the largely empty corridors of said mall to catch a film, the first sign of normalcy

in my book.

Allow me a confession: I wasn't too excited. Partly due to the film; it was Christopher Nolan's *Tenet*. Nor was I nervous of visiting theatres in the midst of a raging pandemic. Of course I missed going to the movies, witnessing the images unfold with child-like enthusiasm. But it couldn't be the same in this New Normal, I thought.

Until I stepped into the darkroom.

Welcoming me was a cold, refreshing breeze from the AC, accented by the sweet fragrance that is so unique to theatres. Even the statutory warnings about cigarettes felt like music to the ears.

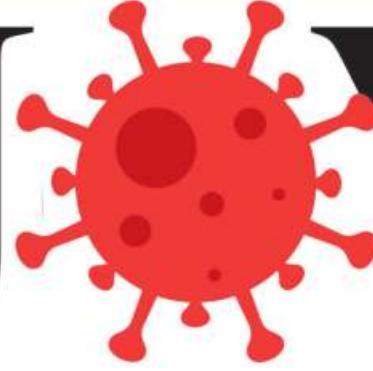
And there were faces inside – not too many, but definitely enough for company. The house lights went out, the projector switched on and the crystal-clear sound from Dolby Atmos boomed in the hall.

It was something I hadn't felt in a long time; it felt pure.

Nolan Sir must be delighted.

- Srivatsan S

Oh, simple joys



Absence makes the heart grow fonder. To mark one year of the first lockdown, we asked our reporters what slices of life they value a whole lot more, after spending months deprived of them

TEAM METROPLUS, ILLUSTRATIONS: SATHEESH VELLINEZHI



I missed... Outdoor playtime with my son

Only the crows seemed to brave the virus.

It was in early April last year, when the country was under its first lockdown. The Prime Minister appeared on TV warning us about the strange new virus. It had been two weeks since we stepped out of home and my three-year-old son and I decided to go for a walk around our tree-lined neighbourhood in Coimbatore.

I assumed there would be other reckless souls like us outside but no, it was just us and the crows that cawed from atop the electric poles. We sat on our usual bench outside our apartment when we heard it: a loudspeaker announcement that warned against people stepping outside. My son and I ran for our lives, long before the security guards reached us.

Cut to the present.

The two of us sit on the same bench, grinning ear to ear behind our masks. Children are cycling, people are on their evening walks and dogs yelp happily. The outdoor play area has a sandpit, swing set, sliding boards... heaven, from my son's perspective. Mine too, to be honest, given how we have lived mostly indoors over the past one year.

We have packed bottles of water to play with, his plastic shovel and a few toys. He does a little dance before plonking himself on the sand. It seems cleaner than ever before. As he empties the bottle and starts mixing water and sand with his little hands, I drift away.

A cool breeze wafts our way as I run my hands through the sand. "Shall we play on the slide?" I ask my son. He jumps up, and before I could stop myself, I am sliding too. No one is looking, I promise.

- Akila Kannadasan

I missed... Annoying my dadu!

Grandfather can barely hear, so we don't call. On the rare occasions when video calls were possible, beaming smiles and silent waves have had to suffice.

So naturally, when we were under the same roof after more than a year apart, the chatter and the laughter reached such a crescendo that he began to wish we were



back within phone screens, if only for the relief of putting us on mute and retiring into his newspaper.

For, at the age of 95, my grandfather's joys are simple – soft rotis on the clock for dinner and a chair on the balcony to take in the morning sun. So when his work-harried grandchildren stumbled in with their laptops for some long-overdue family time, joy took little time in giving way to confusion.

The company at lunchtime was welcome; discussions over the newspaper (with sly nudges at wedding jewellery ads) were a plus. But this visit being longer than most, some things had to be clarified. For instance, it took us weeks to assure him that we had not lost our jobs, and were in fact working from the next room every single day.

Shut doors and confidential work meetings, 10 minutes after a snack run into the kitchen, were also a lot to grasp. After all, why shouldn't a man just stroll into his grandchildren's room and peer into those complicated laptops whenever he wanted to?

And then we gifted him his nemesis – a hearing aid. The calm of his life was suddenly interrupted by laugh tracks of TV shows, shrill whistles of the cooker, squabbles of his now less-than-beloved progeny.

It didn't take him long to find the off button, however. Now if only he could find ours.

- Meghna Majumdar

I missed... Ordering cocktails at a bar

"And ma'am, what would you like to drink?" asked the waiter, turning to me for the third time, polite but deadpan. I take too long to decide what I want.

That is because, for me, a bar menu is cathartic. I enjoy reading the name of each drink, mulling over its ingredients, thinking about how it will feel in my mouth and most importantly, how my tummy will react to it the following morning.

This simple joy was abruptly taken away when the lockdown was announced last year. A seemingly trivial matter in comparison to the bigger problems that lay ahead, but in the months that followed I realised how much I missed this process of ordering an immaculately put together drink.

Of course, I experimented with cocktails at home. Milo, condensed milk to tamarind, jam and spices... Sometimes I just winged it, and at other times, concoctions were inspired by my favourite bars. But I soon ran out of combinations, ingredients and enthusiasm.

After a long hiatus, when I finally entered a bar and the familiar fragrance of lemongrass and cedar wafted through my triple-layer mask – oh it felt like being home again! Drinks in test tubes, cherry blossom in cubes of jelly, lavender ice balls... a night of endless possibilities lay ahead of me once more.

There was comfort in seeing familiar faces and flipping through that menu again, knowing that I can order anything I want without worrying about washing up. Even if, with bartenders in PPE suits, gloves and visors, the atmosphere felt less like *The Great Gatsby* and more *Apollo 13*.

- Priyadarshini Paitandy



SWETA AKUNDI

For 10 days, all I could taste were oranges. Those citrusy bites were my only gustatory awakenings in the sleepy blandness that COVID-19 brought into my life. But, I could not smell them.

Close your eyes and picture your favourite food. It is likely that the first thing you thought of was how it smells. The parts of your brain that process your emotions and memories use olfactory data, linking them closely. Our sense of smell enriches our sense of taste.

So when you wake up one morning and lose both, the world around you shifts slightly. You don't realise it but you miss the stimuli that were anchoring you: the smell of your skin, your bedsheet, wet soil in the garden, the shampoo in your hair, breakfast cooking in the kitchen.

From memory

It happened to me in February, after I caught COVID-19. But to Chindi Varadarajulu, it happened 30 years ago – a severe flu during her second winter in Vancouver, Canada, left the would-be chef's nose incapable of sniffing out flavours. "I am still upset that I have never smelt real lilacs," says Chindi. After appointments with specialists in Singapore and Canada, she had a name for the condition: anosmia.

In the past year, anosmia has become a significant marker of COVID. Or in my case – parosmia, where instead of an olfactory vacuum, familiar smells seem



In a world without fragrance

As this writer recovers from COVID-19, she speaks to a chef who lost her sense of smell 30 years ago

All about practice Blind sniffing spices to recognise and remember smells helps train the nose • GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

distorted. For a few days, I wondered if anyone had spilled anything rancid. Did our dog kill a rat we did not know about? Because it seemed as though a stench would follow me around, stuck inside my nose. Around the world, as there is greater research on 'long COVID', there may be relief for

people whose symptoms have still not abated, even after testing negative.

Thirty years on, Chindi's sense of smell still has not returned. Still, it did not pull her back from a career in the culinary arts. Could her journey provide some answers for those who

still show symptoms of anosmia? "For a year after I stopped being able to smell, I tried nasal sprays of all sorts. Sometimes I would convince myself that I smelled something familiar – but it was just like a phantom itch," says Chindi. At her first restaurant in

Vancouver, set up in 2003, she remembers accidentally burning a batch of *dal*, failing to notice and put it out until someone drew her attention to it. Today, she creates new recipes out of memories of old flavours, and has her team at Pumpkin Tales in Chennai test it out.

She can do this because all these years, she has been making up for her lack of smell through an accentuated sense of taste. "I may not be able to identify flavour profiles [a combination of taste and smell] but my taste is enhanced in many ways. For instance, tamarind, tomato, lemon – these are all sour tastes, but to different degrees: some sharp, some more rounded, some with a bitter aftertaste, some sweet. I can appreciate all of that because of my years of training," says Chindi.

