



PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT, ALWAYS IN SESSION



'INDIA COMMITTED TO
CONNECTIVITY WITH
AFGHANISTAN, C.ASIA'

P4



SASIKALA QUILTS
ACTIVE POLITICS TO
FIGHT DMK

P5



SUU KYI
IN COURT

P6



POLLARD HITS
SIX SIXES
IN AN OVER

P12

WEATHER

Mainly clear sky. Mist in the morning. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 33 and 13 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: NIL

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 93% Min: 39%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 30.8°C (+4) Min: 13.2°C (0)

SUN RISES

06:41 hrs 18:23 hrs

MOON RISES

01:01 hrs 10:50 hrs

THUMBNAILS



Central force personnel patrol at Manicktala area in Kolkata on Thursday.

SNS

EPFO retains 8.5 pc interest on EPF deposits: Retirement fund body EPFO on Thursday decided to retain 8.5 per cent annual rate of interest on provident fund deposits for the current financial year for its more than five crore active subscribers. The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation's (EPFO) apex decision-making body Central Board of Trustees decided to fix 8.5 per cent rate of interest for 2020-21 at its meeting in Srinagar on Thursday. As per the practice, the CBT decision on interest rate would be sent to the finance ministry for concurrence.

P8

Give priority in admissions to elderly, SC directs: The Supreme Court on Thursday directed that elderly people be given priority in admissions at private hospitals besides at government medical institutions amid the Covid-19 pandemic. A bench of justices Ashok Bhushan and R S Reddy modified its earlier order of 4 August, 2020, by which it had directed only government hospitals to give priority in admission and treatment of elderly people looking at their vulnerability to coronavirus.

P4

Taj Mahal vacated after hoax bomb call; caller detained



The Taj Mahal complex in Agra was vacated on Thursday morning following a hoax bomb call, police said.

The caller, identified as Vimal Kumar Singh, has been detained for questioning in Firozabad, Additional Director General (ADG) of Police, Agra zone, A Satish Ganesh said.

Singh called the 112 emergency response number of the Uttar Pradesh police around 9 a.m. and claimed a bomb was kept inside the monument that is conserved by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and protected by armed personnel of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF).

The police immediately informed the CISF personnel, who asked the visitors to vacate the premises of the iconic 17th-century monument and launched anti-sabotage checks around 9:15 am.

Nothing suspicious was found during the checks at the monument, a CISF officer said in Delhi. An initial probe revealed that Singh is a resident of Patiyali in Kasganj and was presently staying in his maternal grandmother's house in Okhra village in the Narkhi area of Firozabad, the ADG said.

"Prima facie it seems that Singh is mentally ill and is probably under treatment. The Taj Mahal was reopened for visitors after about an hour and 45 minutes," he added. PTI

Bengaluru, Shimla 'most liveable' cities

Delhi figures at 13th spot, Srinagar at bottom in Govt's Ease of Living Index

SNS & PTI
NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

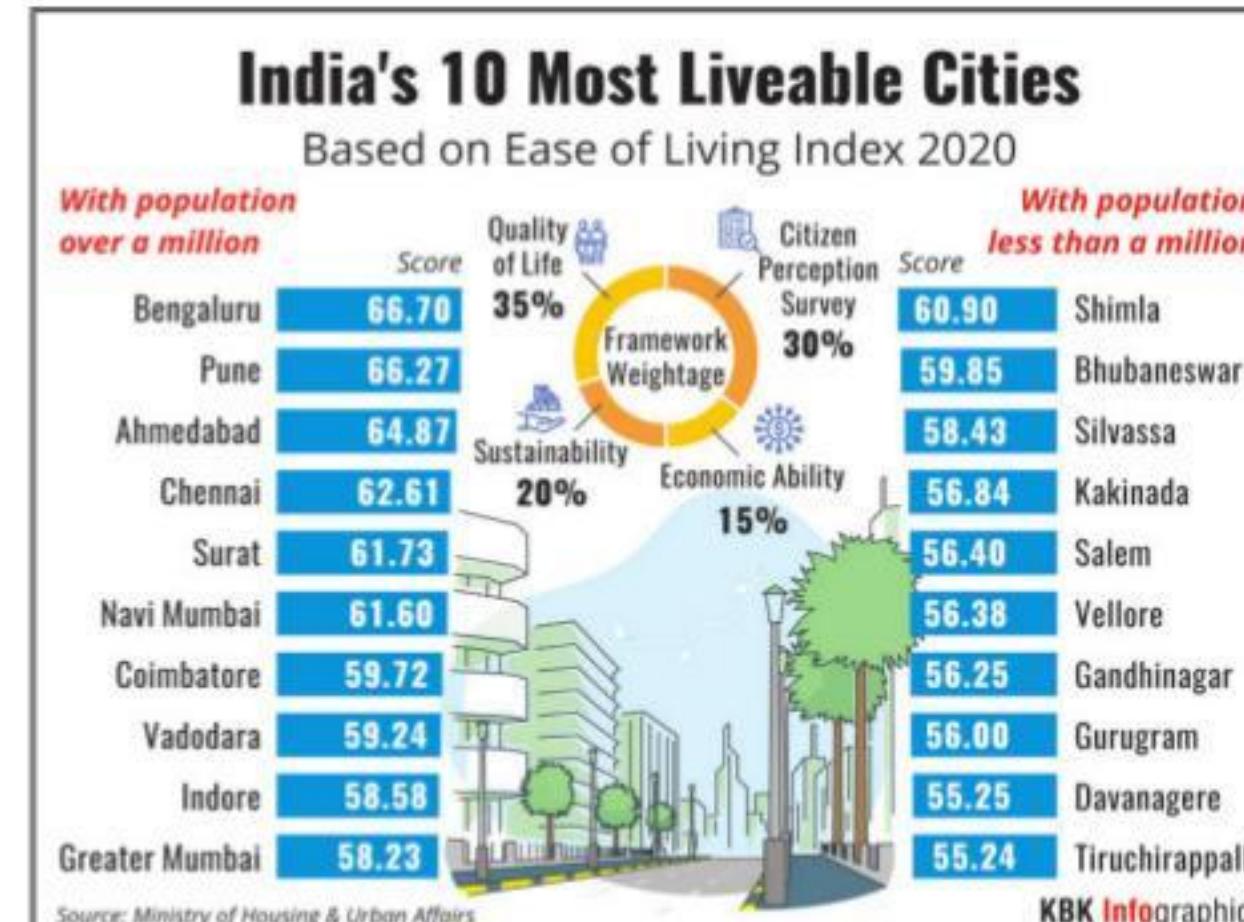
Bengaluru was adjudged the most liveable among 111 cities in India in the government's 'Ease of Living Index' on Thursday, followed by Pune, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Surat, Navi Mumbai, Coimbatore, Vadodara, Indore and Greater Mumbai.

Of the 49 cities ranked on livability index in the 'million-plus population' category, Delhi figures at the 13th spot and Srinagar at the bottom. According to the index released by Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, Shimla topped the category of cities with 'population less than million'.

In this category, Bhubaneshwar was ranked second, Silvassa came third, and they were followed by Kakinada, Salem, Vellore, Gandhinagar, Gurgaon, Davangere and Tiruchirappalli. Muzaffarpur was at the bottom of the list of 62 cities that were ranked on livability index in the 'less than million population' category.

Ghaziabad and Meerut figured at the 30th and the 36th spot in the 'million-plus population' category respectively, while Allahabad is at the 32nd position and is followed by Patna (33rd). Faridabad is ranked 40th in this category.

Performance of the cities have been measured on four broad parameters governance and social, physical and economic infrastructure. The government said the 'Ease of Living



Source: Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs

In the 2018 'Ease of Living Index', Pune was ranked the most liveable city in the country. Navi Mumbai and Greater Mumbai, which held the second and the third position in 2018, have slipped to the sixth and the 10th rank respectively in the 2020 edition of the Ease of Living Index.

edition of the Ease of Living Index.

The government said the 'Ease of Living Index' is an assessment tool that evaluates the quality of life and the impact of various initiatives for urban development.

Index' is an assessment tool that evaluates the quality of life and the impact of various initiatives for urban development.

Total of 32.2 lakh people residing across 111 cities participated in a 'Citizen Perception Survey' holding a weightage of 30 per cent.

"These cities have emerged as models of development who will inspire others to perform better. Further, their peers will also benefit from emulating their best practices

ing their best practices," Puri said. In the 2018 'Ease of Living Index', Pune was ranked the most liveable city in the country. Navi Mumbai and Greater Mumbai, which held the second and the third position in 2018, have slipped to the sixth and the 10th rank respectively in the 2020 edition of the Ease of Living Index.

Tirupati was at the fourth position, while Chandigarh had been ranked fifth in 2018, but in the 2020 'Ease of Living Index', Tirupati and

Chandigarh have slipped to the 46th and the 29th position respectively.

Indore topped the 'Municipal Performance Index', involving 51 municipal corporations in the 'million-plus population' category, while Guwahati figured at the bottom.

In this category, Surat came second. New Delhi Municipal Council topped the 'Municipal Performance Index 2020' in the 'less than million' population category. (SEE P3)

'I-T raids on pro-farmers': Battle of idioms between Rahul and BJP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Hindi idioms took centre stage in a political slugfest between the Congress and the ruling BJP on Thursday as Rahul Gandhi cited them to accuse the government of using probe agencies to target critical voices, prompting Union minister Prakash Javadekar to invoke a few sayings to hit back.

A day after income-tax raids at the homes and offices of Bollywood actor Taapsee Pannu, filmmaker Anurag Kashyap and others, Gandhi used the hashtag 'ModiRaid-SProFarmers' with his tweet in Hindi to take a dig at the government.

Putting out three popular Hindi idioms ~ 'Ungliyon pe nachana', 'Bheegi billi banna'

and 'Khisiyan billi khamba noche'~ Gandhi stated what he believes they mean in the current context.

In his three-pronged attack, he alleged that the Central government makes the Income Tax department dance to its tunes, friendly media gets cowed down before the Centre and the Central government raids those supporting farmers. Pannu and Kashyap are known to be outspoken in their views on a range of issues.

Hitting back, Javadekar asked Gandhi to recall three more Hindi idioms~ 'Sau chuhé khakar billi chali Haj ko', 'Ungliyon per gine ja sakna' and 'ranga siyar' ~to target the Congress.

He used the first saying to mock the Congress for giving lesson in media freedom after

stifling it during the Emergency, the second for the current political standing of the party and the third for a "family party" like it lecturing on democracy and "the most communal party" pretending to be secular.

At a press conference, BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said that the Modi government has given complete freedom to probe agencies, and no one is a Bollywood star or a celebrity in their eyes.

It is the Congress's character to bend laws to help certain people and spare even criminals if they sing praises of the Gandhi family, he claimed. If somebody breaks law, evade tax or conspire against the country, then probe agencies will do their job, he said, referring to the I-T raids.

RELENTLESS



Farmers protest against Centre's new agri laws at New Delhi Ghazipur border on Thursday.

IANS

'Porn content on OTT platforms'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Thursday objected to streaming of films on web platforms without any prior screening of the content and also cited some films having pornographic content.

The observation by the top court came during the hearing of a plea by Amazon Prime Video India head Aparna Purohit against an Allahabad High Court order, which declined to entertain her anticipatory bail in connection with the FIRs lodged against her over the web series 'Tandav'.

A bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan said: "There should be some screening (of content on web platforms). There is

pornography in some films."

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Uttar Pradesh government, said some programmes feature filthy abuse.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Purohit, contended this was "a matter of free speech" and cited that his client is not the producer of the show, instead an employee of the company.

On 25 February, Allahabad High Court declined to grant her anticipatory bail in the matter.

BJP flip-flop over Metroman's CM candidature

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
4 MARCH



'Metroman' E. Sreedharan, who recently joined the BJP, will be the party's chief ministerial candidate for the Kerala Assembly elections, party leaders from the state declared on Thursday, only to do an U-turn within hours to say that such decision had been taken.

Rival parties mocked the BJP, which currently has a single MLA in the 140-member Kerala Assembly, over the announcement and the subsequent confusion.

Speaking at a reception accorded to his Vijaya Yatra at Thiruvalla, BJP Kerala chief K Surendran today declared that the party has made Sreedharan its chief ministerial can-

didate for the Assembly elections to be held on 6 April. He said a person like Sreedharan becoming chief minister could be good for the state. "The Kochi metro and the timely completion of the Palavattam flyover are typical examples of Sreedharan's brilliance. If the metroman is given a chance, we believe he will be able to execute the development plans mooted by

PM Modi," Mr Surendran said. Later, Union minister V Muraleedharan tweeted: "BJP4Kerala will fight Kerala polls with E Sreedharan Ji as its Chief Ministerial Candidate. We will defeat both CPIMKerala & INCkerala to provide a corruption-free, development-oriented Government for the people."

Soon after, however, the Union minister of state for external affairs and parliamentary affairs clarified that the party has not made any such announcement. Muraleedharan said he had learnt through media reports that the party has announced Sreedharan as the chief ministerial candidate. But when he cross-checked with state party president K Surendran, he said he has not made any

such announcements, he said. Referring to Muraleedharan's clarification tweets, Congress leader Shashi Tharoor took a dig at the BJP, saying the saffron party was "confused". "Hilarious!" BJP4Kerala manages to be confused about who will occupy the top floor of a building that will never be built. There will be no BJP CM in Kerala," Tharoor tweeted.

The development comes on a day the 88-year-old technocrat announced his decision to end his 24-year long career with the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation to enter electoral politics. Today, Sreedharan inspected the Palavattam flyover in Kochi, where he told mediapersons that he will soon submit his resignation as principal adviser of DMRC. (With PTI inputs)

The SC bench said there should be prior screening of content on web platforms while hearing a plea filed by Amazon Prime India's head regarding the FIRs against her over web series 'Tandav'.

The top court indicated that there should be a censor board-like body which screens the films. It scheduled the matter for further hearing on Friday.

In January, the top court refused to grant interim protection to the 'Tandav' crew from any coercive action and had asked them to move the concerned courts to seek bail in the matter.

Purohit has been accused of inappropriate depiction of Hindu deities, UP Police personnel and for adverse portrayal of a character in the role of prime minister in the web series.

On 25 February, Allahabad High Court declined to grant her anticipatory bail in the matter.

CM gets Covid shot, urges people not to fear vaccine

Kejri's parents and LG along with his wife also get jabs; Delhi continues to see an uptick in new virus cases

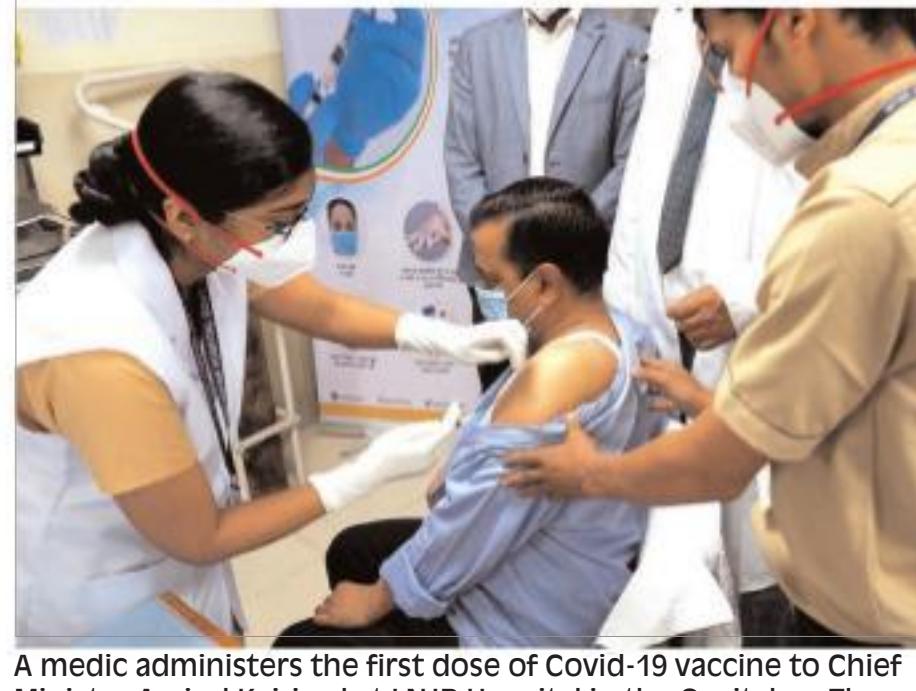
SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, who along with his parents took their first dose of Covid-19 vaccine today, appealed to all eligible people to come forward and get vaccinated against coronavirus, asserting that there is "nothing to fear".

The vaccine was first administered to Kejriwal's parents, Govind Ram Kejriwal and Gita Devi, and then to the chief minister at the state government-run Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan Hospital here. They all were given the Covishield vaccine. "I and my parents got our first dose of Covid-19 vaccine today. We had no problems and are perfectly healthy. There is nothing to fear. Doubts in people's mind (about the vaccine) no longer exist. I appeal to everyone eligible for the vaccine to come and get themselves vaccinated," Kejriwal told reporters after getting the jab.

During the second-phase of the inoculation drive that started



A medic administers the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal at LNJP Hospital in the Capital on Thursday.

SUBRATA DUTTA

ed on 1 March, people aged 60 years and above and those in the 45-59 age group with certain comorbidities are being administered the vaccine at 192 hospitals across Delhi.

The 52-year-old CM, who has a history of diabetes, said the hospital has made adequate arrangements for the vaccination drive. The government will increase the number of vaccination centres if needed,

he said. "We are in constant touch with the Centre and are working according to the prescribed guidelines. As and when we receive further directions, we will increase the number of vaccination centres. We have enough stock of the vaccines," the CM said.

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal and his wife, Mala Bhagat, also took their first dose of Covid vaccine at Tirath

Ram Shah Hospital here today. Meanwhile, the national capital has continued to witness an uptick in new coronavirus cases. It today recorded 261 fresh Covid cases and one coronavirus-linked fatality, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin.

The city's Covid toll mounted to 10,915, the health bulletin said.

The fresh cases were detected out of 66,432 tests conducted the previous day. The positivity rate rose to 0.39 per cent.

Delhi's Covid caseload crossed 6.40 lakh. The number of active cases of the disease in the city increased to 1,701 from yesterday's 1,584, the bulletin stated.

The city has been logging more than 200 fresh Covid cases for the past three consecutive days. It had reported cases and 3 deaths yesterday.

On 2 March, the count of fresh coronavirus infection-linked fatality in Delhi was nil. The city had then logged 217 new cases. On 27 February, it had registered 256 cases—the highest in February.

'Children taking parents to vaccination', social media takes dose of humour

PTI

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

As the elderly population of the country are currently getting vaccinated against COVID-19, many social media users are professing their love for their parents with some expressing it with a shot of healthy humour.

The Twitterati particularly was expressive and phrases like

"mom gets first shot" and "took dad for vaccination" have been floating on the micro-blogging site with #Covid19 hashtag.

Twitter user @ladybirdsgf shared a screenshot of a phone chat with her mother.

"Pretty crazy way for my mom to announce her vaccination - 'got shots', it was painless," she tweeted quoting her mother after the vaccination.

"Mother's first vaccine dose

picture showed a selfie of the user with her mother.

Another user @goyalnashree said, "My parents are on the covid vaccination list at our home in Delhi and for the first time in ages I am truly overjoyed. Fingers crossed!"

Delhi-based Svetla Mohla shared a photo of her with her mother after the vaccination.

"Mother's first vaccine dose

administered," she posted on Facebook. But some posts on Twitter sought to inject a healthy dose of humour amid the ongoing vaccination exercise's second phase, meant for the elderly population. User NareshKataria14 shared a poster with a humour-laced message, "For the first time in the history of mankind, kids are taking parents for vaccination."

PTI

Classified

PUBLIC NOTIFICATIONS

NOTICE			
Notice is hereby given that share certificate of Goodyear India Limited, CIN No. L25110KL1996PLC005878 having registered office at Matunga Road, Ballabgarh, Distt. Faridabad (Haryana), held in the name of KUMAR SINGH RAM, P.S. 0500744			
Cert. No.	Shr./Deb.	Paid per Shr.	
00001713001-0001713005	5	10.00 F	
0002723346-0002723352	103656	5	
0005205004-0005205004	134513	1	10.00 F
0005502045-0005502048	164368	4	10.00 F
0014841789-0014841803	231629	15	10.00 F
		30	

has/have been lost or misplaced or stolen and a request for issuance of duplicate certificate in lieu thereof, has been made with the said company. Members of the public may file a complaint with the concerned authority if they find any discrepancy with the share certificate(s) if no objection is received at the above registered office within 15 days of this notice after which, no claim will be entertained by them.

NOTICE

This is to inform to all concerned that my Client intends to purchase the below mentioned properties at Mouza Kismat Suhkani (Sheet 5), J.L. No. 10, Panikuri Gram Panchayat, P.O. Rajganj, P.S.- Rajganj, District Jalpaiguri, in which Baradars are recorded in the land records of the B.R.L.O., Rajganj, Jalpaiguri.

