



Pages 12 | ₹5/LC

KOLKATA | NEW DELHI | SILIGURI | BHUBANESWAR



A RAJA COMPARES
PALANISWAMI TO
STALIN'S SLIPPER

P4



'DISINVESTMENT
TARGET OF FY '22
ACHIEVABLE'

P8



PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT, ALWAYS IN SESSION

N. KOREA SNAPS
BACK AT BIDEN
OVER MISSILE TEST

P10



INDIANS TRYING
TO HIT UPON
WINNING PLOY

P12

WEATHER

Mainly clear sky. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 36 and 17 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: Nil

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max: 88% Min: 33%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 35.3°C (+3) Min: 16.4°C (-2)

SUN RISES

06:15 hrs 18:37 hrs

MOON RISES

18:16 hrs 06:44 hrs

THUMBNAILS



Young girls and boys playing with colours ahead of the Holi festival, in the Capital on Saturday.

SUBRATA DUTTA

'No lockdown possibility in Delhi': Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain on Saturday dismissed any possibility of imposing another lockdown in Delhi, saying it was not a solution to check the spread of coronavirus that is again surging. Jain said there was a logic behind the lockdown enforced earlier as nobody knew then how this novel virus spreads. "It follows a 14-day cycle ~ between a person catching the infection and recovering from it. Experts said the virus will die if a lockdown is imposed for 21 days. Authorities kept on extending the lockdown, but the virus did not. I don't think lockdown is a solution," he said. P2

Top court rules on dying declaration: The Supreme Court has said there can be no rigid standard for acceptance or rejection of dying declaration, which alone can form the basis for conviction if it has been made voluntarily and inspires confidence. The court observed if there are contradictions, then the benefit of doubt shall have to be given to the accused. P5



People wait to cast votes at a polling station during 1st phase of Bengal Assembly polls, at Sirshi in Jhargram on Saturday.

polling had to be kept on hold for some time. Mr Aftab said that a technical snag had developed in the EVM but polling continued after replacing it.

BJP leader Suvenndu Adhikari's younger brother Soumendu was attacked in Contai allegedly by Trinamul supporters, alleged party workers. His car was vandalised and his driver injured in the attack.

"Barring a few stray incidents polling was by and large peaceful. Ten people have been arrested so far," said CEO Ariz Aftab at a press conference today.

In the Contai South seat in East Midnapore, voters staged a protest outside a polling booth over EVM malfunctioning. They blocked a road outside the polling station at Majna, claiming that even if they voted for one party, the VVPAT slip showed another party. A contingent of Central forces was deployed to control the situation and

connection with the incident and a report has been sought from the district administration. The Trinamul, however, denied any involvement. Later, a CPI-M delegation led by Rabin Deb met the CEO and demanded re-polling in 21

booths in Salboni.

In Bankura, allegations were levelled against Central forces for influencing voters in eight places and there was a poll boycott in three areas namely Jamthola and Kendua in Chatra and Ranibandh in Hir-

bandh over demands of road and bridge construction. In Purulia, where polling was almost peaceful, complaints of EVM malfunctioning leading to protests by voters were registered in some areas including Munsifdanga, Para and Manbazar.

Voters in several areas, including Khejuri, Pataspur, Bhagabanpur in East Midnapore and Salboni, Garbeta in West Midnapore complained of intimidation.

A few stray incidents of violence were registered in Bhagwanpur, Bhupatinagar and Jhargram while complaints of bombing and booth jamming were lodged at some areas in Khejuri.

Many voters and political party workers were found without masks amidst the recent surge in coronavirus. In some booths, voters were provided masks, while sanitiser and polythene gloves were made available at many locations.

Flagging 'discrepancy' in voter turnout data, All India Trinamul Congress' parliamentary party complained to the CEO in this regard. MP Sudip Bandopadhyay further said that the polling process is conducted smoothly if polling agents are from the same locality but BJP requested EC to send any person that the party decides. "We have requested EC to change it from the second phase onwards," said Mr Banerjee after meeting the CEO.

A BJP delegation led by senior leader Kailash Vijayvargiya, who met the CEO lauded the EC's role claiming that the polling was 90 per cent peaceful.

The process can be made 100 per cent peaceful if all persons having criminal records are rounded up," said Mr Sisir Bajaria, BJP leader. He further flaunted an audio clip of a conversation between chief minister Mamata Banerjee and BJP's East Midnapore district vice-president Pralay Pal accusing the former of influencing voters and beginning votes. Long queues were seen outside most booths in the morning hours with people stepping out early to avoid the sweltering heat, besides the uncertainty of being able to cast their votes in case of violence later in the day.

Various political heavyweights including State chief minister and BJP leader Sarbananda Sonowal, Assembly speaker Hiteshwar Goswami, State ministers Ranjit Dutta, Naba Kumar Doley, saffron legislators Angorlata deka, Prasanta Phukan, Mrinal Saikia, Opposition leader Debrata Saikia, State Congress president Ripun Bora, Asom Gana Parishad president Atul Bora, party leaders Keshab Mahanta, Priti Rabha, Amon Jatiya Parishad chief Lurinjyoti Gogoi etc cast their votes in respective constituencies. The authorities deployed a large number of police and paramilitary forces to ensure a safe ambience for voters.

Assam logs 72.14 per cent voter turnout



The first phase polling of Assam legislative Assembly elections covering 47 constituencies across 12 districts remained peaceful and the turnout reached to 72.14% till 5 p.m. The polling began at 7 a.m. today and scheduled to end around 6 p.m. Weather was pleasant for the voters all the day.

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SNS

See Pg 5

Govt holds meeting to review Covid readiness of 12 states

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

try has seen the sharpest rise in weekly Covid cases and fatalities since May 2020 (7.7% and 5.1% respectively).

The 12 states include Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Punjab and Bihar. Meanwhile, India's total active cases have reached 4,52,647 and 62,258 new cases registered in the last 24 hours.

Another spike in Delhi: Delhi today reported over 1,500 Covid cases for the third consecutive day, while 10 more people died due to the pathogen.

Today's 1,558 coronavirus infections pushed the city's case-load to 6,55,834. (See Pg 2)



Kovind shifted to AIIMS for bypass surgery

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

President Ram Nath Kovind has been shifted to the AIIMS this afternoon and is likely to undergo a bypass procedure on Tuesday, 30 March.

A Rashtrapati Bhawan Press release said, "The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind has been shifted to the AIIMS, Delhi, on Saturday.

Post investigations, doctors have advised him to undergo a planned bypass procedure which is expected to be performed on the morning of 30 March. The President's health is stable and he is under the care of the experts at the AIIMS." The president was undergoing a health check-up in the military hospital following a chest discomfort on Friday morning.

SNS

Modi holds talks with Hasina; two sides sign 5 MoUs

SNS & PTI
DHAKA, 27 MARCH

PM PAYS TRIBUTE

► Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday visited the mausoleum of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and paid floral tributes to him, becoming the first ever Foreign Head of State to pay homage at the grave of 'Bangabandhu' at Tungipara in southwestern Bangladesh.

► Prime Minister Modi was received at the mausoleum by his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina, who is the daughter of Rahman.

SEE PG 11

Sheikh Hasina discussed the progress achieved in areas of health, trade, connectivity, energy, developmental cooperation and many more, Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi tweeted after the talks.

The two sides signed five Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) covering areas such as connectivity, commerce, information technology and sports

► Prime Minister Modi handed over a representational key of 109 ambulances to his Bangladeshi counterpart Hasina. He also handed over a representational box to her as a symbol of India's gift of 1.2 million Covid vaccine doses to Bangladesh

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Hasina presented a gold

and a silver coin released on the occasion of the birth centenary of her father and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to Modi. She also handed over a silver coin released on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's Independence. The two leaders also jointly opened some projects virtually.

Modi's visit is taking place at a time Bangladesh is commemorating Mujib Borsho, the birth centenary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The two sides are celebrating 50 years of the establishment of diplomatic ties. The two PMs held a virtual summit on 17 December during which Modi said Bangladesh is a key pillar of India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy, while Hasina described India as a "true friend."

See also Pg 5

Biden invites Modi to climate summit

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

► The summit, which will be hosted by the US president on 22-23 April, will underscore the urgency and the economic benefits of stronger climate action. It will be a key milestone on the road to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) this November in Glasgow.

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Apart from Modi, other South Asian leaders invited are: Prime Minister Sheikh

Hasina of Bangladesh and Prime Minister Lotay Tshering of Bhutan.

In his invitation, Biden urged leaders to use the summit as an opportunity to outline how their countries also will contribute to stronger climate ambition.

In recent years, scientists have underscored the need to limit planetary warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius in order to stave off the worst impacts of climate change.

A key goal of both the Leaders' Summit and COP26 will be to catalyse efforts that keep the 1.5-degree goal within reach.

The summit will also highlight examples of how enhanced climate ambition will create good paying jobs, advance innovative technologies, and help vulnerable countries adapt to climate impacts.

By the time of the summit, the US will announce an ambitious 2030 emissions target as its new Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement.

The summit will reconvene the U.S.-led Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate, which brings together 17 countries responsible for approximately 80 per cent of global emissions and global GDP.

Myanmar forces kill dozens in deadliest day since coup

ASSOCIATED PRESS
YANGON, 27 MARCH



for the previous high on March 14, which ranged in counts from 74 to 90.

Figures collected by the researcher, who asked not to be named for his security, have generally tallied with the counts issued at the end of each day by the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners, which documents deaths and arrests and is widely seen as a definitive source.

The killings quickly drew international condemnation, with multiple diplomatic missions to Myanmar releasing statements that mentioned the killing of civilians Saturday, including children.

This 76th Myanmar armed forces day will stay engraved as a day of terror and dishonour, the European Union's delegation to Myanmar said on Twitter. The killing of unarmed civilians, including children, are indefensible acts."

The death toll in Myanmar has been steadily rising as authorities grow more forceful with their suppression of opposition to the February coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.



The opposition parties are notorious for misleading the electorate through false information, but I assure you that the Kanniyakumari Container Transhipment Terminal project will not be allowed here.

K PALANISWAMI
TAMIL NADU CHIEF MINISTER

No possibility of imposing lockdown in Delhi: Jain

Capital records 1,558 fresh coronavirus cases, highest since 15 Dec, thereby logging over 1,500 cases for 3rd consecutive day; reports 10 Covid-linked deaths, highest since 13 Jan

SNS & PTI
NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain today dismissed any possibility of imposing another lockdown in Delhi, saying it was not a solution to check the spread of coronavirus that is again surging in the national capital and other parts of the country.

Jain said there was a logic behind the lockdown enforced earlier as nobody knew then how this novel virus spreads.

"It follows a 14-day cycle between a person catching the infection and recovering from it. Experts said the virus will die if a lockdown is imposed for 21 days," Jain told reporters.

"Authorities kept on extending the lockdown, but the virus did not die. I don't think lockdown is a solution," he asserted.

There is "no possibility" of imposing another lockdown in the city, Jain said.

The minister also said action will be taken against those found violating the Covid-19 guidelines issued for Holi celebrations.

The Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) had last Tuesday ordered that there will be no public celebrations in the national capital during upcoming festivals



such as Holi, Shab-e-Barat and Navaratri.

The government has set up a number of teams to ensure that people adhere to its directions on Holi. District magistrates and police have created district-wise teams. Legal action would be taken against violators, Jain said.

He said there were enough hospital beds available for coronavirus patients in the city, which could be increased if the need arises. "Only 20 per cent of the beds are occupied currently," he said.

Around 90,000 tests are

being conducted in Delhi every day, which is five times the national average, the minister said, adding that random testing is being done at railway stations and the airport to check people coming from outside.

The minister said a direct correlation can be seen in the changing weather and the increase in the number of cases. "However, it cannot be concretely said that this is the sole reason for the surge in cases."

Today's 1,558 new coronavirus infections pushed the city's caseload to 6,55,834, while over 6.38 lakh patients have recovered from the virus here so far, the health bulletin said.

This is the highest number of cases since 15 December last

year when 1,617 people had tested positive for the virus, according to official data.

The city had recorded 1,534 Covid cases yesterday, 1,515 cases on Thursday, and 1,254 cases on Wednesday. It had

logged 1,101 cases on 23 March – the first time since 24 December that the number of Covid cases crossed the 1,000-mark in Delhi again.

Today, the city's active cases rose to 6,625 from yesterday's 6,051. The positivity rate stood at 1.70 per cent, the bulletin stated.

The positivity rate was 1.80 per cent yesterday, 1.69 per cent on Thursday, 1.52 per cent on Wednesday, 1.31 per cent on Tuesday, 1.32 per cent on Monday and 1.03 per cent on 21 March.

With 10 more fatalities, Delhi's coronavirus toll rose to 10,987. It is the highest number of deaths since 13 January when 11 people succumbed to the disease.

A total of 91,703 tests, including 59,648 RT-PCR tests, were conducted to identify today's cases, the bulletin said.

The number of Covid patients under home isolation increased to 3,708 from 3,312 a day ago. The containment zones rose to 1,506 from 1,307 the previous day, the bulletin added.

months of June-July, when there is a peak, the battery will aid in the power supply," Jain said.

When the demand will be low, the system will get discharged. He added that the battery system is cost-effective, has a longer life span and causes less pollution.

"Earlier batteries caused a lot of pollution. This is a lithium-ion battery with a robust life span, and the cost is quite reasonable too. Earlier they were very expensive. For this battery system, if we take 4 hours of storage, it would mean 150kW, and for 1 hour it is 600kW. The cost is Rs 1 crore. I request the ones who installed the battery to reduce the cost

four times so that we can install more of these," he said.

The minister suggested that if the cost of the battery system further reduces by three times, the Delhi government may use it in the city hospitals in place of the currently used backup generators.

"In our hospitals etc we make use of backup generators. The problem with them is that they are not used anymore because ever since the Kejriwal government has come into power, electricity has never been a problem. All those generators can be replaced with a battery system. And when we integrate, if we pull the same sources, we will perform better," Jain said.

Delhi govt inaugurates grid-connected energy storage system at Rani Bagh

PTI & SNS
NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Delhi Power Minister Satyendar Jain on Saturday inaugurated a grid-connected energystorage system in northwest Delhi's Rani Bagh substation.

According to a statement by the Delhi government, the energy storage system, which is "India's first", will improve supply reliability at the distribution level and will also help in avoiding a situation of grid failure in case of any exigency.

"This battery system has a life span of 10-20 years. When there is peak load, transformers usually burn out which causes power failure. This only works for a month or two. In the

bulletin stated.

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Delhi Police commissioner S N Shrivastava on Saturday held a meeting through video conferencing to review the law & order situation in the city. He asked the city police personnel to "ensure optimal visibility" in the coming festive week. According to a press release issued by Delhi Police, he also directed them to enforce the DDMA's guidelines on Covid-appropriate behaviour on the ground. SNS

Minor fire at Rail Bhawan, says DFS; railway claims it was 'just smoke'

PTI
NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

computer motherboard short circuit.

"The matter has been put under investigation," a railway spokesperson said.

DFS officials said that a call about the fire was received around 6 pm and eight fire tenders were rushed to the spot.

No one was injured in the incident, they said.

The fire broke out in room 451 of the Rail Bhawan. The source of the fire is suspected to be from a computer. Other materials in the office were also damaged in the fire, a senior official said.

Metro to be available from 2.30pm on Holi

PTI
NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Metro services in Delhi will be available from 2.30 pm on

Monday in view of Holi, the DMRC said on Saturday.

Taking to Twitter, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) informed passen-

gers that during Holi on March 29, metro services will not be available till 2.30 pm on all lines of Delhi Metro, including Rapid Metro and Airport

Express Line.

However, metro services will be available from all stations post 2.30 pm.

"Metro train services will

thus start at 14.30 Hrs (2:30 PM) from terminal stations on all lines on 29th March and will continue normally thereafter," the DMRC tweeted.

THIS YEAR

Celebrate Holi AT HOME

IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORONAVIRUS NO GATHERING PERMITTED AT PUBLIC PLACES/ GROUNDS/PARKS ETC.

No public celebrations & gatherings are allowed during Holi

Maintain social distancing of at least 2 yards

Always use face cover /mask and hand sanitizer

Have a Happy and Safe Holi

PLEASE FOLLOW LATEST DDMA GUIDELINES

E-mail to CP, Delhi at: cp.sns@delhipolice.gov.in
Write to CP, Delhi at P.O. Box No. 171, GPO, New Delhi

FOR IMMEDIATE POLICE HELP CALL 112 TO SHARE INFORMATION CALL 1090

APPEAL REGARDING SHAB-E-BARAT
In wake of COVID-19

SHANSHI SEWA NYAYA

The sacred night of Shab-e-Barat is an occasion for families to pray for and remember their departed family members with reverence.

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, people are requested to remain at home and refrain from any activity which compromises their safety and that of others.

I appeal to all religious leaders, Residents' Welfare Associations and parents to advise families to observe the occasion solemnly, while strictly adhering to COVID appropriate behaviour.

Delhi Police will make elaborate arrangements in public interest to facilitate and ensure observance of COVID protocol by all.

(Anil Baijal)
Lt. Governor, Delhi

HELP US TO HELP YOU

FOR IMMEDIATE POLICE HELP CALL 112 TO SHARE INFORMATION CALL 1090



It is only first phase but there are seven more phases to go. I'm confident that Trinamul Congress will come to power in West Bengal...

WHILE HOLDING ELECTION CAMPAIGN FOR HER PARTY CANDIDATES IN HOWRAH

The Sunday Statesman
NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH 2021

03

Delhi govt issues SOP for interfaith couples' protection

Sets up 'special cell', 24-hr helpline; would provide accommodation in its 'safe house' to interfaith, inter-caste couples facing harassment, threats from their families or communities or khaps

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

The Arvind Kejriwal-led Delhi government has issued a standard operating procedure (SOP) for the protection of inter-faith and inter-caste couples from harassment and threats and directed setting up of "special cells", headed by deputy commissioners of police, to look into such matters.

According to the SOP, the government will provide accommodation in its "safe house" to those couples whose relationship is being opposed by their families or the local community or khaps.

The government said the existing 181 toll-free women helpline of the Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) will serve as a round-the-clock helpline to receive from



inter-faith and inter-caste married couples complaints of threat and harassment and provide necessary assistance.

The telecallers trained to handle distress calls and already aware about available services can provide necessary assistance/advice to the

couple in distress. If required, they can be further trained to handle such calls," stated the SOP issued by the social welfare department.

It is stated that after hearing the couple, the DCP of the area concerned, who will perform as head of the "special cell", will bring the entire facts to

the knowledge of the district magistrate and convey their requirement for stay in "safe house".

Earlier this week, violence had erupted at Southeast Delhi's Harijan Basti allegedly in connection with an inter-faith marriage. Delhi Police has arrested several persons for their alleged involvement in the incident.

"Adequate security shall be provided to the couple in form of PSO (protective service officer) and the 'safe house' will also be secured by the DCP of the area concerned.

The couple shall be briefed about the threat to them and in no case they be exposed till the issue is resolved," the department said in SOP.

In case the couple does

n't want to stay in the "safe house", the special cell will provide protection to them in accordance with the threat perception at their place of stay.