The passion with which she speaks of taste reminds me of the two weeks I spent bereft of it. At lunchtime, I could see how visually appealing the meal was: a dollop of ghee melting over the tomato *dal*, seasoned with herbs and greens. But inside my mouth, it was a hot lump of nothingness. Fluffy rotis were like wet paper; evening snacks nothing better than an exercise in chewing.

Smell kits help. Comprising essential flavour profiles, they help associate odours with the correct source, almost willing your brain into remembering them

So of course, after getting my taste back, the first swirl of peanut butter chocolate ice cream made me feel complete in a way nothing else has.

Chindi encourages me to pay more attention to the food I eat, and I readily agree. "Take in the texture. Look at what you are eating and associate it with what you're feeling in your mouth, focus on the balance of tastes," she recommends.

Train yourself

Pay attention because if it slips away, you might not notice all at once. For, while there are eye charts and hearing tests, there are not many quantitative ways we can measure our power of smell and taste. Which is why, many people who have been infected with COVID once find it difficult to say for sure whether their senses have returned completely.

Smell kits help. Comprising essential flavour profiles, they help associate odours with the correct source, almost willing your brain into recognising and remembering them.

Back in February, I would do an informal training every day, as I picked up an apple or my favourite bar of soap, sniffing it, trying to remember what it smelt like.

After I was reacquainted with a familiar smell – a cloud of freshly sprayed disinfectant, I rushed to the kitchen, sniffing spice after spice. Most I could recognise again, but some are 'muffled' till date.

"You should come over to the restaurant once," offers Chindi, "We can do a smell-test and see how many you get right." I look forward to it.

I missed... Putting in tuk-tuks

I have a love-hate relationship with putting auto rickshaws. An old favourite from my college days, I now prefer to flag them down only for assignments in crowded areas, admiring the drivers for their deft manoeuvring through small gaps and also cursing them for rattling my bones.

When I stepped out for the first time after months of pandemic confinement, it was an auto rickshaw that came to my rescue.

I picked up groceries and rushed back to the protective bubble of my car. But the machine that always revs up with a gentle push to the start button groaned and sputtered that evening.

Loaded with multiple bags and stranded on the side of road at 7.30 pm, I did what I thought was best – flagged down the first auto coming my way. Barely had I adjusted myself inside, than the auto screeched to halt and a young boy hopped in. I realised I had boarded a share auto.

Half a kilometre down, a maskless woman threw herself in on the same deck. I crushed myself to the side of the auto, wrapped my scarf around my face and requested the driver to not take on any more passengers. He replied that with less transport available we should not leave anybody stranded on the road in fear of the virus! I have never felt so fiendish.

Soon, *dhinchak* music set the mood to this thriller, and another couple squeezed themselves in. The four co-passengers squashed my body, mind and ego.

Eight kilometres had never seemed so long.

The auto gathered speed and I swayed to the back-breaking rhythms of the vehicle. It leapt over a speed breaker on a fairly empty road and all of us went into the air and came down with a thud. I reluctantly clutched the rod above my head.

The driver cut through a crowded evening *haat*, scraping past sedans, matadors, cyclists, and motorcyclists, and looking calm all the while.

It was a perspiring ride back home but I was relieved to return safe. The autowallah had come to my rescue when I needed him the most. It was a welcome back to reality.

- Soma Basu

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"You should come over to the restaurant once," offers Chindi, "We can do a smell-test and see how many you get right." I look forward to it.

How Zhayynn James transformed a space in his farmland into a photography hide that is now a hangout for 44 avian species and 11 non avian species

SRINIVASA RAMANUJAM

An Asian koel is ready for his afternoon snack. He flutters in, perches on his favourite branch and bites into a banana. As he enjoys the fruit, a coppersmith barbet glides in.

They exchange hostile glances. This could be war.

Thankfully, the coppersmith barbet decides to retreat and flies away. The fight will continue another day.

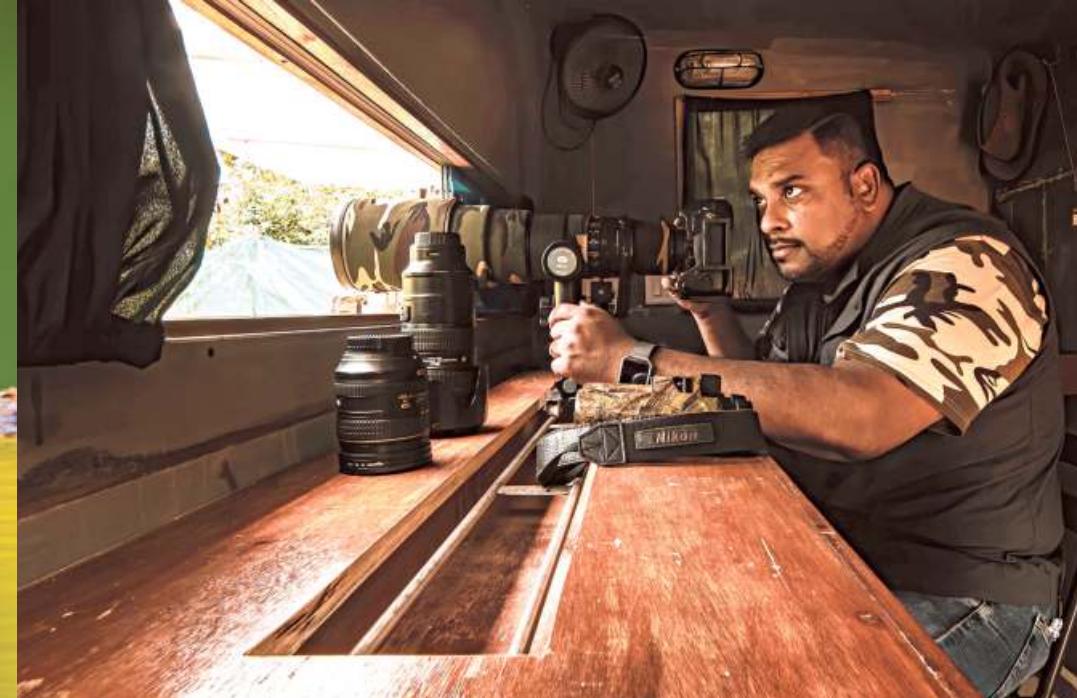
Every afternoon at Zhayynn James' personal photography hide, located inside his farmland at Tirukazhukundram, 70 kilometres from Chennai, is an episode from a Nature channel.

When this landscape architect and passionate wildlife photographer slides open the small windows in his hide, the chirps and whistles – seldom heard in the city – give him a warm welcome.

Nature's choice

Zhayynn's intention behind creating the photography hide was simple: to provide an environment that allows photographers to get close to wildlife and observe animal/bird behaviour at close quarters without adversely impacting them.

Combining his designing skills – Zhayynn is a professional landscape architect – with his knowledge of light and lenses, the 45-year-old conceptualised this hide that has, over the last three years, witnessed 44 avian species, 11 non-avian species including reptiles, mammals and amphibians.



Shoot at sight
Zhayynn James in his photography hide; (left) a flock of white-rumped munias and (below) the red-vented bulbul

Flight CLUB

"A few friends of mine were discussing what to do with some space they had, and I suggested a hide. But they thought it was an outlandish idea, and so, I figured I should create one myself, as proof of the concept," says Zhayynn.

What followed was a process of experimentation in his 10-acre farm. He found a patch that had the least amount of human interference and zeroed in on an area in which light was ideal for photography.

He decided to make it an evening hide for convenience sake; to help him drive down from his Chennai residence, in order to catch the action. With an investment of about ₹1.5 lakh, Zhayynn and his team went about creating a small pond, planting a few trees

and creating an environment that they hoped the birds would like. "Some birds do not like moving branches. Some like the bounce on the branches. The

idea was to put different tensile quality purchase to suit the variety of birds that come in," he recalls. A few metres away, they created a small, well-ventilated space for the photographer to sit comfortably.

"The first birds that came were babblers. Though they are common on the farm, the fact that they chose to come here, drink and bathe was wonderful. It is a man-made structure, but for Nature to choose it was so heartwarming," says Zhayynn.