Since those baradars / their heirs are untraceable, it is hereby conveyed that any person or entity having any right, title, interest, claim or demand whatsoever in respect of baradari rights, is called upon to intimate the same to me in writing, along with documents / evidence in support thereof, within 15 (fifteen) days from the date of publication of this notice, failing which the same if any, shall be deemed to have been abandoned, waived claimed and/or given up irrevocably.

Duttasoam, Bhattacharya, Advocate, 3rd Floor, 'Jagannath Apartment', 350, Jessor Road, Kolkata - 700055, Police Station Lake Town, Email : duttasoam.adv@gmail.com, Mobile No. 9177992790.

L. R. Dag. No.	Recorded Bargadar	Land Measuring
245	Ashwini Das, son of Agyat	32 Dec
246	Mandu Roy, son of Chekra Roy	65 Dec
253	Pradip Pal, son of Yogendra Pal	5 Dec
254	Pradip Pal, son of Yogendra Pal	91 Dec
258	Pritibhi Roy, son of Palla Roy	55 Dec
264	Mandu Roy, son of Chekra Roy	129 Dec
300	Doka Roy, son of Kochua Roy	14 Dec
305	Nekal Roy, son of Kochi Roy	4 Dec
306	Nekal Roy, son of Kochi Roy	8 Dec

CITATION UNDER SECTION 271 OF THE INDIAN SUCCESSION ACT

Whereas an petition under Section 276/278 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925, for grant of Probate/Letters of Administration in respect of the Estate of deceased Lt. Sh. Satish Chander Gupta, s/o Lt. R. N. D. D. Sector 47, Noida Distt. H.P. Gautam Buddha Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, Who died on 08-01-2018 at Uttar Pradesh, has been made by Sh. Pradeep Gupta, s/o Lt. Satish Chander Gupta, Shop No. 23, Lehna Singh Market, Subzi Mandi, Noida-11007.

Whereas the 25-05-2021 has been fixed for hearing of the case. Notice is hereby given so that any person, having any interest in the Probate/Letters of Administration of the Estate of the said deceased if he/she desires to be heard shall appear before this court on 25-05-2021 before the Grant of Letters of Administration.

Given under my hand and the Seal of this Court on this 27th day of February, 2021.

Addl. District Judge-05 Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi Seal of the court

IN THE COURT OF SH. SUNIL RANA Addl. District Judge-05 (Central)

Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi PC No. 5/2020 N.D.O.H. - 25-05-2021

Pradeep Gupta Central Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi Seal of the court

CITATION UNDER SECTION 271 OF THE INDIAN SUCCESSION ACT

Whereas an petition under Section 276/278 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925, for grant of Probate/Letters of Administration in respect of the Estate of deceased Lt. Sh. Ravinder Nath Prabhakar, s/o Sh. Sohan Lal Prabhakar, r/o 16/204, Gali No. 7, Faiz Road, Karol Bagh, New Delhi. Who died on 13-03-2013 at New Delhi, has been made by Sh. Himanshu Prabhakar, s/o Sh. Ravinder Nath Prabhakar, r/o No. 13, 3rd Floor, Pocket-1, Sector-14, Rohini, Delhi-110085.

Whereas the 20-05-2021 has been fixed for hearing of the case. Notice is hereby given so that any person, having any interest in the Probate/Letters of Administration of the Estate of the said deceased if he/she desires to be heard shall appear before this court on 20-05-2021 before the Grant of Letters of Administration.

Given under my hand and the Seal of this Court on this 27th day of February, 2021.

Addl. District Judge-05 Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi Seal of the court

COURT NOTICE (U/O 5 Rule 20 CPC)

IN THE COURT OF MS. VANI KUMARI SHARMA Principal District Judge (Family Court), Gurugram

CIS No. : HMA/209/2020 CNR No. : HGR01-002043-2020

Next Date: 12-04-2021 at 10 a.m.

Komal Mondal Versus Vinod Kumar Petition/S/12 of HMA

Publication Issued to J. Virendra Kumar & Soni

Mandal, c/o G. S. Caterers and Services, 03, St. Peters Road, Mariyannapahay, H.A. Farm Post, Bangalore-560024.

Also at H. No. 75, Ward No. State & Ors.

LEGAL NOTICES

IN THE COURT OF SH. SUNIL RANA Addl. District Judge-05 (Central)

Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi PC No. 5/2020 N.D.O.H. - 20-05-2021

Himanshu Prabhakar Versus State & Ors.

IN THE COURT OF SH. SUNIL RANA Addl. District Judge-05 (Central)

Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi PC No. 6/2020 N.D.O.H. - 25-05-2021

Pradeep Gupta Central Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi Seal of the court

IN THE COURT OF SH. SUNIL RANA Addl. District Judge-05 (Central)

Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi PC No. 7/2020 N.D.O.H. - 25-05-2021

Komal Mondal Versus Vinod Kumar Petition/S/12 of HMA

Publication Issued to J. Virendra Kumar & Soni

Mandal, c/o G. S. Caterers and Services, 03, St. Peters Road, Mariyannapahay, H.A. Farm Post, Bangalore-560024.

Also at H. No. 75, Ward No. State & Ors.

IN THE COURT OF SH. SUNIL RANA Addl. District Judge-05 (Central)

Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi PC No. 8/2020 N.D.O.H. - 25-05-2021

Komal Mondal Versus Vinod Kumar Petition/S/12 of HMA

Publication Issued to J. Virendra Kumar & Soni

Mandal, c/o G. S. Caterers and Services, 03, St. Peters Road, Mariyannapahay, H.A. Farm Post, Bangalore-560024.

Also at H. No. 75, Ward No. State & Ors.

IN THE COURT OF SH. SUNIL RANA Addl. District Judge-05 (Central)

Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi PC No. 9/2020 N.D.O.H. - 25-05-2021

Komal Mondal Versus Vinod Kumar Petition/S/12 of HMA

Publication Issued to J. Virendra Kumar & Soni

Mandal, c/o G. S. Caterers and Services, 03, St. Peters Road, Mariyannapahay, H.A. Farm Post, Bangalore-560024.

Also at H. No. 75, Ward No. State & Ors.

IN THE COURT OF SH. SUNIL RANA Addl. District Judge-05 (Central)

Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi PC No. 10/2020 N.D.O.H. - 25-05-2021

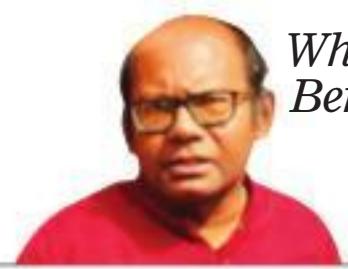
Komal Mondal Versus Vinod Kumar Petition/S/12 of HMA

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Also at H. No. 75, Ward No. State & Ors.

IN THE COURT OF SH. SUNIL RANA Addl. District Judge-05 (Central)



What is the stake of Shiv Sena, RJD or SP in Bengal? They don't have any presence in Bengal.

BJP BENGAL GENERAL SECRETARY SAYANTAN BASU
ON SHIV SENA SUPPORTING TRINAMUL CONGRESS IN ASSEMBLY POLL

The Statesman
NEW DELHI, FRIDAY 05 MARCH 2021

03

HP House deadlock over Cong MLAs' suspension continues

Ex-CM Virbhadr Singh & state Cong chief Kuldeep Singh Rathore join party MLAs' silent protest

ARCHANA PHULL
SHIMLA, 4 MARCH

The deadlock over suspension of five Congress MLAs on the first day of the budget session of the Himachal Pradesh Assembly on 26 February continued as the principal Opposition party boycotted the proceedings of the House again today.

All the Congress MLAs sat silently in protest outside the Assembly gate wearing black masks and black badges, with senior most legislator and former six-time chief minister, octogenarian Virbhadr Singh, and HP Congress president Kuldeep Singh Rathore also joining them.

Five Congress MLAs—including Leader of the Opposition (LOP) Mukesh Agnihotri—were suspended from the Assembly after the incident of alleged "gherao" of Governor Bandaru Dattatreya and manhandling of his staff as he was going back to Raj Bhawan after his brief address in the Assembly on 26 February. The Congress was upset over the brief address of the Governor, which they said had no content.

"I have been chief minister of Himachal Pradesh six times in the past and Jai Ram Thakur has become chief minister for the first time. Had I been the chief minister at this moment, I would have immediately resolved this issue," Virbhadr Singh told



Former HP CM Virbhadr Singh joins silent, sit-in protest of Congress leaders and legislators against suspension of 5 party MLAs outside the state Assembly in Shimla on Thursday.

LALIT KUMAR

reporters here.

He said such a deadlock is not good and he has never seen such a stalemate. Singh said the Congress MLAs have every right to protest and he fully supported them. LOP Agnihotri said the Congress was up against the "undemocratic" BJP government. "They have killed democracy. It is

a black day in the history of Himachal," he said.

The LOP said the 26 February incident could not be blamed on the Congress MLAs. "The onus is on the chief minister Jai Ram Thakur as he is responsible for the entire episode. There is no question of us going to the Governor. Rather, the CM should apolo-

gise," he said.

He said the government has deployed a large number of cops in and around the Assembly and have closed the gates for the Opposition MLAs. "The chief minister has been talking in a totally dictatorial manner," he charged. He said the chief minister was "angry" as the Congress raised voice

against issues like price rise and unemployment.

Agnihotri said the onus was on the chief minister to resolve the stalemate. "The Governor's address was a bundle of lies," he said.

He said so far there was no official communication to the Congress Legislature Party for any dialogue on the issue from the Thakur government.

"We are protesting here. We will take to roads if a solution is not worked out," he said.

The Thakur-led BJP dispensation has been condemning the Congress MLAs for their alleged role in the 26 February incident in the Assembly premises, even as it has asked them to apologise to the Governor over it.

The Congress MLAs had staged a walkout from the House again yesterday over the row.

The five Congress MLAs were suspended on the first day of budget session for the entire session till 20 March for allegedly blocking the passage of Governor, manhandling his staff outside the Speaker's gate and banging his official vehicle when he was going back to Raj Bhawan after his address in the Assembly on 26 February. They are also facing a FIR for alleged assault on the Governor. In protest against suspension of their party colleagues, the Congress members have not participated in any proceedings of the House after the first day, except for obituary references.



Jai Ram criticises Cong for not apologising to Governor

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 4 MARCH

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur on Thursday replied to the discussion on the motion of thanks on the Governor's address in the state Assembly in absence of members of the principal opposition Congress.

The discussion continued for three days with 18 ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) members participating in it, none from opposition Congress.

"It would have been better if the opposition members would have also participated in it," said chief minister at the outset of his reply.

He launched a scathing attack on the opposition Congress and said it was most unfortunate that they indulged in such an incident involving the Governor. "It has never happened in the past and never happened in any part of the country," he said.

He said without listening to his address, the Congress members called the Governor's address a bundle of lies.

"After going out they started raising slogans outside the Speaker's gate. We thought that if they are raising slogans it's okay and we went to see off the Governor from there. But we were surprised that the Congress MLAs indulged in gheraoing the Governor and I personally saw Leader of Opposition Mukesh Agni-

hotri jostling the ADC of Governor. The Congress MLAs even tried to pull the door when the Governor sat in his car and banged the bonnet of the car. This is something we have never seen, never thought about in a peaceful state like Himachal Pradesh," he said.

The chief minister urged the Speaker that if the rules permit, the CCTV footage of the 26 February incident should be shown to the public to expose Congress MLAs.

He said the Congress MLAs should have immediately apologized to the Governor about the incident. "Even today they can do that. It is up to them," he said.

He condemned the behavior of a Congress member for having reached the chair of the Deputy Speaker Hans Raj during discussion in the House and said this was unfortunate.

The chief minister said one year is lost in Covid pandemic. "Everyone faced problems during Covid. But one thing is clear that the state government did its best to run the things smoothly. Himachal was appreciated at the national level for work during Covid," he said.

SAD MLAs reach Assembly in bullock carts to demand VAT cut on fuel prices

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 4 MARCH

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) legislative group on Thursday travelled to the Punjab Assembly in bullock carts to register a protest against the Congress government's "refusal" to give relief from high diesel and petrol prices to farmers as well as the common man.

The legislative group also staged a walkout on this issue when the government refused to give an assurance that it would reduce State tax on petroleum products, which is levied in the form of value added tax (VAT).

Earlier in the morning, SAD legislators led by Sharanjit Singh Dhillon and Bikram Singh Majithia led a protest astride bullock carts to the Assembly to focus attention on the "callousness" of the Congress government for not paying heed to the demand to reduce the price of fuel to the demand to reduce prices on petroleum products by at least Rs five per litre.

The legislators while raising slogans of "lokan nu lutnaband karo" (stop looting the people) and "VAT ghat karo" (reduce the VAT) also took on Punjab Congress president Sunil Jakhar for trying to "befool" Punjabis by refusing to put pressure on his government to reduce VAT on petroleum products. SAD legislative wing leader



Sharanjit Singh Dhillon also raised the issue during zero hour and demanded an assurance from the government that it would reduce VAT on petrol and diesel immediately. When the treasury benches failed to pay heed to this demand, the SAD legislators staged a walkout on this issue.

Dhillon while speaking on this issue said the SAD was ready to join the state government and approach the Centre to reduce the prices of petroleum products. "We are even ready to go to Delhi and hold a protest on this issue. However before this is done the Congress government must come to the aid of farmers and the common man by reducing VAT on petrol and diesel," he said.

He said instead of doing this the Congress government was playing a "fixed match" with the Centre as each hike in prices of petroleum products resulted in a similar hike in VAT. "Instead of tackling this issue, the State government is trying to shift its responsibility to the Centre," the SAD leader added.

adding the VAT of 27.5 percent on petrol and 17.5 percent on diesel was amongst the highest in the country.

Meanwhile, speaking to reporters, Majithia said it was finance minister Manpreet Badal and Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh's responsibility to reduce the steep VAT being imposed on petroleum products in Punjab.

He said instead of doing this the Congress government was playing a "fixed match" with the Centre as each hike in prices of petroleum products resulted in a similar hike in VAT. "Instead of tackling this issue, the State government is trying to shift its responsibility to the Centre," the SAD leader added.

HP agri varsity's vet complex to be made a 'centre of excellence'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 4 MARCH

The CSK HP Agriculture University's Veterinary Clinical Complex will be made a centre of excellence, Vice Chancellor Prof HK Chaudhary said on Thursday.

Chaudhary said that

Advanced Veterinary Multi-specialty Complex was known for providing specialized and super specialized multispecialty public outreach clinical services to the sick and ailing animals from all over the state.

"Efforts have been initiated to make it a Centre of

Excellence by augmenting more technical and other facilities," he added.

He appreciated the scientists and students who were providing services to farmers in the areas of animal reproduction, veterinary medicine and veterinary surgery, uninterrupted

Parasitology and Veterinary Pathology. Further, a veterinary medical outlet will be set up to provide medicines at discounted rates and some facilities for the farmers, bringing their animals for the treatment, will also be provided, he added.

A prompt treatment is often preceded by equally effective diagnostic laboratory services in the College Clinics extended by the Department of Veterinary Microbiology, Veteri-

HP CM takes first dose of Covid shot

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 4 MARCH

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur on Thursday took first dose of COVID-19 vaccine at Vidhan Sabha complex under the second phase of vaccination in the state.

The Chief Minister, after taking COVID vaccine, said the first phase of vaccination of COVID-19 was completed successfully with active participation of health and frontline workers and lauded their services for combating this sit-

uation.

He urged the people to take the vaccine when their turn comes to make the society COVID-19 free.

Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha Speaker Vinod Singh Parmar, CPM MLA Rakesh Singh and other leaders also took first dose of COVID-19 vaccine on the occasion.

Former chief minister Virbhadra Singh and his wife Pratibha Singh took first dose of Covid vaccine at his residence, Holy Lodge, in Shimla.



SKM announces 5-hr blockade at KMP expressway on 100th day of protest

IANS
NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) expressway will be blocked for five hours on March 6 as the farmers' protest against the three Central farm laws complete 100 days, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) announced on Tuesday after a meeting held on the 96th day of the protest to prepare future strategy.

After the meeting, farmer leader Balvir Singh Rajewal said, "March 6 will mark the 100th day of the farmers' protest on the borders of Delhi. On that day, there will be a 5-hour blockade on the KMP Expressway connecting various protest sites. The blockade will be between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. and no toll will be collected at the toll plazas during this time."

"In the rest of the country, the day will be marked by hoisting black flags on houses and offices to support the movement. The SKM members will be wearing black bands on that day as a mark of protest," he added.

The SKM is also working on a strategy for the states where Assembly elections are scheduled. The members of the farmers' body will visit the states and participate in various programmes. The SKM will mark March 8 as Mahila Kisan Diwas. The SKM has invited women's organisations and others on that day to support the movement and highlight the contributions of women farmers to the country. On March 15, the SKM along with the Central trade unions will mark the day as 'anti-privatisation day'. The SKM will support the call of trade unions by marking the day as 'anti-corporation day' and extend solidarity to the protests of trade unions across the country.

The farmer leaders added that the SKM will also launch a 'MSP Dilao Abhiyan' across the country.

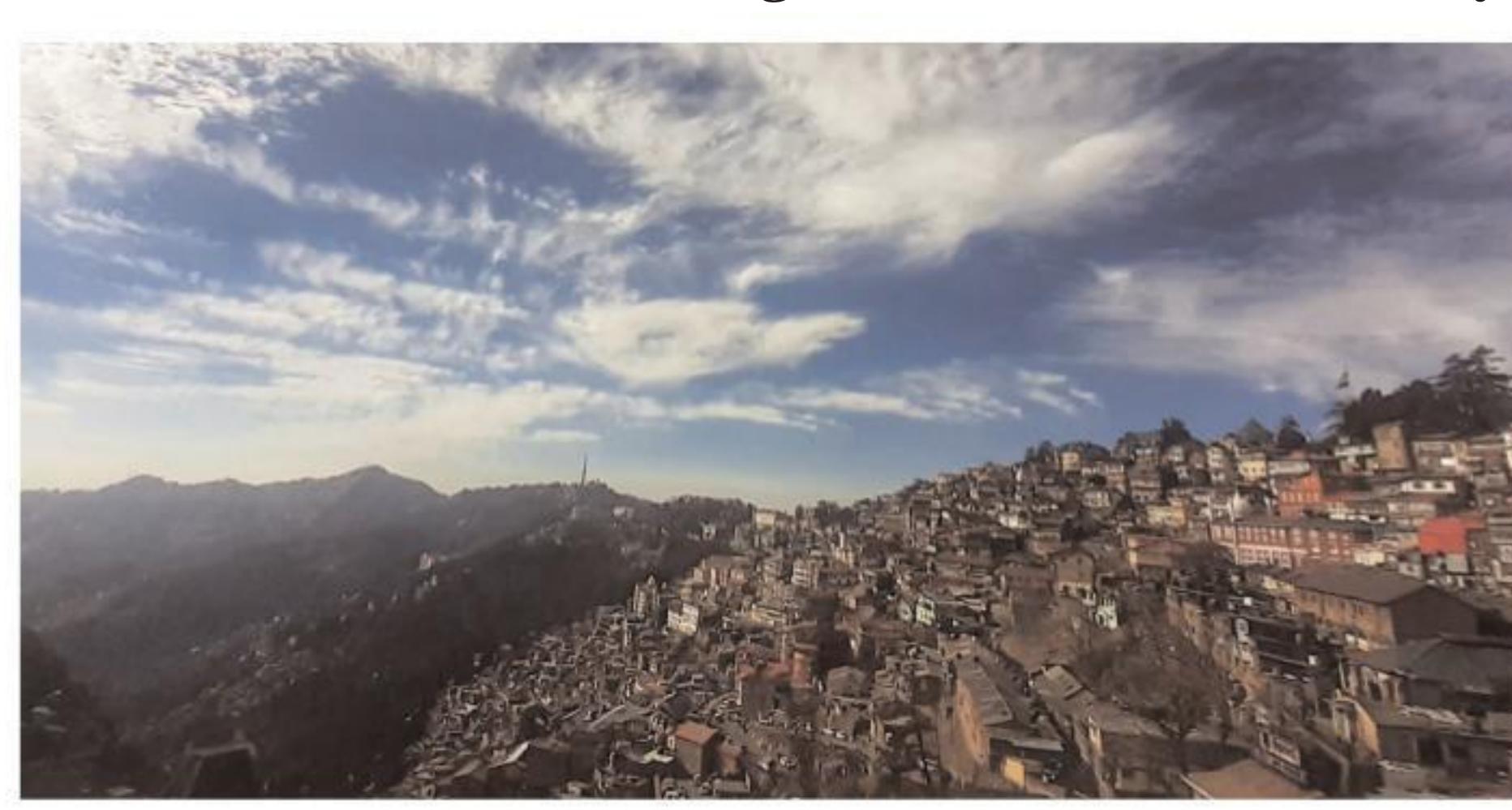
Shimla ranked 'most liveable' among small cities in country

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 4 MARCH

Shimla has been ranked as the best city for living in the category of cities with less than 10 lakh population under Ease of Living Index (EoL) and Municipality Performance Index (MPI) in the country. HP Urban Development minister Suresh Bhardwaj informed the state Assembly on Thursday.