If preliminary enquiry ascertains the authenticity of threats, the DCP concerned will direct an ACP or sub-division police officer to register an FIR against those threatening the couple. According to the social welfare department, the government has established a 'safe house' at a state-run residential area in North Delhi's Kingsway Camp which can accommodate maximum three couples.

It is said that in March 2018 the Supreme Court had directed the state to create "special cell" in every district comprising the superintendent of police, the district social welfare officers and others to receive petition or complaints of harassment and threats to inter-caste and inter-faith couples.

Dattatraya said that scouting and guiding is a movement to contribute to the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual and skillful aspects as individuals, as responsible citizens and as members of the local, national and international communities.

He quoted the words of Founding Father of scouting Lord Baden Powell, "You make a living by what you get, but you make a life by what you give". Scouting helps to achieve active citizens, cultivate life-long values and skills besides engaging in peace education based on four pillars of scouting, character and intelligence, health and strength, handicrafts and skills besides service, he added.

Dattatraya stressed on following the three major principles of Scouts and Guides, including duty to God, duty to others and duty to oneself. He lauded the role of Scout and Guides for carrying out various activities during the corona pandemic and said that now the cases were increasing again. He said that it was very important to be cautious and he asked all the scouts to contribute in making people aware by spreading awareness on wearing masks, making proper distance in public places and taking care of hygiene etc.

Earlier, Director, Higher Education, Dr Amarjeet Singh detailed various activities of Bharat Scouts and Guides in Himachal Pradesh.

Covid: Uttarakhand issues strict guidelines for Holi celebrations

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
DEHRADUN, 27 MARCH

With a surge in Covid-19 cases, the Uttarakhand government has issued strict guidelines for the celebration of Holi festival in the hill state.

Under the guideline issued by the state government, the maximum attendance in any 'Holi Milan' programme should not exceed above one hundred. The responsibility of the organizer is fixed and they are asked to make

arrangements for sanitizer, thermal scanner and not to allow anybody suffering from cold and fever in the programme.

In cantonments zones celebrating Holi in open places is completely prohibited. Uttarakhand chief secretary Om Prakash issued the guidelines in Dehradun on 26 March. Under the norms, the public are advised not to use wet colour and water.

They are also asked to avoid playing Holi in congested streets. Use of masks and maintaining social distancing have been made mandatory.

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 27 MARCH

Himachal Pradesh Education Minister Govind Singh Thakur on Saturday said the procedure for setting up the Sanskrit University in the state was under process.

Presiding over the meeting of Sanskrit Bharati Samiti for implementation and promotion of Sanskrit language here, he said the identification of land for the University is being done and the work would commence as soon as appropriate location is identified. "A Committee is also con-

stituted to prepare rules and by-laws for the University," he said.

The minister said the state government was considering changing the designation of Shastri and Language teacher to Trained Graduate Teacher (TGT) Shastri and TGT Hindi. The minister said the

state government has given Sanskrit the status of the second official language in Himachal Pradesh.

"We want that HP should be made a model state of Sanskrit language across the country by promoting Sanskrit in the state and efforts are being made in this direction," he said.

Sharma, Director Elementary Education Shubhakaran Singh, Director Language, Art and Culture Sunil Sharma and office bearers of Sanskrit Bharati Professor Omprakash Sharma, Sanjeev Kumar, Sunil Dutt, Dr. Mamaraj Pandir and Pawan Mishra and others were present in the meeting.

Himachal to set up Sanskrit University

UHF issues advisory to apple growers



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 27 MARCH

Dr YS Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry (UHF), Nauni on Saturday issued advisory to apple growers for management of scab disease in plants.

An official of UHF Plant Pathology department said the wet weather conditions prevalent earlier this week in most parts of the state had become conducive for apple scab development in future as it had re-emerged in some parts during the previous year.

"The dead leaves fallen on the ground during last winter's having dormant spores of scab (pseudothecia) have matured and shall release ascospores which will land on the emergent new leaves."

These rains create congenial conditions for ascospores to germinate and cause infection," he added.

He said the UHF experts had advised apple growers to follow the spray schedule of apple scab recommended by the university as per the crop stage, especially in those areas where the disease had appeared in epidemic form during the previous year.

As per the schedule, recommendation of spray of Captan (600gm/200L water) or Dodine (200gm/200L water) or Ziram (600gm/200L water) or Fluxapyroxad 75g/L + Difenoconazole 50g/L/LSC (60mL/200L) at green tip, he added.

Let's Make This Holi SAFE by STAYING at HOME

DON'T...

- DRINK & DRIVE
- CAUSE NUISANCE ON ROADS
- TRIPLE-RIDE
- DRIVE WITHOUT HELMET

In the wake of rising Covid cases, Public Gathering on Upcoming Festival like Holi, Shab-e-Barat and Navratri etc. is Not Allowed in Public Places, Roads & Streets.

Wishing You A Safe & Happy Holi

24 Hrs. Traffic Helpline: 1095/25844444

Follow WEAR MASK Maintain SOCIAL DISTANCING NO SPITTING

Email to CP, Delhi at: cp.snsrivastava@delhipolice.gov.in | Write to CP, Delhi at P.O. Box No. 171, GPO, New Delhi

FOR IMMEDIATE POLICE HELP CALL 112 TO SHARE INFORMATION CALL 1090

Shimla College scouts develop 'Swarnim Pushp Vatika'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 27 MARCH



Himachal Pradesh Governor Bandaru Dattatraya on Saturday inaugurated 'Swarnim Pushp Vatika' developed by Seema Scouts at Government Degree College Seema of Rohru in district Shimla. He also launched "Holistic Development through Scouting Model of Sustainable Livelihood" through virtual media from Raj Bhavan.

The Governor appreciated the efforts of Seema Scouts for their venture and hoped that it could be replicated throughout the state and other states as well.

He called on all youths associated with scouting to adopt nine basic laws of Scouts and Guides in life which included trust, loyalty, brotherhood, courtesy, love towards animals and nature, discipline, courage, thriftiness, purity in thought, word and deed.

Dattatraya said that scouting and guiding is a movement to contribute to the development

of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual and skillful aspects as individuals, as responsible citizens and as members of the local, national and international communities.

Dattatraya stressed on following the three major principles of Scouts and Guides, including duty to God, duty to others and duty to oneself. He lauded the role of Scout and Guides for carrying out various activities during the corona pandemic and said that now the cases were increasing again. He said that it was very important to be cautious and he asked all the scouts to contribute in making people aware by spreading awareness on wearing masks, making proper distance in public places and taking care of hygiene etc.

Earlier, Director, Higher Education, Dr Amarjeet Singh detailed various activities of Bharat Scouts and Guides in Himachal Pradesh.

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WAZIRPUR A-5, Near Richi Rich Banquet (Opp. Shalimar Bagh)
JANAKPURI B-1/2, Main Najafgarh Road, Opp. Metro Pillar 543
NOIDA, Nirula's Sec-2, Near Metro Station, Sec-15, Noida, UP
LAJPAT NAGAR, 49, Main Ring Road, Adj. Haldi Ram, Near Moolchand Crossing

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Traitors have occupied Delhi. We have to defeat them and make our farmers who are protesting victorious

CPI LEADER KANHAIYA KUMAR

ADDRESSING VOTERS IN ASSAM

i
ndia

THUMBNAILS



A health worker collects swab sample from a person for Covid-19 test at the India Gate in New Delhi on Saturday.

AGENCIES

Aircraft crash: A trainer aircraft crashed near Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh on Saturday, leaving three persons, including the pilot, injured, police said. "The small-body aircraft was flying towards Guna from Bhopal when it crashed in an agricultural field near Badwai village in afternoon," Police said. All the three persons on board sustained minor injuries. None of them was hospitalised.

Road accident: Four members of a family were killed when their car collided head-on with a truck in Bihar's Gopalganj district, a police officer said. The incident took place near Dumarai ghat bridge on NH 27 under Mohammadpur PS on Friday night when four members of a family were on their way to Bangoan in Saharsa.

Transhipment port: CM K Palaniswami on Saturday asserted that a container port would not come up in Kanyakumari and slammed the DMK and its ally Congress for spreading 'lies' that the project was in the works.

PTI

Mumbai hospital fire: FIR names HDIL's Wadhwans

Management of Dreams Mall & Sunrise Hospital named in the FIR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 27 MARCH

Cooling operations are still underway nearly 36 hours after a major fire in Bhandup on Saturday.

As the fire at a Bhandup mall which claimed the lives of nine COVID-19 patients admitted at the hospital in the same building was finally doused on Saturday, a case has been registered against HDIL promoter Rakesh Wadhwani and five others for 'culpable homicide'.

The blaze, which broke out early Friday morning at Dreams Mall in suburban Bhandup and spread to Sunrise Hospital, a Covid-19 facility on its top floor, was doused completely after 40 hours, a fire department official said.

Bhandup police on late Friday registered a case in connection with the incident against six persons including Housing Development and Infrastructure Ltd promoter Rakesh Wadhwani and his son Sarang who are, allegedly, directors of the mall. No arrest has been made so far.

"Rakesh Wadhwani, Nikita Amit Singh Trehan, Sarang Wadhwani and Deepak Shirke, who are directors of the mall, and Amit Singh Trehan and Sweety Jain, who are directors of the hospital are named in the FIR. Nikita Trehan is also a director of the hospital," said a police official.

IPC sections 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) and 34 (common intention) have been invoked, he added. The Wadhwans had been earlier booked in the PMC Bank fraud case.

"During the probe so far we found several lapses. There was mismanagement in terms of security and the fire safety equipment was not checked regularly," the official said.

The four-storey (ground plus three) mall houses as many as 1,108 shops, but 40 per cent of them are closed, he said.

Sunrise Hospital was converted into a Covid Care Centre in January, the official said. The fire broke out in a shop shortly after Thursday midnight and spread to the hospital on the top floor.

Cong-led UDF has taken up the job of 'hangman' of KIIFB: Kerala CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOCHI, 27 MARCH

Sharpening his attack against the Congress and BJP in poll-bound Kerala, chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Saturday alleged that the Central agencies were carrying out "destructive activities" in the southern state and the Opposition UDF was "playing musical instruments" to it.

Hitting out at the Central agen-

cies' probe against certain state government projects, the Marxist leader alleged that the sangh parivar was using its power at the Centre to "destroy" institutions like the KIIFB, which undertook unprecedented infrastructure development activities in the state in the last five years.

Two days after the IT department carried out inspection at the KIIFB headquarters in Thiruvananthapuram, Vijayan alleged

that the Congress-led UDF has taken up the job of "hangman" of KIIFB by placing noose around its neck.

Leader Opposition in the state Assembly Ramesh Chennithala, has become a "strong advocate" of the BJP government at the Centre.

Accusing the Opposition UDF of supporting the central agencies' actions targeting KIIFB, he said, "We never thought that

they would take up the job of the hangman".

"The Central agencies are carrying out destructive activities in the state after entering through the doors kept open by the Congress-led UDF. They want to destroy KIIFB, and sabotage the LIFE Mission projects of the state government", the CM told a press conference here, also referring to the Central agencies probe into the 'Life Mission'.

A Raja compares CM Palaniswami to Stalin's slipper, AIADMK files complaint

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHENNAI, 27 MARCH

Former union minister and DMK leader P A Raja stirred a controversy by using derogatory remarks against AIADMK leader including chief minister Edappadi K Palaniswami, which provoked the ruling party to complain against it to the Election Commission.

Altogether 78 patients were being treated at the 107-bed hospital at the time of the incident, the BMC said.

Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray, who visited the spot on Friday afternoon, had said permission was granted to the hospital to run a Covid-19 centre temporarily.

The rescued patients have been shifted to various hospitals including Jumbo Covid Hospital in Mulund, Fortis Hospital in Bhandup, Viraj Hospital in Thane, BKC Phase I COVID centre, Godrej Hospital at Ghatkopar, Sarathi Hospital on Tank Road and Agarwal Hospital.

Municipal commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal has also ordered an inquiry into the fire, civic officials said.

of growth."

While narrating how Stalin became a leader step-by-step, he said, "Stalin is someone who was born out of a 'rightful' marriage after 300 days. While no one knows Edappadi K Palaniswami until Jayalalithaa's death and EPS has not reached any heights in public life. So if Stalin is a baby born out of a right relationship then Edappadi is born as a premature baby out of an illicit affair in politics."

In an other speech Raja said CM EPS was worth a rupee less than Stalin's slipper, which also came under severe criticism.

"Till recently, Edappadi was working in a jaggery mandi and how is it fair to say that he is in equal competition with Stalin? Even the price of our leader Stalin's slipper is greater by a rupee when compared with your worth," Raja said during the campaign in Thousand Lights constituency.

AIADMK has filed a complaint with Chief Electoral Officer against Raja for his allegedly derogatory and sexist comments.

C Thirumaran, state Joint Secretary of the Advocate Wing of AIADMK, who gave the complaint also requested the Election Commission to take stringent action under election laws and Indian Penal Code along with issuing directions to prohibit him from addressing future campaigns.

In the complaint, C Thirumaran said, "MP A Raja not only made adverse comments against Tamil Nadu chief minister Edappadi K Palaniswami, but also made vulgar and third-rated comments, which is clearly offensive under the provisions of election offences and Indian Penal Code."

However, chief minister Palaniswami responded to these remarks by saying that he is a farmer and is happy to be a rupee less than Stalin's slipper.

"I am a farmer and farmers are like this. Poor people will be like that only. People who have stolen Rs 1.76 lakh crore will speak like this only," he retorted, taking a swipe at the 2G scam.

Congress, CPM facing an ideological crisis: Nadda

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
TIRUPUR, 27 MARCH

BJP national president JP Nadda has on Saturday said that that CPI-M and Congress are confused and facing an ideological crisis.

Speaking to media persons while participating in a roadshow at Chakkarakkal along with CK Padmanabhan, the BJP candidate for the Dharmadham constituency on Saturday, Nadda said both the CPI-M and Congress

are confused and facing ideological crisis, while in Kerala they both fight with each other, they are fighting together in West Bengal only to oppose the BJP.

He alleged that both the CPI-M-led LDF and Congress-led United DFDP are synonymous of corruption and it's time for the people of Kerala to get rid of them. During the LDF rule Swapna Suresh's gold smuggling has flourished and it was Solar scam during the UDF regime, he said.

Stating that the NDA government under PM Modi is giving special attention for the development of Kerala, Nadda said that the Centre government allotted Rs 2 lakh crore for Kerala, which is three times more than that was given by the previous government, he added.

"BJP government is giving a lot of impetus to development, like the Kanyakumari-Mumbai economic corridor, which is going to give several lakhs of jobs to the youth," he said.

JOBS & CLASSIFIEDS QUEST

LOST & FOUND

We have been lost our Old Account Books, Export and Excise/ Bank Statements including Some Other important documents of Ms Vaishali Pharmaceuticals for the year 1996-97 to 2013-13 in Darva Ganj while shifting the same from 4299/2, 2nd Floor, Ansari Road, Darva Ganj, New Delhi-110002 through a Cycle Rickshaw. Lodge complaint at Delhi Police if found by anyone. Kindly return to the above address. FMG

CHANGE OF NAME

I, BITHIKA Rani, spouse of Ripu Sudan Sarkar, resident of Vill. & P.O.: Kalyandaha, P.S.: Chapra, Dist.: Nadia (W.B.), have changed my name from Bithika Rani to Bithika Rani Sarkar, vide affidavit dated 25.03.2021 before the Learned Judicial Magistrate (1st Class), at Krishnagar, Nadia.

I, BIKASH Roychoudhury, S/o. Lt. Abinash Chandra Roychoudhury, resides at Trisulapatty, Bolpur, Birbhum, do hereby solemnly affirm before the Executive Magistrate Suri, Birbhum, dated 24.03.21 on oath declaring that Bikash Kumar Roy Chowdhury, Bikashkumar Raychoudhury & Bikash Roychoudhury is same & identical person.

I, ANIMA Biswas Sarker, wife of Sri Bhishma Deb Sarker, residing at Vill. Kaliabari, Kacharbari, P.O.: Patulia, P.S.: Rahara, Dist.: 24 Parganas (North), Kol-700119, West Bengal, have changed my name from Anima Sarker to Anima Biswas Sarker, vide affidavit at Barrackpore Judicial Magistrate 1st Class on 19.03.2021 (both name is same and one identical person).

BY DINT of Chief Judicial Magistrate's affidavit at Barrasat dated 17.03.2021, I, Sushma Das and Sushama Das, wife of Keshab Chandra Das of Sulangori, P.O.: Gourangangan, P.S.: New Town, Kolkata-700162 be the same and one identical person from today.

SITUATION WANTED

A.B.COM. (Hons.), PGDBA, Keralee, convent-educated, knowing Stenography with 24 years experience as Personal Assistant / Executive Secretary, seeks change. E-mail: msuni2018@rediffmail.com

18 YEARS experienced Steno-Typist computer savvy, seeks job in good firm. 9836729689.

LEGAL NOTICES

IN THE COURT OF
SH. UMED SINGH GREWAL
Addl. District Judge-02
(West)

Room No. 127, 1st Floor
Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi
PC No. 19/2021

Hirdesh Gantora
Versus

State & Anr.

CITATION UNDER SECTION
283(2) OF SUCCESSION
ACT,1925

Whereas an application

under the Indian Succession

Act, 1925, for grant of Probate

of the Will or for Letters of

Administration to the estate of

Le Sh. Darshan Dayal Ganatra, s/o Sh. Darshan Dayal Ganatra, s/o Sh. D-96, Jeevan Niketan (LIC Colony), Paschim Vihar, Sudder Vihar, New Delhi-110087 and other movable assets died on 10th May 2020 at Delhi has been made by Sh. Hirdesh Gantora, s/o Sh. Darshan Dayal Ganatra, s/o Sh. D-96, Jeevan Niketan (LIC Colony), Paschim Vihar, Sudder Vihar, New Delhi-110087.

Whereas the 16th day of April, 2021, has been fixed for hearing of the case. Notice is hereby given that any person having any interest in the Administration of the Estate of the said deceased may if he/she desires to appear in this court on the 19th day of March, 2021.

Addl. District Judge-02
(West)

Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi

Seal of the Court

CS (Comm) No. 286/2019

ICICI Bank Limited
Versus

Charanjevi Kumar

To,

Charanjevi Kumar, s/o Sh.

Sewa Ram Singh r/o H. No.

First Floor S-71A, Sunder Block,

Kakarpur, Delhi-110092.

Whereas a movement petition

has instituted a suit

against you for hereby cum-

moned to appear before this

court in person or by pleader

on 08-04-2021 at 10:00 am. to

answer the same.

Take notice that in default of

your appearance on that day

before mentioned the suit

will be heard and determined

in your absence.

Given under my hand and

the Seal of the Court on this

18-02-2021.

District Judge (Commercial Court)-01

Room No. 12

Karkardooma Courts, Delhi

Seal of the Court

Code of Civil Procedure

In the Court of

Sh. Raheenesh Kumar Gupta

District Judge

(Commercial Court)-02

Central Room No. 120

Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi

Seal of the Court

CS (Comm) No. 2326/2019

ICICI Bank Limited
Versus

Rakesh, s/o Sh. Jasraj,

r/o H. No. 3714, Kucha Mauhar Khan

National Bar, Ghaziabad-110006.

The defendant abovemented



Modi govt wants to run the country in a fascist manner. Electoral malpractices, horse trading, and when failing in both, it resorts to passing such a dictatorial bill in Parliament....

