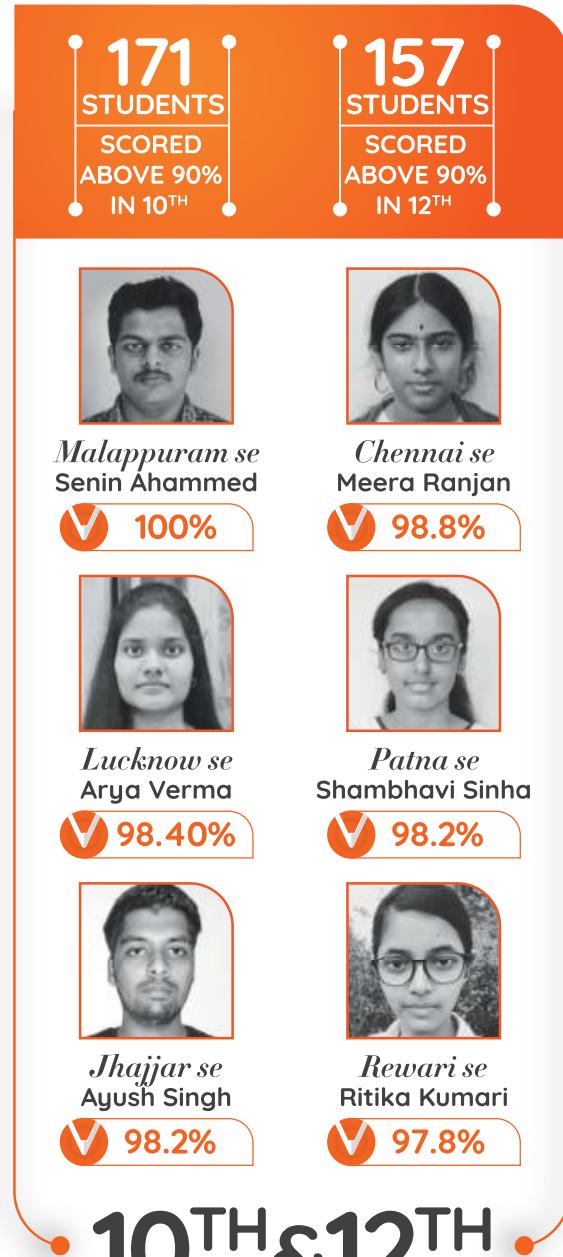
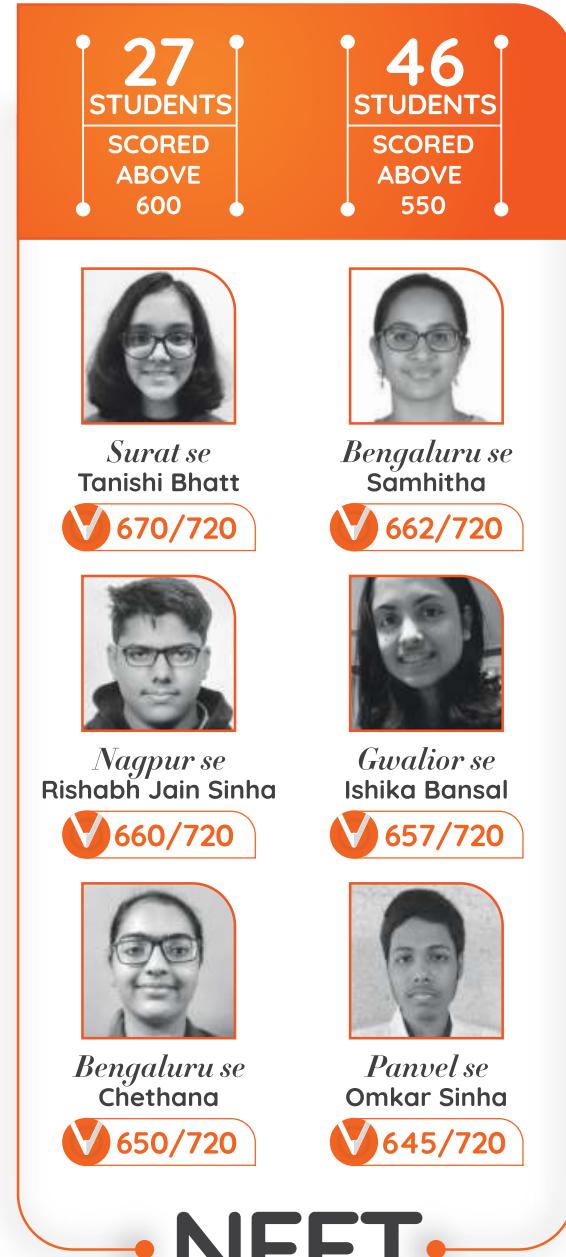
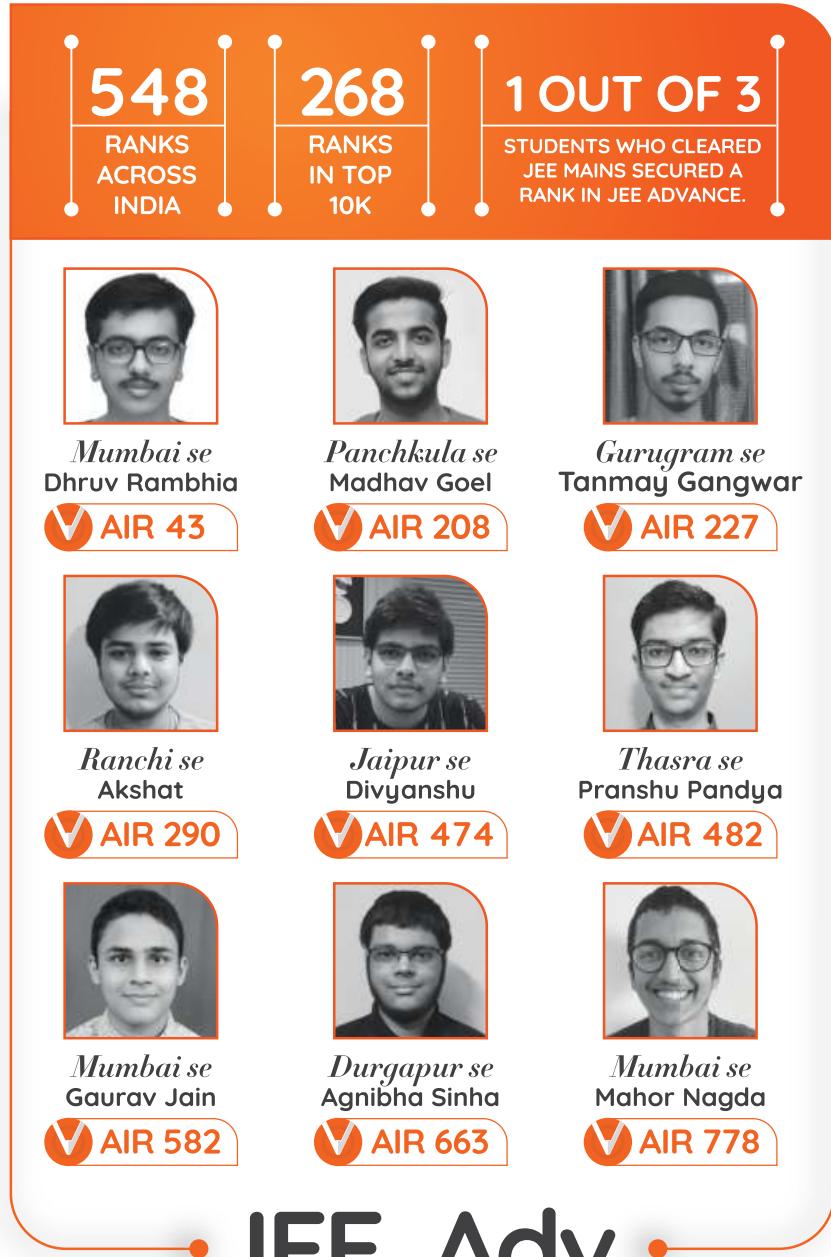


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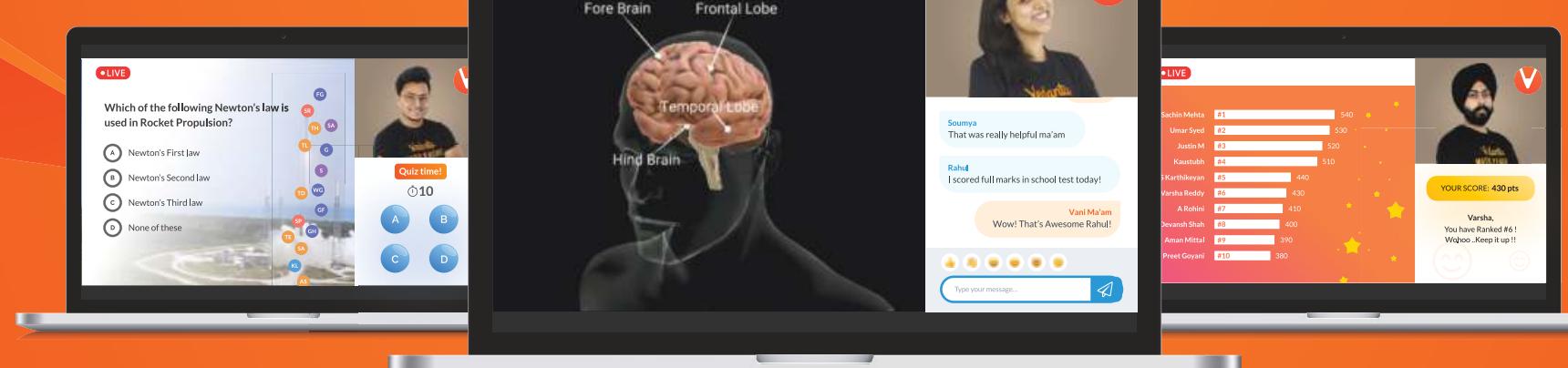
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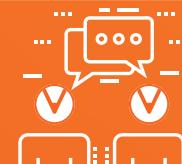
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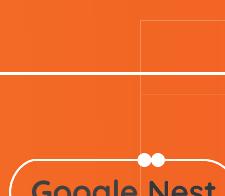
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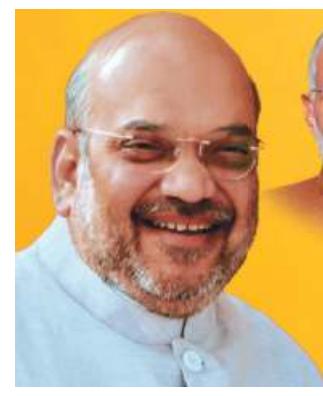


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Karmanye vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kadachana I  
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## HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Heartfelt birthday wishes to our

Union Home Minister **AMITH SHAH JI**

"We wish a very happy birthday to Amit Shah Ji, a hard-working, experienced, a skilled strategist, efficient organiser. Apart from playing a valuable role in the government, he is also contributing significantly in empowering and securing India. May god give him a long and healthy life."

### NEARBY



Ex-CS assault case: HC allows witness statement

NEW DELHI  
In a major boost to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and other AAP leaders in a case related to alleged assault of then Chief Secretary Anshu Prakash in 2018, the Delhi High Court on Wednesday directed a trial court here to also consider the statement of a former adviser to the Chief Minister who was one of the witnesses.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

Give FIR copy to Umar Khalid, court tells police

NEW DELHI  
A court here ordered Delhi Police to give to former JNU student leader Umar Khalid a copy of the FIR, remand application and remand order of the case related to northeast Delhi riots in which he was arrested. Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Purshotam Pathak said it was a settled proposition of law that no person shall be kept in custody without being informed of the grounds for arrest.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

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## ICMR nod for low-cost COVID-19 testing device

COVIRAP showed accuracy level similar to RT-PCR method

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

A new COVID-19 diagnostic method, using a low-cost portable unit developed by researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kharagpur, has been approved by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) after testing with patient samples showed an accuracy level slightly lower than the gold standard RT-PCR method, at a fraction of the cost.

The machine cost less than ₹5,000 to make and the test kits would each cost about ₹500. IIT-Kharagpur researchers told journalists on Wednesday.

Once the viral RNA was extracted, the testing process takes about one hour. The IIT was in discussion with commercial manufacturers and start-ups, and hoped that the government would also subsidise the cost of the test kits, they said.

### Comparable to RT-PCR

In parallel testing with 200 samples containing a wide range of viral loads, the COVIRAP method correctly detected 108 out of the 115 positive samples identified by an RT-PCR machine, and 83 out of 85 negative samples, meaning that it has 94% sensitivity and 98% specificity

### Novel solution

A look at how the new COVID-19 testing device works



Virus alert: Researchers with the COVIRAP device at IIT Kharagpur.  
• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

• COVIRAP machine resembles a box and comes with a kit

• Kit has three master mixes which are markers of different genes to confirm the virus

• RNA samples are extracted from nasal swabs and mixed with the master mix in tubes

• Tubes are put in the machine which is set at a specific temperature and programmed to run for a fixed period

• Once the heating is over,

it's mixed with another solution and reheated

• A paper strip is dipped into reaction product

• Coloured lines develop, like in a pregnancy kit, to indicate presence or absence of virus

• A smartphone app can grab image of the strip and convey results

• COVIRAP can deliver results in an hour

### KEY DIFFERENCES WITH RT-PCR

• While RT-PCR machines can cost up to ₹25 lakh, the COVIRAP machine cost the IIT researchers only ₹5,000

• COVIRAP test kits cost about ₹500

• RT-PCR needs to be operated by a molecular biologist

• COVIRAP can be operated with minimal training

in comparison to RT-PCR.

"Initially, we were very sceptical, but we were delighted when it worked. The assays are comparable [to RT-PCR]," ICMR virologist Mamta Chawla Sarkar told journalists on Wednesday.

"This assay holds the capability of detecting extremely low levels of viral loads that any other method based

on similar principles of testing... In practice, this means that very early stages of infection can be detected, thereby isolating the patient and arresting the uncontrolled spread of infection in the community via asymptomatic patients," she added.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

RECOVERIES SURGE ▶ PAGE 10

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

RECOVERIES SURGE ▶ PAGE 10

### Mammoth task



Light relief: A potter making earthen lamps ahead of Deepavali, in Ahmedabad on Wednesday. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

## Air pollution now biggest health risk in India, says report

Long-term exposure contributed to over 1.67 million deaths in 2019; 1.16 lakh infants died in first month

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Long-term exposure to outdoor and household air pollution contributed to over 1.67 million annual deaths from stroke, heart attack, diabetes, lung cancer, chronic lung diseases and neonatal diseases in India in 2019, according to the State of Global Air 2020 by the U.S.-based Health Effects Institute. Overall, air pollution was now the largest risk factor for death among all health risks, the report noted.

Outdoor and household particulate matter pollution

also contributed to the deaths of more than 1,16,000 Indian infants in their first month of life last year. More than half of these deaths were associated with outdoor PM2.5 and others were linked to use of solid fuels such as charcoal, wood, and animal dung for cooking.

For the youngest infants, most deaths were related to complications from low birth weight and preterm birth.

India faced the highest per capita pollution exposure – or 83.2 µg/cubic metre – in the world, followed by Nepal at 83.1 µg/cubic metre and

Niger at 80.1, according to the report which sources its data from publicly available sources. Countries with the least population exposure are below 8 micrograms (µg) per cubic metre.

**Marginal decline**  
The government has claimed that average pollution levels in India are declining over the past three years but these have been marginal, particularly in the Indo-Gangetic plains which see extremely high particulate matter pollution especially during winter. After a decline in pollution

due to the nationwide lockdown in late March and the months-long process of re-opening, pollution levels are again rising and air quality has dipped to 'very poor' category in several cities.

COVID-19, a disease for which people with heart and lung disease are particularly at risk of infection and death, has claimed more than 1,10,000 lives in India. Although the full links between air pollution and COVID-19 are not yet known, there is clear evidence linking air pollution and increased heart and lung disease, creating a key factor in the deaths of these youngest infants."



**K.N CHAKRAPANI**

Senior BJP Leader & President - Chakrapani Foundation (R)  
AC-152 Bytarayanapura Constituency, Bangalore North, Karnataka  
Mob: 9845394166

## Rajasthan to oppose new farm laws

State to bring Bill to nullify Central laws, says Gehlot

MOHAMMED IQBAL  
JAIPUR

Rajasthan is set to become the second Congress-ruled State after Punjab to formally reject the Centre's farm Acts. A special session of the Assembly will be convened soon to discuss the impact of the new laws on farmers.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Wednesday said an Amendment Bill would be brought in the Assembly to nullify the Central laws, and a resolution adopted against the Centre's stand on the issue of farmers' welfare.

The Council of Ministers

Congress stands resolutely with our *annadatas* (food providers) and will continue to oppose the anti-farmer laws passed by the NDA government  
ASHOK GEHLOT  
RAJASTHAN CM

took the decision to call the Assembly session at its meet-

(MSP). It observed that the removal of ceiling on the stock of farm commodities in normal circumstances under the Essential Commodities Act after the implementation of the new laws would lead to price rise and an increase in black marketing and hoarding.

The Council of Ministers laid emphasis on a mandatory provision for procurement of agricultural produce at minimum support prices

government had last month issued an order extending the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee Act, 1961, to the entire State in order to regulate private entities buying produce directly from the farmers.

In another tweet, Mr. Gehlot lashed out at BJP president J.P. Nadda over his remarks on the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act. Mr. Gehlot said the BJP's insistence on implementing CAA had led to communal tension. "Now, when the corona situation is still very serious...it is time to overcome the crises the nation is facing unitedly and not disrupt peace and communal harmony," Mr. Gehlot said.

## Chinese soldier held in Ladakh sent back

ANANTH KRISHNAN  
DINAKAR PERI  
NEW DELHI

The Chinese soldier who strayed across the Line of Actual Control in the Demchok sector in Ladakh on October 18 has been returned, both India and China confirmed.

The People's Liberation Army soldier was handed over at the Chushul-Moldo meeting point late on Tuesday, a defence source said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

## Punjab farmers lift blockade for goods trains till November 5

Chief Minister welcomes move, says it is in State's interest



Up in arms: Farmers raising slogans during their 'rail roko' protest at Devi Dass Pura village in Amritsar. ■ FILE PHOTO

ture sector that were 'unanimously' passed by the State Assembly on Tuesday.

The Akali Dal said the Bills have thrown the farmers of the State "completely back at [Prime Minister Narendra] Modi's mercy". AAP termed them parallel to the three Central agriculture legislations, which were not enough to safeguard the interests of the farmers.

Capt. Amarinder accused both AAP and Akali Dal of adopting "double standards" on the Bills.

AMARINDER HITS BACK ▶ PAGE 4

## Waqf board members not paid since Feb.

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Members of the Delhi Waqf Board have written to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal over non-payment of salaries for the last nine months. They said they will protest if not paid soon.

In a letter dated October 20, the members stated that they haven't received their salaries since February "due to the sudden removal of the then Chairman of Delhi Waqf Board on 20.03.2020 and further because of the lockdown".

The members said they made representations to the authorities concerned but haven't received a response yet. "We got only verbal assurance that everything will be fine after selection of chairperson, but unfortunately the board is continuously facing hurdles in the appointment," the letter stated.

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31/10/2020	MTS-ESS-01	Essay
01/11/2020	MTS-GS1-02	Indian Heritage and Culture, History of India and the World and Indian Society
08/11/2020	MTS-GS2-03	The Constitution and Polity of India
15/11/2020	MTS-GS3-04	Indian Economy and Development and Disaster Management
22/11/2020	MTS-GS4-05	Ethics and Human Interface and Related Case Studies
28/11/2020	MTS-ESS-06	Essay
29/11/2020	MTS-GS1-07	Geography of India and the World
06/12/2020	MTS-GS2-08	International Relations, Social Justice and Governance
13/12/2020	MTS-GS3-09	Science and Technology, Environment and Internal Security
20/12/2020	MTS-GS4-10	Ethics in Public Administration and Related Case Studies
25/12/2020	MTS-ESS-11	Essay
26/12/2020	MTS-GS1-12	Indian Heritage and Culture, History and Geography of India and the World and Indian Society
27/12/2020	MTS-GS2-13	Indian Constitution and Polity, Governance, Social Justice and International Relations
	MTS-GS3-14	Indian Economy and Development, Science and Technology, Environment, Disaster Management
	MTS-GS4-15	Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude

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## IN BRIEF

Sisters drown in Agra  
Canal near Kalindi Kunj

Two sisters drowned in Agra Canal in south-east Delhi's Kalindi Kunj area, the police said on Wednesday. They said that a PCR call was received around 2 p.m. regarding the incident. When police reached the spot, they were informed that Anjali (15) and Nandini (8), residents of Sarita Vihar Priyanka Camp, were playing near the canal and went close to the water to pick up plastic bottles and other articles but drowned because of deep water.

## 'Nearly 3.5 lakh corporation schoolchildren yet to get books'

## STAFF REPORTER

The Aam Aadmi Party on Wednesday said that the BJP-ruled municipal corporations have not given books to 3.5 lakh children of 700 schools.

"BJP leaders are getting richer while the BJP-ruled municipal schools and hospitals are getting worse day by day. How will students study without books," AAP leader Durgesh Pathak said during a press conference.

The party also appealed to the BJP State president Adesh Gupta to not engage in politics over students' education.

"I appeal to Mr. Gupta to not play with the lives of the students. You have a budget of ₹20 crore and yet unable to provide books to your schools," the AAP leader said.

## Plea for witness statement in ex-CS case gets HC nod

Trial court asked to consider statement of former adviser

**SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH**  
NEW DELHI

In a major boost to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and other AAP leaders in the former Chief Secretary Anshu Prakash alleged assault case, the Delhi High Court on Wednesday directed a trial court here to also consider the statement of a former adviser to the Chief Minister who was present at the 2018 meeting pertaining to the case.

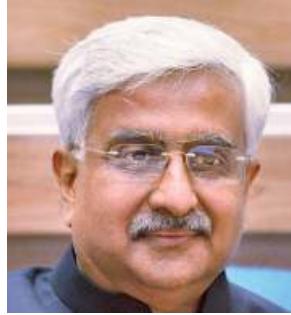
Justice Suresh Kumar Kait directed the trial court here, which is seized of the case, to consider the statement of V.K. Jain at the time of passing the order.

The High Court's order came with a stern message to the police that it was their duty "to do free and fair investigation by bringing to the notice of the court all the evidences collected during the investigation without picking and choosing the one which does not support them".

"The accused has been provided with a definite right under the provisions of CrPC (Code of Criminal Procedure) and the constitutional mandate to face the charge against him by a fair investigation and trial," the HC said.

## Withholding statement

Mr. Kejriwal and his Deputy Manish Sisodia, represented by senior advocates N. Hariharan and Dayan Krishnan, had alleged the prosecution of withholding the statement of witness Mr. Jain recorded on February 21, 2018, because it did not suit the pro-



(Left) Former Delhi Chief Secretary Anshu Prakash; Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal



**C** The investigating agency has no power to appreciate the evidence, it rests with the court

**JUSTICE SURESH KUMAR KAIT**  
Delhi High Court judge

secution case and helped in falsely implicating him, his Deputy Manish Sisodia and other AAP leaders including Prakash Jarwal and Amanullah Khan.