Shimla was ranked the highest in ease of living, followed by Bhubaneshwar, Silvassa, Kakinada, Salem, Vellore, Gandhinagar, Gurugram, Davangere, and Tiruchirappalli in a survey whose result were declared today by the Union Housing and Urban Affairs ministry.

Bhardwaj said the award symbolizes the good governance of the BJP government and efforts made for the all round development of the state. "The efforts of the state government has resulted in crime rate going down in



Himachal Pradesh and impetus is being given to strengthen roads network, water and electricity facilities and development activities across the state," he added.

He further stated that the recognition of government's efforts in Shimla, which had been included in Smart City project, will further encourage to work hard on improv-

ing citizen centric facilities in the capital city as well as in the entire state.

Bhardwaj said the Ease of

life and the impact of various initiatives for urban development. The survey which was conducted in 2020, provides a comprehensive

understanding of participating cities across India based on quality of life, economic ability of a city and its sustainability and resilience.

The assessment also incorporates the residents' view on the services provided by city administration through a citizen perception survey. "The MPI examined the sectoral performance of 111 municipalities across five verticals which comprise of 20 sectors and 100 indicators in all totality. The five verticals under MPI are Services, Finance, Policy, Technology and Governance," he added.

It is worth mentioning here that the Municipal Performance Index (MPI) was launched as an accompaniment to the Ease of Living Index. It seeks to examine local government practice in municipalities across areas of services, finance, policy, technology and governance. It seeks to simplify and evaluate the complexities in local governance practice and promote the ethos of transparency and accountability.

Punjab Police arrests 855 drug smugglers in week-long drive

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 4 MARCH

Under a week-long special drive launched against the drug menace, the Punjab Police have arrested 855 drug smugglers and suppliers after registering 672 first information reports (FIRs) under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act across the state.

The drive commenced on 25 February, the Director General of Police (DGP) Punjab Dinkar Gupta said in a press communiqué.

He said under this drive the police have recovered 16 kilogram (kg) heroin, 35 kg opium, 46 kg ganja, 12 quintals poppy husk and 4.61 lakh intoxicant pills among other drugs after carrying out cordon and search operations in drug affected areas beside laying nakkas at vulnerable routes across the state.

The DGP said during this



drive, the police have prepared 18 proposals to forfeit illegally acquired properties by drug smugglers worth Rs 9.66 Crore. The police have also arrested 34 proclaimed offenders (POs) of NDPS cases, he said.

Gupta said as part of Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh-led Punjab government's zero tolerance policy against drugs, the Punjab Police is committed to eradicate the drug menace from the state.

Meanwhile, extensive anti-drug drives are being launched by the Punjab Police to combat the menace of drugs from the border states of Punjab.



The new farm laws are unconstitutional and illegal.

FORMER PUNJAB MINISTER NAVJOT SINGH SIDHU

SAYING IT'S AN ATTACK BY CENTRE ON RIGHT OF STATES TO FRAME NEW LAWS & FEDERAL STRUCTURE

THUMBNAILS



Constables take a pledge during a passing out parade function, in Moradabad on Thursday. ■ IANS

Lawyers protest in Meerut:
Over 100 lawyers protested in Meerut, alleging police inaction after their colleague Omkar Tomar, an office bearer of Bar Association of Meerut allegedly hanged himself to death, accusing BJP MLA from Hastinapur Dinesh Khatik of harassing him in his suicide note. ■ SNS

54% population developed antibodies in H'bad: CCMB

HYDERABAD, 4 MARCH

A study has found 54 per cent of Hyderabad's population have developed antibodies against coronavirus with women showing marginally higher seropositivity rate than men. The study was conducted by Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), along with National Institute of Nutrition and Bharat Biotech with 9000 samples covering 30 wards. The people participating in the study were more than 10 years of age. Those above 70 years of age showed a lower seropositivity of 49 per cent which can be attributed to limited mobility and precautions taken due to the pandemic.

Families which had positive cases showed maximum seropositivity of 78 per cent followed by those who had known somebody outside their house contracting Covid. As a scientist from NIN pointed out households with larger number of rooms in their houses and smaller family size had low seroprevalence. ■ SNS

CPM: Polls to decide if BJP extends 'hegemonic rule'

Among the five states and one UT going to the polls only Assam has a BJP govt

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The CPI (M) today said the coming Assembly elections in five states will decide whether the BJP extends its "hegemonic rule" in the entire country, or the opposition to its "authoritarian" drive gains strength. In an editorial in its official journal People's Democracy, the party said among Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and the Union Territory of Puducherry, going to the polls from 27 March to 29 April, only Assam has a BJP government.

All India Mahila Congress President Sushmita Dev said the Congress-led alliance will focus more on the upliftment of women and youths. ■ PTI

Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) to advance its communal agenda.

Against the BJP, a combination of seven parties has emerged comprising Congress, AIUDF, CPI (M), CPI, CPI (ML), Anchalik Gana Morcha and Bodoland People's Front. "This united opposition grouping should be able to give an effective fight to the BJP alliance," the CPI (M) said.

In Assam, the BJP has sought to use the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the

Assam Cong promises 50% quota for women in govt jobs. Continuing with its series of "guarantees", the Congress said on Thursday that if the Opposition "Mahajot" or Grand Alliance is voted to power in Assam, it will ensure 50 per cent reservation for women in government jobs.

The 2019 Lok Sabha election saw a polarisation between the TMC and BJP and the latter won 18 of the 42 seats polling 40.6 per cent. The Left Front got squeezed out in this polarisation and got only 7.4 per cent of the vote.

The CPI (M) and the Left Front have been strenuously working to recover lost ground.

"The danger of BJP advance in West Bengal is real. This has led some liberal and Left circles outside Bengal to advocate cooperation with the TMC by the CPI (M) and Left Front," the party journal said.

"This would be suicidal for the Left and actually facilitate a BJP victory. There is strong discontent against the

TMC and its thuggish misrule. A soft attitude to Mamata Banerjee and her party on the part of the Left will drive all the anti-TMC voters into the arms of the BJP," the editorial said.

"In fact, it is the projection of an alternative combination of the Left Front, Congress and other non-BJP, non-TMC forces that can rally these people and deprive the BJP of additional support," the CPI (M) said.

The contest in Kerala is between the LDF and the UDF. The BJP is aspiring to become the third pole.

Throughout last year, the Congress worked in tandem with the BJP in raising allegations against the LDF government and the chief minister regarding the gold smuggling and other cases.

Rejecting this anti-LDF tirade, the people gave a resounding mandate to the LDF in the local body election in November, 2020.

India committed to connectivity with Afghanistan, Central Asia: Jaishankar

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

India today reaffirmed its strong commitment to work together with all regional stakeholders to enhance connectivity in the region and to provide unhindered access to the sea to land-locked Afghanistan and Central Asian countries through the Chabahar Port, bypassing Pakistan.

"The Chabahar Port has not only emerged as a commercial transit hub for the region but also facilitated the delivery of humanitarian assistance, especially during the pandemic. The port is part of our shared commitment towards peace, stability and prosperity of the people of Afghanistan," external affairs Minister S Jaishankar said.

He was addressing the 'Chabahar Day' celebration hosted by India on the margins of the 'Maritime India Summit' to showcase the business potential of the strategic port located in Iran. Senior ministers from Afghanistan, Armenia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Uzbekistan virtually participated in it.



Jaishankar noted that India had utilised the strategic port to ship 75,000 MT of wheat as humanitarian food assistance to Afghanistan in September 2020. India also assisted Iran to fight the worst-ever locust invasion in the last 25 years by supplying 25 Metric tonnes of Malathion in June 2020, again through the port. The second batch of 25 Metric tonnes has recently reached the port.

Besides the Indian exports of food products, the port has also handled several shipments and trans-shipments from Russia, Brazil, Thailand, Germany, Ukraine and the UAE, the minister said.

Jaishankar said the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) was an important trade corridor project, wherein India was partnering with twelve countries to establish an economic

corridor for the benefit of the peoples. "We also welcome the interest of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan to join the multilateral corridor project. Establishing an eastern corridor through Afghanistan would maximise its potential. India has also proposed the inclusion of Chabahar in the INSTC route," he added.

Jaishankar said the port was intended to ensure the unhindered flow of commerce throughout the region and to create a safe, secure and reliable route to trade initially with Afghanistan, and thereafter with Central Asia as a whole.

He observed that in the modern age, the correlation between connectivity and economic growth has got more pronounced. Growth in trade, commerce, industrial development and technological advancement has gone hand in hand with the ease of connecting. "Maritime connectivity, in particular, has played a significant role in creating regional corridors for trade and economic linkages, as indeed for cultural and intellectual exchanges over the centuries," he said.

Bihar Cov jabs: Cases soar, lens on medical fraternity

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
PATNA, 4 MARCH

So far, one MBBS student has died whereas six medical students have been left infected after taking the first dose of vaccine in the state.

cination drive at the NMCH Dr Papu Kumar Saifi told a local newspaper. Reports said majority of them contracted the virus well some 20 days after getting the first shot. Heath experts say one begins to develop immunity against the virus 14 days after getting the second jab of the vaccine.

Panic gripped the medical students at the Nalanda Medical College and Hospital (NMCH), one of the two premier government hospitals in Patna, after 10 more of them tested positive earlier this week. Strangely, six of them had taken first dose of Covid vaccine in the first week of February, according to local doctors.

"All the undergraduate students testing positive for the virus at the NMCH belong to 2016, 2018 and 2020 batches. They began to show symptoms of the virus from the last week," a junior resident doctor associated with the vac-

went into dizzy after a final year MBBS student Shubham Shekhar died, 22 days after he had taken the first dose of the Covaxin.

According to hospital officials, the deceased had taken the first shot of the Covaxin in the first week of February but was tested positive on 27 February.

Hospital sources said the medico had given his swab samples on 24 February after developing symptoms before leaving for his native village in Begusarai district. He was admitted to a private hospital after his condition deteriorated but he died later.

The medical superintendent of Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, Dr Gopal Krishna too got infected after taking the first shot of the vaccine earlier. Subsequently, he was advised to go for home quarantine.

However, the Opposition legislators have refrained from getting the vaccines so far despite appeals by the chief minister to go for the shots.

There are some 700 medical students at the hospital. The hospital administration

IN NATURE'S LAP



At Kangsabati river in West Midnapore on Thursday. ■ AJHARUL PATHAN

UGC invites suggestions on draft rules for dual degree

NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

Suggestions have been invited from all stakeholders by the UGC for the draft Regulations on Academic Collaboration between Indian and Foreign Higher Education Institutions to offer Joint Degree, Dual Degree and Twinning Programmes. The regulations have been kept in the public domain. According to the Press release from the Ministry, the government is taking a number of initiatives for the implementation of the National Education Policy-2020. The NEP-2020 calls for permitting credits acquired in foreign countries to be counted for the award of a degree.

These Regulations shall apply to Indian Higher Education Institutions intending to collaborate with Foreign Higher Education Institutions leading to award of diploma and degree including Post Graduate and Doctoral programmes, and Foreign Higher Education Institution intending to collaborate with Indian Higher Education Institutions. ■ SNS

TENDER

State Health Agency, U.T., Chandigarh
GMSH Complex, Sector-16, Chandigarh, 172-2752008

ONLINE TENDER FOR SELECTION OF IMPLEMENTING SUPPORT AGENCY FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF AYUSHMAN BHARAT -PRADHAN MANTRI JAN AROGYA YOJANA

State Health Agency, UT, Chandigarh invites online tender from eligible implementing Support Agencies (ISAs) for support services in implementation of Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana in UT, Chandigarh. Detailed terms and conditions are available in the tender document (reference no. SHAC/HPD/PMJAY/2021/Spl-01) which can be downloaded from the website <http://etenders.chd.nic.in/gcep>. The end date for submission of bid is 24.03.2021 till 2:00 P.M. (refer Bid Data Sheet for dates).

The competent authority reserves the right to reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason.

In case of any query/clarification regarding e-tendering process, the bidder can contact with IT Department of U.T. on Ph. No. 0172-2740641.

Nodal Officer, SHA,
For Chief Executive Officer,
SHA, U.T., Chandigarh

SC to private hospitals: Give priority to elderly amid Covid

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed that elderly people should be given priority in admissions at private hospitals besides at government medical institutions amid the pandemic. A bench of justices Ashok Bhushan and RS Reddy modified its earlier order of August 4, 2020, by which it had directed only government hospitals to give priority in admission and treatment of elderly people looking at their vulnerability to coronavirus.

Wednesday that the priority with reference to admission con-

tended in order dated August 4, 2020 to the elderly people should also be given in the private hospitals. List the matter after four weeks, the bench said in its order. During the hearing, senior advocate Ashwani Kumar, petitioner in person, told the bench that in order dated 4 August, last year this Court had directed that priority with reference to admission be given to the elderly people in the government hospital only.

He said that the priority in admission to the elderly people should be given in all private hospitals as well since it is mostly private hospitals which cater most of the population in the country.

Shiv Sena backs 'tigress' Mamata, won't contest polls

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 4 MARCH

After Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and Samajwadi Party (SP), the Shiv Sena on Thursday extended its support to the TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, and said it would not contest Assembly elections in Bengal.

Senior Shiv Sena leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut today extended full support to Miss Banerjee-led TMC.

Raut tweeted, people are willing to know whether Shiv Sena is contesting in West Bengal poll or not. So update after discussions with party president Uddhav Thackeray.

"Looking at this present scenario it appears like a 'Didi vs All Fight. All M's Money, Muscle and Media are being used against Mamata Didi. Hence, Shiv Sena has decided not to contest West Bengal poll and stand in solidarity with her."

"We wish Mamata didi a roaring success, because we believe that she is the real Bengal tigress."

TMC national spokesperson and Rajya Sabha MP Derek O'Brien retweeted the tweet by Raut.

"We welcome Shiv Sena's decision. We are thankful to Shiv Sena for not putting up candidates in the assembly polls in West Bengal," TMC MP Sougata Roy said.

The BJP, however, declined to attach much importance to the devel-

opment.

"What is the stake of Shiv Sena, RJD or SP in Bengal? It hardly matters whom they support or not. It is laughable," TMC state general secretary Sayantan Basu said.

A significant takeaway of the Shiv Sena, SP and RJD pledging support to Miss Banerjee is they are shunning Congress and siding with the TMC in the battle for Bengal.

Meanwhile, Trinamool Women Congress president Chandrima Bhattacharya today announced that on 8 March celebrated as International Women's Day Miss Banerjee will hold rally in Kolkata from College Square to Esplanade.

Party sources revealed TMC chief may declare the candidate list of her party by tomorrow. There should be some surprises in the list, as many as 40 fresh faces may be given nominations especially in those Assembly constituencies where the sitting MLAs have defected to BJP.

The party may field Nirbed Roy in Dum Dum (North), Jyoti Priya Mullick from Habra, Bratya Basu from Dum Dum (South), Nayana Bandopadhyay in Chowringhee, Aroop Biswas in Tollygunge. State power minister and Rashbehari MLA Sobhaben Chatopadhyay may not be given ticket, instead Debasish Kumar, South Kolkata's TMC president, may contest.

YSRCP govt to support bandh call against RINL privatisation

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD, 4 MARCH

The YSRCP government in Andhra Pradesh has decided to support the bandh that has been called tomorrow in protest against the move to privatise Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), more popularly known as Vizag Steel Plant.

The government's stand has assured the success of the bandh which is being supported by people from all walks of life apart from various trade union organisations. The statewide bandh call was given by Steel Plant Protection Forum with most of the political parties, including TDP, Congress and Left parties, extending support.

YSRCP, which has already opposed the decision to privatise the steel plant, has decided to extend support too with no service by state-run buses till 1 pm.

State minister for information and public relations Perni Venkataramiah said that the Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) buses will be continued to respond to the proposal.

Chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to reconsider the decision of 100 per cent disinvestment of the steel plant. Instead, he suggested the loss-making public enterprise can turn around if captive iron ore mine are allocated to the plant and the debt is converted into equity. However, the Centre is yet to respond to the proposal.

TDP's Visakha North MLA Ganta Srinivas Rao who has sent his resignation letter to the Speaker has also appealed to the general public to support the Vizag steel plant.

Around 700 'super sensitive' booths in Bengal: EC sources

KOLKATA, 4 MARCH

About 700-odd polling booths in the state have been identified as "super sensitive" by Election Commission as West Bengal goes for an eight-phase Assembly election later this month. The number of "sensi-

tive" booths in the state number more than 6,000, according to commission sources. Interestingly, one cannot jump to the conclusion that these numbers are the sole foundation of the commission's findings pointing to a dismal law and order situation in the state. ■ SNS

HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT "NOTICE INVITING TENDERS"

Sealed item rate tenders are hereby invited by the Executive Engineer, Bilaspur Division No. I, HP-PWD, Bilaspur, for the following works from the registered contractors of appropriate class enlisted in HP-PWD, whose registration stand renewed as per the revised instructions and also registered dealers under the Himachal Pradesh, General Sales Tax Act, 1968. The important dates of the tenders are as under

Date of application 22/03/2021

Date of sale of tender form 23/03/



Samajwadis will win UP election and will work towards abolishing the electronic voting system

SAMAJWADI PARTY PRESIDENT AKHILESH YADAV
WHILE ADDRESSING A PRESS CONFERENCE

'Put up Mamata's posters ahead of PM's rally': On the eve before declaration of Trinamul Congress' candidate list, poll strategist Prashant Kishor along with TMC leaders Abhishek Banerjee, Subrata Bakshi, Partha Chatterjee and Firhad Hakim met all TMC councilors at Trinamul Bhavan, asking them to lend complete support to the nominated candidates while it was decided that civic polls will be held 75 days after 2 May. Bakshi reportedly said, "The election committee has decided that Mamata Banerjee will finally select the candidates."

SNS

BEFORE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-III, DELHI

4th FLOOR, JEEVAN TARA BUILDING, PARLIAMENT STREET, NEW DELHI-110001

Notice under Section 19(4) of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993 read with Rule 12 & 13 of the Debts Recovery Tribunal (Procedure Rules) 1993.

In the matter of: O.A. No.905/2019

LIC Housing Finance Ltd.Applicant

Versus

POOJA SETIA & ORS.Defendants

D-1. MS. POOJA SETIA

Flat No. E-4/4, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi-110017.

Also at: M/s. ALK INDIA, Terminal - B, Domestic Airport, Palam, New Delhi-110037.

Whereas the above named applicant has instituted a case against you and whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance in this Tribunal 08.04.2021 at 10:30 A.M. Take notice that in case of your failure to appear on the above mentioned day before this Tribunal, the case will be heard and decided in your absence.

Due to ongoing Pandemic situation, all the matters will be taken up through Video Conferencing and for that purpose:-

(i) All the Advocates/Litigants shall download the "Cisco Webex" application / Software.

(ii) "Meeting ID" and "Password" for the next date of hearing qua cases to be taken by Registrar / Recovery Officer-I and Recovery Officer-II shall be available one day prior to the next date at DRT Official Portal i.e. "drt.gov.in" under the Public Notice Head.

(iii) In any exigency qua that, the Advocates / Litigants can contact the concerned official at Ph. No.23748469.

Given under my hand and seal of this Tribunal on this the 12th Day of Feb. 2021.

SEAL OF COURT

BY ORDER OF THE TRIBUNAL
Assistant Registrar, DRT-III, New Delhi

DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-I, DELHI

4th FLOOR, JEEVAN TARA BUILDING, PARLIAMENT STREET, NEW DELHI-110001

O.A. No. 1222/2018

Central Bank of IndiaApplicant

Versus

Mr. Shiva Nagavara Prasad Bathula & Ors.Defendants

To,

1. Shiva Nagavara Prasad Bathula (Defendant No.01)

WZ-276/15, Ground Floor, Indepur, New Delhi-110012.

Also at: H.No.D-99, Rear Sida Anand Niketan, Chanakyapur, New Delhi-110021.

Also at: H.No. 10-49-100A, Kacherimitta Kavali, P.O.- Nelore, Distt.-Nelore, Andhra Pradesh-524201.

Whereas the above named applicant has instituted a case for recovery of Rs.63,12,153/- (Rupees Sixty Three Lakhs Twelve Thousand One Hundred Fifty Three Only) against you and whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance in this Tribunal before D.R.T. website: www.tribunal.gov.in Phone Number 011-23748473). Take notice that in case of your failure to appear on the above mentioned day before this Tribunal, the case will be heard and decided in your absence.

Due to ongoing Pandemic Situation, all the matters will be taken up through Video Conferencing and for that purpose:-

(i) All the Advocates/Litigants shall download the "Cisco Webex" application / Software.