RAJASTHAN CHIEF MINISTER ASHOK GEHLOT
CALLS GNDT BILL 'MURDER OF DEMOCRACY'

The Sunday Statesman
NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH 2021

THUMBNAILS



Visitors at the historic Taj Mahal in Agra on Saturday.

IANS

Money laundering case: Assets worth about Rs 1.49 crore of a former IAS couple, Arvind Joshi and Tinoo Joshi, of the Madhya Pradesh cadre have been attached as part of a money laundering probe against them, the Enforcement Directorate said on Saturday.

PTI

UP Dalit rape case: A man has been arrested for allegedly raping a disabled Dalit woman under Ramraj Police Station area in the district, police said on Saturday. The incident took place on Friday, they said. According to police, the accused, Farman, took the 25-year-old woman to the nearby sugarcane fields and raped her.

PTI

Assam: Nearly 72.14% turnout

A total of 300 companies of security forces have been deployed in the 1st phase

SNS/AGENCIES
GUWAHATI, 27 MARCH

The first phase polling of Assam legislative Assembly elections covering 47 constituency across 12 districts ended with a voter turnout of 72.14 per cent recorded as of 6.52 pm, according to the Election Commission.

Rupohihat constituency witnessed the highest voting percentage at 83 per cent while Sootea constituency saw the lowest voting percentage at 64 per cent, according to the latest trends.

An estimated 25.88 per cent of the total 81,09 lakh electors exercised their franchise till 11 am. While the polling so far has been peaceful, some complaints of EVM glitches were lodged, an Election Commission official said.

Long queues were seen outside polling booths with voters and election officials adhering to Covid protocols.

Chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal exercised his franchise around 11 am at Sahaitya Sabha Bhawan, a model polling station, in his home town Dibrugarh in upper Assam.

"The BJP and its alliance partners will win again and return to power in Assam. People have seen the performance of our government in the last five years," he said after casting his vote.

Altogether 264 candidates,



» The ruling BJP is contesting 39 seats and its partner newly-formed Assam Jatiya Parishad 10.

» The Opposition grand alliance is contesting all the seats, with the Congress putting up candidates in 43, and the AIUDF, CPI(ML-L), RJD and Anchalik Gana Morcha (contesting as Independent) in one each.

» CM Sarbananda Sonowal is trying his luck from Majuli, Speaker of the outgoing assembly Hitendranath Goswami is fighting the elections from Jorhat.

including 23 women, are in the fray in the first phase of the elections, he said.

Various political heavyweights -Assembly speaker Hitendranath Goswami, State ministers Ranjit Dutta, Naba Kumar Doley, saffron legislators Angoorata deka, Prasanta Phukan, Mrinal Saikia, Opposition leader Debraj Saikia, State Congress president Ripun Bora, Asom Gana Parishad president Atul Bora, Aamajatiya Parishad chief Lurinjyoti Gogoi, etc cast their votes in respective constituencies.

State chief electoral officer Nitin Khade informed that all steps were taken to conduct safe, smooth and peaceful polls in 11,537 polling stations, where 264 candidates of various political parties with many independents were in the fray. The authority deployed a large number of police and paramilitary forces to ensure a safe ambience for voters and the State borders were put under close monitoring by the security personnel.

The voter verifiable paper audit trails (VVPAT), along with EVMs were used at every polling station. Moreover, following the pandemic guide-

lines, the authority allowed maximum 1,000 electors in a polling station. The option of postal ballot facility was already extended to the electors who are infected with the Covid, those with disabilities, above 80 years of age, etc. First voters in many polling stations were greeted with saplings and 'Gamosa', a traditional hand-woven Assamese scarf. Women officials are exclusively conducting the exercise in 479 polling stations.

RGI turns down Assam govt's request to financially support pending NRC work beyond 31 March: The Registrar General of India (RGI) has turned down a request of the Assam government to continue financial support for completing pending work of the NRC beyond March 31 this year. Taking strong exception to the "inordinate delay" in completion of the entire exercise, the office of the RGI in a letter suggested to the state government to terminate the services of "surplus staff" and hand over the workload to government staff, besides shift the NRC office to a government building.

In a letter on 4 March, the Assam government had sought an additional Rs 3.22 crore per month beyond 31 March for completion of the pending NRC activities in addition to the allocated Rs 1,602.66 crore for the entire project.

West Bengal polls: Polling almost peaceful on red soil

KANCHAN SIDDIQUI/
BISWABRATA GOSWAMI
BANKURA/MIDNAPORE,
27 MARCH



First phase of Assembly Election being held at Betkundari Primary School of Jhargram AC on Saturday. BHASKAR MALLICK

Barring a few stray incidents of violence and allegations against the Central Forces for having failed to conduct their duties, polling was mostly peaceful in the Junglemlah belt, which comprises Bankura, East & West Midnapore, Jhargram and Purulia.

Despite incidents of violence, parts of Raipur, Chhatna, Ranibandh and Saltora Assembly Constituencies (AC) recorded a whopping over 80 per cent polling in the first phase today.

In Ranibandh, the average polling was 72.58 per cent. At three places the polling stations remained empty as voters boycotted alleging that their long-standing demands of roads and bridges were not addressed over the years. At Jamthol and Kendua village, within Chhatna AC, voters refrained from voting.

At a booth in Hir Bandh in Ranibandh AC, no vote was cast. The booths had 650, 1100 and 750 voters respectively.

DM, Bankura, K Radhika Aiyyar said: "The issues raised were taken care of. Road construction proposal has been approved." She added: "Polling was peaceful across the district and no significant untoward incidents were recorded till evening."

The Chhatna AC Trinamul candidate, Subhashis Batabyal complained he was denied access to the booths 157 and 182 at Kantapahari and Baguri villages by central paramilitary forces. "Our polling agents were hounded out of the booth at Baguri. We have complained to the EC. In seven booth premises in four ACs, central forces tried to influence the voters." The DM, Aiyyar said: "No specific complaint was received by DM office."

Notably, the party chief Asaduddin Owaisi arrived in the city yesterday and addressed a public meeting at Sagardighi today. Launching a scathing attack on chief minister Mamata Banerjee, he said: "Before my arrival here, Mamata Banerjee said that I am an extremist and a traitor. But I want to tell the CM of the state that such things do not make any difference to me."

Notably, the party chief Asaduddin Owaisi arrived in the city yesterday and addressed a public meeting at Sagardighi today. Launching a scathing attack on chief minister Mamata Banerjee, he said: "Before my arrival here, Mamata Banerjee said that I am an extremist and a traitor. But I want to tell the CM of the state that such things do not make any difference to me."

Meanwhile, Assembly polls in East and West Midnapore and Jhargram went peacefully amidst tight security, today.

An audio clip which allegedly contains a conversation between Trinamul supremo Mamata

At Chawkopalpur in Pataspar, TMC alleged armed BJP workers were outside the booth to intimidate voters. Security forces later intervened. At Dadavilal village in Keshiary, CRPF jawans clashed with local residents who alleged that the jawans were influencing the voters to cast their votes in favour of BJP. Protesters staged a roadblock.

KOLKATA DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-I
42C, J. L. Nehru Road, 'Jeevan Sudha Building', 9th Floor, Kolkata-700 071
NOTICE
O.A. No. 333 of 2018
STATE BANK OF INDIA
...Applicant.
VS-
MR. ARIJIT CHATTOPADHYAY & ANR.
...Defendants.

To,
1. Mr. Arijit Chattopadhyay, son of Sri Ashok Chattopadhyay at Flat No. 7, 164-Shib Narayan Road, Uttarpara, District-Hooghly-712 256 and 72/1-Santim Rasta, P.O. Bally, Suktunk Park, Howrah-711 201.
2. Mr. Aritra Chatterjee, son of Mr. Arijit Chattopadhyay at 16A-Shib Narayan Road, Uttarpara, District-Hooghly-712 256.

WHEREAS the applicant(s) above named has/have filed an application under Section 19(1) of the Recovery Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institution Act, 1993 against you/ other for Recovery of Rs. 15,99,230.17 and other reliefs, you are hereby summoned to appear to person or through authorized agent before this Tribunal within 30 (Thirty) days from the date of receipt / publication why the reliefs prayed for shall not be granted.

TAKE NOTICE that in default of your appearance on the date aforementioned, the application will be heard and determined in your absence.

Given under my hand and seal of the Tribunal.

The 11th day of July, 2019.

Sd/-
Registrar / Asst. Registrar
Debts Recovery Tribunal-I, Kolkata
Department of Financial Services
Ministry of Finance
Government of India

Ex-CM: BJP manifesto silent on statehood for Puducherry

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PUDUCHERRY, 27 MARCH

Senior Congress leader and former chief minister of Puducherry V Narayanasamy on Saturday questioned the silence of the BJP in its poll manifesto on the issue of granting statehood to the Union Territory. Addressing reporters at the party office here, he said the Congress, DMK and even AINRC (now aligned with the BJP) had been demanding the statehood.

"At one stage, the AINRC leader N Rangasamy had made an appeal to all politi-

cal parties to boycott the Assembly poll in case the Centre did not sanction statehood to Puducherry," Narayanasamy said. "Now that the manifesto of the BJP has not mentioned its stand on statehood, I want to know what is the policy of the AINRC," he asked. The BJP manifesto had also not made any promise to write off the loans totalling Rs 7,000-crore due from Puducherry to the Centre over the years, he said.

The saffron party has thus exposed its anti-people policies by remaining quiet, the former Chief Minister said.

Prime Minister Narendra

Modi too had not made any firm reference to the plea for statehood during his campaign here on February 25, he said.

Narayanasamy alleged the Centre was crushing the business sector through GST (goods and services tax).

Also alleging that the BJP was indulging in money power and misuse of authority in view of April 6 Assembly polls here, the former Chief Minister said the election authorities should be vigilant and prevent questionable practices of the BJP during the poll. The present election is a fight between principles of democracy and misuse of power, he said.

People of Sagardighi are to cast their votes for the upcom-

Owaisi releases two names

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 27 MARCH

The All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) has announced the names of two of its candidates for the forthcoming Bengal Assembly elections on Saturday.

The candidates declared today are for the constituencies of Jalangi and Sagardighi.

From the Sagardighi constituency, Noor Mehbob Alam has been announced as the contesting candidate. Sagardighi falls under Jangipur Lok Sabha constituency. In 2016, Subrata Saha of Trinamul Congress won the seat by defeating Aminul Islam of Congress by a margin of 5,214 vote.

People of Sagardighi are to

No rigid standard for acceptance or rejection of dying declaration: SC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

The Supreme Court has said that there can be no rigid standard or yardstick for acceptance or rejection of dying declaration, which alone can form the basis for conviction if it has been made voluntarily and inspires confidence.

The apex court observed that if there are contradictions that create doubts about the truthfulness of the dying declaration then the benefit of doubt shall have to be given to the accused.

The plea in the apex court was filed by a man who had challenged the acquittal of his deceased sister's husband and sister-in-law in a case lodged in 1991. The woman had suffered 95 percent burn injuries in her matrimonial home on September 17, 1991, and succumbed in a hospital the next day.

The petitioner's lawyer had argued that the accused were wrongly given the benefit of doubt by the high court that the deceased had committed suicide.

The apex court noted that the accused had taken the defence that the deceased suspected a promiscuous relationship between them and was also frustrated by her inability to conceive and, therefore, committed suicide by setting herself afire.

In the facts and circumstances of the present case, considering that the statements of the deceased have vacillated, there is no evidence about the fitness of mind of the deceased to make the dying declaration including the presence of the doctor, the veracity and truthfulness of the dying declaration remains suspect, the bench said. It would not be safe to simply reject the probable defence of suicide, to reverse the acquittal and convict the respondents, it said, adding, The appeal is, therefore, dismissed.

The bench further said, Therefore, much shall depend on the facts of a case. There can be no rigid standard or yardstick for acceptance or

MORE SPECIAL TRAINS

In order to clear extra rush of passengers, Railways have decided to run the following Festival Special / Other Special trains as per schedule given below:-

05125/05126 Manduadih - Patna Jn. - Manduadih Special Train (Daily) Fully Reserved

Train No. 05125	ARR. DEP.	STATIONS	Train No. 05126	ARR. DEP.
---	06:20	MANDUADIH	22:15	---
11:00	---	PATNA JN.	---	17:20

DAYS OF RUN: 05125 Ex Manduadih and 05126 Ex Patna Jn. on Daily from 31.03.2021 to 30.04.2021.

STOPPAGE: Varanasi, Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Dildarnagar Jn, Buxar & Ara station.

ACCOMMODATION: AC Chair Car & Second Seating (Reserved).

02527/02528 Ramnagar - Chandigarh - Ramnagar Festival Special Train (Weekly) Fully Reserved

Train No. 02527	ARR. DEP.	STATIONS	Train No. 02528	ARR. DEP.
05:35	---	RAMNAGAR	23:35	---
13:20	---	CHANDIGARH	---	16:05

DAYS OF RUN: 02527 Ex Ramnagar and 02528 Ex Chandigarh on every Monday from 05.04.2021 to 26.04.2021.

STOPPAGE: Kashipur, Pipalsana, Moradabad, Najibabad Jn, Laksar Jn, Roorkee, Saharanpur Jn., Yamunanagar Jagadhri & Ambala Cantt station.

ACCOMMODATION: AC Chair Car & Second Seating (Reserved).

05036/05035 Kathgodam - Delhi Jn. - Kathgodam Festival Special Train (Daily) Fully Reserved

Train No. 05036	ARR. DEP.	STATIONS	Train No. 05035	ARR. DEP.

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Signal of intent

Joe Biden dwelt on a welter of issues at his first press conference as President of the United States of America after just a little over two months in office. These included relations with China and his perception can scarcely impress the likes of President Xi Jinping in Beijing. The United States, in step with its partners and allies, is going to hold China "accountable" in the region. Furthermore, it will press Beijing to follow the rules on a range of issues, notably the contentious South China Sea. The world awaits a response from China. Mr Biden was as forthright as he could be. The other contentious issues that figured in course of his interaction with the international media were border security, delivery of vaccines and withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan scheduled for the 1st of May, a date by which fruition seems improbable if the guarded response of the occupant of the White House is any indication. These are issues of tremendous contemporary import. As regards the border, most particularly the Mexican frontier ~ the wall that Donald Trump proposed remains a non-starter ~ Mr Biden has faced criticism in recent weeks over the increased numbers of migrants crossing into the United States over its southern border with Mexico. He said that "there is a significant increase in the number of people coming to the border in the winter months of January, February, March. It happens every year". There is hope yet in the context of his latest initiative that those who had come to the United States as children and have known no other place of residence will be offered citizenship. When he assumed office, President Biden had pledged 100 million vaccine doses in his first 100 days. He has now doubled that commitment, in a statement couched in the pledge that "we will vaccinate 200 million in my first 100 days". "I know it's ambitious ~ twice our original goal. But no other country in the world has even come close, not even close, to what we are doing". On closer reflection, there was a palpable measure of negligent nonchalance, even stagnation, during the stewardship of his predecessor. The US has thus far delivered over 130 million doses of the vaccine, but it still lags behind some other countries when comparing the number of jabs done relative to the size of the population.

As regards the pullout from Afghanistan, Mr Biden admitted with remarkable candour that "it's going to be hard to meet the 1st May deadline to get troops out" of Afghanistan. But he assured his audience that he is committed to continuing the pullout of all US forces from the fractious country. There are now around 2,500 US troops in Afghanistan which is the lowest level since 2011, as the US continues the process of drawing down its forces there. From the President's response, it was pretty obvious that the proposed pullout will remain a thorny issue for a while. From China to Covid, from the Mexican border influx to Afghanistan, President Biden did present an overview, clothed with signals of intent.

Kohli or Azam?

It doesn't really take an Aristotelian intellect to deduce why the Twenty20 World Cup, which India is to host in October-November this year, is already such a hit, hinting at a blockbuster once it gets going. While the format and the Indian Premier League have fed on one another, Indians, high on the national team's sundry successes in the recent past, even in the traditional, cerebrally demanding format, are euphoric in unison anticipating another global triumph. The 50-over World Cup victory in Mumbai in 2011, by Mahendra Singh Dhoni and his peers, is in the scrapbook now and the young enthusiast could do with something to match it. But, as Life teaches Bertie Wooster even in Wodehousian idylls, there is always a cloud around a silver lining. Snags impede progress precisely when you count on the going being smooth on a road, to pinch a simile from an Indian politician, good enough to be compared to an actress' cheeks. Pakistan have for some time been requesting official assurances that they would be given their visas by India for the high-decibel tournament that they too quite obviously hope to win. Every time they fidgeted or fulminated, India looked disdainfully away, preserving the expressionless calm of a pin-cushion. That would have added fuel to the fire the Pakistan Cricket Board breathed but India, not to be staved down, steadfastly refused to douse the flames by dignifying the demand with a response, affirmative or negative. It has long been cross since Pakistan gets up to a lot of monkey business, incurring its wrath.

The Indian cricketers go up against Pakistan only in international competitions, eschewing bilateral exchanges. Tours are a memory and allied matters part of history. And since India bankrolls the game it dominates across the formats, a silence of the stony kind has been the golden policy that underpins the world's reaction. But word is the PCB has wrung ~ or coaxed ~ a promise from the International Cricket Council that India will let the green-shirted boys in for the T20 World Cup all right. No top-of-the-page declarations but cautious whispers, with possibly a don't-rock-the-boat sub-text laced into the clandestine message. Pakistan should find India's doors thrown open simply because trying to stop them as the host could entail the paying of a heavy price by India, including the shifting of the tournament, which the indigenous fan too will deem a load he could do without. All that he probably wants to find out is who is better: Virat Kohli or Babar Azam? But then, sport is a magnet for lots other than the innocent entertainment-seeker. And they can, and do, bung a spanner into its works. Which is why India, regrettably, stop well short of dreaming of yet another authentic Test series triumph over Pakistan at a time when Kohli and his mates rule the roost. Pakistan will not mind coming here for that too.

Systemic Fault-lines

Police reforms, that would shield the police force from political interference and invest senior officers with enough control over their subordinates are absolutely necessary. However, politicians, when in power, are averse to any reform in the police. A number of commissions and committees have been set up to review the functioning of the police, but to little avail



The situation in Maharashtra is getting 'curiouser and curiouser'. Since an explosive-laden SUV was discovered near the residence of a top industrialist, there have been innumerable twists in the tale, many of which even Dame Agatha Christie could not have foreseen. Right thinking citizens have been scandalised by events suggesting that Mumbai Police was being used to collect hafta for the Home Minister. The situation has turned so murky that even top cop, Jyoti Ribeiro, who never flinched from facing extremists' bullets, and who post-retirement, never hesitated to call a spade a spade, declined to get involved. Twitterati, as is their wont, gleefully assassinated the character and antecedents of the dramatis personae.

Disregarding the personalities involved in the imbroglio, an alarming picture of institutionalised corruption emerges, where the primary purpose of a Government department appears to have been reduced to the collection of illegal gratification for a politician. The somnolence of watchdogs like the Lokpal, Lokayukta, CVC and CBI, not to mention State-level anti-corruption agencies, makes one wonder whether these high-powered bodies were created solely to tackle stray cases of individual corruption.