Mr. Jain, in the 2018 statement, which was reproduced in the judgment, stated that on the night of February 19, there was a meeting that took place between the AAP leaders and Mr. Prakash on the issue of 'Door Step Delivery of Ration', 'Advertisement Funds Release' and slow processing of files.

During the meeting, Mr. Jain stated that he went to the washroom and upon returning saw former Chief Secretary Prakash leaving. Mr. Jain stated that he could not say anything about what transpired while he was in the washroom.

The trial court had in its order, which was contested by the AAP leaders, noted that since it was a record of oral examination of Mr. Jain by the Investigating Officer (IO) and was noted in the 'Case Diary', the said examination did not take the place of a statement made under Section 161 CrPC (Examination of witnesses by police). It had declined to supply this "crucial document" to the AAP leaders.

Justice Kait, however, observed that if a situation arose wherein an accused sought documents which supported his case and do not support the prosecution and the IO ignored these documents and forwarded only those documents which favoured the prosecution, in such a scenario, it would be the duty of the IO to make such documents available to the accused.

"The investigating agency has no power to appreciate the evidence, it rests with the court," Justice Kait remarked.

## GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Directorate of State Motor Garages J&K Bemina Bye Pass Road Srinagar/ New Plots Jammu

Ph. No. 0191-2546697 (J) Fax: 0191-2565105 (J) Ph.No. 0194-2493309 (S) Fax: 0194-2490473 (S)

Website: [ksmgs.gov.in](http://ksmgs.gov.in), E-mail: [dirsmg@gmail.com](mailto:dirsmg@gmail.com)

NIT NO: 18 DSMG OF 2020, DATED: 13:10:2020

For end on behalf of the Lt. Governor of J&K Union Territory e-tender are invited from the manufacturer/Authorized Dealers/ Registered Firms & Distributors for supply of "Hard coke Iron stone with Iron Pipes and Hard coke/Rejection wood" as per detail mentioned in Bill of Quantity (BOQ).

1. Last date of submission of bid 09.11.2020 at (1700 hours)

2. Date for opening of technical bid (Online) 10.11.2020 at (1100 hours)

3. Date of opening of financial bid (Offline) 11.11.2020

The original copy of e-NIT and other documents can be downloaded from the official website [www.jksmgs.gov.in](http://www.jksmgs.gov.in) and www.tenders.gov.in. The tenderer shall have to upload scan copy of below mentioned technical documents including CDR/FDR in the portal of tenders.gov.in. The below mentioned original tender documents shall be obtained only from the bidder who declared as L1 after opening of financial bid of "Hard coke Iron stone with Iron Pipes and Hard coke/Rejection wood"

**Technical Documents:**

a) CDR/FDR for an amount of Rs.20000.00 pledged to Accounts Officer, State Motor Garages Department, J&K Government.

b) Tax Clearance Certificate from Income Tax Department for last 8 assessment quarters.

c) An undertaking to the effect that the rates offered if approved by the State Level Purchase Committee shall remain in force for one year from the date of issuance of 1st supply order in the first instance.

d) Copy of certificate if registered as Start-up (SSI unit holders) & CDR/FDR as required under rules.

e) GST Certificate & TIN number.

f) Pan Card

Financial Bid

The "Financial Bid" is required to be uploaded on line as per the Bill of Quantities (BOQ) of e-NIT.

Other Terms & Conditions of Tender:

1) In case of any breach of the agreement at any time on the part of the tenderer, the agreement shall be terminated summarily by the Department and a penalty of 2% of the total cost of ordered item (s) shall be imposed on the supplier and CDR/FDR shall be forfeited.

2) Disputes if any, shall be settled by the Courts within the jurisdiction of J&K Union Territory (Srinagar/Jammu).

3) No tender will be considered unless and until all the documents are properly signed.

4) During the period of contract if the price of the ordered item decreases during the period of delivery the decreased price shall be considered as final.

5) Delivery of item (s) is further subject to the inspection by the inspecting authority nominated by the Director, State Motor Garages Department, J&K Government whose decision regarding the delivery shall be final and binding to consignees/indenting authority.

6) Financial bid of only those tenderers shall be opened who will qualify the technical bid.

7) The Department shall procure item (s) in minimum quantity as per requirement on daily basis or as and when needs arise and the supplier shall procure the stock available and make supplies at the time of receipt of supply order without delay failing which the Department shall procure the item from L2 bidder on the risk and responsibility of the successful bidder and the difference of amount whatsoever shall be deducted from the pending bills of the successful bidder.

8) Guarantee/Warranty period of item (s) wherever applicable be specified and for such item, in case of detection of any defect during the said period the items shall have to be replaced free of cost by the successful bidder.

9) Rates shall be quoted FOR DESTINATION i.e., Jammu/Srinagar and should be inclusive of all taxes.

10) no interest shall be paid on CDR/FDR and the FDR/CDR of the successful tenderer shall be converted into security deposit and those of unsuccessful tenderer the same shall be returned immediately after completion of the tendering process.

11) Any postal delay shall not be responsibility of the department.

12) No terms and conditions of the tenderer shall be entertained by the Department.

13) The Chairman State Level Purchase Committee can stop the process at any time and can exercise options whatsoever, in the interest of the administration of the State Motor Garages Department.

14) Chairman, State Level Purchase Committee reserves the right to accept or reject any tender at any time without assigning any reason thereof.

15) The successful tenderer has to sign the contract on terms and conditions of this notice,

16) Successful Supplier should have available stocks both at Jammu and Kashmir Divisions to meet out the requirement of "Hard coke Iron stone with Iron Pipes and Hard coke/Rejection wood" at any time of emergency.

17) Payments shall be made after receipt of verified bills of the ordered items from the consignee.

18) In case of any dispute, decision of Administrative Department (Tpt) shall be final

19) Disputes if any, shall be settled by the Courts within the jurisdiction of J&K UT (Srinagar/Jammu).

DIPK-7671/20

State Motor Garages Department, J&K,Srinagar

**Government of Jharkhand**

**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,  
ANIMAL HUSBANDRY & CO-OPERATIVE**

**(ANIMAL HUSBANDRY DIVISION) Jharkhand, Ranchi**

**NOTICE INVITING e-TENDER FOR SUPPLY OF VETERINARY MEDICINES, and OTHERS**

**e-Tender No. 01/2020-21**

Online e-tenders are invited from sole manufacturers/loan licensees having minimum 3 years' experience in manufacturing and marketing for supply of veterinary medicines and others for Veterinary Dispensaries, Veterinary Hospitals, Pet-Clinics, Mobile Polyclinics, Referral Veterinary Hospitals, Animal/Poultry Farms and others institutions situated at different Districts of Jharkhand under Two Bid System (Technical- 1 & Financial- 2)

1. After publication of the N.I.T., the desirous bidders may download tender documents along with terms & conditions from the Website, <https://www.jharkhandtenders.gov.in> and <https://www.jharkhandtenders.gov.in> with submit only through NIC e-tender portal <https://www.jharkhandtenders.gov.in> with the help of Digital Signature Certificate (DSC).

2. Disclosure of rate other than financial bid will disqualify the bidder.

3. Estimated Contract Value- Rs 6 Cr. or less if any due payment of previous year's rate contract exist as liability.

4. Validity Period – One Year from the date of agreement.

5. Each tenderer will have to deposit Tender fee in form of DD of Rs 10,000/- (Ten Thousand) and Earnest Money Rs.2,00,000/- (Rupees Two Lakhs) in form of Bank Guarantee(BG), of any nationalized Bank in favour of Director Animal Husbandry, Jharkhand payable at Ranchi. Fees are being relaxed for MSEs of Jharkhand, however proper documents regarding relaxation should be attached.

6. The under mentioned schedule is fixed; however, the undersigned reserves the right to change the date of activities in case of any exigencies through a notice in the government website viz & Notice Board at official address Director, Animal Husbandry, Pashupati Bhawan, Hesat, Hatia Ranchi Pin- 834003.

**Important Events**

1	Floating of Tender	21.10.2020
2	Download of tender document will start from	22.10.2020
3	Online submission of bid will start from	26.10.2020
4	Last date for receiving EMD & Tender fee (in original Tender fee in form of D.D. & EMD as BG in Animal Husbandry directorate Office, by hand)	23.11.2020
5	Last date of online bid submission	24.11.2020
6	Date of Opening of Technical bid-	26.11.2020
7	Date of Opening of Financial bid-	Declared later

Sd/-  
Director Animal Husbandry  
Jharkhand Ranchi

PR 234725 (Animal Husbandry)20-21\*D

## Plea for witness statement in ex-CS case gets HC nod

Trial court asked to consider statement of former adviser

**SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH**  
NEW DELHI

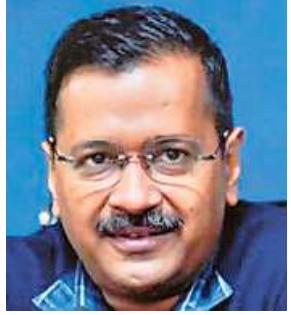
In a major boost to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and other AAP leaders in the former Chief Secretary Anshu Prakash alleged assault case, the Delhi High Court on Wednesday directed a trial court here to also consider the statement of a former adviser to the Chief Minister who was present at the 2018 meeting pertaining to the case.

Justice Suresh Kumar Kait directed the trial court here, which is seized of the case, to consider the statement of V.K. Jain at the time of passing the order.

The High Court's order came with a stern message to the police that it was their duty "to do free and fair investigation by bringing to the notice of the court all the evidences collected during the investigation without picking and choosing the one which does not support them".

"The accused has been provided with a definite right under the provisions of CrPC (Code of Criminal Procedure) and the constitutional mandate to face the charge against him by a fair investigation and trial," the HC said.

Mr. Kejriwal and his Deputy Manish Sisodia, represented by senior advocates N. Hariharan and Dayan Krishnan, had alleged the prosecution of withholding the statement of witness Mr. Jain recorded on February 21, 2018, because it did not suit the pro-



(Left) Former Delhi Chief Secretary Anshu Prakash; Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal



**C** The investigating agency has no power to appreciate the evidence, it rests with the court

**JUSTICE SURESH KUMAR KAIT**  
Delhi High Court judge

secution case and helped in falsely implicating him, his Deputy Manish Sisodia and other AAP leaders including Prakash Jarwal and Amanullah Khan.

Mr. Jain, in the 2018 statement, which was reproduced in the judgment, stated that on the night of February 19, there was a meeting that took place between the AAP leaders and Mr. Prakash on the issue of 'Door Step Delivery of Ration', 'Advertisement Funds Release' and slow processing of files.

During the meeting, Mr. Jain stated that he went to the washroom and upon returning saw former Chief Secretary Prakash leaving. Mr. Jain stated that he could not say anything about what transpired while he was in the washroom.

The trial court had in its order, which was contested by the AAP leaders, noted that since it was a record of oral examination of Mr. Jain by the Investigating Officer (IO) and was noted in the 'Case Diary', the said examination did not take the place of a statement made under Section 161 CrPC (Examination of witnesses by police). It had declined to supply this "crucial document" to the AAP leaders.

Justice Kait, however, observed that if a situation arose wherein an accused sought documents which supported his case and do not support the prosecution and the IO ignored these documents and forwarded only those documents which favoured the prosecution, in such a scenario, it would be the duty of the IO to make such documents available to the accused.

"Any obstruction in the discharge of constitutional

## HC raps govt. for 'starving' district courts

Funds for basic facilities, required to run the courts efficiently, yet to be released

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

**Timings**

**DELHI**

THURSDAY, OCT. 22	RISE 06:27 SET 17:45
	RISE 12:16 SET 22:43
FRIDAY, OCT. 23	
	RISE 06:27 SET 17:44
	RISE 13:10 SET 23:43
SATURDAY, OCT. 24	
	RISE 06:28 SET 17:43
	RISE 13:56 SET 00:00

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	35	14
Safdarjung	35	14
Palam	35	17

**Delhi Pilm Today**  
**34°C** A pleasant morning with thick smoke haze and warm day likely. Sky would remain mainly sunny.

**Delhi Pilm Tomorrow**  
**34°C** Dry and warm weather with light winds and mainly clear sky.

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Air Quality of Delhi-NCR		
Delhi	256	Gurugram 263
Ghaziabad	254	Faridabad 263
Noida	264	Greater Noida 284
Good 0-50	Satisfactory 51-100	Moderate 101-200
Poor 201-300	Very Poor 301-400	Severe >400
Air Quality Index at 4 p.m., yesterday (Average of past 24 hours)   Source: CPCB		

**Delhi reports 3,686 new COVID-19 cases in 24 hours**

National capital's tally reaches 3,40,436

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

As many as 3,686 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi in the past 24 hours, taking the total number of cases to 34,0436, according to a Delhi government health bulletin released on Wednesday.

Also, 47 more deaths have been reported, taking the total number of deaths to 6,128. Of the total cases, 3,10,191 people have recovered and there are 24,117 active cases.

The positivity rate is 6.2%. There are a total of 2,724 containment zones.

Meanwhile, Health Minister Satyendar Jain said that plasma therapy saved his life after he had tested positive for COVID-19.

"ICMR-AIIMS study has not got much breakthrough. We have been doing [plasma therapy] trials and the Delhi government has gone way ahead in it. Over 2,000 people have been benefited after receiving plasma," Mr. Jain told reporters here.

## Woman 'escapes' after testing positive for virus

Husband knows her whereabouts: police

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

A 20-year-old woman, who tested positive for COVID-19 at AIIMS here, allegedly escaped from the hospital, the police said on Wednesday. Her husband filed a missing person complaint despite knowing her whereabouts to mislead the police, said a senior police officer.

The police said that the woman got herself tested on Sunday and was found COVID-19-positive. The hospital staff asked her to get admitted at the dedicated COVID-19 centre, but she escaped.

Probe revealed that the woman had managed to reach her rented house in Zamrudpur village in south Delhi and then left for her maternal house. "Her relatives, however, claimed that she had not reached her maternal house," he said. A case has been filed. "The matter is being investigated and efforts are on to trace the couple," DCP (South) Atul Kumar Thakur said.



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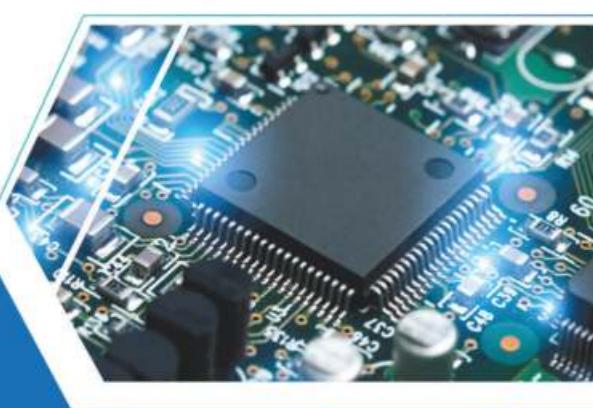
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## Opposition parties call for repeal of UAPA

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BHUBANESWAR / MUMBAI

Major Opposition parties have joined forces to demand the repeal of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), charges related to which were slapped against activists in the Bhima Koregaon case.

Condemning the arrest of Stan Swamy, an 83-year-old tribal rights activist, leaders of the Congress, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Communist Party of India, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the Nationalist Congress Party emphasised the need for building a strong movement against the misuse of harsh laws like the UAPA.

**'Illegal arrests'**

The People's Union for Civil Liberties organised a press conference on Wednesday to condemn the role of investigating agencies in carrying out "illegal" arrests and to demand the release of all 16 activists arrested in the case. PUCL general secretary V. Suresh quoted data presented by the Home Ministry before the Parliament, and said, "There has been a steady increase in the number of those arrested

under the UAPA – from 999 in 2016 to 1,054 in 2017 to 1,031 in 2018."

"The NDA government at the Centre is trying to gag people who raise voice against atrocities against Dalits, tribals and weaker sections," said Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren.

Speaking over a virtual media platform, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said, "I would appeal to all political parties and civil society organisations not to see this as an isolated single law issue. We have UAPA, National Security Act and sedition laws.... This UAPA must go."

DMK leader Kanimozi said political parties and civil society organisations must decide if the present arrests should be accepted silently or they should all stand up and fight against it.

CPI secretary D. Raja said his party had been opposing the arrest of all Opposition leaders, intellectuals, students and activists.

Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor urged the government to release Fr. Swamy immediately. NCP MP Supriya Sule said the arrests in the Bhima Koregaon case seemed to be about "dirty political vendetta".

## CM hits back after Oppn. 'U-turn' on Punjab Bills

He questions their dual stance inside and outside Assembly

VIKAS VASUDEVA  
CHANDIGARH

A day after the Punjab Assembly "unanimously" passed three amendment Bills to negate the Central farm laws, Opposition criticism prompted Chief Minister Amarinder Singh to express "amazement" at their "double standards". He said they [Shiromani Akali Dal and Aam Aadmi Party] spoke in favour of the Bills in the Assembly, and even went with him to meet the Punjab Governor, but said different things outside.

"It is more than clear that these parties are not interested in securing the future of the farmers or protecting the State's agriculture and economy," said Capt. Amarinder.

He said the SAD and AAP were playing to the gallery by pretending to back the Bills in the Assembly on Tuesday. "Their lack of sincerity towards the farmers' cause has been totally exposed by their statements thereafter. If they thought we were fooling the people of Punjab, why did they not say so in the House? Why did



CM Amarinder Singh

they support and vote for our Bills?" said the Chief Minister.

Reacting to Arvind Kejriwal's tweet raising doubts about the effectiveness of the amendment Bills, Capt.

Amarinder said it smacked of total ignorance on the part of the Delhi Chief Minister. He said instead of questioning his government's Bills, it would be better for Mr. Kejriwal to "get out of the IT mindset" and ask AAP's Punjab unit to back the State government in its fight for the rights of the farmers, unless their support to Bills was just a facade.

"The ball is in your court – are you with farmers or against them," he asked the Delhi Chief Minister, challenging him to come out

with a categorical stand on the issue of the Punjab amendment Bills.

SAD leader and former Minister Bikram Singh Majithia said that the Bills, and the manner in which they had been brought and passed on Tuesday, were "clearly an orchestrated and foxy move by the [Prime Minister Narendra] Modi-Capital duo to completely destroy the farmers' cause by throwing the responsibility for purchase of crops up in the air between the State and the Centre".

**Farmers betrayed'**

Mr. Majithia said that the Assembly session had been convened with only two objectives and on both, the farmers had been stabbed in the back.

AP Punjab president Bhagwant Mann said the State government Bills were not enough to safeguard the interests of farmers and the only way forward was that it should enact its own law guaranteeing the purchase of all crops, including wheat and paddy, at minimum support price.

## Din over alleged scam

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

The special session of the Punjab Assembly on Wednesday witnessed unruly scenes as MLAs of Opposition parties staged a protest against allegations of scam in the post-Matriculation SC (Scheduled Caste) scholarships.

Shiromani Akali Dal MLA Pawan Kumar Tinu, Leader of Opposition Harpal Cheema of the Aam Aadmi Party and Simarjeet Singh Bains, MLA of the Lok Insaaf Party, raised the issue of an alleged scam in the SC scholarships, demanding the dismissal of Minister Sadhu Singh Dharamsot.

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## Swaraj India report highlights deficiencies in crop procurement

It offers 17 suggestions to Haryana govt. for improvement

ASHOK KUMAR  
GURUGRAM

Swaraj India chief Yogendra Yadav presenting the report to Haryana Minister Jai Prakash Dalal. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ing, if imposed, should be the upper end of statistical range.

The report said the online registration at "Meri Fasal Mera Byora" had increased, but in backward areas like Mewat, many farmers were still not aware about the requirement of registration and thus lost out on this opportunity for a fair price for their produce.

The report pointed out that only 5-11% of the total registered farmers in four districts – Bhiwani, Mahendragarh, Charkhi Dadri and Rewari – had managed to sell their crops in the first two weeks of the six-week procurement session. The slow procurement process forced the farmers to sell their crop to private traders at a price much lesser than Minimum Support Price and the commission agents were also forced to work much below their capacity.

Referring to the inconvenience faced by the farmers due to the new software and alleged wrong policies of the government, Mr. Yadav attracted the attention of the minister to the fact that none of farmers was paid for the crops procured so far. He said that Swaraj India would be forced to launch an agitation if the government failed to address the farmers' grievances.

**'No payment'**

Based on the Swaraj Abhiyan team's visit to a dozen mandis across six districts in South Haryana, the report claimed that notwithstanding the government's claim to make payment within 72 hours, they "did not come across any farmer or trader who supported this claim", adding that "the impression we gathered is that yet no farmer has received the payment in their account. This is putting farmers to great dis-

trust in this festival and wedding season. This delay acts as severe disincentive for the farmers and pushes them towards the private traders at severe losses".

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The report argued that the eight quintal and 33 quintal per acre limit on procurement of bajra and paddy respectively was irrational and punished the farmers for producing more. It said the limit fixed using the arithmetic average of the production in the State defied logic and the ceiling

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**Forecast for Thursday:** Heavy/very heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Odisha, Rayalseema, coastal Karnataka and Kerala. Thunderstorm with lightning likely at isolated places over Jharkhand, Konkan & Goa, Yanam, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Karaikal

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...32.5	26.3	21.6	Kozhikode	32.7...	32.2...	24.6
Ahmedabad	...36.3	26.9	21.2	Kurnool	3.7...	30.5...	24.2
Aizawl	...28.9	17.4	12.2	Lucknow	...34.3...	21.2	12.2
Allahabad	...35.0	23.0	18.2	Madurai	43.4...	35.9...	24.3
Bengaluru	67	26.4	20.4	Mangalore	37...	28.7...	22.4
Bhopal	...32.5	21.7	16.2	Mumbai	33.3...	26.4	21.6
Bhubaneswar	10.6	31.2	24.7	Mysuru	...29.7...	21.6	16.2
Chandigarh	...33.9	17.2	12.2	Patna	...35.5...	14.3	12.2
Chennai	6.3	31.5	25.3	Pond Blair	3.3...	30.9...	25.3
Coimbatore	3.9	31.7	22.8	Puducherry	...33.6...	25.8	22.8
Dehradoon	...31.9	15.8	10.2	Pune	48.4...	32.4...	20.3
Gangtok	21.6	14.1	8.2	Raipur	...33.6...	24.0	8.2
Goa	5.5	30.0	24.1	Ranchi	...32.6...	24.0	8.2
Guwahati	...34.5	23.8	18.2	Shillong	...22.7...	16.3	12.2
Hubballi	...26.0	22.0	16.2	Shimla	...24.3...	13.9	12.2
Hyderabad	13.3	29.9	22.0	Srinagar	...24.3...	4.0	4.0
Imphal	1.6	29.2	19.6	Thiruvananthapuram	9.7...	32.0...	23.6
Jaipur	...33.8	21.0	15.8	Tiruchi	...34.4...	25.4	25.4
Kochi	4.4	30.0	24.2	Vijayawada	5.8...	32.4...	25.9
Kohima	1.2	24.2	16.8	Visakhapatnam	...31.2...	27.4	27.4
Kolkata	...33.2	26.8	21.6				

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

**Pollutants in the air you are breathing**

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>x</sub>	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	26	33	66	123	127	...
Bengaluru	3	13	33	135	—	...
Chennai	25	12	57	64	—	...
Delhi	18	111	48	263	350	...
Hyderabad	38	34	16	101	85	...
Kolkata	.9	14	—	45	62	...
Lucknow	12	82	.71	311	294	...
Mumbai	.2	21	153	79	99	...
Pune	—	—	.52	—	—	...
Visakhapatnam	.8	42	.29	.69	.92	...