(ii) "Meeting ID" and "Password" for the next date of hearing qua cases to be taken by Registrar / Recovery Officer-I and Recovery Officer-II shall be available one day prior to the next date at DRT Official Portal i.e. "drt.gov.in" under the Public Notice Head.

(iii) In any exigency qua that, the Advocates / Litigants can contact the concerned official at Ph. No.23748473.

Given under my hand and seal of the Tribunal on this 10th February of 2021. Respondent may contact under mention Phone number for further enquiry. Mr. Amit K. Dar, Ld. Registrar, DRT-I, New Delhi. Phone No.: 011-23748473, E-mail: drt1delhi-dfs@nic.in.

By Order of this Tribunal,
For Registrar

BEFORE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-III, DELHI

4th FLOOR, JEEVAN TARA BUILDING, PARLIAMENT STREET, NEW DELHI-110001

Notice under Section 19(4) of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993 read with Rule 12 & 13 of the Debts Recovery Tribunal (Procedure Rules) 1993.

In the matter of: O.A. No.922/2019

LIC Housing Finance Ltd.Applicant

Versus

VIVEK CHAND & ORS.Defendants

D-1. SH. VIVEK CHAND

Flat No. G-3, A-176, Shalimar Garden Extn.-II, Ghaziabad, U.P.-123307 Also at: M/s. Sugoi Motors Pvt. Ltd.

21-A, Shivaji Marg, New Delhi.

D-2. PIYUSH COLONIZERS LTD.

A-16/B-2, Mohan Co-operative Industrial Estate, Main Mathura Road, New Delhi-110044.

Whereas the above named applicant has instituted a case against you and whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance in this Tribunal 05.04.2021 at 10:30 A.M. Take notice that in case of your failure to appear on the above mentioned day before this Tribunal, the case will be heard and decided in your absence.

Due to ongoing Pandemic situation, all the matters will be taken up through Video Conferencing and for that purpose:-

(i) All the Advocates/Litigants shall download the "Cisco Webex" application / Software.

(ii) "Meeting ID" and "Password" for the next date of hearing qua cases to be taken by Registrar / Recovery Officer-I and Recovery Officer-II shall be available one day prior to the next date at DRT Official Portal i.e. "drt.gov.in" under the Public Notice Head.

(iii) In any exigency qua that, the Advocates / Litigants can contact the concerned official at Ph. No.23748469.

Given under my hand and seal of this Tribunal on this the 12th Day of Feb. 2021.

SEAL OF COURT

BY ORDER OF THE TRIBUNAL
Assistant Registrar, DRT-III, New Delhi

BEFORE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-III, DELHI

4th FLOOR, JEEVAN TARA BUILDING, PARLIAMENT STREET, NEW DELHI-110001

Notice under Section 19(4) of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993 read with Rule 12 & 13 of the Debts Recovery Tribunal (Procedure Rules) 1993.

In the matter of: O.A. No.473/2020

CENTRAL BANK OF INDIAApplicant

Versus

RAHUL SINGH AND ORS.Defendants

D-1. RAHUL SINGH, S/O. SH. RAMBEER SINGH,

R/o. U.G.F. No.2, C-7, Ganga Vihar, Sadullabad, Ghaziabad, U.P.-201102. Also at: Merino Centmark Pvt. Ltd., D-531, First Floor, West Vinod Nagar, Delhi-110092.

D-2. MRS. MAMTA, W/O. SH. RAHUL SINGH,

R/o. U.G.F. No.2, C-7, Ganga Vihar, Sadullabad, Ghaziabad-201102.

D-3. BUILDER JBK DEVELOPERS PVT. LTD.

Regd. Office: 99, Patparganj, Delhi-110091.

CORP. OFFICE: B-21-22, Sector-16, Noida, U.P.-201301.

Whereas the above named applicant has instituted a case against you and whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance in this Tribunal 31.03.2021 at 10:30 A.M. Take notice that in case of your failure to appear on the above mentioned day before this Tribunal, the case will be heard and decided in your absence.

Due to ongoing Pandemic situation, all the matters will be taken up through Video Conferencing and for that purpose:-

(i) All the Advocates/Litigants shall download the "Cisco Webex" application / Software.

(ii) "Meeting ID" and "Password" for the next date of hearing qua cases to be taken by Registrar / Recovery Officer-I and Recovery Officer-II shall be available one day prior to the next date at DRT Official Portal i.e. "drt.gov.in" under the Public Notice Head.

(iii) In any exigency qua that, the Advocates / Litigants can contact the concerned official at Ph. No.23748469.

Given under my hand and seal of this Tribunal on this the 24th Day of Feb. 2021.

SEAL OF COURT

BY ORDER OF THE TRIBUNAL
Assistant Registrar, DRT-III, New Delhi

Samajwadis will win UP election and will work towards abolishing the electronic voting system

SAMAJWADI PARTY PRESIDENT AKHILESH YADAV
WHILE ADDRESSING A PRESS CONFERENCE

Quitting active politics to fight DMK: Sasikala

Move aims at ensuring Jayalalithaa's golden rule is established in Tamil Nadu

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHENNAI, 4 MARCH

from Bengaluru Jail, where she served four years' conviction in a disproportionate asset case.

If the unexpected exit of Rajinikanth from politics due to health reason was an early blow to BJP in the state, Sasikala's exit makes sense for them, as political observers point out, because the BJP was trying hard to make a truce among warring factions of AIADMK led by EPS-OPS duo and Sasikala's nephew TTV Dinakaran.

Though they could not bring the unity among these two factions formed after Jayalalithaa's death due to an adamant attitude of chief minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami that Sasikala could not be inducted into AIADMK again, they are now delighted in Tamil

Nadu because they think Sasikala's exit will immensely benefit the AIADMK front in the Assembly elections by avoiding the split of votes.

While Sasikala announced her decision to step aside from politics in a statement released last night, in which she merely stated that she has never had any post or power and encouraged her followers to support Jayalalithaa's vision and ensure the defeat of DMK, her brother Dhivakaran alleged that her sudden announcement is a result of conniving by AMMK founder and siblings' nephew TTV Dinakaran.

Dhivarakan alleges the claims made by Dhivakaran that he will be the chief minister candidate even if AMMK joins an alliance with AIADMK.

Indirectly puts pressure on Sasikala. But Dhivakaran told media that he tried to persuade her but her decision was final.

BJP hails decision
BJP on Thursday hailed the decision of expelled AIADMK general secretary VK Sasikala to quit politics and said her exit will help fulfil late chief minister J Jayalalithaa's dream of a progressive and prosperous Tamil Nadu, adds PTI.

Pointing out that it was entirely Sasikala's decision to relinquish politics, BJP national secretary in-charge of Tamil Nadu C T Ravi said "our party welcomes her decision. Her decision will fulfil Amma's dreams". The BJP's aim is to strengthen the NDA in Tamil Nadu and strive for victory in all the 234 constituencies" he added.

EC special observers to land today

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 4 MARCH

The Election Commission today announced that two special observers would visit the state tomorrow while a delegation of 'Sanyukta Morcha' comprising Left Front, Congress and the ISF has today submitted a deputation with the EC alleging violation of Model Code of Conduct by the Trinamul Congress.

The EC has planned to appoint 500 observers and three police observers per district for the eight-phased elections.

Two special observers, Vivek Dubey and Ajay Nayak, will be in state tomorrow and they have already been briefed about the past incidents of violence," said an EC official, adding that the commission has devised a fool-proof plan for monitoring law and order situation while GPS-equipped vehicles would be deployed this time.

According to sources, 295 companies of CAPF are expected to reach West Bengal by 8 March and more companies would start coming from third phase onwards.

Alongside, the 'Sanyukta Morcha' delegation led by CPI-M leader Rabin Deb today submitted a deputation with the EC, alleging MCC violation by TMC chief, Mamata Banerjee and leader Firhad Hakim.

Addressing the Press, Deb said, "It was a total violation of MCC when Mamata Banerjee and Firhad Hakim met the RJD leader Tejaswi Yadav at the state secretariat, Nabanna, to discuss about poll alliance. This cannot be done inside a government institution. Nabanna is not Trinamul's party office."

The CPI-M leader further alleged that despite the prevailing MCC, Miss Banerjee's photo is still being used in state government schemes like 'Ma' where rice and egg meal is provided for common people.

The Kolkatta Municipal Corporation, with Hakim as the chairman of the board of administrator, is constantly using TMC supremo's photos in every civic body schemes as a vote campaign.

Adding to these, he alleged ISF workers are being attacked by TMC workers in several districts.

Meanwhile, 'Votekarmi Aikya Mancha', a platform for workers, today demanded that they be given one hour break since the poll timing has been extended by 30 minutes.

Swapan Mondal, general secretary of the organization also added they have requested that TMC's Birbhum leader Anubrata Mondal be kept in 'house arrest' on the day of polling since he recently threatened to assault central forces if they pose stiff resistance.

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The KMC has engaged party workers to do acts of despotism. The party will be extinct after poll," he said.

TMC violating MCC: BJP

A day after Election Commission (EC) directed petrol

pumps to remove hoardings carrying photographs of Prime Minister Narendra Modi advertising central government schemes, BJP's state vice-president and spokesperson

Congress v Congress

It would be simplistic to dismiss the latest bout of convulsions within the Congress Party sparked by the party's alliance with the Indian Secular Front (ISF) in West Bengal as some commentators are doing. The pettiness on display by state party president Mr Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury in casting aspersions on the loyalty of senior leader Mr Anand Sharma who called out the Congress' ideological insanity in aligning with Furfura Sharif cleric Abbas Siddiqui's ISF may be par for the course given the all-enveloping culture of sycophancy in the party. What is not, however, is the issues on which Congress dissidents have been speaking out. At the heart of the matter, to paraphrase Mr Sharma's tweet which led to the brouhaha, is the party's understanding of "Gandhian and Nehruvian secularism" and the electoral strategy which it has been following to attract the support of various communities to its banner at the hustings. Without getting into an academic debate on the problematic nature of conflating the views of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru ~ let us assume the Congress has managed in some form to amalgamate the two ~ the fact remains that the party has consistently misread the mood and motivations of the electorate for over a decade now. More Gandhi and less Nehru when it comes to understanding the zeitgeist of the Indic cultural tradition while retaining the latter's modernising impulses albeit applied uniformly across communities, majority and minority, would, if that indeed is the argument of the so-called Congress dissidents, be a start for the party in the long haul to clawing its way back into national relevance. Of course, there is a measure of self-interest involved in the alleged revolt of the G-23, as the group of senior leaders has been termed by a section of media. So what? Neither ambition nor the survival instinct are disqualifiers in politics. Mr Chowdhury's speculation that Mr Sharma's concern about the Congress throwing in its lot with the ISF for the West Bengal Assembly election was aimed at pleasing the BJP brass or his "future political boss" by tarnishing the image of the party may, however, be completely off the mark. And that has very little to do with the Congress and everything to do with the BJP. Most if not all the Congress dissidents would have reasonably comfortably moved to the BJP of the AB Vajpayee-LK Advani-MM Joshi era from say the late 1980s till the end of the first decade of the 21st century. It used to be an ideologically committed but non-doctrinaire political party in the main with a clearly expressed ~ in words and actions barring outlier events ~ distaste for lumpen politics. The pre-2010 BJP would have welcomed Mr Sharma's stand that he espouses "a civilised political dialogue even if there are differences on ideological issues". Today, a politically-electorally-ideologically dominant BJP needs no credibility-lending leaders from other parties, only winnable candidates for various polls who are ready to sign up to the party leadership's vision. The battle is clearly within the Congress and between Congress leaders.

Suu Kyi in court

Young San Suu Kyi's appearance in court via video link has happened at a critical juncture for Myanmar. At least three attendant factors are striking. First, countries that comprise the Association for South East Asian Nations (Asean) have ramped up the pressure on Myanmar over the coup on 1 February, the imprisonment of Suu Kyi, and the repression of protesters thereafter, most particularly in the two largest cities of Yangon and Mandalay. While the country had been almost totally isolated by the United States under Barack Obama during her earlier incarceration, this time it has been reduced to a state of unsplendid isolation within the regional bloc. The other is that Suu Kyi's virtual presence in court has come a day after at least 18 protesters were killed by security forces in the bloodiest crackdown since the military takeover. Thirteen more were done to death on Wednesday. Yet another must be that two additional charges have been added to those filed against her since the military coup a month ago. One charge, derived from the country's colonial-era penal code, prohibits publishing information that may "cause fear or alarm". Linked to that is the allegation that she possessed telecommunications equipment without licence. She has, therefore, been charged with publishing information to "cause fear and alarm", a form of unofficial censorship if ever there was one. She was initially charged under import-export laws over the possession of six walkie-talkies, and later charged with violating a natural disaster law by breaching coronavirus protocols. The leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD) has not been seen in public since her government was ousted in a military coup on February 1, when she was detained along with other party leaders. Well and truly has Myanmar turned the clock back three decades after her earlier detention. In the early 1990s, following a spectacular victory in the election, she was not allowed by the junta to assume power. A not dissimilar situation has recurred in February 2021 and with a measure of brutal suppression of people's protest, of a kind that was scarcely witnessed three decades ago. As Suu Kyi appeared in the video conference court hearing, police in the main city of Yangon used stun grenades and tear gas to disperse protesters, a day after the worst violence since the coup. This just about points to the mobilisation by the forces and the counter-mobilisation by the people. As many as 18 deaths on a single day lends a deeply tragic dimension to the upsurge, intrinsically a movement for the restoration of democracy. "We have to continue the protest, no matter what," said a demonstrator, a determined resolve that has resounded in the echo chambers of GHQ and the cantonnements. It is virtually a conflict between the military and the disenchanted populace. Myanmar is back to junta rule.

Avoidable Intrigues

Vajpayee was to use his brilliant 'Sherpa' and handpicked Foreign Minister, Jaswant Singh, for thawing and warming relations with Saudi Arabia, in particular. Jaswant, with a manifest sense of history and destiny would soon charm the House of Saud with his own desert ancestry and lifelong interest in horses



Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Atal Bihari Vajpayee represented the opposite ends of political ideologies, but both were cut from the same cloth of statesmanship, erudition and foresight. Both were avowed internationalists who had a scholarly grip on global affairs, albeit one that was tempered which an abiding sense of civilisational ethos, moral compass and unflinching principles. There was more in common between the personas, thinking and spirit of the two men-of-letters, as opposed to differences, which led some to call Vajpayee 'BJP's Nehru'. Befittingly, both held the mantle of India's Foreign Ministry with much aplomb, prudence and prescience.

Nehru had deftly and strategically reposed his support in the Arab causes after independence, to blunt and legitimise the competitive logic of a 'religious state' as underlined in Israel then, as the idea of a 'Secular India' too was similarly conflated to a religiously ordained Pakistan. This pro-Arab tilt may be seen as counter-intuitive, given Pakistan's natural traction in the Arab world, but Nehru realised the perceived fears of India's own minority and thought it morally right and Gandhian to uphold the Palestinian cause, even at the cost of realpolitik gratification. The 'morality' of Indian diplomacy that was conceived and nurtured in the formative conscience of India, had inspired a young Member of Parliament from the opposition, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who was to later burnish India's high-ground, restraint and responsible position as a conscientious sovereign, decades later, in the NDA governments that he led.

Dealing diplomatically with the dynastic-monarchical Arab sheikdoms is an inherently tricky task, as it is rife with fickle 'palace-intrigues' that are based on coercive, illiberal and often amoral insistences that test the equi-

alences and steadfastness of decidedly 'moral' democracies like India. Nehru was faced with an immediate dilemma of assuaging and impressing the superior 'idea of India' over its hyphenated rival, Pakistan which unabashedly invoked the religious card with Arab princelings. Nehru made more seamless causes with Egyptian President Nasser, who like Nehru was favourably disposed towards Non-Alignment and was a rival of the Arab sheikdoms that preferred Pan-Islamism, as opposed to Nasser's more inclusive Pan-Arabism.

As the custodian of the holy mosques, Saudi Arabia was of significance to Indian Muslims, as also from the perspective of securing energy and the concerns of its growing diaspora in the Kingdom. Nehru countered Pakistan's propaganda judiciously and was greeted by chants of 'Rasoul as Salaam' (Welcome Messenger/ Prophet of Peace) when visiting the Kingdom. The vital lesson of not taking anything for granted in dealing with the Arab princelings came with King Faisal disposing of his brother and with Nehru's own death, which soon tilted relations back to favouring Pakistan. Decades later, Vajpayee was to use his brilliant 'Sherpa' and handpicked Foreign Minister, Jaswant Singh, for thawing and warming relations with Saudi Arabia, in particular. Jaswant, with a manifest sense of history and destiny would soon charm the House of Saud with his own desert ancestry and lifelong interest in horses. The moribund relations breathed life again, as Jaswant gently, sensitively and loftily reiterated India's position on various contentious issues, sincerely and

uprightly. Vajpayee, like Nehru, was not personally constrained by petty, divisive or partisan agendas ~ he could and did go beyond. Soon, retaining India's patented 'moral diplomacy' and without unnecessarily ingratiating itself to anyone, India laid the foundation for winning over the Arab capitals, on its own dignified terms.

Today, Saudi Arabia's heir-apparent, Prince Mohammed Bin Salman is subjected to unsavory and disreputable publicity as declassified American intelligence reports trace the brutal as-

sassination of journalist Khashoggi, directly to the unscrupulous Prince. Equally, Joe Biden got a taste of having to balance values with necessities, as he meekly avoided penalizing Prince Salman directly, after having called Saudi Arabia a 'pariah' state with 'no redeeming social values' before he became the President. While still short of Donald Trump's brazenly transactional foreign policy dictated solely by personal whims, low gas prices and sale of military wherewithal to the Arabs, which virtually resulted in a 'cover-up' of Prince Salman's misdemeanors, Biden has cautiously pushed the envelope of 'moral diplomacy' but only just, as the proverbial chickens have come home to roost with America's earlier complicity, acquiescence and amorality. No alliance, agreement or understanding with the Arab Sheikdoms is without a moral catch or susceptibility ~ even Pakistanis increasingly face the same, as money has become the most important religion!

Against this backdrop, the resurfacing of international news that in 2018, Indian commandos

had raided a boat in which an Emirati Princess was fleeing from her regressive world, and then handed her over to Emirati soldiers, who forced her back into incarceration, is atypical of Indian diplomacy, if true. Indeed, the world of diplomacy is full of backroom compromises, interventions and facilitations that are kept away from the public glare, yet the sense of proportion, measure and limits are always implied. Differences between personal and sovereign matters are usually blurred in autocratic Arab regimes; however, care in delineating the two spheres and walking the tightrope of 'balance', is imperative. As an example, the Pakistanis fall over themselves to court the Arab princelings by arranging their Houbara hunting jaunts, personalised chauffeuring by the Prime Minister and retrogradely invoking religiosity as their calling card ~ but even that servility comes to naught when a 'bigger market' like India is the alternative. Personal matters within Arab palaces have their boundaries and sensitivities that are best not facilitated, one way or the other, as relationships earned through these are sustainable. However, one based on 'morality' and the 'big picture' stands the test of time. The muck involved in the Arab 'palace intrigues' had led to the implosive and self-cleansing 'Arab Spring', however that too was crushed. India has the benefit of scale, trained personnel, entrepreneurship and untapped socio-economic opportunities (besides, 'moral' bearing) to always remain preferred ~ it need not forsake its historical assets for transitory, amoral or personalised favours to endear itself. The Americans, who are more heavily invested in the Middle East, realise the long-term consequences of making short-term decisions with such autocracies. India needs to remember those lessons and put its best foot forward, not surreptitiously and clandestinely, but confidently and morally.

A MEMBER OF THE **ANN**
ASIAN NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

Please Mr Postman

Trust Nepal's civil servants to find an excuse where there is none. The General Post Office remained out of work for almost six months when the suspension of international flights in March last year put an automatic brake on the delivery of letters and parcels. It resumed receiving mail when international air services restarted in September. However, months after the resumption of international flights, the post office is yet to accept outbound letters and parcels except those destined to India.

Officials blame the bankruptcy announced by Thai Airways, which has partnered with the post office for outbound delivery. They cite 'rules' that prohibit them from dealing with other airlines for their failure to find alternative routes to resume services immediately. What's more, they have no idea when they hope to get out of the imbroglio even as they wait for the Thai national carrier to let them know how it hopes to fulfil its obligations as per the existing contract. While officials of the post office feign helplessness, those at the Department of Postal Services blame procedural obstacles for the delay in the resumption of services. Meanwhile, the public has no option but to wait and hope for the best. The post office in Nepal provides, at affordable rates, a range of services including mail, printed material, money transfer, express mail and parcel. The longstanding suspension of these services means that people as well as institutions using them are deprived of their right to affordable communication, not to speak of the loss of revenue to the government.

That, apparently, is not enough

THE KATHMANDU POST
THE KATHMANDU POST
reason for the concerned authorities to expedite negotiations with Thai Airways, or find an alternative to the carrier, and resume services. The government has some serious troubleshooting work to do to ensure that its services are not hampered by procedural obstacles or minor glitches.

