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Women play with colors ahead of the Holi festival, in Jabalpur on Friday

## SC upholds Mistry's ouster from Tata Sons

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Friday upheld the ouster of Cyrus Mistry as executive chairman of Tata Sons in connection with the dispute between Tata Sons Pvt Limited and Cyrus Investments Pvt Ltd. A three-judge bench, headed by CJI SA Bobde, gave its verdict on the basis of cross-appeals filed by the two entities on the 2019 National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) order reinstating Mistry as executive chairman of Tata Sons. The top court's judgement is a big win for Tata Sons, which had earlier filed the appeal against the NCLAT order.

## 'KHELA HOBE' Bengal goes to polls today



Kolkata: The first phase of elections in high-stakes poll battle in West Bengal will be held on Saturday with both the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) seeking to outdo each other in poll promises and campaign rhetoric. While the BJP is striving to form its first government in the State, the Left-ISF-Congress alliance is also striving to spring a surprise. Thirty seats go to the polls in the first phase and include all constituencies in Purulia and Jhargram and some constituencies from Bankura, Purba Medinipur and Paschim Medinipur. Elections to 294 constituencies in the state will be held in eight phases till April 29 and the results will be declared on May 2. The first phase of polling will decide the electoral fate of 191 candidates including 21 women.



## NEW DELHI

AS farmers protesting against three contentious agricultural laws hold an all-India strike - Bharat Bandh - today to mark four months of their agitation at Delhi's borders, demonstrations have affected rail and road traffic.

Four trains were cancelled, and more than 30 trains were stopped amid agitations near railway stations in Delhi, Chandigarh, Firozpur and Amritsar.

Demonstrations were

# No threat of water crisis till April 6: DJB

NEW DELHI

AMID The threat of water shortage in the national capital due to proposed repair works of the Bhakra Nangal Canal, the water supply will continue to its full capacity in coming days, a senior official in Delhi Jal Board (DJB) told IANS on Friday.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court on Friday has directed to maintain 'status quo' in supply of water to Delhi till April 6.

The official said that raw water supply from Punjab through the Bhakra Nangal Canal to Delhi was continuing till Friday. However, the relaxation has come after the intervention of the Supreme Court. On Thursday, hearing a DJB's plea, the top court had directed to maintain a status quo in supply of water to Delhi till Friday.

Replying to IANS on whether DJB has received any official communication from the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB), a senior DJB official said, "We are commuting with BBMB regularly and have learned that they are preparing for an estimated cost required for repair work. After the Supreme Court's intervention,

we are hopeful that BBMB will continue to supply raw water to Delhi and will postpone repair work. Delhi has received a full water supply from Punjab till Friday morning." The BBMB, a Central government agency, provides 232 million gallons per day (MGD) of raw water to Delhi from the Ravi and Beas rivers, which is around 25 per cent of its total water supply. It had last month announced that repair works of canal will be carried out between March 25 to April 24, and therefore raw water supply to Delhi will remain affected.

The DJB, however, like in the past approached the Supreme Court to seek its intervention in the matter and got a much needed relief.

The threat of depletion in the water supply has led to panic which has been added by the fact that the DJB has no emergency plans to increase raw water supply from other resources, as IANS was told earlier. DJB vice chairman Raghav Chadha had said that DJB lacked any other emergency resource of water but they will knock every possible door to meet the requirement of water during the summer.

## 'Spidermen cops' stunt helps 3 trapped in Delhi blaze

NEW DELHI

THREE lives were saved in the heart of the national capital on Friday when a Delhi Police head constable and constable decided to go all super-hero risking their lives climbing a building to rescue people trapped in a raging blaze.

DCP South Atul Thakur in a statement said that a call of fire was received at 6.55 a.m. from a building at Greater Kailash area and it was entrusted to Head Constable Daryav.

All available police station staff, including the SHO were among the first team to reach the site.

"It was a fierce blaze on the second floor that had engulfed the third floor also.

"Three people -- Amit Sudhakar, 56, his wife Shalini, 48, and mother Sudha, 87, were trapped in the third floor balcony.

"The balcony was secured fully with iron grills, meaning there could be no rescued before the fire was extinguished."

However, the DCP said not just the fire what was also necessary at that point before the

survivors could be extracted out was calming down of their nerves -- and that is exactly what the two policemen - Head Constable Munshilal and Constable Sandeep did.

Once the rescue operation was in full swing supervised by the Delhi Fire Brigade personnel, Thakur said, "The brave police personnel scaled the walls from outside reached the iron rails and spoke to them, nearly hand-holding the three family members as the fire personnel launched the rescue from all sides.

The trapped needed to be calmed down, before any attempt to extract them could be attempted, and Munshilal and Sandeep -- did exactly that.

According to police officials, amid the blaze, two policemen - Head Constable Munshilal and Constable Sandeep -- risked their lives as they climbed on to the iron grills of the building to reach the family and calm them down.

Fire was doused after a few hours after four fire tenders worked alongside the police and persons were rescued with the help of fire department personnel, the DCP added.

## Govt extends validity of driving licence till June

NEW DELHI: The Union government on Friday extended the validity of motor vehicle documents like driving licence (DL), registration certificate (RC) and permits till June 30, 2021, in view of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. In an advisory to states, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MORTH) said it is extending the validity of fitness, permit, driving licence, registration and other documents whose extension of validity could not be granted due to lockdown and which had expired since February 1, 2020, or would expire by March 31, 2021.

# Went to jail for Bangladesh freedom: Modi PM attends Bangla National Day ceremony in Dhaka

DHAKA

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi, on a visit to Bangladesh, congratulated the country on Friday for its 50th year of Independence and said one of the first protests of his political career was for the freedom of the neighbouring nation.

"The freedom struggle of Bangladesh was a significant moment in my journey too... My colleagues and I had done a satyagraha in India... I was in my early twenties. I even had the opportunity to go to jail during this satyagraha for Bangladesh's struggle for freedom," he said.

Wearing a 'Mujib Jacket'



Sheikh Rehana, the younger daughter of Bangladesh's Father of Nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, receives Gandhi Peace Prize 2020 from PM Narendra Modi in Dhaka on Friday. Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina is also seen.

as tribute to Bangladesh's Father of the Nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Modi attended the National Day ceremony with the country's President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister

## Delhi Cabinet nod for job to bro of Ankit Sharma

NEW DELHI

THE Aam Aadmi Party government on Friday announced it will provide a government job to the brother of Intelligence Bureau (IB) staffer and Delhi riots victim Ankit Sharma.

According to the office of the Delhi Chief Minister, a proposal in this regard was approved in a cabinet meeting chaired by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday. Now, the proposal will be sent to Delhi Lt. Governor Anil Bajjal seeking his consent.

Sharma had lost his life during the riots in north East Delhi last year. His charred body was recovered from a drain near his home in northeast Delhi's Chand Bagh area on February 27, 2020. "The Delhi government wants to provide a government job to the late Ankit Sharma's brother as per the merit in Delhi government at the earliest. For this, the Delhi government will now have to get approval from the Lieutenant Governor therefore the proposal will be sent at the earliest for his approval," the statement issued by the Delhi Chief Minister's office read.

Earlier, the Delhi chief minister had provided financial aid of Rs 1 crore to Sharma's family during a visit to his home.

# 2ND WAVE FEARS LOOM GOVT CONFIDENT OF TAMING COVID

NEW DELHI

INDIA is better prepared now to tackle any challenges that Covid throws our way, said Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan at an event on Friday.

Commenting on the Covid-19 trajectory in India and the recent surge in cases, Vardhan noted at the 'India Economic Conclave' that: "The detailed concerted efforts of Central and State governments and India's investment in the 'Test, Track and Treat' strategy have resulted in India recording one of the lowest cases and deaths per million population. In the initial part of the pandemic, we had to establish everything from scratch, be it the surveillance, the laboratory capacity, the dedicated hospital infrastructure for Covid, the logistics of therapeutics and vaccine and not to forget creation of the public movement for Covid appropriate behaviour. We have amply demonstrated that our policy of test, track and treat effectively contains the transmission."

"Now that the systems are in place, we are better prepared to tackle any challenges that it throws our way."



A BMC health worker takes an antigen test of passengers arriving from Gujarat at Dadar station, in Mumbai

## 5 States record sharp rise in Covid cases

NEW DELHI: After touching its lowest mark in mid-February, India's active Covid-19 caseload is on a steady rise and has breached the 4-lakh mark again after around three-and-half months. As of date, there are 4.21 lakh active cases in the country. "Three states -- Maharashtra, Kerala and Punjab -- together account for 73.64 per cent of the total active cases in the country," the Union Health Ministry said.

## Night curfew in Maha from tomorrow

MUMBAI: Maharashtra will impose a night curfew in the entire State from Sunday amid the alarming rise in coronavirus cases. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Friday instructed officials to impose a curfew from the night of March 28 as he also asked them to strictly enforce the restrictions and Covid-19 norms in the State. Thackeray also warned of stricter restrictions if the people did not observe Covid-19 safety protocol.

# 'Country can't be capital for illegal immigrants'

NEW DELHI

The country cannot be the "capital" for illegal immigrants, the Centre told the Supreme Court which on Friday reserved order on a fresh plea seeking directions for immediate release of detained Rohingya refugees in Jammu and restrain the government from implementing any order deporting them to Myanmar. A bench

headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde refused to hear at this stage the intervention application filed by United Nations special rapporteur in the matter. "We will not hear you today. There is serious objection to it," the bench told the counsel appearing for the UN special rapporteur. "We are closing it for order," said the bench, which also comprised Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubra-

manian, after hearing submissions on the fresh plea. During the arguments, advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the petitioner, said Rohingya children were subjected to killing, maiming and sexual exploitation and Military in Myanmar has failed to respect international humanitarian law. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, said he is stating the

problems which persist in Myanmar. He said they are not refugees at all and this is the second round of litigation as the top court had earlier dismissed an application filed by the petitioner. "There was a similar application for Assam earlier. They (petitioners) wanted that no Rohingya be deported, we had said that we will follow the law. They are illegal immigrants.

## PM uses new VVIP aircraft for 1st time

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday went from Delhi to Dhaka on a new custom-made VVIP aircraft, using it for the first time on a foreign journey. The B777 aircraft, which has registration number VT-ALW, was delivered by Boeing to the Indian government in October last year. The aircraft, which has call sign AI1 or Air India One, departed from Delhi around 8 am and landed at the Dhaka airport around 10.30 am on Friday, government officials said. Another custom-made B777 aircraft, with registration number VT-ALV, was also delivered by the American aircraft giant to the Indian government in October last year.

## PM hands over Gandhi Peace Prize for Mujibur Rahman to his daughters

DHAKA: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday presented the Gandhi Peace Prize 2020, being conferred by India upon Bangladesh's 'Father of the Nation' Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, to his daughters - Premier Sheikh Hasina and her younger sister Sheikh

Rehana. Modi arrived in Bangladesh on a two-day visit to attend the celebrations of the golden jubilee of the country's independence, the birth centenary of 'Bangabandhu' Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and hold talks with his counterpart Hasina.

honoured the contribution of the Indian Army in Bangladesh's 1971 freedom war.

"We will never ever forget the sacrifice the soldiers of this great nation have made

and those by Indians who stood beside the soldiers of Bangladesh... we have not forgotten their bravery and courage.... we will never forget it," the PM added.

## 11 killed in Mumbai hospital fire

### Maha CM apologies, announces Rs 5 lakh relief

MUMBAI

A major fire broke out at a mall in Mumbai that houses a Covid-19 hospital on the third floor. Eleven people have died so far in the fire that broke out late on Thursday night. However, Sunrise Hospital later issued a statement saying the casualties were due to Covid-19 and not the fire.



The fire broke out late on Thursday night at the Mumbai mall that houses a hospital inside

Initially, it was reported that two Covid patients at the hospital have died in the fire while some others were feared trapped in the

building. Hours later, the Mumbai fire death toll went up to 10. Chief Fire Officer at Mumbai Fire Department said the death toll has gone up to 11 in the fire at Sunrise Hospital in Dreams Mall at Bhandup West. The firefighters have managed to douse down the flames after a prolonged fight since Thursday night to contain the fire.

# Bharat Bandh hits rail, road traffic

NEW DELHI



Farmers stage a sit-in protest on railway tracks in support of the nationwide strike, called by farmers' unions against the three farm laws, at Bahadurgarh Railway Station in Haryana district on Friday

also reported at National Highway-9 near one of three protest epicentres in

the national capital - the Ghazipur border. Policemen had set up barricades

to block the movement of protesters. The farmers' protest at the Delhi bor-

ders started on November 26 at three epicentres-Singhu border, Ghazipur and Tikri.

In a video message, Samyukta Kisan Morcha leader Darshan Pal had earlier said that the supply of vegetables and milk will be stopped by the protesting farmers.

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha - an umbrella body of protesting unions - also appealed to protesting farmers to be peaceful and not get involved in any conflict during the day-long protest.



# Womenia

TWEET PATROL


**AMEESHA PATEL**  
**@AMEESHA\_PATEL**

 Taking all  
 COVID precautions  
 at SHOOTS 🤝👍


## Power to women designer

ASKARI JAFFER

Ruchika's cerebral design philosophy and process is rooted and at the same time globally relevant. She practices her craft in a way that is unprecedented, by linking contemporary techniques with time-honored traditions and indigenous fabrics.