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

**SO<sub>2</sub>:** Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

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

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

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

# Will announce relief package soon, Uddhav tells farmers

MVA govt. committed to restoring livelihoods hit hard by retreating monsoon: CM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
PUNE

The Maha Vikas Aghadi government was committed to restore the livelihoods of farmers hit hard by the retreating monsoon, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said on Wednesday. He said his government would soon announce a relief package.

Speaking after touring rain-hit Osmanabad in Maharashtra, Mr. Thackeray said he had not come there to announce any random figure merely for the sake of garnering applause. He said the State Cabinet would be meeting in a day or two to decide on the modalities of the relief that would be given to the affected people.

## 90% spot inspections done

"The situation is terrible. Crops and livelihoods have been destroyed... I am aware that you all have come here with a lot of expectations from me about when and how much will be the pack-



**Floral tribute:** Uddhav Thackeray pays homage to martyrs on National Police Commemoration Day, at Naigaon. ■PTI

age that is announced. But I cannot announce anything that I will not fulfil. Today, I have come to reassure everybody that the government is with you... the spot inspections are nearly 80-90% over and we have received an esti-

ment officials had informed him that the threat of heavy rainfall had now waned, with only the possibility of lightning over the next seven to eight days.

He said, "This year has been a catalogue of calamities – first COVID-19, then floods in Vidarbha and now heavy rains in other parts of the State... I am here to review the losses and to assure you that the government is with you. The soil has eroded in a number of places owing to heavy rains... help will be given as soon as possible."

## Opposition pressure

Mr. Thackeray has been under pressure from the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party and Leader of the Opposition Devendra Fadnavis, who has been relentlessly targeting the Chief Minister and the State leadership demanding to know why the government has not yet announced a relief package for the rain-hit farmers.

## Gutkha racket: main accused arrested

RAINA ASSAINAR  
NAVI MUMBAI

The Anti Narcotics Cell of the Navi Mumbai police have arrested Pramod Das alias Kalu (35), the main accused in a gutkha racket, from the Mumbai airport as he was trying to flee to Bhubaneshwar.

"Kalu ordered the stock from Gujarat and supplied it in Mumbai," senior police inspector Ravindra Budhwant said.

On October 9, four people were arrested with gutkha worth ₹35.53 lakh from Rabale MIDC. The next day, Mumtaz Ahmad Nafis Ahmad Shah (33) was arrested and gutkha worth ₹5.3 lakh was seized. On October 13, Lakshminarayana Budhan Jha (35) was arrested and gutkha worth ₹4.2 lakh was seized.

The police traced Kalu when he switched on his mobile to access his ticket at the airport on October 17 and nabbed him.

## File cases against leaders for violating COVID-19 norms'

M.P. HC says functionaries taking no steps to avoid gatherings

SIDHARTH YADAV  
BHOPAL

The Gwalior Bench of the Madhya Pradesh High Court has directed Datta and Gwalior district administrations to register cases against former Chief Minister Kamal Nath and Union Minister Narendra Singh Tomar for the alleged breach of COVID-19 protocol during election campaigns.

While issuing the direction on Tuesday, Justices Sheel Nagar and Rajeev Kumar Shrivastava restrained District Magistrates of nine districts under the jurisdiction of the Bench from permitting any political party/candidate to organise physical congregations unless they satisfied the DM that virtual campaigns were not possible.

The decision of the DM permitting any political party to conduct physical con-

## EC notice to Kamal Nath

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission issued a notice to former M.P. CM Kamal Nath on Wednesday for calling BJP candidate and Minister Imarti Devi an "item."

Acting on a complaint by the State BJP and the NCW, the EC said it had gone through the video clip of the speech and found it to be in violation of the provisions of the model code of conduct. The EC gave Mr. Nath 48 hours to give his explanation.

gregation should become effective only after the EC approved it in writing, the court said, while hearing a petition filed by Gwalior

based lawyer Ashish Pratap Singh.

Even if the permission was granted, the Justices added, congregations could be organised only after the political party/candidate concerned "deposits money with the DM sufficient to purchase double the number of masks and sanitiser required for protecting and sanitising the persons expected."

Candidates are also required to file an undertaking that they would be personally liable to distribute masks and sanitiser to members of a congregation before it started. Instances pointed out in the last 15 days gave "a clear indication" that functionaries, members of political parties or the person at the helm were taking no steps to avoid physical congregation, the court noted.

**Khadse's exit exposes discontent over BJP sidelining OBC leaders**

12 BJP MLAs likely to switch sides: NCP

STAFF REPORTER  
MUMBAI

Senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Eknath Khadse's decision to quit the party, which he served for 40 years, has brought to the fore the discontent within the State unit over the sidelining of leaders from the OBC community, a core voter base of the party.

Mr. Khadse was a product of the BJP's social engineering programme in the 70s and 80s to attract OBC voters, with its Madhav (Mali, Dhangan and Vanjari) formula. Mr. Khadse has categorically put the blame on the Leader of Opposition, Devendra Fadnavis, and clarified that he has no ill feelings against the party and its leadership.

In the 2019 Assembly polls, Mr. Khadse and Chandrashekhar Bawankule, another OBC leader from Vidarbha and former power minister, were denied party tickets. Mr. Khadse's daughter was then given the ticket that she has gone to such an extent that she has also blamed Jamaatis for spreading Corona virus etc. thereby trying to create hatred and communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims deliberately as she is well aware that she is a well known actress and has a big fan base so her tweets will be seen and will reach out to many people."

He urged the court to give a direction to the police to register an FIR against the duo for "promoting enmity between groups on grounds of religion" through their tweets.

This direction came after Munawarali alias Sahil Ahlsrafai Sayed, a film casting director, filed an application before the court.

The application said, "Her [Ms. Ranaut's] tweets are creating divisions between Hindu Artists and Muslim Artists. I say that she is maliciously bringing religion in almost all her tweets for example lynching of Hindu Sadhus at Palghar, calling the BMC as 'BABUR SENA'. I say

at the last moment.

There was also speculation that Pankaja Munde, daughter of the late Gopinath Munde, would switch parties as she was unhappy with the functioning of Mr. Fadnavis, the then CM.

With Mr. Khadse joining the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), the party hopes to regroup its lost strength in north Maharashtra and gain the support of the Leva-Patil community. NCP State president Jayant Patil has said another 12 BJP MLAs are in touch with the party and are likely to switch sides soon.

Reacting to the development, Mr. Fadnavis said Mr. Khadse was dealing in half-truths. He said, "I have nothing to comment as he wants to make a villain out of someone. The BJP is a big party and it won't stop if one person leaves it. Jalgao is a stronghold of the BJP and its people are with the party." He added that no MLAs would leave the party.

## Mumbai police issue notices to Kangana Ranaut, sister

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

The Mumbai Police on Wednesday issued notices to actor Kangana Ranaut and her sister Rangoli Chandel to be present at the Bandra Police Station on October 26 and 27. Deputy Commissioner of Police Abhishek Trimukhe confirmed this to *The Hindu* and said, "They have been issued notices after the direction from the court."

On October 17, the Bandra magistrate court ordered a FIR to be registered against the duo for "promoting enmity between groups on grounds of religion" through their tweets.

This direction came after Munawarali alias Sahil Ahlsrafai Sayed, a film casting director, filed an application before the court.

The application said, "Her [Ms. Ranaut's] tweets are creating divisions between Hindu Artists and Muslim Artists. I say that she is maliciously bringing religion in almost all her tweets for example lynching of Hindu Sadhus at Palghar, calling the BMC as 'BABUR SENA'. I say

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## A crucial season

Public health messaging must convince people that festivals can be celebrated safely

Faced with a potential reversal of gains that India has made in slowing the spread of COVID-19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has appealed against weakening the fight during the annual season of festivals. Over the past six months, numerous individual events have enabled the infection to explode and spread. These have ranged from the opening of wholesale markets and political gatherings to big funerals; many were infected when places of worship were allowed to be thronged. Mr. Modi's appeal, which comes during the Navratri celebrations, and ahead of Dussehra, Deepavali and other festivals, is to be welcomed, although the opportunity to caution the public was not grasped early enough. Also, in spite of the call to "mask up" on October 8, as part of a communication campaign he launched, its visibility has remained low. Moreover, virus estimations remain a mosaic of data, without a standardised system for testing, tracing and isolation across States. Only broad-brush statistics are available, even as the economy has reopened. The Union Health Ministry's data point to a rising trend in daily cases in Bihar, Delhi, Maharashtra, Manipur, and West Bengal, while Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, with their high levels of incidence earlier, have started showing a decline in test positivity rates, a more reliable metric than absolute cases. Kerala has experienced a wave blamed on lax behaviour during Onam.

Health messaging on the dangers of another wave of infections can be effective if it is not drowned by repeated emphasis of massive recoveries. States, anxious to present a picture of near-normality to boost economic activity, highlight recoveries over risk, and people are lowering their guard. Mr. Modi has suggested that the fight must not weaken until there is a vaccine, and experts and WHO want countries to learn to live with an endemic virus. In India, the reality is that even as of October 21, the official death toll in a day stood at 717, a not so inconsequential number, and there were 7.4 lakh active cases. The emphasis, therefore, has to be on preparing for the new normal, adopting acknowledged defences such as masking, distancing norms and hand hygiene. In parallel, the Centre should launch policy reform to transform a predominantly commercialised health system into one providing universal coverage. COVID-19 has meant double jeopardy – a loss of income on the one hand and a steep rise in health insurance premiums on the other, after insurers were asked to provide cover for more conditions. Under such circumstances, the cheapest protection against disease and financial loss is prevention, now and into the future. The Centre says it has a communication strategy centred around the theme of safety until March next year. Its efficacy will be tested immediately, by the festival season.

## Return of the socialists

Following his win in Bolivia, Arce should learn from the successes and mistakes of Morales Preliminary results of Sunday's Presidential election in Bolivia point to an emphatic victory for the former President Evo Morales's Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party almost a year after he was ousted by protesters and the military. While the official results will not be announced for days, exit polls and independent counts give his hand-picked candidate, Luis Arce 53% of the popular vote against his main rival Carlos Mesa's 29.5%. Mr. Mesa, who was President between 2003 and 2005, has conceded the election. This is as much a victory for Mr. Morales, Bolivia's first indigenous leader, as it is for Mr. Arce. Mr. Morales left the country, first for Mexico and then for Argentina, after the Generals asked him to stand down in November 2019. Since then, Jeanine Añez, a right-wing conservative Senator, has been the acting President, rolling back many of Mr. Morales's policies and going after his supporters. But MAS mobilised its supporters and fought back. Mr. Arce promised voters that if elected, he would carry forward the pro-poor socialist legacy of Mr. Morales, while MAS portrayed Mr. Mesa as a representative of the pre-Morales elites, whose rapid privatisation and pro-market policies had triggered frequent mass protests. The results demonstrate that the voters chose the equity-oriented socialist stability, which MAS offered, over the free-market conservatism of its rivals.

The new leader could learn from the achievements and mistakes of Mr. Morales, credited with turning around South America's poorest country economically. Under his government, Bolivia saw a drop in extreme poverty, from 33% of the population in 2006 to 15% in 2018. He also stepped up public investments, opened more schools and health clinics, built roads and nationalised the oil and gas industry, all while ensuring that the economy continued to expand. These policies helped MAS build a strong connect with the poor, a base which continued to back the party despite last year's political turbulence. At the same time, his push to stay in power beyond the term limits set by the Constitution helped the Opposition organise itself. He got the ban lifted by a constitutional court after his bid failed in a referendum. This raised questions about the legitimacy of his candidacy in the October 2019 election, which he won but was accused of fraud, leading to protests and his ouster. Mr. Arce's biggest challenge would be to continue Mr. Morales's welfare policies, while keeping the battered economy on track. Moreover, the anti-Socialist and mostly white opposition is now more powerful, after ousting Mr. Morales and having run the interim government for a year with the U.S.'s support. Mr. Arce can keep the galvanised opposition at bay only by continuing MAS's socio-economic "revolution" to expand its support base in a divided country.

# Potholes on the digital payment superhighway

The National Payments Corporation of India must be supported and there has to be a rational structure of pricing



R.B. BARMAN

Digital payments have found strong ground, especially in India, increasingly relegating all other modes of payments to the background. It is through a faster system of simultaneous debits and credits that the money value is transferred from one account to the other across banks. It embraces all kinds of operators (including direct benefit transfer by the government) across the country and even internationally, subject to regulatory forbearance. With such versatility and ease of settling financial transactions, the growth of digital payments is going to be phenomenal, supported by banks and Fin-Tech, or financial technology, companies.

### Steered by the RBI

There is a long and interesting history behind the evolution of digital payments in India, piloted by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and succinctly captured in the "Payment Systems in India", published in 1998 (<https://bit.ly/3jmZ7F7>). A major thrust toward large value payments was effected through the Real Time Gross Settlement System, or RTGS, launched by the RBI in March 2004. The large value payments on stock trading, government bond trading and other customer payments were covered under the RTGS, providing finality of settlement, thereby reducing huge risks such as the Harshad Mehta scam; besides this, it substantially reduced the time taken for settlements. The RBI introduced National Electronic Funds Transfer, or NEFT (<https://bit.ly/3kjGAEa>), and bulk debits and credits to support retail payments around the same time. Now, NEFT is available round the clock and RTGS will follow from December 2020 – only a few countries have achieved this.

Such historical changes brought about by the RBI triggered major changes in the corporate and capital market transactions as well. Today, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), the market regulator, is contemplating a T+1 settlement (T is for transaction date) because the underlying consideration of the sale proceeds of the shares get exchanged very fast under the payments system. This is expected to attract more international capital into the Indian market, in turn broadening and deepening the financial market.

### An umbrella system

The sterling contribution of this robust payment system, especially retail payments, was seeded and reinforced with the setting up of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) by 10 lead banks at the instance of the RBI in 2009. The idea for this umbrella retail payments institution emerged in the vision document on payments system, 2005-08 released by RBI in 2005. Very few people know about the unwritten history of the background under which this umbrella organisation was mooted. In 2004, a four-member team including this writer visited the Riksbank, the central bank of Sweden, on a study tour. This included a visit to the Bangrocentralen (BGC AB), a not-for-profit organisation owned by eight Swedish banks for providing retail payment and related services. The model appeared as an attractive proposition as payments is basically a public good. Thus the idea of the NPCI as a not-for-profit company has a link from the BGC.



The setting up of such an umbrella organisation to build a super highway for digital payments has a strong appeal which was well-appreciated by Dr. Y.V. Reddy, the then RBI Governor, taking a number of policy decisions to spread digital payments and protect consumer interest. However, there were many within and outside the RBI, including in the Indian Banks' Association, who had apprehensions about the success of such a model for the NPCI.

### Indicators of success

With digital payment being a public good like currency notes, it was necessary that the corporation was fully supported by the RBI and the government as an extended arm of the sovereign. It was also necessary to contain expectations on profits, avoiding gyrations of the stock market along with direct or indirect control by powerful private interests which had the potential to dilute the public good character of the outfit. The NPCI's success against deeply entrenched formidable international players, supported by innovative technology, viz. Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and Immediate Payment Service (IMPS), is well recognised by central banks in many other countries. The Bank for International Settlements's endorsement of the NPCI model in 2019 is a major accolade. If the NPCI has gained such a rare distinction in just 10 years of its successful and path-breaking journey, we should be

proud to preserve this precious jewel.

There is a demand from some quarters that the NPCI should be converted into a for-profit company to withstand competition. The shareholders of the NPCI can have windfall gains too. But this will be a retrograde step with huge potential for loss of consumer surplus along with other strategic implications. Instead, like the RBI providing free use of the RTGS and other products, the strategy should be to assist the NPCI financially, either by the RBI or the government, to provide retail payment services at reduced price (in certain priority areas). This may also help support expansion of the payment system network and infrastructure in rural and semi-urban areas in partnership with Fin-Tech companies and banks.

### On merchant discount rate

In Budget 2020-21, the government prescribed zero Merchant Discount Rate (MDR), the rate merchants pay to scheme providers, for RuPay and UPI, both NPCI products, to popularise digital payments benefiting both customers and merchants. There is justification in this prescription by the government because depositors implicitly pay around 3% to banks as net interest margin, being the difference between saving and risk-free bond rate, for enjoying certain payments services traditionally. When banks enjoy such a huge amount of current account savings account (CASA) deposits, in return, is it not incumbent on them to provide such payment services, costing only a small fraction of such a gain?

For reasons unknown, the government left out other providers of digital payment products from this MDR prescription, which is unjustified and had adverse effects. Taking advantage of this di-

chotomy, many issuing banks switched to mainly Visa and Mastercard for monetary gains. As customers were induced by such supplier banks, it created a kind of indirect market segmentation and cartel formation, though there is hardly any quality difference in payment products. It may be noted that even the European Central Bank imposed a ceiling on MDR for all, protecting consumer interest. It is hoped that the government will take corrective action in the next Budget to ensure a level playing field and to relieve the NPCI from such policy-induced market imperfection.

### Settle the pricing

The ideal pricing for digital payments products should be based on an analysis of producer surplus, consumer surplus (i.e. gain or loss of utility due to pricing) and social welfare for which we need cost-volume-price data. A factor which needs to be reckoned is the float funds digital payments allow (cash withdrawal is a drain on the banking system), which is a source of sizeable income for banks. The RBI will do well to study and arrive at a rational structure of pricing including MDR (possibly also penalty on default by customer), given that the digital payment system is like a national superhighway, for which the government has a crucial role to play in protecting consumers against exploitation. This can run into a huge amount when digital payments become all pervasive.

It is not the intention to deny a fair amount of return to payment service providers including Fin-Tech companies. But should this be at the cost of huge loss of consumer surplus? Ideally, it should be a case of win-win for all.

*R.B. Barman is Former Executive Director, Reserve Bank of India*

## In West Asia, it's a bleak future amid America fading

President Trump's policy has not factored in the geopolitical consequences of the U.S.'s declining influence in the area



STANLY JOHNY

When the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain signed normalisation agreements with Israel in September, under the mediation of the United States, American President Donald Trump hailed it as a "new dawn in the Middle East". The so-called 'Abraham Accords', which saw the first normalisation between Israel and Arab countries in 26 years, was a rare diplomatic victory for Mr. Trump. It was rare because most of the President's other big foreign policy bets were either disastrous or inconclusive. The U.S.-Taliban deal is largely seen as American capitulation to the Afghan insurgents; the outreach to North Korea failed to produce any result; the maximum pressure campaign on Iran seems to have backfired; the promise to fetch "the deal of the century" between the Israelis and the Palestinians was a non-starter; and the trade war with China failed to produce any structural shift in the way China does business while tensions between the two countries rocketed. Amid this policy chaos, Mr. Trump at least got something in the 'Abraham Accords' to present as a breakthrough. But does it bring peace to West Asia, as Mr. Trump has claimed?

It was evident during the Barack Obama years that the U.S. had

overstretched itself in West Asia and North Africa, a region America has deeply engaged with since President Dwight D. Eisenhower's time. The U.S. had been stuck in an unwinnable war in Iraq. In Syria, it was checkmated by the Russians. Its intervention in Libya turned out to be disastrous. Iran continued to be defiant despite threats and sanctions. Israel was uncontrollable. The Arab allies were upset. Mr. Obama realised the historical necessity of resizing the U.S. presence in the region and pivoting to East Asia where China was steadily on the rise. But the U.S. has both allies and rivals in the region. It cannot just pack up and exit.

**The Obama and Trump years**  
Mr. Obama, in his second term, adopted a realistic approach to address this problem. He made peace with Iran, accepted the Russian lead role in Syria, left Libya burning, ignored Saudi and Israeli sulking over Iran. But, to balance these, he overlooked Israel's deepening occupation of Palestine and cooperated with the Saudi attack on Yemen. The plan was to let the regional players establish what he called a "cold peace" among themselves.

When Mr. Trump came to office, he wanted to undo Mr. Obama's policy legacy. He demolished the Iran deal, brought Israel back to the centre of America's policy towards the region and prompted the Arab and Jewish allies of the U.S. to join hands. The plan, as it emerges, was to remake the regional dynamics in favour of America's allies and push rivals to



a corner. Mr. Trump succeeded in bringing the Gulf Arab countries and Israel together, but he failed to escape the historical reality which Mr. Obama faced – America's dwindling influence in shaping the present and future of West Asia. A policy in which the historical reality is not factored in may not produce the desired outcome.

### The case of Iran

Take, for example, the case of Iran. The acrimony towards Iran was one of the defining factors of Mr. Trump's West Asia policy.

While pulling the U.S. out of the nuclear deal unilaterally and reimposing sanctions on Iran, Mr. Trump thought the Iranians would flinch once again so that he could extract more concessions from them and cut their regional wings. But the perils of that policy were the predictability of the policy-maker's objectives, and the Iranians were determined to defy him at any cost. Iran responded with multiple cuts on the U.S. and allied interests in the region – from targeting Saudi oil facilities and cargo ships in the Strait of Hormuz to launching rocket at-

tacks at American troops in Iraq. Mr. Trump's response was the typical American-style response of the good old days when it was in a position to shape the geopolitical outcome in West Asia. He had Qassem Soleimani, one of the top Iranian Generals, killed and declared that the U.S. had re-established deterrence vis-à-vis Iran. But the use of force did not reflect the ground realities. Less than a year after the assassination of Soleimani, the U.S., faced with continuing rocket attacks by Iran-backed Shia rebels in Iraq, is contemplating shutting down the American Embassy in Baghdad, besides withdrawing most troops from Iraq. Where is the deterrence?

### Open embrace of Israel

While in the case of Iran, misplaced adventurism sabotaged even the available policy options, the Trump administration's open embrace of Israel – the decision to move the American Embassy to Jerusalem, recognition of Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights and the go-head to its annexation of Jewish settlements in the West Bank – sharpened the geopolitical contradictions in the region, instead of bringing peace. The normalisation agreements between Sunni Arab countries and Israel, partly driven by their shared concern of an aggressive Iran in a West Asia sans America, could strengthen the pro-American pillar in the region, but the withdrawal of Arab powers from the Palestinian question would not finish off the Palestinian question. It would rather leave a vacuum in regional politics which non-Arab Muslim

countries would seek to fill. This offers new avenues to Turkey, which under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, seeks to re-establish its influence in the region, and Iran, which uses the Palestinian cause to drive public opinion in the Muslim world across the Shia-Sunni divide. In other words, Mr. Trump brought together Gulf Arabs and the Jews, who had had backroom contacts for years, on a public platform. But he also opened the way for the agitated Persians and the ambitious Turks to enhance their weight in the troubled regional politics.