Moreover, there is a need to overhaul the whole postal system to make it work in the internet age when the very idea of communication has taken a wholly new meaning. Nepal's postal service exhibits a failure on its part to reinvent and make itself a reliable communication and service delivery partner in tune with the changing times. Although the business of letter mail has suffered an irreversible decline, that of parcel mail has increased substantially, thanks to the penetration of e-commerce in the retail market.

The only survival tactic for the post office, therefore, is to reinvent the way it does business. If the postal service is entrepreneurial enough, it can increase its revenue substantially by harvesting the e-commerce windfall. It can also serve as a nodal institution for the delivery of various other public services such as passports, citizenship cards, driving licences and permanent account number cards. Not all existential crises lead to obsolescence if the right corrective measures are taken in time. Nepal's post office cannot continue to use procedural obstacles as an excuse for its failure to fulfil its public service obligations.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Arguably the strongest force in Europe

SIR, The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 served as a catalyst for Angela Merkel's political career. Although she did not participate in the celebrations the night the wall came down, one month later she was involved in the growing democracy movement, and she joined the new Democratic Awakening. She served as Leader of the Opposition from 2002 to 2005 and as Leader of the Christian Democratic Union from 2000 to 2018. Merkel was sworn in as Chancellor of Germany on 22 November 2005. As the first woman to hold the position, she emerged as one of the strongest forces in European politics over the next decade. She steered Germany and Europe as a whole through a series of crises since she took office in 2005.

One of her priorities was to strengthen trans-Atlantic economic relations. She signed the agreement for the Transatlantic Economic Council on 30 April 2007 at the White House. She had cordial relations with Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

Although Putin was trained by the KGB and Merkel probably by the East German Stasi, they had good understanding that transcended personal animus. Angela deftly dealt with her betes noires, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping. During the plenary session of the World Economic Forum annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland on 23



January 2020 she stressed that the need of the hour is for "multilateralism" and global cooperation and not shutting walls for isolating the developing countries. She underscored the importance of countering what she called "naked international hegemony" and even accused the US of "international tyranny". While serving her fourth term in November 2018, Ms Merkel stepped down as leader of the Christian Democratic Union and announced she wouldn't seek another term as Chancellor in 2021. Nonetheless, she remains the de facto leader of Europe, heading the region's largest economy after steering Germany through a financial crisis and towards growth. Angela, dubbed as the lady of the world, was most often being likened to Iron Lady Margaret Thatcher. An October 2020 survey revealed that

75 per cent of adults in 14 European countries trust Merkel more than any other leader in the region. Angela Merkel demitted the office of Chancellor on 26 January 2021. It marked the end of an era. During her tenure as Chancellor for 15 years, she was the de facto leader of the European Union. As Chancellor she has worked with five British prime ministers, four French Presidents, seven Italian prime ministers and four American Presidents, including Joe Biden.

Yours, etc., Samaree Bandyopadhyay, Kolkata, 3 March.

PITCH CONTROVERSY

SIR, With reference today's report "India calculated England's ineptitude against spin", the controversy over the pitch in the third India-England Test match at Ahmedabad has seen former English cricketers like Michael Vaughan, Andrew Strauss and David Lloyd question the spinning track that was offered to the visitors which saw them lose within two days. In fact, the Ahmedabad tie was the shortest completed Test match since 1935.

This has led to criticism that the pitch wasn't good enough for Test cricket and India was unfairly preparing rank turners. But such an argument reeks of hypocrisy and fails to look at other factors that saw England underperform.

There's no denying that every home team prepares pitches according to local conditions. That's the whole point behind home advantage.

In fact, when India tours abroad, it has to contend with green tops and bouncy tracks in England, Australia and New Zealand. No one cries foul on these occasions and Team India's difficulties in coping with prodigious swing and bounce are put down as lack of application. Besides, there's nothing in the

MULTIPLE CHARGE

SIR, This refers to the report, 'Dual charges for some IAS officers raise eyebrows' (25 February). The matter of dual charge is not confined only to IAS officers. In fact, officers of other services of the state are also entrusted multiple charges. Even superannuated officers are being re-employed in the same post. Every Government has the right to govern in the manner it feels would be best for governance and in doing so may seek to introduce dual charge, re-employment, etc. Still there are areas of concern. Unlike IAS officers other Government officers of this state WBES (General), WBES, WBA&AS, etc. are denied promotion due to dual or multiple charges. Re-employing retired officers to discharge functions of cadre posts is hindering employment opportunities. Dual charge or multiple charges raise a question on the efficiency of in-service officers and the rationale behind the expenditure incurred on training and development programmes. This culture of dual or multiple charge and re-employment should not be a norm and should be exercised only when there is a dearth of properly qualified and trained officers. The spirit behind transfer and retirement after a period of time must be given proper consideration to stop coterie, nepotism, corruption and ensure accountability. Every Government post has a defined role and responsibility; so it is immaterial which officer is manning the post and the only consideration should be his qualification and experience. Hence, dual charge and re-employment is hindering the career prospects of Government officers, is preventing employment generation and is propagating the yes-man culture.

Yours, etc., Sandipan Santra, Kolkata, 28 February.

APARAJITA MUKHERJEE AND DEBAPRIYA MUKHERJEE

On 7 February, a sudden and massive flood devastated a Himalayan valley in the state of Uttarakhand, tearing through two hydroelectric dams, killing more than 100 people. As a result of the flood, there has been massive flooding in Chamoli district - the Rishiganga river, the Dhauliganga river, and in turn the Alaknanda. Several bridges, roads, homes and hundreds of grazing sheep, cattle and goats were also swept away in the deluge. A surge of water, thought to be triggered when a glacier broke off from Nanda Devi mountain in the state of Uttarakhand, left a trail of devastation. Millions worldwide watching the tragedy unfold on their television screens and realizing the humanitarian cost of the disaster were obviously in search of the causes of frequent disasters because this flooding forced people to recall the 2013 floods that devastated the state, when 1000 people died.

While many speculate the flooding was caused by the outburst of a glacier, many others are attributing the disaster to the ecological impact of climate change and extensive construction and human activities in the highest mountain region in the world, the Himalayas. The Himalayas being structurally unstable and young is still geologically active, fragile and vulnerable to both natural and man-made processes. An avalanche or cloud burst may be natural, but the impact of this disaster is local and man-made. It was highly unusual for a glacier to break off during the winter months. The possible reason is that with increasing global warming, the upper reaches of the Himalayas are warming faster, leading to more rapid melting of the glaciers. Researchers have already warned global heating would become a huge problem for the region in the next few years. A survey from 2019 found that glaciers in the Himalayas have been melting at double the speed since 2000, losing nearly a vertical 50 cm of ice each year.

In the era of globalization and in pursuit of industrialisation and so-called modernisation, successive governments practically overlooked the natural ecosystems and carrying capacity of the Himalayas, besides the traditional beliefs and norms of nature conservation despite grievances voiced by environmentalists and public about development which is dangerous and unsustainable. This type of development in this fragile region clearly reveals that science is being operated without an iota of conscience. It is evident that top level managerial personnel, engineers and

Fragile Himalayas deserve respect



scientists supported by politicians and the corporate brigade are carrying out their job without accountability and responsibility.

Over years, the numbers of pilgrims have increased exponentially at major pilgrim centers across the Himalayas. This expansion of tourism has created a variety of social vulnerabilities in the entire region, which are ultimately responsible for turning a regional extreme weather event into a national disaster. Uttarakhand is one such centre of pilgrim activity in the Himalaya as it has four major Hindu and one Sikh shrines - Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Yamunotri and Hemkund. In order to fulfill the needs of such huge numbers of pilgrims, an intricate network of roads, hotels, lodges and related support systems has been built into the remote mountainous areas of the Himalaya. Around

50,000 trees have been felled under the Chardham road project to connect the pilgrim spots in Uttarakhand. The project is a 900-km long road, which is being constructed at a cost of Rs 12,000 crore. The 900-km stretch project had been broken into 53 contract road projects.

This approach is in practice simply to escape from the requirement of environment impact assessment (EIA) report before the start of the project. Regulatory authorities in environment sector framed the procedures and processes of EIA in such a manner that destruction of this fragile ecosystem in the name of development cannot be resisted. The broadening of roads means the mountains have been vertically sliced. Reconstruction of roads and other infrastructure hurriedly for tourism after the disaster further aggravate existing

vulnerabilities and create new vulnerabilities that might lay the cornerstone for disasters to come in the region. Despite knowing the history of landslides, the government has not conducted any environmental assessment before implementing such projects. It seems that policy-makers who approve these schemes either do not understand the scientific evidence or choose to ignore it.

Uttarakhand is now known as the 'energy state' of India due to more than 500 large and medium sized hydro-projects commissioned there. Several projects are being built on its major and minor rivers. Though the mega hydro-projects are blamed as an environmental menace, other medium and small projects are also a major component of the economy of the state. Therefore, almost all rivers are being dammed to use the valuable

water resource for electricity generation without taking into account future consequences. These require stream diversion, large-scale excavation of rock by blasting, tunnelling and dumping loose rock debris/soil, creating unstable land forms prone to slope instability.

In addition to the above activities, construction of multi-storied buildings and domestic houses in such a high-risk earthquake zone is also a matter of concern. Earlier the houses in the mountains were mostly built of mud, wood, rock-slab, and other biomaterials which could withstand the tremor of earthquakes. However, due to a ban on timber for house construction, easy availability of building materials and impact of market forces, people are constructing semi-concrete, concrete, and other not so shake-proof structures. Therefore, a medium level earthquake results in much larger damage in the region. The kind of construction that is actually taking place for developmental activities is not sustainable, and is dangerous.

This was a man-made disaster and to prevent similar calamities, the government should implement development projects in a scientific manner. Environmental assessments should be done before the implementation of development projects in ecologically sensitive areas. Policy-makers must actively engage with scientists and experts possessing adequate knowledge on the problems facing the Himalayas and their people to make sustainable development work. Global warming can grab the headlines, but many of the other pressures on the fragile mountain region are more mundane. The population is increasing fast in the Himalayas, and so is the speed of the landscape changes needed to support it. Cattle grazing and rampant deforestation — on current trends, one-third of the total Indian Himalayan forest cover could be gone by 2100 — will drive nearly one-quarter of endemic species to extinction and disrupt the natural flow of water. Scientists and engineers must make the case more forcefully that rampant construction cannot be permitted by any means on riverbanks or flood plains that are constantly swept by monsoon floods.

If the people of the Himalayas were more aware of the geological vulnerability and ecological fragility of their mountain home, they would surely force more compliance of laws and regulations to protect it.

The writers are, respectively, a post-doctoral fellow of the Chemistry department of Jadavpur University and a former Senior Scientist, Central Pollution Control Board.

New soundtrack, old US movie



MAHIR ALI

There was nothing new in the US intelligence assessment about the murder of Jamal Khashoggi released last week. Anyone with even a few active grey cells had realised the identity of the mastermind behind the plot soon after the US-based Saudi journalist failed to emerge from a routine appointment at the kingdom's consulate in Istanbul.

The gory details of his final minutes and the atrocious aftermath emerged soon afterwards, and even the fairly obvious conclusion reached

by American intelligence agencies was reported soon afterwards. It wasn't officially acknowledged by the Trump administration, however. In his characteristically clumsy way, Donald Trump sought to aid the cover-up as he boasted to journalist Bob Woodward, while referring to the Saudi crown prince.

Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) was excluded from sanctions imposed by the US on a handful of his minions, which practically entail little more than a denial of visas should they wish to travel to America. It's tantamount to little more than a

mild rap on the knuckles. The crown prince remains unscathed, as does the relationship established in 1945 by Ibn Saud and Franklin Roosevelt. Saudi Arabia remains too important an ally for the US to risk a rupture with, notwithstanding the deadly predilections of its crown prince.

This is hardly a singular instance, though, of realpolitik getting in the way of supposed US ideals. For successive American administrations, concerns about human rights have seldom been much more than a pretence. They are routinely heightened

in the case of regimes that refuse to kowtow to Washington, and glossed over in innumerable other instances. Venezuela is red-flagged, but not Brazil. The Saudi, Emirati, Israeli and Egyptian regimes get more or less a free pass, but not Syria.

But then, it has always been thus. And that's no surprise, given the long trajectory of US human rights violations in both the domestic and international spheres. It could be argued that the Trump administration was the personification of such abuses, but it stretches back decades, if not centuries. The main difference in recent years was that Trump saw little reason to disguise his designs.

Hence the argument that the Biden administration should revert to some blessed ideal is sanctimonious nonsense.

In his first foreign policy statement, Joe Biden announced an end to the sale of "offensive" weapons to Saudi Arabia, given its role in the war that has devastated Yemen. But there's no bar on "defensive" weapons. The difference between the two varieties is hardly set in stone.

The supposed recalibration of relations with Riyadh was to be reflected in a White House statement on Monday, after the decision not to include MBS among the sanctioned individuals encountered a pushback from a few Democratic legislators. It was not in evidence at the time of writing, but earlier that day the Pentagon declared its relationship with the Saudis "remains robust". A spokesman noted: "Militarily speaking, we have obligations there in Saudi Arabia and we're going to meet those."

What a surprise. Those "obligations"

include five military bases. The Saudis have lately also mended ties with Qatar, home to the biggest American base in the Gulf, after a failed effort to bring it to heel. And women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul's release last month from years of imprisonment and torture was also interpreted as an overture to the new administration in Washington.

But several other activists for women's right to drive — which has, mind you, been allowed, ushering the kingdom into the 20th century, just 120 years too late — remain incarcerated, as do a number of members of the royal family. The latter include MBS's predecessor as crown prince, and a prominent princess — the daughter of Saudi Arabia's second king — and her daughter.

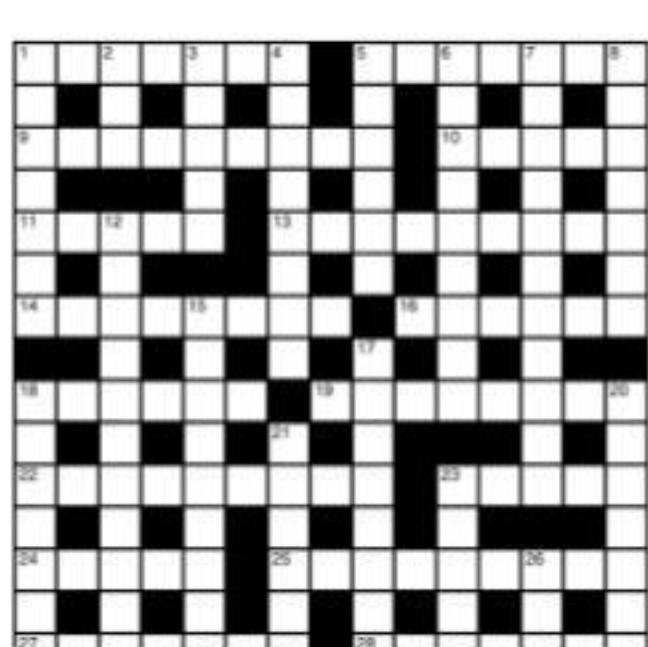
Basmah bint Saud has been described as an outspoken human rights advocate, and her unknown fate reflects that of two of the Dubai ruler's adult daughters. The UAE has always liked to view itself as more socially advanced than its Saudi neighbours, but its ruling class reflects its enduring deficiencies. Abu Dhabi, meanwhile, has played a leading role in perpetrating the catastrophe in Yemen (as well as the one in Libya) with the aid of multinational mercenaries.

A US that truly stood for human rights would have nothing to do with such countries — nor, for that matter, with the likes of Egypt, Turkey and Israel. But miracles are a myth. The soundtrack may have changed in America, but the movie essentially remains the same.

Dawn/ANN

NO 28844

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



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

ACROSS

- 1 Playwright in gamble, out of pocket, losing 33% (7)
- 5 He created unusual sculptures of the French prize winner (7)
- 9 Source regarding series to see in Paris (9)
- 10 Article not entirely nasty? It gets a hammering (5)
- 11 Bathroom accessory excessively and thoroughly trimmed (5)
- 13 Limited connection, with hesitation, in sexual activity (9)
- 14 Central Americans, ignoring expense, welcoming fine folk from another continent (8)
- 16 Refuse to accept broadcast restricted by noise (6)
- 18 Mid-20th century writer or early 20th century writer, mostly (6)
- 19 New Zealand painter from good family, dosh liberally spread around (8)
- 22 New Zealand writer offering sexist view of discipline? (9)
- 23 Description of power reflected in natural oscillations (5)
- 24 Part of opera to cut from Tosca, retaining tenor's second note (5)
- 25 Russian poet writing articles about Knight and Queen, tovarish? Not half (9)
- 27 Temporarily stop America (8)
- 28 Refuse to accept broadcast restricted by noise (6)
- 28 Ebbing current with return of damage – metal? (7)
- 29 Religious attire – black attire, restyle (7)
- 30 Lettuce crops regularly denuded (3)
- 31 Register ultimate in danger is involved in solo climbing (5)
- 32 Description of power reflected in natural oscillations (5)
- 33 Expression of annoyance about Wisconsin regional capital (6)
- 34 Line in excellent meat product (9)
- 35 Radio travel broadcast is a promotional feature (11)
- 36 Guy in distress is a knight (7)

DOWN

- 1 Religious attire – black attire, restyle (7)
- 2 Lettuce crops regularly denuded (3)
- 3 Register ultimate in danger is involved in solo climbing (5)
- 4 Run into the last place to be seen with a musician (8)
- 5 Expression of annoyance about Wisconsin regional capital (6)
- 6 Line in excellent meat product (9)
- 7 Radio travel broadcast is a promotional feature (11)
- 8 Guy in distress is a knight (7)
- 12 Radical currently turning up in factory is to do marvellous stuff (4,7)
- 15 Historic Arctic vessel trapped in ice – not one spot to grow plants (4,5)
- 17 Staff's methodology when hosting a travelling exhibition (8)
- 18 Absorption? Unusually large bog will absorb one (7)
- 20 Sharp humour a Roman Catholic displayed during disrupted Mass (7)
- 21 Chap apparently owing money gets court decision (6)
- 23 One slow-moving bridge team to fare badly (5)
- 26 Awkward person puts it in propeller (3)

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

One of the good points of Mr. Churchill's work as a Minister has been the energy which he has put into the development of British aviation. His speech on the Air Estimates in the House of Commons shows that the Government are alive to the importance of securing a thoroughly efficient Air Service. Civil aviation, however, it appears, must be content with the crumbs which fall from the military table. Mr. Churchill does not feel justified at present in asking the House of Commons to devote to the civil branch more than the million already provided — a sum which in the old days would have been considered liberal but which now is mentioned apologetically. It is possible, of course, to argue that they may be justified by assisting civil aviation through early difficulties, thus enabling it to become self-supporting; or that they may be regarded, in effect, as payment for a public service or for a school of reserve airmen. If commercial aviation is to prosper, however, it must, in the long run, stand - or rather fly - on its own merits. The most disappointing part of Mr. Churchill's speech was that relating to airships. It may be taken for granted that whatever can be done will be done for the assistance of civil airmanship so long as Mr. Churchill has anything to do with the Air Department; but only limited help can be expected from State aid.

NEWS ITEMS

COMMUNISTS PLOTS IN EUROPE

It now appears that among the documents seized by the police in the course of searches made among the members of the Young Communists was a plan, says an exchange from Paris, for a revolution which was to be launched on May 1 simultaneously in France, Italy and Spain. The documents showed the towns in which Soviet Governments were to be established, and it included a key for the correspondence of the conspirators. A number of important arrests have been made during the present week. The results of the investigations which are being carried out by the police have given unmistakable evidence that the isolated cases which have been brought to the attention of the authorities are only part of a widespread movement which has ramifications throughout the country.

GOVERNMENT FROM THE HILL TOPS

The Council met this morning and the proceedings were followed by a number of ladies and European visitors. Interest centred on the resolution moved by Mr. R.S. Mahajan regarding the exodus of the Government to the hills. The mover said that it entailed unnecessary expenditure and that the work of the administration could be successfully carried out from the plains as from the hills. The Hon. Mr. Joshi, the Home Member, speaking in Hindi, said that the expenditure amounted to only Rs 10,000, that the onerous duties of the administration could be performed with greater efficiency and despatch from the hills, and that the Government had also the chance of being in touch with the Hindi speaking divisions of the province.

STUDENTS ABSENT WITHOUT LEAVE

An Education Department circular has been issued by the Director of Public Instruction, Burma, to all Inspectors and Principals of the Government Anglo-Vernacular Schools in Burma, informing Inspectors and Principals that pupils absent without leave from Government Schools in connection with the boycott or strike, who sought re-admission, will be re-admitted without penalty, save in the case of those who have been guilty of other serious misconduct. Any fines or re-admission fees, which have been paid by pupils not guilty of such conduct are to be refunded. Pupils who applied for re-admission later, and who have not been guilty of any serious offence in addition to the offence of striking, will ordinarily be re-admitted without any penalty other than the penalty laid down in the above circular.