She shares that her journey has been exciting, frightening, and many more things that words fail to express.

She adds, "I'm still very much on that journey and figuring my way out as I go. But if I were to look back, I'd say I feel thankful for the immense support and love people have extended towards Bodice and for acknowledging and appreciating the language we speak through our clothes. My journey started with a simple wish to reinvent our country's textiles and see it in a new light every time, and I wish to keep doing so."

Ruchika was the Lakmé Absolute Grand Finale designer at the FDCI X Lakmé. Ananya Panday was the Lakmé Absolute Grand Finale showstopper. It was the Phygital edition of the FDCI X Lakmé Fashion Week and the collection is inspired by Lakmé's beauty theme #Mini-PlayMegaSlay. She shares that the experience felt surreal to say the least. The road between Gen-Next and FDCI X Lakmé has been less of a linear path and more of a roller coaster.

"I'm so excited that Bodice is coming full circle with Lakmé again and this time with the Lakmé Absolute Grand Finale. And I hope this journey we've charted becomes visible to people through our show," shares the designer.

The collection is called Ready. Set. Play. Which is inspired by games and the small things we find joy in. She shares that this collection is, in a way, about the delight of building Bodice from the ground up, piece by piece - adding two, three, five more blocks for every one block that fell out.

She says, "I also resonated with Lakmé's theme of finding joy in small things. Making the collection itself was such an exciting and joyful experience for me, despite all the unforeseen challenges that Covid threw our way. As the collection also coincides with Bodice completing 10 years, I wanted to experiment with colors, something we haven't explored a lot before. It came naturally to me amidst the somberness as I kept going back to colors for some cheer and joy. The signature of linear designs and symmetry is very much there but this time, we've rethought it in a way where the lines in the garments intersect like in a domino effect which kind of breaks with the wearer's movement. The whole vibe of the collection is aimed to be playful and something that evokes joy."



Bodice by Ruchika Sachdeva

**Ruchika Sachdeva is the Creative Director and CEO of BODICE, based in New Delhi, India. She has created a new language of modernity that acts as an antidote to Indian maximalism without discounting the heritage of the craft. Ruchika enjoys a pared-back approach that is expressed as an impulse to refine and elevate while also allowing imperfections be**



ment. The whole vibe of the collection is aimed to be playful and something that evokes joy."

The sensibility of the designs of Ruchika has always been minimal, functional, and focusing on the essential. She always questioned excess in anything and tried to simplify things, and that extends to my design sensibility as well. Linear patterns, architectural influencers, and geometry inspires her.

According to her, Bodice's creations are all about merging these elements with the great treasure trove of Indian textiles that they are blessed with. Comfort, utility, and practicality are always guiding their designs in their collections.

She shares, "Doing things sustainably was never a conscious

decision for me. I wouldn't have done it otherwise. I treat it as a responsibility and not something we do over and above everything else. Ethical decisions and accountability are good values to have. It isn't an added conversation; it is the foundation of every conversation at Bodice. And I think it is the responsibility of every designer at this day and age; in fact, it should be a prerequisite to designing clothes."

Sharing about her lateral perception towards traditional Indian techniques, she shares, "From my household, from simply watching my mother and grandmother and what they wore and how they treated their clothes. As I delved further into design, the absolute treasure chest, the Indian embroidery, weaving, dyeing skills opened up to me like a Pandora's box. It's available to every Indian designer to explore with respect and preserve and present to the world. Bodice tries to bust the myth that Indian traditional techniques are only exclusive for traditional Indian clothes. Its wisdom can be applied to any design aesthetic."

The most difficult task for any designer in designing a collection during the pandemic has to be the lack of physical touch, the lack of a team presents in the studio. "It's of primary importance to touch and feel the fabrics, to have trials and errors, brainstorm with your team, sit with your masterji and discuss things. All of that was missing almost overnight. But having said that, I'd also say that despite these hurdles, the excitement of this challenge was also very high. It gave me a certain sense of freedom to create without any stress or anxiety which I hope reflects in the collection," ends the designer.

GRUSHA KHANNA

With the beginning of the year, the festival of colors is just round the corner to spread joy amidst the seemingly never-ending chaos of Covid-19. Holi is the festival of colors which not only marks the victory of good over evil but also spreads happiness and colors in the lives of people. Fun-loving people have already started planning Holi parties with friends and family. To create your own style statement and be the show-stopper amongst your friends here are some tips that can help you enjoy the Holi party like never before:-

### Wear White

The best way to celebrate holi is by wearing white. White is the color that people sometimes avoid wearing during holi but wearing white on holi is not less than any celebrity feeling. Try wearing white kurta, top, sando etc. Just compliment your white top wear with jeans or shorts. This not only looks classy but is a perfect combo for Holi.

### Oiling

Don't forget to apply oil all over your body. Oiling helps you remove the stubborn color off your body. So do apply baby oil

on your face and mustard oil all over your body and Hair.

### Nail Paint

Do apply nail paint on all your nails, preferably dark colored. Nail paint will help in protecting your nails from colors and other stuff. Not only it will protect your nails but will make you look glamorous.

### Limited Gathering

While hosting a party make sure you follow the Covid-19 guidelines thoroughly and try to have a limited gathering in order to minimize the risk of spread of the Corona virus. Although Covid-19 has spoiled almost every festival last year, don't ruin your Holi this year by contributing to the spread of the deadly virus.

### Post Holi Ritual

Avoid wearing accessories as the color can get stuck and can ruin your ornaments. Also, don't be too harsh while removing color because it might harm your sensitive skin. Apply moisturizer and let your skin absorb it and then wash it off and take a nice bath with lukewarm water.

Lastly, don't forget to wear your mask this Holi, because Holi this year is all in all different so enjoy your festival with proper safety measures.



## NEWS ROUNDUP

### Taapsee Pannu posts 'pitch set' picture of 'Shabaash Mithu'

Actress Taapsee Pannu took to Instagram on Friday to post a picture from the set of her upcoming film Shabaash Mithu. The film is a biopic of Indian women's ODI cricket team captain Mithali Dorai Raj.

In the image, Taapsee stands at a cricket pitch donning cricket gloves and a helmet. She captioned the picture as: "Smile on Spirits high Pitch set #ShabaashMithu." Within minutes of the actress posting the picture, fans started commenting about how they are waiting for the film.

The actress has been keeping her fans updated with her preparation sessions for the film. She shared a picture recently of her practicing the cover drive shot.

The film has been directed by Rahul Dholakia and written by Priya Aven. Shabaash Mithu has been produced by Viacom18 Studios.

Besides this film, Taapsee will be seen in the films Looop Lapeta, Haseen Dillrubaa, Rashmi Rocket and Dobaaraa.



## World Theatre Day

The theater has been one of the most popular forms of entertainment since the Greeks, and the acting industry today is a hard but potentially prosperous career. If you have ever been in theater or seen a live show, you know how fun theater can be. It may seem like a dying industry due to the movie industry taking its role, but for those who love the art of theater, then you should know about World Theater Day. Let's find out about this special holiday and celebrate it!

World Theater Day has been created to pay tribute to this incredible form of entertainment. People have enjoyed going to the theater for many years now. It is a great way to spend time with loved ones and to witness live entertainment. There is just something magical about the theater, isn't there?

Initiated in 1961 by the International theater Institute (ITI), each year theaters across the world celebrate the value and importance of theater, and this holiday acts as a wake-up call for

governments, politicians, and institutions to see its value to society and for economic growth. ITI also host a yearly message, spoken by a chosen famous theater performer, to share their reflections on the art of theater and its future.

It also spreads the message by broadcast to all corners of the world through their institutions. Because ITI has over 90 centers throughout the world, the institute also encourages colleges, schools, and theater professionals to celebrate this holiday as well.

The date of this holiday also corresponds with the opening



of the Theater of Nations season in Paris. The goals of this holiday, according to ITI, is to promote theater in all corners of the world, bring awareness to the value of theater in all its forms, to help promote local theater communities on a broader scale, and to share the love of theater with others.



## Styling your denims this summer

If there's one clothing item as quintessential to summer as ice cream cones and SPF, it's denim shorts. The mere thought of wearing denim in the summer season can make us feel icky. While most of you feel like ditching denims in the summer because of the fabric's ability to stifle you, some of us are too loyal to just give up on them. If you belong to the latter clan, we've put together 6 ways to wear denim in this scorching heat and still be breezy.

### Layering

Choose denim vests to layer them over your sundresses or tank tops for an easy-breezy summery look 'coz let's be honest, thick, chunky denim jackets may work in the winters but for summers? They're a complete no-no.

### Denim dresses

A spaghetti denim dress will never fail to make a statement. Alternatively, you can also opt for off shoulder/cold shoulder dresses look out for the fabric used in these dresses that's comparative thinner so the outfit stays as breathable and breezy as any other summer outfit. Alternatively, you can also use the chambray shirts as tie-arounds



over your breathable dresses.

### Ill-fitted overalls

You can also opt for loose, ill-fitted overalls like jumpsuits and dungarees for a more comfortable approach towards wearing denim in the summers. The silhouette is relaxed and far from body-hugging which will ensure you don't feel hot!

### Denim bottoms

If denim jeans are your ride or die wardrobe staple and yet, wearing them in the summer gets uncomfortable AF, opt for loose silhouettes like flared, wide-legged or even culottes.





# Wife's family says she couldn't have died by suicide: Tharoor

NEW DELHI

CONGRESS leader Shashi Tharoor claimed before a Delhi court on Friday that the family and friends of his wife Sunanda Puskar have maintained that she couldn't have died by suicide.

Tharoor, represented by senior advocate Vikas Pahwa, said there cannot be abetment when she didn't die of suicide and sought discharge in the case.

The submissions were made before Special Judge Geetanji Goel during arguments on framing of charges in the case.

"Her relatives and son say she was a strong woman and couldn't have died by suicide. How

can there be a question of abetment when she didn't die by suicide," Pahwa said.

He further said the prosecution have failed to prove suicide.

The court put up the matter for further hearing on April 9.

He had earlier said post mortem and other medical reports have allegedly established that it was neither a suicide nor homicide.

The senior lawyer had further said not even a single witness has made any allegations of dowry, harassment or cruelty against him.

Pushkar was found dead in a suite of a luxury hotel in the city on the night of January 17, 2014. The couple was staying in the hotel, as the offi-



cial bungalow of Tharoor was being renovated at that time.

Pahwa had said there was no evidence against Tharoor to prove the offence punishable under either section 498A (husband or relative of husband of a woman subjecting her to cruelty) or

306 (abetment of suicide) of Indian Penal Code. Pahwa had said her death should be treated as accidental.

He had also said that during the course of the investigation there have been a plethora of reports by experts before the investigating officer (IO) but there was 'no definite opinion on the cause of death'.

He had added that even after years of investigation by the police, the prosecution has failed to conclusively identify the cause of death.

Pahwa had further submitted before the court that Pushkar was grappling with various medical ailments at the time of her death.

"The Investigating Officer erroneously formed

an opinion vis-a-vis the commission of an offence. However, reports and other material relied upon in fact exonerates Tharoor from all charges," he said. "The opinion of the Autopsy Board took into consideration circumstantial evidence beyond the four corners of the autopsy room which is not permissible.

"The Board has failed to substantiate their opinion during the course of the investigation due to which the IO decided to move onto seeking opinion from another Medical Board," Pahwa told the court.

Tharoor has been charged under sections 498A and 306 of the IPC, but was not arrested in the case. He was granted bail on July 5, 2018.

## Hand over Ansari to UP police, SC directs Punjab

NEW DELHI

THE Supreme Court Friday directed the Punjab government to hand over the custody of gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari, who is lodged in Rupnagar jail there, to Uttar Pradesh Police.

A bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and R S Reddy said that the custody of Ansari, an MLA from Mau constituency, be handed over to the state of Uttar Pradesh within two weeks. The top court also dismissed a plea by Ansari seeking transfer of cases lodged against him in Uttar Pradesh to some other place outside the state.

The top court delivered the verdict on the plea of Uttar Pradesh government seeking a direction to the Punjab government and Rupnagar jail authority to immediately hand over the custody of Ansari, to the district jail Banda. On March 4, the top court was informed by Punjab government that Yogi Adityanath-led government has got no fundamental right to seek Ansari's transfer from Rupnagar jail to a district jail in Banda in Uttar Pradesh. Ansari is lodged in district jail Rupnagar in Pun-



job in connection with an alleged extortion case since January 2019.

He is also accused in several cases of heinous crimes lodged in Uttar Pradesh. The UP government has earlier contended that Ansari has been "dodging" the judicial system and is running his alleged illegal activities from Rupnagar district jail in Punjab. While Uttar Pradesh had alleged in the apex court that there is "collusion" between Ansari and Punjab Police, the Amarinder Singh government has refuted these claims and raised questions over the maintainability of plea filed by the Yogi Adityanath government.