He has been making a weekly visit to the hide to document animal behaviour, and has witnessed many birds including the scaly-breasted munias, white-

ANIMAL INSTINCT

Zhayynn was born and raised in Chennai's Adambakkam, and he says that it played a big role in developing an interest in animals. "The Adambakkam of the 1970s was completely different from what it is today. Back then, we used to have snakes in our compound once a week! I was always surrounded by my wildlife, and my folks nurtured my interest by getting me books." He studied in Madras Christian College, a place known for its greenery, and got into active wildlife photography in 2014; he rates Kaziranga and the Rann of Kutch highly in India, and Tanzania as the best in the world to observe animals. "Wildlife photography is telling a story without words. I would rather make it an interesting story about a common subject than a boring story about an interesting subject."



throated kingfishers and Brahminy starlings. That's not all; his hide has also turned into a hangout for other animals like rat snakes, calotes and mongoose. "And then one day, when my wife and I were sitting around 7.30 pm, a cobra decided to take a swim in the pond. It was an experience we will never forget."

Feathered friends

Since 2017, Zhayynn had been making weekend visits to the hide. These increased during the lockdown last year. "It's almost home," says the photographer, who is usually armed with his trusted Nikon D5, bananas and grains for his feathered friends. "As a means of documenting bird behaviour, hides are a fantastic tool...but they are also great from a conservation point of view."

Over the last six months or so, Zhayynn has been actively branching out to conceptualise hides for clients. Today, he has three projects, for clients in Bangalore and Coimbatore.

"One of them even has a pantry and a built-in toilet. Hides can be customised based on budget and space, but the idea is to get a sense of animal behaviour at close quarters. The kind of drama that plays around a hide is fascinating."

SHONALI MUTHALALY



Remember when we made Dalgona?

Our last unmasked night out at a restaurant was a year ago. The pandemic, and a year at the sink, has changed how we cook and dine

toes and apples with equal vigour, as well as cook instead of ordering in. Classes from mothers, grandmothers and chefs on Instagram demonstrated basic techniques and demystified regional ingredients, even as Facebook and WhatsApp groups buzzed with generally shared family recipes and cooking hacks.

One year later, we are all more comfortable in the kitchen. It helps that lockdown triggered a wave of food start-ups supplying high

quality sauces, pickles and *masala* for home cooks making it easier to put together both family meals and dinner parties.

It also led to a dramatic rise in dishwasher sales.

Now, the joy of masked dining

COVID baby restaurants surprised everyone, including their promoters. Launching a restaurant is always risky. In a world bristling with fear, you would think it would be riskier. However, after many months of home cooking and solitary dining, customers are embracing new openings with excitement. Eager to venture out again, buoyed by savings accrued from a year at home, people are congregating at restaurants to work, reunite with friends or just linger over coffee.

The romance with home chefs was short. Of course, there was a rise in talented, motivated ones, who steadily



ly cooked their way through the pandemic, drawing a loyal audience. But, in the surge of 2020, many put profits over passion, cutting costs on ingredients and raising prices arbitrarily. Quality is often inconsistent and packaging haphazard, although they do seem to strive tirelessly when it comes to updating Instagram.

We also saw a surge in dark kitchens, as customers embraced takeaway, all of varying quality. Given the current levels of competition, many of last year's food start-ups will not survive through 2021.

The pandemic has devastated the hospitality industry, with restaurant closures and job cuts. However, the last few months have seen an encouraging number of restaurant openings, capitalising on low rents, lower overheads and a large pool of talented manpower available from last year's closures.

In response to the lockdowns, they are designed to be filled with sunshine and colour. Menus focus on comfort over style, and local ingredients over imported exotica. Service is less formal, prioritising warmth over ritual. And customers, largely, are less demanding, grateful to be out again.

After a year of uncertainty, restaurants remind us about the joy of social interaction, even if it does come with masks, temperature guns and sanitiser.

Just for thrills

Director Sajit Warrier on the making of his cyber crime thriller 'Chakravyuh'

ANASUYA MENON



Director Sajit Warrier's web series *Chakravyuh – An Inspector Virkar Crime Thriller* that has been streaming on MX Player from March 12, pitches the old world against the new digital age. Shot in posh South Mumbai, including trippy underground clubs, the series resonates with the youth, capturing their joys and inner struggles. Based on Piyush Jha's novel, *Anti-Social Network*, the cyber crime series is packed with twists and turns, says the director. Prateik Babbar essays the lead role.

Excerpts from an interview:

Was Prateik Babbar the first choice as lead in Chakravyuh?

• Prateik Babbar was always our first choice. He has an intensity in his eyes, which was perfect for this part.... This is rarely tapped and it was such a pleasure to work with him. From physically transforming himself for this role to creating a character with a lot of pent up fury, this was very challenging and he just rocked it totally.

What was your experience shooting for the series?

• The most wonderful aspect was that everyone really connected with

wood. When I arrived in Mumbai, I set up Warrier Films and we just enjoyed doing branding and animations for MTV VHI and other channels. Storytelling and experimenting in the visual medium began with short films and video art. There's so much opportunity in the visual medium that it's a great time to try out different genres and have a unique stylistic approach.

What role do you identify with most: director, writer, editor?

• For me, filmmaking is the ultimate visual art. As a director, I bring in a vision which I feel is unique and that's what I identify with most. I think as a director, my strength is to keep an audience engrossed in the storyviewing process. The social experience of keeping an audience engaged in a dark theatre is what makes me want to enhance my directing approach.

With the entry of OTT platforms, has the canvas widened for young filmmakers?

• It is with the advent of OTT platforms that I am able to tell my stories. I have been in innumerable meetings where people have told me "The story is a little too out there". Well this medium is all about being out there and telling stories and characters, which have a unique perspective. We can attempt stories in budgets that would not have worked before. There's no fatigue for watching content now, which should help us try unique stories. So these are exciting times.

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9				8		
10						
11	12	13		14		
15			16			
17		18	19			
20						
21				22	23	
24						
25						
26						

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Across

- 1 Highly detailed (9)
- 8 Repast (4)
- 9 Keep down costs (9)
- 10 Where the altar is
- 13 Precipitous (5)
- 15 Dissimilar (6)
- 16 Legal (6)
- 17 Board ship (6)

THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-15542

19 Small restaurant

(6)

20 Reasonable

judgement (5)

21 Rowing team (4)

24 Trembled (9)

25 Christmas (4)

26 Full stiff petticoat

■ Down

2 Shortage (4)

3 Explosion (4)

4 Stand-offish (6)

5 Ornamental tuft of threads (6)

6 Take a silly risk (5,4)

7 Aristocratic descent (4,5)

11 Inactive – quit scene (anag) (9)

12 Walloped (9)

13 Sound of the bagpipes (5)

14 Lose one's cool (5)

18 Genuine and legitimate (informal) (6)

19 Commanded (6)

22 Prison accommodation (4)

23 Shaped as with an axe (4)

15 I F O E Y G A

D A I Q U I R I G U S T

R I Q U I T C E O

F L I M S Y R A I S I N

E N H S R W

T O G S I M M O L A T E

L L O U G A

O V I P A R O U S G U T

C N O C E E I

K E E P S T H E L I D O N

A N T I C L I M A C T I C

V H L N L O H

O R E I N S O L E N C E

I F Q E Y G A

D A I Q U I R I G U S T

R I Q U I T C E O

F L I M S Y R A I S I N

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THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-15542

Solution will appear on April 1, 2021.

Solution No. 15541

To play The Guardian Quick Crossword, The Hindu Cryptic crossword, Sudoku & other puzzles online, scan the QR code.

A ND-NDE

Solution will appear on April 1, 2021.

Solution No. 15541

A ND-NDE

China lashes out at U.S. and EU

Report raises 'racism, inequality' in America; govt. accuses EU of 'hypocrisy'

ASSOCIATED PRESS



Sharp attack: Chinese academics and officials at a press conference regarding a report on the U.S. on Wednesday. ■ AP

China took the U.S. to task on Wednesday over racism, financial inequality and the federal government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in an annual report that seeks to counter U.S. accusations of human rights abuses by China's ruling Communist Party.

The 28-page report opens with "I can't breathe", a reference to George Floyd, a Black-American who died last May after a police officer pressed his knee against Floyd's neck for about nine minutes.