HEART OF DUBLIN RAIDED

The military authorities made a remarkable raid in Dublin early yesterday morning, and operations are likely to continue for three days. A densely populated area nearly half-a-mile square in the heart of the City is occupied. Armoured cars and tanks are in position and sentries are posted. Barbed wire barricades have been erected, and, by the seizure of three bridges, dockland has been cut off. Troops have occupied commanding positions in high houses have sandbagged windows, and mounted machine-guns. The reason for the raid has not been disclosed, but it is believed to be connected with the search for urgently wanted men, or alternatively to locate a suspected arsenal. A house-to-house search is proceeding, and six arrests have been made. Nobody is allowed to enter or leave the proscribed area.



Capgemini will cover the cost of the vaccination for all the eligible employees and their dependents

ASHWIN YARDI
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, CAPGEMINI IN INDIA

THUMBNAILS

Coal India dividend: State-owned Coal India's second interim dividend could be in the range of Rs 4.5 per share as it is working to match the previous year's total dividend amid an outstanding of Rs 25,000 crore, coupled with sluggish demand, sources said on Thursday. The miner had announced Rs 7.5 per share as the first interim dividend in November. The board of Coal India is slated to meet on 5 March as it mulls to pay a second interim dividend.

PTI

Indian Hotels plan: Indian Hotels Company (IHCL) on Thursday said it will launch India's first all-women-managed luxury residences Taj Wellington Mews in Chennai, expected to open from April. The initiative is in line with the company's ongoing efforts in creating an equitable workplace and ecosystem while empowering women in the hospitality industry, IHCL said in a statement.

PTI

Isuzu price hike: Japanese utility vehicles maker Isuzu on Thursday said it will increase prices of its commercial pick-up range D-MAX Regular Cab and D-MAX S-CAB by Rs 1 lakh with effect from 1 April. The increase in price is due to the increasing costs of production, transportation and logistics, Isuzu Motors India said in a statement. At present, D-MAX Regular Cab prices start at Rs 8.72 lakh and that of D-MAX S-CAB begins at Rs 10.7 lakh, said the statement.

PTI

Aluminium industry plea: The Aluminium Association of India (AAI) on Thursday urged the government to provide support by notifying at least five per cent remission rate for the sector under tax refund scheme RoDTEP to boost exports. Giving relief to exporters, the government has decided to extend the benefit of tax refund scheme RoDTEP to all goods with effect from 1 January 2021.

PTI

Samsung launch: Samsung has launched a new range of single-door refrigerators with Digi-Touch Cool 5in1 technology. The new refrigerators come with an advanced digital touch technology that will empower consumers to control their refrigerator settings with a simple touch without opening the refrigerator door and help save energy by retaining cooling, according to a company statement.

SNS

Infosys workforce: Infosys on Thursday announced that it would be bringing 500 jobs to Calgary over the next three years, doubling its Canadian workforce to 4,000 employees by 2023. The Bengaluru-headquartered digital services and consulting major said within the last two years, it has created 2,000 jobs across Toronto, Vancouver, Ottawa, and Montreal, with plans for further expansion across the country.

PTI

EPFO retains 8.5% interest on deposits for FY 2020-21

After getting finance ministry's nod, the interest would be credited into subscribers' accounts

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 4 MARCH

The Central Board of Trustees (CBT) of the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) today recommended 8.50 per cent rate of interest on EPF deposits for financial year 2020-21, continuing with the rate announced for the previous fiscal, 2019-20.

The tripartite CBT, comprising representatives of employers, workers' unions and the government, met at Srinagar to take the decision. The EPF Organisation had paid EPF subscribers 8.65 interest for financial year 2018-19.

Earlier this year, there were speculations that the EPFO would lower interest on provident fund deposits for this fiscal (2020-21) in view of more withdrawals and lesser contribution by members amid the coronavirus pandemic.

In March last year, the EPFO had lowered interest rate on provident fund deposits to a seven-year low of 8.5 per cent for fiscal 2019-20, from 8.65 per cent in fiscal 2018-19.

The EPF (Employees Provident Fund) interest rate proposed for 2019-20 was the lowest since 2012-13, when it was 8.5 per cent.

From fiscal 2015-16, the CBT decision on interest rate would be sent to the finance ministry for concurrence. After getting the finance ministry's nod, the 8.5 per cent rate of interest for this fiscal would

be credited into the EPFO subscribers' accounts.

The interest rate would be officially notified in the government gazette following which the EPFO would credit the rate of interest into the subscribers' accounts, the statement said.

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Now this puppet spectacle won't continue, now this drama won't continue, Imran Khan will have to correct his behaviour.

PAKISTAN PEOPLE'S PARTY CHAIRMAN BILAWAL BHUTTO ZARDARI
AFTER IMRAN KHAN'S PARTY SUFFERED A DEFEAT IN A KEY SEAT IN THE SENATE ELECTIONS

The Statesman
NEW DELHI, FRIDAY 05 MARCH 2021

Myanmar protesters march again after 'bloodiest day'

Security forces dramatically escalated their response to protests against the military takeover

ASSOCIATED PRESS

YANGON, 4 MARCH

Demonstrators in Myanmar protesting last month's military coup returned to the streets on Thursday, after the 'bloodiest day' as at least 38 people were killed previous day by security forces.

New protests were held in at least three areas of Yangon, the country's largest city, that have been scenes of violence for the past few days. Police again used force to try to disperse the crowds, according to social media accounts.

Protests also continued in Mandalay. A formation of five fighter planes flew over the city on Thursday morning in what appeared to be a threatening show of force.

The U.N. special envoy for Myanmar, Christine Schraner Burgener, said 38 people were killed Wednesday, a figure consistent with other reports.

The death toll was the



Anti-coup protesters discharge fire extinguisher to counter the impact of tear gas fired by police. AP

highest since the Feb. 1 takeover, when the military ousted the elected government of leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Over 50 civilians, mostly peaceful protesters, are confirmed to have been killed by police and soldiers since then.

The U.N. Security Council has scheduled closed-door consultations on Friday on calls to reverse the coup including from the U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and stop the escalating military crackdown.

Any kind of coordinated action at the UN will be difficult since two permanent

members of the Security Council - China and Russia - are likely to veto it. Some countries have already imposed or are considering their own sanctions.

The U.N. envoy Schraner Burgener said she warned Myanmar's army that the world's nations and the Security Council might take huge strong measures and noted that the opposition to the coup was being spearheaded by young people. She was speaking by video link from Bern, Switzerland, on what she called the 'bloodiest day' since the coup.

Schraner Burgener said that opposition to the coup was being spearheaded by young people who lived in freedom for 10 years, noting they are well organized and very determined they don't want to go back into dictatorship and isolation.

Myanmar army 'surprised' at opposition to coup: UN envoy

ASSOCIATED PRESS
NEW YORK CITY, 4 MARCH

The UN special envoy for Myanmar said the generals who have seized power in the Southeast Asian nation indicated they don't fear renewed sanctions, though they are very surprised that their plans to restore military rule without much opposition isn't working.

Christine Schraner Burgener told U.N. correspondents on Wednesday that after the 1 February military coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government from power.

She warned Myanmar's army that the world's nations and the U.N. Security Council might take huge strong measures. When she also warned the army that Myanmar would become isolated, Schraner Burgener said,

the answer was, 'We have to learn to walk with only a few friends.'

The coup reversed years of slow progress toward democracy in Myanmar, which for five decades had languished under strict military rule that led to international isolation and sanctions.

As the generals loosened their grip, culminating in Suu Kyi's rise to power after 2015 elections, the international community responded by lifting most sanctions and pouring investment into the country.

Schraner Burgener noted that opposition to the coup was being spearheaded by young people who lived in freedom for 10 years, noting they are well organized and very determined they don't want to go back into dictatorship and isolation.

Bangladesh govt to decide on waiving Zia's sentences

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DHAKA, 4 MARCH

Bangladesh will decide on relaxing the bail conditions and waiving the 17-year sentence of former prime minister Khaleda Zia due to her failing health after discussion with the Law Ministry, media reports quoted the country's home minister as saying.

The government in March, 2020 released the 74-year-old leader for six months on condition that she would stay at home amid the coronavirus outbreak in the country, receive treatment and not travel abroad. Her release was later extended by another six months last September.

In the application, the family said that they could not arrange better treatment for her during the COVID-19 pandemic and requested a relaxation of her bail conditions and a waiving of the sentence imposed on her, said the home minister.

"Our prime minister (Sheikh Hasina) is the mother of humanity. She always cooperates whenever she sees this type of condition," Kamal said. Hasina arranged Zia's stay in her residence with conditions to ensure proper treatment, said the minister.

She received treatment from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital specialists when she was in jail, Kamal said.

Nepal signs peace accord with rebel group

KATHMANDU, 4 MARCH

Nepal's government signed a peace agreement Thursday with a small communist rebel group widely feared because they were known for violent attacks, extortion and bombings.

The government agreed to lift a ban on the group, release all their party members and supporters in jail and drop all legal cases against them, while the group agreed to give up all violence and resolve any issues through peaceful dialogue, the government said.

Details of the agreement would be made public at a joint ceremony on Friday with Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli and the leader of the rebel group Netra Bikram Chand, who is better known by his guerrilla name, Bipav. The rebels also call themselves the Nepal Communist Party.

This group is known for violence, threats and enforcing general strikes. It had split from the Maoist Communist party. AP

Thailand probes Facebook's removal of army-linked accounts

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BANGKOK, 4 MARCH

Thailand's Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha says he has assigned the Royal Thai Army to investigate after Facebook Inc. removed 185 accounts and groups allegedly engaged in an information-influencing operation in Thailand run by the military.

That followed Facebook's announcement a day earlier that it had deleted 77 accounts, 72 pages, 18 groups and 18 Instagram accounts for violating its policy against government interference, which is defined as coordinated



inauthentic behavior on behalf of a government entity.

Facebook took action like this. It can be interpreted in many ways. We must make it clear, said Prayuth. At least 703,000 accounts followed

one or more of these pages, about 100,000 accounts joined at least one of these groups and around 2,500 people followed one or more of the Instagram accounts. Facebook said.

Facebook says the net-

work of accounts originated in Thailand and targeted domestic audiences in its southern provinces, where the army faces a longstanding insurgency movement.

The people behind the network used both authentic and fake accounts, posting their content on multiple pages to make it look more popular than it was. The majority of page postings appear to have occurred in 2020.

A Facebook report says the network posted primarily in Thai about news and current events, including content in support of the Thai military and the monarchy. The posts

included calls for non-violence, regional Covid-19 updates, allegations of violence by the insurgent groups in southern Thailand and criticism of separatist and independence movements.

Although the people behind it attempted to conceal their identities and coordination, our investigation found links to the Thai military's Internal Security Operations Command, Facebook said.

Nat-tacha Boonchaisawat, a lawmaker from the opposition Move Forward Party, accused the army of misusing funds to foment hatred toward critics of the government.

China body meets amidst Covid, HK crackdown

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEIJING, 4 MARCH

China's top legislative advisory body opened its annual session on Thursday against the background of a crackdown on Hong Kong's political opposition and the country's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

In his opening address, the head of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Wang Yang, pledged support for calls that only patriots who show undivided loyalty to the ruling Communist Party should be allowed to hold elected office

in Hong Kong, a semi-autonomous southern Chinese city where Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law last year.

"We will strengthen unity and friendship with our compatriots overseas and in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, and conduct studies and consultations on fostering patriotism among young people in Hong Kong and Macao," Wang told delegates in the hulking Great Hall of the People in the heart of Beijing.

Taiwan is a self-governing democracy that China claims as its own territory. Wang, the party's fourth

ranking member, also said the CPPCC contributed to local-level efforts to end the coronavirus outbreak in the country, where no new cases of local transmission have been reported so far for more than two weeks.

The CPPCC has no legislative powers of its own but is mandated to conduct research and offer proposals to the ceremonial parliament, the National People's Congress, which begins its annual session on Friday.

However, the meetings are shorter this year and media coverage is being conducted remotely

Migrant workers face dire conditions at S Korean farms

ASSOCIATED PRESS

POCHEON, 4 MARCH

It's a world of lawlessness, Rev. Kim Dal-sung muttered over the phone as he drove his tiny KIA over narrow dirt paths zigzagging through greenhouses made of plasticsheets and tubes.

In the bleak landscape of dull blue and gray in Pocheon, a town near South Korea's ultra-modern capital, hundreds of migrant workers from across Asia toil in harsh conditions, unprotected by labor laws while doing the hardest, lowest-paid farm work most Koreans avoid.

Daunted by opposition from farmers, officials chose

not to ban using shipping containers as shelter.

Kim, a pastor and outspoken advocate for migrant workers' rights, is an unwelcome visitor at the farms in Pocheon, especially after the Cambodian woman, Nuon Sokkheng, was found dead on 20 December inside a poorly heated shelter at one of the farms.

Her death, and those of many others, highlight the often cruel conditions facing migrant workers who have little recourse against their bosses.

Farm owners here are like absolute monarchs ruling

over migrant workers, Kim said. Some say they want to kill me.

As per reports, there are around 20,000 asian migrant workers who are legally working on South Korean farms, who are mostly from Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and Nepal.

Not only them, but the South Korean farmers are too getting massively affected with the condition.

The industry is in decline, hurt by decades of labor shortages and increasing foreign competition. They get by importing labour to work long hours for low pay.

Indian in UAE wins Rs 24 crores in lucky draw

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

DUBAI, 4 MARCH

An Indian man, living in the UAE for the last 15 years, has won a whopping 12 million dirhams (24 crores) in a raffle, the latest addition to the long list of lucky winners from India, a media report said on Thursday.

Shivamurthy Krishnapa, who is a mechanical engineer and hails from Shimoga district of Karnataka, has been living in the UAE for the last 15 years.

He bought the winning ticket number 202511 on 17 February this year, the Gulf

News reported. Krishnappa was excited as he watched the draw live from home.

When the host Richard

called him on his mobile, an elated Krishnappa said: I am watching the live draw. Thank you so much. I cannot believe I have won, the report quoted him as saying.

He said that he wants to build a house from the winning money of 12 million dirhams.

I want to build a big house for my family back in my hometown. I have two children aged 10 and 4, so a large part of the money will be put

into deposit for their future, he said.

Krishnappa has been buying the Big Ticket every month

for the last three years.

"Before I used to share the ticket with friends. For the last one year I have been buying the ticket on my own. This time I bought two tickets as the organisers had a special offer for regular ticket buyers," he said.

Meanwhile, Big Ticket organisers launched a new look to the live draw.

Several other Indians in the past have got lucky and bagged such prizes in the raffle.

Kuwait's emir flies to US for medical checks

DUBAI, 4 MARCH

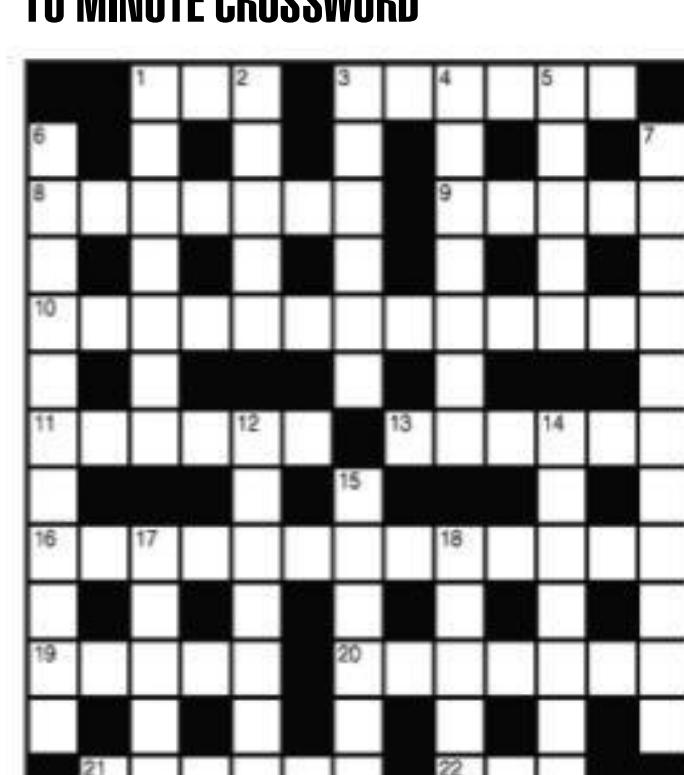
The ruling emir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Sabah flew on Thursday to the United States for medical checks, state-run media reported, just months after he ascended the throne.

A state-run news agency described the purpose of his visit to the US as the usual medical check-ups, without elaborating.

Sheikh Nawaf's medical trip raises concerns over his health condition, of which little is known.

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



CROSS

1 Conifer (3)
3 Remained (6)
8 Nuclear apparatus (7)
9 Type of car (5)
10 Echidna (5,8)
11 Relaxed (2,4)
13 Finally (2,4)
16 Two-humped animal (8,5)
19 Jousting weapon (5)
20 Give sanction to (7)
21 Sides (6)
22 Slippery fish (3)

DOWN

1 Easily damaged (7)
2 Irritable (informal) (5)
3 Tranquil (6)
4 Very old (7)
5 Rejoice (5)
6 Fortune teller's globe (7,4)
7 Type of hat (11)
12 Type of doctor (7)
14 Naval commander (7)
15 Fondle (6)
17 Artificial waterway (5)
18 Obtain by sponging (5)

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Baker's dozen, 16 Samovar, 18 Tramp, 19 Hostage, 21 Traipse, 22 Lava, 23 Lot.

DOWN

1 Wilful, 2 Niche, 3 Tress, 4 Sate, 17 Vida, 19 Appal.

13 Ammonia, 14 Outlay, 15 Upbeat, 16 Sate, 17 Vida, 19 Appal.

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

BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker

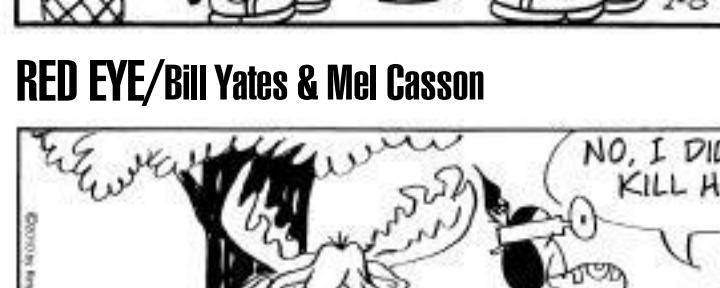


PEEL! CHOP! BOIL!

BY MORT WALKER

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RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson



NO, I DIDN'T KILL HIM

HE CAME SNOOP



The United States is seeking to support a diplomatic solution to help Afghans achieve a political settlement

SPECIAL US REPRESENTATIVE FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONCILIATION ZALMAY KHALILZAD

AFTER THREE DAYS OF CONSULTATIONS IN KABUL

WEATHER

CITY	MAX (°C)	MIN (°C)
SINGAPORE	32	25 H
HONG KONG	21	18 H
TOKYO	16	7 H
LONDON	8	4 H
DUBAI	29	20 CL
SAN FRANCISCO	13	8 H
NEW YORK	7	-3 H
MOSCOW	1	-4 H

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

THUMBNAILS



SpaceX Starship lands upright, then explodes: SpaceX's futuristic Starship looked like it aced a touchdown Wednesday, but then exploded on the landing pad with so much force that it was hurled into the air. The failure occurred just minutes after SpaceX declared success. Two previous test flights crash-landed in fireballs.

Prince Philip's heart procedure successful: Britain's Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, has had a "successful procedure" for a pre-existing heart condition at a London hospital where he was moved earlier this week, Buckingham Palace said on Thursday. He will remain in hospital for treatment, rest and recuperation for a number of days.

New Zealand quake: A shallow, 7.3 earthquake struck off the northeastern coast of New Zealand on Thursday, with officials warning of a possible tsunami threat. There were no immediate reports of serious damage or casualties. New Zealand's National Emergency Management Agency said it was still assessing whether the quake had triggered a tsunami.

Pramila Jayapal named vice-chair of a key committee



WASHINGTON, 4 MARCH

Indian-American Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal has been named vice chair of the Subcommittee on Antitrust, Commercial, and Administrative Law.

Chennai-born Jayapal, 55, from the Democratic Party, will oversee the subcommittee's urgent work on antitrust, big tech, reigning in anti-competitive behaviour, helping prevent monopolistic practices, protecting a free press, and allowing innovation to thrive.

Jayapal, the only Indian-American woman in the House of Representatives, has been a leading voice on the committee, where she most recently played an active role in conducting America's first major congressional antitrust probe in decades, a media release said.

"I am honoured to lead the House Subcommittee on Antitrust, Commercial, and Administrative Law at a pivotal moment in which we must write the next chapter of antitrust law," Jayapal said in a statement.

"That's how we will finally hold dominant tech platforms accountable while advocating for workers, stopping hate and misinformation, and protecting a free press," she said.