The UP government has referred to

the prison rules and said that though the state itself does not have fundamental rights, it can espouse the cause and the fundamental rights of the victims and it may assume the position of the victim. It said Ansari had flouted the jail manual rules and rights of the victim and the State at large cannot be overlooked and the accused cannot be allowed to jettison the fair trial. It had said that the top court under Article 142 can order transfer of Ansari from Punjab jail to a jail in Uttar Pradesh as around 14 and 15 cases are at final stages.

Ansari who has also filed petition seeking transfer of his cases in UP to outside the state, had submitted that because of his political affiliation to a party in opposition, he is being targeted. Punjab government had said that Ansari has been unwell and central government owned PGI Chandigarh has been given him the medical certificates from time to time. It had that UP government has made repeated efforts to seek Ansari's custody and it has been told by the Punjab jail authorities that Ansari has been unwell and their response has been based on medical records.

## Rahul becoming reason for Cong's downfall: Adityanath

NEW DELHI

UTTAR PRADESH Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday took a swipe at Rahul Gandhi, saying the Congress leader does not speak on his own but depends on "borrowed wisdom" and he is becoming a reason for his party's downfall.

"Rahul ji apni buddhi se toh kuch kahte nahin. Udhar ki buddhi vivek nahin deti hai. (Rahul ji does not say anything from his wisdom.

Borrowed wisdom does not give sense of reasoning)," Adityanath said while responding to a question about Gandhi's criticism of the state of affairs in Uttar Pradesh under his government. Adityanath made the remarks at the India Economic Conclave which he attended via a video bridge. The chief minister said that since Gandhi hardly visits the state, he would have little information about the ground situation there. When India faces a crisis, Rahul Gandhi does not remember the people of the country but his maternal grandmother in Italy, Adityanath said.

"He criticises north when he is in south, and south when he is in north (India)," the senior BJP leader said targeting Gandhi who is the MP from Wayanad in Kerala. The Congress leader had contested the 2019 Lok Sabha Elections from Wayanad and Amethi, but lost to BJP's Smriti Irani in the Uttar Pradesh seat. Gandhi also criticises India when he is abroad, Adityanath said, adding that when a person has such a nature, his reliability is under question. Adityanath claimed that Gandhi is becoming a reason for the Congress' downfall.

To a question about opinion polls predicting another term for the Left Democratic Front in Kerala against the convention of the party in power being ousted in the next election in the state, he said Gandhi's arrival in the state has triggered a slide in Congress' fortunes there. Responding to a question on West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee, he said it is an "ideological victory" for the BJP that people who used to describe going to temple as "communal" are themselves visiting temples. "This may be due to elections, but we consider it as our ideological victory. Ideological victory leads to real victory," Adityanath said.



## BHARAT BANDH

### Demonstrations held in Bundelkhand

BANDA

DEMONSTRATIONS in support of the 'Bharat Bandh' call by farmer unions protesting against the three farm laws were held in the Bundelkhand region on Friday but there was no impact on traffic and businesses.

Normal traffic was seen on the roads in Banda, Chitrakoot, Hamirpur, Mahoba and Lalitpur districts of the region, where movement of vehicles were seen and markets remained open. Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP), Banda, Mahendra Pratap Singh Chauhan said that some farmers associated with the Bundelkhand Kisan Union gave a memorandum to authorities by staging a peaceful protest.

However, there was no effect of the Bharat Bandh here, he said. President of Bundelkhand Kisan Union, Vimal Kumar Sharma, said that the memorandum addressed to President Ram Nath Kovind was submitted to the district administration after peaceful protests in Astarra, Baberu, Naraini, Palani and Sadar tehsils of Banda district. Superintendent of Police (SP), Chitrakoot, Ankit Mittal said that the bandh call had no impact in the district. Some farmers have, however, submitted a memorandum, he said. SP, Hamirpur, Narendra Kumar Singh said that some farmers staged a symbolic demonstration and submitted a memorandum to the administration. The markets remained open in the district, he said.

ASP, Mahoba, Rajendra Kumar Gautam said some farmers submitted a memorandum to the authorities and markets remained open and normal traffic was witnessed on the roads. ASP Lalitpur, Girijesh Kumar, said that a few members of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Tikait) gave a memorandum and left without staging any protest. No impact of the call was seen anywhere, he added. The 'Bharat Bandh' has been called by the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), an umbrella body of farmer unions protesting the three contentious Central agri laws. The nationwide shutdown has been scheduled from 6 am to 6 to mark four months of the farmers' agitation on Delhi's three borders -- Singhu, Ghazipur and Tikri.



### CYCLE-ON PROMOTES LIFESTYLE

The much-awaited event Firefox Firestorm, powered by Cycle-on was organised on March 21, at Gaur Chowk, Greater Noida. More than 150 participants took part in the cycling rally and everyone covered 10 kilometers of distance during the event. The idea of Cycle-On as a brand is the brainchild of Rajinder Singla, Abhishek Ranjan, and Saurabh Sharma. The primary purpose of the event was to promote cycling, not only as a fitness medium, but a lifestyle. The Cycle-on brand will conduct more events and exhibition in future also to promote the same.

## Doctor convicted in cheating case held for jumping bail

NEW DELHI

A 65-year-old doctor who was convicted in a cheating case has been arrested from Dwarka by the Delhi Police's crime branch for jumping bail, officials said on Friday. Gajender Nayyar, who was declared a proclaimed offender in 2016 by a court here, was on interim bail in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, he did not surrender before jail authorities after expiry of his bail period, they said. "After receiving a tip-off on Wednesday, a raiding party was constituted and the doctor was arrested from Aakash Hospital in Sector-3 of Dwarka," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Bhisham Singh said. He was also involved in issuing fake medical reports and had helped over 50 inmates in securing bail from the Delhi High court and other district courts, police said. Nayyar, an MBBS doctor, is an alumnus of the Maulana Azad Medical College, police said.

## UP food processing units to increase self-employment

LUCKNOW

THE Yogi Adityanath government is trying to increase self-employment among the youth in rural Uttar Pradesh through food processing units. Under the current food processing industries policy, capital grants and rebate in interest are being provided to those who are setting up such units. Apart from providing employment opportunities to people, these food processing units will also make the farmers of the villages economically self-reliant and fulfil the resolve of rural development. According to the government spokesman, the state government will create new jobs in the rural areas through its 62,122 units. A record investment of Rs 10,500 crore has been made in the food processing industry which is considered to be the backbone of the project. The government has made amendments in its food processing industry policy and will be ready to provide employment to around 3 lakh people by bringing investment of more than Rs 20,000 crore.

To increase employment and self-employment in rural areas, the units are being set up according to the area wise agricultural production.

Units related to milk products will be set up in Aligarh, Bareilly, Bulandshahr, Kanpur Dehat, Jaunpur and Mathura, while Auraiya and Kasganj will have units for making ghee.

## Delhi riots: Court issues NBW against man out on bail in UAPA case

NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has issued non-bailable warrant (NBW) against a man who was out on bail in a case registered under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, after he failed to appear before it in a case of north-east Delhi riots in February last year.

Additional Sessions Judge Amitabh Rawat issued NBW against Faizan Khan in the case after he did not appear before the court despite repeated calls. "Since accused Faizan Khan is absent despite repeated calls, hence, issue NBW against him with notice to his surety for next date of hearing," the court said in its order passed on March 25. Khan's counsel said she will move an application for cancellation of NBW against him.

The court also directed the police to supply hard copies of the charge sheets filed in the matter to all the 18 accused



and put up the matter for further hearing on April 8. Khan, then salesperson of a telecom service provider who allegedly sold a SIM card on a fake ID to co-accused Asif Iqbal Tanha, was granted bail by the Delhi High Court in October last year.

The police had alleged that the SIM card obtained on a fake ID was used to coordinate protests against the CAA. While granting him the relief, the high court had said "it is not the case of the investigating agency that the petitioner (Khan) was part of any such WhatsApp

groups which were made to coordinate/organize protests against the CAA. Moreover, there is no allegation against the petitioner that he engaged in any form of terror funding or such other ancillary activity".

It had further said that the transaction relating to the SIM card had allegedly taken place in December 2019, whereas the violence erupted in north east Delhi around February 23-25, 2020. The high court had said that Khan shall not directly or indirectly influence any witness or tamper with the evidence and added that the trial court shall not be influenced by the observations in the present matter. Communal violence had broken out in north-east Delhi on February 24 last year after clashes between citizenship law supporters and protesters spiralled out of control leaving at least 53 people dead and around 200 injured. (PTI)





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# A new era in technology awaits us

SCIENTISTS have discovered a new exotic, strange state of materials in contact with an environment that alters its physical properties in the presence of an electromagnetic field, leading to better quantum technologies, which are tunable and controllable as per the user requirements. Though this sounds a bit complicated for ordinary minds, it should be understood that quantum technologies could bring in yet another round of revolutionary changes in technology that could make life easier for people.

Indian scientists now have shown that, in an external electromagnetic field, geometric properties of a crystalline solid with lattices arranged in a one-dimensional periodic manner can display phase transitions, thereby altering its physical properties. The 2016 Nobel Prize for physics was awarded to the

theoretical discoveries of topological phase transitions and topological phases of matter, which have played a significant role in the modern understanding of materials and their applications.

Topology is concerned with the properties of a geometric object preserved under continuous deformations, such as stretching and twisting. Understanding various phases and phase transitions is of central importance in the study of matter. Generally, phase transitions are studied by assuming that the system is isolated, with little or negligible environmental interactions. Dibyendu Roy, Associate Professor, and his group from Raman Research Institute (RRI), an autonomous institute of the Department of Science & Technology, have been exploring systems in contact with the environment or the open quantum systems and their physical properties for a while.

They explored ways to control the topological phase transitions of matter in contact with an environment by an external periodic perturbation such as laser light in their present work. While studying the geometric phase in systems in contact with an environment and examining the environment's consequence on the band-structure topology of the systems, they discovered a new metallic state of the materials coupled to an environment. This work funded by the Department of Science and Technology, India, via the Ramanujan Fellowship, and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), India, under a grant for "Centre for Excellence in Quantum Technologies" has been published in the journal 'Physical Review B' recently.

In our everyday lives, several devices and technologies exploit some of the

other aspects of quantum physics, like LEDs, semiconductor technology, and nanomaterials. Usually, the environmental interactions in such quantum systems are either neglected or are considered very small. Through this work, the RRI team has shown that if such effects are carefully taken into account, one can drastically alter the quantum system's physical behaviour and lead to better quantum technologies. When the technology is applied, our batteries last 10 years per charge and MRI scanners the size of smartphones could be launched and above all, we can also have Medical sensors that diagnose disease with nothing more than a breath sample.

By harnessing the quirks of the quantum world – we're talking electrons and individual photons of light, the fundamental components of nature – we stand to explore and develop a new era of technology unlike anything we've known. It's only a matter of exerting proper science to get there.



# Odisha women lead as green warriors

TAZEEN QURESHY

SEVERAL studies and reports have found that local communities play a big role in conservation, sometimes bigger than the government agencies. A great reminder of this is the Chipko Movement, where women resisted deforestation in Uttar Pradesh (now Uttarakhand). Or, how a tribe in Arunachal Pradesh has prevented the critically-endangered Bugun Liocichla songbird from going extinct.

UN Special Rapporteur Victoria Tauli-Corpuz explained the effectiveness of community-led conservation in a 2018 study, titled 'Cornered by Protected Areas: Many (indigenous people and local communities) share an ethical interconnection with nature through their languages, beliefs and practices, reflecting a commitment to respecting and caring for the natural world.'

A case in point will be the tribal women of Odisha, who have been guarding their forests against smugglers for many decades -- voluntarily. Armed with nothing but a stick, women go into local forests in groups of three to six to drive the timber thieves away. If they catch one, they issue a warning and confiscate the produce being smuggled. When matters escalate, they either bring these thieves to the village meeting and demand a public apology or fine or involve an NGO to initiate police action.

This is thengapalli, a practice where every household takes turns to patrol their community forest with a stick (thenga means stick and palli means turn).

## 'Smuggling reduced, forests revived'

Thengapalli started in Odisha's Nayagarh district in the early 1970s but became popular in the 1990s when women came forward to protect forests alongside men.

Cut to the present. Women are solely responsible for keeping vigil on the forests in at least 300 villages in Nayagarh. In the Gunduribadi village of the district, the women-led forest protection committee has rejuvenated at least 500 acres of forest land because the smuggling of timber and other forest produce has reduced.

"We can spot the Giant Indian Squirrel in the Nayagarh belt, which wasn't the case a decade ago. Even the soil moisture retention has improved," Manas Mishra, an environment activist who has studied the forest-dwelling communities of the Nayagarh-Khorda belt, talks of the changes these women have brought.

Thengapalli has spread to other districts as well. The presence of women sentinels in smaller pockets of the Mayurbhanj district, such as Punasia, has brought down the menace of smuggling, and with that, the need for patrolling at night and carrying sticks as their weapon. They provide an extra layer of surveillance to the forests within the Similipal Tiger Reserve in Mayurbhanj. Dhaneswar Mahanta, who works with Vasundhara in the Reserve limits, explains, "The forest department deploys two to five guards per forest. On that, these committees send at least three volunteers through the day."

The practice has also crossed over to the bordering state of Jharkhand and has become a case study that is now studied in the schools of Hampshire in England.