Historically, the withdrawal of empires had seen new conflicts arising in their peripheries. In 1911, Italy invaded the Turkish province of Libya, triggering a dangerous competition with the Ottomans in their decline years. A year later, four Balkan states formed the Balkan League to take on the Ottomans in Europe. The collapse of the British empire left ethnic, religious, geopolitical wounds open across the former colonies. Some of the conflicts in the Caucasus, including the ongoing fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh, have their roots in the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Given these examples, it is worth asking if the U.S. is prepared to face the geopolitical consequences of the decline of its influence in West Asia. If the four years of the Trump presidency shows any indication, it is not. The new beginning Mr. Trump promised in the region could very well be that of a more troublesome future.

*stanly.johny@thehindu.co.in*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

### Words of caution

India is now in "Unlock" mode, and people seem to be assuming that things are back to normal (Page 1, "Virus still around, PM cautions nation", October 21). Unfortunately, no one seems to care to take the Prime Minister's appeal seriously, which includes leaders of all political parties who are on campaign mode in the northern States. The less said the better about the general public. As a part of standard operating procedures, there is no effective system to enforce the rules in public as neither civil defence personnel (including NCC

cadets) or volunteers are stationed at all hours to make sure people follow protocols. Let us not forget what WHO chief scientist Dr. Soumya Swaminathan said recently: "There will be a lot of guidance coming out, but I think an average person, a healthy young person, might have to wait until 2022 to get a vaccine." Indians do need to be cautious.

N. NAGARAJAN,  
Secunderabad

■ The Prime Minister is right in asking us to be cautious as there seems to be a sense of complacency creeping back into the system. Cases of people throwing caution to

wind as they make purchases during the festival season ahead are examples we must be aware of. A lack of safe behaviour during Kerala's Onam festivities is an indicator of what might happen, reversing all the good work done. The Prime Minister and all other authorities concerned need not be mild in their counselling.

GOVARDHANA MYNEEDU,  
Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

■ It is amusing to have words of advice from the highest level when every single COVID-19 safety protocol is being violated by almost every political party in election rallies. Is not the

tallest leader planning to address many rallies in Bihar, which again runs counter to all dictated norms? He should first advise the political class to set an example and one in which he should play the lead role, before advising the rest of the country.

BIDYUT KUMAR CHATTERJEE,  
Faridabad

■ The Prime Minister would have given us a powerful message in a simple manner. All he had to do was to wear a mask or a face visor while speaking. Indians would have got the point in an instant.

ANAND KRISHNAN,  
Bengaluru

### IPL teams

One does not understand why some readers of the daily are shocked by CSK's poor performance in IPL 2020. After all, cricket is also a game like any other. Why are they lamenting the

### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

An OpEd page article titled "Towards fewer deaths in Tamil Nadu" (October 21, 2020) needs to be amended as below to focus on the new deaths per lakh population. The sentence that read, "It is not that the government is unaware or has not done anything, but it must set a goal so that the number of deaths per lakh is reduced further" should be recast to say: "It is not that... the number of new deaths per lakh is reduced further."

The sentence, "The State must attempt to reduce it to about 6 per lakh or 7 per lakh, below the national average" should say: "The State must attempt to reduce new deaths going forward."

The sentence, "The day a common man... effective control of deaths per lakh of the population" should say, "The day a common man... control of the mortality rate."

The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in



# The manacles of caste in sanitation work

Despite laws, workers in the field in India still face stigma and are devoid of essential rights



RAEES MUHAMMAD



No way out: Phoolu, 45, shows his hands while cleaning a manhole in Ghaziabad. • PTI

Even in 2020, the Indian government and our civil society continue to grapple with the inhuman nature of manual scavenging. While civil society started a movement in the 1990s to abolish dry latrines, the focus now is on manhole deaths and provision of safety equipment to sanitation workers. The movement has been demanding the abolition of the dehumanising practice of the manual removal of human excreta and calls for the introduction of mechanisation for handling waste. Various State governments and the previous Central governments have responded to these civil society demands by introducing different laws to stop manual scavenging and provide incentives to build toilets.

If, on the one hand, the civil society has tended to approach this issue as a collective problem that needs to be addressed by the State, on the other, the current ruling dispensation seems to be framing the issue as a spectacle in the form of *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*, and is addressing the problem in terms of an obstacle in the way of tourism promotion.

#### Problematic descriptions

In 1993, the then government promulgated an Act prohibiting the construction of unsanitary dry latrines and employing manual scavengers.

The Act defined 'manual scavenger' as a person engaged in or employed for manually carrying human excreta. On August 18, 2010, I recorded a video of a sanitation worker entering a manhole without any safety gear, in the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, for Dalit Camera, a YouTube channel that documents the experiences of Dalits, Adivasis, Bahujans and other minorities. I also approached various social movements that were campaigning against dry latrines and requested them to include this aspect of manual scavenging to their cam-



dertake rescue operations during natural calamities, hardly any volunteer offers to do clean-up work or dispose of dead bodies. During the last Chennai floods, sanitation workers from the Nilgiris district were made to travel in garbage trucks to Chennai. This situation has continued even during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Tamil Nadu, sanitation workers are asked to work in newly formed COVID-19 wards. For example, the Gudalur municipality in the State issued an order to six of its staff members to work in COVID-19 wards. Similarly, in Kotagiri town panchayat, officials asked the sons of sanitation workers to work in COVID-19 wards.

#### Question of dignity

Unlike other labour forces, sanitation workers do not have a separate rule-book that lays down guidelines for their work timings, holidays, a proper place for roll call, removal from duty, etc. For example, in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu, all the sanitation workers have to stand outside the office during the morning and afternoon roll calls. If they reach early, they are seen sitting on roadside pavements. Even though there are spaces within the office premises, the officers force them to stand outside. The officials claim that the practice is traditional and that for any change, new rules need to be formed. There are no vehicles for sanitation workers to travel to their designated workspaces, and they have to either walk for kilometres or use garbage vehicles. This is a forced choice and is connected to the dignity of a worker. To put this in contrast, no supervisor would stand and travel with the sanitation workers.

There are hardly any exclusive trade unions for sweepers, and unlike other sections in government or private workforce, their problems are voiced by only those who are not associated with sanitation work – often NGOs. This, I argue, is because in India, sanitation work is caste-ridden and hence, there is an urgent need to dissociate caste from labour.

Workforce in sanitation departments is recruited via open competition. The local administration usually approaches particular caste members during such hiring. The situation is so dire that while we find volunteers to distribute food and un-

tion of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act.

Though the construction of dry latrines has drastically reduced, the number of deaths in manholes, sewers and septic tanks continues to remain high. The present government had plans to amend the 2013 Act to completely mechanise the cleaning of sewers and manholes and build new sewers. But neither the past nor the present amendment addresses the issue of labour safety. Same is the case with the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*, which skirts the issue of labour rights and the stigma attached to sanitation. As a matter of fact, in Tamil Nadu, all political parties have trade unions for government servants, except for sanitation workers. Bodily wastes are seen as unholy elements that need to be kept away from places of living, cooking, studying, or worshipping. Not only toilets, but even cleaning work is seen as a lowly job in India. Dalit movements have been found wanting in this regard – there have hardly been any organised movements to demand permanent job status for sanitation workers. Most sanitation contracts are given to private contractors or self-help groups, and such staff hardly have ID cards, leave alone the protection of medical insurance policies.

Workforce in sanitation departments is recruited via open competition. The local administration usually approaches particular caste members during such hiring. The situation is so dire that while we find volunteers to distribute food and un-

# Back to basics in algorithms

The NEP 2020 must take a larger view of computational thinking and move beyond just data science and AI

SUBHASHIS BANERJEE  
S. ARUN-KUMAR

In the modern world, the use of algorithmic ideas is not limited only to computations with numbers, or even to digitisation, communication or AI and data science. They play a crucial role in modelling and expressing ideas in diverse areas of human thinking, including the basic sciences of biology, physics and chemistry, all branches of engineering, in understanding disease spread, in modelling social interactions and social graphs, in transportation networks, supply chains, commerce, banking and other business processes, and even in economic and political strategies and design of social processes. Hence, learning algorithmic thinking early in the education process is indeed crucial.

Coding, however, is merely the act of encoding an algorithmic method in a particular programming language, which provides an interface such that the computational process can be invoked in a modern digital computer. Thus, it is less fundamental, and indeed great algorithms have been designed through the ages even without this facility. While coding certainly can provide excellent opportunities for experimentation with algorithmic ideas, they are not central or indispensable to algorithmic thinking. After all, coding is merely one vehicle to achieve experiential learning of a computational process.

#### Learning the fundamentals

Rather than the intricacies of specific programming languages, it is more important at an early stage of education to develop an understanding of the basic algorithmic processes behind manipulating geometric figures, computing with numbers, solving systems of equations, modelling road networks and social graphs, and applying algorithmic ideas to everyday problems. In fact, an overemphasis on learning the nitty-gritty of specific programming languages prematurely – even from middle school – may distract from focusing on the development of algorithmic creativity. Indeed, this is a common outcome of the overly utilitarian skills training-based approaches evidenced throughout the country.

The devil lies in the details, and, while the NEP guideline of introducing algorithmic thinking early is a welcome step, it must be ensured that it does not degenerate and get bogged down with mundane coding tricks at a budding stage in the education process.

S. Arun-Kumar and Subhashis Banerjee are professors in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering at IIT Delhi.

# The battered Puja economy

With a possible reduction in revenue by half, this year's Durga Puja may be a dim affair

ATANU BISWAS

It is time for dew drops, soft essence of nyctanthes, and the usual holiday season in West Bengal. Most importantly, it is time for the annual extravaganza concerning Durga Puja – the greatest social and cultural feast of Bengal.

A few years ago, one of my Malaysian collaborators – a professor in Kuala Lumpur – visited Kolkata during the *Puja* days. Despite being accustomed to some of the greatest festivities on the globe like Christmas, Chinese New Year, Rio Carnival and Hanami, he found the splendour and magic of Durga Puja astonishing – he was amazed by the hundreds of colourful and thematic *pandals* (marquees) built temporarily in street-corners and parks, idols of the goddess Durga and her family members prepared in varied styles and depictions, streets flooded with light and the smell of street-food, a riot of colours, with millions of people out for *pandal* hopping, dressed in their finest clothes, with an average daily footfall of 2-3 lakh in any *pandal*.

#### Sizeable economy

Possibly, the only reasonable estimate of the *Puja* economy is available in a 2013 ASSOCHAM report, wherein the size of the economy was estimated at ₹25,000 crore, at an unbelievable 35% compound annual growth rate (CAGR). The situation might have changed in between, but at this CAGR, the projected size of the Durga Puja economy could be about 2 lakh crore in 2020 – around 13-14% of West Bengal's GDP. This is in stark contrast to less than 2% contribution of the Rio Carnival to the GDP of Rio de Janeiro, 1.35% sharing of Oktoberfest to the GDP of Munich, slightly more than 1.5% contribution of Mardi Gras to New Orleans's GDP, and Hanami generating around 2.25% of Japan's GDP.

However, the economy of Durga Puja needs to be re-evaluated this year as a deadly pandemic has ravaged the world. As a direct impact of shrinking economy, millions of job losses and reduction in income, and amid the fear of contagion, the festivity and economy of the *Puja* are bound to be curtailed considerably. The Rio Carnival in February and Mardi Gras triggered contagion

among the respective communities. And some Indian States saw a surge in COVID-19 cases after Ganesh Chaturthi and Onam. In fact, the Calcutta High Court has ordered that area within a radius of five metres for small *pandals* and 10 metres for big *pandals* in West Bengal will be out of bounds for visitors. No wonder, many of the big *Pujas* will be offering glimpses of prayers and festivity virtually – a remarkable change in the ever-changing history of Durga Puja of Bengal.

**Large network**  
The ecosystem of community worship in *Puja* has changed with the economic liberalisation in India. Corporate funding and outdoor advertising, accounting for about 90% or more of the funding, and the traditional five-day festival extending to 10-12 days in the recent years, entail additional business scope, for sure. Also, with the expansion of online marketing, the purchasing pattern has changed remarkably for *Puja* shopping as well. Furthermore, unlike Oktoberfest or the Rio Carnival, which primarily depend on visitors, *Puja* economy in Bengal is mostly self-sustained. *Puja* shopping for apparel, shoes, electronic gadgets, spending over idols, *pandals*, and tourism, all contribute to the economy.

My 'guesstimate' is that usually community worship contributes about 15% to the economy, about 10% is spent in *pandal* hopping, inbound and outbound travel contribute about a quarter, and the remaining half of the *Puja* economy might be attributed to *Puja* marketing. The COVID-19 pandemic has jeopardised *Puja*-trips of Bengali people. Assuming that the expenditure on community worship would be reduced to half, and that on *pandal* hopping would become a quarter, and assuming almost no *Puja*-trips, about 80% of usual *Puja*-marketing might make the *Puja* economy half of what it could normally be.

My 'guesstimate' might be way wrong, but there is no doubt that the *Puja* economy has been shattered by the pandemic.

Atanu Biswas is a professor of Statistics at the Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata.



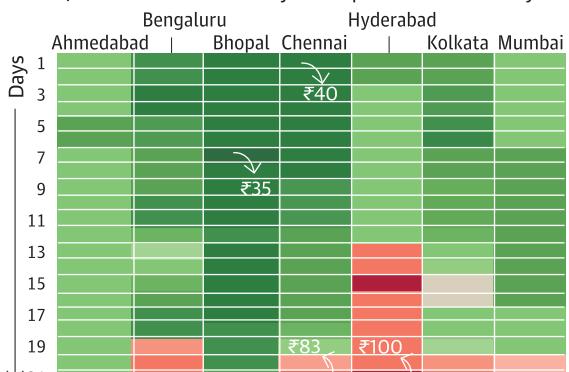
#### DATA POINT

## Onion costs hit 100

to ₹100/kg, with other cities close on the heels. Supply crunch, either naturally due to failed crops/flooded fields or artificially by hoarding of the vegetable, is the reason behind the drastic hike in prices. With COVID-19 further straining an already fragile household food budget, many may omit onions from their diet. Notably, the price hike will not help farmers much, as other players in the supply chain corner a big chunk of profits from perishables. By The Hindu Data Team

### 1. KNOW YOUR ONIONS

| The graph shows average retail price (₹/kilo) of onions in the first 21 days of October 2020 across ten cities. The deeper the shade of green, the cheaper the onion. The deeper the shade of red, the costlier. In most cities, cost of onions suddenly shot up in the last two days



2. MISSING BULBS | In Hyderabad, only 845 tonnes of onion arrived at the markets in the first fifteen days of October this year, a significant fall from similar periods in the last two years. Other major cities also recorded a significant shortfall in onion arrivals. The table lists onion arrival (tonnes) in markets in the first 15 days of October

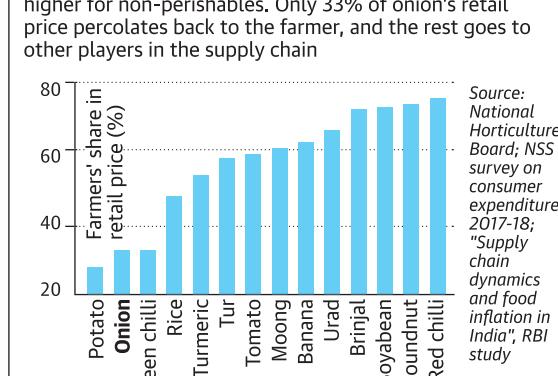
Year	Ahmedabad	Bengaluru	Hyderabad	Kolkata	Mumbai
2018	9,200	34,272	24,264	10,480	14,363
2019	8,987	59,196	6,532	2,384	55,958
2020	6,606	31,630	845	1,424	7,368

### 3. EATING INTO THE BUDGET

| An urban household in India spends ₹1,618 per month on an average on food and ₹178 on vegetables. As onions are selling at ₹72/kg on an average in urban areas in the second half of October, even purchasing a kilogram of them will consume 40% of a household's vegetable budget that month. The table lists the % share of expenditure on onions of the total food and vegetable budget. For instance, an average urban household has to spend 18% of their monthly food budget to buy 4kg of onions

Monthly budget	1 kg	2 kg	3 kg	4 kg
₹1,618 on food	4%	9%	13%	18%
₹178 on vegetables	40%	81%	121%	162%

4. FARMERS' SHARE | Farmers' average share in retail prices is lower in the case of perishables like onion and higher for non-perishables. Only 33% of onion's retail price percolates back to the farmer, and the rest goes to other players in the supply chain



## FROM PAGE ONE

**ICMR nod for low-cost COVID-19 testing device**

Unlike the RT-PCR machine, which could cost up to ₹25 lakh, and needed to be operated by a molecular biologist, the COVIRAP machine cost the IIT researchers only ₹5,000 to make and could be manufactured at even lower cost if economies of scale were applied by commercial manufacturers, said lead researcher and IIT professor Suman Chakraborty.

"The COVIRAP method requires very little equipment, and is ideal for use in rural areas with limited facilities. The portable unit can even be placed on a table in a field, without the need for an air-conditioned laboratory. It can be operated by rural youth with minimal training," said Dr. Chakraborty. However, the viral RNA would still have to be extracted in a lab.

The machine employed an isothermal nucleic acid amplification method, which did away with need

for a thermocycler, he said. Once the sample was processed in the machine after being mixed with solutions developed by the IIT team, treated paper strips – similar to the pregnancy strips – are dipped into it, and the emergence of coloured lines will depict the presence of the virus. A mobile app has been developed to analyse the strips placed in a handheld unit, in order to minimise human error.

Isothermal nucleic acid amplification employs an approach similar to one in RT-PCR and has its advantages and disadvantages. Other laboratories, including those of the CSIR (Council of Scientific and Industrial Research) and the Department of Science and Technology have designed devices based on this approach but none yet have been cleared by the ICMR and reached the stage of commercial manufacturing.

**Chinese soldier held in Ladakh handed over**

The soldier, identified as Corporal Wang Ya Long, was handed over to PLA frontier troops in the early hours of Wednesday (as per Beijing time), the Chinese Army's website said, citing military media.

Both sides are preparing to hold another round of senior military commander talks, which is likely to happen later this week. An official source said both sides were working out the dates for the eighth round of Corps Commander talks. The last round of talks was

held on October 12 at Chushul. A joint statement issued later said both sides held "a sincere, in-depth and constructive exchange of views on disengagement along the Line of Actual Control in the Western Sector of India-China border areas". However, there has been no movement on disengagement and de-escalation so far.

The Indian Army said the soldier had been provided medical aid, including oxygen, food and warm clothes as protection from the harsh climatic conditions.

**185 tanks in Hyderabad overflowing after rain**

Central team will visit Hyderabad to assess damage

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD

Telangana Principal Irrigation Secretary Rajat Kumar on Wednesday said all 185 tanks in Hyderabad were overflowing following heavy rain over the past week.

Mr. Kumar held a meeting with irrigation officials and constituted 15 teams to monitor the situation at tanks round the clock and inform higher officials.

Speaking to reporters, he said except three tanks – Pal-lechuruvu at Rajendranagar, Appacheruvu at Gaganpahad and Gurram Cheruvu at Balapur – which suffered major breaches, none of the remaining 182 tanks were a concern. The repairs to the three tanks were carried out within twelve hours. There



To the brim: The Osman Sagar reservoir in Hyderabad, at 1,786 feet water level, is inching towards its full tank level of 1,790 feet after over a decade of meagre inflows. ■ NAGARA GOPAL

were minor damages to 53 tanks.

**CM's directive**

Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao asked officials to take steps to guard against the danger of tanks in Hyderabad breaching in view of

the continuous rain and flooding of localities in the past few days.

**Ex gratia payment**

Minister of State for Home G. Kishan Reddy said a five-member Central team would tour Hyderabad and Telanga-

na to assess the damage to properties and crops during the recent heavy rain and flooding. A sum of ₹4 lakh each would be given as ex gratia to family members of the deceased and ₹2 lakh each to the disabled affected by the calamity.

**Field visit**

Ground study: Congress leader and Wayanad MP, Rahul Gandhi, during a visit to a paddy field and some organic farms in his constituency in Kerala on Wednesday. ■ PTI

**Poll panel moves HC against Andhra Pradesh government**

Writ plea filed in court for funds to hold civic elections

**STAFF REPORTER**

VIJAYAWADA

The State Election Commission (SEC) filed a writ petition in the High Court seeking a direction to the government (Principal Secretaries of Finance and Panchayat Raj & Rural Development) to

provide budget and release funds as and when a request is made by it (SEC) for conducting elections. The SEC also prayed for assistance from the government in holding the civic polls.

State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar

said in his affidavit that the government was trying to take control of the commission and its employees by mirroring them in controversies and casting aspersions on their functioning.

In the affidavit, he

stated that the SEC was not being provided adequate support and resources needed to discharge its duties, as a consequence of his recent contempt petition against the government's action of not reinstating him as the Commissioner.

Mr. Ramesh Kumar pointed out that the High Court

had struck down the AP Panchayat Raj (second amendment) ordinance - 2020 resulting in his restoration as the State Election Commissioner.

**Funds not released**

He said the process of elections, which were postponed due to COVID-19 pandemic, was still under way and his reminders for the release of ₹40 lakh (which was sanctioned through G.O. R.R. No. 35 dated January 17, 2020) was deliberately kept pending even as the SEC faced acute shortage of funds.

**IN BRIEF**

**PMO gives clean chit to Muraleedharan**

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM An inquiry by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has found no substance in a private complaint that Union Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan had violated protocol by including a public relations professional as an official delegate in the meeting of Ministers representing the Indian Ocean Rim Association Council in Abu Dhabi last year.

**Delivery boy caught with 10 kg of marijuana**

BENGALURU The Bengaluru police have arrested a 20-year-old youth for allegedly trying to sell marijuana on Monday. Around 10 kg of marijuana, worth ₹8 lakh, was seized from accused Gondipalli Vanshi.

**'Singapore will reach out on travel bubble'**

Tamil Nadu is a go-to investment destination, says High Commissioner

**T.K. ROHIT**

CHENNAI

Singapore is looking at ways of rebuilding air travel in a way that is safe for travellers and residents, and the relevant agencies in Singapore will reach out to authorities for discussions on a proposal of the Indian government for a travel bubble with Singapore, High Commissioner of Singapore to India Simon Wong said.

"India is an important partner for Singapore and the strong air connectivity between our countries prior to the pandemic had been critical to driving the flow of trade and investment, and people-to-people exchanges," Mr. Wong told *The Hindu* in an interview.

**'Feel safe'**

The High Commissioner thanked the Indian government for its support in helping repatriate around 400



Simon Wong

Singapore citizens on two flights during the pandemic. He said around 50-60 Singaporeans are still in India as they feel safe here and want to continue their work in India.

Mr. Wong said that despite the restrictions during COVID-19, Singapore investments are still coming in to India, although it has slowed

down a little bit. "For example, in the last one year, between August of last year (2019) to August of this year (2020), we have about close to US\$2 billion worth of investments," he said.

The High Commissioner, who was in Chennai for a series of meetings, also met Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Wednesday. He said that the government in Tamil Nadu was very serious about working with foreign investors, and Singapore was happy to be a part of this, economically.