True, the Government has tried to harness technology to reduce corruption but results are at best, mixed. Technological solutions, aimed at eliminating discretion available to Government employees, have led to over-centralisation, which has hamstrung bureaucratic initiative at the operational level, that is often required to deal with unforeseen problems, like Aadhaar beneficiaries not getting access to subsidised food grains for technical reasons.

The jury is still out on the biggest such initiative of the Government, the faceless assessment and appeal system of the Income-tax Department. Rumblings of protests by tax officials and tax professionals have been heard, which may well be attributable to the discomfort felt on the loss of a familiar environment. Only time will tell whether the faceless scheme empowers taxpayers, and simultaneously, enhances revenue collection.

Entrenched corruption in Government offices flourishes because Government employees across departments are programmed to say 'no' to all requests by the public. Superiors ask no question about the requests that were denied but ask for

justification for the requests that were allowed. Consequently, members of the public are burdened with the onerous task of persuading the bureaucrat to change the automatic 'no' to a 'yes'. Additionally, bureaucrats are taught to instinctively disbelieve whatever evidence or explanation a member of the public may offer. Enormous time and effort are required to get a simple job done in the atmosphere of hostility and distrust prevailing in Government offices. Consequently, a heterogenous variety of 'consultants,' a euphemism for touts, have mushroomed, to facilitate Government related work. Thus, we have 'RTO consultants' who would get your licence for you, 'passport consultants' who would help you in getting a passport. At a higher level, certain individuals facilitate transfers and postings, and award of contracts, in Government departments. A person in the know, attributed the large-scale eruption of scandals in UPA-2 to the tendency of ministers and officers to operate without middlemen. Corruption can be reined in to a large extent, if in routine matters, Government employees are re-programmed to trust fellow citizens and accede to reasonable requests. Easing of passport procedures, that has reduced frustration and delay for passport applicants, with no commensurate increase in passport frauds, has several valuable lessons for government functioning. Firstly, the public is generally truthful and secondly, procedures can be devised to catch and deal with people taking unconscionable advantage of the system.

Proper Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), framed in line with the new technologically enabled environment, would go a long way to reduce systemic corruption because both the public and Government functionaries would know what is required of them for completion of a certain transaction. Then, timelines could be set for all dealings with the Government. Purchase of Rafale fighter aircraft is an example of all that is wrong with the Government purchase process. This aircraft, of 1998 vintage, entered the Indian Air Force in 2020, because of a protracted negotiation process, which was insufficient to ward off allegations of corruption and irregularities. The Indian Army is not able

to modernise because of the long interval between the time a need is felt for a particular armament to the time of delivery of that armament. No wonder, at the time of the recent Chinese incursion, we had to acquire various hardware under emergency purchase procedures. A simple method to save time and cost would be to prescribe timelines for all stages of the purchase process i.e., search, evaluation, negotiation and delivery. The scope for corruption in civil projects, that drag on for years with cost overruns could be drastically reduced should we abridge the timeline of all civil projects to one year. Such a timeline is not impossible, if, we take a cue from our bête noir China, which built a 1,500-room hospital for Covid-19 patients in five days.

Systemic corruption is difficult to control because of the involvement of powerful people. The Vohra Committee Report (1993) had noted the nexus between criminals, politicians and Government functionaries and the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2007) had commented upon the excessive power in the hands of police that was being abused by the political executive to unduly influence police personnel for serving personal and political interests.

A startling revelation in the Maharashtra imbroglio is contained in the affidavit of the former Mumbai Police Commissioner before the Supreme Court, that alleges the Home Minister was seeking a Rs100 crores, through some junior level police officials. The plight of conscientious senior police officers who have to countenance and abet such illegal acts, can well be imagined.

Police reforms, that would shield the police force from political interference and invest senior officers with enough control over their subordinates are absolutely necessary. However, politicians, when in power, are averse to any reform in the police. A number of commissions and committees have been set up to review the functioning of the police, but to little avail.

The National Police Commission (NPC) submitted 8 reports between 1977-1981, suggesting wide-ranging reforms in the existing police set-up and also a Model Police Act but none of the major recommendations of the NPC, were adopted by any

Government. Inaction of the Government on NPC reports, till 1996, prompted filing of a Public Interest Litigation in the Supreme Court (Prakash Singh Vs. Union of India) asking the Supreme Court to direct all Governments to implement the NPC recommendations.

The Supreme Court, in 2006, directed the Central Government to set up State Security Commission which would lay down the broad policies and give directions for the performance of preventive tasks by the police. State Governments were directed to set up Police Establishment Boards to decide upon transfers, postings, promotions and other service-related matters of police officers and men and a Police Complaints Authority at the District and State levels, to inquire into allegations of serious misconduct by police personnel.

The Supreme Court also formed the Soli Sorabjee Committee that drafted a Model Police Act. Later on, in 2000, the Ministry of Home Affairs set up the Padmanabha Committee to examine the future requirements of the police. Subsequently, the Malimath Committee on Reforms of the Criminal Justice System was set up in 2003.

A review of the status of implementation of reformatory directions contained in various Court orders, and recommendations of various Committees and Commissions reveals a sorry picture. None of the proposed reforms has been implemented at the ground level, probably because reforms would reduce the stranglehold of the political executive on the police. Not surprisingly, bypassing Supreme Court directions, 17 States have passed laws to legitimize the existing status quo that had drawn the Supreme Court's ire, while the remaining States have merely passed executive orders to implement piecemeal reforms. Even the Central Government is yet to pass the Delhi Police Bill. An aversion to reform guarantees the proliferation of systemic and institutional corruption, with law-abiding citizens perpetually being at the receiving end. Anti-corruption agencies, again under political compulsion, have not taken any action to limit institutional corruption.

Newt Gingrich, former Speaker of the US House of Representatives has tellingly commented on the futility of addressing only individual instances of corruption: "Until someone is prepared to lay out the systemic problem, we will simply go through cycles of finding corruption, finding a scapegoat, eliminating the scapegoat, and relaxing until we find the next scandal."



DEVEN德拉
SAKSENAA

The writer is a retired Principal Chief Commissioner of Income-Tax

rites, including in combat positions, was not upheld in letter and spirit. The apex court has minced no words in pointing out the gender-skewed selection criteria adopted.

A pattern of evaluation of merit that is derived from an equal society ~ one that affords a fair work ambience and dignity to women ~ is needed. The one prevailing is drawn from a world created by 'males for males', as the SC observed, and only serves to bestow equality on a superficial or symbolic level. Ever since their entry into the tri-services was allowed, women have with tenacity met the

fold, with over 9,000 women currently serving in the Army, Navy and Air Force.

But sadly, it has been

an uphill battle and they have had to petition the Supreme Court at every stage to get their rightful dues. The forces must remedy the hesitancy in providing them with greater responsibility. Removing the hurdles that are detrimental to the induction and career progression of the lady defence officers and providing qualified women a level playing field is bound to make the armed forces better and stronger. It also assumes significance in light of the acute shortage of officers in the Army.

Yours, etc., Khokan Das,

Kolkata, 26 March.

Give women officers their due

SIR, Please refer to today's front page report 'SC allows women SSC Officers' pleas; says ACR evaluation flawed'. The Supreme Court directive to reconsider giving permanent commission in the Army to Short Service Commission (SSC) women officers ~ calling the medical grounds for their rejection systematically discriminatory ~ smoothens the path for aspiring lady officers to avail equal opportunity in public employment and also underscores gender equality.

It is a pity that the SC's watershed ruling of February 2020 that allowed SSC women officers' full integration into the defence ser-



exacting standards of the armed forces. With postings in difficult terrains and conflict zones, they have time and again proved that valour has no gender. In the last six years, their strength in the military has increased three-

ONLINE SALES

SIR, Customers from online sellers and aggregators had felt assured that under the new Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020, e-tailers have to compulsorily display details about return, refund, exchange, warranty, guarantee, delivery, shipment, modes of payment and grievance redressal mechanism as well as country of origin.

But till now most online sellers, who include multinational aggregators, do not provide customers even their e-mail ID for proper recording of serious complaints. As per the most prevalent rules adopted by such online marketers, customers are expected to report grievances to the sellers or aggregators over phone or through their apps. With informal system of grievance reporting now practised by major online sellers, customers do not have any effective way to establish rightful claims against sub-standard or wrong deliveries of products and services. Therefore, an effectively actionable grievance redressal system continues to elude online customers even now.

The situation will remain so, till formal grievance reporting systems by way of e-mails, over and above any existing systems, are instituted.

Yours, etc., Kunal Kanti Konar, Kolkata, 27 March.

It is always a pleasure to address members of our armed forces, an institution about which many Malaysians have misconceptions. I have been lucky to have had contact with many soldiers, sailors and airmen, being an Honorary Major in Regiment 508 of the Territorial Army (Askar Watanah) and having joined events of the Royal Signals Regiment (RSR) and Royal Electric & Mechanical Engineer Corps (JL) of which my father is Colonel-in-Chief.

I have great memories too of attending the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (Lima) where I boarded KD Tunku Abdul Rahman and met our submariners; and of the Firepower Exercise at Gemas, Negri Sembilan, where I got to see our MiG-29s and Astros II in action. A knowledge of our assets provides useful context when our P-91Ms and Adnans roll past during Merdeka Day parades.

In considering social issues, I reflected upon my family's interactions with the military over several generations. My great-great-great-grandfather Yamuan Antah led his troops into battle, fighting in the War of Bukit Putus, Negri Sembilan, in 1875 (which was ferocious enough to see a Victoria Cross being awarded on the British side).

His son Tuanku Muhammad was one of the Rulers who urged the creation of the Royal Malay Regiment, whose original home in Port Dickson continues to ensure Negri Sembilan's strong association with the army. My great-grandfather Tuanku Abdul Rahman served in the Malayan Volunteer Infantry and later became the first Supreme Commander of the Malayan Armed Forces when he became Yang di-Pertuan Agong, while my grandfather Tuanku Munawir also served in the Home Guard.

Each of these involvements illuminates the political and geopolitical contexts of their times: British imperial strategy shifting from conflict to accommodation, to decolonisation and independence, and the cooperative fight against communists thereafter. In 2021, amidst a global pandemic, the threat of climate change and economic uncertainty, the role of the military once again must take cognisance of these contexts. These influences what Malaysians care about, expressed through the traditional and new media: alongside head-on socio-political debate are celebrity product endorsements and their dancing kids. But amidst the ever-evolving vocabulary of online life, it is easy to glimpse the social issues confronting Malaysians.

Issues of race and religion, sexism and domestic abuse, poverty and inequality, job security and unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, gambling and prostitution, the environment and urban development, and concerns over refugees and the stateless. Some of these issues attract explicit attention, but others are more subtle, or embedded in everyday speech. Throughout the movement control order periods over the past year, some of these issues have taken a greater visibility and urgency.

Thankfully, the growth and solidification of civil society has provided space for these issues to be discussed and debated using facts, evidence, reasoning and analysis. This is what a healthy democracy is about: for people with different ideas and opinions to exchange views on a topic and find a way to live better together, or even to disagree but still accept each other as being 100 per cent Malaysian, just with different ideas of how to achieve a better future. A key part of this is giving further substance to the vision of shared prosperity that the government has championed.

Newt Gingrich, former Speaker of the US House of Representatives has tellingly commented on the futility of addressing only individual instances of corruption: "Until someone is prepared to lay out the systemic problem, we will simply go through cycles of finding corruption, finding a scapegoat, eliminating the scapegoat, and relaxing until we find the next scandal."

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Burning sofas in Islamabad

PERVEZ HOODHBOY

A bad joke or fake news? A report I had just read said Maulana Abdul Aziz (of Lal Masjid fame) had deliberately set fire to sofas inside one of the madressahs he heads in Islamabad. There had been no denial and a quick Google search settled my doubts.

Filmed at close quarters a video clip shows the visibly irritated maulana entering the visitor hall of Jamia Faridia, a large seminary complex in the posh E-7 sector of Islamabad. He is accompanied by students and their teachers. Before setting fire to the first couch, he scolds all for disobeying his long-standing instructions. This, he said, had made his personal visit necessary.

The maulana put his logic squarely up front: Islam forbids sitting on a couch, particularly for those training to be mujahids. Never, he said, had the Holy Prophet or his companions sat on sofas. He rubbed his excuses that the sofas were for disabled persons. Like his martyred father (who was the earlier chancellor of Jamia Faridia), the maulana said he too prefers the floor. Students wanting sofas and an easy life should either quit or do physical workouts. Thereafter the maulana called for a knife, slit the couch cushion, lighted a match and put it to the exposed foam. As one couch burned, he called for the next to be brought in.

While provisionally accepting the maulana's logical framework, I can see three problems with his actions.

First, burning a sofa indoors is not safe. Foam or plastic, when burned, releases dense smoke containing carcinogenic material. In fact, as the fumes spread, those in the crowd around him can be heard coughing. Exposing strapping young jihadis to such substances endangers their health needlessly and could reduce their lifespan below what a hazardous occupation normally entails.

Second, while indeed there were no sofas in the previous millennium, the lack of historical precedence was taken a tad too far. The maulana must justify his use of a cellphone, travelling in an SUV with padded seats, equipping his bodyguards and others with AK-47s, as well as using amenities — electricity, gas, piped water — that had not existed in the seventh century. He must also explain his once-frequent presence



Still from *Among the Believers*

on television which depicts human lifeforms and was condemned by almost every religious authority until lately. One notes the maulana's lead role in the award-winning documentary film, *Among the Believers*, available on Netflix.

Third, with the decision on Pakistan's possible removal from FATF's grey list just three months away, now was scarcely the time to remind the world of a large complex in the heart of the nation's capital which aims to produce what the world fears. Those trying to put Pakistan on the blacklist must feel encouraged by the additional evidence that the maulana has made available to them.

Although setting sofas on fire left the city's peace unaffected, other actions inspired and encouraged by the maulana have not. Last year, hundreds of his students from the female madressah Jamia Hafsa launched projectiles at participants of the Aurat March near the Islamabad Press Club. While walking along with others, my wife and I were fortunate to have avoided a largish brick by a few inches.

This year, as per the maulana's orders, the Shuhada Foundation of Lal Masjid has filed a petition in the Islamabad High Court seeking a ban on all marches by 'Westernised' women and their supporters. Doctored videos originating from some mysterious source were circulated and used to slap blasphemy allegations on participants. While countless foundations and NGOs have been banned, the kindness of Islamabad's authorities allows the Shuhada Foundation not just to exist but to thrive.

This kindness is not easy to understand. In 2007, led by Maulana Aziz and his brother Abdur Rashid Ghazi (later killed), Lal Masjid clerics had set out to create their version of an Islamic state in the city. On 12 April 2007, in an FM broadcast from an illegal transmitter on the mosque's premises, they issued a chilling threat to the government: "There will be suicide blasts in every nook and cranny of the country. We have weapons, grenades and we are expert in manufacturing bombs. We are not afraid of death."

The mosque's clerics had attracted around them a core of banned militant organisations including Al Qaeda and Jaish-e-Mohammad. A state within a state, Lal Masjid was a magnet for fighters from Central Asian Republics. Inside the mosque's premises the maulana brothers — Ghazi and Aziz — ran their own Islamic court. Here they received the Saudi Arabian ambassador and negotiated with the Chinese ambassador for the release of Chinese nationals who had been kidnapped.

For many months, Gen Musharraf's government looked the other way. Even as arms and fuel were being stockpiled inside the mosque and Jamia Hafsa students rampaged across Islamabad, the government rejected suggestions to cut off the mosque-madressah complex's electricity and gas supply, block its website, or shut down its illegal FM radio station. To this day, we do not know if this was cowardice or complicity.

The rest became history. In July 2007, Islamabad shook to the sound of rockets and bombs and carnage followed. Ten SSG crack commandos

were martyred by the heavily fortified defenders and scores were wounded. Days earlier a suicide attack on a checkpoint near the mosque had wiped out a dozen policemen. On the side of Lal Masjid defenders, the death count ran into hundreds. A massive cache of weapons was seized after the defenders were eliminated and placed in police custody. Weeks later, it disappeared mysteriously.

Chief of Army Staff Gen Qamar Bajwa recently suggested that Pakistan needs to put its house in order.

He did not, of course, ask for the house's sofas to be set on fire. But this particular episode has brought back to memory the deaths of our soldiers and policemen. Yet to this day no FIR has been lodged by the authorities against the maulana and his companions.

Normal states do not let those who kill its citizens go scot-free, or allow them to head institutions that will create more killers.

Fourteen years later, the great mystery of Islamabad remains unresolved.

Dawn/ANN.

POLITICAL DIARY | KALYANI SHANKAR

Reviving the Legislative Council debate



Will Tamil Nadu swing back to a bicameral legislature? Interestingly, the DMK has been trying for it for many years but now it is AIADMK ally BJP which has promised the revival of the council in its poll manifesto this week. While such a promise would be no surprise from the DMK, the BJP's move is quite surprising. The BJP manifesto for the April 6 polls, released this week in Chennai, said the upper house of the legislature would be revived, 'to allow experts from various fields to debate and participate in the legislative process'. This time the Congress and the AMMK have also promised the revival of the upper house. The council was abolished when MG Ramachandran was the chief minister in 1986.

DMK founder and former chief minister C. N. Annadurai used the analogy of a cup and saucer for the two houses. He claimed that the council was like a saucer that can cool down a hot issue through its enlightened debates.

There are stories about why MGR abolished the Council. One version was it was because of his rivalry with DMK leader M. Karunanidhi who became leader of the opposition in the council. Karunanidhi even said when he heard of the proposal, he was prepared to resign to save the Council. But MGR went ahead and brought the proposal to the Assembly.

Also, the MGR Government had

nominated three members to the legislative council, including film actress 'Vennira Adai' Nirmala, who had starred with MGR in a number of movies. The Madras High court admitted a writ petition pointing out that Nirmala had filed for insolvency in 1981 and owed Rs 10 crore to her creditors. Nirmala promptly produced Rs 10 crore the same day and got her insolvency annulled by a high court judge. The governor then asked MGR to explain how she was nomi-

nated without proper scrutiny. Nirmala ultimately resigned from the council. On 14 May 1986, a resolution seeking to abolish the Council was moved successfully in the Legislative Assembly. Parliament also passed the bill in 1986.

Since then, the DMK has been making it an electoral promise and has so far made three unsuccessful attempts during the 1989-91, 1996-2001, and 2006-11 regimes of Karunanidhi. The attempt in 2010

almost succeeded but the delimitation of constituencies from the 78 member council was challenged in the court. Soon elections were held and the AIADMK chief minister J. Jayalalitha repealed it through a Bill.

Does this bring us to the larger issue of whether there is a need for two Houses? Even the Constituent Assembly was divided on this issue. Dr. B R Ambedkar wasn't particularly in favor of an Upper House in states. Those in favour argued that the upper House would check a hasty decision of the Assembly and also enable persons of eminence to contribute to the legislative process. There was a counterargument that poorer states cannot meet the additional expenditure of a second house. Also, a second house would delay important legislation. Above all, the Council could be utilized to accommodate discredited party-men. So it was left to each state to create or abolish the Council with Parliament sanction.

Now only five states have Vidhan Parishads — Bihar (58 members), Karnataka (75), Maharashtra (78), Telangana (40), UP (100). Jammu and Kashmir had a Council until the state was bifurcated into the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh.

The Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly had passed the resolution for the abolition of the Legislative Council on 27 January 2020. This resolution is yet to be cleared by Parlia-

ment to finally abolish the council.

The Odisha Assembly has passed a resolution for a Legislative Council. Proposals to create Councils in Rajasthan and Assam are also pending in the Rajya Sabha. The Parliamentary Standing Committee which was formed to examine the Bills has recommended the creation of Councils in both States.

The West Bengal Legislative Council was abolished on 21 March 1989. Mamata Banerjee had disclosed a plan to revive the legislative council in 2013. She has repeated the promise again during the current polls.

In fact, the framers of the Constitution themselves made a provision for Council abolition as well as their creation. Since then, the Upper Chambers in the Punjab, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh were abolished though originally these states had opted for bicameral legislatures.

Unfortunately, the abolition of the council or its revival has become a political issue. Andhra Pradesh chief minister N.T. Rama Rao got the council abolished in 1986 but his successor Dr Y.S. Rajashekhar Reddy got it revived in 2007. Now Y.S. Jagamohan Reddy is again getting it abolished.

This politicisation should be avoided. It may be better to think of the Parliamentary committee suggestion for the Centre to evolve a national policy for creation or revival of Upper Houses. Political parties also should not dump discredited party members in the Council to patronize them.

NO 28867

NOW AND AGAIN

Many shades of Holi

BUDHADEV NANDI

One are the days when preparations for Holi were a tremendous task. Teenage boys would be the most exuberant, whereas the girls would prefer shyness. Most boys would try to invent ingenious methods of playing Holi to surprise others. The innovations would be kept top secret.

Though the celebration of Holi popularly known as 'Doljatra' in West Bengal and Orissa usually lasted for two days, the effects of the festival would remain for more or less a week. The first day morning session would be celebrated with water colours. Credit always went to those who could use "fast" colour. So our destination would be to the weavers' homes. They would charge exorbitantly to supply us varieties of "fast" colours used for dyeing the world famous Baluchari saris of Bishnupur.

Besides balloons filled with colours, long range syringes called 'pichkaries' were widely used for spraying coloured water. But there was keen contest on the capacity or range of these syringes. Some enthusiasts would visit the local iron-smith's workshop for specially manufactured syringes having the capacity to hurl the colourful liquid as far as possible.

But the celebration of Holi on the first morning would not be limited in throwing colours. There would be something unfair, too. Some would cut big potatoes into two equal halves. Slang or derogatory comments, or names of scummy animals, were engraved inversely. A thick black paste made of lamp black and mustard oil would be used as the ink to stamp the words on the cheeks of contenders. However, that was considered unethical. As a preventive measure, some children would coat their faces and limbs with oil or lotion so that the colours could not stick to the skin. Old, torn and almost dispensable garments would be kept reserved especially for Holi.

The evening of the first day and the next day would be celebrated with 'abeer' or 'gulal' i.e. coloured powder. Very often, the apparently-innocent 'abeer' would cause havoc as dust of "fast" colours was mixed with it. Some would be offered betel leaves filled with colour dust in place of spices. Needless to say, everybody would try to keep himself extra alert not to be befooled any way. However, showing respect to elders by applying coloured powder on their feet was a constant.

Holi days would then be regarded as days of love, too, as Valentine's Day had not still gained traction. Young boys would look forward to the day to touch their sweethearts in the guise of smearing them with 'abeer'. The whole of the night would be filled with rendition of love songs presented in chorus by groups of singers. Many young men would reserve the day to propose to their darlings.

100 YEARS AGO

RAILWAY TROUBLES

To The Editor Of The Statesman

SIR, - With reference to a resolution appearing in the report of a Lillooah men's meeting, conveying the impression that certain Anglo-Indian members of the Railway Workmen's Association are trying to cut away from the Indians, I feel it my duty to repudiate the allegation. In the first place the Lillooah men went on strike without any reference to the Railway Workmen's Association. Of the 8,000 men on strike, 1,500 approximately are Association men who were constrained by force of circumstances to join the majority, and on whose account chiefly the General Secretary of the Railway Workmen's Association at a meeting at Howrah promised that he would mediate in their behalf when the then impending trouble came to be settled. This offer of mediation and action in their behalf is certainly a proof of the honest intentions of the R.W.A. and I deprecate the dissemination of resolutions such as the one referred for the rights of labour irrespective of caste, colour or creed.

K.C. TWEEDDALE.
Calcutta.

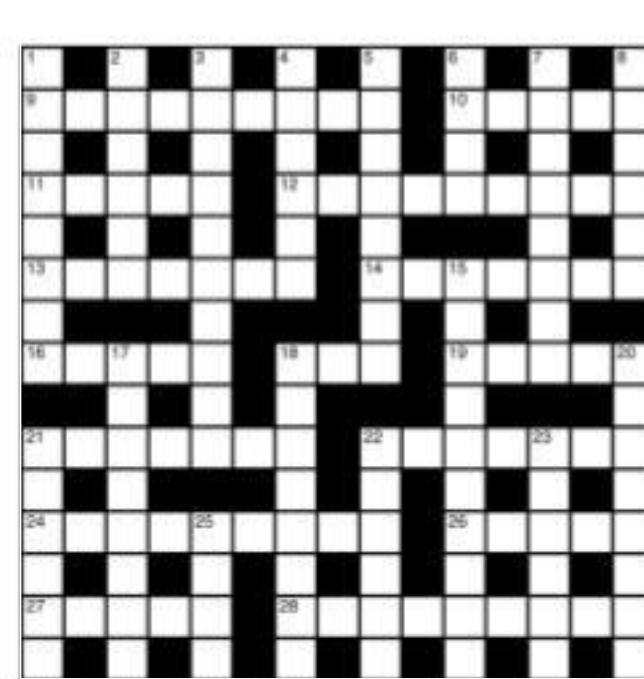
PLEA FOR DISPENSARY

To The Editor Of The Statesman

SIR, - There is a branch out-door dispensary of the Mayo Hospital, Ripon Street, which has been in existence for the past 95 years and which has been giving charitable medical relief to nearly 52,000 patients of the locality. Recently it has been decided to close the dispensary on the ground of want of funds. The total cost of maintenance of the dispensary is about Rs 6,000 annually. There is no dispensary near at hand for the benefit of the European, Anglo-Indian and Indian communities. I am of opinion that a good amount of money could be raised from residents in and around the locality who benefit by this institution if only a proper attempt is made. The Mayo Hospital authorities never thought of closing the Sukea Street dispensary which is one of the four branches of the Mayo Hospital, and which is not of so much benefit to the people of the locality.

A.G.W.
Calcutta.

CROSSWORD



SOLUTION FOR 21 MARCH

ACROSS

- 9 Who, ditching wife, dated girl — one's ashamed to hear it (4,5)
- 10 Mineral with yellow colour taken after sickness (5)
- 11 Not totally great beginning to Olympic movement (5)
- 12 See 25 Down
- 13 Brave man to vex six-footer (7)
- 14 Siren never has time for leading lady (7)
- 16 Not on bill: two rounds (5)
- 18 Keep working steadily in place with yard (3)
- 19 The Spanish sovereign defeated contender (5)
- 21 Tactless remark about Irish beast (7)
- 22 Ring for captain to supply troop with weapons? (7)
- 24 Beat back workers in sober performance (9)
- 26 Axe discovered in extremely spiritual wood (5)
- 27 Genre making comeback in some terrific stories (3-2)
- 28 Confession being task of Christian era? (9)

DOWN

- 1 See 25
- 2 Old woman upset over exam lacking principles (6)
- 3 Way horse eats good with bad meat in this dish (10)
- 4 Pound fare for travellers here? (6)
- 5 Court risk associated with railway (8)
- 6 Mercian king to hold out for hearing (4)
- 7 Simply lock for solid support (8)
- 8 Flower pot almost useless (6)
- 15 Edited parchment, most faded: wicked things (10)
- 17 Repeatedly counter one cold and brutal (8)
- 18 Design surrounding emblem is oddly vulgar (8)
- 20 Complex read to include feature in Mao's domain (3,5)
- 21 Rock enjoyable on the radio (6)
- 22 Cold cask for beer contains malt initially for season (6)
- 23 Fuss about an American soldier showing slow movement (6)
- 25//12 Dance tour great that draws in underweight people? (4,3,5)

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

*The health sector is in dire need of a health developmental financial institution*

N K SINGH

FINANCE COMMISSION CHAIRMAN

THUMBNAILS

Adani acquisition: Adani Transmission Ltd on Saturday said it has entered into a pact with Essel Infraprojects to acquire Warora-Kurnool Transmission Ltd (WKT) for an enterprise value of Rs 3,370 crore. The acquisition is in sync with Adani Transmission's strategy to enhance the value for its stakeholders, through organic as well as inorganic opportunities, ATL said in a statement.

PTI

Coal India record: Accelerating its rake loading, Coal India Limited (CIL) loaded 372.5 rakes on 19 March 2021, from its own sidings, the highest for any day so far during the ongoing financial year, according to a Press statement issued by the state-run coal major.

SNS

Microfinance report: MFIN, an association for microfinance entities and the self-regulatory organisation for NBFC-MFIs, along with KPMG released a special report titled "Rejuvenating Microfinance in India - Embracing Digital". Speaking on the report, G R Chintala, chairman of Nabard, said: "By embracing digital, a new impetus was provided to microfinance and I complement both MFIN and KPMG for documenting this dynamic transformation of the sector."

SNS

Malabar Gold & Diamonds to invest Rs 1,600 cr: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one of the largest gold and diamond retail chains in the country, has announced that it will launch 56 stores globally with 40 across India and 16 internationally in FY 2021-22 to further boost its retail presence across the globe. The move is expected to amount to an overall investment of Rs 1,600 crore and generate 1,750 new jobs.

SNS

'Make 71 pc recycling must for packaging producers': Over 45 academicians, scientists, and NGOs have come together to appeal to the FSSAI and MoEF&CC "not consider any non-recycled, non-biodegradable materials like tetra pack, plastic/glass bottles, aluminum cans ~ for new food/beverage packaging, till the time packaging waste producers do not deploy their resource under the EPR framework to collect and recycle waste generated by their products." The group has proposed 61 to 71 per cent recycling rate as a benchmark to allow any non-biodegradable packaging material for new product/beverage categories. The decision to allow new packaging materials must be taken post evaluating their environmental impact and subsequently assessing the health impact of uncollected waste," said Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Smriti Manch president Vinod Shukla and nephew of late Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya.

SNS

Disinvestment target of FY'22 achievable: CEA

Government has set a disinvestment target of ₹1.75 lakh crore for fiscal 2021-22

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH



Disinvestment target of Rs 1.75 lakh crore for fiscal 2021-22 is actually a carry-over of the Rs 2.10 lakh crore target set for the current fiscal ending 31 March. Of this, BPCL privatisation and LIC listing itself were important contributors. There are estimates suggesting Rs 75,000-80,000 crore or even higher can just come from the privatisation of BPCL itself. LIC IPO could bring in Rs 1 lakh crore approximately

K V SUBRAMANIAN
CHIEF ECONOMIC ADVISER

ing 31 March.

"Of this, BPCL privatisation and LIC listing itself were important contributors. There are estimates suggesting Rs 75,000-80,000 crore or even higher can just come from the privatisation of BPCL itself. LIC IPO could bring in Rs 1 lakh crore approximately," he said.

The government is selling its entire 52.98 per cent stake in BPCL in the nation's biggest privatisation till date. Vedan-

tently achievable because the work had begun on many of these and they will be completed in FY'22," he said.

Recalling Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement on privatisation, he said these are signature changes that are happening.

Prime Minister Modi had last month said the government has no business to be in business and his administration is committed to privatising all PSUs barring the bare minimum in four strategic sectors.

Subramanian also emphasised that India needs a lot more banks for meeting its growth potential. Citing an example of the US, he said America which has one-third the population of India has about 25,000-30,000 banks.

On the long-term growth story of India, he said the economy is expected to record double-digit growth next financial year.

During 2022-23, it could moderate to 6.5-7 per cent and thereafter 7.5-8 per cent, aided by the reform measures announced by the government recently, he added.

AEP urges govt to put restrictions on cotton yarn exports

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH



mitments they made to their customers.

"This has also affected handloom and powerloom weavers badly. Looms have stopped production. Due to this, the domestic industry has also got affected adversely," he added.

The AEP chairman said despite several efforts by the government to reduce the price of cotton yarn, it has consistently increased in the last four months and was affecting the entire value chain.

"We request immediate intervention to increase the supply of yarn to domestic manufacturers. We suggest that quantitative restrictions should be imposed on exports of cotton yarn, specifically on cotton yarn of 26 counts and above," he said.

Sakthivel further said the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) has reduced the price of cotton for small mill owners, but this did not result in reduction of cotton yarn prices.

"The rate of increase in yarn prices far exceeds that of cotton prices. The steep increase in prices and unpredictability in availability of yarn means that garment exporters cannot honour com-

JNPT's new inter-terminal route

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 27 MARCH

Country's premier container port JNPT today announced the opening of a new inter-terminal route, connecting BMCTerminal with the other four terminals at the port to further streamline the traffic movement.

The new route, inaugurated by JNPT chairman Sanjay Sethi in the presence of other port and Customs officials, among others, will reduce the container movement distance between BMCT and the other four terminals by half, from the existing 5 km to 2.5 km in one direction, JNPT said in a statement.

"We also suggest that export duty should be levied on exports of cotton yarn. This will result in a sharp decline in domestic yarn prices and an increase in value addition and employment in the country.

"This will also help in increasing garment exports. And, it will result in only normal profits accruing to yarn spinners, not the super-normal profit owing to the profiteering currently happening," Sakthivel said.

"I am happy to inform

ment. The new route is expected to increase the rail share and volume of transhipment in the port, it said.

Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) operates five container terminals that handle over 50 per cent of the total container cargo among the major domestic ports.

These are Jawaharlal Nehru Port Container Terminal (JNPCT), the Nava Sheva International Container Terminal (NSICT), the Gateway Terminals India Pvt Ltd (GTIPL), Nava Sheva International Gateway Terminal (NSICT) and the newly-commissioned Bharat Mumbai Container Terminals Private Limited (BMCTPL).

87 pc tobacco users don't support proposal to ban sale of loose cigarettes, finds survey

IANS
NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH

Vadodara, Bhopal, Chennai, Bangalore, Vijayawada, and Hyderabad.

P

ublic Response Against Helplessness and Action for Redressal (PRAHAR), an NGO dedicated to finding solutions for problems of the helpless has released findings of the first-ever survey among actual users of tobacco products conducted to understand the likely impact of the proposed COTPA Amendment Bill 2020. The survey polled 1986 respondents across 14 cities spanning Delhi NCR, Jaipur, Lucknow, Ranchi, Kolkata, Guwahati, Mumbai, Nagpur,

other groups, consumers are not cohesively represented by any associations or bodies. Therefore, PRAHAR took it upon itself to collect the views of the users and table it for the consideration of the policymakers.

The survey found that 87 per cent of the participants do not support the proposal to ban the sale of loose cigarettes. They believe that this decision to reduce tobacco consumption may instead force smokers to buy full packs which will make cigarettes readily available in their hands leading to an increase in consumption of tobacco.

'My unlisted portfolio delivered higher returns'



ond and third quarters of the current fiscal year is a testament to the earnings potential of the Indian companies.

He noted that the easy liquidity conditions in the US and other advanced economies would have contributed 10 per cent to the rise of the domestic markets, but reiterated that the more important reason for growth is the earnings potential of Indian stocks.

Jhunjhunwala further said he is more bullish on battered sectors like infrastructure, cyclicals and state-run lenders, and cautioned that compa-

nies with faulty corporate governance should be avoided. The growth opportunity for a business, people running the business, governance structure at a company, technology adoption and the firm's belief in frugality are the list of priorities which should be considered before choosing a stock to invest in, Jhunjhunwala said.

He also said the market benchmarks will keep doubling every four to five years, and added that in the next 25 years, India's per capita income will surpass that of China's on the back of high economic growth.

NEWSFEED

Directorate of Tourism, Jammu Residency Road, Jammu

Directorate of Jammu is organizing "Fulkari-2021" a festival of folk, colours and music in collaboration with M/S Atlas Event Management on 27th of March at Mansar and 28th of March at Jammu respectively.

Jammu Region endowed with abundant natural beauty is all set to enter a new era of peace and development by celebrating the first of its kind Mega Event "Fulkari 2021".

The first day of event i.e. 27th March includes adventure activities like MTB from Surinagar to Mansar, Nature Walk, Live Painting Competition,



etc. Also, in the evening there would be an ethnic fashion show along with Celebrity Performance by Sh. Rohanpreet Singh (Punjabi Singer/Actor).

The second day of event

Union Bank Of India bags prestigious IBA Award



Union Bank of India bagged prestigious Indian Banks Association (IBA) award under the category of "The best IT Risk Management & Cyber Security Initiatives - Large Bank". The award was conferred to Union Bank of India during IBA's 16th Annual IBA Technology Awards-2021 event held

POWERGRID signs agreement with Jaiprakash Power Ventures Limited



PowerGrid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID) has signed a Share Purchase Agreement with Jaiprakash Power Ventures Limited (JPVL) to acquire 74% stake in Jaypee Powergrid Limited-JPL (JPL) in which POWERGRID holds 26% equity. JPL will become a wholly owned subsidiary of POWERGRID following this acquisi-

Crisis of shipping containers

Covid-19 has affected our life in more than one way. Its impact on the global trade and consequent effects on our daily lives are directly felt.

More than 17 million containers (TEUs) are circulating globally which are exclusively handled by more than 5300 vessels. Approximately 85 percent of global trade happens in containers. However, a major collateral crisis created by the pandemic is the serious shortage of shipping containers hitting trade since mid-2020. Indian exports have been hurt irrecoverably.

The overall export figures in the period April 2020 to January 2021 at \$390.6 billion, have fallen by

10.63%. In the same period the merchandise exports have fallen by 13.58% and the service exports too have fallen by 6.29%.

This fall has been only on account of shortage of containers by sharp fall in imports. Traditionally Indian imports have exceeded exports making the boxes surplus to our exports requirement. The pandemic has tilted the balance in favour of exports notably since the latter half of the year 2020 and our policy of "Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan" has also given fillip to exports and reduced imports. Indian exports, 90% of which is done through the sea, have rebounded on the path of recovery faster.

Tyre fitters' skill training programme



Rubber Skill Development Council (RSDC) has organised a tyre fitters skill training programme at Nuh (Haryana). The training drive was carried out as a CSR project of Central Warehousing Corporation (CWC) and as an initiative of National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation (NBCFDC), a Govt. of India Undertaking.

SCOPE launches New Website



Construing that change is the only constant, Standing Conference of Public Enterprises (SCOPE) launched its official website in line with the dynamic environment. The new website www.scopeonline.in will provide enhanced interaction, information and swiftness in user interface.

POWERGRID acquires Ramgarh New Transmission Limited under TBCB

On being declared as successful bidder under Tariff Based Competitive Bidding (TBCB), Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID) on 9th March 2021 has acquired Ramgarh New Transmission Limited (RNTL) which is the Project company to establish Transmission System Strengthening Scheme for evacuation of power from solar energy zones, in Rajasthan (8.1 GW) under phase II - Part A.