## 'Women depend on forests more'

According to Y. Giri Rao, executive director of Vasundhara, a non-profit organisation that documents the forest conservation methods in Odisha, natural resources mean a lot more to women than men. "If the forest cover is depleted, the women would have to walk an extra mile to collect fuel for their daily needs," he gives an example.

This dependence did indeed encourage Sudamani Mahakud to take up thengapalli in her village Punasia. "If I need fuel to cook food, I can take leaves and twigs from the forest. If I need food to eat, the forest can give me greens and tubers. Some trees also have medicinal value. They are a source of food for the cattle as well. What more reasons do I need to protect the forest? I exist because the forest does," shares the 65-year-old, who has been guarding the forests for over two decades.

No sooner did women start protecting local forests, the conflict with the smugglers reduced. "If a group of men would confront smugglers, there were chances [for many instances] of fights. With women, there would only be verbal exchanges. In most cases, the smugglers belonged to neighbouring villages and so they would avoid confrontation with these women," explains Sanjukta Basa, who runs NGO Sangram in the Mayurbhanj district.

But breaking into a male bastion came with its share of pushback. "Since I would visit the police station often, I was labelled an 'undignified girl'. It became difficult for my parents to find me a groom. But it didn't matter to me. I had grown up listening to the stories about forests and I did not want to lose them," says Sabita Naik, who is in her late 40s and has gone from being a thengapalli volunteer to a forest guard in Mayurbhanj.

The rules of patrolling are decided mutually, factoring in when women can take time off from their domestic duties. If three women go for the 6am-9am shift, the second group goes out between 9am and 12pm. This continues till 9pm or 11pm. Guidelines to collect the forest produce are also laid down. For instance, a villager can take bamboo only after getting approval from the village committee.

## Communities await forest title

These women had taken up forest management long before The Forest Rights Act (FRA) was enacted in 2006. The Act gives these communities the right to use and manage traditionally-held forest lands. Three years later, the Odisha government declared that the forest title holders will get a house under the Indira Awas Yojana (now Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana). "Now people have started getting work under MGNREGA, especially related to forest land development," Rao informs how the Act has given an impetus to the forest conservation movement in Odisha, thengapalli included.

They may have got a push to do better but they haven't got the Community Forest Rights (CFR) yet. According to the data collected by Vasundhara, close to 32, 570 villages in Odisha have the potential to get CFR but only 2,800 applications have been approved and 2,300 titles given.

While the government officials say the delay is mostly due to insufficient documents, activists say the administration is being callous. "We are talking about the rights of people who have been associated with forests for generations. They may not always have the documents. Many of them are not aware of the legalities involved and need guidance," says Bhagyaxlami, a social activist in the region.

Forest protection can be strengthened if these communities get CFR because their understanding of the forest ecosystem is profound and unbiased, says Rao. Or, as Mahakud puts it: "Forest might be an entity for others, but for us, it is our means of survival. We can't think of a life without it."

A reassuring thought this is because multiple reports suggest that when women are involved in conservation activities, the results show.

# Get vaccinated now, don't repent later



V RAMU SARMA

READING about Corona virus and its re-emergence on a week-end does not bring cheers to anyone. But then getting confined to the four walls of the house in the name of home quarantine or to be in hospital getting treated for Covid-19 too is not what one would like. Hence its time we spare few minutes to think why we are once again facing the threat of a second wave? Why we Indians refuse to learn from experience? Why we don't respect the scientific temper and go in for vaccination? Why the political executive at the national level and those at the state level talk big but act low.

Last year has changed the world forever. From connecting to distancing, from the experiential to the virtual. As we move to the new normal it was expected that people would not forget the bitter experience, they had, but unfortunately for past few months people had become relaxed. They had started feeling that Corona has gone and they can go back to the practices of pre-Covid period. They had stopped wearing masks and most of those who wore, kept it hanging around their necks. Physical distancing was forgotten, and the result now is that there has been a spike in Corona cases to the extent of about 66 per cent within one week.

The situation in Maharashtra asserted that the situation could be as 'severe' as the previous one if norms were not followed. Cases could spread even more rapidly if preventive steps were not adhered to. Remember pandemic is not over.

The re-emergence of Covid-19 cases has turned financial markets nervous, economists and brokerages are not that worried this time around but small and medium enterprises particularly those in the tourism and hospitality industry are nervous that this would further slow down the recovery for these Covid-battered sectors and delay a full-blown economic recovery. Analysts say things are un-

likely to become too bad, and the nation should be able to deal with it much better.

India's daily Covid count crossed the 60,000 mark for the first time since November 6. In such situation, human behaviour is a major factor. State and local governments, as well as individual people, differ in their response to the pandemic. Some follow Covid-19 precautions, such as social distancing, proper wearing of mask and hand washing. Others are not as prescriptive in requiring these measures or in restricting certain high risk activities.

In some cities, towns and communities, public places are closed or certain restrictions imposed in malls and other such public places while others are operating normally. Some government and community leaders encourage or even mandate mask wearing and physical distancing in public areas. Others say it is a matter of personal choice.

However, the relationship between those precautions and cases of Covid-19 is clear: Places where people live or work closely, big families where more than two generations live, people gathering indoors to eat, celebrate, party or follow certain religious practices or hold kitty parties and other forms of socialisation, cases are on the rise.

Hotels, nursing homes are also super spreaders. During the first wave of Corona, the government used to claim that more number of cases are getting reflected because of increased testing and every government patted its own back saying that they were doing the most wonderful job. But the same cannot be said now. The spike in coronavirus cases is not due to more testing. The actual number of people getting sick with the coronavirus is increasing.

With festivals of Holi and Mahakumbh in Haridwar round the corner and five states in the midst of poll process, surge in Covid-19 cases was but natural. People who had lowered the guard are now worried and keep asking will there be second lockdown?

Their concern is not about the health but it is more about wealth. Even the cine industry is worried not about the welfare of those working in the industry but are concerned about the heavy financial losses the investors and the producers would



Vaccines have come into the market. But instead of taking the jab, people are indulging more in endless discourse making use or shall we call it misuse of social media. Curiosity is but natural for the public, especially with an unprecedented illness and its prevention. Nothing wrong in asking questions like, will the vaccine work, is it safe, when should I receive it, which one should I receive, can I choose not to be vaccinated, etc. The problem is we have any number of self-proclaimed experts who give shape to their fears and spread misinformation

suffer. But then they too lowered the guard and despite promising that all health protocols would be followed, nothing much is being done at the shooting spots.

State governments like Telangana have decided not to take any hasty decision. The Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao announced in the Assembly that though the second wave is firmly upon us there will be no lockdown under any circumstances since the state economy suffered a lot. Experts point out that lockdowns will once again destroy livelihoods and squeeze the economy. Instead, they say, India must double down on genomic sequencing to spot new variants, the pace of vaccination must pick up, and Covid-19 precautions must continue apace.

Agreed that another lockdown is not desirable nor necessary at this point of time. But at the same time the government should at least take strict measures to enforce measures like

physical distancing and wearing of masks. All state-run transport buses are being operated without either the authorities or the passengers following any precautions. Street food joints are back into roaring business. When Covid-19 cases began to fall in early 2021, people began to feel like the pandemic was behind us and hospitals have almost closed down Covid centres.

This rise comes along with the presence of new variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, and scientists are still trying to figure out how these variants behave. If we can reduce the mobility and mingling, we can restrict SARS-CoV-2 virus and control the surge. Vaccines have come into the market. But instead of taking the jab, people are indulging more in endless discourse making use or shall we call it misuse of social media.

Curiosity is but natural for the public, especially with an unprecedented illness and its pre-

## LETTERS

### Publicise vaccine drive more

INDIA'S Covid vaccination drive is suffering due to lukewarm response by private hospitals and people's apprehensions about the vaccines especially in rural areas (The surge continues, March 26). It is a pity political parties failed to give wide publicity as they were otherwise busy with various election campaigns across the country. There is urgent need to reaching out to people to quickly increase vaccine uptake, the way Jandhan zero balance accounts were opened in a big way in 2014. Our governments need to door deliver vaccine rather than ration.

Kshirasagara Balaji Rao, Hyderabad

### Cricket should inspire other sports too

ACE cricketer and Pakistan's former skipper Inzamam-ul-Haq has lauded the Indian team, especially it's

youngsters who in the recent tournaments have been stealing the show by displaying tremendous cricketing skills on the field - be it batting, bowling and fielding. Inzamam has heaped praise on the team by commenting that it seems as if India has set up 'a cricketing machine manufacturing smart and intelligent youngsters ready to perform stupendously in any format of the gentleman's game'. The former captain was referring to the way in which the youngsters of the Indian team turn up and give impactful and impressive performances and do their best in high voltage matches when the senior players were unable to perform well.

It is indeed a fact that Indian cricket of late has been witnessing the rise of many youngsters ready to display their potential and thereby showing that the future of Indian cricket is really strong, bright and optimistic. Most of these young cricketers were able to perform wonderful cricket in their debut matches and at times turned out to be game changers and match winners - be it Krunal Pandya, Prasidh Krishna, Ishan Kishan and the likes of Shubman Gill, Axar Patel, Suryakumar Yadav, Washington Sundar, Navdeep Saini and T Natarajan - have all left their mark in the first match that they played for India.

Inzamam is apt in saying that this gives a clear signal to the senior cricketers that they have to perform well to stay in the side. This also means each and every player will have to come out with their best to maintain a berth in the team.

The BCCI and the selection committee will have to be lauded for their choice of selection. Right from this cricketing year after the lockdown Indian team has been really doing good in India and abroad. The high voltage Australia series saw youngsters along with the seniors performing beautiful cricket. India's performance has been excellent in the last six months and the young cricketers have really done well for the team to gallop ahead. The IPL and the various tournament's conducted in a systematic manner has helped and opened the doors for deserving youngsters to choose the gentleman's game, get selected and come out with their best. This system is worth emulating and can be followed in other sports and games too.

M Pradyu, Kannur

### LPG cylinder leakage

I want to raise the issue of LPG gas leakage through the means of The Hans to Indian Oil Corporation. Being a small family, with a single connection, we, eco-

nominically, go for refill every three months. Unfortunately, since the last two refilled cylinders we have bitter experiencing of gas leakage and the cylinder exhausted within a period of two months.

Generally, the delivery boy checks the cylinder by removing the seal and pours some water on the vent to see whether the bubbles are coming or not. How this method is useful god knows. There are many complaints regarding gas leakage. The gas dealers are not sincere on this issue. Central government should think on this important matter seriously.

Deshavaina Kishan Prasad, Thimmapur Mandal, Karimnagar

### Entry restricted

THE Bengaluru civic body's move to tighten protocols for people entering the city from other parts of the country is a step in the right direction. From April 1, travellers from other states must carry a recent RT-PCR negative report for COVID-19. The rule had so far been limited to people from Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, and Chandigarh. The BBMP will also resume stamping the hands of COVID-19 patients to prevent them from roaming around. These steps could limit the spike in cases.

N J Ravi Chander, Bengaluru

thehansreader@gmail.com



## Police ask people to install CCTV cameras

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
RAJENDRANAGAR

TAKING note of crime-related incidents in Hassan Nagar and surrounding areas, the Rajendranagar police on Friday held an awareness programme in these localities to inform people about the importance of CCTV cameras in curbing the crime and nuisance cases in residential areas.

Under the supervision of Circle Inspector K Kanakiah and Sub Inspector M Vittal Reddy, the police personnel held awareness programmes at Hassan Nagar and Suleman Nagar to install confidence among local people and to inform them about the necessity of having CCTV cameras in and out their houses to contain cases pertain to crime and nuisance in the wake of regular incidents in recent days. It is pertinent to mention here that the incidents of hooliganism, substance abuse and quarrelling under the influence of contraband were reported exponentially from these areas in recent days.

“We have taken up awareness programmes in Hassan Nagar and Suleman Nagar areas to educate local people about the importance of CCTV cameras in the wake of increasing cases of nuisance,” informed Kanakiah.

# CAG wants State to streamline budget

Asks TS government to bridge the gap between budget estimates and actual expenditure

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD



THE Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) asked the State Finance Department to rationalise the budget preparation exercise to the bridge and minimise the gap between the budget estimates and actual expenditure. The CAG has made these recommendations making a series of observations considering the fiscal situation of Telangana.

It said there had been an increase in growth of Revenue Receipts (RR) and Revenue Expenditure (RE) during the years 2015-16 to 2018-19. As a percentage of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), however, both RR and RE have decreased marginally in 2018-19. But, the growth rates of RR and RE rose in 2018-19 and came close to the growth rate of GSDP. Contrary to the claims made by the State government that it has been investing in capital expenditure, the public finances watchdog pointed out that the Capital Expenditure (CE) has decreased in 2018-19 in comparison with the preceding year as well as in comparison to GSDP.