"I think because of historical links, many of our forefathers come from Tamil Nadu and speak Tamil. So, Chennai, Tamil Nadu in general, is a go-to destination for our investments. That is also the main reason why, despite COVID-19, we are making a trip from Delhi to Chennai. This is my first stop. And I feel that we need to, despite the health risks, we want to signal to the Tamil Nadu government that we take our partners very, very seriously. And we will also want to signal to our Singaporean investments that this is the preferred State to put their money in," the envoy said.

pore companies had invested close to \$500 million in Tamil Nadu. He added that between 2018 and now, Singapore companies had invested about \$1 billion in Tamil Nadu.

**Historical links**

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The TDP government had faced a rough weather in the run-up to the 2019 elections. The YSRCP highlighted two major allegations levelled in 2018 by Mr. Deekshithulu – a 'pink diamond' going missing from the temple treasury and an attempt to excavate the temple, allegedly with an eye on the 'hidden treasure'.

**Row over TTD decision to withdraw case**

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

TIRUPATI

The decision of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Trust Board to withdraw the defamation case filed during the TDP term against YSRCP Member of Parliament V. Vijaya Sai Reddy and former chief priest A.V. Ramana Deekshithulu has triggered widespread criticism, besides raising question marks over the use of temple funds by the parties to settle political scores.

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**CPI cagey about Mani group's inclusion in LDF**

Coalition will take a call today: Kanam

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Communist Party of India (CPI) refused to declare openly on Wednesday whether it would welcome the Jose. K. Mani faction of the Kerala Congress (M) into the Left Democratic Front (LDF) fold.

CPI State secretary Kannan Rajendran, who chaired a crucial meeting of the party's State executive here, said an announcement about the future of Mr. Mani on the eve of the LDF conclave would be extremely inappropriate.

"The CPI has not welcomed Mr. Mani outright. It has attempted to weigh the changes Mr. Mani's shift in allegiance to the LDF has brought about in the political field. The CPI will state its case at the LDF meeting on Thursday. The party has a positive approach to all is-

sues. It will not let go an opportunity to weaken the UDF," he added.

Mr. Rajendran said the CPI was under no illusion that Mr. Mani's possible inclusion in the front would "abruptly reverse the course of the Meenachal river." Mr. Mani's purported strength in Central Travancore remained untested in the changed situation.

The CPI was singularly focussed on steering the LDF to victory in the local body elections in December. Assembly polls would come only later. He refused to state whether Mr. Mani's likely inclusion in the LDF was subject to any timeline.

The CPI felt Mr. Mani's exit from the UDF had weakened the Opposition considerably. The party saw no rationale for opposing Mr. Mani, Mr. Rajendran said.

**Former IAS officer Venkataraman no more**

He was an authority on Chola history

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

CHENNAI

Former IAS officer B. Venkataraman, who was an authority on Chola history and architecture, died in a private hospital in Delhi on Tuesday. He was 95.

Venkataraman, a 1950 batch officer, had served as chief secretary, Orissa, and then as secretary, Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, New Delhi. Besides his career as an IAS officer, he had a passion for Chola art and history that he had inherited from his father S.R. Balasubrahmanyam. He had co-authored a book 'Later Chola Temples' with his father.

Some of the books that he had authored include 'Ladigam: A Later Chola Temples', 'Temple Art under the

**'Sivasankar was in cahoots with Swapna'**

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

KOCHI

The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday informed the Kerala High Court that M. Sivasankar, former Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, had actively participated in various activities with Swapna Suresh and others who are accused of committing various offences, including the one under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act.

Opposing the anticipatory bail plea of Mr. Sivasankar, the ED sought permission of the court to hand over the materials so far collected against Mr. Sivasankar in a sealed cover.

The ED said that it might require the custodial interrogation of Mr. Sivasankar at an appropriate stage.

**At 8,369, Kerala cases highest among southern States**

Test positivity rate of 13.5% marks a rise; Karnataka records 5.42% positivity, Andhra Pradesh 5.03%

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

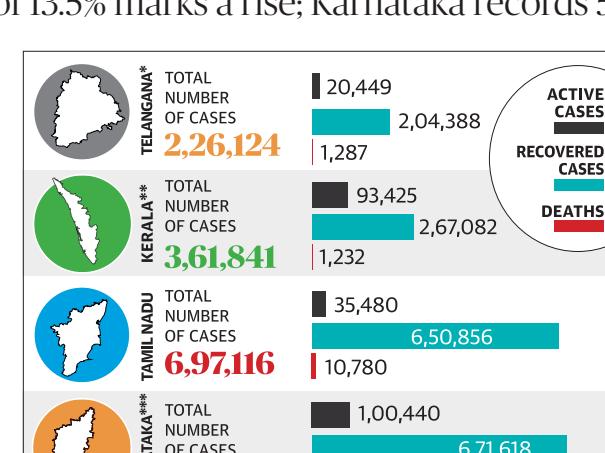
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala reported 8,369 new COVID-19 cases on Wednesday, testing 62,030 samples, and recorded a higher test positivity rate of 13.5%, compared to 12.2% the previous day. Among active cases, 804 patients were critically ill and being treated in ICUs with 196 on ventilator support. The Health department added 26 deaths to the offi-

cials list.

Telangana recorded 1,579 cases on Tuesday and five fatalities from COVID-19. Testing stood at 41,475 samples.

The new cases included 256 from the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC), 135 from Medchal-Malkajgiri, 106 from



Khammam, 102 from Rangareddy, 90 from Nalgonda and 87 from Bhadravathi Kotagudem districts. The lowest figure of four cases was re-

corded in Narayanpet.

Andhra Pradesh recorded 3,746 new COVID-19 cases and 27 deaths on Wednesday. Over a 24-hour period, 10,824 tests

were conducted in 24 hours including 21,623 rapid antigen tests, raising the total number of tests to 69,52,835.

# When politics is an end in itself

Voters are mostly discussing victory prospects of leaders, not jobs or corruption

AMARNATH TEWARY

PALIGANJ

For voters of Bihar, issues such as unemployment and corruption have taken the back seat, with the debates revolving around personalities: can Chief Minister Nitish Kumar retain his chair; will the BJP have a Chief Minister of its own for the first time in the State; and whether Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) chief Chirag Paswan can make or mar the prospects of Mr. Kumar?

In Paliganj, Arwal and Sasaram, most voters across age and caste lines appeared more interested in discussing these political scenarios.

"Forget about unemployment or mass migration in search of livelihood... these have been going on for years and years and will continue, irrespective of which party comes to power. But we are more interested in knowing whether Mr. Kumar will again be the Chief Minister or Chirag Paswan could be a spoiler for him," Chandra Prakash Singh of Dawath village in Rohtas said, sitting on a platform with several middle-aged men on the premises of a temple.

At the Karat market, Pankaj Kushwaha, Rajendra Kumar and Shiv Shankar Singh were heading for their village on a motorbike, all without masks and helmets. Asked if they were not afraid of catching the coronavirus,



**Will he, won't he?** Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar addressing a rally in Jehanabad district on Tuesday. • PTI

Mr. Shiv Shankar said, "Do you see anyone here in the market wearing a mask or a helmet? This is normal, and if you wear these two things, people will stare at you."

#### Politicians sans masks

"Even campaigning politicians do not wear masks," Mr. Kushwaha said and went on to ask, "Okay, you are from the press. So please tell me

#### IN FOCUS

if Nitish Kumar will remain Chief

Minister or will go... will Chirag be able to do something or is he just creating a bubble?"

Rajendra Kumar, in a white kurta-pyjama, smiled and turned away. He is a supporter of Mr. Nitish Kumar, the others said.

At the Bikramganj block office too, people were engaged in an animated discussion on whether the BJP

would have its own Chief Minister now.

"I think, the BJP this time will get no fewer than 100 seats and has its own Chief Minister," Ravi Shankar Singh said at a tea shop. "Not 100, but around 90," Janardan Yadav added.

The debate then turned to Tejaswi Yadav and the RJD-led grand alliance. "The RJD will get 70 to 75 seats, but the Congress will not get to even double digits," Mr. Janardan Yadav said.

Political analyst Ajay Kumar told *The Hindu*, "Bihar is said to be one of most politically aware States where people love to argue and discuss politics for hours and hours. But sometimes, they keep mum and throw only a smile when one asks them about their voting preference. We call them *chupka* [silent] voters."

About 100 km away, at Sakri, Madanpur Dhawa and Chakia villages of Arwal district, people seemed less interested in discussing issues such as rampant crime, farmers' woes or the pandemic. They showed interest only in discussing how many seats the JD(U) would win. "Nitish Kumar's party would win around 50 seats or, it can go even below 30," said Anshuman Sharma, a post-graduate in political science from Magadh University.

Asked why he thought so, Mr. Sharma said, "This time, he is being caught off-guard by none other than his alliance partner, the BJP. Don't you see his body language these days while he addresses public meetings? He looks tired and defeated." On the question of unemployment, he said, "It is an issue but we've lost hope from Mr. Kumar. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP can do something."

Had Mr. Modi fulfilled his promise of giving a ₹1.25 lakh crore economic package to Bihar yet? "Not yet, but having its own Chief Minister, the party may think about it positively," said Mr. Sharma's friend Rajesh Chandrabhushan.

"Yes, the Bihar election this time veers around Nitish Kumar – will he be Chief Minister again, will he not?" Mr. Kumar, the political analyst, said.

#### INTERVIEW | ASADUDDIN OWAISI

# 'Bihar needs an alternative voice'

JD(U), BJP, RJD and Congress have failed the people, says AIMIM chief

SOBHANA K. NAIR

President of All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen Asaduddin Owaisi says the people of Bihar need an alternative, explaining the reasons for allying with the Samajwadi Janata Dal (Democratic), Upendra Kushwaha's RSLP that decided belatedly to exit the grand alliance?

Initially, we started our journey alone. Then we had an alliance with Mr. Devendra Prasad Yadav's Samajwadi Janata Party. Later on, there was a lot of discussion to be part of a larger alliance, so that a consolidated fight

can be given to the RJD and Nitish Kumar.

As far as Mr. Kushwaha is concerned, questions were not asked till he was with the RJD or the BJP. Questions are raised only when someone allies with us. The meeting point for all of us is to form an alternative political platform.

You are always referred to as a 'nuisance factor' in Indian politics, be it in Maharashtra, now Bihar and at some point you would be contesting West Bengal elections too...

We started our political journey five years ago. When we contested six Assembly seats, we lost deposit in five of them. We have been consistently demanding justice for the most backward region of our country, the Seemanchal region. It should be granted special status. Bihar right now requires an alternative political voice that is different from JD(U)-BJP-RJD-Congress combination. Because during 15 years of Nitish Kumar or 15 years of the RJD, nothing has happened in terms of real development. In every parameter, Bihar is still behind the rest of the country. During the COVID crisis, the highest unemployment rate of nearly 46% was in Bihar compared to the national average of 26%.



During 15 years of Nitish Kumar or 15 years of the RJD, nothing has happened in terms of real development

ground. Last Assembly elections, the *mahagatbandhan* contested on only one issue, that is, 'we will stop the BJP'. Nitish Kumar had gone to the extent of saying that he will work for 'Sangh-mukt Bharat'. Lalu Prasad had said, 'We will stop Mohan Bhagwat [RSS chief]'. All these three parties are to be blamed for the BJP being in power today in the State. The fault of deceiving and lying to the people of Bihar lies with them.

Why should the Bihar Muslim vote for you instead of the RJD, Congress or the JD(U) who are already an established political force in the State?

We are not an exclusive Muslim party. I, Asaduddin Owaisi, am not a Muslim

leader. I don't want to be a Muslim leader; that is not my ambition or objective of my political journey. Voters of Bihar should exercise their vote in our favour because the RJD and the Congress have utterly failed in stopping the BJP juggernaut. Five years ago they took your vote and now BJP is back in power. They were unable to put up a fight during the parliamentary elections in Bihar and because of them, the NDA won 39 Parliament seats. And another example of why you must vote AIMIM is the Kisanganji parliamentary seat. Our candidate Akhtrul Imam got 3 lakh votes, the JD(U) got 3.25 lakh votes and the present Congress MP got 3.5 lakh votes. Had we not contested, even that seat would have been lost.

People have seen this game by so-called secular parties, who are interested in taking their votes, but they don't have enough votes to stop or defeat the BJP. What happened to the RJD in the Lok Sabha election, how come even Lalu Prasad's family members lost the parliamentary elections?

So your sole electoral promise is to stall the BJP?

We have always been opposing the BJP, continue to oppose the BJP.

# Nitish puts his faith in women voters for a win

In his public meetings, Bihar CM focuses on reservations offered in government jobs and panchayat posts

NISTULA HEBBAR

NALANDA

Quite separate from caste arithmetic and loyalties, if there is one constituency that Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has courted, it's been that of women. So much so that his controversial decision to impose prohibition in the State in 2015 was also guided by the opinions expressed by his female support base.

This section has remained loyal to Mr. Kumar since 2010, and has also seen a steadily increasing voting percentage in successive elections: from 54.85% in the 2005 election to 59.92% in the 2015 polls, to nearly 60% again in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Male polling rates increased from 51% in 2005 to

54% in 2015. Women comprise 47% of the electorate of the State, and 24% of these voters are in the 18-29 age bracket.

This increase in women's voting and much of it coming Mr. Kumar's way has been one of the main reasons for his success.

In most of his public meetings, Mr. Kumar brings up his government's focus on reservations for women in government jobs and panchayat posts as well as welfare programmes like Jeevika. He hopes that programmes like Jeevika, a skills and livelihood-based self-help group (SHG) project, will help him sail the choppy political waters he finds himself in currently.

The programme has en-



**Pride of place:** A tableau of the Jeevika scheme at the Republic Day celebration this year in Patna. • RANJEET KUMAR

rolled 60 lakh households so far, extending credit to women who had very little access to it in the rural countryside.

Premsudha, a Jeevika member from a villa near Gaya, had a difficult domestic situation with a husband

who had barely any income. "On top of it, my father felt that my husband's family had misled him as to his economic situation and wanted me to come away. I said that I was already married and would like to stay with my husband," she said.

In 2011, five years after she was married, Ms. Premsudha's mother-in-law asked her to join an SHG with a contribution of ₹10 per week.

"In 2012, I became a committee mobiliser, a 'beat mitali' and after that a micro enterprise consultant. I have availed loans upto ₹3,25,000 and bought a kirana shop for my husband," she said.

#### Micro enterprises

In Mr. Kumar's home ground of Nalanda, support for him among women is strong. In Kul-Fatehpur panchayat in Nalanda, Lakshia Devi, says that she has availed an SHG loan to buy cattle and start a small dairy business.

"I took a small loan for 'pashu palan' (animal husbandry)," she says.

Sushila Devi, who availed ₹75,000 as loan under Jeevika to add a couple of rooms to her house admits that while the welfare measures and reservations in jobs are moves that she is grateful for, the poor implementation of prohibition, with its spawning of bootlegging enterprises and local administrative collusion is not so good.

"Yeh prashaasan ko theek se karna tha (The administration should have looked into it properly)," she says.

The complaint is not a vehement one as it was a demand from women voters that led to prohibition, but the dissatisfaction could be the reason why Mr. Kumar hasn't been selling prohibition as an achievement in his campaign.

# Maharashtra withdraws consent to CBI

STAFF REPORTER

MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government on Wednesday withdrew the general consent given to the Central Bureau of Investigation, curtailing its powers in the State.

The CBI will now have to approach the State government on a case-to-case basis seeking permission to conduct investigations.

The move comes a day after the Central investigation agency registered an FIR in the TRP scam case involving Republic TV. The Mumbai police had registered the case on October 8. The CBI on Tuesday took over the probe based on an FIR filed in Uttar Pradesh.

# Modernisation done to boost security: Shah

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday said the Centre was bringing in technology for a comprehensive modernisation drive to make the country's borders "impregnable". He was speaking on the occasion of Police Commemoration Day at the National Police Memorial.

SALEM CITY MUNICIPAL CORPORATION			
Invitations for Bids			
Date : 21.10.2020			
I	Implementation of System Integrated Command and Control	Rs. 1211.00 Lakhs.	
II	Bid document and other information available at <a href="http://www.tntenders.gov.in">www.tntenders.gov.in</a> , <a href="http://www.tenders.tn.gov.in">www.tenders.tn.gov.in</a> , <a href="http://www.salemcorporation.gov.in">www.salemcorporation.gov.in</a>	Tender document can be downloaded from the above website.	
III	Date, Time and Venue for Tender Procedures.		
	Submission of bids - 27.11.2020 upto 03.00 P.M		
	Opening of bids - 27.11.2020 at 03.30 P.M		
		Commissioner, Salem Corporation	

GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU / PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT			
BUILDING ORGANISATION, BLDGS (C & M) CIRCLE, CHEPAUK, CHENNAI - 5.			
TENDER NOTICE No. 37 BCM / 2020-21 / DATED : 20.10.2020.			
FORM OF CONTRACT : LUMPSUM / ITEMWISE RATE			
For and on behalf of the Governor of Tamil Nadu, Sealed tenders are invited from the PWD duly registered contractors by the Superintending Engineer, PWD., Bldgs (C & M) Circle, Chepauk, Chennai-5 for the following work:-			

Tender schedule can be Downloaded at free of cost from the Website "<https://www.tenders.tn.gov.in/> (or) <https://www.intenders.gov.in/>" and also available in the O/o the undersigned at a cost of Rs. 1500/- & Rs. 100/- (GST). Tender schedule will be made available from 22.10.2020 to 23.11.2020. Last date of receipt of tender is 24.11.2020 upto 03.00 P.M. and opened on the same day at 04.00 P.M. by the undersigned. Contractors Eligibility conditions and all other conditions are available in the above Website.

DIPR/930/Tender/2020

Superintending Engineer, PWD, Buildings (C & M) Circle, Chepauk, Chennai - 5.

**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, RWS&S DIVISION, KENDRAPARA.**

At : Ichchapur, Post : Shree Baladevan, Email : [gerwskendrapara@gmail.com](mailto:gerwskendrapara@gmail.com)

INVITATIONS FOR BIDS (IFB) [e-Procurement]

Bid Identification No. RWS/47/2020-2021

Letter No. 3591 Dated 15.10.2020

1 The Executive Engineer, RWS&S Division, Kendrapara on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites lump sum bids in double cover system in ONLINE MODE from eligible contractors for execution of Rural Piped Water Supply Schemes in Kendrapara District.

2 Name of the work

HC modifies its order on puja pandals

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

The Calcutta High Court on Wednesday made minor modifications to its order passed on Monday, allowing a higher number of organisers to enter the Durga Puja pandals, but maintained that pandals will remain no entry zone and visitors will not be allowed inside.

Hearing a review petition filed by Forum of Dur-gotsav, a group of Durga Puja clubs, a Division Bench of Justices Sanjib Banerjee and Arijit Banerjee said that 'dhakis' (traditional drummers) may be permitted, not within the pandal area but in the no entry zone outside.

For small Durga Puja pandals whose area is less than 300 sq m, the entry chart prepared by the respective committees can include 30 organisers and for bigger ones, 60 – from 15 and 25 ordered on Monday.

**Abdullah quizzed by ED once again**

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) once again questioned former Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah on Wednesday, in connection with the alleged misappropriation of funds of the State cricket association.

Mr. Abdullah was earlier summoned on Monday and his statement was recorded under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) for about six hours.

Raising objection, his son and former J&K Chief Minister, Omar Abdullah, on Wednesday tweeted, "This is a day when my father turns 84!" He also tagged a statement from the National Conference that termed the ED summon part of a coercive plot and expressed dismay over "unnecessary hounding of octogenarian leader".

**'Integrated commands next step in reforms'**

It will be well-considered: Army chief



Manoj Naravane

Department of Military Affairs was "a momentous one" and that the services needed to "demonstrate great wisdom and statesmanship in enabling the CDS, a long standing demand of the armed forces".

Speaking at the College of Defence Management, Secunderabad, Gen Naravane referred to issues concerning the integration, modernisation and modernisation of the armed forces. He noted that the appointment of the CDS and the creation of the

**SC questions delay in verdict update on web**

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has asked the Registrar-General of the Patna High Court to verify an "inordinate delay" of 733 days in uploading a judgment on its website.

A Bench led by Justice S.K. Kaul found the judgment was pronounced on January 24, 2018. It was however uploaded on the website after so many days.

"We call upon the Registrar-General of the Patna High Court to submit the report to us whether the facts are correct and the reasons for the same," the Bench ordered.

## J&K district council polls soon

Union Cabinet approves adoption of Panchayati Raj Act for Union Territory

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the adoption of the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act, 1989, which was amended and notified by the Union Home Ministry on October 17.

The amendment paves the way for the creation of District Development Councils (DDCs), whose members will be directly elected by the people.

"The move will help establish all the three tiers of grassroots-level democracy in the Union Territory (UT) like in other parts of the country," said Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting Prakash Javadekar.

### Three-tier system

"The three-tier system was not there in Kashmir before. They did not have the opportunity to elect their local representatives. This step redeems the promise made



by the Prime Minister in Kashmir, and the Home Minister in Parliament. Now there will be early elections, and the power to manage local bodies will go to the people. Locally elected representatives will be able to do district and block level planning, and implement welfare schemes," Mr. Javadekar noted.

With the amendment, the DDCs will have jurisdiction over the entire district, excluding those areas designated as municipalities or municipal corporations.

Political parties in J&K

have expressed concern that the amendment will limit the MLAs' role. The Assembly was dissolved in November 2018.

Last year, the special status of the former State under Article 370 was revoked, and it was bifurcated into the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, the latter without an Assembly. Currently, J&K has been under the administrative control of the Lieutenant-Governor.

The order issued after the amendment says, "Every district will be divided into

14 territorial constituencies to elect members of the body. The DDC shall consist of the directly elected members from territorial constituencies in the district, members of the Legislative Assembly representing a part or whole of the district whose constituencies lie within the district and the Chairperson of all Block Development Councils of the district."

### Right to vote

"All DDC members, whether or not elected by direct election from the territorial constituencies in the district, shall have the right to vote in the meeting of the District Development Council," reads the amendment.

"But the MLAs will have no voting rights in the case of election or removal of the chairman and vice-chairman. Only the directly elected members shall have the right to vote," the amendment adds.

## In festival cheer, 30 lakh Central staff to get bonus

Plan is to put cash in employees' pockets, says Javadekar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Central government will disburse bonus worth ₹3,737 crore to more than 30 lakh non-gazetted government employees within a week's time in a bid to bolster spending as the festival season gets under way.

The decision was taken by the Union Cabinet on Wednesday, Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar told presspersons after its meeting.

The decision to put cash in employees' pockets on the eve of the festival season will boost demand and address a major concern of the middle class, Mr. Javadekar said.

The money would be paid into bank accounts via direct benefit transfers, and payment would be completed before Vijaya Dashami, he



**Splurge time:** Customers busy selecting bangles at a shop in Ahmedabad during Navratri. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

added. Overall, almost 17 lakh non-gazetted employees of commercial establishments, such as the Railways, India Post, defence production, the Employees Provident Fund Office and the Employees State Insurance Corporation, will get productivity-linked bonuses totalling ₹2,791 crore for 2019-20. Ad hoc or non-performance-linked bonuses will be given to 13.7 lakh non-gazetted employees, totalling ₹946 crore.