The document also highlighted the January 6 attack on the Capitol, as well as gun violence and health disparities. China issues the report every year in response to

U.S. criticism of its record on issues such as abuses against minority groups and a crackdown on opposition voices in Hong Kong.

"To defeat the epidemic requires mutual help, solidarity and cooperation among all countries. However, the United States, which has always considered itself an exception and superior, saw its own epidemic situ-

ation go out of control, accompanied by political disorder, inter-ethnic conflicts, and social division," the report said.

'Arbitrary sanctions'
Separately, China also hit out at the European Union on Wednesday, accusing it of "hypocrisy" after the two sides summoned each other's envoys in an escalating

row over the treatment of China's Muslim Uighurs.

France, Germany and other EU nations called in Chinese ambassadors to protest against sanctions imposed by Beijing targeting their citizens, including five members of the European Parliament and two EU bodies and two think-tanks. The sanctions were a tit-for-tat response after the EU, Britain and Canada blacklisted four former and current officials in China's Xinjiang region.

"The EU ... arbitrarily imposes sanctions based on false information and lies, but does not allow the Chinese to talk back or fight back," said Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying. "This in itself is double standards, a manifestation of bullying and hypocrisy."

Biden calls for ban on assault weapons

U.S. saw two mass shootings within a week, in which 18 people were killed

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

WASHINGTON



Joe Biden

Hours after a gunman opened fire in a supermarket in Boulder, Colorado, U.S. President Joe Biden asked Congress to ban assault weapons and mandate stricter background checks for those buying guns.

The House of Representatives had passed two laws earlier this month that would require more background checks for potential gun buyers. The bills are yet to be passed by the evenly split Senate, where it would require a majority of 60.

"I don't need to wait another minute – let alone an hour – to take common-sense steps that will save the lives in the future, and I urge my colleagues in the House and Senate to act," Mr. Biden said.

said in remarks delivered at the White House on Tuesday. "We can ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines in this country once again," he said, referring to a ban on these weapons between 1994 and 2004.

'Pass the Bills'

The U.S. has seen two mass shootings in the span of a week, resulting in a total of 18 deaths. Ten people were

reported dead in Monday's shooting in Boulder. While details are still emerging, reports say an assault rifle (AR-15) was used in the attack. Last week, eight people were gunned down, most of them Asian women, at three spas in Atlanta.

"The United States Senate

– I hope some are listening – should immediately pass the two House-passed bills that close loopholes in the background check system," Mr. Biden said.

"The AR-15 is one of the most popular guns in America, and not just for sportsmen, but also for people that hunt," GOP Senator from Iowa, Chuck Grassley, said on Tuesday as per the Financial Times.

Senate Majority [Democrat] Leader Chuck Schumer

said he would push for a vote on the House bills in the Senate but it is far from clear that he can get at least 10 Republicans, let alone all Democrats, to support him. Centrist Democrat from West Virginia, Joe Manchin, said he did not support the House bills.

Second Amendment

The U.S. Constitution's Second Amendment grants the right to bear arms. According to a Gallup poll published in the autumn of 2020, 57% percent of Americans felt that gun laws need to be more strict and 42% of respondents said they kept a gun at home.

More than 43,500 people died due to gun violence in 2020, according to the Gun Violence Archive.

Uncertainty hangs over Israel election outcome

Netanyahu's Likud and the rival front are in a close contest

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

JERUSALEM

Israelis awoke on Wednesday to find that after their fourth general election in less than two years, there was still no clear indication of who would form the next government.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party won the most votes, boosting his chances of building a coalition with a majority in the 120-seat Knesset.

But a rival "Anyone but Netanyahu" camp of parties was running neck-and-neck, spelling more uncertainty ahead as the official vote count continued.

Mr. Netanyahu, 71, Israel's longest-serving premier after 12 years in power, had hoped that Tuesday's election would finally allow him to unite a stable right-wing coalition behind him, after three inconclusive elections since 2019.

Likely partners
Analysis by state broadcaster Kan showed that with close to 90% of ballots counted, the combined strength of the declared pro-Netanyahu parties was 52 seats while the rival front commanded 56. This leaves both camps short of the 61 seats required to build a government.

The kingmaker, down the

road, could be the hard-right Yamina party led by Mr. Netanyahu's estranged former protege Naftali Bennett, which, by Kan's projection, won seven seats. Mr. Bennett, a former entrepreneur, has so far not declared which way he will jump.

A Netanyahu coalition would also require alignment with a new far-right extremist alliance called Religious Zionism, which is projected to win six seats. Among its most controversial figures is Itamar Ben-Gvir, who has voiced admiration for Baruch Goldstein, the murderer of 29 Palestinian worshippers in Hebron in 1994.

Myanmar junta frees 600 detainees

Official says 360 men, 268 women were released; journalist was among them

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
YANGON



Set free: A bus with detainees leaving Insein prison in Yangon on Wednesday. ■ AFP

Myanmar freed more than 600 coup detainees on Wednesday, including an Associated Press photographer arrested while covering rallies, following fresh outrage over brutal crackdown on protesters.

In commercial hub Yangon, AP photographer Thein Zaw, 32, who was arrested last month while covering a protest, was freed from Insein prison. "The police officer who sued me withdrew his charge, that's why they released me unconditionally," he said.

"We released 360 men and 268 women from Insein prison today," said a prison official.

Lawyer Khin Maung Myint, who was at Insein prison

for the hearing of two other clients, said 16 busloads of people left the jail at 10 a.m. local time. "Some clients called me (after) informing me of their release," he said.

Silent strike

The regime has unleashed a deadly wave of violence as it struggles to quell nationwide protests against the Febru-

ary 1 ouster and arrest of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Ms. Suu Kyi was due to have a court hearing on Wednesday in Naypyidaw. But her lawyer, Khin Maung Zaw, said the hearing was adjourned till April 1 because of problems with video conferencing caused by a junta-imposed Internet shutdown.

Activists called for a na-

IN BRIEF



'Putin's chef' demands removal from FBI list

MOSCOW
Businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin, nicknamed "Putin's chef" because his company Concord has catered for the Kremlin, has written to the FBI demanding that it remove him from its wanted list. He was indicted by the U.S. three years ago for meddling in its 2016 presidential vote. AFP

Hong Kong clinic barred over foreign vaccine

HONG KONG
Hong Kong health authorities ejected a private clinic from the COVID-19 vaccination drive after it reportedly recommended the German-made Pfizer/BioNTech shot over the one from Sinovac. Authorities said they also reclaimed unused Sinovac doses from the clinic. AFP

Taliban slam Afghan President's proposal for new election

Ghani likely to announce plan next month, say officials

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL

C They are talking about a process that has always been scandalous ... We will never support it
ZABIHULLAH MUJAHID
Taliban spokesman

Involving the Taliban to rule the country once the last U.S. troops withdraw. "The government will go to Turkey with a plan for an early election, which is a fair plan for the future of Afghanistan," said an official.

The Taliban immediately rejected the proposal. "Such

processes [elections] have pushed the country to the verge of crisis in the past," said Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid. "They are now talking about a process that has always been scandalous," he said, adding that any decision on the country's future must be hammered out in ongoing talks between the two sides. "We will never support it."

The U.S. is due to withdraw the last of its troops by May 1 under a deal finalised last year, although President Joe Biden said earlier this month the deadline would be "tough" to meet.

SEARCH FOR MISSING



Maya **Amrit**
5', Built: Thin, Complexion: Fair, Face: Long, Wearing: Pink colour Saree, Red Coat, Black Sleeper and Pajeb in her feet has been missing from her home since 05.02.2021. In this regard a case FIR No. 84/21, u/s 365 IPC, dated 09.02.2021 has been registered at P.S. Burari, Delhi.

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing lady alongwith son but no clue has come to light so far, if any one having any information about this lady alongwith son please inform undersigned.