Giving its observations on the revenues and fiscal deficit, the CAG report tabled in the State Assembly on Friday said that the State registered a Revenue Surplus of Rs 4,337 crore. The Fiscal Deficit was Rs 26,949 crore. But, giving ammunition to the charges of the Opposition parties that the State government has been fudging figures, it pointed out that the revenue surplus, however, was overstated to the tune of Rs

9,481.97 crore. Similarly, the State government had understated the Fiscal Deficit by Rs 217.86 crore on account of misclassifications and non-contribution to Statutory Funds. Effectively, there was a Revenue Deficit of Rs 5,144.97 crore and a Fiscal Deficit of Rs 27,166.86 crore.

The CAG said that the fiscal parameters of the fiscal deficit were within the limits with 3.11 per cent of GSDP (Rs 8,65,688 crore) and within the limit of 3.25 per cent prescribed by the 14th Finance Commission. Also, a 3.5 per cent target set out in the Medium-Term Fiscal Policy Statement of the State Government as per the FRBM Act. Similarly, regarding the second fiscal parameter, the total outstanding liabilities (Rs 1,96,963 crore) were 22.75 per cent of the GSDP, which is within the limit of 23.33 per cent prescribed by the 14th Finance Commission. Also, within 25 per cent as targeted by Medium Term Fiscal Policy Statement (MTFP) of the State government.

The Primary Deficit (Rs 14,363 crore), in 2018-19, has decreased by nine per cent in comparison to the preceding year (Rs 15,864 crore). Primary Deficit, though decreased, indicates that the non-debt receipts were not sufficient to meet Primary Expenditure.

On Mobilisation and application of resources, the CAG said that Revenue Receipts (Rs 1,01,420 crore) in 2018-19 increased by Rs 12,596 crore (14 per cent) over FY 2017-18. However, it was lower than the budget estimates by Rs 29,555 crore (23 per cent). Revenue Expenditure (Rs 97,083 crore) in 2018-19 increased by Rs 11,718 crore (14 per cent) over FY 2017-18. It was, however, lower than the budget estimates by Rs 28,372 crore (23 per cent). On capital expenditure fronts, it was (Rs 22,641 crore) in 2018-19 decreased by Rs 1,261 crore (five per cent) in comparison to 2017-18, which was, however, lower than the budget estimates by Rs 10,728 crore (32 per cent), it added.

## ‘TS tax collocations remained constant’

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD

THE State government measures on collection of taxes in terms of cost of collection as a percentage of the Gross Revenue Collection (GRC) of major taxes remained almost constant compared to previous years.

It is one among the several observations made by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) in its report tabled in the State Assembly here on Friday.

On the tax collection front, it said that they are almost constant compared to previous years in respect of taxes on vehicles, stamps and registration fees. However, there was improving inefficiency in respect of taxes on sales, trade etc said in its review of the State Goods and Services Tax and State Excise. On the committed expenditure in the budget, it said that the burden of committed expenditure measured as a percentage of Revenue Expenditure of the State. On this front, what was steadily rising during the previous years has declined by six per cent from 61 per cent of Revenue Expenditure in 2017-18 to 55 per cent in 2018-19. There was an increase in interest payments to the tune of 16 per cent, subsidies of two per cent, and salaries by 1.5 per cent. However, pension payments, on the

other hand, decreased by four per cent.

Specifically, the CAT pointed out that the greater reliance on market borrowings by the Telangana government in recent years has led to an increase in liabilities on account of interest payments.

The State government’s focus on some fields to incur development expenditure is however resulting in the lesser expenditure on some other sectors, it added. The public watchdog, in its observations on the adequacy of public expenditure, said that the Telangana focused more on Development Expenditure to the tune of Rs 93,483 crore and Capital Expenditure of Rs 22,641 crore.

It said that the focus of the State government on education was comparatively lesser across the years. The per capita expenditure in some major socio-economic sectors shows that agriculture got the top priority with a 97.82 per cent increase in per capita expenditure over the previous year due to a new Investment Support Scheme (Rythu Bandhu). Similarly, there was a considerable increase of 12.41 per cent on health and family welfare over the previous year. However, there was a considerable dip in the per capita expenditure in respect of transport by 14.32 per cent, and education, sports, arts and culture by 6.19 per cent, it said.

## EC: Several hurdles to ‘one nation one poll’

HYDERABAD

THE Election Commission of India is working with IIT-Madras on using Blockchain Technology for remote voting and considerable development in that direction is expected by 2024 General Elections, Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora said here on Friday.

Interacting with Indian Police Service (IPS) probationers at the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Police Academy here, he said though ‘One Nation One Elections’ is desirable, it is difficult to achieve it as it requires amendments of existing laws and political consensus.

“We are doing a project with IIT-Madras, Chennai, and some of the eminent scientists. We are doing a Blockchain project. We are very hopeful by 2024 Lok Sabha elections you will see a lot of fundamental differences the way we (Election Commission) is working, including this (e-voting),” Arora replied when asked if the EC is working to introduce app-based e-voting for the convenience of citizens to vote remotely. He said the EC is also working on linking Aadhaar card with voter id as part of electoral reforms. Elaborating on the ‘One Nation One Election,’ he said the existing laws would have to be amended to undertake that gigantic exercise which also requires political consensus. “It’s a desirable goal, difficult to achieve till the basic laws are amended... Unless you align the life of Parliament with the life of the state legislatures by amendments of the law...”

## MPTC, ZPTC POLLS

# Govt eager to complete the process with new SEC



- It is likely to set aside the seats where candidates died in the last one-year period

- According to information, 87 MPTC candidates and 13 ZPTC candidates, including 41 from YSRCP, have died since March last year when polls were deferred
- New sarpanches will be administered oath of office on April 3

P V KRISHNA RAO  
AMARAVATI

THE state government is planning to go for MPTC and ZPTC elections immediately after the appointment of new State Election Commissioner (SEC) on April 1. The government is said to be preferring to complete the election process along with Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection to con-

centrate fully on Covid-19 vaccination programme.

It may be noted that the present SEC N Ramesh Kumar ruled out conducting of MPTC and ZPTC elections by the end of his term on March 31. The SEC deferred the elections due to legal issues and demand from opposition for fresh notification. He cancelled the MPTC and ZPTC elections schedule on March

15 last year due to Covid pandemic.

Now the state government is facing a fresh problem of death of candidates who filed nominations for MPTC and ZPTC elections last year. It is said 87 MPTC candidates and 13 ZPTC candidates, including 41 candidates from YSRCP have died since March last year. These include those who were declared unanimous winners.

According to the ruling party sources, the government wants to hold MPTC, ZPTC elections setting aside the seats where the contesting candidates died and there is no possibility of nomination of fresh candidate as it would delay the election process. The panchayat raj officials are also getting ready to conduct polls.

Meanwhile, the government directed the officials to administer oath of office to elected sarpanches on April 3.

Of the total 10,047 MPTC seats in the state, the State Election Commission issued notification to conduct elections for 9,692 MPTC seats leaving the unanimous seats.

- Launches updated Spandana portal which has simplified petition system
- Says clearing Spandana petition will be the criterion for the performance of District Collectors
- Status of the petition can be known through web link or by calling 1092 or through village secretariat

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
AMARAVATI

CHIEF Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy launched the updated Spandana portal at his camp office here on Friday. Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said the officials and higher authorities should track the petition submitted by a person till the issue is solved and this tracking mechanism should be strong. The grievances of people should not be ignored and the officials of CMO should directly monitor and review on a regular basis, he added.

The reason for rejecting a grievance petition must be mentioned and if accepted, they must be addressed to. If they are not



Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy launches the updated Spandana portal at his camp office in Tadepalli on Friday

solved within the stipulated time, they should be noted and alerts should be sent to relevant officials. Clearing Spandana petitions would be a criterion for performance of collectors, he said.

The new updated portal has 858 subjects and 3,758 sub-subjects as against 2,677 subjects and 27,919 sub-subjects in old portal. The updated portal will help save the time.

The petitions can be submitted through village secretariats, call centre, web application, mobile app and Praja Darbar.

The petitions submitted would be classified as critical, high, and general. The status of the petition can be known through web link or by calling 1092 or through village secretariat. If the petitioner

is not happy with the result, he can request to reopen the petition at district level or head of the department level. Feedback will be taken from citizens on the services and surveys would be conducted on the quality of services in solving the grievances and third party auditing also will be conducted.

The Chief Minister said every scheme of Navaratnalu should be implemented effectively and the officials should take necessary action as soon as they come to know if the names of those eligible have not been found in the beneficiaries list during the social audit of Navratnalu schemes and added that if anyone is left out after social audit, they should be given the opportunity to apply

for a period of one month from the date of implementation of the scheme. He said the verification of the applications should be completed in the second month and the funds should be released in the third month and the implementation of the scheme would be considered complete after due process.

He directed the officials to ensure that house sites are allotted within 90 days of receiving the applications and said it’s the responsibility of the officials to hand over the house site patta to the beneficiary in stipulated time.

The officials said around one lakh new applications were received for house sites and their verification is completed. The Chief Minister instructed the officials to re-verify the applications by next month and take steps to allot house site pattas to the eligible beneficiaries.

Land administration chief commissioner Neerab Kumar Prasad, IT, electronics and communication secretary G Jayalakshmi, science and technology secretary Vijay Kumar, AP State Housing Corporation managing director Narayana Bharat Gupta, Aarogyasri CEO Dr A Mallikarjuna and other officials were present in the meeting.

## AP Govt sanctions ₹6.30 cr for vehicles to HC judges

AMARAVATI

JUDGES of the Andhra Pradesh High Court will get a fleet of brand new limousines for their use as the state government has given its consent for the purchase of 20 Kia Carnival premium vehicles at a cost of Rs 6.30 crore. The state government late on Thursday night gave permission for the purchase of the limousines, each worth Rs 31.50 lakh, within hours after the High Court Registrar General writing a letter requesting that the former give consent and also allocate an additional budget of Rs 6.30 crore.

The AP High Court currently has 19 judges, including the Chief Justice and the Registrar General said the new limousines are for their use. Despite the severe funds crunch, the government decided to make an exemption in the case of the High Court and oblige the judges, with directions for file clearance coming directly from the Chief Minister’s Office, bureaucratic sources said.

“Tens, if not hundreds, of crores of rupees of payments are stalled for want of money and there is a general ban on purchase of new vehicles. Even payments running into several crore rupees for Covid-19 management are also not paid for months,” a senior official pointed out.

## Land pooling ‘biggest scam’: Sajjala

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
AMARAVATI

ASSERTING that Amaravati land pooling scheme is one of the biggest scams, Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, advisor to the government (public affairs) and YSRCP general secretary, said that TDP leaders are intentionally playing tricks to bluff people with sting operations as their roles were fully exposed.

Addressing a press conference here on Friday, Ramakrishna Reddy said that former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu deliberately brought land pooling scheme to benefit his benamis and close associates, which is a scam running into Rs 1 lakh crore and part of it is the illegal transaction of assigned lands. He said that Naidu’s aides made agreements on those lands threatening the poor that compensation of land pooling would not come and snatched their lands at a very low price.

Pointing out that the GO 41

- Says TDP leaders are coming with new dramas in the name of ‘sting’ operations as their role in the scandal has been exposed
- Alleges that then CM Chandrababu and Narayana are the key players in the landgrab of Dalits



was issued by the then government amending the Land Pooling Act, he said that the sole intention was to benefit those who grabbed the assigned lands

from the poor. The GO also has the signature of then Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu who was also the chairman of CRDA and municipal minister P Narayana. Chandrababu is Accused-1 and Narayana is A-2 in this case, he added.

The previous government revealed about the capital in January 2015, but even before the announcement, TDP leaders and their aides acquired lands in the region.

Later, amendments were made to the Land Pooling Act in February 2016 through GO No 41, betraying the poor.

TDP leaders are putting up the new drama of bringing sting operations just to mislead the people, he said and added that people were not ready to believe their cheap tricks. If Chandrababu is not involved in the scam, he should cooperate in the investigation or be prepared to face the penal action for the scam, he said.

## Coop sector staff to have transfer facility

- Agriculture Minister Kannababu says new HR policy will be implemented with transfer facility to staff of cooperative banks and PACS
- Market yards will be developed at a cost of ₹500 cr under Nadu-Nedu 2nd phase



HANS NEWS SERVICE  
AMARAVATI

MINISTER for agriculture K Kannababu said facility of transfers will be provided to employees of cooperative banks and primary agricultural cooperative societies (PACS). He said new human resources (HR) policy would be implemented in cooperative sector.

Speaking to media persons at the secretariat on Friday, the minister said market yards will be developed at a cost of Rs 500 crore in second phase under Nadu-Nedu

programme. Food processing units will be set up in each parliamentary constituency. Stating that the state government has been giving priority for the welfare of farmers, the minister said the government purchased agricultural produce worth Rs 4,700 crore.

The minister said during Nabard meeting held earlier in the day, the government submitted State Focus Paper-2021-22 requesting agricultural loans to a tune of Rs 1.57 lakh crore and term loans of Rs 31,805 crore and for crop

production and marketing Rs 1.13 lakh crore registering 9 per cent more than last year.

The agricultural minister said food processing units will be set up in all 25 parliamentary constituencies at a cost of Rs 2,900 crore including Rs 1,300 crore Nabard funds.

The minister said that the state government determined to strengthen and streamline cooperative sector. He said new HR policy will be implemented in cooperative banks and experts will be appointed as ex officio directors for better performance of banks.