**India-Germany flights resume after 3 weeks**

Disagreement had led to impasse

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

After a three-week impasse between India and Germany that led to the suspension of flights between the two countries, the Government of India on Wednesday announced the resumption of services.

"In continuation to the existing Air Bubble arrangement between India and Germany, the flight operations of @airindia and @lufthansa between the two countries have recommenced. Please plan your travels accordingly," the Civil Aviation Ministry tweeted.

According to a senior DGCA (Directorate General of Civil Aviation) official, both Lufthansa and Air India will run 10 flights each a week.

Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Puri said Lufthansa was using the air bubble agreement to ferry "sixth freedom rights" passengers, or passengers destined to travel beyond Germany.



**Middle ground:** Both Lufthansa and Air India will run 10 flights each a week. ■ FILE PHOTO

marily due to the fewer number of flights allowed to Air India (three or four weekly) compared with those allowed to Lufthansa (20 weekly).

"The Centre has advised the States/UTs to aim at bringing down the case fatality rate to below 1%. Presently, 14 States/UTs are reporting it at less than 1%," the Ministry said.

**GJM founder severs ties with BJP**

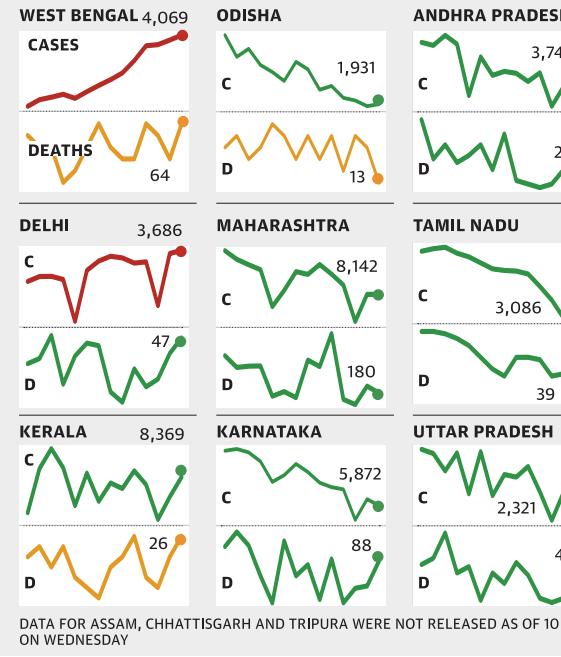
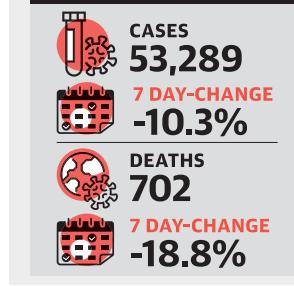
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

Three years after being in hiding, Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) founder Bimal Gurung on Wednesday made a public appearance in Kolkata and announced that he had severed all ties with the BJP. Extending an olive branch to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Mr. Gurung said the BJP had not done anything for the Darjeeling hills.

"I want to see Mamata Banerjee as Chief Minister for the third time," Mr. Gurung said, adding that he wanted to ally with the Trinamool Congress for the 2021 Assembly poll to "give a fitting reply to the BJP".

### Viral tracker

With 53,289 COVID-19 cases recorded on Wednesday, India's tally stood at 77,01,463. As many as 702 new deaths were registered, taking the toll to 1,16,629. The graphs depict new cases and deaths in the last 14 days in select States. The States are classified based on where cases/deaths are rising (red), falling (green) or showing a mixed trend (orange).



increase in the national recovery rate, which was fast approaching 89% (88.81%).

Seventy-seven per cent of the new recovered cases were observed to be concentrated in 10 States/UTs. Karnataka outnumbered Maharashtra, with the number being 8,500. Maharashtra and Kerala both contributed more than 7,000, said the release. India also reported 53,289 new cases in the last 24 hours. Seventy-eight per cent of this was concentrated in 10 States/UT. Maharashtra contributed more than 8,000 and both Karnataka and Kerala over 6,000.

**Reduce fatality rate?**  
"The Centre has advised the States/UTs to aim at bringing down the case fatality rate to below 1%. Presently, 14 States/UTs are reporting it at less than 1%," the Ministry said.

reas the new confirmed cases are only 53,289. This is when 10,83,608 tests have been conducted in

the last 24 hours in the country," the release said.

The total recovery figure now is 67,95,103.

Data released by the Ministry said the higher number of single day recoveries had resulted in continuous

Over 10 lakh tests

"With a high number of patients recovering every day, India's steady trend of posting high levels of daily recoveries also continues. Recoveries numbering 61,775 have been registered in the last 24 hours, whe-

reas the new confirmed cases are only 53,289. This is when 10,83,608 tests have been conducted in

the last 24 hours in the country," the release said.

The total recovery figure now is 67,95,103.

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# The Way we were

During this pandemic, when old albums are being dusted off to rediscover the people in them, the Indian Memory Project, a visual-narrative online archive turns 10. Curator Anusha Yadav on how these sepia-tone pictures are tiny integers in the story of the Indian subcontinent

DEEPA ALEXANDER

The courage and robust optimism of Jemishi Mehta's Gujarati ancestors is bookended by two photographs – the first and the oldest family photograph they possess was taken in 1952, 37 years after Govind Ji Rewa Shankar Mehta, Jemishi's great grandfather, moved from Jamnagar to Madras in 1915; the second, was taken in 2019.

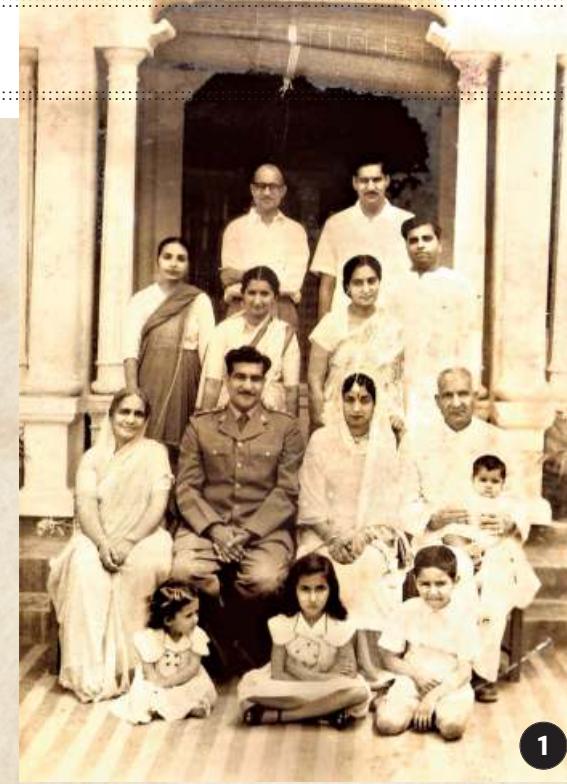


Anusha Yadav

Anusha Yadav, who helms IMP, established in 2010, was raised in the US, UK and India. A graduate of the National Institute of Design, this portrait photographer and brand culture design consultant's interest in creating a human tapestry of our times began when she was a child. Her father passed away when she was 12 leaving behind boxes of photographs and Anusha engaged with his memory through them.

"For me any photograph then had to have a story," says Anusha over a phone call from Mumbai. "You never realise when the idea sows its seed. The interest in photography became sharper when NID and advertising happened. The visual offers valuable information about the sub-continent's people, visitors, cultures, choices, circumstances and, thereby, consequences."

The world over, many have used the lockdown to dust out family albums and catalogue pictures, but Anusha continues to receive the same number of entries for the project per month – two or three. However, she finds



1. Contributor Amita Bajaj's family on the day of her parents' marriage in Jullandhar, 1958. The bride wears 'Sialkoti jewellery' that was smuggled from Pakistan in a trunk during Partition

2. Alyia Phelps-Gardiner's great-grandfather, horticulturist Gustav Hermann Krumbiegel with his family at home in Bangalore, 1935. Krumbiegel contributed to the design of Lal Bagh and to Bangalore earning the moniker 'Garden City'

there is a growing interest in history design services such as family trees and biography books. IMP is supported by patrons whose funding has kept the portal advertisement-free.

#### One life, many stories

A one-woman show, Anusha curates while a floating population of volunteers and researchers unearth stories that have gathered the patina of memories even among the same family.

"When you don't park your monetary hopes on something,

you can keep chiselling at it. Some of the stories have helped families trace four-five generations across the world. It's encouraging to know it is helpful and used for academic research," says Anusha, underlining how IMP offers western audiences an eye-opener to an India they never knew. Part of the coursework at renowned educational institutions such as Ashoka University, Columbia University, and Yale, Anusha adds, "It changes notions of what India is to the West, that it is not Eat, Pray, Love, that it has one million personalities."

Contributors, whether from India or abroad, are encouraged to send photographs and documents from before 1992 that have a link to the subcontinent. The documents should be owned and the sender should be able to identify those in a photograph. An accompanying text should also be submitted. It is after these criteria are met that Anusha and her team swing into action.

"Pictures are sacred; they are colour-corrected for brightness and contrast, nothing more. Aesthetics trump in studio set-up pictures. The text is proofed and edited. Most events mentioned, like war, migration, plague... have been documented and, therefore, can be fact-checked. Very personal facts are stated as 'we were told'. If there is a discrepancy, we vet and articulate a grey area."

Anusha adds that "Some of the text may need translation. Sometimes, pictures are sent on a whim and the sender may not recommit to investigating facts we may ask for; after much to and

3. Jemishi Mehta's great grandparents Govind Ji Rewa Shankar Mehta and Prabha Kuwar Mehta with their children and grandchildren in Madras, 1952  
4. Vaibhav Bhosle's mother Meenakshi Survé, a policewoman, posing by the Taj Mahal in 1978 after returning an abducted girl to her village in Uttar Pradesh. Survé was the first in the family to own a pair of sunglasses  
5. Juhi Pande's aunt Rashmi and mother Soma, posing at a studio at the annual town fair of Etawah, 1977

■ INDIAN MEMORY PROJECT AND GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

fro, there is no response. But quantity is not the issue. It's not a magazine, it's an archive. I don't feel the need to bombard you with stories. I let it simmer."

The tidal shifts that engulfed the subcontinent have resulted in 300 stories, each one a gem, unveiling a smorgasbord of personalities and experiences slotted under headers such as Delhi, Couple, 1920, Headgear, Muslim, 'Mustache', World War II and Studio Portraits.

Anusha's favourite is the story of the devadasi who became the maharani of Dewas. "The photograph tells an incredible story of women who reclaimed their identity. Sometimes one story may lead to another more interesting footnote. Like the one on Sukhsampat Rai Bhandari who compiled the first English to Hindi and Marathi dictionaries. It was while researching on him that his involvement in the abdication of Tukojirao Holkar III of Indore after the famous Malabar Hill murder showed up."

#### Remembrance of things past

Other remarkable stories come from Colonial India when young Indians keen to experience the wider world travelled abroad, like Manjikandy Ramchandran who left Kerala at 16 and found fame as a wrestler in Africa; Lieutenant Laxman Kadle who worked in lonely outposts in Bengal, died and whose body was never found; the Sanghvis of the Wilson Pen Family who designed the pen that was used to write the seminal Constitution of India or the teenage Chameli Jain who participated in the freedom struggle, grew to be the matriarch of a family that has remained in the public eye and after whom is named an eponymous award for women mediapersons.

The writing brings alive old world nostalgia, places and institutions that have frayed around the edges; an escape into a time of wingback chairs, potted palms and Delhi University's first ever girl rock band, Mad Hatter, kitted out in a sari and salwar kameez.

The IMP will never occupy a physical space says Anusha except for the museum store and the occasional pop-up. Its focus continues to underline that memorialisation must be an active practice and not a sporadic indulgence in nostalgia. And that through these visual stories, etched like images on a Grecian urn, we reclaim an almost lost Indian epic.

## People of the dawn

Artist Bhavya Desai's new series, While You Were Asleep, is an ode to the men and women who build our city before the first ray of light hits the streets



Doodle away  
Caricatures of people by Bhavya Desai  
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

SWETA AKUNDI

Thrice every week, before 5 am, artist Bhavya Desai has his eyes peeled as he travels from his home in Thiruvanmiyur to his karaage class in Besant Nagar.

He studies every passer-by: the man who sells tea to the watchmen wrapping up their night shift, the sanitation worker sweeping her last lane for the night, the milkman segregating packets into crates, and the newspaper man about his route.

Each of these people makes their way into Bhavya's latest series, While You Were Asleep. The characters, in his trademark style, are cartoonish, with wide eyes, spindly arms, and in goofy situations.

Since he picked up his pen in 2015, Bhavya's work has often reflected the spirit of Chennai – from colourful bustling tea stalls to porters scooting across the platforms of Central Railway Station. He says, "All these years, I have been drawing whoever I see around me. This time, I wanted to draw those that we don't see on a regular day," the ones who worked under the cloak of night.

"These are the people who make a big difference in our society before we have even begun our day. Our economy starts with them," he says.

The characters he draws are imaginary, although they are inspired by real people. "I exercise my own imagination in creating narratives, but I try and take characteristics from them: their body

language, and expression."

He prefers to observe the people he caricatures without actually interacting with them. "For this series, I didn't want to intrude upon them while they were working, I want to see them as who they are, naturally," he says.

This was not the case in his previous series, where he was commissioned to illustrate the pre-Independence heritage eateries of Calcutta.

"I would ask the cooks if I could take 15 minutes of their time and speak to them about their work, families, and backgrounds. They gave me their 100% while speaking to me, but after that it sounded fake if I asked them to go back to what they were doing. They would become very conscious, so that's why I didn't want to do that this time," he says.

His first sketch, that of an egg seller, received immense response especially from late risers, with people suggesting what other professions he could cover. This motivated him to continue the series. He chose 12 in total in case the sketches could one day be turned into a calendar. "I think practising karate also gave me that discipline to stick to a project and not get distracted by other ideas," he muses.

Bhavya is happy he is developing the skill of giving a theme and context to his caricatures. "When I started, I was just drawing everything in sight, without any backstory, like a headless chicken!"



## In search of light

Aishwarya Sridhar on how a posse of endangered fireflies deep inside the Western Ghats made her the first Indian woman to win at Wildlife Photographer of the Year

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

In June 2019, standing by the side of an old, indigenous plum tree, amid the deep greenery of Bhandardara, Maharashtra, Aishwarya Sridhar stood stock-still, her camera focused on the hypnotic illumination unfolding before her: Indian fireflies, by the thousands, moving about harmoniously whilst laying forth their magnificent bioluminescence. This moment, forever etched in the young shutterbug's memory, would take her to newer heights.

What she shot that night in June – the photo titled 'Lights of Passion' – fetched Aishwarya the 'Highly Commended' award at this year's Wildlife Photographer of the Year under the 'Behaviour-Invertebrates' cate-

gory. Now in its 56th year, the annual global wildlife photography competition is London's Natural History Museum's showcase for the best nature photography and is open to photographers of all ages. Thrilled as she is, the 23-year-old is a little upset that she cannot be in person at the Natural History Museum, London, to see her photograph on display. "I have asked a couple of friends in London to visit the museum and take photos of the display for me," she says, excitedly.

Aishwarya's interest in fireflies was lit when she came across a newspaper article that spoke of its abundant presence in the Western Ghats. It helped that fireflies, in small numbers, would often fly past the

#### LENS VIEW

Aishwarya's image, 'Lights of Passion', was selected from among 50,000 entries sent by participants from over 80 countries. She, however, is no stranger to wildlife documentation.

Aishwarya is also a filmmaker for Panje – the Last Wetland (2018).

Aishwarya is also a recipient of the Diana Award 2019, given to young change-makers aged nine to 25 by the Royal House, London.



High honour The award-winning photograph; (inset) Aishwarya Sridhar ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

balcony of her home in Panvel, Mumbai. Her research led her to Bhandardara. "Clicking fireflies when the moon is bright is tough because their bioluminescence goes dull," she says. So, the best time to shoot was in the window before sunrise, just as the moon almost set.

With help from locals who guided her to the spot in the jungle, Aishwarya trekked for two-and-a-half hours in pitch darkness, braving nocturnal species on the prowl. "I spotted a Myrobalan tree which was completely covered in fireflies. It was the first time I had seen fireflies.

#### Indian fireflies are different from other firefly species in their bioluminescence

in such huge numbers. I felt like I was standing in the magical world of Harry Potter," she adds.

She initially took snaps using the longer 100-400mm lens, but was not satisfied. "I was missing out on their flashes because the whole tree wasn't in the frame, was tough to focus on the fireflies, and using a torch would have disturbed them. I had to rely on my eyesight to get a precise shot of the tree," she says.

The skies were scattered with stars. Using her Canon EOS-1D X Mark II camera and Canon EF16-35mm f/2.8 L II USM lens – at a focal length of 24mm, shutter speed of 24 seconds, f/2.8 and ISO 1000, she snapped 27 consecutive photos, which she later stitched together, post-production. "In other photographs [of fireflies], I didn't see the juxtaposition of fireflies with the night sky, so that propelled my creative direction," she says.

Aishwarya notes that fireflies in India are not photographed as often as is assumed. "Indian fireflies are pretty different from others in the species with respect to bioluminescence. In other countries, you find fireflies make the grasslands their habitat. Here, they make their home on trees," she says, adding: "They are stunning ambassadors of Earth's natural magic."

## IN OUR BACKYARD

ABHISHEK GULSHAN

In 2014, when I had just started exploring nature and wildlife, I was still mostly oblivious to the wonderful creatures around me. One such experience made me look at my concrete colony in a completely different and positive light. In a sense I owe my career to the female Shikra (a predatory hawk) that frequented the trees around my house.

I would spend hours in the park, sometimes even taking my lunch there so as not to miss an important moment. One pleasant April day, I found the Shikra happily perched on the Champa tree my grandmother had planted in my wee years of childhood. To my excitement, the bird had in its talons, a small worm-like animal. I captured the sight on my camera, and when I processed the images, I was surprised to find it was a scaly creature the Shikra had captured.

I decided to explore what the mysterious prey could be, and a day later narrowed it down to the Common Dotted Garden Skink (*Lygosoma punctata*). Over the next few days, I started seeing one every day. I didn't think our urban gardens could have other lizards apart from the regular girtig (Oriental Garden Lizard) or the usual House Gecko found even in our high-rise apartments, often feasting on insects.

Skinks are often referred to as *saamp ki mausi* in Hindi, mostly



## Ground runner

The Common Dotted Garden Skink, also known as *saamp ki mausi* is harmless and beautiful

dwelling on the ground. This species is quite a widespread species of skink found in the Indian Subcontinent. Skinks are lizards that belong to the family Scincidae, one of the most diverse families of lizards with over 1,500 species described.

The Common Dotted Garden Skink is smooth and iridescent and does have a snout, like other lizards. It can grow up to 85 mm with a very snake-like in appearance with short toes.

On being intimidated, it moves away very swiftly on the ground usually to hide in the undergrowth or in a nearby crevice. Getting a glimpse is difficult, so listen for a rustling sound as it darts across fallen leaves.

You'll find it under rocks, potted

plants, in crevices and underground in the park.

The upperpart of an adult is brown, while a juvenile has a red tail, which turns brown and develops spots as it matures into adulthood. The underpart is yellowish-white.

There is somewhat of a mystery about its general behaviour but what we do know is that like most other small lizards, it is an insectivore and oviparous (lays eggs that mature and hatch after being expelled from the body). Being a reptile, it is more commonly seen in warmer seasons, especially in the rains, when their regular hideouts are flooded with water. At the onset of winter, these cold-blooded animals that need the sun for energy,

**Slitherin' to safety** The Common Dotted Garden Skink ■ LAKHAN KOHLI

will come out to bask in spots of sunlight, like on rocks and barks.

Skinks and other lizards are beneficial for our gardens. They are natural pest-controllers that feed on insects which could potentially harm our plants. Let's respect them for who they are: magnificent colourful reptiles that do a service to humankind.

*The writer is the founder of NINOX - Owl About Nature, a nature-awareness initiative. He is the Delhi-NCR reviewer for Ebird, a Cornell University initiative, monitoring rare sightings of birds. He formerly led a programme of WWF India.*

## Return of the old faithfus

Despite multiple challenges, idol maker Kishori Mohan Pal and his sons are in Chennai in time for Durga Puja, continuing a tradition that began 38 years ago



**Shaping a goddess** The team working on idols ■ R RAGU

lockdown, Deben remarks that they could not scour for raw materials, and had to make do with what was readily available.

The demand for idols is also low this time, which also reflects in the size of the idols: five feet, compared to last year's 10 feet height.

"Last year, we received orders for 30 idols of Ma Durga along with her family: Lakshmi, Saraswathi, Ganesh and Kartik. This year, it is only 17. A lot of places are not celebrating. The ones who are celebrating are doing it on a small scale," says Deben. The price of the idols start at ₹ 25,000.

With small budgets but large expenses, not to forget the time spent away from their families, has this trip been worthwhile for the Pals? "We would anyway have been sitting at home. It doesn't matter if we incurred a loss. What is important is we could make these idols so people can celebrate this festival and pray," says Deben, and expresses hope: "Asche bochor abar hobe (again, next year)."

PRIFYADARSHINI PAITANDY

While most Bengalis flock to Kolkata for Durga Pujo, here is a family that chooses Chennai over the City of Joy. Every year, idol maker Kishori Mohan Pal of West Bengal, and his team, who have been visiting the city since 1982, camp at Thakkar Bapa Vidyalya in T Nagar, known for its gold and saree markets, where they create idols of Durga from scratch.

Kishori's works are a regular fixture at the many Bengali associations in Chennai, Puducherry and Sriperumbudur on the city's outskirts. The pandemic outbreak, however, threw his plans into uncertainty. "We usually reach Chennai three months before pujo. This time, we

only got here in August," says Kishori. A team of seven is now working long hours to complete the work at hand.

They received a call from the Kali Baari in T Nagar, and the following week were on a flight. "Everything worked out to be much more expensive," says Deben Pal, eldest of Kishori's three sons, who has been accompanying his father since 1998. "We normally take the train. This time we had to book flight tickets online, something we attempted for the first time," he adds.

Even transporting the raw materials took longer and cost more. "We bring everything from Bengal. The mud with which we create the figurines is from the Ganges," he adds. Due to



## HOMING IN

Hiphop, acoustic, EDM. This week's roundup of **Live Gigs** is a mix of the global and the local

MEGHNA MAJUMDAR



## MDA Kevin Hart Kid's Telethon

This is an extravaganza for a cause. Musician DJ Khaled, actor Jack Black and other talents are joining comedian Kevin Hart in supporting the US-based Muscular Dystrophy Association, online at The MDA Kevin Hart Kids Telethon. Hart's LoL Network and its YouTube channel on October 24 at 8 pm ET.