E-mail : cic@cbi.gov.nic.in

Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641

Fax : 011-24368639

DP/940/N/2021

SHO

P.S. Burari, Delhi

Ph.: 011-27616844/8750870132

Advt. No. NHM/NNL/2021/2134

GOVERNMENT OF PUNJAB DEPARTMENT OF WATER SUPPLY & SANITATION PUNJAB TENDER NOTICE INVITING ON-LINE BIDS

NO. E-TENDER-11/WSSD/DIV.NO.1 PATIALA/EE/2020-21
DATED:- 24.03.2021

THE DEPARTMENT OF WATER SUPPLY & SANITATION DEPARTMENT PUNJAB INVITES ONLINE BID FOR THE FOLLOWING WORK-

1. Providing and Installing One No. Tubewell, Construction of UGSR, Estate Water Supply, Sewerage System, Construction of ETP 75 KLD, Rain Water Harvesting System, Storm Water System, Air Conditioning, Fire System and other contingent work complete in all respect in New Bus Stand, Patiala.

Closing Date and Time:- As per Website

For Details Log onto: <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>

Note:-

1. Any corrigendum to the Tender /RFP notice shall be published on the above website only.

Executive Engineer,
Water Supply & Sanitation Division No.1,
Patiala

DPRB-NA/12/1754/2021/3020

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED



General Public is hereby informed that a boy namely **Sheelu S/o Sh. Nanhe Singh, R/o Village Agrouli, PS Jaitipura, Distt: Sahajahanpur UP** has been missing/kidnapped from Shanti Sanstha, H.No. 2/10, 4th Floor, Ansari Road, Darya Ganj, Delhi since 20.01.2019 from the jurisdiction of Darya Ganj, Delhi. In this regard a FIR No. 24 dated 21.01.2019 u/s 363 IPC has been registered at P.S. Darya Ganj, Delhi. The description of missing/kidnapped boy is as under:

Age : 15 years, Height : 4'6", Face : Oval, Complexion :

Shallow, Built: Medium, Wearing : Violet jersey and blue colour jeans pant, sky blue colour shoes in feet.

If anyone having any clue/information, about the missing/kidnapped boy kindly inform to the undersigned at following phone numbers.

Website : <http://cbi.nic.in>

e-mail : cic@cbi.gov.in

Fax : 011-24368639

DP/726/CD/2021

SHO

P.S., Darya Ganj, Delhi

Ph : 011-23274683

23279331

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED

(See Section 82 Cr. PC)

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused namely **Izrael Afreen @ Shanu Raj S/o Shamsul Afreen R/o H.No. 3198, 1Ind Floor, Gali Masjid Wali, Pahar Ganj, Delhi** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 364/20 U/s 406 IPC P.S.: Nabi Karim, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrants of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused Izrael Afreen @ Shanu Raj could not be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused Izrael Afreen @ Shanu Raj has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused Izrael Afreen @ Shanu Raj of FIR No. 364/20 U/s 406 IPC P.S.: Nabi Karim, Delhi is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before 07.05.2021.

By order

Sh. Gaurav Sharma

Metropolitan Magistrate Central-05,

Room No 241, 2nd Floor,

Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi

DP/722/CD/2021

By order

Sh. Gaurav Sharma

Metropolitan Magistrate Central-05,

Room No 241,

MARKET WATCH

	24-3-2021	% CHANGE
Sensex	49180	-1.74
US Dollar	72.55	-0.16
Gold	44350	-0.05
Brent oil	63.46	-2.32

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	706.85	-31.70
Asian Paints	2443.55	33.25
Axis Bank	706.40	-24.15
Bajaj Auto	3603.55	-74.80
Bajaj Finserv	9202.05	-203.15
Bajaj Finance	5270.30	-108.50
Bharti Airtel	523.65	-5.60
BPCL	429.95	-6.55
Britannia Ind	3537.75	-30.65
Cipla	792.95	16.85
Coal India	132.30	-2.95
Divis Lab	3481.15	-14.80
Dr Reddy's Lab	4350.50	-21.75
Eicher Motors	2660.65	-42.10
GAIL (India)	131.00	-3.40
Grasim Ind	1387.65	-23.60
HCL Tech	975.65	-5.20
HDFC	2465.75	-44.15
HDFC Bank	1478.80	-21.35
HDFC Life	676.50	-7.05
Hero MotoCorp	3033.85	-33.60
Hindalco	317.75	-13.95
Hind Unilever	2318.60	-18.70
ICICI Bank	567.50	-18.90
IndusInd Bank	958.70	-31.35
Infosys	1353.75	-17.80
Indian Oil Corp	94.55	-2.20
ITC	215.95	-6.25
JSW Steel	437.35	-4.45
Kotak Bank	1782.45	-30.20
L&T	1369.15	-35.20
M&M	811.40	-33.25
Maruti Suzuki	7066.20	-120.05
Nestle India Ltd.	16448.10	-233.25
NTPC	106.00	-2.65
ONGC	104.80	-2.35
PowerGrid Corp	221.05	2.05
Reliance Ind	2047.30	-40.20
SBI Life	880.70	-18.20
State Bank	359.85	-12.85
Shree Cement	2780.30	-508.90
Sun Pharma	585.30	-2.55
Tata Motors	294.45	-12.95
Tata Steel	702.80	-38.35
TCS	3121.10	-21.50
Tech Mahindra	992.15	-21.70
Titan	1488.15	-7.20
UltraTech Cement	6858.65	-80.45
UPL	608.85	-24.50
Wipro	411.00	-4.50

EXCHANGE RATES		
Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on March 24		
CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	72.36	72.68
Euro	85.61	86.02
British Pound	99.26	99.70
Japanese Yen (100)	66.59	66.88
Chinese Yuan	11.09	11.14
Swiss Franc	77.39	77.74
Singapore Dollar	53.79	54.03
Canadian Dollar	57.54	57.80
Malaysian Ringgit	17.50	17.60

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



Malabar Gold to embark on ₹1,600-cr. expansion

MUMBAI
Malabar Gold and Diamonds has announced to add 56 stores globally, including 40 in India, in FY21-22, at an investment ₹1,600 crore. "This is in line with the ambitious expansion plan to triple the retail network from over 250 showrooms this year to 750 outlets by 2023," the company said.

Dream Sports raises \$400 million

MUMBAI
Dream Sports, a sports technology company, has announced the completion of a \$400-million secondary investment led by TCV, D1 Capital Partners and Falcon Edge. This is TCV's first investment in India. The round also saw participation from existing investors like Tiger Global, ChrysCapital, TPG Growth, Steadview Capital and Footpath Ventures. Founded in 2008 by Harsh Jain and Bhavit Sheth, Dream Sports is located in Mumbai.

Define unfair trade practice for e-com'

Parliamentary panel warns Centre that predatory pricing will wipe out competition, hurt customers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

A parliamentary panel has recommended that the government should offer a more clear-cut definition of what constitutes 'unfair' trade practice as well as spell out a practical legal remedy to tackle the issue, warning that there was a risk that predatory pricing by e-commerce firms may result in competition being wiped out and prove detrimental to consumers in the long run.

The panel, headed by Partap Singh Bajwa, in its report on 'The Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020' tabled in Parliament on Wednesday, has also recommended fixing a cap on delivery charges levied by e-commerce firms, as well as providing for penal provisions for violation of rules related to misinformation.



Within limits: Norms are needed to fix delivery charges with a cap on the same during peak hours, the panel says. ■ S.S. KUMAR

The committee noted that while e-commerce enterprises offer many benefits, the development of the segment has rendered consumers vulnerable to new forms of unfair trade practices, violation

of privacy and issues of unattended grievances.

"Predatory pricing as a short-term strategy, adopted by some of the market giants with deep pockets to sustain short-term losses and reduce

the prices of their products below the average variable costs may lead to wiping out competition from the market and could be detrimental to the consumers in the long run," the committee said.

'Difficult to prove'

It, however, added that from a legal standpoint it was very hard to substantiate allegations of predatory pricing, since the impact of such practice on the competition in the market would be very difficult to prove.

"The Committee, therefore, recommends that there should be a more clear-cut definition of what constitutes Unfair Trade Practice and practical legal remedy to tackle such circumventing practices by e-commerce entities specifically multinational companies and kirana small vendors." The panel al-

so suggested that the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution should issue broad guidelines for the fixation of delivery charges charged by the marketplace entities along with a cap on the highest limits of the delivery charges in peak hours of service.

"The Ministry should clearly distinguish in the rules itself the cases of misinformation, no information and the information which is otherwise correct but creates a false impression and provide for penal provision for each case in the rules itself."

The Ministry should also clearly define 'drip pricing'—wherein the final cost of the product goes up due to additional charges, and provide for protecting consumers against this by including penal provisions for violation.