# In a first, ITBP deploys retired combat canines as 'therapy dogs'

**Dogs will help in early recuperation of personnel undergoing medical treatment and also for their specially-abled kids**

NEELABH SRIVASTAVA  
NEW DELHI

IN a novel initiative, border guarding force ITBP has decided to utilise the services of its retired combat canines as 'therapy dogs' to help in the early recuperation of personnel undergoing medical treatment and also for their specially-abled children.

The challenges of life after retirement for the aged and out-of-service four-legged soldiers has been a subject of concern for various central armed police forces (CAPFs) that deploy about 3,500 dogs for a variety of roles in the internal security domain -- ranging from detecting hidden explosives to sniffing out terrorists and drugs and assault and guard duties. The issue was also discussed during a recently-held na-

tional conference on police canines that was conducted by the newly-created cell for this subject in the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). Dogs, at present, who retire from these central forces are usually handed over to animal NGOs or kept at a retirement home within the organisation for post-retirement care.

A first batch of five dogs who have been living in their 'retirement home' at the ITBP national training center for dogs and animals at Bhanu near Chandigarh have been inducted for a second innings task of being 'therapy dogs'. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Sudhakar Natarajan, the veterinary chief of the ITBP, tells PTI that Pooja, Tom, Rambo, Rani and Gravey, who recently retired from active service, are just over 11-years-old and have served in various anti-Naxal op-



erations and counter-insurgency grids of the country along with their handlers accompanying Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) patrols.

"All five dogs have started visiting ITBP hospitals and have given soothing emotional support to patients, that is a welcome break for them from the dreary hospital monotony. "Also, these dogs have interacted with children with special needs, and the spark seen in their eyes is to be seen to be believed. An immediate connection between the child and dog was remarkable," Natarajan said about the preliminary findings of the new move.

A compliance report submitted by the border force to its administrative department - the Union home ministry - on Thursday said that the force plans to visit local schools, where specially-abled children are

taught, with these 'therapy dogs' to spread joy. The report said the experiment is being watched and analysed. "Our veteran K9 (canine) heroes have just been deployed as therapy dogs. The response of patients (ITBP troops under treatment in their hospitals) was very encouraging. "Many are long-term patients and they expressed unalloyed joy in engaging with these dogs in non-verbal communication, purely from the heart. The long term effects on engagement with therapy dogs are being observed," the report said. DIG Natarajan, the brain behind the move, said the aim of the initiative is to ensure that the canine soldiers who served with sincere dedication in the prime of their age and helped to save numerous lives from potential life threats, are taken care off even in their hey days.

## Night curfew in entire Maha

**No proof 2nd wave due to virus variants: Virologist Shahid**  
**China outlines Covid-origin findings, ahead of WHO report**

MUMBAI

MAHARASHTRA will impose a night curfew in the entire state from Sunday amid the alarming rise in coronavirus cases. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Friday instructed officials to impose a curfew from the night of March 28 as he also asked them to strictly enforce the restrictions and COVID-19 norms in the State. Thackeray also warned of stricter restrictions if the people did not observe COVID-19 safety protocol, it said. The chief minister reviewed the COVID-19 situation in the state in a meeting with divisional commissioners, district collectors, superintendents of police and deans of medical colleges.

There is so far no evidence that the second wave of Covid-19 in the country is due to variants of the virus, but it is possible, said noted virologist Shahid Jameel.

He, however, stressed that the sharp rise in coronavirus infections seen recently is mainly because people have stopped following COVID-appropriate behaviour.

In an interview with PTI, Jameel, who has won the coveted Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize, said the rollout of vaccines has caused a false sense of security among people. "But vaccines won't work unless we take them. As of March 25, only 8.1 million people have taken both doses, which is 0.6 per cent of India's population. Further, 46.4 million people or 3.3 per cent of India's population have taken only one



dose, which gives weak or no protection," he said. Jameel further said there is so far no evidence that the second wave is due to variant viruses. "But this is possible".

German health officials warned Friday that the country's latest eruption of coronavirus cases has the potential to be worse than the previous two last year, and they urged people to stay at home during the upcoming Easter break to help slow the rapidly rising numbers of new infections. Chinese officials briefed diplomats Friday on the ongoing research into

the origin of COVID-19, ahead of the expected release of a long-awaited report from the World Health Organisation.

The briefing appeared to be an attempt by China to get out its view on the report, which has become enmeshed in a diplomatic spat. The US and others have raised questions about Chinese influence and the independence of the findings, and China has accused critics of politicising a scientific study. "Our purpose is to show our openness and transparency," said Yang Tao, a Foreign Ministry official.

## Protests erupt over PM Modi's Bangladesh visit, four killed

CHITTAGONG

AT least four people were killed in the Bangladeshi city of Chittagong on Friday after police fired rubber bullets at protesters during a demonstration against the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a police official said.

"We had to fire teargas and rubber bullets to disperse them as they entered a police station and carried out extensive vandalism," Rafiqul Islam, the police official told Reuters, referring to protesters.

Protests against Modi's visit were also flared in the capital Dhaka, where dozens of people, including two journalists, were injured in clashes with police, witnesses said.

"India has now become one of our best development partners. In our independence war, we always remember the contribution of India," Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

"I extend my heartfelt thanks to PM Narendra Modi who has consented to grace this occasion even amidst this pandemic.

"I thank govt of India and PM Modi in particular for awarding the prestigious Gandhi Peace Prize 2020 to Sheikh Mujibur Rehman. On this very auspicious moment, I must say India indeed honoured a worthy leader of south Asia and a real follower of Gandhiji through this award.



## 32 killed, 66 hurt as two trains collide in Egypt

CAIRO

AT least 32 people were killed and 66 injured on Friday when two trains collided in southern Egypt, the Health Ministry said, the latest deadly rail accident to hit the country.

A statement said dozens of ambulances rushed to the scene in the Tahta district of Sohag province, some 460 kilometres (285 miles) south of the capital Cairo. "32 people were killed and 66 injured" and transported to hospital, the statement said.

Video footage seen by AFP showed several carriages overturned.

Egypt has been plagued with deadly train accidents in recent years that have been widely blamed on inadequate infrastructure and poor maintenance.

One of the deadliest occurred in 2002 when 373 people died as a fire ripped through a crowded train south of Cairo, and there have been many fatal crashes since.

In March last year, at least 13 people were injured when two passenger trains collided in Cairo, triggering a brief suspension of rail services nationwide.

At the time rail managers blamed the crash on signals not functioning in bad weather.

## India, Pak hold brigadier-level meet on ceasefire pact

NEW DELHI

INDIAN and Pakistani armies held a brigadier-level meeting at Poonch-Rawalpote crossing on Friday as a follow-up to their agreement to observe ceasefire along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir. Last month, the Indian and Pakistani armies re-committed themselves to the 2003 ceasefire on the LoC.

The return to the ceasefire was agreed upon by the director-generals of military operations of the two countries.

"Post the DGSMO Understanding 2021, a Brigade Commander Level Flag Meeting was held between Indian and Pakistan Army at Poonch-Rawalpote Crossing Point on 26 Mar 2021 to discuss implementation mechanism as per the understanding," the army tweeted. On Thursday, Army Chief Gen MM Naravane said the LoC has been silent for the first time in around five to six years as not a single shot was fired in March barring an odd incident.

At the same time, he said the terror infrastructure including terrorist launch-pads on the Pakistani side remained intact.

"I am glad to inform that in the whole month of March, we have not had a single shot fired at the Line of Control barring an odd incident. It is for the first time in about five or six years that the LoC has been silent. That really bodes well for the future," Naravane had said.

## Can polls in Pondy be deferred? HC asks EC

CHENNAI/KOLKATA

THE Madras High Court on Friday said a serious investigation was required into the allegations that the Puducherry unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party had access to voters' Aadhaar details and asked the Election Commission if the April 6 polls in the Union Territory could be deferred till completion of probe.

The commission submitted that polls cannot be deferred on mere allegations but informed the court that a show-cause notice has been issued to the BJP.

The first bench of Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy raised the query when a public interest litigation from A Anand, president of the Puducherry unit of the Democratic Youth Foundation of India, came up for further hearing on Friday.

The bench asked the EC if it would be possible to defer the polls in the Union Territory beyond April 6, till completion of the probe on the allegation that the BJP was illegally using the Aadhaar data for canvassing.

West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee on Friday lashed out at PM Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah a day before the state begins voting in a closely-watched, flipping back their accusations of the ruling TMC runs extortion syndicates.

"They have two syndicates. One is a rioter, has sponsored riots in Delhi, Gujarat and UP. And the other one... has slowed industrial growth but is only growing his beard. Sometimes he puts himself above Gandhi ji, above Rabindranath Tagore, sometimes calls himself Swami Vivekananda and names stadiums after himself. One day he will sell the country too and name it after himself. Something is wrong with their head. It seems a screw is loose," she said.



Congress candidate from Ranaghat North West Bijoyendu Biswas rides a bullock cart on his way to submit his nomination papers, in Nadia on Friday

## 'Elect govt that upholds democracy'

NEW DELHI: Ahead of the Assam assembly polls, former prime minister Manmohan Singh on Friday alleged that the society is being divided on the basis of religion, culture and language, and asked people to elect a government that upholds the constitution and the principles of democracy.

He assured the people that if the Congress is voted to power, the Citizenship Amendment Act will not be implemented. In a video message, a day before the first phase of polling on March 27, Singh urged the people of Assam to vote for the Congress. "Today, I am speaking as one of you. Once again, the time has come to cast your ballot in the Vidhan Sabha election. You must vote wisely."

## Voters' list fraud in Kerala: Cong

KOCHI: The Congress on Friday alleged that the Left Democratic Front government in Kerala was committing electoral "fraud" in cahoots with the state election machinery by enrolling bogus voters, and moved the Election Commission seeking corrective measures for ensuring "free and fair" polls.

Kerala goes to polls on April 6. Counting of votes will take place on May 2 along with Tamil Nadu, Assam, West Bengal and Puducherry. A delegation of Congress leaders met with the election commissioners in the central election commission and alleged that the Pinarayi Vijayan-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) government was "committing a fraud" in collusion with officials of the state election machinery.

## 73 lakh voters to decide fate of candidates in 30 seats today

KOLKATA

MORE than 73 lakh voters in West Bengal will decide the fate of 191 candidates across 30 assembly segments, most of which are in the once-Naxal-affected Jungle Mahal region, as the state goes to the polls in the first phase on Saturday.

The elections will be held amid tight security with the Election Commission deploying around 684 companies of central forces that would guard 10,288 polling booths housed in 7,061 premises, officials said. Besides, the state police will also be deployed at strategic locations, they added.

In the first phase, polling will take place amid strict COVID-19 guidelines in all nine seats in Purulia, four in Bankura, four in Jhargram and six in Paschim Medinipur, besides the seven seats in high-stakes Purba Medinipur -- the home ground of BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari. The TMC and BJP have fielded candidates in 29 seats each, while the Left-Congress-ISF alliance has put up candidates in all 30 seats, even as there are "friendly fights" in some.

Of these 30 seats, 27 were won by the TMC in the 2016 assembly elections, the Congress bagged two and RSP one. However, the equations changed in 2019 with BJP making massive inroads in the tribal-dominated Jungle Mahal region, winning all five Lok Sabha constituencies -- Purulia, Bankura, Jhargram, Medinipur and Bishnupur.

## Vijayan orders judicial probe against ED

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

CHIEF Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Friday decided to order a judicial probe against the Enforcement Directorate following a complaint by two women police officials that they heard the ED officers pressuring the prime accused in Gold smuggling case Swapna Suresh and asking her loaded questions to name Vijayan.

This new judicial probe will be headed by Justice (retd) V.K. Mohan and the terms of reference also have been given.

To make this a reality, the Vijayan government has to get the approval of the Election Commission, the procedures for that have also commenced.

Incidentally, this judicial probe comes close on the heels after Vijayan ordered the Crime Branch wing of the Kerala Police to register a case against the ED officials who were responsible for this.

An FIR has been filed before a court in Kochi against Kochi ED officials on charges which include conspiracy and other non-bailable offences.

This new move comes a few days after the ED officials approached the Kerala High Court to quash the FIR registered against them and sought a CBI probe into this. All this is happening at a time when Kerala goes to the polls on April 6 to elect a new 140-member Kerala Legislative Assembly.

And ever since Vijayan took over the election campaign, practically every day he makes it a point to say that the government under him was of a different breed and it has always taken on the Centre.

## Men forced to rape family members in Ethiopia's Tigray region: UN

NEW YORK

MORE than 500 rape cases have been reported to five clinics in Ethiopia's Tigray region, the United Nations said, warning that the actual numbers might be far higher.

"Women say they have been raped by armed actors, they also told stories of gang rape, rape in front of family members and men being forced to rape their own family members under the threat of violence," Wafaa Said, deputy U.N. aid coordinator in Ethiopia, said in a briefing to U.N. member states in New York.

She said at least 516 rape cases had been reported by five medical facilities in Mekelle, Adigrat, Wukro, Shire and Axum.

"Given the fact that most health facilities are not functioning and also the stigma associated with rape, it is projected that actual numbers are much higher," she added.