By reasserting the power of Congress and using our historic investigation as a roadmap, we will continue the work necessary to rein in anti-competitive behaviour," Jayapal said. AP

UK, four nations fast-track review of modified Covid vaccines amid variant surge

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON, 4 MARCH



Regulators in the UK and four other countries have announced new rules to fast-track the development of modified Covid-19 vaccines to ensure drugmakers can move swiftly to target emerging variants of the disease.

Previously authorised vaccines that are modified to combat new variants will not need a brand new approval or lengthy clinical studies, Britain's Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency said Thursday.

The clear goal is that future vaccine modifications that respond to the new variants of coronavirus can be made available in the shortest possible time to UK recipients

The US Food and Drug Administration and European

Medicines Agency have issued similar guidance.

Under the new rules, developers will be required to provide robust evidence that modified Covid-19 vaccines produce a strong immune response to the variant, as well as data showing they are safe and meet quality standards.

This means developers will be required to carry out small-scale trials on a few hundred people, rather than the trials in tens of thousands of individuals that were required for initial approval, said Dr Christian Schneider, the MHRA's chief scientific officer.

"I'd like to emphasise that to date we don't have evidence that the vaccines in use in the UK are significantly lacking in effectiveness," Raine said.

The announcement comes

amid concerns that the virus that causes Covid-19 may mutate to create new variants that are resistant to existing vaccines. The UK has banned direct flights from 33 countries in an effort to prevent variants first discovered in Brazil and South Africa from becoming established in Britain.

Vaccine makers have already been developing booster shots to target the new variants.

Moderna said February 24 that it had shipped a variant-specific vaccine candidate to the US National Institutes of Health for review.

The coronavirus pandemic has infected over 115 million people around the world and killed at least 2.5 million, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Virus surge forces Sao Paulo to shut

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SAO PAULO, 4 MARCH

A swell of Covid-19 cases is halting samba steps in Brazil's biggest metropolis while Argentina's capital Buenos Aires tiptoes its way back to the tango floor.

The two biggest cities in each of the neighbouring South American countries are headed in opposite directions, reflecting how those that loosen restrictions despite warnings from scientists see a spike in the pandemic while others that keep social distancing measures in place are able to reopen their

economies sooner.

Sao Paulo, home to almost 12 million people, is bracing for the worst two weeks yet in the pandemic and the growing risk that its once-resilient health care system will collapse, Governor Joao Doria said. More than 75% of the city's intensive-care beds are occupied by Covid patients and some wards like those of the private Albert Einstein hospital are full for the first time.

Doria announced that

arrest the virus' spread. That means closure of all bars, restaurants, shopping malls and any other establishment deemed non-essential until at least March 19.

Germany extends lockdown: Germany is extending its coronavirus shutdown by three weeks until March 28, but easing some restrictions to allow non-essential stores and other businesses to reopen in areas with relatively low infection rates. Germany has seen the number of deaths from Covid and people in intensive care decline in recent weeks.

House passes sweeping US voting rights Bill

The bill will be the largest overhaul of US election law in at least a generation

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 4 MARCH



House Democrats passed sweeping voting and ethics legislation Wednesday over unanimous Republican opposition, advancing to the Senate what would be the largest overhaul of the US election law in at least a generation.

House Resolution 1, which touches on virtually every aspect of the electoral process, was approved on a near party-line 220-210 vote. It would restrict partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts, strike down hurdles to voting and bring transparency to a murky campaign finance system that allows wealthy donors to anonymously bankroll political causes.

The bill is a powerful counterweight to voting rights restrictions advancing in Republican-controlled statehouses across the country in the wake of Donald Trump's repeated false claims of a stolen 2020 election. Yet it faces an uncertain fate in the Democratic-controlled Senate, where it has little chance of passing without changes to procedural rules that currently allow Republicans to block it.

The stakes in the outcome are monumental, cutting to the foundational idea that one person equals one vote, and carrying with it the potential to shape election out-

comes for years to come. It also offers a test of how hard President Joe Biden and his party are willing to fight for their priorities, as well as those of their voters.

This bill will put a stop at the voter suppression that we're seeing debated right now, said Republican Nikema Williams, a new congresswoman who represents the Georgia district that deceased voting rights champion John Lewis held for years.

This bill is the Good Trouble he fought for his entire life. To Republicans, however, it would give license to unwanted federal interference in states' authority to conduct their own elections, ultimately benefiting Democrats through higher turnout, most notably among minorities.

Democrats want to use their razor-thin majority not to pass bills to earn voters' trust, but to ensure they don't lose more seats in the next election, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy said from the House floor Tuesday.

The measure has been a priority for Democrats since they won their House majority in 2018. But it has taken on added urgency in the wake of Trump's false claims, which incited the deadly storming of the US Capitol in January.

Courts and even Trump's last attorney general, William Barr, found his claims about the election to be without merit. But, spurred on by those lies, state lawmakers across the US have filed more than 200 bills in 43 states that would limit ballot access, according to a tally kept by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University.

In Iowa, the legislature voted to cut absentee and in-person early voting, while preventing local elections officials from setting up additional locations to make early voting easier. In Georgia, the House on Monday voted for legislation requiring identifi-

cation to vote by mail that would also allow counties to cancel early in-person voting on Sundays, when many Black voters cast ballots after church.

On Tuesday, the Supreme Court appeared ready to uphold voting restrictions in Arizona, which could make it harder to challenge state election laws in the future.

When asked why proponents sought to uphold the Arizona laws, which limit who can turn in absentee ballots and enable ballots to be thrown out if they are cast in the wrong precinct, a lawyer for the state's Republican Party was stunningly clear: "Because it puts us at a competitive disadvantage relative to Democrats," said attorney Michael Carvin. Politics is a zero-sum game."

Battle lines are quickly being drawn by outside groups who plan to spend millions of dollars on advertising and outreach campaigns.

Republicans are not even being coy about it. They are saying the quiet parts' out loud, said Tiffany Muller, the president of End Citizens United, a left-leaning group that aims to curtail the influence of corporate money in politics. Her organisation has launched a \$10 million effort supporting the bill.

Conservatives, meanwhile, are mobilising a \$5 million pressure campaign, urging moderate Senate Democrats to oppose rule changes needed to pass the measure.

FIERY PROTEST



A protester holds up a Lebanese national flag as he walks in front of burning tires that are blocking a main road, during a protest in downtown Beirut, Lebanon.

AGENCIES

H-1B: Legislation in Congress to end allure of cheap foreign labour

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON, 4 MARCH

in the Immigration and Nationality Act.

Three Republican US lawmakers have introduced a legislation in Congress to bar American employers from hiring H-1B workers, who are mostly highly-skilled Indian IT professionals, if they have recently, or plan to fire their local workers, seeking to put an end to the allure of cheap foreign labour.

Introduced in the House of Representatives by Republican congressmen Mo Brooks, Matt Gaetz and Lance Gooden, the American Jobs First Act proposes to overhaul the H-1B visa programme by making necessary changes

The petitioner employer also needs to file with the Secretary of Labour an application stating the employer will not require an H-1B non-immigrant in an occupational classification unless the petitioner employer has filed with the Secretary of Labour an application stating the employer is offering an annual wage to the H-1B non-immigrant that is the greater of the annual wage paid to the US citizen or lawful permanent resident employee who did identical or similar work during the two years before the petitioner employer filed such application; or \$110.

The bill among other things suspends the F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT) programme, which grants all foreign students extendable work permits and exacerbates job market competition among American graduates.

It ends the diversity visa lottery programme, which allegedly fails to serve US interests.

US warns of military response to rocket attack on Iraq base

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 4 MARCH



northern Iraq earlier in February.

"If we assess further response is warranted, we will take action again in a manner and time of our choosing," Psaki said.

Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said the US contractor suffered a cardiac episode while sheltering from the attack and died shortly afterward. He said there were no service members injured and all are accounted for.

The US airstrikes last week, which killed one member of the Iran-aligned militia, had stoked fears of another cycle of tit-for-tat attacks as happened more than a year ago.

Those attacks included the US drone strike in January 2020 that killed Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad and set off months of increased tensions in the region.

The latest attack also comes two days before Pope Francis is scheduled to visit Iraq despite concerns about security and the pandemic. The much-anticipated trip will include stops in Baghdad, southern Iraq and the northern city of Irbil.

Latest post-Brexit spat: EU slams UK for 'unilateral action'

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BRUSSELS, 4 MARCH



The European Union said Wednesday that Britain's "unilateral action" on trade rules will breach international law and is threatening legal action as post-Brexit tensions continue to escalate between the two sides.

Commission vice-president Maroš Šefčovič said in a statement that UK's decision to unilaterally extend a grace period on checks for goods moving between Great Britain and Northern Ireland amounts to a "violation" of the so-called Northern Ireland Protocol.

Commission vice-president Maroš Šefčovič said in a statement that UK's decision to unilaterally extend a grace period on checks for goods moving between Great Britain and Northern Ireland amounts to a "violation" of the so-called Northern Ireland Protocol.

"This is the second time that the UK government is set to breach international law," Šefčovič said. "This also constitutes a clear departure from the constructive approach that has prevailed up until now."

In September last year, the UK had already upset

the 27-nation bloc when it considered then backpedaled legislation that would have given the Boris Johnson's government the power to override part of the Brexit withdrawal agreement relating to Northern Ireland.

The sensitivity of Northern Ireland's status was underscored earlier this year when the EU threatened to ban shipments of coronavirus vaccines to Northern Ireland as part of moves to shore up the bloc's supply.

Šefčovič held discussions Wednesday with cabinet minister David Frost, the former chief Brexit negotiator now responsible for EU relations.

Buckingham Palace to probe Markle conduct

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON, 4 MARCH

Cinema at its finest

The third edition of the Critics' Choice Awards celebrated the best work across screening formats

SHOMA A CHATTERJEE

Given the uncertain times we live in, it was a pleasant surprise when recipients of the third edition of the Critics' Choice Awards were announced in mid-February this year. That said, there weren't any surprises as far as the winners themselves were concerned. Most films were screened to great acclaim over the last year at festivals and on online streaming platforms. And the media had provided prominent coverage even though not every name involved with them came from the glamour world of mainstream Hindi cinema.

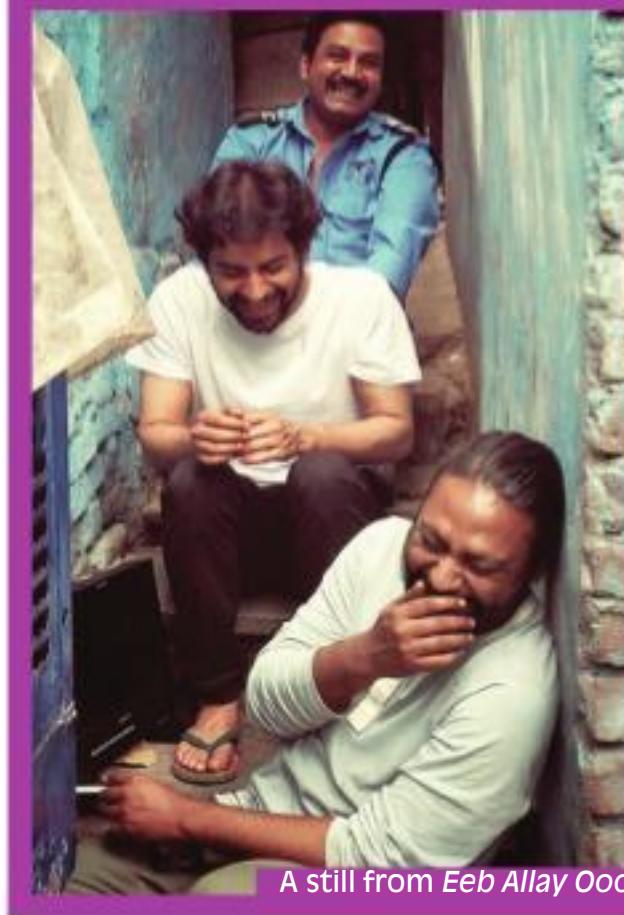
The three categories in which films were chosen by the jury were – short films, feature films and web series across OTT platforms. Here's a look at the note-worthy winners.

Bebaak, written and directed by Shazia Iqbal, bagged the Best Short Film prize. Iqbal, who has studied "Directing for Films" at the MetFilm School, Ealing studios, London, received both the Best Director and Best Writer awards. The film has already won more than a dozen awards including the Audience Choice award at the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles, and the Best Short Film and Best Cinematography honours at the Mumbai International Film Festival.

Bebaak is inspired by a true event that moulded Iqbal's religious, social and political ideology while growing up. That is reflected through the young protagonist Fatin, who defies the conventional thought of the *burqa* being mandatory for Muslim women and in the process, gives up the scholarship offered by an NGO with strongly patriarchal ideologies.

The Best Feature Film award went to the distinctively unusual *Eeb Allay Oo*, directed by Prateek Vats. The film follows the seemingly absurd journey of a poor, driven-to-the-edges young migrant in the heart of New Delhi. He gets a contractual job of chasing away monkeys and has to mimic their calls of *eeb allay oo*.

Responding to what inspired him to make such a strange film, Vats said, "The very idea that it was possible to create an entire universe while making a film and also within the film you have



A still from *Eeb Allay Oo*

created was exciting. There is a strong element of intrigue structured into it too. It never ceases to fascinate me."

Vats won the Best Director award in this category. *Scam 1992: The Harshad Mehta Story* was adjudged the Best Web Series of the year. Spanning 10 episodes, each with a running time of an hour, it is a stunning bio-fictional take on the life, rise and fall of Harshad Mehta, one of the most controversial figures in India's financial history from the 1980s to the turn of the 21st century. It is an adaptation of *The Scam: Who Won, Who Lost, Who Got Away* a book by Sucheta Dalal and Debasish Basu, the journalists who broke the story.

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The challenges directors Hansal Mehta and Jai Mehta faced were first, how to frame a bio-fiction of a "negative" personality dramatically enough to draw eyeballs to the web series. And second, how to manipulate the craft of the cinematic language such as script, editing, dialogue, cinematography, music, acting, etc to create a convincing bio-fiction without being swamped under the life story of Harshad Mehta.

Pratik Gandhi won the Best Actor award for his portrayal of the title role. He brilliantly carries the film on his slender shoulders. Gandhi's body lan-

guage, slightly crooked smile, cool confidence, and evolution from a slightly shaky young man who once wanted to play cricket to becoming one of the richest, most egoistic and arrogant men in India is essayed with incredible conviction. His little-known face minus the halo of a famous star adds authenticity to the character. Interestingly, even though we all know he is a fraud, the script makes us empathise with Harshad Mehta when his sudden fall comes. The four writers also received the Best Writing award.

Adil Hussain won the Best Actor award in the Short Film section for his portrayal of a man who physically abuses his wife for no reason in *Meal*. Directed by Abhiroop Basu, the film has no dialogue in its span of 11 minutes. With only ambient sound, Hussain provokes the audience to hate him. *Meal* is gory and violent but gets its message across right and proper.

Manoj Bajpayee justifiably won the Best Actor Award in the Feature Film category for his performance in *Devashish Makhija's Bhonsle*. Among other accolades, *Bhonsle* bagged the Best Director and Best Screenplay awards at the Asian Film Festival at Barcelona. Bajpayee also won the Best Actor award at the Asia Pacific Screen Awards.

One can always trust Bajpayee, with his "non-hero-like" looks, to slip under the skin of a character with aspirations to rise above her class and status in the feature film, *Sir*, directed by Rohena Gera. Her character persistently refuses to fall into what she feels is a "love trap" laid by her young employer, whose intentions are honest. Shome, who is one of the most versatile but under-utilised performers in Indian cinema, delivers yet another magical performance as Ratna in the film.

Tillotama Shome received the

Best Actress award for her low-key but powerful portrayal of a housemaid with aspirations to rise above her class and status in the feature film, *Sir*, directed by Rohena Gera. Her character persistently refuses to fall into what she feels is a "love trap" laid by her young employer, whose intentions are honest. Shome, who is one of the most versatile but under-utilised performers in Indian cinema, delivers yet another magical performance as Ratna in the film.

The writer is a senior film critic

RELIVING A MYTHOLOGICAL ROMANCE

A recent Manipuri dance festival, held virtually, explored various facets of Radha and Krishna's love through traditional renditions

TAPATI CHOWDHURY

Viswarupa Sai Consciousness recently presented a virtual Manipuri dance festival titled "Nachom" at Global Rudra Parayana. A North-east Indian state situated amidst the Himalayan foothills and valleys, Manipur is mentioned as the land of Gandharvas in Vedic texts. The place is famous for Manipuri dance, which boasts of a rich history. Its style is rooted in the ancient techniques of Lai Haroaba and martial arts. This dance form further filtered down to West Bengal under the initiative of Rabindranath Tagore. His legacy in the form was advanced by choreographer Guru Bipin Singh.

In the virtual programme, Darshana Jhaveri performed two *ash-tapadis* on *Maanbhanjan* – appealing an offended woman – from poet Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*. In *Yahi Madhava yahi Kesava*, she enacted the role of a disappointed and angry Radha, when Krishna comes to her with tell-tale signs of having spent the night with another, writhing large on his body. She repudiates Krishna. Jhaveri followed it up with another *ash-tapadi* called *Priye Charusila*, where she plays Krishna, who surrenders himself to Radha and pleads his way into her heart. The piece was brought alive by the strongly expressive style of Manipuri dance. Vocalist Premila Devi and T Brojen Kumar Singh, who played the pung, added to the aesthetic value of the rendition.

During the first day of the festival, Poushali Chatterjee, a disciple

of Guru Bipin Singh and Kalavati Devi, performed *Radha Nartan*. As Raaseswari Radha, always clad in green skirt, she was Jagannohini. The character was portrayed so deftly that it seemed to come straight out of the Sanskrit couplets that defined her.

The song which followed was in the Meitei language predominant in Manipur. It described Radha's sublime beauty, captivating movements and bright adornments that made her an embodiment of nature. Very significantly she is surrounded by bees with her long hair swaying like a snake, and her eyes darting like Khanjana or a white-browed wagtail bird. All that was backed by the four-beat *tala* *Tancheep* with the vocal support of Draupadi Devi, *bols* by Bimbavati Devi and the pung played by T Brojen Kumar Singh literally transported one to the *Gandharva Loka* – a land where celestial musicians and dancers reside.

Shukshari Dwanda, which followed, has much to do with Gaudiya Vaishnava theology, celebrating the philosophical oneness of Radha and Krishna. It was performed in the *Achouba Bhangi Pareng* style, as known in the Meitei language. The form follows a unique formula rather than just giving expressions to the songs to which is performed.

It suggests how unity and conflict go hand in hand. The two mythical parrots Shuk and Sari are always arguing. Shuk glorifies Krishna who vanquished

the serpent Kaaliya and freed the people from its poison. Sari playfully reminds Shuk that all that Krishna has achieved is due to the influence of his spiritual consort Radha. Shuk says Radha's weakness is Krishna as she keeps waiting at the bower for him. To this Sari replies that Krishna does arrive and profusely apologises, but he has also earned glory by killing a woman Putana and the bird Bakasur.

Their argument continues and ends in reconciliation by singing praises of the divinities. This composition of Guru Bipin Singh has been sung in the style of Bengal's *Padavali Kirtan*. Vocals were by Atashi Chatterjee and Sushanta Das played the pung. Debanjali Biswas danced as Shuk in *tandava* style and Krishnakali Dasgupta perfectly fitted into the role of Sari in *lasya* style, the roots of which are Thang-Ta and Lai Haroaba.