Sensex falls 1.7% as virus variant spooks markets

Banking, metal, auto, IT lead sell-off

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The Union Health Ministry's statement on the surfacing of a 'double-mutant variant' of the novel coronavirus and fears of fresh restrictions and an economic slowdown spooked markets with the benchmark stock indices shedding more than 1.7% each on broad-based selling.

The S&P BSE Sensex lost 871 points, or 1.74%, to end the day at 49,180. As many as 28 of the 30 Sensex members ended in the red. The sell-off was led by banking, metal, auto, financial services and IT stocks.

The NSE Nifty 50 index also shed 265 points, or 1.79%, closing at 14,549.

Bears took charge as weak global cues combined with the news of a new mutant strain in India of the vi-



rus that causes COVID-19 unnerved participants, said Ajit Mishra, VP, research, Religare Broking Ltd.

"The broader markets witnessed sell-off as both mid-cap and small-cap ended with losses of 1.7% and 1.6% respectively," he said.

Mr. Mishra said indications were there would be a further slide with volatility remaining high on account of the scheduled expiry of March contracts.

Rana Kapoor's bank accounts to be attached

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Markets regulator SEBI on Wednesday ordered the attachment of bank accounts as well as share and mutual fund holdings of Rana Kapoor, former MD and CEO of Yes Bank, to recover dues worth more than ₹1 crore.

The decision was taken after Mr. Kapoor failed to pay the fine imposed on him. In September, SEBI had levied a fine of ₹1 crore on him for not making disclosures regarding a transaction of Morgan Credit, an unlisted promoter entity of Yes Bank. By not disclosing the transaction to the bank's board, Mr. Kapoor violated the provisions of the Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements Regulation,

+ SEBI had said in the order.

Ex-JLR CEO Speth joins TVS Motor board

He will take over as chairman in 2023

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI



Ralf Speth

its board as vice-chairman, besides being on the board of Tata Sons.

The board of TVS Motor announced a second interim dividend for FY21 at the rate of ₹1.40 per share, absorbing a sum of ₹66.51 crore, while Sundaram Clayton announced ₹11 per share, absorbing a sum of ₹22.26 crore.

'No digital tax if goods sold via India arm'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

In a bid to provide a level-playing field, the government has decided not to levy 2% digital service tax if goods and services are sold through an Indian arm of foreign e-commerce players.

The amendment to the Finance Bill 2021 clarifies that offshore e-commerce platforms don't have to pay the levy if they have a permanent establishment or they pay any income tax here.

However, foreign firms that do not pay any tax will have to pay the levy. The digital tax, introduced in April 2020, applies only to non-resident companies with annual revenues in excess of ₹2 crore, and covers online sales of goods and services to Indians.

Some States inflated GSDP in budgets: report

GSDP numbers may undergo revision

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

India has appealed against an order by an international tribunal to pay \$1.2 billion in damages, plus other costs, to Cairn Energy in a long-running tax dispute, two sources with direct knowledge of the matter told Reuters.

London-listed Cairn was in December awarded damages of \$1.2 billion plus interest and costs, taking the current total to more than \$1.7 billion. The appeal, filed on Monday in a Dutch court, comes as Cairn is pulling out all stops to recover the damages, including hiring a team of asset recovery experts.

If revised estimates are aggregated, the national GDP will have grown by 3% on a nominal basis

simulation of the last few years' performances.

For some States, there was a significant gap between the economists' estimates and revised estimates provided by these States for FY21, as in the case of West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu."

Though these States showed a rosy picture on GSDP, "the same is not reflected in tax collections," they said in the report.

Health covers for COVID-19 get more life

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

Short term COVID-specific health covers Corona Kavach and Corona Rakshak will get a longer run with IRDAI permitting insurers to offer and renew them up to September. Introduced in July following an IRDAI mandate amid the pandemic and high hospitalisation costs, the policies were allowed to be offered and renewed till March 31.

More than 30 lakh Corona policies have been sold industrywide. The fear of infection is pushing more people to opt for health covers, said Amit Chhabra, head, Health insurance, Policybazaar.com.

Women: 25m sports pistol:

1. Chinki Yadav 32(4) 580; 2.

Rahi Sarnobat 32(3) 581; 3. Ma-

nu Bhaker 28 (576). MQS: Swapnil Kulase

1165; Chain Singh 1159.

Men: 50m rifle

3-position: 1. Aishwary Pratap

Singh Tomar 462.5 (1165); 2.

Istvan Peni (Hun) 461.6 (

Ducks to water – Krunal, Prasidh show they belong

Tuesday's debutants join a long list of newcomers to the Indian team who have made a mark on the big stage this season

ENGLAND IN INDIA

AMOL KARHADKAR
PUNE

One had an emotional outburst. The other chose to display controlled aggression. Despite contrasting reactions to their success, both of Tuesday's debutants not only rose to the occasion but also reaffirmed that they belonged to the fearless generation of new-age India cricketers.

All-rounder Krunal Pandya and fast-bowler M. Prasidh Krishna joined the long list of newcomers taking to international cricket like a duck to water in a unique season for the Indian team.

Like the majority of newcomers this season, neither Krunal – who made his ODI debut on the eve of his 30th birthday – nor Prasidh, 25, are callow young men.

Both have experienced the challenges and pressures of domestic cricket, the India-A circuit and the Indian Premier League (IPL). And as veteran opener Shikhar Dhawan pointed out, performing in the IPL helps domestic cricketers not get overawed in the international arena.

"They are confident because they play so many domestic games and IPL, and they share the dressing room with big players, play



Debutants' day out: Prasidh and Krunal displayed skill and mental toughness in their maiden ODI game. ■ SPORTZPICTS/BCCI

against them. That builds confidence and they feel the same players play international cricket," Dhawan said after winning his first ODI 'Man of the Match' award in India since November 2013.

IPL exposure helps

"Also, IPL has some top-notch coaches, so the IPL exposure helps a lot, and our

domestic cricket is strong, so it is a good mix of the two that's helping new players perform better."

Both Krunal and Prasidh displayed their belief in themselves – in terms of skills and mental toughness. Krunal came in to bat with fewer than 10 overs remaining and his side in danger of falling considerably short of

the par score. He promptly scored the fastest ODI fifty by a debutant, elevating India into the ascendancy at half-time.

It was followed by an emotional outpouring, with a teary-eyed Krunal finding solace in younger brother Hardik's arms, as they paid tribute to their father Himanshu who passed away in

January.

Early in the chase, Jonny Bairstow targeted Prasidh and used the quick's pace – consistently clocked at more than 140 kmph. When a debutant goes for 22 runs early in the piece, seldom does he get his act together later in the match.

No doubt it helped that captain Virat Kohli imme-

diately took him out of the attack, but when Prasidh returned to bowl, he saw the back of Jason Roy and Ben Stokes in successive overs. It got even sweeter – when he dismissed Tom Curran off what turned out to be the last ball of the match, Prasidh became the first India pacer to pick four wickets on ODI debut.

■ Krunal's debut was only the third occasion of siblings featuring together in a men's ODI for India, after the Amarnath brothers (Mohinder and Surinder, 3 games) and the Pathans (Irfan and Yusuf, 8 games).

■ Despite being a bowling all-rounder in T20Is, Krunal earned an ODI call-up thanks to his scintillating performance with the bat in the Vijay Hazare Trophy. He scored 388 runs in five innings at 129.33, including two unbeaten hundreds, for Baroda.

■ In spite of picking up five wickets on his First Class debut, for Karnataks vs Bangladesh-A, Prasidh has played just nine FC games so far. But he has made rapid strides in limited-overs cricket, catapulting himself into the reckoning for the forthcoming T20 World Cup.

Shreyas out of ODIs

Likely to miss significant portion of IPL

AMOL KARHADKAR
PUNE

India batsman Shreyas Iyer has been ruled out of the ODI series and is a doubtful starter for the IPL after injuring his left shoulder while fielding during the first ODI against England on Tuesday.

An India team spokesperson on Tuesday had revealed that Shreyas was diagnosed with partial dislocation and had gone for a scan. The Hindu understands that the scans have confirmed a labrum tear in his left shoulder.