Ethiopia's U.N. ambassador, Taye Atskesse-lasse Amde, told Reuters his government took the allegations of sexual violence "very seriously" and had deployed a fact-finding mission.

"Ethiopia has a zero-tolerance policy for sexual crimes and anyone found responsible for the despicable acts will be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law," he said.

Dozens of witnesses in Tigray have told Reuters that soldiers from neighbouring Eritrea routinely killed civilians, gang-raped and tortured women and looted households and



crops during the conflict. Eritrea's Information Minister Yemane Gebremeskel, responding in general terms to the U.N. briefing, said on Friday that sexual violence and rape "are an abomination to Eritrean society" and should be harshly punished if they occurred.

Eritrea has repeatedly denied its troops were in Tigray, although Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed on Tuesday acknowledged Eritrean troops were present in the region.

A dozen top U.N. officials called on Monday for an end to indiscriminate and targeted attacks against civilians in Tigray, particularly calling out reports of rape and "other horrific forms of sexual violence."

Fighting in Tigray broke out in November

between government troops and the region's former ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front.

The violence in Tigray has killed thousands of people and forced hundreds of thousands from their homes in the mountainous region of about 5 million.

The United Nations has raised concerns about atrocities, while U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has described acts carried out as ethnic cleansing. Ethiopia rejected Blinken's allegation.

Abiy on Tuesday acknowledged for the first time that atrocities such as rape had been committed and said any soldiers committing crimes would be punished.



FOREX (buy rates in ₹)			
US Dollar	73.16	South	
Euro	86.28	African Rand	5.55
UAE Dirham	20.31	Hong Kong Dollar	10.72
Thai Baht	2.56	Japanese Yen	0.76
British Pound	55.74	New Zealand Dollar	51.11
Australian Dollar	56.76	Saudi Riyal	21.24
Canadian Dollar	58.18	Swedish Krona	9.65
Swiss Franc	77.85	Singapore Dollar	54.87

DELHI SATURDAY 27 MARCH 2021

## BIZ BRIEFS

### TTBS hosts conclave

Tata Tele Business Services (TTBS), has hosted the Digital Conclave: smart solutions for smart banking. The virtual round table aimed to enable a platform for industry leaders to share their insights on technology imperatives for banks to re-engineer processes, network their branches more efficiently and optimise their internet and mobile banking and customer relationship management, among others. The company led the discussion on how connectivity and security solutions are the two pillars to enable banks to come up with innovative offerings. Kalidas Ks, Vice-President, Tata Tele Business Services said: "During the pandemic, adoption of digital channels increased tremendously as the customers used online banking facilities."

### Realme unveils new products

Realme has introduced its latest youth flagships: the Realme 8 series and the Realme 8 Pro. The Realme 8 series has features such as a 6.4-inch super amoled fullscreen, ultra-fast In-display fingerprint scanner, 5000mAh battery with a 30W dart charge, which can charge to 100 per cent in 65 minutes. Realme 8 Pro is equipped with a 108MP camera which offers two world's first feature in a smartphone- stary time-lapse video and tilt-shift time-lapse video, 3X in-sensor zoom, 16MP in-display selfie camera. MadhavSheth, Vice President, Realme and Chief Executive Officer, Realme India and Europe said: "With Realme's flagship for the youth - the number series, we have introduced many trendsetting technology. Camera has always been a top-of-the-line feature of Realme number series and one of its strongest suits with not only leading hardware in the segment but deep customised software with Realme's unique algorithm."

## END TO INDIA INC'S NASTIEST LONG-DRAWN BOARDROOM WAR

# SC favours Tata Group

Sets aside NCLAT order of restoring Cyrus Mistry as exec chairman of conglomerate

NEW DELHI

IN a major victory for the Tata Group, the Supreme Court on Friday set aside a National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) order restoring Cyrus Mistry as the executive chairman of Tata Sons Private Ltd (TSPL). A Bench of Chief Justice SA Bobde, justices AS Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian said "it's allowing the appeals filed by the Tata Group. The order of NCLAT dated December 18, 2019, is set aside," while pronouncing the verdict and putting at rest the long-drawn legal battle of the salt-to-software Tata conglomerate. It said, "...all the questions of law are liable to be answered in favour of the appellants Tata Group, the appeals filed by the Tata Group are liable to be allowed and (the appeal by) the SP (Shapoorji Pallonji) Group is liable to be dismissed."

The Bench, which dealt with the SP Group's contention regarding separation, said the valuation of the group's shares depends upon the value of the Tata Sons' stake in listed equities, immovable assets and others. "...at this stage and in this court, we can't adjudicate on the fair compensation," it added.

"We will leave it to the parties to take the Article 75 route or any other legally available route in this regard," the Bench said.

The SP Group had earlier valued its holding in the Tatas at Rs 1.75 lakh crore. However, during the hearing in the matter before the apex court, the Tatas had, on December 8, 2020, said the valuation of the 18.37 per cent shares of the SP Group in Tata Sons Private Limited (TSPL) is between Rs 70,000 crore and Rs 80,000 crore. The SP Group had told the top court that Mistry's removal as the chairman of TSPL at a board meeting held in October 2016 was akin to a 'blood sport' and 'ambush,' in complete violation of the principles of corporate governance and in pervasive violation of the Articles of Association in the process. The Tata Group had vehemently opposed the allegations and denied any wrongdoing, saying the board was well within its right to remove Mistry as the chairman.

## RATAN TATA WINS, CYRUS MISTRY LOSES

● Share valuation of SP Group to be decided in separate legal process

● Apex court upheld the Tata Sons decision to sack Cyrus Mistry on October 24, 2016

● Bench headed by Chief Justice SA Bobde said all questions of law are in favour of Tata Group and dismissed the appeals filed by Mistry

● Mistry had succeeded Ratan Tata the chairman of TSPL in 2012, but was ousted 4 years later



● Shapoorji Pallonji Group argued that Mistry was removed because he was going to place a draft governance structure at the Board meeting on October 24, 2016

● SC granted relief to the Tata Group by staying NCLAT order on January 10, 2020

It's not an issue of winning or losing. The judgement upholding all the appeals of Tata Sons is a validation of the values and the ethics that have always been the guiding principle of the group

— Ratan Tata

The top court had, on September 22 last year, restrained the SP Group and Mistry as also his investment firm from pledging or transferring their shares in TSPL. The SP Group, which owns 18.37 per cent shares in TSPL, had said the latter moved the top court to block its plan to pledge shares for raising funds and that reeked of vindictiveness and oppression of minority shareholder rights.

The apex court had, on January 10, 2020, granted relief to the Tata Group by staying the NCLAT order, by which Mistry was restored as the executive chairman of the conglomerate. Mistry had succeeded Ratan Tata as the chairman of TSPL in 2012, but was ousted four years later. TSPL had earlier told the top court that it was not a 'two-group company' and there was no 'quasi-partnership' between it and Cyrus Investments Private Limited. In his reply to the Tatas' petition challeng-

ing his reinstatement by the NCLAT order, Mistry had also demanded that group chairman emeritus Ratan Tata should reimburse to the expenses to TSPL since his departure in December 2012, in keeping with the best global governance standards. Mistry is seeking representation in the company in proportion to the 18.37-per cent stake held by his family, according to the cross-appeal. TSPL, formerly known as Tata Sons Limited, had sought setting aside of the NCLAT order in toto, alleging that it was "completely inconsistent with the annals of corporate law" and reflected "non-appreciation of facts", which was "untenable in law". The NCLAT had held that the group's chairman emeritus Ratan Tata's actions against Mistry were oppressive and the appointment of a new chairman was illegal. It, however, had stayed the operation of its order with respect to Mistry's reinstatement for four weeks to allow TSPL to file an appeal in the top court.

"In other words, far from putting an end to the alleged acts complained of, the judgment (of the NCLAT) has sown the seeds for a never-ending discord and conflict between shareholders of the appellant (TSPL), creating a recipe for an unmitigated disaster," the Tata Group had said.

## IIL foundation collaborates with FAST

HANS BUSINESS HYDERABAD

INSECTICIDES (India) through its CSR wing 'IIL foundation' collaborates with Hyderabad-based not for profit Foundation for Agriculture Sustainability and Transformation (FAST) to help provide regular piece of information and advice to farmers through digital interventions on crop weather and infestation using its WhatsApp platform. The platform is up for use by mainly Telugu-speaking farmers of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and parts of Karnataka which is likely to benefit large number of farmers. The primary interventions of the programme are WhatsApp groups with close to 400 direct recipients who receive about 1500 customised messages on a periodic basis.

"We have recently done some educational programmes with National Food Security Mission, and organised some seminars in different parts of the States for the awareness of judicious use of agro chemicals. However, Covid-19 has forced us to suspend such physical activities, but we have collaborated with FAST to reach out the farmers in digital way and share the latest advice to farmers based on the current situation," said V K Garg, Vice President Southern Region, Insecticides (India) Limited.

# Mkt snaps 2-day losing streak as bulls make a comeback

Sensex gains 568 pts, Nifty jumps 182 pts; Bajaj Finance leads the gainers' chart with a jump of 4.49%

MUMBAI

EQUITY indices ratcheted higher on Friday after two sessions of heavy losses as investors snapped up recently-battered banking and finance stocks in lockstep with a rebound in global markets.

A recovering rupee also bolstered market sentiment, traders said. The 30-share BSE Sensex surged 568.38 points or 1.17 per cent to finish at 49,008.50. Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty climbed 182.40 points or 1.27 per cent to 14,507.30.

Bajaj Finance led the Sensex gainers' chart with a jump of 4.49 per cent, followed by Asian Paints, Titan, HUL, Bajaj Auto, Bharti Airtel, HDFC and Nestle India. The HDFC twins accounted for most of the index's gains. Tata group stocks rallied after the Supreme Court set aside the NCLAT order restoring Cyrus Mistry as executive chairman of the conglomerate. On the other hand, PowerGrid, IndusInd Bank, ITC and Maruti were the laggards, dropping up to 0.97 per cent. On a weekly basis, the Sensex declined 849.74 points or 1.70 per cent, while

the Nifty fell 236.70 points or 1.60 per cent. "Equity market has been consolidating under fear of losing its traction of economic growth recovery. Positive US job data and climb in fourth-quarter US GDP to 4.3 per cent helped to reduce the gravity of the contraction. "On the domestic front, high-frequency data suggests good economic activity in Q4 FY21 and results will be announced from April. The second wave of Covid and high valuation will maintain volatility in the near term," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

All sectoral indices ended on a positive note, with BSE metal, consumer durables, telecom, basic materials, FMCG and realty surging as much as 3.49 per cent. In the broader markets, the BSE midcap and smallcap indices spurred up to 1.66 per cent. Global equities ticked higher amid easing of bond yields, even as the Covid-19 situation remained an overhang. Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Seoul ended with significant gains. Stock exchanges in Europe were also trading on a positive note in mid-session deals.

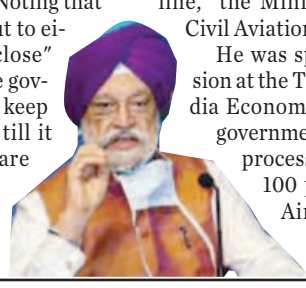


# Govt to invite bids for Air India soon

NEW DELHI

We have no choice, but to privatise or close airline: Min

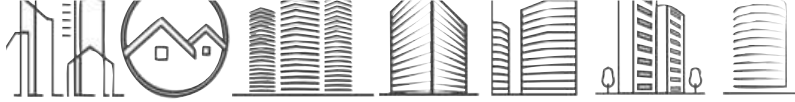
THE government is looking at a new timeline for Air India disinvestment and financial bids will be invited in the coming days, Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on Friday. Noting that there is no choice but to either "privatise or close" Air India, he said the government will have to keep the airline running till it gets divested. "We are looking at another timeline now, what is called data room



for prospective bidders to look at... that is opened up, 64 days for the financial bids to come in. After that it is the question of taking a decision and handing over the airline," the Minister of State for Civil Aviation said.

He was speaking at a session at the Times Network India Economic Conclave. The government has started the process to sell its entire 100 per cent stake in Air India that has been in losses

since it merged with Indian Airlines in 2007. "...There is no choice, we either privatise or we close the airline. We run a loss of Rs 20 crore every day despite Air India making money now. Because the mismanagement has resulted in a cumulative debt of Rs 60,000 crore," Puri said. "I don't have the capacity to keep going to Nirmala ji and say please give me some money," he said in an apparent reference to seeking funds to run Air India from the finance minister.



## REAL CORNER



# Weekend homes attract consumers towards luxury housing

ARCHANA RAO

WITH each sector recuperating post-pandemic, real estate in India is enjoying an upward momentum in 2021. The realty industry was amongst the hardest hit in 2020 due to the lockdown, however, exceptional concepts by luxury housing groups have left a lasting impression.

Hindustan Times awarded Nirvana Realty as Real Estate Tigers in the year 2021 for their weekend home ventures launched amid pandemic. The



firm floated the concept of weekend homes which in turn,

received positive response from the consumers. According to the

Nirvana Realty, the company sold more than 400 weekend homes as a part of their Nirvana Signature Resorts' project. Punit Agarwal, MD & CEO, Nirvana Realty, said, "The USP of these villas is the freedom we are going to give our customers. Often, homebuyers bemoan the fact that they are restricted by the designs and elevations of the developers. Seldom do homeowners have any say in how their property is going to pan out. We will give our customers the freedom to customise the villa in a way they see fit."