## POOCHE CAFE



## HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



## TIGER



## WUMO



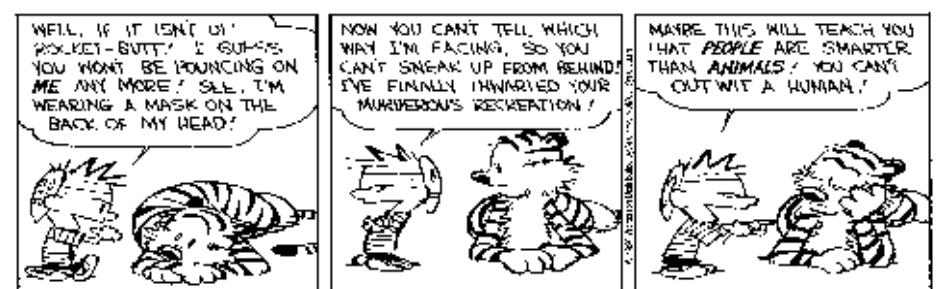
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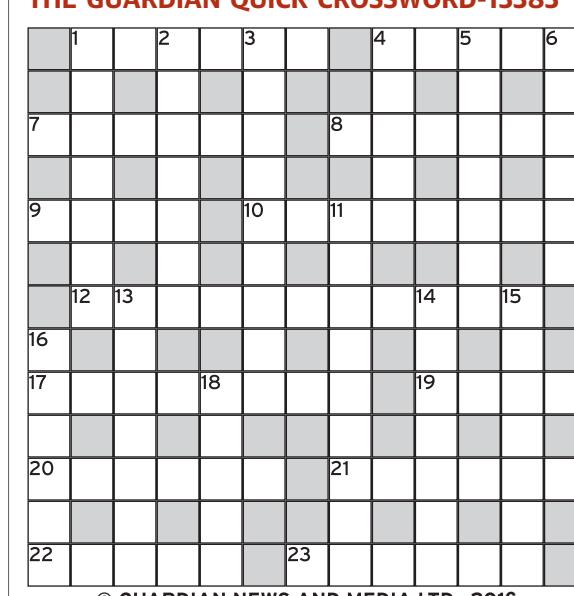
## PEANUTS



## CALVIN AND HOBBES



## THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13383



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pattern (6)

11 Immediately after that (9)

13 Akin (7)

14 Kitchen appliance (7)

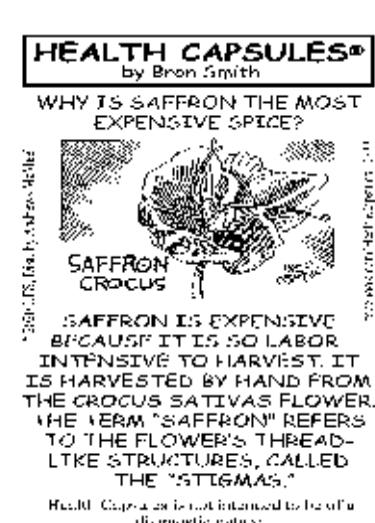
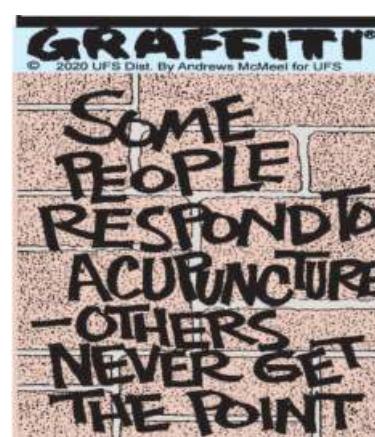
15 State of bliss (7)

16 Tall breed of hound with a long silky coat (6)

18 Nerdish (5)

The solution will appear on October 24, 2020

Solution No. 13382



- 19 Venomous snakes (4)
- 20 Detestation (6)
- 21 Publish – annoy (3,3)
- 22 Enid Blyton character (5)
- 23 Not level (6)
- Down
- 1 At top speed (4,3)
- 2 Gleeful chuckle (7)
- 3 Runaway (9)
- 4 Saying what is 23 (5)
- 5 Addictive drug (7)
- 6 Aim – decorative

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M ND-ND

# Trump steps up attack on Biden, Harris

In battleground Pennsylvania, President says his rival will raise taxes, ban fracking & destroy suburbs

SIRIRAM LAKSHMAN  
WASHINGTON

With just two weeks left to go for Election Day, U.S. President Donald Trump and opponent Joe Biden are speaking at rallies in swing States trying to make each day of campaigning count. Among these States, Pennsylvania has acquired special focus. Mr. Trump spent Tuesday evening in Erie, Pennsylvania, where he held a rally at the airport, and former President Barack Obama is scheduled to campaign for Mr. Biden in Philadelphia on Wednesday.

In Erie County – an overwhelmingly (87%) white, long-standing Democratic constituency – working class voters, driven by the decline in the manufacturing sector, had turned to Mr. Trump in 2016. The President flipped the county, beating opponent Hillary Clinton by 2 points.

Mr. Trump also won Pennsylvania by less than 1 percentage point in 2016. Mr. Biden had also campaigned in Erie earlier this month – the former Vice President is currently leading Pennsylvania 52% to Trump's 43% based on polling averages from September 20 to October 5.

Mr. Trump, however, is leading in Erie and other



**Mounting pressure:** Donald Trump at the 'Make America Great Again' rally in Erie, Pennsylvania, on Tuesday. ■ AFP

western Pennsylvania counties (barring Allegheny County, where Pittsburgh is) by a narrow 50%-47% margin, according to a Washington Post/ABC poll from the end of September.

#### 'Great victory'

"Hello Erie, remember that great victory we had?" Mr. Trump said at the start of his rally on Tuesday night.

"With your vote, we will continue to cut your taxes, cut regulations, support our great police, protect our Second Amendment, defend our borders, keep jobs and wealth in America, where it belongs," he said, summing up his standard set of campaign talking points.

"This is an election bet-

ween a Trump super recovery, which is happening right now, and a Biden depression," Mr. Trump said, adding that Mr. Biden would "double, triple and quadruple" taxes. "By the way, Pennsylvania's been shut down long enough. Get your Governor to open up Pennsylvania."

The President has been banking on his economic record to get re-elected, but the economy has suffered a severe setback due to the pandemic. The country experienced record high joblessness earlier this summer – putting Mr. Trump on shaky ground. Voters are evenly split on which candidate can better manage the economy, the *New York Times* report-

ed, based on an October 15-18 poll it did with Seina College.

Mr. Trump dwelt at length on the economy and the energy sector in particular at his rally on Tuesday.

"Joe Biden will ban fracking and abolish Pennsylvania energy," Mr. Trump said. He also had a clip played – a departure from his rally routine – where Mr. Biden and running mate Kamala Harris had made statements opposing fossil fuels and fracking.

Mr. Biden has repeatedly stated he will not ban fracking: he plans to ban new gas and oil extraction permits on federal lands and wants to move the country towards net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 (which would have implications for fracking).

Mr. Trump also said a Biden administration would destroy the suburbs. [Mr. Biden and other critics have

said Mr. Trump's messaging on suburbs is racist and a dog whistle]. "No, you don't like projects being next to your house," Mr. Trump said. "So much for your American dream."

At one point in his speech, Mr. Trump's mic stopped working. He joked that it must have been "Crooked Hillary" [Hillary Clinton] who was behind it, quickly

moving to Ms. Harris. "But Kamala... Kamala... she will not be your first woman President. You cannot let that happen," he said.

#### Attack on media

Mr. Trump also made repeated attacks on the media during the speech. He listed the media was in cahoots with the Democrats, big tech and the Washington establishment.

On Tuesday, Mr. Biden issued a statement on Mr. Trump's visit. "When candidate Donald Trump visited Erie four years ago, he promised to bring back jobs. President Trump's visit to Erie today is a desperate attempt to distract from the fact that he broke that promise and has repeatedly failed Pennsylvania's families over the last four years," Mr. Biden said.

He also said Mr. Trump had incentivised companies to offshore jobs, "waged war on unions" and misled Americans on the severity of COVID-19.

Both candidates are acutely aware of what the State could do for them with its 20 electoral college votes. Mr. Trump conveyed this at his Erie rally. "You know if we win Pennsylvania, we win the whole thing," he said.



Michael Pompeo

open Indo-Pacific".

Mr. Pompeo said he was especially looking forward to his talks in New Delhi. "I am sure that my meetings will also include discussions on how free nations can work together to thwart threats posed by the Chinese Communist Party," he said.

"Secretary Pompeo will travel to Colombo to underscore the commitment of the U.S. to a partnership with a strong, sovereign Sri Lanka and to advance our common goals for a free and

open Indo-Pacific region," Ms. Ortigas said in a statement.

Mr. Pompeo will then travel to Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Indonesia.

"Thereafter, Secretary Pompeo will travel to Malé to reaffirm our close bilateral relationships and advance our partnership on issues ranging from regional maritime security to the fight against terrorism," she said.

# Pompeo, Esper to travel to India for 2+2 Dialogue

Talks will focus on ensuring stability in the Indo-Pacific region

SIRIRAM LAKSHMAN  
WASHINGTON

U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo announced that he will fly to India on October 25, for the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. Mr. Pompeo will be accompanied by U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper. The third annual ministerial dialogue will take place on October 27, the Ministry of External Affairs said.

"In New Delhi, Secretary Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper and their Indian counterparts will lead the third annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue to advance the U.S.-India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership

and expand cooperation to promote stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific



Interviews for the film. "What we have to have is a civil union law; that way they are legally covered."

**Civil unions**  
While serving as archbishop of Buenos Aires, the Pope endorsed civil unions for gay couples as an alternative to same-sex marriages. However, he had never come out publicly in favour of civil unions as Pope. "The film tells the story of the pope by reversing the cameras," said Vatican communications director Paolo Ruffini.

# In new documentary, Pope endorses same-sex civil unions

Homosexual people have the right to be in a family, he says

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
ROME

Pope Francis endorsed same-sex civil unions for the first time as Pope while being interviewed for the feature-length documentary *Francesco*, which premiered on Wednesday at the Rome Film Festival.

At least 56 people have died across Nigeria since nationwide protests began on October 8, with about 38 killed on Tuesday alone, it said. The United Nations Secretary-General said there had been "multiple deaths".

The papal thumbs-up came midway through the film that delves into issues the Pope cares about most, including the environment, poverty, migration, racial and income inequality, and the people most affected by

# Unrest flares in Lagos after civilians are fired at

REUTERS  
LAGOS

Nigeria's biggest city Lagos and several states were under curfews on Wednesday as unrest rooted in anti-police protests broke out again following a day of violence, including the shooting of civilians by security forces.

Fires burned across Lagos and residents reported hearing gunfire despite President

Muhammadu Buhari's appeal for "understanding and calm".

Armed police tried to enforce a curfew in the commercial capital, setting up checkpoints. But groups of young men blocked a number of major roads with overturned traffic signs, tree branches and rocks. Smoke billowed from buildings that were ablaze.

Police – some armed, some wearing body armour and many in plain clothes – set up roadblocks in Lagos, witnesses said.

Tuesday night's incident at a toll gate in Lekki district was the most serious yet in nearly two weeks of nationwide protests fuelled by anger at alleged systematic abuses by police, although details of what happened

and the number of casualties remained unclear.

#### 12 dead, says Amnesty

The Lagos State Governor said 30 people were hurt in the shooting at the gate, a focal point of the protests. One man had died in hospital from a blow to the head, he said, but it was not known if he was a protester.

Rights group Amnesty International said the Army and police killed at least 12 peaceful protesters at two locations in Lagos – Lekki and Alausa – on Tuesday.

At least 56 people have died across Nigeria since nationwide protests began on October 8, with about 38 killed on Tuesday alone, it said. The United Nations Secretary-General said there had been "multiple deaths".

# Taliban ambush kills at least 25 Afghan security personnel

The group said its soldiers 'engaged the enemy' in retaliation

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
KUNDUZ

At least 25 Afghan security force personnel were killed in an ambush blamed on the Taliban, officials said on Wednesday, as spiralling violence imperils ongoing peace talks.

The ambush came despite Taliban assurances to Washington last week that they would reduce bloodshed.

Security forces were attacked overnight Tuesday in Takhar province and fighting was ongoing, said Jawad Hejri, a spokesman for the governor, who put the death toll so far at 25.

"The Taliban had taken positions in the houses around the area. They ambushed our forces who were there for an operation against the enemy," he said.

Takhar provincial health



Relatives mourning a soldier killed in the ambush in Takhar, on Wednesday. ■ AFP

director Abdul Qayoum said 34 security personnel had been killed – including the deputy police chief of the province.

**Bid to gain leverage**  
The Taliban did not directly take responsibility, but said their fighters had "engaged the enemy" in Takhar to re-

# 15 Afghans die in stampede over Pak. visa

REUTERS  
JALALABAD

At least 15 people, including 11 women, were killed in a stampede among thousands of Afghans gathered near Pakistan's consulate on Tuesday as jostling broke out between people applying for visas, officials in Jalalabad said.

An estimated 3,000 Afghans had congregated on the open ground outside the consulate, waiting to collect tokens needed to apply for a visa, officials said.

"The visa applicants jostled to secure their token from the consulate officials...the crowd got out of control, leading to a stampede," said an Afghan official. "I stood in the queue all night but at some point people got angry and started pushing, many of us fell on the ground," said Farmanullah.

# Thai PM may lift emergency as rival rallies rock nation

He urges protesters to resolve matters through Parliament

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BANGKOK

Thailand's embattled prime minister announced on Wednesday he might lift an emergency decree that has failed to stifle a growing protest movement demanding he steps down and also reforms to the monarchy.

After a day of anti-government and rival royalist protests across the country, thousands of angry pro-democracy activists marched on Government House, defying an emergency decree imposed last week banning gatherings of more than four people.

As they chanted for him to resign, Prime Minister



will do so promptly if there are no violent incidents," he said, without specifying any timeframe.

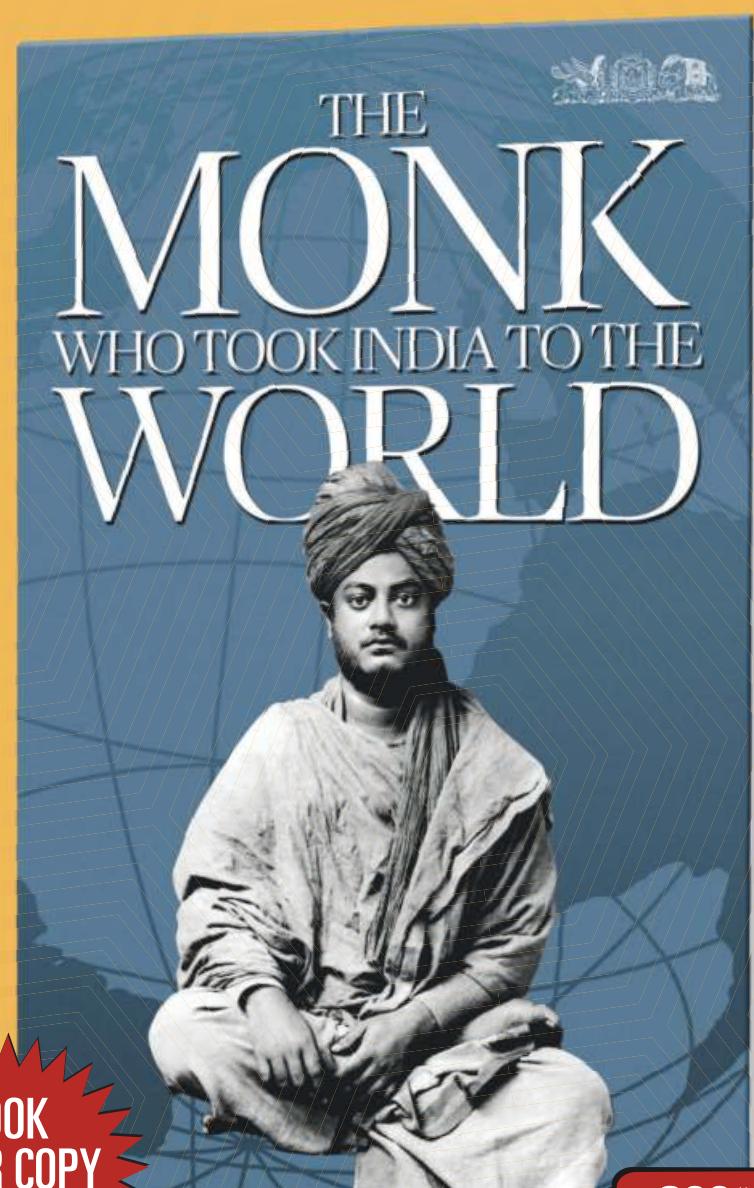
"We must now step back from the edge of the slippery slope that can easily slide to chaos," he added, calling on protesters to resolve their differences through Parliament.

Activists had massed at Bangkok's Victory Monument, while counter-rallies attracted thousands of royalists in the southern province of Narathiwat and scores more in the capital.

Democracy activists have assembled daily in the capital since last week, flouting the emergency edict.

## A SPECIAL PUBLICATION FROM THE HINDU GROUP

Swami Vivekananda, his life and work, continue to be relevant even today. With articles and interviews from the archives of The Hindu, this book tells the life story of the monk who took India to the world.



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## ELSEWHERE



Kyrgyzstan to repeat polls in December

Kyrgyzstan's electoral authorities said on Wednesday parliamentary polls annulled over unrest would be repeated in December as acting leader Sadyr Japarov moved to assure Russia of the two countries' partnership. ■ AFP

**China warns Swedish firms after Huawei ban**  
BEIJING  
China on Wednesday told Sweden to reverse a ban on Chinese tech firms from its 5G network, warning of "negative impacts" if it did not. The Swedish telecom regulator had issued a ban on Tuesday. ■ AFP

CMYK

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## MARKET WATCH

	21-10-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	40,707	-0.40
US Dollar	73.58	-0.12
Gold	51,415	1.09
Brent oil	42.59	-0.09

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	355.35	+6.40
Asian Paints	2114.30	-4.20
Axle Bank	501.45	+7.50
Bajaj Auto	3018.00	+13.80
Bajaj Finserv	5904.15	-47.70
Bajaj Finance	3232.85	-29.30
Bharti Airtel	419.00	+14.00
BPCL	349.55	+6.20
Britannia Ind.	3397.25	-155.90
Cipla	767.10	+2.80
Coal India	115.10	+1.45
Divis Labs	3078.95	-6.80
Dr Reddy's Lab	5046.75	-24.40
Eicher Motors	2181.35	-13.10
GAIL (India)	87.65	+1.95
Grafix Ind.	791.75	+14.55
HCL Tech	871.05	-8.60
HDFC	2048.75	+33.45
HDFC Bank	1246.70	+22.75
HDFC Life	562.70	-8.30
Hero MotoCorp	3178.35	-59.25
Hindalco	185.95	+5.15
Hind Unilever	2163.15	-9.95
ICICI Bank	420.30	+5.70
IndusInd Bank	628.10	+2.85
Infosys	1148.35	+10.85
Indian Oil Corp	76.00	+0.95
ITC	167.65	+0.20
JSW Steel	322.95	+4.25
Kotak Bank	1393.30	+24.50
L&T	924.45	+7.15
M&M	600.85	+1.40
Maruti Suzuki	6861.85	+17.25
Nestle India Ltd.	16030.85	-221.70
NTPC	82.30	+1.65
ONGC	67.80	+0.40
PowerGrid Corp	163.75	+6.55
Reliance Ind.	2124.60	-31.30
SBI Life	785.35	+15.40
State Bank	203.75	+0.70
Shree Cement	21147.50	-37.30
Sun Pharma	490.20	+3.85
Tata Motors	130.25	+0.60
Tata Steel	404.05	+11.65
TCS	2675.40	-63.60
Tech Mahindra	845.90	+3.95
Titan	1244.70	+11.20
UltraTech Cement	4629.10	+84.75
UPL	454.20	+1.75
Wipro	343.45	+3.30

## EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	73.37	73.69
Euro	85.92	86.30
British Pound	93.36	93.80
Japanese Yen (100)	69.89	70.20
Chinese Yuan	10.81	10.86
Swiss Franc	79.78	80.15
Singapore Dollar	53.74	53.98
Canadian Dollar	55.07	55.34
Malaysian Ringgit	17.65	17.75
Australian Dollar	52.30	52.53

Source: Indian Bank

## IN BRIEF



**E-tailers see spike in home-use product sales**  
BENGALURU/NEW DELHI The annual sales events of e-commerce firms Flipkart and Snapdeal seemed to reflect a preference for home-use products, driven by work-from-home arrangements. Snapdeal said sales in the home products category grew by 30% over last year. Flipkart reported a spike in its furniture sales and said it had set up almost 50,000 work-from-home desks across the country.

**Funding values ex-Tesla CIO's Tekion at \$1 billion**  
BENGALURU Former Tesla chief information officer (CIO) Jay Vijayan's Automotive Retail Cloud technology venture Tekion announced a Series C round of funding of \$150 million at a \$1 billion valuation on Wednesday. The funding round, led by private equity firm Advent International, included the participation of Exor (the holding company of Fiat Chrysler Automobiles and Ferrari) and Airbus Ventures.

**Nissan unveils Magnite, SUV to roll out in H2**  
CHENNAI Nissan Motor India Pvt. Ltd. (NMIPL), a subsidiary of Nissan Motor Co. Japan, unveiled a sub-4 metre sport utility vehicle, the Nissan Magnite. "Magnite is a made-in-India product for domestic and overseas markets," said Rakesh Srivastava, MD, NMIPL. It is scheduled to be introduced in the second half of FY21 and is the firm's "first-ever product under the Nissan NEXT strategy for the Indian market," he added.

**Shanthi Gears profit slips 21% to ₹6.63 crore**  
CHENNAI Shanthi Gears Ltd., a subsidiary of Tube Investments of India Ltd., standalone net profit for the second quarter ended September has contracted by 20.7% to ₹6.63 crore from the year-earlier period following COVID-19-led disruptions in operations. Total income of the gear and gear product manufacturer slipped by 23.86% to ₹55.42 crore, the firm said in a regulatory filing.

# Govt. to widen manufacturing PLI plan

Addition of 8 sectors to spur investments; policy for strategic sale of PSEs almost ready, says Bajaj

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI The production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for manufacturing investments will soon be extended to eight more sectors, and the government is close to finalising its policy for the strategic sale of public sector enterprises (PSEs), Economic Affairs Secretary Tarun Bajaj said on Wednesday.

"In the offing are about seven-eight sectors where the PLI scheme would be extended. Unlike our other schemes, this is an outcome-and output-oriented scheme... incentives will be paid only if the manufacturers make the goods," Mr. Bajaj said. "This scheme will give cash incentives for five to seven years and all the sunrise and important sectors are proposed to be co-



**Positive vibes:** The response received for mobiles shows there is demand for supply chain diversification, Bajaj said. •REUTERS

vered in this," he added.

"I have a lot of confidence and hope in the PLI schemes for mobile phones, medical devices and pharmaceuticals. The kind of response we have received on mobile phones gives me a lot of con-

fidence that there is now a demand in the world to have a diversification in your supply chains and India can definitely take advantage of," Mr. Bajaj said at the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Financial Markets summit.

Conceding that the policy for privatising PSEs had been delayed, Mr. Bajaj said this would be a major step that would likely get the approval of the Cabinet 'very soon.'

**Green shoots'**  
Referring to some of the green shoots visible in the economy, such as GST inflows and rail freight in September, Mr. Bajaj said that steel producers had just now informed the Finance Ministry that they were back to using their full capacity. "If steel and cement are doing well, it augurs very well for the economy," he said.