A labral tear of the shoulder usually takes at least three months to heal. It is understood that the BCCI medical team has advised surgery for Shreyas. In that case, he is likely to miss the entire IPL which begins on April 9. It will be interesting

to see if his franchise – Delhi Capitals – adheres to the rehab protocols or tries to convince him to delay the surgery in order to be available at least for the latter half.

Shreyas suffered the injury during the first ODI on Tuesday when he dived full length to his left to stop a full-blooded Jonny Bairstow drive. Having landed awkwardly on his shoulder, he was writhing in pain.

Rohit Sharma, who was hit on the elbow while batting, is understood to be ready to take the field for the second ODI on Friday.

England skipper Eoin Morgan and Sam Billings are doubtful after sustaining injuries in the opener. Morgan split the webbing between his right thumb and index finger while Billings injured his collarbone while diving to stop a boundary.



Ouch, that hurts! Shreyas Iyer injures his shoulder while fielding in the first ODI on Tuesday. ■ GETTY IMAGES

Shafali, Richa, Harleen and Rajeshwari dispel some gloom

Despite series defeat, India appears to be moving in the right direction in the T20 format

SA IN INDIA

P.K. AJITH KUMAR
LUCKNOW

It was delightful, the way Shafali Verma and Smriti Mandhana tangoed together at the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Stadium on Tuesday night. While it was 'see ball, hit ball' for Shafali, Smriti was all silken grace and sublime timing.

Shafali had ruined the South African bowlers' figures in the second T20I too, with her 31-ball 47. But India had lost the match to surrender the rubber.

Her 60 off 30 balls in the final game, however, gave India a much-needed consolation win. A scoreline of 2-1 always reads much better than 3-0.

Shafali's great show also helped her regain the No. 1 spot in the ICC's rankings for T20 batting. Perhaps she will not be made to wait much longer for her ODI debut. Especially after India's 4-1 defeat in the series that preceded the T20Is.

Formidable alliance

Shafali could form a formidable opening alliance with the left-handed Smriti in ODIs, too. She wasn't the only 17-year-old who got the vocal crowds on their feet here.

There was Richa Ghosh,

India-South Africa series in numbers

ODIs							
BATTING	M	I	R	HS	Avg.	SR	50s/100s
Lizelle Lee (SA)	4	4	288	132*	144.00	86.22	2/1
Punam Raut (Ind)	5	5	263	104*	87.66	71.66	2/1
Mithali Raj (Ind)	5	4	210	79*	70.00	67.74	2/0
BOWLING	M	I	Wkts.	BBI	Avg.	Econ.	4W
Jhulan Goswami (Ind)	4	4	8	4/42	17.12	3.51	1
Rajeshwari Gayakwad (Ind)	5	5	8	3/13	20.25	3.56	0
Shabnim Ismail (SA)	5	5	7	3/28	28.57	4.76	0

T20Is							
BATTING	M	I	R	HS	Avg.	SR	50s/100s
Shafali Verma (Ind)	3	3	130	60	43.33	156.62	1/0
Sune Luus (SA)	3	3	91	43	30.33	95.78	0/0
Lizelle Lee (SA)	3	3	90	70	30.00	128.57	1/0
BOWLING	M	I	Wkts.	BBI	Avg.	Econ.	4W
Rajeshwari Gayakwad (Ind)	3	3	4	3/9	14.25	4.75	0
Shabnim Ismail (SA)	3	3	4	3/14	20.50	8.20	0
Anneke Bosch (SA)	3	3	3	2/11	14.66	7.33	0



too. She made a blistering 44 not out off 26 balls in the second T20I. She could turn into a handy finisher.

Yet another youngster, Harleen Deol, also showed what she could do when given an opportunity. The 22-year-old from Chandigarh made her maiden international fifty after being sent in at No. 3 in the first T20I and followed it up with 31 in the second. Her leg-spin is a va-

lue addition. The success of the young trio should indeed gladden the Indian team management. Despite losing the series, this side appears to be moving in the right direction, certainly as far as the T20 format is concerned.

The superb bowling of left-arm spinner Rajeshwari Gayakwad in the final T20I would have also pleased coach W.V. Raman, after the

Indian slow bowlers disappointed in the ODI series. The South African batters tackled the Indian spinners rather well, until they walked into that magical spell from Rajeshwari.

The heavy defeat notwithstanding, there were some memorable moments for the host in the 50-overs series as well. Captain Mithali Raj crossed another milestone, as she became only the se-

cond ever female cricketer to reach 10,000 international runs. And there was a fine hundred for Punam Raut.

The Women in Blue may not have lived up to the expectations, but they had been rusting a bit, having played little cricket during the last one year following the coronavirus outbreak.

The South Africans, on the other hand, arrived here like a well-oiled machine.

Sportstar Aces Awards over five episodes

The virtual ceremony is scheduled for March 27, April 1, 2, 3 and 4

The annual Sportstar Aces Awards, which honour athletes and organisations for their achievements and contributions towards the betterment of sport in the country, will be held virtually this year due to the coronavirus pandemic. The 2021 edition will be held over five episodes on March 27, April 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Owing to the near global shutdown of sport in 2020 due to the pandemic, the 2021 edition seeks to honour the Giants of the Decade in Indian sport.

The past winners of the Aces Awards include Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly, Kapil Dev, Prakash Padukone, Virat Kohli, M. C. Mary Kom, Neeraj Chopra, P. V. Sindhu, Hima Das and Leander Paes, among others.

You can register here for the virtual ceremony:



Saina and Srikanth make winning starts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PARIS

Saina Nehwal crushed Ireland's Rachael Darragh 21-9, 21-5 in just 21 minutes in the opening round to make a winning start to her campaign at the Orleans Masters on Wednesday.

Ira Sharma saw off France's Leonice Huet 12-21, 21-14, 21-17. K. Srikanth beat Ajay Jayaram 21-15, 21-10 to enter the third round.

Nissanka hits century on debut

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NORTH SOUND (ANTIGUA & BARBUDA)

Debutant Pathum Nissanka (101 batting) and Niroshn Dickwella (81 batting) powered Sri Lanka to 435 for five in its second innings, a lead of 333, at tea on the fourth day of the first Test against the West Indies on Wednesday. The 22-year-old Nissanka and Dickwella have added 176 for the unbroken sixth wicket.

The scores: Sri Lanka 169 & 435-5 (Lahiru Thirimanne 76, Oshada Fernando 91, Pathum Nissanka 101 batting, Niroshn Dickwella 81 batting) v West Indies 271, at tea.

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★

TV PICKS

FIFA WC European qualifiers: Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 10.30 p.m., Sony Ten 1, 2, 3 & Sony Six (SD & HD), 1.15 a.m. (Friday)

European U-21 championships: Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.



FIFA bans Blatter for a second time

ZURICH Sepp Blatter was banned for a second time by FIFA on Wednesday for financial wrongdoing, seven months before the 85-year-old former president's first ban expires. FIFA said its ethics committee banned both Blatter and former secretary-general Jerome Valcke for six years and eight months for financial wrongdoing linked to awarding themselves contractual bonuses worth millions of dollars. AP

RWITC thoroughbreds auction on Mar. 29 & 30

MUMBAI The Royal Western India Turf Club's (RWITC) 2021 annual auction sale of two-year-old bloodstock (thoroughbred horses) will be held on March 29 and 30 from 4 p.m. at the Mahalaxmi race course. 184 horses have been entered in this year's catalogue out of which 19 lots are entered in blue pages.



Kean out of Italy World Cup qualifiers

MILAN Italy striker Moise Kean has been ruled out of upcoming World Cup qualifiers because of "fatigue", Italian Football Federation (FIGC) announced on Wednesday. The 21-year-old Kean, who is on loan this season at PSG from Premier League side Everton, has been released to return to the French club. AFP

Iachini returns to Fiorentina as coach

MILAN Iachini has been named as Fiorentina coach just over four months after being sacked following the surprise resignation of Cesare Prandelli, the Serie A club announced on Wednesday. Prandelli took over in early November from 56-year-old Iachini who had been in the post less than a year. "Iachini will direct training and will resume contact with the team this morning," the Tuscany outfit said. AFP



Dembele faints in training ground incident

MADRID Atletico Madrid forward Moussa Dembele collapsed during a training session on Tuesday due to a reported drop in blood pressure, and images of his dramatic slump and medical response were widely reported in the Spanish press. Dembele, 24, was stretching with teammates in the centre circle at the club's headquarters before falling to the ground, a leg shaking as he lay on his back. He regained consciousness on the field and eventually left the stadium at the wheel of his own car. AFP

WB adds new events to popularise basketball

KOLKATA In order to popularise basketball in the State, the West Bengal Basketball Association (WBBA) has decided to introduce two new tournaments — Youth Basketball League and a 3x3 basketball championship. Besides, the WBBA will organise a kids event and conduct coaching camps in various districts. The association will also organise a Junior Basketball League for under-19 boys and girls next month apart from tournaments for men and women.