The project comprises establishment of 400/220 kV new sub-station, 400 kV DC/Transmission lines and associated

sub-station extension works under build, own, operate and maintain (BOOM) basis for 35 years.

National Institute of Industrial Engineering (NITIE)

National Institute of Industrial Engineering (NITIE), a premier Mumbai based management institute, has been an active advocate of Gender Equality in supply chain. Consumer products giant, Procter & Gamble (P&G) aspires to build a world where everyone is equal.

Translating this shared vision into an effort to inspire meaningful action on Gender Equality, NITIE along with P&G India hosted the first all-virtual Director, NITIE.

NITIE P&G Annual Equality Summit : #WeSeeEqual STEM and Supply Chain on March 17, 2021 through a virtual mode.

The keynote session, aptly named Equality Matters and was graced by luminaries such as Honorable Dr. Kiran Bedi, Former LG, Puducherry, Ms. Anna Roy, Senior advisor, NITIE Aayog, Mr. Madhusudan Gopalan, CEO, P&G India Sub-Continent and Dr. Manoj Tiwari, Director, NITIE.

Spat between Centre and Odisha over vaccine supply

State unable to plan for a fortnight, Centre rebuts charge of discrimination

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 27 MARCH:

An ungainly spat between the Odisha government and the centre over supply of COVID vaccines erupted today with the state government requesting the centre not to discriminate between states and the centre denying the charge of erratic supply or any discrimination.

The Additional chief secretary health, Mr P K Mahapatra, in his letter to the Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan stated that Odisha is unable to plan vaccination sessions for even a fortnight

in advance due to insufficient and erratic vaccine supply.

It is seen that other states are achieving up to 3 lakh vaccinations daily due to adequate supply. It is requested that there should not be any discrimination between states in supply of vaccines".

Mahapatra stated that Odisha has already administered more than 20 lakh doses of vaccine and has estimated that the target will be nearly one crore from 1 April with the inclusion of people above the age of 45 years.

"Keeping in view the heat wave conditions in our State, which will worsen over the coming months, we are plan-

ning to accelerate our vaccination drive so as to vaccinate at least 2 lakh citizens daily" stated Mahapatra while requesting to supply at least 15 days vaccine requirement in advance for uninterrupted vaccination.

Reacting sharply, the Union Health Secretary Mr Bhushan said "the arguments of discretion and erratic supply of vaccines is not tenable".

A total of 34,46,760 doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been supplied to Odisha out of which a total of 22,97,431 doses have been used resulting in a balance of 11,49,329 doses available.

"We have been on a daily

basis constantly reviewing & allocating vaccines based on the progress of vaccination in all States/UTs including in Odisha", he said.

In the last 3 days, a total of 2,07,229 beneficiaries have been vaccinated resulting in a daily average vaccination rate of 69,076 beneficiaries. Notwithstanding the available stocks, an additional supply of 5,48,250 doses has also been further allocated which is expected to reach Odisha tomorrow", he said in his reply to Mahapatra.

Taking to Twitter Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan informed Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan on the

"panic being created by the Odisha government on availability of vaccines" and went on to note that there is no dearth or shortage of vaccines.

The state BJP jumped into the fray by holding a hurried press conference to demand an apology from P K Mahapatra. The letter written by the officer appears like a political statement by the organising secretary of a political party, alleged BJP leader Golak Mahapatra.

Significantly, the BJP appeared to give the benefit of doubt to CM Naveen Patnaik by wondering whether the CM had been informed about the letter sent by his officers.

Odisha effects power tariff hike

Increase of 30 paise per unit

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 27 MARCH:

The Odisha Electricity Regulatory Commission (OERC) on Saturday approved a 30 paise hike in power tariff with effect from 4 April while leaving the cost of power for BPL and agriculture sector unchanged.

The tariff has been increased from Rs 2.70 to Rs 3 per 1-50 units, Rs 4.50 to Rs 4.80 per 51-200 units, Rs 5.50 to Rs 5.80 per 201-400 units, and Rs 5.90 to Rs 6.20 per more than 400 units.

The OERC maintained that there is no change in monthly minimum fixed charge (MMFC), demand charge and meter rent and stated that the 30 paise hike amounts only to 5.60% rise in the overall retail supply tariff.

It has fixed the distribution loss at 21.24 per cent as against the 22.42 per cent sought by

the distribution companies and the AT&C loss at 22.03 per cent instead of 25.78 per cent by the DISCOMS.

The average tariff of hydro power corporations has been reduced by 2.3 per cent from 91.79 paise per unit to 89.28 paise per unit.

It is the power factor penalty incentive and reliability surcharge and provided a two percent rebate over and above normal rebate on the bill to the low tension domestic and single phase category of consumers who pay through digital mode.

Charging of electric vehicles shall be treated as General Purpose (GP) category.

The OERC passed orders on retail supply tariff of the distribution companies (DISCOMS), the bulk supply price of Grid Corporation of Odisha (GRIDCO), transmission tariff of Odisha Power Transmis-

sion Corporation Limited (OPTCL), generation tariff of Odisha Hydro Power Corporation (OHPC) and Odisha Power Generation Corporation (OPGC) and State Load Despatch Centre (SLDC) charges for 2021-22 financial year.

The state BJP and Congress lambasted the state government for inflicting a cruel power tariff hike during summer months and the pandemic.

The BIP demanded a rollback and said it will hit the streets if the government does not review the revision. In seven months power tariff has been increased by 50 paise per unit. Water tax arrears of companies are not collected, government has bailed out Gridco repeatedly with funds and guarantees, discoms have not invested a penny, charged the BIP

Odisha logs over 200 Covid cases for 3rd day running

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 27 MARCH:

Odisha's COVID-19 tally continued to rise with 210 more positive cases and one death being recorded on Saturday.

The fatality pushed the state's coronavirus death toll to 1,920.

The state reported over 200 fresh cases for the third consecutive day. It had reported 234 new cases on Friday and 214 on Thursday.

Of the 210 new cases registered in 21 of the 30 districts of the state, 124 were from quarantine centres, while 86 were detected during contact tracing.

Khordha district, under which Bhubaneswar falls, reported the highest number of new cases at 51, followed by Nuapada (23) and Cuttack (19).

The state now has 1,449 active cases, while 3,36,482 people have recovered from the disease. Testing figures

reached 28,828 on Friday, though the majority of it continues to be RATS and not RTPCR.

Odisha currently has 1,449 active cases.

In a related development, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) has made it mandatory for travelers from states with higher Covid-19 cases to undergo mandatory testing or produce Covid-19 negative reports.

To prevent the spread of the disease, the government has also banned large gatherings including for the celebration of upcoming festivals like Good Friday, Easter, Pana Sankranti, Jhamu Jatra, Danda Jatra and Ram Navami.

The spread has been noticed in areas bordering Chhattisgarh state. Another feature has been the number of cases in hostels of educational institutions where students have been travelling outside the state and returning to the hostel.

Govt to set up 1,567 new Anganwadi centres

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 27 MARCH:

The Odisha government has decided to establish 1,567 new Anganwadi centers in the areas encountering acute child malnutrition problem.

"The tribal areas where people are facing acute malnutrition will be prioritized for the opening up of new Anganwadi centres", State Women & Child Development Minister Tukuni Sahoo said.

"The state government has directed the concerned district collectors to initiate the

process to set up new Anganwadi centers in their areas. A total grant of Rs 7 lakh including Rs 5 lakh under MNREGA and Rs 2 lakh from the state treasury have been earmarked for setting up these centers. The Collectors have been asked to allot suitable land for establishment of these centres," said Sahoo.

Currently, 62,171 Anganwadi centres and 10,416 Mini Anganwadi centres are in operation in Odisha. The State Government had sent a proposal to the Centre to open 7,844 new Anganwadi centres.

Racket dealing in snake venom busted

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 27 MARCH:

The officials of city forest division on Saturday busted a racket dealing in snake venom with the detention of the three suspected racketeers.

A team of forest personnel acting as decoys nabbed the accused persons while the trio

struck a deal of Rs 10 lakh as cost of the venom. The trio was apprehended near Ganga Nagar square close to the Biju Patnaik International Airport, they said.

The suspected snake venom racketeers, who hailed from Balangir district, are being interrogated, they said while refusing to divulge further details.

Koraput administration has documented jurisdiction over Kotia villages : ADM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KORAPUT, 27 MARCH:

In the legal battle on jurisdiction of the Kotia villages between Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, the Koraput district administration has furnished 500 pg documents, said Deben Kumar Pradhan, the Additional District Magistrate here today.

Following the conduct of panchayat elections by Andhra Pradesh in Phatusineri of Kotia panchayat, the Odisha state government had filed a contempt of court case against Andhra Pradesh alleging violation of status quo order of the Supreme Court.

Koraput district administration had submitted a 500 page document with many vital letters, directions and orders dating from the pre independence times to the most recent ones. The direction by Privy Council in favour of the then Maharaja of Jeyapore to collect taxes from these villages is one of the many documents submitted

in the apex court by the Odisha government, Mr Pradhan said.

In addition to that the state government also submitted documents along with relevant photos related to provision of 124 services to people in Kotia panchayat by the Odisha government.

Former district collector Gadadhar Parida said there are 18 AP villages where people are disillusioned and want to merge with Odisha.

They have also expressed their willingness to join the Odisha Day (statehood day) celebration at Kotia on 1 April to share their solidarity with Odisha, he added.

BJP stalls Odisha Assembly

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 27 MARCH:

On a day when the budgetary grants for the Food and Supply department was listed for discussion, the BJP MLAs opted to disrupt proceedings in the Assembly over non-procurement of paddy.

Yesterday, the Congress had created a ruckus demanding discussion on the three farm laws when the demand for grants for the Home department was listed and the BJP was keen to discuss it.

Today, the Congress was keen on discussing price rise and fuel prices.

The Speaker Surya Narayan Patro's efforts to restore order by way of repeated adjournments failed. He even drew attention of the BJP members that since the demand discussion of the Food Supply

and Consumer Welfare department is scheduled to be held later today, the issue could be raised and discussed then.

But the BJP continued to protest resulting in a wash out after the question hour.

BJP members demanded a statement from the Food Supply and Consumer Welfare minister on the volume of paddy procured so far.

Leader of Opposition Pradipta Nayak (BJP) said the paddy procurement season is going to end soon but the paddy has not yet been lifted.

The current session of the state Assembly is also going to be over soon but the Chief Minister did not come to the house, he said.

He also demanded the government to extend the deadline for paddy procurement till April 15.

Odisha encountered eight cyclones in two decades

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 27 MARCH:

Odisha, which has a recurring history of devastating cyclonic fury, has managed to reduce the human casualties in a big way since the past two decades.

Since the cataclysmic 1999 super cyclone which had thousands dead in Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara districts, Odisha has encountered eight natural disasters in the form of cyclones. However only 160 people were killed in the cyclones that hit the coast on eight occasions in the past twenty years, said Revenue Minister Sudam Marndi.

The super cyclone had impounded the coast a wind

velocity of 270 kilometer per hour to 300 kmph, killing more than 10,000 people mostly in seaside villages of Jagatsinghpur district. There was a gross absence of an early warning system then. The post-disaster rescue operation mechanism had been found wanting then, resulting in the loss of precious human lives.

The strengthening of cyclone warning system, creation of the Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force in 2001 and formulation of the State Disaster Management Policy in 2005 and the construction of multi-purpose cyclone shelter buildings were some of the measures that helped minimize the human and livestock causality in the State.

Maoists' base dwindling in Odisha: Minister

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 27 MARCH:

The Left Wing Extremism (LWE) activities in Odisha have been brought down substantially in the state over the past one year due to the combined effort of both central forces and state police forces, stated the government.

"The Maoists have withdrawn their operational bases in Angul, Boudh, Deogarh, Nayagarh and Sambalpur

districts and no LWE-related violence has been reported in these districts in 2020. These districts have been removed from the list with Maoists' activities being completely curbed and the red rebels being weeded out", the Minister for home (independent charge) Dibya Shankar Mishra said.

The Maoists violence has come down due to the stepped up security in Swabhiman Anchal and Rayagada-Kala-

handi area. The districts of Malkangiri, Kandhamal, Kalahandi, Nuapada, Koraput, Rayagada, Bolangir, Bargarh, Nabarangpur and Sundargarh witnessed Maoist violence in 2020, he said.

The State witnessed 41 incidents of Maoist violence including 26 exchange of fires between the security force and red rebels. As many as 16 Naxals were gunned down by security forces in encounters while seven civilians were killed by Maoists' attack. Two Jawans of security forces also

laid down their lives during the course of anti-Naxal combing operation. A Maoist was also beaten to death by an angry mob at the Swabhiman Anchal in Malkangiri this year.

The State police arrested 34 Maoist cadres for unlawful activities in 2020, while 21 LWE cadres have surrendered this year. Huge cache of arms and ammunition including 60 guns and 63 improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were seized

in 2020.

The Border Security Force (BSF) has set up company operating bases (COBs) bolstering security in Jodambari, Gurasetu in Malkangiri, Musanala in Kalahandi, Khamanakholi and Sadiniga in Kandhamal, Jharia and photonada in Nabarangpur and Bhainsadani in Nuapada. With the establishment of COBs, the Maoists have retreated from these places, said the Minister.

port 011-25671580; Terminal I-B 25671576, Palam Road 25671579, 18001803838 • JET AIRWAYS Flight Inquiry and Reservation 39841111 • EMIRATES Flight Inquiry and Reservation 33773377 • AIR INDIA Flight Inquiry and Reservation 18001801407 • INDIGO AIRLINES New Delhi City Office 43513185, Call Center 09910383838, 18001803838; Reservation 34513186; Indigo Airlines Airline 25656421/25656431 Reservation 41528181 • Air France Flight Inquiry and Reservation 23466262 (City) 25652294 (Airport) • Kuwait Airways Flight Inquiry and Reservation 23354373

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Pastry dish (3)
- 2 Correct (5)
- 3 Chasm (4)
- 4 Commendation (8)
- 5 White wine (10)
- 6 Breakfast food (6)
- 7 Yell (6)
- 8 Prosperous (4-6)
- 9 Slices of cooked meats (4,4)
- 10 Much (1,3)
- 11 German beer mug (5)
- 12 Put on (3)
- 13 Redolent, especially (7)
- 14 Peer (Reapire), 2 Harness, 3 Arid, 4 Pastoral, 5 Evoke, 6 Delectation, 7 Snag,
- 15 Belongings (7)
- 16 Look, REDEYE! WOULDN'T YOU LIKE FOR US TO HAVE ONE LIKE THAT? (5)
- 17 Natural satellite (4)
- 18 Strike sharply (3)
- 19 Body area (5)
- 20 Reveal (8)
- 21 Shame, 22 Ominous, 23 Neat, 24 Site.
- 22 Duplicating indicator (3,4)
- 23 Serving spoon (5)
- 24 Deception (8)
- 25 Vase (3)

DOWN

- 1 Positive (4)
- 2 Correct (5)
- 3 Strike sharply (3)
- 4 Body area (5)
- 5 Reckless youth (8)
- 6 Publication



China seeks to comprehensively improve relations with Iran

CHINA'S FOREIGN MINISTER WANG YI

AFTER SIGNING A STRATEGIC LONG-TERM COOPERATION AGREEMENT

WEATHER

CITY	MAX(°C)	MIN(°C)
SINGAPORE	31	25 H
HONG KONG	24	19 CL
TOKYO	18	14 H
LONDON	12	4 H
DUBAI	33	24 CL
SAN FRANCISCO	18	9 S
NEW YORK	18	9 S
MOSCOW	6	-1 H

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

THUMBNAILS



A kitesurfer flies over Lake Constance in a wind force of around six near Muehlhofen-Unter-Haldingen, Germany on Saturday.

AGENCIES

China announces sanctions: China on Saturday announced sanctions on individuals and entities in the United States and Canada, in response to sanctions imposed on Chinese citizens and groups over Xinjiang.

AGENCIES

Building collapse in Egypt kills 5: A nine-story apartment building collapsed in the Egyptian capital early Saturday, killing at least five people and injuring about two dozen others, an official said. Rescue workers were searching for any survivors trapped under the rubble of the building in the el-Salam neighborhood, said Khalid Abdel-Ali, the administrative head of Cairo governorate.

AP

Virginia Beach oceanfront shootings: Two people are dead and eight people were wounded in shootings along Virginia Beach's oceanfront, police said Saturday. Eight people were shot just after 11 p.m. Friday. All eight were taken to local hospitals, with some of their conditions ranging from serious to life-threatening.

AP

UK, EU reach first post-Brexit deal on financial rules

LONDON, 27 MARCH

Britain and the European Union took their first step since Brexit to cooperate on financial services, agreeing on a new forum to discuss market regulation.

The move could help finance firms in the City of London to eventually win back some access to the single market they lost when the United Kingdom left the EU.

The two sides have agreed a memorandum of understanding on financial services, the UK Treasury and European Commission said in separate statements Friday (March 26). The content and substance of the deal has been finalised, and the two sides are now working on the formal process of validation.

"Technical discussions on the text" have now been concluded, the UK Treasury statement said, adding that "formal steps need to be undertaken on both sides before the MOU can be signed but it is expected that this can be done expeditiously".

The memorandum sets out a framework for regulatory cooperation and a joint forum for discussing rules and procedures as well as the sharing of information. It is separate from any decision on equivalence, a series of unilateral rulings that each side can make that offer market access to financial services.

"The MOU will establish the Joint UK-EU Financial Regulatory Forum, which will serve as a platform to facilitate dialogue on financial services issues," an European Commission spokesman said.

AGENCIES

Democrats make case for US voting overhaul

Leaders decried the Georgia law signed the day before as specifically aimed at suppressing Black and Latino votes and a threat to democracy

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 27 MARCH

Democrats have seized on new voting restrictions in Georgia to focus attention on the fight to overhaul federal election laws, setting up a slow-building standoff that carries echoes of the civil rights battles of a half-century ago.

In fiery speeches, pointed statements and tweets, party leaders on Friday decried the law signed the day before by the state's Republican governors specifically aimed at suppressing Black and Latino votes and a threat to democracy. President Joe Biden released an extended statement, calling the law an attack on "good conscience" that denies the right to vote for "countless" Americans.

"This is Jim Crow in the 21st Century," Biden said, referring

to laws of the last century that enforced heavy-handed racial segregation in the South.

"It must end. We have a moral and Constitutional obligation to act," he said. He told reporters the Georgia law is an "atrocious" and the Justice Department is looking into it.

Georgia's Republican governor, Brian Kemp, lashed back, accusing Biden of attempting to "destroy the sanctity and security of the ballot box" by supporting what the governor sees as federal intrusion into state responsibilities.

Behind the chorus of outrage, Democrats are also wrestling with the limits on their power in Washington, as long as Senate filibuster rules allow Republicans to block major legislation, including H.R. 1, a sweeping elections bill now pending in the Senate.



Biden and his party are seeking to build and sustain momentum in the realm of public opinion, hoping to nationalise what has so far been a Republican-led, state-by-state movement to curb access to the ballot, while they begin a slow, plodding legislative process.

Allies meanwhile plan to fight the Georgia law, and others, in court. "What's happening in Georgia right now, underscores the importance and the urgency," said Sen. Raphael Warnock, D-Ga., in an interview.

view Friday. "This is about what is fundamental to our identity as an American people, one person, one vote."