# Housing sales rise 29% in Jan-Mar across 7 cities as demand recovers: Report

home loan rates by most banks (to 6.70 per cent) and ongoing developer discounts and offers helped the residential sector stage a convincing comeback in Q1 2021," Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri said.

MMR and Pune have been the most active in this quarter since the limited-period stamp duty cuts and other sops and discounts substantially reduced acquisition cost, he said. "MMR's homebuyers have responded proactively to the bottomed-out property prices in the country's most expensive



real estate market. This is adequately vouchsafed by the significant rise in property registrations in Mumbai in the first two months of the year," Puri said. Housing sales in MMR may rise by 46 per

cent to 20,350 units in January-March 2021 from 13,910 units in the year-ago period. Pune, too, is expected to see 47 per cent increase in sales to 10,550 units from 7,200 units. According to the data, Hyderabad recorded the maximum rise in sales in this quarter among the top cities. Housing sales are likely to increase by 64 per cent to 4,400 units in Q1 2021 from 2,680 units in Q1 2020. In Chennai, 2,850 units are estimated to be sold, an increase of 30 per cent from 2,190 units in Q1 of 2020 calendar year.

# Focus on affordable segment continues in Q1 2021

Hyderabad surpasses sales volume of Q1, 2020; Nearly 70% of the new launches in the sub ₹10 million category: JLL

RESIDENTIAL sales in first quarter (Q1 Jan-March) of 2021 recovered to more than 90 per cent of the volumes witnessed in Q1, 2020 (pre-Covid) across the top seven cities, according to a latest report from JLL. The report 'Residential Market Update-Q1, 2021' revealed that the cities including Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Pune surpassed the sales volumes of Q1 2020. Overall sales increased by 17 per cent on a sequential basis. Hyderabad - the Western Suburbs (Gachibowli, Manikonda, Kukatpally) submarket accounted for more than 65 per cent of the sales during the quarter. Dr Samantak Das, chief economist and head (research & REIS), JLL, said: "The sustained growth in sales presents clear signs of demand and buyer confidence coming back to the market. This has been on the back of historically low home loan interest rates, stagnant residential prices, lucrative payment plans and freebies from developers and government incentives such as the reduction of stamp duty in states like Maharashtra and Karnataka (for affordable housing). The ease of lockdown restrictions and the commencement of the vaccination drive have further aided in bringing buyers back to the market." Importantly, sales either improved or stayed at similar levels (in Q1 2021 when compared to Q4



2020) in majority of the residential markets under consideration. Mumbai has consistently been the largest contributor to sales in the last four quarters. In Q1, 2021, Mumbai accounted for 23 per cent of the sales, followed by Delhi NCR with a share of 21 per cent. However, Kolkata saw the maximum increase in sales activity in Q1, 2021, in comparison to the fourth quarter of 2020. In Kolkata, the offtake of residential units in Q1, 2021, was driven by South Suburbs (Joka, Kasba, Behala, Jadavpur, Tollygunje) and East Suburbs (EM Bypass, Rajarhat, Topsis) with a combined contribution of more than 70 per cent. Residential market reached more than 90 per cent of pre-Covid sales Q1 2020 (in units) Q1 2021 (in units). "In the fourth

quarter of calendar year 2020, India's economy returned to growth territory, recording a 0.4 per cent rise in GDP. In tandem with the GDP growth, the pace of recovery in the residential market intensified with sales increasing by 51 per cent, when compared to the previous quarter. In Q1 2021, sales of residential units continued an upward trajectory. Sales, at the overall level, increased by 17 per cent on a sequential basis," Das added. The Covid-19 pandemic tilted the scale further in favor of established developers. As the sector shows signs of recovery, prominent developers are expected to be at an advantage and capture a greater share of the market. Homebuyers have become even more cautious in their home purchase decisions.



# BAIRSTOW, STOKES POWER ENGLAND TO BIG WIN

2nd ODI SCOREBOARD

India	England
R Sharma c Adil b Sam Curran.....25	J Roy run out (Sharma/Pant) .....55
S Dhawan c Stokes b R Topley .....4	J Bairstow c Kohli b P Krishna.....124
Virat Kohli c Jos Buttler b Adil ....66	Ben Stokes c Pant b Kumar.....99
KL Rahul c R Topley b Tom .....108	Dawid Malan not out .....16
R Pant c Roy b Tom .....77	Jos Buttler (c) b P Krishna.....0
Hardik c Roy b R Topley .....35	Liam Livingstone not out.....27
Krunal not out .....12	Extras (nb 1, w 7) .....16
Shardul Thakur not out .....0	Total (For 4 wkts in 43.3 overs) .. 337
Extras: (LB-2, W-7) .....9	Fall of wickets: 1-110, 2-285, 3-287, 4-287
Total: (6 wkts, 50 Overs) .....336	Bowling: Bhuvneshwar Kumar 10-0-63-1, Prasidh Krishna 10-0-58-2, Shardul Thakur 7.3-0-54-0, Kuldeep
Fall of Wickets: 9-1, 37-2, 158-3, 271-4, 308-5, 334-6.	
Bowling: Sam Curran 7-0-47-1, Reece Topley 8-0-50-2, Tom Curran 10-0-83-2, Ben Stokes 5-0-42-0, Moeen Ali 10-0-47-0, Adil Rashid 10-0-65-1.	

**PUNE**

CENTURION Jonny Bairstow (124 off 112 balls) and Ben Stokes (99 off 52 balls) added 175 runs for the second wicket to help England chase a mammoth 337-run target set by India and win the second One-day International by six wickets, with 6.3 overs to spare at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium here on Friday.

With this win, England levelled the three-match series 1-1, after India won the first ODI by 66 runs. Sunday's final game here will be the series decider.

England got off to a flying start with Jason Roy (55 off 52 balls) adding 110 with Bairstow for the first wicket in 99 balls. After Roy was dismissed, Bairstow and Stokes continued the onslaught and by the time they were removed the visitors needed just around four an over which was easy for the latter batsmen.

Earlier, KL Rahul's perfectly executed hundred coupled with Rishabh

Pant's aggressive 77 off just 40 balls propelled India to an imposing 336/6.

Rahul, who anchored the innings, hit seven fours and two sixes in his 114-ball knock, while Pant plundered seven sixes and three boundaries, which helped the hosts go well past the 300-run mark. Skipper Virat Kohli (66 off 79 balls; 3x4; 1x6) and Rahul laid the foundation for the big total with their 121-run third wicket stand after being put into bat at the MCA stadium.

Opener Shikhar Dhawan (4) fell cheaply after he nicked a Reece Topley delivery to Ben Stokes in the slips. Kohli joined Rohit Sharma (25; 5x4), who looked in his element, as he hit three boundaries off Topley (2/50). But in the next over, Curran (1/47) cut-short his stay at the crease. Rohit flicked a full pitched delivery straight to Adil Rashid at short fine leg, as India slipped to 37/2.

Kohli and Rahul kept the scoreboard ticking, with the India captain being the bit more aggressive one, while Rahul initially played second fiddle. England did not give an opportunity to Kohli to free his arms even as the duo notched up their 50-run stand in the 20th over.

Kohli, who got a 'life' on 35, when Buttler dropped a regulation chance off Adil Rashid, notched up his 62nd fifty, with a single off 62 balls. The duo then completed their 100-run stand off 119 balls, without any fuss. However, Rashid (1/65) removed Kohli, whose thick outside edge was caught by Buttler, with India at 158/3.

Rahul then put his foot on the accelerator, while mostly relying on pulls and drives. Rahul, who hit his 5th ODI century and Pant then launched himself into England attack. Pant pulled Rashid for his first

## Rahul, Pant help India set 337-run victory target for

India's Virat Kohli and KL Rahul run between the wickets during the 2<sup>nd</sup> ODI against England at Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium, in Pune

## When Players Let It Out: Rahul's 'shut out the noise' gesture joins

PUNE

HIS skipper Virat Kohli after one of his Test hundreds, had gestured that his bat does all the talking and on Friday teammate KL Rahul had a unique "shut out the noise" celebration after reaching the three figure mark in the second ODI against England.

Rahul scored 108 off 114 balls here on Friday, following an unbeaten 62 in the first ODI. He pointed his bat towards the dressing room before covering his ears to indicate that he didn't pay heed to any critical comments for his failures in the T20 series. "It (the celebration) is just to shut out the noise, not to disrespect anyone," he told the host broadcasted during the innings break.

"There are people out there who try to pull you down, at times you need to neglect them. So that's just a message to shut out that noise," the relief was palpable in his voice.

"I was disappointed after the T20 series, but that's how the game goes. Few quality shots eased my nerves. Really happy I was able to build those partnerships with Virat and Rishabh. India ended up making 336 in the second ODI courtesy an scores from Rahul, Virat Kohli and Rishabh Pant.

"When me and Virat were batting, we needed anything around 300, so happy with this total. It was a hot day and it was important for us to get a partnership. Really happy with what we have achieved after 50 overs. Scoring runs makes you confident, and that's what you want to do," he added.

Individuals have different ways of venting their emotions and it could be very different in terms of gestures and context. When Kohli celebrated in Perth, back in 2018, there was some mild criticism about him missing out on a hundred during the previous Adelaide Test match. At Perth after a well compiled hundred,

Kohli showed the 'sweet spot' (middle of the bat) with his gloves and then gestic-



does the

ulated that for him his bat

# Saina enters semifinals of Orleans Masters

PARIS

INDIAN ace Saina Nehwal eked out a thrilling three-game win over USA's Iris Wang to advance to the women's singles semifinals of the Orleans Masters badminton tournament here on Friday.

It is the first semifinals in two years for world no. 20 Saina, who is desperate to accumulate ranking points to make it to her four Olympics at the Tokyo Games. Her last semifinal appearance was in January 2019 in the Indonesia Masters 500 tournament which she had won.

The fourth seeded Indian, who had withdrawn from the All Eng-

land Championships last week due to an injury, had to dug deep to script a 21-19 17-21 21-19 win over world no. 36 Wang in a gruelling quarterfinals match that lasted exactly an hour.

The London Olympic bronze medallist will face either Denmark's Line Christophersen or compatriot Ira Sharma for a place in the finals at the Super 100 event, which is a part of BWF's revised Olympic

qualification events.

Commonwealth Games bronze medallists Ashwini Ponnappa and N Sikki Reddy, seeded eighth, also entered the last four stage of the women's doubles competition after notching up a stunning 21-14 21-18 win over England's third seeded duo of Chloe Birch and Lauren Smith. The world no. 25 Indian pair will face top seeded Thailand combina-

tion of Jongkolphan Kititharakul and Rawinda Prajongjai.

The Indian men's doubles pair of Krishna Prasad Garaga and Vishnu Vardhan Goud Panjala outwitted world no. 47 French duo of Christo Popov and Toma Junior Popov 21-17 10-21 22-20 in an hour and three minutes to make it to the semifinals.

The unheralded Indian duo will face England's Callum Hemming and Steven Stallwood for a place in the final on Saturday.

The English pair had ended the campaign of Indian seventh seeds MR Arjun and Dhruv Kapila 21-19 18-21 23-21 in the quarterfinals. (PTI)



## Conway, Mitchell, Neesham lead NZ to 164-run win

WELLINGTON

CENTURIES from Devon Conway and Daryl Mitchell, coupled with a five-wicket haul from James Neesham and a four-wicket haul for Matt Henry, helped New Zealand beat Bangladesh by 164 runs in the third ODI at the Basin Reserve on Friday. New Zealand have thus won the series 3-0.

Conway's 126 off 110 balls and Mitchell's unbeaten 100 off 92 helped New Zealand reach 318/6. In response, Bangladesh were all out for a paltry 154 with Mahmudullah scoring an unbeaten 76 off 73 balls.

Henry ran through the Bangladesh top order dismissing openers Tamim Iqbal, Liton Das and Soumya Sarkar within the first seven overs. Neesham then took over, taking the wickets of Mushfiqur Rahim, Mehidy Hasan Miraz and and Mahedi Hasan to leave Bangladesh tottering at 82/7

in the 26th over.

Mahmudullah then ensured that Bangladesh crossed over into three-figures, striking up a 52-run partnership for the ninth wicket with Rubel Hossain. Mahmudullah contributed 47 runs in that partnership but Neesham then dismissed Hossain to end the brief stand in the 43rd over. Neesham then got the final wicket of Mustafizur Rahman in the same over to end the Bangladesh innings.

Earlier, Conway first put up 63 runs for fourth wicket with captain Tom Latham before a blistering 159-run partnership between him and Mitchell, which came off just 147 balls, flattened the opposition.

**Brief scores:** New Zealand 318/6 in 50 overs (Devon Conway 126, Daryl Mitchell 100 not out; Rubel Hossain 3/70) beat Bangladesh 154 all out (Mahmudullah 76 not out; James Neesham 5/27, Matt Henry 4/27) by 164 runs. (IANS)

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