"There are certain things in which we have not only seen improvements, but have also gone up year-on-year. I acknowledge as some of the commentators keep saying, last year itself was

not very good, so you can't compare. But I think I am trying to come out of a very dreadful disease. So I can't be obese immediately, I have to eat my food before moving up the ladder," he said, stressing that indicators point to an economy 'trying to limp back to normalcy'.

Taking aim at 'experts' who changed their opinions every two months', the Economic Affairs Secretary said: "Initially, we had this very 'doom' kind of a feeling given to us, saying things will only go down."

"Suddenly, the festivals have come and the economy is looking up a bit; now the basic point being mentioned is 'this is the pent-up demand and we will have to see what happens in January and February,'" he added, trying to show the shift in opinions.

## SBI extends concessions on home loans

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

State Bank of India (SBI) announced concessions in home loan rates of up to 25 basis points (bps) for loans above ₹75 lakh based on CIBIL scores and if the loan application is made via its mobile application, YONO. Such a customer can now borrow at a rate of 7%.

"India is at the doorstep of revival process after the effects of the pandemic. And it's very important that financial entities have adequate capital. Many of them have already raised capital, others in public and private sector are planning and would certainly do so in the coming months," he said.

The RBI had asked all banks and NBFCs to build capital buffers so that credit is available to support growth when the economy's revival phase begins, the central bank chief added.

Current market rally is broad-based: SEBI's Tyagi  
'India logged \$11 bn in net FPI inflows'

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The current stock market rally, in the backdrop of the challenging times caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, has been broad-based with large and mid-cap stocks gaining 55% and small-cap stocks 70%. Ajay Tyagi, Chairman, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) said on Wednesday.

Stating that the secondary markets reacted adversely in March following the declaration of pandemic, he said the volatility index, or VIX, rose to 84 in March from an average of 15 in the previous three months.

Mr. Tyagi said the markets had since recovered with SEBI taking timely surveillance measures with respect to exposures and margins to curb volatility.

"The Sensex/Nifty today is very close to the all-time high hit in January," he said.

"Volatility has also relatively stabilised with the VIX now hovering at around 25," Mr. Tyagi said at a virtual Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) event.

On the narrative that liquidity and low interest rates were primarily boosting the markets and that there had been a disconnect between the markets and the real economy, the regulator said the recovery had been broad-based owing to SEBI's policy measures.

"It is not just the large-cap but also mid- and small-cap indices which have recovered since the lows hit in March," he said.

**Rising investor interest**  
He said investor participation in the equity market had risen, with the average daily turnover in the cash market in this financial year about ₹60,000 crore, or 54% higher than last year.



He also said India had received about \$11 billion in net FPI investments in the equity markets, till date in this financial year.

"While most emerging markets, including Brazil, Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand, South Africa and Malaysia, have witnessed FPI outflows this calendar year so far, India has witnessed net FPI inflows during the same period," he added.

Net funds had recorded net inflows of ₹1.47 lakh crore in this financial year till September, he said, adding that in the case of primary markets, the total funds raised had touched ₹1.54 lakh crore till September, just short of the ₹1.58 lakh crore raised during the same period last year.

**IPOs oversubscribed**  
"Almost all IPOs and rights issues this year have been oversubscribed several times. Further, over ₹22,000 crore equity issues are in the pipeline."

He also said the funds raised through corporate bonds this financial year till September was about ₹3.8 lakh crore, or 25% more than the year-earlier period.

"SEBI's policy measures have somewhat contributed in facilitating the rather satisfactory working of both the primary and secondary markets in these gloomy and uncertain times."

## Two-wheelers headed for strong festival show: ICRA

Sector, however, to shrink 16-18% in FY21'

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Two-wheeler sales are expected to grow during festive season despite the pandemic, aided by rural demand, as per an ICRA report.

"While the overall consumption and investment demand is expected to remain subdued for an extended period, some growth offshoots are visible from rural markets," it said.

"Buoyed by healthy rabi yields, timely kharif sowing, progressive government support schemes and relatively lower COVID-19 impact, rural (and semi-urban) demand has enabled a sequential growth in sales since the unlocking in May 2020. A shift towards personal mobility in urban areas continues to augur well for



demand," it added.

"While the urban markets continue to grapple with rising cases of COVID-19, the relatively less impacted rural and semi-urban markets have enabled a sequential improvement in sales ever since," said Shamsher Dewan, vice-president, ICRA.

However, despite the strong performance, the segment will see a volume contraction of 16-18% in FY21, ICRA added.

## UltraTech Q2 net rises more than twofold

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Aditya Birla Group firm UltraTech Cement Ltd. on Wednesday reported a more than twofold jump in consolidated net profit to ₹1,235.1 crore in the September quarter, mainly on account of operational efficiencies.

The cement producer had posted a net profit of ₹578.6 crore a year earlier, UltraTech Cement said in a filing. Revenue from operations rose 7.7% to ₹10,354.2 crore. "The company's strong quarterly performance is on the back of operational efficiencies and its ability to serve all India markets," the Aditya Birla Group firm said in its earnings statement. Volume growth stood at 20% in the quarter under review.

gely on account of the lockdown. Though prices of natural rubber witnessed a slight fall in the latter half of 2019, they continued to remain high till March 2020.

However, the price of latex shows a different pattern. While the price in 2019 had shown steep increases till October, the fall has been steady since then. The lockdown accentuated the decline, as per the study.

### Pandemic proof

# Destructive Siraj leads Royal Challengers' rout of Knight Riders

Pacer's opening spell of 3-2-2-3 hurts Kolkata, which can only manage 84 for eight; Kohli's men win with 6.3 overs to spare and move closer to securing playoff spot

## IPL 2020

### SPORTS BUREAU

Mohammed Siraj steamrollered Kolkata Knight Riders with a blistering fast-bowling display (4-2-8-3) at the Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday. The 84 runs that KKR managed for the loss of eight wickets was the lowest total in IPL history for a team that wasn't bowled out. Royal Challengers Bangalore romped home with eight wickets and more than six overs to spare.

Pat Cummins was economical in the PowerPlay (3-0-18-0) but KKR needed wickets. Lockie Ferguson, who had impressed against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Sunday, was introduced only in the seventh over, by which point Devdutt Padikkal and Aaron Finch had slashed the target by half and there was no turning around.

The win lifted Virat Kohli's men to second spot (14 points), ever closer to the playoffs, which has eluded the side since 2016.

For KKR (10 points), the crushing defeat can potentially drag it into the scrap for the last playoff position.

### Striking gold

Kohli lost the toss, but struck gold with every roll of the dice, right from selecting Siraj in place of Shabaz Ahmed, to the bowling changes he rang in through



**Too hot to handle:** Nitish Rana is bowled by a beauty from Mohammed Siraj, who ripped through the Kolkata Knight Riders top-order. ■ BCCI/IPL



the contest. KKR never recovered from Siraj's opening spell (3-2-2-3).

The pacer made full use of the moderate swing, and was aided by some impulsive batting.

KKR scored just 17 runs in the PowerPlay for the loss of four wickets. Rahul Tripathi went first, caught by A.B. de Villiers while trying to glide a half-volley beautifully down

Siraj to third-man. Nitish Rana was out next ball when he pushed forward without accounting for the movement, only for the ball to curl in and hit the off-stump.

Navdeep Saini, the first-change bowler, excised Shubman Gill, caught off a top-edged pull.

Tom Banton, who replaced Andre Russell, drove a half-volley beautifully down

the ground and then sent Sai-

nī soaring over the deep square-leg boundary. But his counter-attack was short-lived, caught by de Villiers when he swung at Siraj without moving his feet.

Siraj's first two overs were both maidens, the first time in IPL history anyone had done so. These were superb returns for someone who has often attracted criticism for

being profligate.

Then, the Yuzvendra Chahal-Washington Sundar double act suffocated KKR, with just 16 runs coming off six overs (nine to 14). Chahal trapped Dinesh Karthik leg-before with a googly that spun slightly and then outwitted Cummins with a teaser.

When Washington snuffed out Morgan (30, 34b, 3x4,

1x6) in the 16th over, all hopes of a KKR recovery had evaporated.

### Siraj's dream night

■ Siraj became the first bowler to deliver two maidens in an IPL match

■ His effort restricted KKR to 84/8, the lowest for a team not bowled out

## SCOREBOARD

### KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS

Shubman Gill c Morris b Saini 1 (6b), Rahul Tripathi c de Villiers b Siraj 1 (5b), Nitish Rana b Siraj 0 (7b), Tom Banton c de Villiers b Siraj 10 (8b, 1x4, 1x6), Dinesh Karthik lbw b Chahal 4 (14b), Eoin Morgan c Gurkeerat b Washington 30 (34b, 3x4, 1x6), Pat Cummins c Padikkal b Chahal 4 (7b), Kuldeep Yadav run out 12 (19b, 1x4), Lockie Ferguson (not out) 19 (16b, 1x4); Extras (lb-2, w-1); Total (for eight wkts. in 20 overs): 84.

### FALL OF WICKETS

1-46 (Finch, 6.2), 2-46 (Padikkal, 6.4).

### KNIGHT RIDERS BOWLING

Cummins 3-0-18-0, Prasidh 2.3-0-20-0, Varun 4-0-28-0, Ferguson 4-0-17-1.

**Toss:** KKR; **MoM:** Siraj.

**RCB:** won by eight wickets with 6.3 overs to spare.

### FALL OF WICKETS

1-3 (Tripathi, 1.3 overs), 2-3 (Rana, 1.4), 3-3 (Gill, 2.2), 4-14 (Banton, 3.3), 5-32 (Karthik, 8.4), 6-40 (Cummins, 12.3), 7-57 (Morgan, 15.4), 8-84 (Kuldeep, 19.6).

### RCB BOWLING

Morris 4-16-0, Siraj 4-2-8-3, Saini 3-0-23-1, Udana 1-0-6-0, Chahal 4-0-15-2, Washington 4-14-1.

### ROYAL CHALLENGERS

Devdutt Padikkal run out 25 (17b, 3x4), Aaron Finch c Karthik b Ferguson 16 (21b, 2x4), Gurkeerat Mann (not out) 21 (26b,

4x4), Virat Kohli (not out) 18 (17b, 2x4); Extras (lb-2, w-3); 5; Total (for two wkts. in 13.3 overs): 85.

### Next assignment

**KKR:** Oct. 24 vs. DC

Abu Dhabi, 3.30 p.m. IST

**RCB:** Oct. 25 vs. CSK

Dubai, 3.30 p.m. IST

### Innings scan

KKR	RCB
72	Dots
6	Fours
2	Sixes
17/4	PP
4.20	RR

### Points table

Team	M	W	L	PTS	NRR
Delhi Capitals	10	7	3	14	0.774
Royal Challengers	10	7	3	14	0.182
Mumbai Indians	9	6	3	12	1.201
Kolkata Knight Riders	10	5	5	10	-0.828
Kings XI Punjab	10	4	6	8	-0.177
Rajasthan Royals	10	4	6	8	-0.591
Sunrisers Hyderabad	9	3	6	6	0.008
Chennai Super Kings	10	3	7	6	-0.463

After the KKR-RCB match on Oct. 21

## Sunrisers take on upbeat Royals

Warner's men need to get their act together quickly

### PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

DUBAI



The Bairstow-Tyagi battle should be interesting. ■ BCCI/IPL

### TODAY'S MATCH



**HEAD-TO-HEAD**

Played: 12

RR 6 | SRH 6

### FORM GUIDE

(last five matches, latest game first)

RR	W	I	L	I	W	L
SRH	L	I	L	I	W	L

STAR SPORTS 1 & SELECT 1 (SD & HD)

consistent partnerships

whether it is Priyam Garg, Abdul Samad of Sunrisers or Kartik Tyagi, Riyan Parag of the Royals, the youngsters from both sides will be feeling the pressure of doing something out of the box in case their illustrious seniors fail in that pursuit.

Royals would hope to continue with the winning momentum and will expect their foreign recruits to perform like they did against CSK.

In batting, Jos Buttler looked in ominous form the other night, forcing skipper Smith to play the second fiddle but RR would need more

left-handers, the mercurial Shikhar Dhawan, who had just completed a hundred and Axar Patel who can use the long lever.

The situation screamed for Karn Sharma but Dhoni opted for Jadeja. After a wide, and then a single by Dhawan, Axar smashed Jadeja for 6, 6, 2 and 6 to close out the humdinger in Delhi's favour.

The left-handers simply had to hit Jadeja with the turn, and if they connected, a six was always on the cards.

Leg-spinner Karn, who has a googly in his repertoire, could have spun the ball away from the left-handers, forcing them to hit against the turn and a mishit was a distinct possibility.

## Leg-spinners have been buzzing

### S. DINAKAR

CHENNAI

M.S. Dhoni had an important decision to make. Chennai Super Kings had 17 to defend in the final over against Delhi Capitals but his 'death' bowler Dwayne Bravo had pulled out unfit.

Dhoni had to pick one of the two, left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja or leg-spinner Karn Sharma for the 20th over.

### Two lefties

On strike were two left-handers, the mercurial Shikhar Dhawan, who had just completed a hundred and Axar Patel who can use the long lever.

The leg-spinners, otherwise, have been buzzing in the ongoing IPL. You could see the joy on legend Anil Kumble's visage when Ravi Ashwin and M. Ashwin, both leggies, bowled with craft and heart for Kings XI Punjab.

Ashwin, with his side-spin and the ability to get the ball to skid off the surface – and his wrong 'un to castle Vijay Shankar was a beauty – have been influential. Mumbai's Rahul Chahar has impressed with his precision and topspin.

M. Ashwin has a slight rock-back and a pause in his action that enables him to spot the batsman's initial movement. He is a much improved bowler, operating

## Kings game a wake-up call for us: Shreyas

### PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

DUBAI

It's a wake-up call, said Delhi Capitals skipper Shreyas Iyer as he urged his batsmen, with the exception of an in-form Shikhar Dhawan, to take "more responsibility" following a surprise loss to KXIP here.

DC lost by five wickets after scoring 164 for five in 20 overs. Opener Dhawan continued to be in great form.

"This is like a wake-up call for us. Going forward we are going to face tough situations and tougher teams. We have played amazing cricket in the past, but we have to leave that in the past," Shreyas said.

"We have to come out all guns blazing, play with freedom and take more responsibility. We need one match to qualify and we will take it one match at a time," he added.

He feels that his batsmen are in a good frame of mind. "I feel that all the batsmen are in a really good frame of mind and few matches can go wrong here and there as fatigue creeps in," he said.

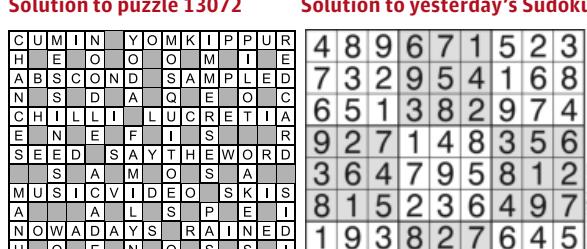
## SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

### Solution to puzzle 13072

### Solution to yesterday's Sudoku



## FAITH

### Complete avatars

Of the many avatars of Lord Narayana, Rama and Krishna avatars are considered complete avatars. What is so special about them? In the case of other avatars, the Lord came for a certain purpose, stayed on the earth briefly, and left the moment the mission was accomplished. But not so in the case of Rama and Krishna avatars, said M.A. Venkatakrishnan in a discourse.

Thirumangai Azhwar lists the Lord's avatars in one of his verses, where he refers to Parasurama as 'Rama,' and to Balarama again as 'Rama.' But the Rama avatar which is placed between these two, is not referred to as the Rama avatar! Instead, Thirumangai Azhwar uses the word 'thaanaai,' meaning His Himself. This indicates the importance of the Rama avatar. Valmiki says Rama lived on the earth for 11,000 years. Krishna lived for more than a hundred years.

But why did the Lord come to this earth in the first place? In the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord answers this question. He says it is to protect virtuous people, to destroy the wicked and to establish dharma. But just one action could have accomplished the other two goals. If the wicked, who harmed the good, were killed, then automatically dharma

## TV PICKS

**Europa League:** Sony Ten 2 & Sony Six (SD & HD), 10.20 p.m.; Sony Ten 1, 2, 3 & Six (SD & HD), 12.30 a.m.  
**PGA Tour:** Eurosport (SD & HD), 2.30 a.m. (Friday)

## IN BRIEF



Aashi Hanspal named impressive new driver

Mumbai-based Aashi Hanspal was named the 'Most Deserving and Impressive New Driver' in the FIA 'Girls On Track-The Rising Stars programme', held at Paul Ricard karting circuit in France, according to FMSCI's women's commission chairperson Sita Raina. The 13-year-old was one of 70 young girls selected from different parts of the world for the programme. PTI

## Altamash Saifi enters semifinals

NEW DELHI  
Title aspirant Altamash Saifi beat Love Kukreja 30-21, 47-26, 9-30, 41-10, 45-22 in the quarterfinals of the Delhi State Snooker memorial 6-Red snooker championship.

In the semifinals, Saifi will play Sunil Kumar, who fought off a stiff challenge from Sanhit Gupta.

The other semifinal will feature Jaison Malhotra against Harpreet Singh.

**The results (quarterfinals):** Altamash Saifi bt Love Kukreja 30-21, 47-26, 9-30, 41-10, 45-22; Sunil Kumar bt Sanhit Gupta 37-16, 2-39, 39-20, 5-40, 40-30, 10-42, 50-17; Jaison Malhotra bt Sunny Solanki 50-16, 32-22, 33-20, 60-19; Harpreet Singh bt Shoaib Khan 14-33, 16-42, 42-18, 38-30, 38-13, 18-57, 37-17.

# Rashford sinks PSG again

Barca sends out a strong message; Chelsea-Sevilla in listless draw

## CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
PARIS

Marcus Rashford once again sank Paris Saint-Germain after netting the decisive goal in a 2-1 Champions League win in the French capital, while Barcelona sent a message with a thumping 5-1 victory over Ferencvaros.

Rashford, who scored the winning spot-kick when United knocked PSG out in 2019, drilled home a low shot three minutes from the end which won a thrilling Group H contest at a near-empty Parc des Princes.

Ronald Koeman got his first Champions League campaign as Barcelona coach off to a winning start with a confident win over Ferencvaros.

Messi won and converted the penalty to give the Catalans a 27th-minute lead and the match was as good as done when Ansu Fati clipped home Frenkie de Jong's sumptuous pass just before the break.

## Red for Pique

Philippe Coutinho lashed home the third before Ibor Kharatin pulled one back from the penalty spot after



Lashing home: Manchester United's Marcus Rashford winds up to score the winner against PSG. ■ AFP

Gerard Pique was sent off for pulling back Nguen as he charged towards goal.

Pedri and Ousmane Dembele finished the scoring for the 10-man host as it took control of Group G, finishing the opening round top but level on points with Juve which had a comfortable 2-0 win at Dynamo Kiev.

Chelsea is still waiting for a £220 million spending spree to pay off as it began its campaign with an uninspiring 0-0 Group E draw with Sevilla at Stamford Bridge.

**The results:** Group E: Chelsea 0 drew with Sevilla 0; Rennes 1 (Girassy 86-pen) drew with Krashnodar 1 (Ramirez 59).

**Group F:** Lazio (ITA) 3 (Immobile 6, Hitz 23-og, Akpa Akpro 76) bt Borussia Dortmund 1 (Haaland 71); Zenit St-Petersburg 1 (Horvath 74-og) lost to

Club Brugge 2 (Bonaventure 63, De Ketelaere 90+3).

**Group G:** Barcelona 5 (Messi 27-pen, Fati 42, Coutinho 52, Pedri 82, Dembele 89) bt Ferencvaros 1 (Kharatin 70-pen); Dynamo Kiev 0 lost to Juventus 2 (Morata 46, 84).

**Group H:** Paris St-Germain 1 (Martial 55-og) lost to Manchester United 2 (Fernandes 23-pen, Rashford 87); RB Leipzig 2 (Angelino 16, 20) bt Istanbul Basaksehir 0.

## TTFI's National camp from October 28

Sharath Kamal says its a welcome move

K. KEERTHIVASAN  
CHENNAI

The Table Tennis Federation of India's (TTFI) National camp – postponed multiple times due to circumstances beyond its control – will finally begin on October 28 at Sonepat (Haryana).

In an e-mail on Wednesday addressed to some of the top players, TTFI said: "SAI has now agreed for the camp beginning October 28 at DPS School, Sonepat, with the

condition that all players must report on the same date (Oct. 28).

"Since you all had given your consent we will be asking SAI to issue tickets for your travel to Delhi on the said date."

Speaking to *The Hindu* on Tuesday, M.P. Singh, secretary TTFI, said: "We are very much eager to start. It will be good practice for the Olympic qualification scheduled to begin next year. G. Sathi-

yan and Harmeet Desai can join the camp when they return from their respective European leagues.

"Earlier the camp was for 15 days with a short break followed by another 15 days. Now SAI and TTFI have decided that it will be for 35 days. If the players agree to it, we can plan accordingly."

India's top paddler Sharath Kamal said it's a good start. "All of us have been looking for good practice

partners and it is great that we all will be coming under one roof."

However, Sharath wondered on the possibility of players getting stale if the TTFI sticks to its plan of a long camp of 35 days.

## The National camp players:

**Men:** Sharath Kamal, Manav Thakkar, Manush Shah, Sudhan-shu Grover and Jubin Kumar.

**Women:** Archana Kamath, Sutirtha Mukherjee, Takeme Sar-kar and Anusha Kutumbale.

## Bopanna & Middelkoop in quarters

SPORTS BUREAU  
ANTWERP

Rohan Bopanna and Matwe Middelkoop of the Netherlands beat fourth seeds Jamie Murray and Neal Skupski 6-4, 6-4 in the €472,590 ATP tennis doubles first round here on Wednesday.

**The results:** First round: €472,590 ATP, Antwerp:  
Rohan Bopanna & Matwe Middelkoop (Ned) & Rohan Bopanna bt Jamie Murray & Neal Skupski (GBR) 6-4, 6-4.  
\$15,000 ITF men, Sharjah El Sheikh: Ivan Gakhov (Rus) bt Sidharth Rawat 7-5, 7-5; Arjun Kadhe bt Alexander Donski 6-4.

(Bul) 7-5, 6-0.  
**Women:** Bianca Jolie Fernandez & Leylah Annie Fernandez (Can) bt Sathwika Sama & Samanya Vig 6-3, 6-3.  
\$80,000 ITF women, Macon, USA: Anna Danilina (Kaz) & Anita Raina bt Naomi Broady (GBR) & Erin Routliffe (Nzl) 6-3, 6-4.

**Vel Tech**  
Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology  
(Deemed to be University Edn. u/s of UGC Act, 1956)

**10<sup>th</sup>**  
**e-CONVOCATION**

23<sup>rd</sup> October 2020 2:30 p.m.

**Chief Guest**  
**Dr. Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank'**  
Hon'ble Education Minister, Government of India

**SCAN & JOIN**

**In the presence of**

**Col. Prof. Vel. Dr. R. Rangarajan**  
Chancellor & Founder President

**Dr. Sagunthala Rangarajan**  
Foundress President

**Dr. S. Salivahanan**  
Vice Chancellor

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