The emerging brawl over the politics and policy of voting access is swelling like nothing seen in recent years, harkening back to what many Americans may assume are well-settled rules ensuring equal access to the ballot.

But as Republican-controlled state legislatures from Georgia to Iowa to Arizona are taking dramatic action to limit

early voting and force new voter ID requirements, the debate in Washington threatens to exacerbate the nation's cavernous political divides in the early days of the Biden presidency, just as the Democratic president vows to unite the country. It is expected to be a months-long slog in the narrowly divided Congress, specifically the Senate, where Democrats are, for now, unwilling to muscle their slim majority to change filibuster rules, despite the party's urgent calls for action.

Instead, the Democrats are prepared to legislate the old-fashioned way, unspooling arguments in lengthy Senate debates, spilling out of the committee hearing rooms and onto the Senate floor, and forcing opponents to go on the record as standing in the way, much as South Carolina Sen. Strom Thurmond was positioned when he filed

bustered the Civil Rights Act of the last century.

"They're literally squeezing the arteries of the lifeblood of America," Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., the son of civil rights activists, said in an interview. "They are choking what makes us distinct and unique on the planet Earth."

Booker would not, however, openly call for the end of the filibuster, a parliamentary tool requiring at least 60 votes to advance Senate legislation in some cases.

On Friday, the president revived his call on Congress to enact H.R. 1, an elections overhaul that would confront the Republican restrictions. He called as well for the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which would restore some aspects of a landmark law struck down by the Supreme Court in 2013.

But Biden remains unwilling to embrace the so-called

"nuclear option", ending the filibuster, for fear it would further divide the country.

Meantime, the political fight was intensifying in Georgia, where years of voter registration drives in Black communities and steady population changes helped Biden win the once solidly red state.

Just as Kemp and several white state lawmakers celebrated the signing of the state's new voting law on Thursday, state police officers handcuffed and forcibly removed state Republican Park Cannon, a Black woman, after she knocked on the door of the governor's private office.

Cannon was charged with obstruction of law enforcement and disruption of the General Assembly, both felonies. She was released from jail late Thursday.

Donald Trump congratulated the Georgia governor and state leaders on the new law.

Ten arrested as riot police disperse anti-lockdown protesters in Bristol

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON, 27 MARCH



At least 10 arrests were made as British police officers faced a barrage of eggs and glass bottles from hundreds of protesters in yet another anti-lockdown protest dubbed 'Kill the Bill' in the south-west England city of Bristol.

After a stand-off between police and protesters on Friday evening, officers in riot gear and mounted on horses attempted to disperse the crowds after several warnings were made through a loudspeaker.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Home Secretary Priti Patel condemned the scenes of police officers being targeted.

Last night saw disgraceful attacks against police officers in Bristol, said Johnson on Twitter.

Our officers should not have to face having bricks, bottles and fireworks being thrown at them by a mob intent on

violence and causing damage to property. The police and the city have my full support, he said.

Patel also took to Twitter and said she was disgusted with the violence directed at the officers.

The local Avon and Somerset Police said specialist resources including dogs and a police helicopter were used in the policing operation near Bridewell Police Station in the city centre, which has been the site of two previous 'Kill the Bill' protests, one of them turning violent disorder.

Officers were instructed to use protective clothing after ammonia was smelt in the crowd.

The majority of people

acted peacefully however there was a minority who once again showed hostility to officers, said Superintendent Mark Runacres in reference to Friday's protest.

Items, including glass bottles and bricks, were thrown at officers, fireworks were launched at our mounted section while one of our horses was also covered with paint. This violent conduct is not acceptable. Officers repeatedly encouraged people to disperse but once the atmosphere changed and people became physical it was necessary to take action, he said.

Runacres said the 10 arrests were for offences including violent disorder, assaulting an emergency worker and possession of banned Class A drugs. Three of those arrested were also detained in connection with the violent disorder in the city last Sunday.

Officers were instructed to use protective clothing after ammonia was smelt in the crowd.

Francisco, 34, an asylum-seeking migrant from Honduras, cradles his nine-month-old daughter Megan from the early morning cold and wind, as they await for transport to a processing center after crossing the Rio Grande river into the United States from Mexico on a raft in La Joya, Texas.

AGENCIES

N Korea snaps back at Biden over missile test

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SEOUL, 27 MARCH



North Korea on Saturday snapped back at President Joe Biden's criticism of its ballistic missile tests, calling his comments a provocation and encroachment on the North's right to self-defense and vowing to continuously expand its most thoroughgoing and overwhelming military power.

The statement issued by senior official Ri Pyong Chol came after the North on Thursday tested-fired two short-range missiles off its eastern coast in the first ballistic launches since Biden took office.

Experts say the flight data released by South Korea's military and North Korea's own description of the tests indicated that the North tested a new solid-fuel weapon that is designed to evade missile defense systems and is potentially nuclear capable.

The launches showed how the North continues to expand its military capabilities while

nuclear negotiations with the United States remain stalled. They also underscored the growing threat such short-range weapons pose to US allies South Korea and Japan, which host a combined 80,000 US troops as the core of America's military presence in the region.

Biden was restrained as he admonished North Korea for the launches, which were a violation of UN sanctions against the North.

"We're consulting with our allies and partners," Biden said at the first news conference of his presidency on Thursday. "And there will be responses if they choose to escalate. We will respond accordingly."

AGENCIES
DUBAI, 27 MARCH



Foreign ministers from China and Iran, which are both subject to US sanctions, signed a landmark 25-year cooperation agreement on Saturday.

"Relations between the two countries have now reached the level of strategic partnership and China seeks to comprehensively improve relations with Iran," China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi was quoted by Iran's state media as telling his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif.

"Our relations with Iran will not be affected by the current situation, but will be permanent and strategic," Wang said ahead of the televised signing ceremony.

"Iran decides independently on its relations with other countries and is not like some countries that change their position with one phone call," he said.

Wang met President Hassan Rouhani ahead of the

signing of the agreement in Teheran, which is expected to include Chinese investments in key sectors such as energy and infrastructure.

Rouhani voiced appreciation for Beijing's support within Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers and called for more coronavirus vaccine exports to Iran, the worst-hit country by the pandemic in the Middle East.

"Cooperation between the two countries is very important for the implementation of the nuclear accord and the fulfillment of obligations by European countries," Rouhani said, according to his official website.

"Under the new administration, the Americans want to reconsider their policy and return to the nuclear accord, and China welcomes their move," Wang said. "We will provide more coronavirus vaccines to Iran and Iran is our priority for the vaccines."

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said the agreement was a "roadmap" for trade, economic and transportation cooperation, with a "special focus on the private sectors of the two sides".

Israelis gather for Passover, celebrating freedom from virus

ASSOCIATED PRESS
JERUSALEM, 27 MARCH



A year ago, Giordana Grego's parents spent Passover at home in Israel, alone but grateful that they had escaped the worst of the pandemic in Italy.

This year, the whole family will get together to mark the Jewish feast of liberation and deliverance from the pandemic.

Israel has vaccinated over half its population of 9.3 million, and as coronavirus infections have plummeted, authorities have allowed restaurants, hotels, museums and theaters to re-open. Up to 20 people can now gather indoors.

It's a stark turnaround from last year, when Israel was in the first of three nationwide

lockdowns, with businesses shuttered, checkpoints set up on empty roads and people confined to their homes. Many could only see their elderly relatives on video calls.

For us in Israel, really celebrating the festivity of freedom definitely has a whole different meaning this year after what we experienced, said Grego, who immigrated to Israel from Italy.

It's amazing that this year we're able to celebrate together, also considering that in Italy, everybody is still under lockdown." Passover is the Jewish holiday celebrating the biblical Israelites' liberation from slavery in Egypt after a series of divine plagues.

The week-long springtime festival starts Saturday night with the highly ritualized Seder meal, when the Exodus

story is retold. It's a Thanksgiving-like atmosphere with family, friends, feasting and four cups of wine.

Throughout the week, observant Jews abstain from the consumption of bread and other leavened foods to commemorate the hardships of the flight from Egypt. Instead, they eat unleavened matzah.

Holiday preparations involve spring cleaning to the extreme to remove even the tiniest crumbs of leavened bread from homes and offices. Cauldrons of boiling water are set up on street corners to boil kitchenware, and many burn their discarded bread, known as chametz. Supermarkets cordon off aisles with leavened goods, wrapping shelves in black plastic.

Most Israeli Jews religious and secular alike spend the Seder with extended family. Last year's Passover was a major break in tradition.

Government-imposed restrictions forced the closure of synagogues and limited movement and assembly to slow the virus' spread. Some conducted the ritual meal with their nuclear family, others over videoconference, while an unfortunate few held the Seder in solitude.

For now, however, Israelis are enjoying what feels like a post-pandemic reality, lending special significance to Passover. "It's not only symbolic that it's the holiday of freedom, but it's also the holiday of the family," said Rabbi David Stav, chief rabbi of the city of Shoham.

As daily deaths near 4,000, worst may lie ahead for Brazil



China will continue to play a constructive role in bringing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action back on track

CHINA VICE FOREIGN MINISTER MA ZHAOXU
DURING TALKS ON THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL WITH US OFFICIALS

The Sunday Statesman
NEW DELHI, 28 MARCH 2021

India, B'desh want stability, love, peace: Modi

PM Narendra Modi said that during the coronavirus pandemic, both India and Bangladesh proved their capabilities

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DHAKA, 27 MARCH

India and Bangladesh want stability, love and peace instead of instability, terror and unrest in the world, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday as he underlined that the two friendly neighbours want to see the world progressing through their own development.

Prime Minister Modi made the remarks while speaking to the Matua community members after offering prayers at their temple in Gopalganj's Orakandi - the birthplace of Hindu mystic figure and community's spiritual guru Harichand Thakur.

"Both India and Bangladesh want to see the world progressing through their own development. Both the countries want to see stability, love, and peace instead of instability, terror, and unrest in the world," Modi said.

Modi said he was waiting for this opportunity for many years and during his visit to Bangladesh in 2015, he had expressed desire to visit Orakandi, which has come true now. This place is a pilgrimage site for the spiritual relationship between India and Bangladesh, he said.

"I was speaking to some people here. They were saying who could have thought that India's Prime Minister would visit Orakandi, Modi said, adding that he was feeling the same emotions as felt by the Matua community members in India after coming to Orakandi, from where Harichand Thakur disseminated his pious message.

Orakandi is the abode of Hindu Matua community, a large number of whom are residents of neighbouring West Bengal.

Modi announced that India will upgrade one girls' middle school and set up a primary school in Orakandi. Analysts said Modi's planned temple visits carry a political significance at the time of the ongoing assembly elections in West Bengal.

The Prime Minister was accompanied by BJP MP from West Bengal Shantanu Thakur during his visit to Orakandi. The Matua community's vote may determine the winner in some seats in the elections to the West Bengal state assembly, the first phase of which began on Saturday.

Modi said the Matua community celebrates 'Baroni Shanan Utshab' every year on the auspicious occasion of the birth anniversary of Harichand Thakur and a large number of devotees from India come to Orakandi to participate in this festival.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a group photo during his visit to the Jeshoreshwari Kali Temple, in Sathkhira, Bangladesh.

AGENCIES

"To make this pilgrimage easier for citizens of India, efforts will be made on behalf of the Government of India," he said. "We are also committed to grand events and various works reflecting the glorious history of the Matua community in Thakurnagar (West Bengal)," he said.

"I have always been very close to the family members of the Thakurbari," he added.

The way India and Bangladesh governments are working towards strengthening their ties, Harichand Thakur and Thakurbari have been doing this for ages. This place

symbolises the spiritual trust of India and Bangladesh," he said. In his address, Modi said that it was important for both India and Bangladesh to come together and fight common challenges. He said that during the Covid-19 pandemic, India and Bangladesh proved their capabilities.

"Both nations are facing this pandemic strongly and fighting it together. India is working by considering that it is its duty that the 'Made in India' vaccine reaches the citizens of Bangladesh," Modi added.

He said India is moving forward with the mantra of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, and Sabka Vishwas', and Bangladesh is its co-passenger in it.

Bangladesh is presenting a strong example of development and change in front of the world and India is your co-passenger in these efforts," he added. Last time when Prime Minister Modi visited Bangladesh in 2015, he offered puja at Dhakeshwari temple in the national capital. Bangladesh has taken extra security measures for the Indian premier's visit in the wake of protests by few leftist and Islamist groups.

PM Modi visits mausoleum of 'Bangabandhu'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DHAKA, 27 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday visited the mausoleum of Sheikh Mujib Rahman and paid floral tributes to him, becoming the first-ever foreign Head of State or Head of Government to pay homage at the grave of 'Bangabandhu' at Tungipara in south-western Bangladesh.

Prime Minister Modi was received at the mausoleum by his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina, who is the daughter of Rahman. Sheikh Rehana, the youngest daughter of Rahman was also present.

Modi, who was covering his face with a mask, paid floral tributes to 'Bangabandhu' and stood in silence for a few minutes while Hasina and her Cabinet colleagues offered 'Fatiha'.

Prime Minister Modis the first-ever foreign Head of State or Head of Government to pay homage at Bangabandhu Mausoleum Complex, the Ministry of External Affairs said in a press release.

"The life of Bangabandhu epitomized the freedom



struggle of the people of Bangladesh for their rights, for the preservation of their inclusive culture and their identity, Modi wrote in the visitor book at the Mausoleum complex. Prime Minister of Bangladesh but was assassinated by some military officers during a coup d'etat on August 15, 1975.

Rahman was imprisoned in Pakistan, which was forced to set him free on January 8, 1972. He returned to Dhaka on January 10, 1972. He later took over as Prime Minister of Bangladesh but was assassinated by some military officers during a coup d'etat on August 15, 1975.

His wife, brother, sons and daughters-in-law were also assassinated along with him. Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana survived as they were in Europe.

Modi, who is visiting Bangladesh on his first trip to a foreign country since the outbreak of the coronavirus, on Friday attended the celebrations of the golden jubilee of the country's independence, the birth centenary of Bangabandhu's Sheikh Mujib Rahman in Dhaka.

Train resumes in southern Egypt after crash

ASSOCIATED PRESS
CAIRO, 27 MARCH

Rail traffic resumed on Saturday in southern Egypt, a day after two trains collided, killing at least 32 people and injuring 165 others.

The collision of two passenger trains in the province of Sohag, about 440 kilometers south of Cairo, was the latest in a series of deadly accidents involving the country's troubled railways.

An Associated Press video journalist at the scene saw the reopening of the railway early Saturday.

Authorities had replaced the rail track in the area where the collision took place. The damaged tracks and wrecked train cars were on the side of the railway.

The two trains had collid-



ed Friday at the town of Tahta, causing two carriages to derail and flip on their side.

Rail officials initially said someone activated the emergency brakes on one of the trains, which was headed to the Mediterranean city of Alexandria.

Prime Minister Mustafa Madbouly however said no

cause has been determined.

Egypt's rail system has a history of badly maintained equipment and mismanagement, and official figures said there were 1,793 train accidents in 2017.

In 2018, a passenger train derailed near the southern city of Aswan, injuring at least six

The same year, President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi said the government needed about 250 billion Egyptian pounds (\$14.1 billion) to overhaul the rail system.

Those remarks came a day after a passenger train collided with a cargo train, killing at least 12 people.

A year earlier, two passenger trains collided just outside of Alexandria, killing 43. In 2016, at least 51 people were killed when two commuter trains collided near Cairo.

Egypt's deadliest train crash was in 2002, when over 300 people were killed after a fire broke out in a train traveling from Cairo to southern Egypt.

Patinder Singh assumed the post on Friday for a term of three years, the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) announced.

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) aims to create a single market and production base for the free flow of goods, services, investment, capital, and skilled labour within the region.

Singh, who succeeds Dr Aladdin D Rillo from the

Singapore's Indian-origin civil servant appointed as ASEAN Secretariat's deputy secretary-general

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SINGAPORE, 27 MARCH

A senior Singaporean civil servant of Indian origin has been appointed as the ASEAN Secretariat's next deputy secretary-general for its economic community, according to a media report.

Satinder Singh assumed the post on Friday for a term of three years, the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) announced.

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) aims to create a single market and production base for the free flow of goods, services, investment, capital, and skilled labour within the region.

Singh, who succeeds Dr Aladdin D Rillo from the

Philippines, will support the ASEAN secretary-general in the implementation of the AEC Blueprint 2025, as well as the realisation of the AEC's goals, The Straits Times reported. He will also oversee the directorates and divisions of the ASEAN Economic Community Department in the ASEAN Secretariat.

Additionally, he will manage development cooperation in economic matters, policy and relations with ASEAN member states, dialogue partners and international organisations as well. Singh has relinquished his earlier role as the assistant chief executive officer of Enterprise Singapore, a state-owned trade promotion agency.

MTI said the AEC represents ASEAN's continued commitment to an increasingly seamless, integrated and connected region. "It envisions ASEAN as a single market and production base, a highly competitive region with equitable economic development, and fully integrated into the global economy," The Straits Times quoted the ministry as saying.

MTI said that over the years in its service, Singh has built strong relationships with the global trade community, and strengthened the trading ecosystem in Singapore. He has also led teams to develop strategies and policies to support companies in strengthening capabilities and expanding overseas.

Indonesia's Merapi volcano spews ash, debris

YOGYAKARTA, 27 MARCH

Indonesia's most volatile volcano was erupting again Saturday, releasing plumes of ash high into the air and sending streams of lava and debris down its slopes.

No casualties were reported.

An avalanche of rocks spilled down Mount Merapi's slopes before dawn and clouds of hot ash shot 200 meters (656 feet) into the air as the mountain groaned and rumbled, said Hanik Humaida, the head of Yogyakarta's Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Center.

The volcano unleashed hot clouds of ash at least eight times since the morning as well as a series of pyroclastic flows a mixture of rock, debris, lava and gasses that had reached nearly 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) down its slopes, Humaida said.

The 2,968-meter (9,737-foot) high volcano is on densely populated Java island near the ancient city of Yogyakarta. It is the most active of dozens of Indonesian volcanoes and has repeatedly erupted recently.

Indonesia's Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation Center has advised villagers living on Merapi's slopes to stay five kilometers (3.1 miles) from its crater and be aware of the peril of lava.

Merapi's last major eruption in 2010 killed 347 people.

Indonesia, an archipelago of 270 million people, sits along the Pacific Ring of Fire, a horseshoe-shaped area along the edge of the ocean that is prone to earthquakes and volcanic activity.

FUN TIME



Vice President Kamala Harris, Rep. Rosa DeLauro and Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona visit with children in a classroom at West Haven Child Development Center on Friday.

Pak SC finds evidence in Pearl's case doubtful

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE
ISLAMABAD, 27 MARCH

In a 2-1-majority judgment in the 2002 murder case of American journalist Daniel Pearl, the Pakistan Supreme Court held that the entire evidence is shrouded with doubts, with prosecution failing to prove the four accused guilty.

Giving out the judgment, the court acquitted the prime suspect in the murder case, British-born Pakistani Ahmed Omar Sheikha of all the charges.

"Hence Criminal Appeal No 602/2020 filed by Ahmed Omar Sheikha is allowed. He is acquitted of all the charges. He shall be released from jail if not required to be detained in any other case," maintained the majority judgment.