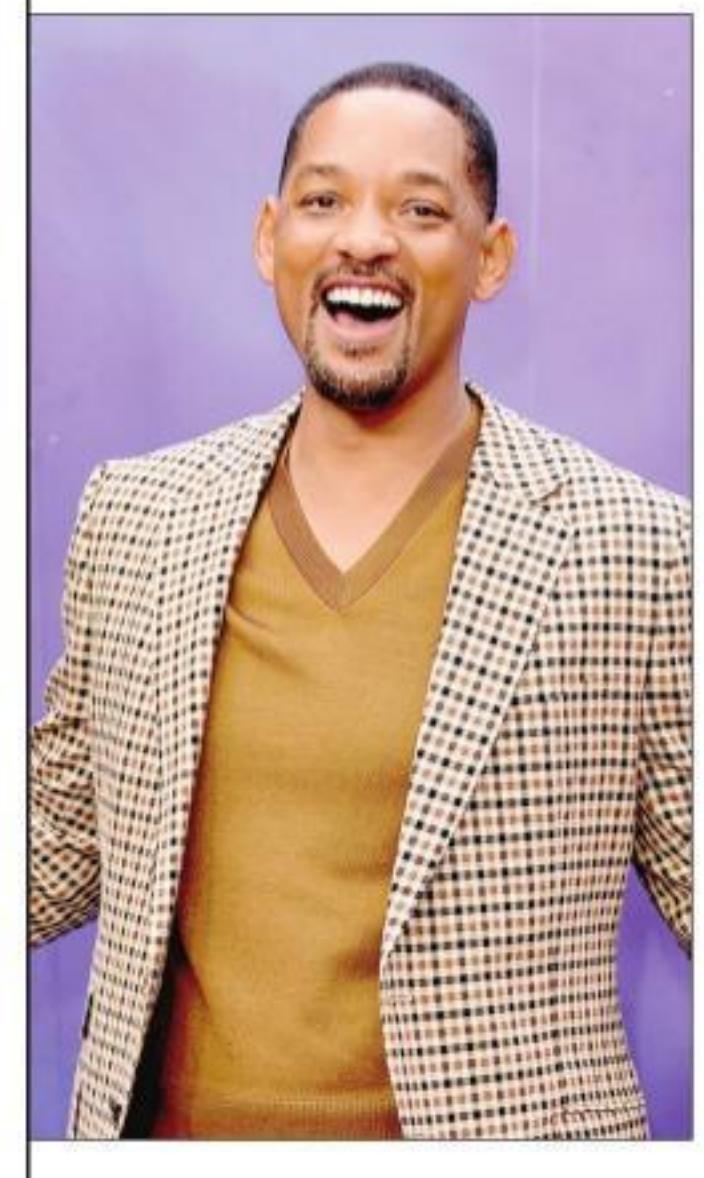
Brahmatala Prabandha Krishna Nartan – a unique creation of Guru Bipin Singh – stands out for its rhythm composition. Chatterjee, in the role of Krishna, danced to a *Prabandha Nartan*, set to *dui tala macha* of 12 beats and two stresses, *Brahmatala* of 28 beats and 10 stresses and *tala Tancheep* of four beats. The song in Meitei describes Krishna as Natarabar, who has mastered the *tandava* style with elegance. He dances on the syncopated beats of *Brahmatala*, one of the most difficult *talas* of the *Nata Sankirtana* tradition. Vocals were by Draupadi Devi and the pung was played by Oja Bir Mangal Singh.

Guru Bipin Singh initiated his female disciples in *Pung Vadan*, which had always been a male bastion. Pung is the most important percussion in classical Manipuri dance. The synchronised play of percussion hand movements was from a pre-recorded ensemble performance by artists of Nandanik Movement Arts, led by their *acharya* Chatterjee. They played *tala Dashkosh* of seven beats and three stresses, accompanied by Guru Kalavati Devi on *kartala*. Despite it being a virtual recital, there was no compromise in aesthetic enjoyment.

The writer is a senior dance critic

SNIPS

President Smith?



American superstar Will Smith has opened up about his political ambitions, with the actor saying he might consider running for office "at some point" in the future in a podcast appearance recently.

The 52-year-old was asked about his views on joining politics and his brushes with racism on the "Pod Save America" podcast hosted by Jon Favreau, Jon Lovett, Dan Pfeiffer and Tommy Vietor. "I think for now I'll let that office get cleaned up a little bit," Smith said, adding, "and then I'll consider that at some point down the line".

The actor said he "absolutely" has an opinion and believes in fostering understanding between people, as well as the possibility of social harmony. "I will certainly do my part, whether it remains artistic or, at some point, ventures into the political arena," he added.

The *Men in Black* actor and four times Grammy winner also shared his own experiences of growing up as a black man in the US, saying he has been called with the n-word at least five times. "I've been called (n-word) to my face probably five or six times. And fortunately for my psyche, I've never been called (n-word) by a smart person," Smith said. "I grew up with the impression that racists and racism were stupid, and they were easy to get around. I just had to be smarter now while they were very dangerous. I had never looked into the eyes of a racist and saw anything that I perceived as intellect."

He said he saw more systemic racism when he entered his acting career and said he noticed a "difference between ignorance and evil". "Fortunately, ignorance is more prevalent than blatant evil, so I've always been encouraged that the process of education and understanding could alleviate some of the more dangerous and difficult aspects of racism that have unfortunately been embedded in the very fibres of our country," Smith said.

Smith has been promoting his new Netflix series *Amend: The Fight For America*. He last hinted at a turn in politics back in 2015 when he said then-presidential candidate Donald Trump's statements would drive him to run for office.

—THE INDEPENDENT

Sinha as Bulbul

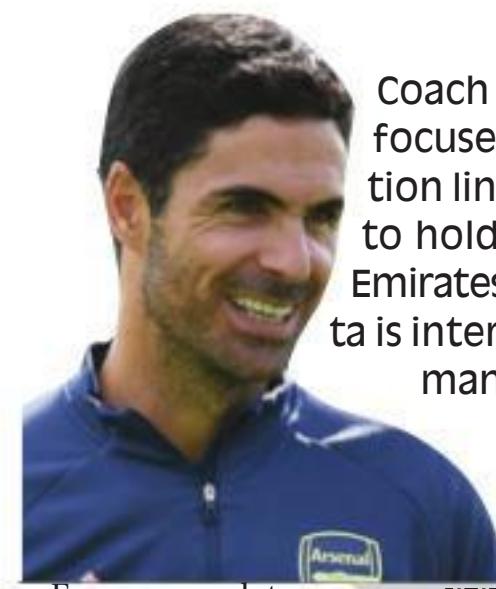


Bollywood actress Sonakshi Sinha took to Instagram on Wednesday to announce her next project. The actress will be seen in *Bulbul Tarang*, which will have an OTT release.

The actress posted a picture of herself where she is dressed in a blue *salwar kameez*. She captioned the picture saying, "Meet Bulbul...A girl out to make her dream come true? Thrilled to announce my next film #BulbulTarang streaming soon on @netflix_in. #AbMenuMeinSabNew @tahirrajbhaisin @reliance.entertainment #Shree-NarayanSingh #ArshadSayeed @sarkarshibasish (sic)."

The film will be directed by Shree Narayan Singh and is said to be inspired by a true story. It also features Raj Babbar and Tahir Raj Bhasin.

Meanwhile, Sinha is gearing up for the release of *Bhuj: The Pride Of India*. Set against the backdrop of the Indo-Pak War of 1971, it also stars Ajay Devgn, Sanjay Dutt and Sharad Kelkar, among others.



WARP AND WEFT

Coach Mikel Arteta (in photo, left) says he is fully focused on improving results at Arsenal amid speculation linking him with Barcelona - but the Spaniard is yet to hold talks over a new deal to extend his stay at the Emirates Stadium. Barca presidential candidate Joan Laporta is interested in replacing current manager Ronald Koeman with Arteta.

For more updates

www.thestatesman.com

THUMBNAILS

Nagars Feat: In Buenos Aires, Sumit Nagal registered the biggest win of his career when he stunned second seed Cristian Garin of Chile 6-4, 6-3 to enter the quarter-finals of the Argentina Open Association of Tennis Professionals 250 tournament here.

Neuhwai out: Saina Nehwal crashed out of the Swiss Open Super 300 tournament in Basel after a first-round loss to Phittayaporn Chaiwan of Thailand here. The celebrated Indian battled for 58 minutes before going down 16-21, 21-17, 21-23 in women's singles.

Boxam tournament: Pooja Rani (75kg) entered the semi-finals to secure a medal but Lovlina Borgohain (69kg) bowed out after a quarter-final loss at the Boxam international boxing tournament in Castellon, Spain. Rani defeated Italian Assunta Canfora.

Training camp: Chennai Super Kings captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni has fetched up in Tamil Nadu's capital city to take part in the team's training camp likely to begin on 9 March in the lead-up to the next season of the Indian Premier League Twenty20 tournament.

English league: Manchester United and Leicester are stumbling their way towards Champions League qualification. United played out a 0-0 draw at Crystal Palace on Wednesday. Leicester also had to make do with a point, drawing 1-1 at Burnley.

German Cup: Yussuf Poulsen scored as Leipzig reached the semi-finals of the German Cup with a 2-0 win over a Wolfsburg team which hadn't conceded a goal for eight games. Wolfsburg on Wednesday had the chance to seize control of the quarter-final.

David strikes: Jonathan David scored twice as Lille beat Marseille 2-0 to stay top of the French league. David netted in the 90th minute and again two minutes into injury time on Wednesday. The northern side remain two points ahead of Paris Saint-Germain.

Milan held: Franck Kessie's late penalty saved the once-almighty AC Milan from a home defeat in Serie A, as the Rossoneri drew with Udinese 1-1. Milan have managed just one win in their past three matches and needed another to keep pace on the table.

Campaign for womanhood: In its commitment to creating an inclusive space in society for women, global sportswear giant - adidas, has launched Watch Us Move - a campaign to celebrate womanhood and their freedom of movement. The launch of the campaign saw Manushikhillar, Dipika Pallikal & Nikhat Zareen coming together to narrate how they have broken unrealistic stereotypes of perfection through their incredible journey and positioned themselves as role models for young girls across the country.

Camp for coaches: The Kho Kho Federation of India (KKFI) will be starting a 10-day 'High Performance' camp for coaches to be held at the Manav Rachna Educational Institutions in Faridabad. The programme was launched on Wednesday. The KKFI had earlier successfully completed a High-Performance Assessment and Scientific Analysis & Evaluation Programme, "Rise in Sports Excellence" for the national players. According to KKFI general secretary Mahender Singh Tyagi, as many as 54 coaches from all over the country are taking part in this 10-day programme.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AHMEDABAD, 4 MARCH

Axar and Ashwin rock England



There was turn and bounce but the pitch was far from being a minefield that some of the England batsmen save Ben Stokes (55, 121 balls) made it out to be. For India, spinners Axar Patel (26-7-68-4), Ravichandran Ashwin (19.5-4-47-3) and Washington Sundar (7-1-14-1) toyed with the already messed up minds, clueless on how to deal with the conditions.

'Stokes was swearing at me'

India pacer Mohammad Siraj on Thursday said England all-rounder Ben Stokes swore at him on the opening day of the fourth and final Test here, an incident "handled well" by skipper Virat Kohli during an on-field showdown with the visiting player.

Kohli was seen having an animated discussion with Stokes after the all-rounder allegedly swore at Siraj. Umpire Nitin Menon had to intervene for play to resume after England were reeling at 32 for three.

"He was swearing at me, so Virat bhai intervened and handled that well. These things happen at ground," Siraj said at the post-match press conference. Stokes, on his part, played down the incident.

"Pretty animated was that (the conversation)... look at it from a different way, you know, two-three guys who care about what they are doing, care about representing and played against each other and you know, why would they not be competitive?" he asked.

"So we are not going to back down to anyone... for me that is what it was competitive guys trying to get over each other," he added. England were eventually bowled out for 205 with India 24 for one at stumps in response. Playing his second game of the series, Siraj picked up two wickets in England's innings.

SCOREBOARD

England 1st Innings:	121, 6-166, 7-170, 8-188, 9-189.
Bowling:	Ishant Sharma 9-2-23-0
Zak Crawley c M Siraj b A Patel 9	
Dom Sibley c A Patel 2	
Jonny Bairstow lbw b M Siraj 28	
Joe Root lbw b M Siraj 0	
Ben Stokes lbw b M Siraj 55	
Ollie Pope c S Gill b R Ashwin 29	
Dan Lawrence stt b Pant b A Patel 46	
Ben Foakes c A Rahane b R Ashwin 1	
Dom Bess lbw b A Patel 3	
Jack Leach lbw b R Ashwin 7	
James Anderson not out 10	
Extras: (NB-1) 1	
Total: (For one wicket in 12 overs) 24	
Fall of wickets: 1-0.	
Bowling:	James Anderson 5-5-0-1, Ben Stokes 2-1-4-0, Jack Leach 4-1-6-0, Dom Bess 1-0-4-0.

ISL: FC Goa take on league winners Mumbai City

AGENCIES
MARGAO, 4 MARCH

One of the most consistent teams in the history of the tournament, FC Goa will look to take a step closer to their maiden ISL title when they face table-toppers Mumbai City in the first leg of their semifinal fixture here on Friday.

Goa have secured playoff qualification a record six times but they could never manage to lift the ISL trophy, having lost the finals on two occasions.

Come Friday, the Gurus will look to put it past League Shield winners Mumbai City FC to inch closer to the next delivery of their first-ever trophy.

Having qualified for the playoffs for the fourth-straight time, Goa are only behind Mumbai in terms of goals scored, alongside NorthEast United.

They have form backing them too, having been unbeaten in 13 games now -- a feat no other side has managed in Hero ISL history.

Facing Mumbai will not be an easy task but coach Juan Ferrando hopes his players stick to his philosophy as they aim to go all the way.

"If we enjoy the game, we will have success," he said.

"Sometimes there is pressure because everybody wants

to win but for me, it's important our players want to play (our way). I am scared when my team is not playing football (our way) because it's difficult to help the team. But all our players want to participate and stick to our style."

However, they will have their task cut out with Ivan Gonzalez and Alberto Noguera missing out due to suspensions.

While Goa top the charts for most possession (58 per cent), Mumbai (57 per cent) are not too far behind. Dominating possession has worked for Lobera's side, who have netted a whopping 35 goals.

During the last meeting between the two sides, Ferrando had stated that the pressure was on Mumbai to win the League Winners Shield. And having achieved that target, Lobera will aim to prove a lot more to his former employers.

"I love when others speak about Mumbai City as a favourite team since they are thinking we are better than them," he said. "It's good for us. I love this pressure but we need to prove ourselves on the pitch."

Similar to Ferrando, Lobera too, wants his players to enjoy themselves rather than take pressure.

"It's a special game," he added.

Hardest series as batsman'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AHMEDABAD, 4 MARCH

with the team's overall batting performance.

"I think we are disappointed with the batting. I think we are more than capable of scoring, so yeah frustrating but was nice to get a wicket at the end of the day, added he said referring to Shubman Gill's dismissal.

Stokes had no hesitation in admitting that these are the "hardest conditions" to bat on. "Yeah, I have played 70 odd games now and I have told others in the team that this is the hardest conditions I have ever faced as a batsman and I have played all around the world.

"It is a case of finding it your own way. It is not about coming together as a group and saying this is what we need to do next. It is about how can we go away as individuals and when we come back here next time, have we progressed as an individual and a group of batsmen, because everyone plays in a different way."

Ravichandran Ashwin has made Stokes his bunny having dismissed the left-hander many times, and Stokes said that the India off-spinner was a fantastic bowler but refused to read too much into it.

"You come to India, you are going to face a lot of Ashwin. So he has got more chance of getting me out, but I don't tread into the fact that he has got me out that many times," he said.

Stokes was also disappointed

Pollard hits six sixes in an over as Windies win

ASSOCIATED PRESS
COOLIDGE (ANTIGUA), 4 MARCH

Sri Lanka leg-spinner Akila Dananjaya experienced the precipitous highs and lows of Twenty20 cricket when he claimed a hat trick which included the wicket of West Indies star Chris Gayle for a first-ball duck, then was hit for six sixes in an over by Keiran Pollard (*in photo*) in the first international in Antigua.

The West Indies on Wednesday won the match by four wickets with 41 balls in hand, finishing with 134-6. Dananjaya became only the 15th player and the fourth Sri Lankan to take a T20 international hat trick when he dismissed Evin Lewis (28), Gayle and Nicholas Pooran (0) with consecutive deliveries in the fourth over. He had little time to reflect on his newfound fame when it turned to notoriety: in his next over he was hit to all parts of the ground by Pollard, who became only the third player to achieve the feat in all international formats. Yuvraj Singh did so from England's Stuart Broad in the inaugural T20 World Cup in 2007 and had to wait 14 years for company. Pollard said he thought six sixes were a possibility after the third one. "I just had to come out and back myself," he said. "It was something the team needed. I didn't see the hat trick, I only heard. But I still had to

come out and do what the team required at that point in time." Dananjaya's see-sawing fortunes - he was hit for a seventh consecutive six by Jason Holder in his next over and had two catches dropped from his bowling - turned the West Indies' seemingly easy chase for 132 to take a 1-0 lead in the series into a thrilling spectacle. Sri Lanka managed only 131-9 after being sent in to bat. They had been 86-3 but fell apart after a short rain break and lost six wickets for 45 runs.

Captain Angelo Mathews (5) fell in the first over after play resumed and Dinesh Chandimal (11) was out three balls later. Thisara Perera (1) fell in the 17th over and Sri Lanka slumped further to 106-6, then 111-7 when Hasaranga de Silva was out for 12. Two run-outs in the final over saw Sri Lanka fall well short of a competitive total. The West Indies looked like rapidly to run

down the Sri Lanka total when Lewis hit the last three balls of the first over for six. But Dananjaya's hat trick saw the home side slip from 52-0 to 52-3, losing Gayle to the first ball of his T20 in two years.

Pollard's barrage in the sixth over lifted the West Indies from 62-4 on the dismissal of Lendl Simmons to 92-4 and again had the home side coasting to victory. Another twist was in store when de Silva dismissed Pollard (38) and Fabian Allen with consecutive deliveries in the seventh over, only to be denied a hat trick by Dwayne Bravo who defended the next delivery. The West Indies were 101-6 and were seen home by Bravo and captain Jason Holder, who made an unbeaten 29. Holder hit six in the 15th of the innings, to take West Indies past Sri Lanka's total.

Brief Scores: Sri Lanka 131/9 (20), West Indies 134/6 (13.1).

Barcelona rally to reach Copa del Rey final

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MADRID, 4 MARCH



Two weeks ago, Gerard Pique and Antoine Griezmann (*in photo*) were heatedly arguing with each other in a big loss to Paris-Saint-Germain in the Champions League that deepened Barcelona's crisis. On Wednesday, the two were celebrating together after Griezmann set up Pique's stoppage-time goal that allowed Barcelona to reach the Copa del Rey final. Pique's goal helped secure a 3-2 aggregate victory over Sevilla, easing some of the pressure on the embattled club that two days saw former president Josep Maria Bartomeu get arrested by Catalan police investigating irregularities during his administration.

Pique showed that he is one of the leaders of this team," Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman said. "He is good on set pieces and it was a great cross for a goal in a very important moment." Goalkeeper Marc-André ter Stegen had kept Barcelona in it by saving a

73rd-minute penalty kick that would have practically ended the team's chances of advancing. Ousmane Dembelé opened the scoring early for Barcelona, which will be trying to win a record 31st Copa title.

The victory comes four days before the club hold their presidential elections to try to move on from one of their worst crises ever. Sevilla were trying to return to the Copa final for the first time since 2018, when they lost to Barcelona. The five-time Copa winner also lost to the Catalan club in the 2016 final.

This season's final will be on 17 April at the La Cartuja Stadium in Seville. Levante host Athletic Bilbao in the other semi-final on Thursday. The teams drew 1-1 in the first leg in Bilbao. Barcelona made it to the Copa final for sixth straight seasons before being eliminated by Athletic in last

year's quarter-finals. Barcelona got off to a fast start and Dembelé scored with a superb shot into the top corner from outside the area in the 12th minute.

Sevilla were awarded a penalty after foul by scar Mingueza on Lucas Ocampos in the 73rd, but the forward's shot from the spot was stopped by Ter Stegen. The away goal would have forced Barcelona to score three more times to advance.

"It was a decisive moment," Koeman said. "If they equalised it would have been complicated to score three goals. We had the confidence in our goalkeeper."

Sevilla midfielder Fernando was sent off for a foul in stoppage time, and a few moments later Pique - who appeared to be injured at the end of the game - netted the second goal with a header into the corner after a well-placed cross by Griezmann.

Klopp threatens to withdraw Liverpool players

AGENCIES
LONDON, 4 MARCH



Liverpool manager Jürgen Klopp (*in photo*) has threatened to withdraw players from international matches this month if there is a chance they will have to quarantine on their return under coronavirus rules.

Arrivals in Britain from Red List countries are subject to 10 days' hotel confinement, which would apply to Brazilian trio Alison Becker, Roberto Firmino and Fabinho and Portugal forward Diogo Jota.

World governing body Fifa has given clubs dispensation to prevent players who may be affected by the regulations from joining up with their countries for the matches, which include World Cup qualifiers. And Klopp fully intends to apply it, saying: "I think all the clubs agree that with the same problems we cannot just let the boys go and then sort the situation when they come back by placing our players in a 10-day quarantine in a hotel, it is just not possible."

"I understand the needs of the different FAs (football associations) but this is a time where we cannot make everyone happy and we have to admit the players are paid by the clubs so it means we have to be first priority."

Alisson is set to return to the side for the visit of Chelsea on Thursday after missing the win at Sheffield United as he was mourning the death of his father in a swimming accident.

dent in Brazil, while Fabinho could also return to a depleted defence after four games out through injury.

Sixth-placed Liverpool, who are one point behind Chelsea in the race for top-four spots, have not won at home since mid-December as their title defence has collapsed.

Chelsea are still unbeaten under new boss Thomas Tuchel and Klopp is aware of the size of the task facing his side.

Tuchel was Klopp's successor at both Mainz and Borussia Dortmund and there is plenty of admiration between the German coaches. "We've known each other for a long time, he worked for Mainz as I did, he worked for Dortmund as I did, so a lot of people we know are the same," said Klopp. "I think he is an outstanding coach and it will be tricky to play his team, like it always was."