'Neeraj is the perfect role model'

Bio-mechanical expert Bartonietz insists Chopra can go past the elusive 90m mark

ATHLETICS

UTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

Neeraj Chopra may be India's brightest Olympic hope, but the stardom sits easy on the javelin thrower. His coach insists it is just one of the factors that make him an ideal role model.

"Neeraj can be the perfect role model. He is not jealous and he is not insecure of his own form or position. He never says no to anyone for help."

One of the best

"He is also one of the best all-round athletes here and one of the hardest working people. What more can you ask for?" says Dr. Klaus Bartonietz, the bio-mechanical expert in charge of Chopra for the last two years.

Bartonietz took charge in 2019, at a time when the youngster was going through a testing time with his injury and subsequent surgery



All-round athlete: Dr. Bartonietz says the pandemic gave them enough time to iron out the creases in Chopra. AP

which forced him to forego competitions for the entire year.

With 2020 marred with COVID, there was little opportunity to test him against the best in the world. But it gave them enough time to iron out the creases and push him towards the elusive 90m mark.

"We had a very good general preparation in the last

three months. We worked in the gymnastic hall with parallel bars, high bars, rope climbing and all such things, did a lot of systematic strength training.

In the last two years we have worked on things like improving the use of the javelin, no unnecessary attack, the angles which you let the javelin fly and the importance and impact of air

resistance," Bartonietz told The Hindu.

What makes Neeraj different, he said, was his athleticism. "His athleticism is at world level. He is the best overall athlete – on the track in sprints, jumps, lifting, gymnastic work for flexibility and athleticism, core work, everything. He is also the most creative towards his own training.

"He is always reflecting on his position and takes the initiative to bring his own ideas into his training. There is a clarity of thought on what he wants to do," Bartonietz explained.

Asked if he can cross the 90m mark, Bartonietz insisted he could.

"Maybe he throws 90m at the next competition, that is possible. Honestly, it isn't anything spectacular you need to do. It is all about daily hard and smart work, removing shortcomings, working on strong sides, staying healthy."

National Para Athletics hits a new low

A few night events held with just mobile phone torch lights



A dark episode.

• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Norms flouted

There were also allegations from athletes that international Paralympic norms were flouted in deciding the weights for events like shot put. Neither Satyanarayana, the Bengaluru-based chairman of the Technical Committee of Paralympic Committee of India (PCI) nor Gursharan Singh, Secretary General of PCI, were available for comment.

Earlier in the day, the organisers were at the receiv-

ing end of the Sports Authority of India's ire. SAI, in a press statement, had expressed concern that Stadia in Bengaluru at which the Championship is being held were not "wheelchair-friendly" and that COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedures like physical distancing were not being adhered to. It sought a report from the PCI regarding the same.

The PCI wrote back listing

PCI's assurance

To the specific concern about one of the stadia – Sree Kanteerava Stadium – not being wheelchair-friendly, PCI said that a very small patch of track under renovation could not be completed before the competition was shifted to Bengaluru from Chennai at short notice.

The PCI assured that a temporary solution will soon be found.

On day one of the competition on Wednesday, S. Gokul Srinivas of Tamil Nadu won the gold in long jump T20 category with a leap of 4.56m. M.S. Sujith of Kerala finished first in long jump T12 category with a jump of 6.88m.

According to the PCI, no athlete secured qualification for Tokyo 2020 Paralympics.

Raj Kumar beats Kamlesh, in semifinals

TENNIS

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Raj Kumar defeated Kamlesh Shukla 6-4, 6-4 in the men's over-35 quarterfinals of the ITF seniors tennis tournament at the DLTA Complex on Wednesday.

In the over-55 event, second seed Chandra Bhushan fought hard to beat Sanjai Kumar 6-2, 6-4, 6-2.

The results (quarterfinals): Over-35: Aditya Khanna bt Nitin Sharma 6-0, 6-1; Raj Kumar

bt Kamlesh Shukla 6-4, 6-4; Vipin Sirpaul bt Kapil Bhalla 6-1, 6-2; Mohit Phogat bt Mukesh Kumar 6-1, 6-2.

Over-55: Pawan Jain bt Sharad Tak 7-5, 6-4; Nagaraj Ravanasiddaiyah bt Dilip Singh Nongmaithem 6-0, 6-0; Ajeet Bhardwaj bt Kuldeep Singh 6-0, 6-3; Chandra Bhushan bt Sanjai Kumar 6-2, 6-7(4), 6-2.

Over-65: AJS Chhatwal bt Ravi Singh 6-4, 7-6(1); Yogesh Shah bt Ali Hydar 6-2, 6-1; Vinayak Gujrathi bt TS Gambhir 6-2, 6-2; Bhag Nand Singh bt Dileep Shivpuri 3-6, 7-5, 2-0 (retired).

Svrina stuns Rawat

SPORTS BUREAU

PUNE Top seed Sidharth Rawat was beaten 6-4, 6-1 by Dalibor Svrina of the Czech Republic in the first round of the KPIT \$15,000 ITF men's tennis tournament at the Deccan Gymkhana on Wednesday.

National champion Arjun Kadhe beat SD Prajwal Dev 6-3, 7-6(2) to reach the pre-quarterfinals. Manish Sureshkumar, Vijay Sundar Prashanth and Ishaque Eqbal were the other Indian players to reach the next round.

The results: First round: Dalibor Svrina (Cze) bt Sidharth Rawat 6-4, 6-1; Dominik Palan

(Cze) bt VM Ranjeet 7-6(6), 6-1; Manish Sureshkumar bt Lorenzo Bocchi (Ita) 6-1, 6-4; Zane Khan (USA) bt Abhinav Sanjeev Shanmugam 6-2, 6-0; Arun Kadhe bt SD Prajwal Dev 6-3, 7-6(3).

Oliver Crawford (USA) bt Atharva Sharma 6-1, 6-0; Aidan Mchugh bt Omni Kumar (USA) 6-2, 7-6(4); Vijay Sundar Prashanth bt Faisal Qamar 6-4, 6-2; Ishaque Eqbal bt Luca Castelnuovo (Sui) 6-3, 2-0 (retired); Simon Carr (Ita) bt Dhruv Sunish 6-2, 3-6, 6-4.

Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Marco Brugnerotto & Davide Pozzi (Ita) bt Sahil Gaware & Gunjan Jadhav 2-6, 6-3, [10-8]; Filip Bergevi & Jonathan Mridha (Swe) bt Jonathan Binding & Henry Patten (GBR) 6-7(5), 6-3, [10-4].

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The scores: RSC 284 in 39.5 overs (Aditya Sharma 67, Rahul Chaudhary 40, Ankit Yadav 37, Shivraj 6/29) bt Dahiya Academy 163 in 25.4 overs (Varun Pahadiya 5/40).

Shubham leads DFC to title

An unbeaten 71-ball 122 by man of the match Shubham Sharma and four-wicket haul by Akhil Kumar saw Darling Frontline Club beat Cricways Academy by six wickets to lift the 4th Phool Singh memorial tournament.

Despite Osaka's absence, seven of the world's top ten female players are expected in Stuttgart, headed by World No.1 Ashleigh Barty of Australia.

As well as defending champion Petra Kvitova, top-ten stars Simona Halep, Sofia Kenin, Elina Svitolina, Aryna Sabalenka and 2018 Stuttgart winner Karolina Pliskova are also expected to be feature.

Japan's World No. 2 Naomi Osaka has withdrawn from next month's WTA clay-court tournament in Stuttgart, organisers confirmed on Wednesday.

"Naomi Osaka will now begin the European clay court season a little later in May," said the Stuttgart organisers in a statement.

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