"Criminal Appeals No.599 to 601 of 2020, filed by the state against acquittal and Criminal Petitions No1085 and

1086 of 2020 filed by the parents of Daniel Pearl against the acquittal of Fahad Nasim Ahmed, Syed Salman Saqib and Sheikh Muhammad Adil and for enhancement of sentence of Ahmed Omar Sheikha are dismissed."

The case has become a tipping point of contention in relations between the US and Pakistan as Washington has raised serious questions over

the proceedings of the case. On January 28, the Supreme Court issued a short order after hearing appeals filed by the Pakistan People Party (PPP) leg of the Sindh provincial government and Pearl's parents, challenging the decision of the Sindh High Court, which acquitted the four suspects of all charges.

The Sindh High Court had commuted the death sentence of Sheikha to seven years and acquitted three others, who were serving life term in the case.

The decision came after at least 20 years, after the accused were found guilty and jailed.

The Sindh High Court had maintained that the prosecution had failed to bring home guilt of the accused and appellant, as the evidence furnished during the trial they maintained, was full of factual and legal defects.

"In this case, regarding

each and every piece of evidence the doubts are emerging from the mouth of the witnesses, and it is settled since centuries that the benefit of doubt automatically goes in favour of the accused," read the verdict of the provincial court.

The Supreme court rejected the decision of the Sindh High Court and maintained that the latter has "rightly extended the benefit of doubt to Fahad Nasim Ahmed, Syed Salman Saqib and Sheikh Muhammad Adil and acquitted them from all the charges and had also rightly extended the benefit of doubt to Ahmed Omar Sheikha qua all the other charges".

The court also maintained that Pearl's parents had argued that it was a high-profile case, adding that even in such cases, the benefit of doubt cannot be extended to the prosecution.

Suez Canal remains blocked amid efforts to free stuck vessel

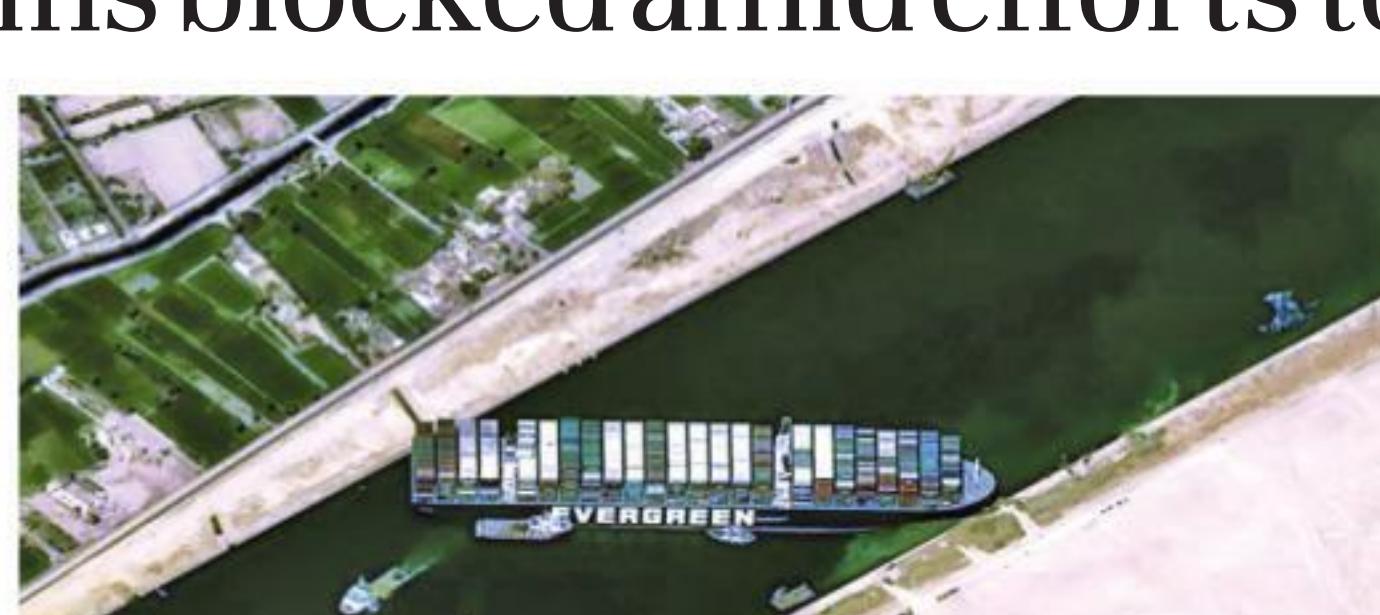
ASSOCIATED PRESS
SUEZ, 27 MARCH

A giant container ship remained stuck sideways in Egypt's Suez Canal for a fifth day Saturday, as authorities prepared to make new attempts to free the vessel and reopen a crucial east-west waterway for global shipping.

The Ever Given, a Panama-flagged ship that carries cargo between Asia and Europe, ran aground Tuesday in the narrow canal that runs between Africa and the Sinai Peninsula.

The massive vessel got stuck in a single-lane stretch of the canal, about six kilometers (3.7 miles) north of the southern entrance, near the city of Suez.

Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement, the technical manager of the Ever Given, said



the site of the vessel.

Shohei Kisen President Yukio Higaki told a news conference at company headquarters in Imabari in western Japan that 10 tugboats were deployed and workers were dredging the banks and sea floor near the vessel's bow to try to get it afloat again as the

high tide starts to go out. Shohei Kisen said in a statement Saturday the company was considering removing containers to lighten the vessel if refloating efforts fail, but that would be a difficult operation.

The White House said it has offered to help Egypt reopen

out mechanical or engine failure, the company and the canal authority said.

GAC, a global shipping and logistics company, had previously said the ship had experienced a power blackout, but it did not elaborate.

A maritime traffic jam grew to around 280 vessels Saturday outside the Suez Canal, according to canal service provider Leth Agencies.

Some vessels began changing course and dozens of ships were still en route to the waterway, according to the data firm Refinitiv.

Apparently anticipating long delays, the owners of the stuck vessel diverted a sister ship, the Ever Greet, on a course around Africa instead, according to satellite data from MarineTraffic.com.

Others also are being diverted. The liquid natural gas carrier Pan Americas changed course in the mid-Atlantic, now aiming south to go around the southern tip of Africa, according to satellite data from MarineTraffic.com.

<h2



THE TOXIC TOUCH

Thierry Henry (*in photo, left*) has decided to quit social media, saying racism and abuse online is "too toxic to ignore." The former France, Arsenal and Barcelona footballer has called on the people in power to ensure social media is regulated to prevent racism and bullying taking place.

For more updates

www.thestatesman.com

THUMBNAILS

Tendulkar afflicted: Sachin Tendulkar has tested positive for Covid-19. The world's highest scorer in Tests and One-Day Internationals said this on Twitter on Saturday. "I have been testing myself and taking all the recommended precautions" said Tendulkar.

Proteas' plan: South Africa's Indian Premier League-bound players may travel to India on a chartered flight that may be arranged by their franchises early next month. The players may leave after the second One-Day International against Pakistan to be available.

Gavaskar 'wrong': Soon after recording his 11th One-Day International century and helping England win against India on Friday, Jonny Bairstow questioned the basis on which Sunil Gavaskar had said the England batsmen looked "uninterested" in Test cricket.

Vaas rethink: Chaminda Vaas has withdrawn his resignation and will resume working as Sri Lanka's fast-bowling consultant after a pay dispute was resolved, Sri Lanka Cricket said on Friday. Vaas called it quits on 22 February, days after being appointed.

Tokyo Olympics: The International Olympic Committee has decided to grant accreditations only to those who have essential and operational roles at this summer's Olympic Games in Tokyo. This step will significantly reduce the number of accredited people at the event.

Verstappen fastest: Max Verstappen set the pace in the first practice session of the Formula One season in Bahrain on Friday as his Red Bull team immediately lived up to expectations that have soared since testing. He set a best time of 1min 31.394secs.

Duo out: Marcus Rashford and Bukayo Saka have been ruled out of England's World Cup qualifiers against Albania and Poland. They got off to a good start on the way to Qatar 2022 against San Marino on Thursday, with a comprehensive 5-0 Wembley stadium win.

Haaland praised: Erling Haaland is a "one of the best strikers in the world," according to Pep Guardiola, though the Manchester City manager refused to discuss potential transfer interest in the Borussia Dortmund striker. City played Dortmund in the Champions League.

Osaka's return: Naomi Osaka returned to action for the first time since winning the Australian Open with a 7-6 (7/3), 6-4 victory over Ajla Tomljanovic in her opening match at the Miami Open. The Japanese star, world No 2, looked a little rusty in the match.

3rd ODI: India reconsider attacking options

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

PUNE, 27 MARCH

India could reconsider their 50-over template while picking up the pieces after last night's mauling to complete a hat trick of series wins against England in the third and final One-Day International here tomorrow. On the shirftfront wicket at Gahajne stadium, England hit 20 sixes in a 337-run chase, due partially to inept bowling by Kuldeep Yadav and Krunal Pandya.

Never before did captain Virat Kohli miss Ravindra Jadeja as much as he would have last evening when Jonny Bairstow and Ben Stokes took the mickeyout of India's spinners. Yadav conceded eight sixes, the most by an Indian bowler. He leaked 84 runs in the second game after giving away 64 in the first. Pandya conceded 72 in six overs. So leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal could be back in along with Washington Sundar,



who can be useful also with the bat. Pandya Senior would still make the team because of his batting skills but his left-arm spin cannot be considered a long-term option.

The Men In Blue are the only team that believe in accelerating in the last 15 overs, a template that was set by Mahendra Singh Dhoni. It has worked on most occasions but England

of late have shown the world the advantages of early aggression. Kohli, who has hit two successive 50+ plus scores, would be keen to carry on similarly and make a big score.

"I never played for 100s in my life, that's probably why I ended up getting so many in such little time," he has said, adding: "It's all about contributing to the team's cause.

If the team don't win when you get three figures it doesn't mean anything. You're not going to sit back at the end of your career and look at numbers, it's more about how you played the game." His last century in this format came in August 2019. Hardik will continue to be a finisher but you might wonder what India's workload management is like, considering he

On the pace front, while India would stick with spearhead Bhuvneshwar Kumar, they could try going in with T Natarajan if they want to rest Shardul Thakur.

has rarely bowled barring a few overs in the recently Twenty20 Internationals.

On the pace front, while India would stick with spearhead Bhuvneshwar Kumar, they could try going in with T Natarajan if they want to rest Shardul Thakur. "Mohammad Siraj or Prasidh Krishna?" could be another, interesting area of speculation. England would be energised by their latest performance and the biggest positive for them is the return of Ben Stokes, who has struggled on many occasions on this tour.

Match starts at 1.30 pm.

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Harbhajan checks in at KKR: Two-time champions Kolkata Knight Riders' latest addition in the spin department, Harbhajan Singh, checked into the team hotel here on Saturday afternoon as a few other players began their training at the DY Patil Stadium. This is the first time the 'Turbanator' will turn out in Purple and Gold, having represented Mumbai Indians and Chennai Super Kings in previous editions of the lucrative league. PTI

Stokes is intimidating to bowl at, hope he continues like this for Royals, says Buttler

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

PUNE, 27 MARCH



and how he has evolved as a player in the past few years.

"He (Stokes) has had a few (innings) and his World Cup final (80 odd) one was pretty good. But we all know the talent Ben has. I feel like his batting in the last few years has

continued to improve and go to another level and we have seen that in all formats."

The skipper wasn't surprised that Stokes did as well as he did batting at No 3.

"It was impressive to watch how Ben (Stokes) always wants

to bat. He is involved in the game as much as he can. It was fantastic to watch and it was no surprise that he played so well in that position," Buttler said at the pre-match virtual press conference ahead of the third ODI.

The skipper said that with so many options available, it is only a given that all players would like to play as many deliveries possible.

"And the same questions are asked, where I should bat, where Jonny (Bairstow) should bat, we have a wealth of talent at the moment in white-ball cricket and (there are) lots of guys, who want to face as many balls as possible, so it is no surprise that Ben played so well. It is a good headache to have for the guys in charge," he said when asked whether Stokes could also bat one-drop in T20s.

"I tell you what, with those seam-up deliveries, he is someone that the Indian selection committee must consider seriously for Tests as well," Gavaskar said on television last evening.

"Just like Jasprit Bumrah from Twenty20s and ODIs, has now become India's premier bowler. Personally, I would like to

Gavaskar says Krishna is good enough for Test cricket

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

PUNE, 27 MARCH



Sunil Gavaskar believes new fast bowling sensation Prasidh Krishna (*in photo*) can serve India well in Test cricket with his "pace and seam position" and should be considered for the longest format just as Jasprit Bumrah was in 2018. The 25-year-old from Karnataka made a sensational debut in international career bagging four wickets in the first One-Day International against England. Krishna then struck twice in the 37th over in the second game against England, with an unplayable yorker seeing Jos Buttler off.

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"Just like Jasprit Bumrah from Twenty20s and ODIs, has now become India's premier bowler. Personally, I would like to

start better. I would like to get better in terms of starting with the new ball. Otherwise, all the runs that I gave away were scored off bad balls. So I would go back and work on those aspects," Krishna said after India had lost the second ODI by six wickets last evening. While Indian bowlers had had a poor day at work, Krishna said they could hardly have done anything in the face of the onslaught from Jonny Bairstow and Ben Stokes.

"We could have bowled better, I am not denying the fact, but we must note the way they played as well. It was an onslaught, we got hit quite badly. With only four fielders outside the circle during the second powerplay, it is always difficult to stop the batsmen on a flat deck. That swerve-ball cricket today. With four outside for the 11th to the 40th overs, that's bound to happen. It was a very good wicket to bat on, no doubt," he said.

Shooting WC: Vijayveer, Tejaswani shoot gold in 25m rapid fire pistol mixed event

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 27 MARCH



India's Vijayveer Sidhu and Tejaswani claimed the gold medal in the 25m rapid fire pistol mixed team event to extend the country's dominant run in the ISSF World Cup here on Saturday. In an all-Indian gold medal match, Sidhu and Tejaswani comfortably beat the duo of Gurpreet Singh and Ashok Abhidnya Patil 9-1 at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range.

In the Qualification 2, Gurpreet and Patil finished at the top with a total score of 370 while the team of 16-year-old Tejaswani and 18-year-old Sidhu aggregated 368.

On Friday, Sidhu won the individual silver medal in the 25 rapid fire pistol event ahead of Anish Bhanwala and Gur-

preet. However, the Indian pair of Kynan Chennai and Shreyasi Singh missed out on a podium.

um finish as they settled for the fourth place in the trap mixed team final of the prestigious tournament. The home team lost to Turkey's Safiye Saritürk and Yavuz İlhan 35-38. Kynan, who finished fourth in the individual men's trap on Friday, began badly but improved as the mixed final progressed, even as Shreyasi too missed a few shots while finding the target on other occasions.

The Indian duo shot 141 in the qualifications to qualify in the fourth place for the bronze medal match behind Saritürk and İlhan (143), who made up for his partner's off-colour outing with his consistent showing.

Gokulam Kerala win maiden I-League title

AGENCIES

KOLKATA, 27 MARCH



Gokulam Kerala FC on Saturday clinched their maiden I-League title in spectacular fashion as they came back from a goal down to beat TRAU 4-1 in the final match of the season here.

Bidyashagar Singh's 23rd minute strike did little to stop the Gokulam juggernaut as goals by Sharif Mohamed (69th), Emil Benny (74th), Dennis Antwi (77th) and Mohammad Rashid (90+6) handed them the trophy. With Churchill Brothers winning 3-2 against Punjab FC in the day's other match held simultaneously at another venue here, Gokulam shared points (29) with the Goan side but were crowned champions on head-to-head record.

In the two matches the two sides had played in the season, Churchill had won 3-2 once while Gokulam had emerged 3-0 victorious in the other.

Gokulam thus qualified for

the group stage of the AFC Cup next season, Asia's second-tier club competition, as I-League champions. They also became the first side from Kerala to win the I-League title.

The winning team's coach Vincenzo Alberto Annese could not hide his joy at his players' achievement.

"This is the best day of my life. I feel so happy and I feel amazing to be crowned a champion. I am immensely proud of my team and we deserved to

be champions. We outscored all teams and we have played like champions in this season," Annese said.

"This means everything to me. This is my first season in India and it has already been a very special one. We have a very special team and nobody plays the style of football that we play," he added.

Bidyashagar, a revelation in the I-League much like his team TRAU, opened the scoring when he produced a brilliant finish from outside the box in the 23rd minute. Just after resumption, Chanso Horam had a golden opportunity to hand TRAU their second goal of the match but his chip shot went inches over the bar following a fine counter-attacking move.

Gokulam forward Dennis Antwi failed to find the net in the 62nd minute as his header went agonisingly wide off an Emil Benny cross from the right flank. Sharif Mohamed's free kick in the 69th minute from the edge of the box grabbed the equaliser for Gokulam Kerala FC. The comeback was well on course in the 74th minute when Emil Benny tussled past his marker and slotted home through Amrit Gope's legs to

Add bubble to fixture congestion and lump what you don't like

PULAKESH MUKHOPADHYAY

Some three years ago, himself perhaps on a once-in-a-blue-moon break as his team huffed and puffed on the tour treadmill in Sri Lanka for a few entirely inconsequential matches organised for the sake of the all-important cash box, captain Virat Kohli spoke of the excessive physical demand made on cricketers by the global schedule. Not that he was the first national leader to voice the opinion.

Time was when all captains showed up at Lord's in an annual international programme where the mind-boggling fixture congestion was a popular subject for loud thinking. Or, oh-so-polite protests. No one expected it to yield a New Deal, and none ever came through. Things, if anything, would be much the same after as they

were before the confabulations, such as they were. It was like strictures against smoking being stubbed out in the school gymnasium.

The big boys in the portals of power always knew how far the skippers would allow themselves to go without injuring themselves seriously - and therefore, what was off-limits. They got it

SHORT POINT

exactly right too. But Kohli was required to go back to the subject a day ahead of the first One-Day International this time around against England in Pune, when the Press asked him if the ODI series made any sense in a year dominated by the World Test Championship, complete with its box-office final, and the Twenty20 World Cup. Players, he said, needed to

be consulted on schedules, given the additional affliction of bio-secure bubbles, part of the new normal protocols in the game in the time of the coronavirus pandemic.

Kohli referred to cricketers' mental health as an aspect that merited serious attention, and that was quite interesting.

Kohli it was who was got

hold of for a stern massage on the advisability of toeing the party line to be conveyed to some unidentified, purported mischief-makers when the Indian Premier League was wobbling last year in its West Asian bio bubble amid so many breaches of it and his command performance would have gratified the men up top. But that was then.

The fact that India's best-known players have since IPL 2020 been trudging out of a putatively scientifically rigged up prison to stagger into another no jive.

Kohli's plain speaking was also a rare example of an Indian cricketing celebrity calling a spade a spade on bio bubbles, on which Englishmen and Australians have been candidly cagey, given the enormous psychological pressure they subject players to.

And no one says they are calling a spade a shovel. But you know why fixture congestion can only get worse and bio bubbles cannot be got out of for a long while yet. Money is why the wheel rolls on. If the game were the chief concern, things would have panned out differently. Kohli, as in the past, will draw a blank, and all will have to be believed to be right with the world.

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